with the reality of Aboriginal disadvantage. Yet Hirst does not distinguish sufficiently clearly between critiques of colonialism and apologies for colonialist actions. Even if, as he claims, it is morally incoherent for the descendants of settler Australians today to apologise for the conquest on which their own nation rests, it does not follow, as he insinuates, that critique of the colonialist conquest is necessarily misplaced. Many cries for “sorry” are soft targets for Hirst’s keen intellect, but many critiques of colonialism in Australia are harder-edged than he acknowledges here.

Some recurring themes thread through many of the essays: the fundamental importance of the European heritage to Australian society and culture, the distinctive evolution of democracy and egalitarianism in the Australian colonies, the primacy of pragmatism over ideology in Australian politics. Insofar as the essays cohere as a collection, however, it is not so much through theme as through style and approach. Original and insightful, Hirst is unafraid to tackle fashionable orthodoxies and to thumb his nose at the politically-correct proprieties of many of his fellow historians. Yet in doing so, he does not at all come across as an embattled history warrior, intent at all costs on victory for his own presumed truths. His empathy for other people, combined with his awareness of the intricate complexity of human history, are too great to allow an easy lapse into such certitudes. Committed to history as a humanistic discipline, Hirst is not attempting to distil some unassailable residue of facts from the documentary evidence, but to explore some important aspects of the human condition, specifically in relation to Australia. Some other historians who claim the mantle of conservatism — as well as those of different political orientation — could well heed the example.

Claire Brennan

WEATHER MAKERS: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM


There are interesting contrasts in this book, signaled from the beginning in its deliberate presentation as a non-scholarly paperback. The book is presented with endorsements on its cover (from Dr Karl Kruszelnicki, an Australian populariser of science, and from Bill Bryson, a journalist, travel writer, and popular writer on language and history). Inside its front
cover the provocative sentence, “Now we are the weather makers, and the future of biodiversity and civilisation hangs on our actions” leaps out at the prospective reader, and a checklist of environmentally sound actions can be found inside the back cover. The text comes complete with important sentences printed in bold — the argument is already summarized for the reader. Yet, the book’s argument is often scholarly and elegant — the revival of Alfred Russel Wallace’s description of the atmosphere as “The Great Aerial Ocean” is both historically rigorous in its description of the term and scientifically rigorous in justifying its use (11). This is a central contrast in the work of Tim Flannery — he is deliberately populist as his agenda is the education of “the masses” yet his polemics are supported by clear and reasoned argument, and by an engaging writing style.

Flannery concludes his book with an extended call to action in a chapter titled “Over to You,” although earlier sections of the book also urge action on the part of the reader, such as the purchase of a hybrid fuel car (246). The larger argument, which explains Flannery’s urgency and his suggestions to the reader, is that climate change is real, that it is caused by human behaviour, but that the worst of it can still be averted. Throughout the book Flannery remains relentlessly optimistic despite recounting extinctions, habitat destruction caused by climate changes, and the possibility of sudden catastrophe on a global scale. Yet despite this engagement with the long-term large-scale environmental side-effects of the industrial revolution Flannery has a touching faith in the power of technological innovation to overcome obstacles, and to minimize climate change with “almost no cost to our lifestyles” (7).

In order to support Flannery’s desire to actively engage the reader, the style of this book is intensely personal. If Flannery can recount a personal experience or encounter to support his argument, he will. In support of this author-reader intimacy, and in true paperback style, as well as a short biography at the start of the book there is also a photograph of Flannery looking straight at the reader. The prominence of Flannery’s watch in the image may be accidental, but his self-description as a “writer, scientist and explorer” and the references to him by his first name, are not, and they clearly indicate his salesmanship of both himself and his argument, and of the intimacy he is aiming for with this book.

These observations are not to traduce Flannery or his argument. The book is thoroughly researched, his descriptions of science are well-judged and he does manage to convey the excitement of scientific research — his descriptions of the extraction of ice cores and of the information that can be gained from them is gripping beyond expectation (48-50). His comment on a graph showing the
concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide between 1958 and 2000 that, "This is one of the most wonderful things I've ever seen. In it you can see our planet breathing," (21) combines his breathless enthusiasm with a startling and elegant image of science. Flannery's thorough and engaging introduction to the science of climate change, and to science more generally, is the great strength of this book. Personal conviction and an obvious presence in the text are becoming the hallmark of scientific writing aimed at a non-specialist audience, and Flannery's warmth is engaging, his optimism is almost a sufficient antidote to the picture he presents of the way human activities have damaged the planet and of the environmental damage that is unavoidable in the future, even if worse yet can be averted.

The book is an interesting marker of the way in which discussions on climate change have shifted recently. With the release of the Stern Report in late 2006, climate change has been recognized not as a matter of conscience in the treatment of other species and of humans living in the regions worst affected by rising sea levels but as an economic issue that may have severe impacts on the economies of wealthy nations. This book by Flannery, updated and revised from the 2005 book The Weather Makers, combined with his position as Australian of the Year 2007, must surely contribute to the discussion that has now commenced in earnest. Even the now widespread use of the term "climate change" rather than "global warming" (evoking, as Flannery points out, images of comfort rather than disaster (214-215)) is a significant shift in public discussion. This book, balancing neatly between the global scale of human impacts and the particular situation of Australia, is engaging, thorough, and the image it presents of potential catastrophe on a global scale is made almost enjoyable through Flannery's boundless enthusiasm and optimism.

Tony Simoes da Silva

AND THE WORD WAS "QUEENSLAND"


In a brief Introduction to *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland*, editors Patrick Buckridge and Belinda McKay ponder whether such a study risks reifying the notion of the strange, perhaps even quirky Queensland of old, either as a physical space or as a construct. The state, they argue, is now far more like the rest of Australia than is often recognised and even catchy