

From the editor of the issue

One of the earliest publications in the field of Australian Studies that came into my hands was Peter Quartermaine's anthology *Diversity Itself – Essays in Australian Arts and Culture* (1986). I am now reminded of that title as I endeavour to introduce the 2011 issue of *Zeitschrift für Australienstudien*. Why? – because what you have before you is indubitably a collection of great thematic diversity. No need to 'apologize' for diversity, I think; even in collections that purport to present contributions on only one area will we find those that stray from the straight and narrow – and often they provide the best read. Perhaps it is a typical European attitude that prefers self-imposed thematic shackles to the free roaming of the mind? In Europe it is an unquestioned principle that conferences must have a common thematic concern, while ASAL, which was founded in 1899 and serves as our guiding spirit, eschews such shibboleths. ASAL CFPs frequently contain the laconic statement "Papers on any aspect of Australian Literature will be considered". And why not.

A minority of the papers gathered in this volume were presented at the 12th conference organized on behalf of the German Association of Australian Studies in October 2010 in Klagenfurt. Mitchell Rolls' is one of them. His paper confronts the much-vaunted notion that white Australians were simply too uninformed about the status of the indigenous population to be moved into action. Citing a white activist who "was distressed by [her] ignorance" he points out that such sentiments do not point to Aboriginal distress, no, it is the whites who claim to suffer. About the claim of collective "ignorance" Rolls is skeptical. Since the 1920s at least the "Aboriginal problem" was always an integral part of a discourse of the national. Pictures in the print media (and in many film documentaries) were plentiful. It was less an issue of being uninformed, it was one of not wanting to listen. Most of the novels written in the pre-war period did tell, but as they were now deemed racist the same people who claimed they "had not been told" had labeled them "dangerous" and consigned them to a censorious memory hole. His argument then takes on a highly original and decidedly non-pc direction. The culture of "ennobling guilt" which

so many Australians of good intentions have embraced needs to be critiqued. Rolls maintains that it has created a hegemonic and patronizing discourse. He asks if those who wallow in Australia's collective guilt are not doing so because they love the warm feeling of shame. He is critical of their "narcissistic empathizing." Their discourse freezes Aboriginality in a permanent state of victimhood. The final twist of Rolls' fine paper addresses the question whether Australia's settler-society 'amnesia' concerning colonial treatment of the indigenous is not a standard feature of juvenile humans – and the settler era represents a juvenile phase in Australian history. He even argues that this is matched by certain aspects of systemic Aboriginal amnesia, such as the well-known culture of not naming deceased people.

A particularly delightful article is that by Eva Meidl. An Austrian Archduke with the name of Ludwig Salvator, one of the many European aristocrats keen to expand their geographical horizon, visited the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880 and then several other states. His travelogue contains some interesting observations; at one point he physically intervened when several "disgraceful rascals" attacked two harmless Chinese men walking the streets of Melbourne. Plus ça change ...? "Delightful" is the word that also comes to mind when characterizing Michael Ackland's probing essay on one of Australia's best and best-known contemporary authors, Murray Bail. His novels and stories, from his irreverent re-working of "The Drover's Wife" to *Eucalypts*, have always shed an interesting light on collective Australian identity formation or identity critique. A novel title such as *Holden's Performance* immediately calls to mind the 'Holden' car which held such high hopes for Prime Minister Menzies' golden years. In an opening scene the aptonymically named Holden Shadbolt vomits and his vomit jells into the contours of Australia as it appears on our maps. As we follow Holden on his 'Bildungsroman' journey, so Ackland demonstrates, we are made aware of a rich spread of Australia's "know-nothingness" or its servitude to crazy British monarchs and dignitaries, all of which is punctuated by "acerbic comments" on the psychology of the nation's masses. Easily taken in by "mug politicians"

and “huckster salesmen” who can produce “a surf of words” devoid of meaning they resemble Australia’s iconic animal, the bleating sheep.

Anne Koch offers a close reading of Alex Miller’s award-winning novel *Journey to the Stone Country*, elucidating how Miller’s vision of a future bi-cultural collective Australian identity is structured. It is a beautiful vision indeed and should not be put down or sneered at as hopelessly utopian. Judith Wilson’s contribution addresses one of the core interests of our German Association: how did German scientists, philosophers, writers of the 18th and 19th Centuries view the Aborigine? In imitation of or in opposition to the British colonizers of “Botany Bay”? She mainly investigates two prominent sources of German knowledge-providers at the time: one the traveller and writer Georg Forster (1754-94), the other the adventurer and popular author, Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816-72).

Ildiko Dömötör is likewise interested in Australia’s colonial times. Her foray into the question whether there was or was not a “Colonial gentlewomen’s appreciation of rural Australia in the mid-19th century” is based on a wide range of epistolary material and concludes that the usual dismay of British colonials over the lean land soon gave way to a keen appreciation of its unique features. She hints that the “appreciation” may have been gendered: while the men.

Ms. J. Seipel, whose monograph *Film und Multikulturalismus* was reviewed in ZfA 24, contributes an essay titled “Einbindung von MigrantInnen in ein nationales australisches Kino”, which provides a welcome overview of the role of female characters in the surge of “multicultural” Australian movies of the 1990s. She covers such important but relatively unknown films as *Floating Life*, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Fistful of Flies*.

And definitely not least if last in my survey there is Sybille Kästner’s essay on an issue that has become a point of contention amongst ethnologists: were Australia’s indigenous women only gatherers and not also hunters? It adds to the rich tapestry of this issue’s themes. Sybille won GAST’s dissertation award of 2010; she writes well and her

findings add a small but significant detail in our understanding of Aboriginal culture.

The editors also continue with ZfA's practice of giving considerable emphasis to reviews. We can be proud to have such a number of solid and reliable reviewers - they and their reviews are something to be proud of. As in our last issue, there is a review essay that looks at three separate but thematically related books: Oliver Haag's "Uncovering the German Aborigine." It investigates how German publishers have responded to the growing curiosity of mainstream Germans about Australia's indigenous population. My personal favourite amongst the reviews is Werner Senn's review of John Masteer's Collected Poems. It is an art to review poetry, but when a critical review is as deftly handled as here the result is pure reading pleasure.

Meanwhile, our Association continues to issue its bi-annual electronic Newsletter which bubbles with news, reports and debates on Australia's current affairs. Visit it on [**www.australienstudien.org**](http://www.australienstudien.org) and be part of our thriving community of Australianists abroad.

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