

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### CHARTED BUT LARGELY UNKNOWN AUSTRALIAN LITERARY HISTORY IN PERSPECTIVE

FROM AN EARLY DATE, settlers in *terra australis incognita* have been aware of the potentially significant role which literary history could play in shaping national identity. For many of the educated, literature was synonymous with culture.<sup>1</sup> It was thought to project the sweep and peaks of indigenous thought, and to reflect or give voice to the environment out of which it grew. To each country would be accorded its own distinctive heritage; and the prevalent organic metaphors of the day guaranteed a fruitful exchange between soil and cultivator, as well as the necessary progress and development of the native product. Not surprisingly, then, the first history of local literary achievements was written expressly for an international exposition of national identities, the Paris Exhibition. As G.B. Barton explained in 1866, the aim of this work was 'to give distant readers an exact idea of our progress in literature' and 'also [to] prove an historical record of some value to ourselves.'<sup>2</sup> The latter aim entailed not simply an historical recording of bibliographical and biographical detail, but the praiseworthy endeavour to select, preserve and nurture what was best in local writing. Subsequent literary histories were often less ambitious, although they did retain a dual focus on a readership at home and abroad, as well as the accompanying tendency to write apologetically of the relative dearth or demerits of local productions. With increasing national awareness however and, more recently, the international recognition of Australian *belles lettres*, literary histories have assumed a more confident tone. Assured treatment of material replaces earlier diffidence; and agreed categorizations, clear period demarcations, and the emergence of an established canon all foster the belief that our national literature has been satisfactorily mapped, if not thoroughly explored. Yet the works to hand suggest that even these modest claims may be somewhat premature.

With the bicentenary looming ever closer, the 1980s have witnessed a concerted effort to place local writings within the perspective afforded by two hundred years of white settlement. 1981 saw the appearance of *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*, edited by Leonie Kramer, with sections contributed by Adrian Mitchell, Terry Sturm, Vivian Smith and Joy Hooton. In 1984-85 Dorothy Green's long-awaited revised edition of H.M. Green's *A History of Australian Literature: Pure and Applied* appeared, as too did *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, edited by William H. Wilde, Joy Hooton and Barry Andrews. Two years later the Macmillan publishing house entered the lists with Ken Goodwin's concise general survey, *A History of Australian Literature*. Other works of course are planned, such as a new version of the influential Penguin title, *The Literature of Australia*, to be edited by Laurie Hergenhan. But these are of more limited scope, so that the three major compendia, backed by Angus and Robertson and Oxford University Press, should hold sway in their field for some time. Moreover these works of the eighties, in themselves, are representative of the range, development and ambition of literary histories of Australia. Green's *History of Australian Literature*, as we shall see, is linked in its aims and methods with the seminal work of G.B. Barton, while its own genesis and revisions over a fifty-year period make it a convenient conspectus of evolving attitudes to literary history in this country. With Green's survey recognised, in the words of Joy Hooton, as 'an invaluable reference guide to Australian literature and its standard history' (p.439),<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* sets out selfconsciously to question ruling

assumptions; to offer evaluation and even rankings of writers and their works; and to afford a streamlined reading of the major phases in the evolution of our literature. Goodwin's *History* is apparently aimed at the general reader, but it does indicate new directions both in its emphasis on and in its treatment of post-war literature. Finally, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* is ambitious in a less assuming way. Through a judicious blending of bibliographical and critical information, as well as through its capacity to treat individual instances and larger issues or movements, it renders much of Green's data supererogatory, and highlights shortcomings in the complementary narrative sweep of *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*.

George Burnett Barton (1836-1901) is the acknowledged 'father' of Australian literary history, and a direct precursor of Green in his aims and approach.<sup>4</sup> Although Frederick Sinnett had already provided a pioneering account of Australian writing in 'The Fiction Fields of Australia', published in the *Journal of Australasia* of 1856, it was Barton who ten years later attempted to offer a systematic review of the growth of literature in the colony. To ensure comprehensiveness and to allow the reader to form an individual judgement, Barton produced two volumes, a critical-bibliographical account in *Literature in New South Wales*, and a complementary anthology entitled *The Poets and Prose Writers of New South Wales*. Furthermore his aims, articulated in the former work, would be those of subsequent writers: to 'enable the reader to form an exact idea of the progress, extent and prospects of literary enterprise among us'; to provide 'a bibliographical account that might be practically useful'; and 'to throw some light, from a new point of view, on our social history' (p.1).<sup>5</sup> Also Barton's conception of literature was wide-ranging, and by no means restricted to the major genres, as a checklist of his sub-groupings illustrates: Periodical Literature, Newspapers, Magazines, Poetry, Fiction, Oratory, History, Biography, Travels and Voyages, Philology, Ethnology, Physical Science, Geography, Law, Theology and, for anything which may have escaped this formidable categorization, Miscellaneous. A similar inclusiveness would later characterize Green's account, just as both would lament the limited availability of local materials, and attempt to proselytize for their underrated cause. For to these writers Australian literature was an index of our culture, and as such a yardstick of developing nationhood, so that Barton, in speaking of men of letters, could assert that 'injustice to the class means injury to the nation' (p.13).

Most interestingly perhaps, Barton also foreshadows the work of Green and later commentators in crucial critical assumptions. According to Barton, that which is peculiarly indigenous is to be encouraged; and this is naturally most manifest in works which describe colonial experience and landscapes. Consequently he attacks the reading public's preference for imported over local products, and distinguishes in his commentary between works 'influenced by the productions of the Mother Country', and truly native literature. The latter are normally assumed to reflect lived events, and are described in terms of the Sister Arts' tradition; that is, in Simonides' famous formulation, poetry should aspire to be 'a speaking picture'.<sup>6</sup> Thus Charles Harpur's 'The Creek of the Four Graves' is singled out for praise because it is

narrated with much dramatic force, and at each step the scene is brought vividly before the reader. The subject affords peculiar facility for the exertion of the author's powers of landscape painting — powers which constitute the chief merit of his productions. He writes like a man who has lived in the midst of those scenes which he never tires in describing, and who is eminently gifted with a capacity for appreciating their beauty.  
(pp.98-9)

Similarly, the alleged 'gloomy and despondent tone' of Henry Kendall calls forth the conjecture that 'one would think he had been "lost in the bush" at an early period of his life, and thus had learned to associate thoughts of horror with the fairest scenes' (p.105), while Barton's evaluation of the currency lad's *Poems and Songs* as 'the highest point to which the poetic genius of our country has yet attained' rests again on the Horatian precept of *ut pictura poesis*.

It [the volume] consists almost entirely of descriptive poems, or of poems in which the sentiment is subordinate to the description. The author paints the scenery of his native land with the hand of a master. (p.105)

Immediacy of impression is of paramount importance. It either flows from direct personal experience or is mediated with a minimum of traditional or cognitive qualification through the writer. These criteria emerge elsewhere in Barton's survey, but I have chosen to show their dominance of his section on poetry because, according to Green, it was in this genre that Australian literature would attain its most sustained and pre-eminent achievements.

The publishing history of Dorothy and H.M. Green's *History of Australian Literature* spans an impressive fifty-year period. The project may be said to have begun in 1930 with H.M. Green's *Outline of Australian Literature*, itself a prefatory act to the full length *History* of 1961, which was reissued in its current revised form in 1984. Obviously a full discussion of the genesis of the work is beyond my scope, while the wide currency and accepted status of the 1961 text renders a detailed description of its aims and content unnecessary. Instead I shall restrict my discussion to the 1984 edition, concentrating on Dorothy Green's revisions and on the relative merits and limitations of the rejuvenated work as it seeks to hold its place as an invaluable reference and critical guide to Australian literature. Subsequent comments on the scope and nature of editorial emendations are necessarily based on a limited but, I trust, representative collation of variant passages.

The difficulties and challenges for the reader of the *History* begin with Dorothy Green's preface. These arise principally from a lack of clarity concerning the precise nature of revisions and from the ambivalent status which her preface asserts for the work as a whole. Admittedly, Green attempts to outline and justify her emendations, though here some of the ways listed by which revisions have been fitted into the 1961 text are problematical:

- (a) By the obvious method of replacement, for names, dates and matters of simple fact; . . .
- (c) By inserting additional material or dissenting opinion in square brackets at points in the text where practicable. (I,xxv)

In (a) the qualifier 'obvious' begs crucial questions. To whom should this be obvious: to the author, to specialists, to lay readers, to those in a position to compare the 1961 and 1984 texts? Or is this obvious in the sense that updating is a practice which we should expect? This semantic vagueness has a bearing on (c), as we shall see, because there are lengthy passages of 'additional material or dissenting opinion' inserted into the 1961 text without overt acknowledgement, on occasions when the use of square

brackets would seem to be not merely practicable but indispensable for purposes of consistency, and of clearly marking a substantial shift in the emphasis of the original commentary on a given author.

This issue of unmarked emendation is also relevant to the special status which Dorothy Green claims for the *History*. With justice she argues that, as 'the first comprehensive, systematic, unified, critical account of a literature by a scholar-poet,' the work has 'an importance of its own, literary, historical and social' (I,xxiii). She also draws attention to its claims as 'literary criticism; that is, a book which has some of the characteristics of a work of art, and which therefore posed additional problems' (I,xxvi). In effect, she is faced with the apparently insoluble dilemma of retaining the work's artistic integrity and of carrying out the updating necessary to maintain its role as a 'primary source,' another formulation which blurs the work's status. On the positive side, this dual status as reference and literary work means that questionable critical assessments can be valorized as reflections of H.M. Green's time and place, or altered on the assumption that access to more recent information would probably have led him to just such emendations of viewpoint. Similarly, once the need for revision is admitted, it provides an opportunity to improve the text silently through alterations to a thousand incidentals of style and content, in ways scarcely acknowledged here. Instead, the overall thrust of the prefatory rhetoric is to mount a defence of the *History* along the lines of 'admire its undoubted comprehensiveness and generosity of spirit, but restrain your cavils in view of the work's unique historic and critical merits.' But can a work enjoy the rank of a revised and current reference work, and the quasi-artistic sanctity claimed for a unique literary production? Can one, in essence, transfer the status of the 1961 text to the revised edition of 1984? The very process of updating would seem to militate against this and ironically even to invite contemporary judgement. My account therefore first focuses on recent revisions, and then offers a general appraisal of the work's informing vision of Australian literature.

My principal illustrations of the practice and problems associated with emendation to the 1961 text are drawn from the entry on William Baylebridge. He is singled out in the reviser's foreword as one of those writers whose literary reputation has undergone substantial change since H.M. Green completed his work. The need to incorporate additional or dissenting opinion thus becomes a feature of this entry. Characteristically the revisions are judicious and of such a nature as to strengthen the work's literary-critical claims, as in this passage from the 1961 edition:

Here he approached O'Dowd, but whereas O'Dowd makes no claim that the truths which move him are new, Baylebridge, to quote again what he said himself, presents the edifice and even the bricks of his thought as an original 'whatever the straw.' Baylebridge is one of the most difficult of all Australian poets to estimate, for several reasons. In the first place, in a poet ideas matter, of course, only in so far as they are incorporated in and inseparable from his poetry, like a crystal dissolved in spirit . . .<sup>8</sup>

After revision, the line beginning 'Baylebridge' continues 'claimed that both bricks and edifice of his thought were original and *forestalled criticism by asserting that his ideas were handed back to him in "translation"*' (my stress). The final sentence after 'matter' concludes '*but they matter to literature* only in so far as they are incorporated in and

inseparable from the poetry, like a crystal dissolved in spirit' (p.532, my stress). Assessments are subtly refined and the critical focus sharpened through either additional information or a change of phrase; but the spirit of the whole is maintained, in no small measure through the careful retention of Green's distinctive metaphors and similes. These are features of the emendations throughout.

The upgrading of biographical data, although generally less subtle in its effects and more predictable in its scope, is characterised also by scrupulous attention to stylistic detail. A real sense of the impact of revisions can be gained only from a lengthy quotation of passages for comparison by the reader, beginning with the text of 1961:

William Baylebridge (Brisbane, 1883-1942) was a man of marked and enigmatic personality; he cultivated his idiosyncrasies and surrounded himself with mystery. His real name was Charles William Blocksidge, and all his early work was published under that name, but afterwards he adopted the other, though not, apparently, by any process of law. He came of old South of England stock, but was a fourth generation Australian; his father was a Brisbane auctioneer and he was educated at Brisbane Grammar School. At twenty-five he went to England, where he published his earliest volume of verse. During the first World War he appeared mysteriously in Cairo and claimed to have done 'special literary work in France, Egypt and the East' . . .<sup>9</sup>

After revision the passage reads:

William Baylebridge (Brisbane, 1883-1942) was a man of marked and enigmatic personality; he cultivated his eccentricities and surrounded himself with mystery. His real name was Charles William Blocksidge, and all his early work was published under that name, but afterwards he adopted the other, though not, apparently, by any process of law. He was a fourth generation Australian; his father was an estate agent and auctioneer; he was educated at Woolloongabba State school and Brisbane Grammar and later by a private tutor, David Owen, who was an outstanding scholar. During the period of his tutorship it is said he was very much under the influence of his mother as well as his tutor. In 1908 he went to England where he published his first volumes of verse. During the first World War Blocksidge-Baylebridge turned up mysteriously in Cairo, but there is no evidence to suggest, as is sometimes claimed, that he had anything to do with British Military Intelligence, or that he had any newspaper connections. (I,532-3)

Well may it be remarked in the introduction, although solely in reference to background research, that 'a good deal of the work involved in revision is doomed to remain invisible' (I,xxiv). The reviser's hand has not only touched the massive units of biography and bibliography, but also the most minute indices of authorial expression, emending even individual words and commas. Irrespective of the literary merits of the respective passages, it should be clear that revisions on this scale render

the *History* of 1984 a work composed at separate periods, and one penned by two hands.

The other major area of confusion concerns our understanding of what constitutes 'obvious' revision, and again the Baylebridge entry is richly informative. Apart from shifts of emphasis, the other main alterations involve modernisation of the commentary, and condensing the section which illustrates the poet's verse and ideas. The latter deletions are considerable. In addition to short passages of quotation and critique, they include the truncation of a sonnet, cited originally in its entirety, to its opening line 'Heavy with revelation is this hour', as well as the reduction of six stanzas to one with a correspondingly heavy incursion into H.M. Green's accompanying commentary. Given constraints of space and emended focus, such changes are readily defensible. Also it would have been impracticable to acknowledge editorially these contractions; but the case is more problematical with substantial interpolations. The entry, for instance, ends with six lines in square brackets, to denote their status as revisions:

[Baylebridge's will directed that a third of his estate be spent on providing an annual poetry prize, the 'Grace Leven Prize', and on publishing his works in a uniform edition. Four volumes have so far appeared: *This Vital Flesh* (Sydney, 1961); *The Growth of Love* (Sydney, 1963); *An Anzac Muster* (Sydney, 1962) and *Salvage* (Sydney, 1964).] (I,541)

Yet why the following passage, which is a far more remarkable contribution to the *History*, should appear without any indication of its status as interpolation is less clear:

There is one great danger in this excessive allusiveness which has grown more serious in the last twenty years and which makes the assessment of another mannered stylist among Australian writers as difficult as that of Baylebridge. This resides in the fact that as English literature courses in schools become more attenuated and a majority of readers cease to have any knowledge of the great prose and poetry of the past, they will be unable to identify the imitator from the inventor: those who never read the Bible for instance and come upon quotations woven into the text of a modern author are apt to attribute to him a sublimity which is not his own. Baylebridge however has enough native faults to put the reader on guard  
 . . . (I,534)

Perhaps the reference to 'the last twenty years' was thought a sufficient marker, but then why use square brackets in the former instance when the presence of actual dates indicates categorically that the passage must be an addition? Also it seems hardly just that a diatribe against the school system appear in a form which may lead to its incorrect attribution. This is by no means an isolated illustration of the problematic status of revisions, and points again to the difficulty of reconciling fidelity to the original with the desire to maintain the *History* as an up-to-date working reference rather than as a literary museum piece.

Apart from these problems inherent in the reviser's avowed aims, I found the emendations to the 1961 text to be almost always unquestionable improvements which enhance the style, information and critical content of the original. Noteworthy too is

the great care taken to maintain continuities, as when H.M. Green's seven-line discussion of Wentworth's poem 'Australasia' is expanded into twenty-nine lines. Although the interpolation is clearly acknowledged, the reviser does not feel freed from her responsibility to either the tone or content of the original by the presence of square brackets. Instead much of her passage could be read as a demonstration of Green's insight that the poem is instinct with the experience of Wentworth himself, just as the added detail offered on the work's historical impact is perfectly in keeping with Green's original aim. Similarly, the reviser takes Green's isolated figure for the verse ('whose stiff and heavy couplets bang down like slabs of Australian hardwood'),<sup>10</sup> and preserves it from archival oblivion in the form of a home-spun image commensurate to its subject:

it [the poem] gives a charming picture of the environs of Sydney which Wentworth knew well, and of the mountains which he had crossed. It is rhetoric, but rhetoric worthy of respect because of its subject; the couplets are at times stiff and heavy like slabs of Australian hardwood . . . (I,121)

Here as elsewhere, Dorothy Green exhibits scrupulous care and the highest respect for the 1961 text. The result is a revised edition loyal in both its style and content to the original, and one which clearly seeks to accommodate a sense of the work's intrinsic artistic merits with the need to emend and update its substance.

As a work of criticism and reference, Green's *History* is uneven. Undoubtedly volume one, which deals with writings to 1923, is of more abiding value. There Green is particularly impressive on what he designates as the period of 'Self-Conscious Nationalism 1890-1923', not because of his basic thesis that the march towards federation coincided with the birth of a genuinely Australian literature, but because of the sheer breadth of information offered. His survey projects admirably the diversity and plenitude of the time, and provides captivating accounts of the work and ideas of non-canonical figures such as C.W. Bean and Walter Murdoch. Further, his survey of literature before 1890 stands comparison with any on these times, though this in itself is not high praise. Rather it indicates how little our basic information about, and conceptual overviews of, our colonial literary heritage have been advanced in the last thirty years. Volume two, on the period 1923 to 1950, has little more than biographical and bibliographical merit, while the general weaknesses of Green's criticism and categorization are clearly exposed here. Dorothy Green was obviously aware of these shortcomings and acknowledges, in her introduction, that the notion of "Australianness" becomes more diffuse and tenuous' in this volume (I,xxx), as does the attempt to group writers according to subheadings such as lyrical, lyrical descriptive and reflective. For the halting and inconsequential criticism this can produce see pp.1022-23 of the entry on Judith Wright, who eventually is classified as lyrical rather than meditative for reasons 'easier to appreciate than to specify' (II,1022). This volume has been so manifestly overtaken by time and dramatically changed perspectives that not even extensive rewriting on the scale of the Baylebridge entry could have brought it in line with current thinking. Its retention testifies to the reviser's conception of the *History* as a single literary entity, and to the necessarily provisional status of all critical judgements and even of all literary histories.

The other strikingly dated aspect of the *History* is its critical criteria, which recall those of *Literature in New South Wales*. Like Barton, Green praises verisimilitude and

the presentation of authentic Australian experience, the latter being associated predominantly with bush and country scenes. Predictably the *Bulletin* school of the 1890s receives high praise; and the sensitive natural singer is preferred to the intellectual or too self-conscious craftsman. So Green, in justifying his valuation of Wright, distinguishes her as one who 'observes and records easily and naturally' (II,1027). These critical values are of course familiar, and gained much currency through A.G. Stephens' vaunted disdain for expatriate 'bias-bleared spectacles'. It is nonetheless disappointing that half a century after Stephens the same criteria should be capable of such categorical and damning application, as in this comparison of Kendall and Harpur:

Kendall was the first poet to whom the face of Australia, or at least some part of it, appeared unveiled. Harpur had sought for it, but it had appeared to him only through a haze of book-fed recollections and conventions: he had tried to be Australian; Kendall was Australian naturally, without trying, and he made his outlook clearer . . . (I,161)<sup>11</sup>

This antipodean version of Augustan emphasis on the customary and observable can lead to unduly narrow or obscuring readings. Catherine Helen Spence, for instance, wins high praise; Barbara Baynton is dismissed after brief comment. But it is debatable who fares the worst. Of Spence we hear, 'she wrote with her eye almost entirely on her object: she aimed simply at describing the life she had lived and observed about her, at seeing Australia steadily and seeing it whole' (I,219), whereas Baynton's stories are held to be flawed by a straining after effect:

the accumulation . . . of so many horrors that they come gradually to appear invented and unnatural; and a straining of the style in order to intensify the effect, which is weakened also by artificialities that defeat the writer's end by distracting the reader's attention. (I,609)

The first reductive judgement results when a general critical criterion abrogates the need for an individual reading, while the second assessment suggests an alarming degree of parochialism in a literary history written post-Kafka and the Existentialists. As literary criticism, then, volumes one and two are of only limited merit, though the *History* does remain a valuable reference tool. Whatever its limitations may be, they are, as Dorothy Green reminds us, as much those of the time as of the author; and the work still impresses through its attempt to do justice, not just to a few prominent literary peaks, but to a whole range of hills and mountains, in all 'its unusual shape and colouring, its occasional hints of strange fascination that is yet unexplored' (I,xxi).

*The Oxford History of Australian Literature* is distinguished from Green's account by its scope and its more overtly critical thrust. As the work of a group of scholars, it was virtually precluded from offering a single vision of the growth of Australian culture, after the manner of Green. Moreover, its coverage is much less inclusive and, by virtue of selection and assessment, it confers canonical and even hierarchical status on many of the writers it treats. Also, whereas Green sought to provide a mass of material for each reader to explore, the Oxford contributors endeavour to blaze or, more accurately, to rechart well-known trails. This means that we are offered, at best, reappraisal of the already known, except in the section on drama by Terry Sturm.



There astute criticism is combined with a sense of the impact of political and social events on the history of the Australian theatre. The account starts with the morally enlightening role of convict theatre, explores the notion of drama as 'a containment of reality within convention' (p.195), and places the renaissance of drama which began in the sixties well within a tradition of Australian naturalism. This and the bibliographical section by Joy Hooton (with entries devoted to both general studies and individual authors) are *The Oxford History's* real strengths.

The longer sections on poetry and prose offer fewer insights. Vivian Smith's section on verse is solid and reliable, offering a useful conspectus of current views on the development of Australian verse, and on its major periods and writers. Notably lacking, however, are new perspectives, which is reflected at times in underlying critical assumptions, as in this reference to the Ern Malley hoax: 'If poetry is related to a sense of the truth of human experience and imaginative wholeness, then these poems are clear fakes' (p.371). Unfortunately *The Oxford History* opens with its most disappointing section, that devoted to fiction. Unlike the other parts, here we seek in vain for a complex sense of how history, local events or developments overseas have influenced the evolution of Australian works. Links between writers are often effected with superficial transitions, as in the shift from Boldrewood to Praed with the sentence 'Mrs. Campbell Praed had no such innocent vision' (p.64); and the selection and discussion of authors is predictable and primarily descriptive. Again, for instance, we find the stock trio of female writers, Cambridge, Praed and Tasma, the subject of dutiful treatment, as if that was all of note to flow from the pen of colonial women, while the brief and generalised commentary on Barbara Baynton does not even constitute a single paragraph. For a literary history which sets out avowedly to question ruling assumptions, *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* surprisingly confirms a great many of them through its treatment of authors, and affords few innovatory perspectives.

Ken Goodwin's *A History of Australian Literature* is far less ambitious than either of the works discussed to date. Basically it seeks to bring together within a narrow compass a great deal of information in a readable form. In this it succeeds admirably. Most of the judgements and the authors selected for discussion are therefore familiar, though some areas receive comparatively more space than in the conventional histories, such as children's literature. The most interesting feature of this work, however, is the allocation of at least half the book to literature post-1940. Accompanying this emphasis is a corresponding sense that here, at long last, Australian literature has produced works which will stand comparison with those of other nations, and which may even surpass them in terms of their diversity and their inherent interest. The last brief chapter, for instance, focuses on writers of aboriginal and non-English speaking background; and its purport is clearly signalled by the title: 'The uniqueness of recent writing.' While one could quibble with some of this history's details and judgements, it provides a good general map of the readily known, and outlines some recent areas of development.

In terms of comprehensiveness and accessibility of information, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* clearly supersedes rival reference works. Although not a literary history, it challenges comparison with the editions of Green and Kramer on the grounds of its bibliographical, biographical and critical detail, as well as through its attempt to provide overviews of selected areas, such as folk-song and ballad, and war literature. Moreover, at times it surpasses conventional histories in the range of

its entries, particularly concerning newer areas like feminism, criticism, cinema, and their relationship to Australian literature. Obviously such sections, despite their surprising length and detail, cannot compete with full-length studies, nor with extended and masterful treatments of selected topics in standard histories, such as Green's account of newspapers and journalism in Australia. Nonetheless, *The Companion's* coverage, and the balance and accuracy of its judgements, are impressive, while it even attempts on occasions what is sadly lacking in more conventional literary histories: an overview of rich thematic areas of our literature, such as the convict heritage. Collectively these factors make *The Companion* an important contribution to Australian literary studies, and one of those rare reference works to which the reader will return repeatedly for entertainment and instruction.

These recent publications in Australian literary history indicate the existence of a broad consensus on, and even an established canon of, local literature. After years of relative ignominy, there is at last recognition of a product not only worthy of study, but capable of yielding the accepted hallmarks of cultural respectability. But the time for self-congratulation is still far off. There still exist immense gaps in Australian literary scholarship which render the writing of any literary history extremely difficult. As Leonie Kramer reminds us in her balanced introduction to *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*, there is 'surprisingly little work of an extensive and thorough critical kind either on individual authors, or on literary forms' (p.23).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, our nineteenth-century literature remains largely uncharted, as witnessed by the continual enshrinement of Cambridge, Praed and Tasma to the detriment of a host of talented writers. Who has heard, for instance, of Caroline Leakey, Louisa Ann Meredith, Caroline Atkinson and Maud Jean Franc apart from a handful of scholars? Also, and perhaps more tellingly, we lack broader commentaries which would teach us how to envision or approach our national literature: works of comparable calibre to, say, *American Renaissance*, *Errand in the Wilderness*, *The Power of Blackness* and *The Reign of Wonder*. Until Australian scholarship focuses on the neglected parts of our heritage and learns to see it anew, we will necessarily be offered reference 'maps' of delusively neat outline, which give back to us the already accessible but veil from vision aspects of our literature as potentially demanding and rewarding as the once unknown continent itself.

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#### NOTES

1. For a full account of this association see George Nadel, *Australia's Colonial Culture: Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1957).
2. G.B. Barton, *The Poets and Prose Writers of New South Wales* (Sydney: Gibbs, Shallard & Co., 1866), p.vii.
3. From Joy Hooton's bibliographical entry in Leonie Kramer, ed., *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981). All future page references are to this edition.
4. For further details on early literary histories see Brian Kiernan, 'Literature, History, Literary History: Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century in Australia', in *Bards, Bohemians, and Bookmen: Essays in Australian Literature*, ed. Leon Cantrell (St. Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1976), pp.1-18.

5. G.B. Barton, *Literature in New South Wales* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1866). Page references to Barton are from this work.
6. Jean Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
7. H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature: Pure and Applied*. Revised by Dorothy Green (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1984). Page references to Green are from this work.
8. H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature: Pure and Applied*. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961), I, p.484.
9. H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature* (1961), I, p.484.
10. H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature* (1961), I, p.112.
11. Consequently we are told elsewhere that 'Unfortunately for Harpur, though not for Australian poetry, Kendall overtopped and quite overshadowed him' (I, p.110).
12. To this might be added Northrop Frye's general animadversions from 'Literary History', *New Literary History*, 12 (1981), 219-25, which have a relevance to our local enterprise:

When I first became interested in problems of literary history I became very impatient with the kind of literary history that told me nothing about the history of literature, but was simply ordinary history specializing in the names and dates of authors. Genuinely literary history, I thought, was largely concerned with conventions and genres, and as I looked further into it, it began to take on two aspects, one diachronic, the other synchronic. (p.219)

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