

Given the specialized nature of the book, it is worth noting the presence of two features helpful to both the theatre practitioner and the non-specialist. The endnotes are a mine of useful information and references which serve especially to place this book in the context of performance-theory literature. And a concise glossary defines, and sometimes redefines, performance-theory terminology as it is used in the specific context of the Halletts' theory.

Indeed it could be said that the best feature of this book is also its only real weakness: *Analyzing Shakespeare's Action* focuses a little too exclusively on its subject, leaving a number of unanswered questions. The most obvious: is the Halletts' system of beat, sequence, and frame applicable only to Shakespeare's plays? Certainly he is the only dramatist they mention. And no explanation is offered for the fact that the majority of the plays referred to in the course of the book are histories and tragedies. Finally, it might also have been useful to consider how the Halletts' theory might have to be modified for adapted and cut versions of Shakespeare's texts as well as for filmscripts.

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Bruce Bennett. *An Australian Compass: Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature*. South Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991. pp. 271. \$24.95 pb.

As a critic, I now expect books with a national circumference to recognize their agendas and even (especially given the self-deprecation available to the Australian variety) to be able to ironize those agendas. In this respect, Bennett's essays on place and direction in Australian literature are disappointingly straight: they play directly into the grubby palms of the canonization act and its desperate need to validate and validate again. Still, these essays do succeed in their tantalizing sweep of direction, a charting by the Southern Cross. Bennett negotiates some important aspects of the typical concerns of a postcolonial literary culture: the attempt to connect with the universal, the friction between a literature and its place of origin, the centre/periphery tensions of a large country, and the question of what is archetypally Australian. These are intriguing and important if familiar questions, and they maintain their value despite the ubiquitous question of identity (although Bennett is suitably ironic about it) that keeps raising its hoary interrogative head. Identity dogs the footsteps of the literature of settler postcolonial countries in ways that are beginning to seem depressingly impossible to evade. The internationalist bias that Bennett actually decries in this text nevertheless informs his critical positioning. Here we see a critic both creating and questioning his civilization and its discontents, with all the unproblematized loading of value that such concepts carry with them.

Bennett's essays are diverse in their content, ranging from a comparative discussion of the poets Les Murray and Peter Porter ("Patriot and

Expatriot: Les A. Murray and Peter Porter”) to a close examination of Judith Wright’s ecological vision. In “Literature and Journalism: the Case of Robert Drewe,” Bennett makes some interesting distinctions and connections between fiction/faction and the lie of Realism. Bennett’s challenge to naive readings of Drewe, and his argument for a perplexed journalism is interesting for what it proposes about cross-boundary writing.

In four of these essays—“Versions of ‘the West’ in North America and Australia,” “Myths of Innocence and Experience,” “Re-viewing Asia,” and “Literary Constructions of the Near North”—Bennett sets out to question cultural orthodoxies. Because of their uneasy stance, these essays are the most compelling in this collection. They sufficiently problematize the extent to which Australian culture has viewed itself as permanently European and separate from Asia; they seek to establish some rapport with the South Asian world that Australia neighbours. Still, Bennett’s call for Australia to educate its neighbours in Australian culture is dangerously idealist. Why should South Asia concern itself with a country heretofore so resolutely European?

Bennett’s discussion of regionalism and community is attractive, and his arguments for an engagement with the local are compelling. Nevertheless, his separation of the critical and the writerly in a tropic beyond interplay is only too academic. His assertion that in Canada critics have kept their place with poets, novelists, and short story writers in their interpretations of place and region, is simply mis-informed. The only reason this might be argued is because the best Canadian critics *are* poets, novelists, and short story writers. His over-reliance on Atwood’s *Survival* gives far too much credence to a now dated theory; and his references to the old boys—McCourt, Harrison, Ricou—for his reading of the Canadian version of regionalism makes me question his parallel reading of Australian regionalism. Is it still an old boys’ treehouse?

Bennett’s final chapter, “The Manufacture of National Literary Histories,” is a fitting conclusion to an uneasy text. He addresses the problem of such productivization of literature, at the same time as he is waylaid by its tempting comprehensiveness. So that while he is overtly aware of the literary history as a political, economic, and educational tool, he is subverted by his desire for a hegemonic textualization. He raises in passing the “previously sidelined discourses” of Aboriginal writing, women’s writing, and cross-genre writing, without adequately acknowledging that literary histories will continue to sideline these discourses; that by the very nature of their “baggy monsterhood,” they are lists of what is “authentic,” markers of what authority chooses to recognize. No amount of well-meaning humanism will save literary histories from this incipient contamination.

There is a suave balance to Bennett’s work that is temptingly persuasive. Rationality, erudition, and comprehensiveness are the markers of

the nationalist position. But within that national construction is still a culture that needs to decode its own imprisonment. I am tempted by the now much-romanticized myth (and history) of Moondyne Joe, that notorious bushranger who was so expert at escape that the governor had a special cell constructed for him in the Fremantle prison. It was lined with heavy wood and was especially reinforced within its limestone containment. The governor swore that if Moondyne Joe could escape from that cell, he would grant him a pardon. And Moondyne did, and was pardoned, and lived in the wilds of the Darling Range, Western Australia. Here is the conundrum that Bennett has skirted. Is Moondyne Australian literature, and the governor its critic? Is Moondyne the critic, and the governor Australian literature? Is the cell Australian literature, and Moondyne and the governor merely inventors and escapers of its space? Although he is tempted, Bennett is not quite ready to become critic as bushranger. Perhaps that transformation will occur with a subsequent critical escape.

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