



Renata Summo-O'Connell. *Imagined Australia: Reflections around the reciprocal construction of identity between Australia and Europe*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang/Frankfurt am Main, 2009. 401 S. ISBN 978-3-0351-0339-7.

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R. Summo-O'Connell (Hrsg.): *Imagined Australia*

The notion of an unknown continent in the South of the East Indies furnished European imagination centuries before James Cook claimed indigenously inhabited New South Wales on behalf of the British Crown in 1778. Since then Europe's fascination with Australia and its forging as an extension of British civilisation to becoming an independent nation have generated a broad scholarship. But few scholars have yet acknowledged the reciprocity of these processes. The parallel invention of and liaisons with Europe by Anglo-Saxon expatriates and their descendants in reverse facilitating ideas of self-definition remained at the margins of academic attention. The launching of *The Imagined Australia International Research Forum* in 2006 provided a timely response to this lack of scholarly concern. For the past six years the project has provided an international forum to explore the entwined process of imaginative construction that took place in both communities. The current volume, edited by Renata Summo-O'Connell, draws together the first findings of these lively discussions in a range of essays written by a fine cast of European- and Australian-based scholars.

Despite the absence of a unifying thread, the collection comprises a range of compelling essays, several of which gesture toward potential new areas of research. Thematically assembled along seven topics and with a strong focus on the late 20th century, the 23 contributing authors utilise a plurality of approaches, drawing on a wide and varied collection of primary evidence. Source material includes poems, travelogues, diaries, films and paintings to support the overarching argument about

the unacknowledged prevalence of dialogic exchange between European-Australian relations and imaginations of one another. Yet, this thematic and methodological diversity is at once the strength and weakness of this book, making for an interesting, but challenging read. There is not much dialogue between authors' contributions, which grates with Summo-O'Connell's introductory claim that the volume's objective is to provoke dialogue between scholars and artists who "have been witnesses as well as agents of transformation in their societies" (p. 9). In short, it is up to the audience to deduce implied connections and acknowledge overlapping themes through close reading. For example, the second section entitled *Sovereignty and Disappearance* comprises of four essays. Mireille Astore, a Sydney-based artist, contemplates the hospitality and generosity of Australia from the perspective of a refugee from Beirut. Her essay is followed by Aileen Moreton-Robinson's article tracing Cook's inability to grasp the complex understandings of communal title and the legacy of his misapprehension with regard to Indigenous Australians. The section concludes with two essays by Joseph Pugliese on the experience of vernacular violence by asylum seekers and Jon Stratton on the symbolic nature of the beach as a border for both tourists and asylum seekers. While interesting and engaging material is analysed there is a marked lack of continuity and diversity can be jarring at times to the volume's central theme.

Valuable contributions that deserve to be highlighted are concerned with the formation of Australian identity through intervention with the landscape and arising ten-

sions in forging a sense of belonging with an unfamiliar and strange environment. Marianne Elisabeth Lien examines the delicate example of a row of pine trees introduced by early European settlers in Tasmania becoming the point of contention as they threaten the preservation of a nearby Aboriginal midden. Considered a cultural heritage by local residents, but a thorn on the side of conservationists eager “to recreate an idealised imagery of the past” (p. 97), Lien questions the overall idea of a timeless landscape, arguing its state as temporary, always shaped by human intervention. Examining early Australian literature, Christa Knellwolf King then explores the Australian bush as a site of danger, “initially despised” (p. 116), but later appropriated as a setting where white settlers were able to bond and mold a sense of community. Further, European social utopias of Terra Australis Incognita are the subject of several case studies by Roberto H. Esposto, Leigh Penman, and Antony Taylor. Taylor’s essay on William Lane’s failed attempt to establish a socialist ‘New Australia’ in Paraguay during the 1890s provides for a particularly interesting, yet under-researched example of “competing visions of Australia” and its future generated at a time of emerging nationalism in the colonies. Taylor investigates Lane’s critical view of Australia’s development in the vein of ‘Old World’ tendencies, an assumed ill success that nurtured an emerging “back-to-the-land movement” (p. 177). Finally, Christine Dauber inquires into the architecture of the National Museum of Australia in Canberra and the architects’ intentions to deploy “the Holocaust as a trope for the colonisation process” (p. 368), evoking parallels to the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Dauber carries on the national dialogue about how to come to terms with a shared Aboriginal and non-Indigenous past.

Whereas the majority of the essays are engagingly written, with a historical focus and of high scholarly quality, a few contributions seemingly miss the overall

aim of the edited volume, to uncover the parallel invention and liaisons of Europe and Australia. For an attentive readership with a legitimate interest to explore what has been outlined “a spirit of reciprocity” (p. 3) as the volume’s aim, this will be difficult to stipulate. Frederic Boni’s thrilling analysis of alternative narratives of Australianness in Mambo T-Shirt designs is but one example that neglects to articulate a potential link with Europe. Few essays facilitate this dialogue as openly as Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio’s study concerned with uncovering similarities and mutual influences in Europe’s and Australia’s recent reaction to migrants, in particular asylum seekers. Further, despite the claim of internationality, the project’s core research group is mainly Italian-based and its founders unfortunately have missed an opportunity to invite a broader selection of topics of investigation. The extensive number of essays included in this compendium does not hide the fact that there is no accommodation of perceptions of Australia in other Eastern, Northern or Central European nations. This negligence is hopefully to be addressed in the subsequent two volumes planned in this series. Potentially, the publication could be enhanced by including an index that allows to conveniently search for particular themes, people and places.

Imagined Australia offers an appealing, contemporary assemblage of works by a range of experts contributing to an existing void in Australian-European Studies that as of yet has received only marginal academic attention. The essays gathered in this compendium hint at the potency Europe holds in the cultural logic of Australian collective identity and Australia’s reverse closeness to Europe. Beyond the limits of this volume, the publication will appeal to a large number of scholars of cross cultural encounters aware with an avid interest in the continuing dialogue that both countries entered more than two centuries ago.

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