

at Jobsearch being told that she should have learned to drive instead of learning three languages, and the displaced Elizabeth Woodville, widow of Edward IV, giving up her child and relinquishing her proper place. But overall, Edwards' women do not meekly accept their lots. They are, instead, harpies: big, brazen women with strong thighs who will eat you alive if you're not careful, women who will get their revenge. She warns men not to expect safety from her, in the evocative poem 'Eating the Experience: A Warning': 'Never lend your cock to a poet, dear'.

Edwards ends her book with a more optimistic image of a mother doing the tango with her daughter; continuing a theme presented earlier in the poem 'Night Is the Smell of Burning', where the narrator says 'I must make healthy art from this illness. If it is an illness.' This is still, overall, a bleak uncompromising book, but the box lets out a small ray of hope in the end. It is not peaceful poetry, but it is passionate.

Asian / Australian Relations and Identities

RICHARD GEHRMANN

Alter/Asians: Asian-Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture. Edited by Ien Ang, Sharon Chalmers, Lisa Law and Mandy Thomas.

Sydney: Pluto Press, 2000.

It is tempting to consider the proposition that the decade of the 1990s might be remembered as one in which Australian confrontation and acceptance of Asia might be a defining moment. This volume is an illustration of this, as our focus on understanding Asia-Australian relations and Asian-Australian identity has moved from being a topic of interest for scholars in traditional country-based departments like Asian Studies or International Relations, to becoming interdisciplinary. A product of a conference held

in Sydney in 1999, *Alter/Asians* offers the reader some refreshing and varied insights into aspects of an Australia that was compelled, in the last decade of the twentieth century, to face the realities caused by changed immigration policies begun more than a generation earlier.

The decade of Australia's most recent accommodation with Asia began with economic rationalism of the late 1980s and the pressure for Australia to engage the region economically. The boom economies of northeast Asia, identified in the Garnaut Report, were to be the trade partners of a confident Australia determined to link up with an economic miracle in what many were already calling the Asia Pacific century. A desire to articulate into the growing economies of the region was accompanied with as much education and understanding as was necessary for business success. The rhetoric of multiculturalism and the apparently successful and public 'assimilation' of many elite Asian immigrants created a comforting illusion of a harmonious Australia into which Indochinese Australians would drift, unproblematically, towards 'Australian-ness'. Then in 1996 the revival of sentiments previously espoused by Professor Blainey in 1984 gave a new dimension to Australian relationships with 'Asia'. In political terms this 'engagement' with Asia and Australia's Asian identity was manifested in the emergence of a number of avowedly populist (and popular) parties. While not the sole representative of such opinion, Pauline Hanson became the most recognised and reviled public persona of this debate, overshadowing former luminaries such as Graeme Campbell. This challenge to the established public rhetoric of multiculturalism, a term Ien Ang rightly sees as 'increasingly stale' (xix), is addressed in a number of contributions. The response to the challenges posed by Pauline Hanson and her supporters underpins many chapters either directly or indirectly.

The three sections into which *Alter/Asians* is arranged are 'Alter/Asians' Australian Identity', 'Literature /Art Performance' and 'Popular Culture and the Media'. Julie Matthews discusses, among other things, concepts of hybridity and identity and the practice of generalisation about Asians as one group, regardless of actual ethnic and national background. This issue is a per-

petual problem for many Asian Australians, and is something that lies at the heart of the One Nation attack. The cross cultural experience is at the heart of Allen and Carmen Luke's revealing study of interethnic marriage and Devleena Gosh's study of dispossessed Indian Fijians in Australia.

The second section of *Alter/Asians* addresses 'Literature/Art and Performance', and contains several case studies of culture production. To me the contribution of Asian Australians to this section has a significant impact, as accounts like Dean Chan's reflections on the experience of being an Asian Australian artist are most revealing.

Part three on 'Popular Culture and Media' looks at the essence of how ordinary non-elite Australians of all ethnic backgrounds address contemporary debates. The issue of Hanson is directly addressed by Denise Woods in her fascinating and well researched chapter on the representation of the Hanson debate in the Southeast Asian press. On a hopeful note, it is established that a diversity of opinion on Hanson is shown to exist, and that this reflects the problematic nature of Australian perceptions of Asia. Another chapter reflecting on the connections between Australia and the region is the discussion on Australian interpretation of the fall of Indonesia's President Suharto, by Andrew Jakubowicz and Rod Palmer. The fall of Indonesia's long term authoritarian leader and the image of an anarchical Indonesia were used to convey images of chaos in a neighbour while in contrast Australia was calm. Successive Australian governments had ignored differences of political orientation and cultural practice to accommodate the government of President Suharto, a policy that left Australia as Indonesia's closest ally in the western (but not Asian) world. When the democratic pressures from within were accompanied by severe economic dislocation, Australians were treated to a nightly television news depiction of desensitizing revolution and change. Indonesia was presented as the 'unstable other' while Australia was a 'white' civilized area of stability. Jakubowicz and Palmer see this as a diversionary movement by which Australian viewers, at a time of concerns about multi-cultural identity, land rights issues and the rise of One Nation, could be reassured about

the comparative stability of Australia.

Other chapters in the popular culture and media section discuss aspects of the interaction of Australian and Japanese culture. Tony Mitchell and Craig Norris work on this area of rapidly growing importance. As increasing numbers of Australians travel and work in Japan, a trend reciprocated by Japanese in Australia, the inter-connectedness of Australia and Japan, the two long term developed states in the periphery of 'Asia', can only increase. The broader aspects of the cultural flow from Asia towards Australia are addressed by Mandy Thomas, who shows how different interpretations are drawn by different consumers. But while high culture cosmopolitans have sought and valued isolated aspects of Asian culture, this only occurs within boundaries defined by Australia.

In any conference based book, different styles may not always mesh, and the editors are to be commended for their work in arranging *Alter/Asians* in such a harmonious fashion. The diversity of approaches in the book will mean that the different chapters will appeal to an extensive and eclectic range of readers. Given the growing significance of issues of nationality and ethnicity in the post Cold War world, it would be interesting indeed if the editors could re-publish on the same themes in 2010 to reflect on where Australia has gone in the possibly troubled decade that lies ahead.

Expatriate Biography

ROBERT DIXON

Rosa! Rosa!: A Life of Rosa Praed, novelist and spiritualist by Patricia Clarke
Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1999.

Writing in 1995 about Rosa Praed's interest in the occult world, I suggested that to fully understand this and other aspects of her life in London during the last quarter of the nineteenth