

Bader, Rudolf, ed., 2002. *Australien. Eine interdisziplinäre Einführung*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag. 2nd revised edition, 430pp. ISBN 3-88476-440-3. € 29.50.

Reviewed by Geoffrey Davies, Aachen

"Alas! No paint can match / The varying hues" – thus the nineteenth-century poet Emily Manning lamenting the difficulties of describing the unfamiliar landscape of Australia in her poem the "The Weatherboard Fall". She might just as well have been referring to the predicament of a reviewer faced with the task of assessing a volume containing nineteen essays on almost every aspect of Australia and including not only much that is familiar, as becomes an introduction to the subject, but, as this poem demonstrated for me, a wealth of unfamiliar material as well.

As is apparent from the rising numbers of school and university students who display a lively interest in the country's culture and the growing number of German-speaking tourists who choose Australia as their destination, the book responds to a real need.

It contains contributions on geography, botany, zoology, history, politics, economics, language, literature, music and film. The scholars from Germany, Austria and Switzerland involved in the project are all recognised as capacities in their field, which in itself reveals something of the widespread interest in Australia at German-speaking universities. It is their collective endeavour both to provide an introduction to Australian studies from the vantage point of their own discipline and to maintain a high scholarly standard in their essays. Since the book is an interdisciplinary project it is, of course, essential to its success that the student of literature be enabled to profit from the chapter on flora and the botanist from that on poetry. Although it may be argued that some contributors make fewer concessions to readers from other disciplines than do others, the editor and contributors do on the whole pass the rather awkward test of adjusting the academic level quite well, as this reader's experience confirms.

The fact that this collection of essays has gone into a second edition is in itself an indication of the success the project has achieved with a wide readership which, in this case, one may assume extends beyond the purely academic. The new edition adds a fine contribution on music in Australia by Albrecht Dümling and an extensive index. It also updates the contributions to record events since the mid-1990s and to take account of more recent scholarship.

In a volume as logically constructed as this, it falls to the geographers to set the scene. Heinrich Lamping begins with a survey of the topography, climate and hydrology of Australia. He takes us through the different regions of the country (Eastern Highlands, the Central Lowlands and the Great Western Plateau) pointing out their salient characteristics. He accounts for the extremes of temperature, has some advice for tourists as to which parts of the continent to visit at what times of the year, and is instructive on the curiosities of Australia's unusual river-system and the problems of water supply to the urban centres. Like many authors in this volume, he enlivens his text through welcome "local" knowledge of the country, which in his case means he can tell us what the "Fremantle Doctor" is.

Burkhard Hofmeister's overview of patterns of settlement, urbanisation and early economic development abounds in interesting historical information. Hofmeister covers matters as

diverse as the spread of penal colonies, the goldfields, transportation and river crossings, the growth of urban centres, stock routes, and the coming of the overland telegraph. He has much to say which will be of interest not only to the geographer but also to the student of literature, concerned as the latter must also be with the factors that contributed to the making of an Australian society and with the themes to which it gave rise. Which is to say that this chapter exemplifies the value of an interdisciplinary volume such as this, since it has much to interest students from various disciplines.

Klaus Wegmann provides a brief introduction to Australian flora usefully explicating the varieties of eucalyptus and illustrating the piece with his own sketches. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, he devotes only five lines to tropical rainforest and has nothing to say about the all-too-visible disasters of deforestation.

Josef H. Reichholf provides an absorbing account of the many species of Australian fauna, giving the reader unfamiliar with Australia a lively sense of that continent's abundance ("Der Besucher aus Übersee könnte sich in einem Vogelhaus riesigen Ausmaßes wähnen") and paying particular attention to the negative ecological effects of the intervention represented by European settlement. Limitations of space regrettably prevent him from discussing Australian environmental protection measures, whose excellence he praises in his final sentence.

In her very substantial and refreshingly outspoken contribution – whose title "Auswirkungen der britischen Eroberung auf das Leben von Aborigines und Torres Strait Islanders" I nevertheless find slightly misleading since the article's emphasis lies pre-eminently on more recent issues – Elisabeth Strohscheidt, long associated with *amnesty international*, lays the groundwork with an overview of Aboriginal belief systems regarding the land, the early history of their conquest by Europeans, and the devious twists and turns of ideology ("separation", "assimilation") with which the latter long sought to dispossess Aborigines of their land and, later, to resist restitution, in order comprehensively to address those many contentious questions – such as Aboriginal deaths in custody, the struggle for land rights, the fate of the stolen generation – which have remained unsolved in the Australia of the twenty-first century. This is an up-to-the-minute account whose updating since the first edition has regrettably served only to underline the ongoing nature of the problems and to compound the evidence of the reluctance of the present Howard administration to embrace reconciliation.

Norbert Schaffeld faces the almost unmanageable task of condensing two hundred years of Australian history from the penal settlements to the Republican Movement into sixteen pages, and the reader sympathises with him as he struggles manfully. To criticise him for lack of detail on certain topics would hardly be just, since the problem of condensation is one all the contributors must have encountered and sometimes it has involved choices not always happily made. Schaffeld's resourceful solution is to accommodate various historiographical perspectives and to situate his own contribution firmly in relationship to those on Aboriginal matters and multiculturalism. He introduces the reader to such critical sources as the works of Henry Reynolds, provides a useful bibliography, and in the space allotted manages to cover a good deal of ground. Nor are his remarks without insight, for instance on the role played by Aborigines in the survival of early European explorers.

Jürgen Tampke provides a sober account of the history of immigration to Australia and of the evolution of multiculturalism, paying particular attention to the legal provisions and the

political debates which have accompanied the process. He has few illusions about the persistence of racism in Australia, as his references to John Howard's early opposition to multiculturalism and the rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party demonstrate. Although Tampke is politically even-handed, he surely runs the risk of over-optimism when he suggests that the Mabo-ruling on *terra nullius* will in all likelihood lead to a treaty such as that reached with the Maoris of New Zealand. There is certainly no sign of it yet! And I found his comparison of the success of Australian multiculturalism with New Zealand and Sweden, but not with Canada where, apart from anything else, the Governor-General is a former immigrant from Hong Kong, rather unjust.

In his essay Franz Oswald takes the centenary of Federation as his starting point for a survey of the workings of the Australian political system. He covers such matters as the constitution, parliament, the electoral system and the political parties, pointing out specifically Australian features such as the legal obligation to vote and providing us with the basic knowledge necessary for an understanding of some of the political issues which have exercised the minds of Australians over the years (the circumstances surrounding the fall of the Whitlam government in 1975, for instance). In the light of the political changes over the last century, and particularly the debate as to whether the country should become a republic, Oswald wonders whether the constitution is not now "in need of repair", as he delightfully puts it. It is a timely question, indeed, and one which he answers in the affirmative, convinced as he rightly is that the rejection of the republic in the recent referendum was only a postponement of an inevitable outcome.

In the last line of his sensible piece on Australia in the context of international politics and tensions, Gert Leutenecker asserts that the alliance with the US is assuming importance once again. Writing this review as Australian troops are nearing Baghdad alongside the Americans in the 2003 war against Iraq one cannot but agree with him. But at the same time one is aware of the cost that that American alliance is continuing to exact. In the light of Leutenecker's account of the successive dependencies and alliances Australia has entered on, one wonders what further price is now to be paid in terms of international isolation, what tenuous sympathies Australia has again forfeited in the Islamic countries of Asia.

To Boris Braun and Reinhold Grotz falls the considerable task of surveying the Australian economy. In a forty-page (!) essay they trace the development of the Australian economy from its beginnings with the export of sheep, through the vicissitudes of gold-mining, the expansion of the wheat-fields, the first iron and steel works, the Great Depression, and post-war growth through to the structural causes of the present-day recession. They show the effects of Australian economic dependence on Britain and its end, as well as the significance of the resource-based trade with Asia. They survey in turn the major sectors of the economy (agriculture, mining and energy, industry and trade, services and tourism), substantiating their account from the most recent statistics available (*Year Book Australia 2001!*) and purveying an immense amount of information on topics as diverse as the expansion of the overseas wine trade and the complex legal conflicts between mining companies and Aboriginal land owners. The conclusion they reach is noticeably pessimistic, though: in spite of recent diversification Australia's foreign trade will continue to be resource-based, while domestically the country will increasingly depend on services, trapped as it is by too small a domestic market and protectionism.

One of the most demanding contributions to the volume is Gerhard Leitner's study of language use and development in Australia, at thirty-one pages apparently an abridgement from the first edition. Leitner offers an analysis of mainstream Australian English, investigates the linguistic situation of Aborigines and non-English speakers and examines Australian language policy. In so doing he covers an immense amount of ground and much of what he has to report on matters as diverse as the evolution of pidgin, the influence of mixed marriages on language preservation, or code-switching between German and Australian English is quite fascinating. This is obviously a piece which would repay further study by students of literature, since one is constantly being reminded of the many literary examples which one could adduce to illustrate the points he makes here. It is, of course, not his task to provide them, but some indication of literary sources might nevertheless have been useful. As a thoroughly scholarly study the author displays a predilection for technical abbreviations which I found rather irritating. On the other hand, he gives one a real sense of the ongoing progress of linguistic research in his field and of future areas of research which is quite stimulating.

Norbert Platz's contribution represents a significant attempt to come to terms with Australian cultural identity, in itself an interdisciplinary enterprise and one which here usefully links into other contributions to this book. Starting from the premise that in a new continent so far from home and one whose features differed so greatly from European expectations, one necessarily had to evolve new images both of the unfamiliar environment and of the self, he traces the complex psychological process of Australian identity formation and particularly its-future-oriented, utopian dimension, unearthing a wealth of little-known texts to illustrate his thesis along the way. The essay abounds in acute and often critical observations on the self-satisfaction of the "lucky-country", the escapism of a society much devoted to leisure, the persistence well into the second half of the twentieth century of the "cultural cringe", and the demise of egalitarianism. The latter part of the essay is devoted to concepts which became particularly associated with the evolution of an Australian identity: the commitment to the idea of the nation, some of whose manifestations proved quite reactionary, the stylisation of the "typical" Australian born of the bushman and the pioneer and often not without racist overtones, the myth of the bush as a paradoxical product of the urban mind, and the phenomenon of mateship which, Platz suggests, is not wholly comprehensible to non-Australians and in its modern form is not free of misogyny.

Following on from this overview, five authors share the daunting task of producing a survey of Australian literature, which is both compact and useful. Not an easy task in the context of such an introductory volume. The problem lies in distinguishing the defining characteristics of the period or genre covered and then deciding which works warrant a paragraph of solid interpretation and which rate only a brief mention as a pointer to further reading. The contributors have, however, been accorded a generous space allocation (111 pp.) which has enabled them to transform the third quarter of the volume into a respectable enough history of Australian literature, although at some cost.

It is the merit of Horst Prießnitz's formidable contribution, which opens the series of literary essays, that it expounds a viable thesis and enables the reader to substantiate it from a rich store of lesser-known early Australian texts quoted in its support. The thesis is that the evolution of a specifically Australian culture can essentially be understood as a palimpsest in which the British has been superimposed or overlaid on the indigenous. British culture

having been transferred to Australia, it there undergoes change and gradually begins to ignore, or rather, eliminate the indigenous. Australian literature of the 19th century, Prießnitz submits, is at once the result of colonisation and itself an act of colonisation. The process of differentiation from the culture of the mother country he then traces through an interpretation of the records of contact from the first explorers like Cook, the poetry of such as the mercantilist Wentworth, journal entries by early settlers and travellers, as well as newspaper articles which increasingly espouse the view of Aborigines as a dying race. Prießnitz then turns his attention to the perception of nature, the depiction of convicts and bushrangers, and the nationalism of the 1890s as expressed for example, in *The Bulletin* in an effort to document an evolving accommodation to Australian circumstances and to demonstrate how very different from the British Australian culture had already become by the end of the 19th century.

The editor's own contribution deals with Australian literature from 1901 to 1945, a period during which it began both to assume its specific thematic characteristics and to experiment with bold new formal ideas. If nothing else his essay serves to remind us what a wealth of important works appeared in these years, some of which he discusses in some depth: Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*, Tom Collins' *Such is Life*, Henry Handel Richardson's trilogy *Australia Felix*, Katherine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*, Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* and Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. Quite a reading list for the "newcomers" to whom the article is addressed! Of particular interest is Bader's account of Henry Handel Richardson and Christopher Brennan as prime exponents of a conscious attempt to confront the European literary tradition from an Australian perspective. In a period marked by world war and the depression, he also accords importance to the socio-political concerns informing the fiction of the day and the urban focus some writers began to adopt. By the end of the period, Bader rightly concludes, Australian literature no longer had anything to fear from a comparison with the British.

Annegret Maack's illuminating summary of narrative fiction since 1945 offers substantial readings of the novels of Patrick White which so defined the early part of that period, shows how both Stow and Keneally prosecuted White's onslaught on "dreary, dun-coloured realism" and then moves on to historical revisionism and postmodern fiction. In selecting texts for closer discussion Maack makes some judicious choices which would certainly stimulate newcomers to contemporary Australian writing (Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Mudrooroo's *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, Malouf's *The Great World*, Carey's *Jack Maggs*, and Bail's *Eucalyptus*, for example).

Both Aboriginal and multicultural writing would in my view, have deserved more extensive treatment. The way Carey's Booker-prize winning novel *True History of the Kelly Gang* slips into her contribution with a one-liner is, no doubt, some indication of the difficulties of updating a contribution – but at least it is mentioned.

Marion Spies distinguishes four phases of Australian poetry since 1945: an initial turning away from the English tradition; a concentration on matters Australian; an orientation to American models; and the growth of interest in Asia. In some ways this subdivision, of course, correlates with political developments and Spies does make some attempt to view poetry in the context of social forces, for instance in her focus on the poetry of protest against the Vietnam war (R.D. Fitzgerald, Bruce Dawe), against environmental degradation (Judith

Wright, Rodney Hall) and against the negative consequences of urbanisation (Vincent Buckley, Geoffrey Lehmann). Nevertheless, I find some aspects of this piece rather questionable: the inexplicable absence of Peter Porter, the consigning of Les Murray to a single footnote, the ignoring of Aboriginal poetry altogether, the classificatory impulse which leads to remarks such as "Australische Dichter schreiben auf dreierlei Weise über Italien" and the following remarkable statement: "Im Golfkrieg 1990 entsendet Australien lediglich drei Kriegsschiffe in den Persischen Golf und demonstriert so recht läßig und vor allem unblutig seine Allianz mit den Vereinigten Staaten (p.358). From the perspective of April 2003 where Australia has repeated this gesture, it looks neither so "läßig" nor so "unblutig"!

Albert-Reiner Glaap sidesteps the constraint of length by focussing largely on the drama of the 1980s and 90s and otherwise restricting himself to a "ein flüchtiger Blick zurück". Legitimate as this may be, it has several disadvantages (in an introduction): it elides the nineteenth-century entirely; it generates some curious omissions (e.g. John Romeril, Jack Hibberd); and it truncates the careers of some better-known playwrights (David Williamson, for instance). But Glaap is a passionate man of the theatre, ever in search of new work, and so he compensates for minor shortcomings with some enthusiastic advocacy of recent productions by Jimmy Chi (the musical *Bran Nue Dae*), Hannie Rayson (*Hotel Sorrento*) and Jane Harrison (*Stolen*).

The volume's treatment of Australian culture is greatly enhanced by its final two contributions, Albrecht Dümling on music and Adi Wimmer on film. Dümling's well-documented contribution I found particularly absorbing since it deals with one of those topics within Australian culture about which least is known overseas. Few amongst us would, I suspect, be able to name an Australian classical composer. And few of us would have guessed that so many musicians active on the international scene were and are in fact Australians. Dümling proves a good guide to the world of music in Australia: he looks at indigenous musical practice and the various ways Europeans have responded to it; he documents the role of church music in the development of a musical tradition; he describes the role of the ABC in supporting Australian musical life and he gives us some idea of the work of some of the composers the country has produced like Percy Grainger and Peter Sculthorpe. Some aspects of his discussion will be of particular interest to German readers since they pertain to the "export" of the German musical tradition to Australia (*Hausmusik*, for example) and to the role of figures like George Dreyfus and Felix Werder who have chosen such opposing ways of dealing with their dual heritage as German musicians practising in Australia.

Wimmer, too, is a true enthusiast. His essay on Australian film is comprehensive and well-informed; full of lively wit, it is also a pleasure to read. Wimmer presents an overview from the beginnings – the very early beginnings at that – of cinema in Australia. His treatment is convincing not least because he offers a discussion of the industry as a whole, not just of the movies. Matters such as legally imposed quotas of domestically produced films to protect the industry against the dominance of Hollywood, funding problems in the development of a home-grown industry and the relationship of filmmaking to nationalism all form part of his purview. His essay describes the successive phases of Australian film (*outback melodramas*, *ocker comedies*, *period films*, etc.), abounds in insightful readings of significant movies such as Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*,

and successfully negotiates the formidable heterogeneity of current Australian cinema which as he irrefutably concludes, has now become "eines der besten der Welt".

It will no doubt be thought somewhat brazen of a reviewer confronted with a compendium that already runs to 430 pages to suggest that there are a number of omissions which might well have been addressed (and should be in future editions). To my mind, not enough attention has been paid throughout to Aboriginal culture. Some topics have been omitted altogether, archetypically Aussie ones at that. In a country which has twice hosted the Olympic Games, fields the finest cricket teams in the world and otherwise excels in international sporting competition, it must be counted a glaring omission that sport, indeed popular culture almost as a whole, is not deemed worthy of mention. Whatever happened to the beach?! And *pace* the editor, who does at least concede the point, it remains unfortunate that the visual arts have been accorded no space, since it is surely to the worldwide success of Aboriginal art, for example, that many would attribute their initial curiosity about Australian culture. Since, too, Utzon's Sydney Opera House, which has since its construction been regarded as the prime icon of Australia and whose interior is now to be restored in line with the original plans (as Dümling reminds us), a chapter on the country's remarkable architecture (including not only landmarks like the Melbourne Museum and the new parliament building but also traditional house design) remains an important *desideratum*.

The volume provides extensive bibliographies, useful both for sources and for further reading. Most constitute a good mix of Australian and German references. Their updating is slightly uneven, though. Lamping's bibliography still informs us in 2002 that the second edition of his study *Australien* is to appear in 1996.

In its second edition the book has sensibly been provided with an index. Undeniably useful as it is, it nevertheless (and to my mind curiously), fails to include the states, so that it would not, for instance, be possible to use it to cross-reference topics pertaining particularly to Western Australia, for instance. And why index Russel Ward but not Manning Clark when both are mentioned in the main text?

The editor has done a good job in reducing typographical errors to an infinitesimally small number. One does, however, have the occasional terminological quibble: in an authoritative work like this do we still have to speak of Ayer's Rock and not Uluru?

When this volume goes into a third edition, which at some stage it no doubt will, one would like to hope that the eye-strain induced by the perusal of its densely packed pages might be somewhat relieved by the use of a more generous typeface. Certainly more illustrations would enhance the volume (from the non-geographer's point of view, Heinrich Lamping's discussion of geological forms would have greatly benefited from a representation of those forms, for example). Likewise some investment in photographic reproductions would have served to enliven the historical discussions, as would stills in the chapter on film.

Certainly the publisher should be encouraged (if he has not already been) to build on the success of this volume and commission parallel studies of, say, Canada or South Africa, which would serve a similar market and be as well received.

This work is an almost inexhaustible fund of information and opinion. Whether the reader who consults it is a prospective visitor to Australia seeking information on a country about which he knows little or a scholar who flatters himself that he is already well versed in

Australian affairs, he will find his interest in the country stimulated and his knowledge of it greatly enhanced. If he reads the whole of it, he will, in the spirit of true serendipity, also find himself discovering aspects of Australia he never dreamt existed.

In addition, it must be said, *Australien. Eine interdisziplinäre Einführung* bears very real testimony to the work of *Gesellschaft für Australien-Studien*. It exemplifies the academic excellence of its contributing members and it triumphantly confirms its commitment to an interdisciplinary approach to Australian studies. One cannot but be impressed by such a communal effort. The editor is to be congratulated on putting together such a fine team of authors, on bringing the project to such a successful conclusion, and on achieving the accolade of a second edition.