

Book Reviews

Giovanna Capone, ed. *European Perspectives: Contemporary Essays on Australian Literature*. St. Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1991. pp. xxvi, 203. \$15.00 pb.

In a brief but provocative introduction, Giovanna Capone, Professor of English at the University of Bologna and director of its Australian Literary Studies Centre, provides at the outset the genesis for "putting together" this wide-ranging collection of sixteen unique yet often inter-related papers "taking up European perspectives" on Australian literature. The idea came to her, Professor Capone says, "as the need to pick a fruit which seemed ripe, since Europe now has an active group of scholars who share this interest [in Australian literature] across methodological boundaries." Capone, also the Foundation President of the European Association of Studies on Australia (E.A.S.A.), informs the reader that the contributors to the collection were limited to Europeans who were asked to make proposals taking into account "the problematic issue of Europeanness, without in any way taking it for granted." As to the resultant product of these proposals, *European Perspectives*, Capone sees it as "a cross-section and a sampling of *our* [European] way of receiving Australian literature, *our* Australian literature—an idiosyncratic way, if you like"; she hopes the collection "will help Australian writers and critics to see how others see them."

The reviewer, who is an American and has been "receiving" Australian literature on *his* own terms for many years, is hesitant to join, as do some of the contributors, in what Professor Capone calls "the debate on Eurocentricity." Nor does he have space in reviewing this collection to "wonder" formally with *Australian Literary Studies* editor Laurie Hergenhan in his instructive single-page foreword "how . . . European cultures can shape critical readings of non-European literatures, such as Australian, which are nevertheless heavily European-influenced" and "what is the impact on European thinkers of Australian writing, and vice versa?"

Certainly one leaves this fine collection of essays by nine women and seven men, readable scholars all, with some inferential and partially

explicit answers to these questions. But this is the least of the pleasures offered by *European Perspectives*. For Professor Capone, having imposed on her contributors no restrictions on approaches to be used and encouraging them to "diversification [and] a plurality of views" has brought forth a full flowering of assorted papers all of which, separately and together, provide one of the more stimulating "reads" of critical material on Australian literature that the reviewer has experienced in recent years.

The essays in *European Perspectives* can be read with pleasure in any order, but it is worthy to note that they have been creatively positioned to serve the collection as a whole. The first five, which deal imaginatively with more or less general or theoretical issues, include Martin Leer's "Imagined Counterpart: Outlining a Conceptual Literary Geography of Australia," Horst Priessnitz's "The Bridled Pagaroo, Is there a Colonial Poetics of Intertextuality?" Eva Rask Knudsen's "Fringe Finds Focus: Developments and Strategies in Aboriginal Writing in English," and "Home Ground, Foreign Territory: Living in Australia," and "Topographies of the Self: Coming to Terms with the Australian Landscape in Contemporary Australian Poetry" by Peter Quartermaine and Gerhard Stilz, respectively.

In almost every respect, each of these essays does justice to its title and indicates the strength of its writer. The reviewer is familiar with some of the earlier bibliographical essays of Horst Priessnitz, Professor of English at the Bergische Universität-Gesamthochschule Wuppertal (Germany), but relatively new to him is the work of Martin Leer and Eva Rask Knudsen, whom the very complete "Notes on Contributors" informs are both research fellows at Copenhagen University, who have studied in Australia and have written on Australian literature: Leer's book on David Malouf, Len Murray, and Randolph Stow is to be published by Collins and Angus and Robertson, and Knudsen is the author of *Tilbage til fremtiden: australsk aboriginal litteratur siden 1964* (Back to the Future: Australian Aboriginal Literature since 1964). With reference to Peter Quartermaine, he is the Associate Director of the Centre for American and Commonwealth Arts and Studies at the University of Exeter and has written extensively on Australian literature and culture. Gerhard Stilz is Professor of English at the University of Tübingen (Germany) and has published widely on the new literature in English.

In support of the collection's intent of "Europeanness," it is instructive to note that only two of the sixteen contributors, Quartermaine and Angela Smith, Director of the Centre of Commonwealth Studies at the University of Stirling and Vice-President of the British Australian Studies Association, are not affiliated with a university on the "continent." And even here, to the extent that the Australian reader needs to be reassured, this American reviewer has not found any "lingering effects of the imperial-colonial connection" in either of their excellent essays.

Smith, the author of *East African Writing in English* and editor of the Australian section of *The Year's Work in English Studies*, contributes to the volume's second grouping, eleven essays, in which, with the exception of the concluding one, Dieter Riemenschneider's inclusive "Literary Criticism in Australia: A Change of Critical Paradigm," the focus narrows to embrace more concrete subjects and individual writers and their texts. Her paper, the simultaneously thoughtful and delightful "Is Phallogocentricity a Sin? or a Peccadillo? Comedy and Gender in Ethel Anderson's *At Parramatta* and Patrick White's *Voss*," is but one of the string of essays in the second grouping worthy of extended comment; something valuable is said in each, and said well. Unfortunately, space dictates that the range and depth of the essays and the quality of their authors can only be suggested by a simple listing. Thus, following the essays seriatim, one notes that after the aptly titled "'Savage Paradise': History, Violence and the Family in Some Recent Australian Fiction" by Xavier Pons, a Lawson specialist who is Professor of English at the University of Toulouse-Le Miral (France), and after an especially lovely and perceptive piece, "Australian Poems in European Paintings" by Werner Senn, Professor of English at the University of Berne (Switzerland), who has published on modern English and Australian literature, the reader will find eight studies of individual texts and authors. These include, in addition to the previously mentioned Angela Smith essay on the Ethel Anderson and Patrick White texts, "Searchlights and Search for History in Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*," a solid and imaginative interpretation by Maria Teresa Bindella, Professor of English literature at the University of Verona; the provocative "Gambling on Reality: A Reading of Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*," by Kirstein Holst Petersen, a graduate of Aarhus University, Denmark, who is currently teaching Postcolonial and English literature the University of Stockholm, Sweden; a deceptively simple but valuable piece, "The Novel as 'Work in Progress': Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus*," by Anna Grazia Mattei, Associate Professor of the English Department of the University of Pisa, who has published on English literature and the new literatures in English; the demanding "Reading the Signs of Michael Wilding's 'Knock, Knock'" by Simone Vauthier, Professor Emeritus of the Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg; and the very discerning "A Gendered Bush: Mansfield and Australian Drivers' Wives" by Isabel Carrera-Suarez of the University of Oviedo (Spain) whose speciality is in women writers and Postcolonial literature. Editor Giovanna Capone, who recently published *Incandescent Verities: the Fiction of Hal Porter* (1990), and Hena Maes-Jelinek, Professor of English and Commonwealth Literature at the University of Liège and co-editor of the series, *Cross/Currents: Readings in the Post-Colonial Literature in English*, then round out the collection auspiciously before Riemenschneider's fine concluding essay with, respectively, their "Hal Porter,

The Tower and the Quintessence of Porterism" and "Last Flight to Byzantium: Patrick White's *Memoirs of Many in One*."

All the essays include, of course, "Works Cited" bibliographies. Yet it is worth pointing attention to the especially useful and lengthy bibliography of several pages developed by Dieter Riemenschneider for his essay, "Literary Criticism in Australia: A Change of Critical Paradigms." Riemenschneider is Professor of English literature at J. W. Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt, Germany, and has edited, among other books, *Critical Approaches to the New Literature in English*.

Before concluding this review, it is appropriate to note that Bruce Clunies Ross, not previously referred to, and Werner Senn are credited inside the volume as being "Editors" of *European Perspectives* together with "General Editor" Giovanna Capone. Only Professor Capone, though, is credited on the cover and she alone introduces the collection.

HERBERT C. JAFFA

Tania Modleski. *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Post-feminist" Age*. New York: Routledge, 1991. pp. 160. \$39.95; \$13.95 pb.

Tania Modleski's recent work, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age*, offers a provocative discussion of the ways in which challenges posed to patriarchal culture by the feminist movement are quietly being neutralized through strategies of appropriation and denial, both in academia and in popular culture (particularly film), through the premature proclamation of a "postfeminist" climate. Modleski argues that one of the implications of the rise of gender studies as an alternative or more "democratic" application of the methods of feminist scholarship is that feminist struggles may appear to be relocated to an unlikely site within the patriarchal project. She suggests that recent texts which "focus on the question of male feminism as a 'topic' for men and women to engage . . . are bringing men back to center stage and diverting feminists from tasks more pressing than deciding about the appropriateness of the label 'feminist' for men" (6). While Modleski welcomes solidarity with males who support the aspirations of the feminist movement and is occasionally critical of women scholars (particularly Elaine Showalter) who appear, in her view, too ready to replace a rigorously feminist agenda with a less woman-centered focus, she raises a concern that the more positive potentials of gender studies might be subordinated to anti-feminist agendas. She argues convincingly that the neologism "postfeminist" prematurely forecloses on the promise of viable social change inherent in feminist questions and points out that anti-essentialist arguments can operate to serve patriarchal strategies of "divide and conquer," by reducing possibilities of organizing around the category "woman," while failing to address the