

biography is highly unsympathetic. Spencer is described as having 'a token marriage with an unsympathetic woman' while his inability to grapple with his drinking problem is partly blamed on her lack of companionship and support, things she had never received from her husband.

In a now familiar scenario, it was another woman half his age, Jean Hamilton, who assisted in Spencer's rehabilitation and gave him his 'two most perfectly happy years'. These years, spent quietly in London working on the manuscripts of *The Arunta* and *Across Australia* with Jean Hamilton as secretary and companion, came to an end with Spencer's ill-conceived expedition to Tierra del Fuego. Although accompanied by Hamilton, the winter and exposed circumstances proved too much for Spencer's heart. Spencer's inability to relax in his old age and draw satisfaction from his laurels is described by Mulvaney and Calaby as an 'impulsive and romantic predisposition towards outdoor life, a boyish eagerness for fresh scientific adventure'! Might this be their unconscious assessment that Spencer, like many men of unrelieved action, never quite grew up?

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John Batman and the Aborigines. By Alastair H. Campbell. Kibble Books, Malmsbury, Victoria, 1987. 288pp. Australian price: \$20 paperback, \$40 hardback.

THIS BOOK is an interesting addition to the rapidly-growing literature about relations between Australian Aborigines and British settlers. Batman was an important figure in early colonial society. Native-born son of convict parents, he grew up in New South Wales, transferred his operations to Van Diemens Land in the 1820s, and in the following decade led the exodus of island settlers to Port Phillip. Despite premature death Batman had an active and vigorous life; his biography touches on many of the major themes of colonial history. Thrusting, aggressive, and ambitious, he was the epitome of the first generation of Australians who refused to accept inferior status just because he happened to be born Australian and the son of a convict. Campbell admires some aspects of his subject's personality, but he does not really like him.

Campbell does not intend his book to be a conventional biography. He is more interested in the circumstances of Batman's times than with the man himself. This applies particularly to Batman's relations with the Aborigines, and indeed the book is written with an eye to contemporary events, Campbell hoping that his work will encourage European Australians to 'openly examine their roots in Australia, and that it will benefit Aborigines today in their struggle to reclaim their history'.

The most interesting section of the book is about Batman's treaty with the Port Phillip Aborigines. Campbell makes several points which add significantly to our understanding of the episode. He argues that the members of the Port Phillip Association were more liberal than many of their contemporaries, wishing to avoid the disastrous conflict with the Aborigines they had experienced in Tasmania. At much the same time Colonial Office officials were drawing the same conclusions about events in the island and attempted to provide far greater respect for land rights in the two new colonies of the 1830s — South Australia and New Zealand.

But good intentions notwithstanding, Campbell establishes that Batman largely faked the treaty. He argues that

(1) the Port Phillip tribes did not have chiefs capable of transferring land;

- (2) the land in question was not owned by one tribe but by five;
- (3) Batman had not, as he claimed, marked the boundaries of the land as requested to make any transaction legal;
- (4) the Aborigines could not have understood the language of the New South Wales blacks who accompanied Batman as interpreters;
- (5) their correct names were not obtained;
- (6) the marks which were entered as the Aborigines' signatures had no meaning and were entered on the deed by someone else.

Campbell assumes, incorrectly, that the government's rejection of the treaty indicated that there was no recognition at all of native title in Australia. This is the conventional view which has been argued many times over in Australian historical work and, for that matter, in Australian courts. The argument went the other way in New Zealand. The refusal to recognize Wentworth's purchase of land in the South Island was not taken as a rejection of native title but rather an affirmation of the deeply-entrenched legal principle that subjects could not purchase land from the indigenous people of the Empire. This principle was fully established in North America in the eighteenth century and was embodied in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The principle was affirmed in the famous 'land rights' cases in the American Supreme Court in the 1820s and 1830s and in the New Zealand Supreme Court in *Symonds v the Crown* in 1847. In this one question of vital contemporary importance it is a pity that Campbell followed, rather than circumvented, the conventional wisdom.

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Big-noting. The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing. By Robin Gerster. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1987 x, 294pp. Australian price: \$34.95, hardback.

SOLDIERS' letters and other war literature have in recent years been used for a variety of purposes: in Christopher Pugsley's *Gallipoli. The New Zealand Story* (1984) for a military history; in Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years. Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (1974), and in my *A Destiny Apart. New Zealand's Search for National Identity* (1986) to explore the origins of national identity; in Jock Phillips' *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male*, to debunk our male culture. Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) broke new ground, using literary and journalistic sources, as well as soldiers' memoirs etc. to explore how the war has been remembered in Great Britain. Robin Gerster's *Big-noting*, as he acknowledges, follows in Fussell's footsteps. It uses a variety of sources, notably novels, to examine the theme of heroism in Australian war writing. The genre is closer to literary history or criticism than to military history.

Most Australian literature of the First World War glorified war. It was frankly propagandist, promoting national sentiment. 'Big-noting' is an Australian vernacular term signifying self-praise, exaggerating one's own importance, blatant boasting. There is plenty of evidence of this presented in this book.

Gallipoli was close to Troy. The Australian soldiers, tall, tough, sunburnt, walk like gods and Homeric heroes, resolute, keen-eyed. This is so catching that the author, on one occasion, and without any sign of satirical laughter (p.68), compares the works of Homer and the Australian military historian, C. E. W. Bean.

The Australians are also portrayed as resembling the public school heroes of the *Boys' Own Paper* variety, lean and clean-shaven, 'playing the game' in dangerous situations.