

Atkinson writes very well, and his account is engagingly quirky, packed with insights and fascinating detail. He works mainly from the primary sources, and even when he makes a familiar point he nearly always illustrates it with a fresh example. The book, however, is not for novices, and readers who have little background in Australian history will find its structure confusing. They will also struggle because although Atkinson's thought is rich, his points can be subtle, and his manner of exposition is sometimes suggestive and elliptical rather than explicit and analytical. Even specialists in Australian history will reap rewards if they give key parts of the book a second reading.

It is hard not to compare the first two volumes of Atkinson's trilogy with Manning Clark's multi-volume history of Australia. There are obvious similarities. Both histories are written 'from the inside', both address profound moral concerns and both take religion and idealism seriously. But there are also striking differences, for they operate on different levels. Much of the grandeur of Clark's work is generated by its conscious search for the tragic and by a schematic framework based on the clash of broad social visions linked to Catholicism, Protestantism and the Enlightenment. Atkinson's account is less structured around the tragic, less schematic, more suspicious of standard categories, more sensitive to idiosyncrasy and multiple voices. It therefore lacks the exhilarating sweep and grand simplicity of Clark's account, but it engages more with the complexity of its subject matter. It is also more broadly sympathetic. Clark had great powers of empathy, but sometimes he chose not to use them. His history has a residual category, 'the philistines', to which he consigned people devoid of vision, driven solely by the pursuit of mammon. He deplored their influence, but never tried to understand them. Atkinson, by contrast, tries to understand everyone about whom he writes. Reading his history, therefore, is not just an intellectual experience, but a humanizing one.

CHRIS CONNOLLY

University of Canterbury

History, Historians and Autobiography. By Jeremy Popkin. Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2005. 339 pp. US price: \$35.00. ISBN 0-226-67543-2.

THERE ARE NOT MANY FULL-SCALE BIOGRAPHIES OF HISTORIANS, but a surprising number of historians have written their autobiographies. Popkin's bibliography itemizes over 160 book-length autobiographies and approximately the same number of autobiographical chapters, articles and published interviews by historians. Even so, Popkin makes no pretence to exhaustiveness (he excludes, for example, unpublished autobiographies) but instead seeks 'to define and analyze the issues that such works raise'. Not confined to the English-speaking world, Popkin's sample has a goodly quota of French and German examples. Broadly speaking, Popkin seeks to show the interconnections between history, historians and autobiography and stresses the extent to which historians have made a contribution to the autobiography as a genre. To simplify a complex argument, he contends that historians' autobiographies, for all their variability, are fundamentally different from conventional historical monographs, that autobiography is to be judged according to its own rules (which includes 'a respect for verifiability'), and thus disputes literary theorists who assert that autobiography is akin to fiction.

Drawing on theorists such as Paul Ricoeur, Popkin explores some complex (and complexing) theoretical questions surrounding the relationship of autobiographers and their texts, and the relationship between autobiography and other genres. Those who believe that theory emerges out of practice may have misgivings about pronouncements on the nature of autobiography (or history or biography for that matter) from those who have never written one, especially when their findings are expressed in an arcane language that Popkin replicates in his second chapter ('Narrative Theory, History and Biography').

Once over (or around) that hurdle the reader can settle back to page after page of revealing discussion, expressed with precision and clarity. In some cases there is the careful unravelling of individual biographies, notably in demonstrating how Gibbon's *Autobiography* and *The Education of Henry Adams* have contributed to the genre. The other technique is the thematic approach where Popkin addresses the big questions concerning the lives of historians as those historians see them. Family background may or not have been an encouragement to choose a career in history, and frequently enough it had to be overcome. But many historians were initially attracted by an inspiring undergraduate teacher, who they sometimes came to realize was not a very good historian — demonstrating again that teaching ability and research prowess are not necessarily one and the same. For others, history was 'inviting, encompassing, infinite' and, as Popkin says, 'the academic discipline most connected to reality and least dependent on abstract theory'. Then there is the influence of supervisor, choice of subject and the progress of a career. Another theme is the historian–autobiographers' wider encounters, including wartime experiences (in which several expressed the frustration that they made so little contribution to the war effort), the commitment to communism (notably the ex-communists attempting to explain why they were attracted to such a repressive system to begin with), activism in the cause of racial equality, and Cold War and Holocaust experiences.

Two activities that occupy many an academic historian's waking hours are noticeably absent from the autobiographies. The historian–memoirists have little to say about teaching and the curriculum, despite many affirming that an undergraduate teacher inspired their choice of career, and even less about their administrative roles. The latter is something of a no-go zone. Not only will the rancour and seeming pettiness of it all alienate a popular readership, discussion of such matters will jeopardize one's standing within the profession at large. As Popkin points out, there are tacit rules that historian–memoirists ignore at their peril. To recount academic dogfights is considered poor taste; to be ostentatious about one's achievements is bad form; to dilate on personal feuds is downright embarrassing. It recalls Beryl Fletcher's novel *The Word Burners*, set in the fictitious University of Hamilton, where the embattled Julia openly admits that she had acted as she did in order to get tenure. Her colleagues, had they been honest with themselves, would probably would have done the same but were horrified and unforgiving because Julia had broken an unstated taboo.

This is one of the rare books on a universal topic that incorporates Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. Australian historians' autobiographies, as Popkin explains, have a wider importance given they 'had a significant role in establishing a tradition of first-person writing' within the country. This wider significance is not the case with New Zealand and the Pacific; there have been too few New Zealand historian biographers (Morrell, King, Sinclair and Oliver), not to mention the brief interviews in the sadly defunct *History Now*, to have made a wider impact. Accordingly Popkin can only discuss such contributions to illustrate a particular point. But with Pacific historians there is scope to consider their autobiographical writing in more expansive terms. During the 1990s there was a flourish of autobiographical writings, in article form, directed at peers rather than for wider consumption. This passing phase was initiated by Brij V. Lal in his edited collection *Pacific Islands History: Journeys and Transformations* (1992); it was followed up with a special issue of the *Journal of Pacific Studies* (1996) and more recently by Lal's edited collection *Pacific Places, Pacific Histories* (2004). The idea was to allow these autobiographers-in-passing to relate their academic interests to their outlooks, upbringing and training and thus give colleagues a more informed perspective on their work. It is noticeable that 'accident and chance . . . rather more than careful calculated thought' has led Pacific historians to their topics of research.

Whatever their faults, historians' autobiographies add to our understanding of the human experience, and ourselves as historians. It is appropriate, then, that Popkin

concludes his first-rate study on an agreeably autobiographical note. He lived his project 'as a grand adventure', enjoyed doing something different and acquiring new skills and 'learned some unexpected truths about myself'. I wonder whether he experienced the same emotions as Edward Gibbon, on the shores of Lausanne, upon the completion of his epic *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, when 'joy on the recovery of my freedom' was overtaken by the realization 'that I had taken my everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion'? I hope that Jeremy Popkin, whatever he is doing next, will take time off every so often to provide his further thoughts on this open-ended subject.

DOUG MUNRO

Victoria University of Wellington