

Reviews

The Making of the Aborigines. By Bain Attwood. Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1989. pp.xii x 181. Price: \$A16.95.

THERE CAN be no doubt that *The Making of the Aborigines* is a major contribution to the historiography of European/Aboriginal relations in Australia. Bain Attwood's study of Victoria's Gippsland region in the second half of the nineteenth century is a subtle and complex exploration of the pattern of contact between the 'killing times' of the initial pastoral expansion and the overtly racist atmosphere of twentieth-century 'White Australia'. In a series of case studies, he vividly recreates the ways in which Aboriginal people adapted to life on missions and stations and negotiated the paternalistic interference of missionaries, pastoralists and government officials in their lives. Attwood is at all times sensitive and sympathetic to the plight of these dispossessed people. Equally impressive is his treatment of the colonizers: their motivations and actions are analyzed in great detail, teasing out the connections between individual personality, personal experience, ideology, and practice. The work as a whole is informed by a self-conscious reading of ethnographic and British Marxian history as well as feminist theory, a combination which at times is extremely illuminating. Nevertheless, the text is not burdened by jargon or obscure concepts. On the contrary, the prose is fresh, engaging and clear.

Having said all this, we must confess to a basic dissatisfaction with Attwood's approach. As the title suggests, we are supposed to be getting a history of the creation of a new consciousness amongst the dispossessed which transformed them from people with specific local, clan identifications into a group with a much broader sense of common Aboriginal identity. But while we get a very clear sense of how the Europeans were trying to reshape 'the Aborigines', this alleged transformation in consciousness on the part of the colonized is not adequately demonstrated. Attwood seems to be aware of this problem, excusing the dominance of Europeans in the text by reference to his theoretical commitment not to lose sight of the structures of domination. This desire is laudable, but in practice it obscures his main project. The problem is largely, we suspect, one of source material. With the exception of Bessy Cameron's letters, Attwood has very little documentary evidence of Aboriginal consciousness. He attempts to fill this gap by imaginative interpretation of actions and events rather than words, after the style of ethnographic historians such as Denning and Isaacs. However sensitive this analysis is, it remains highly speculative. The other obvious place he could have turned to for Aboriginal voices is oral history, but he is at pains to emphasize the methodological problems of this approach. While we do not wish to deny that such problems exist, it does seem that any study of consciousness needed to confront and deal with the problems rather than rejecting the methodology completely.

Attwood's reluctance to embark on oral history seems to be personal and political as

much as theoretical. His concluding chapter provides a welcome exploration of his own approach to writing history and it is here that he confesses to being very much an 'outsider', an expatriate New Zealander resident in Melbourne for less than ten years. And unlike most researchers in the field of Aboriginal history, he has remained aloof from modern Aboriginal politics. We would suggest that his rejection of oral history and the importance of the Aboriginal perspective on Aboriginality is another way in which he has kept himself apart and avoided the difficult, time-consuming and often painful experiences which other European writers in this field have had to deal with. Nor is the reader reassured by his quoting E.P. Thompson in defence of such deliberate distance.

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Sergeant, Sinner, Saint, and Spy: The Taranaki War Diary of Sergeant William Marjouram, R.A. Edited by Laurie Barber, Garry Clayton, and John Tonkin-Covell. Random Century, 1990. 112 pp. NZ price: \$34.95.

THIS EDITION of Sergeant Marjouram's Taranaki war diary is altogether a less weighty work than is suggested by its impressive title, attractive format, and no fewer than three editors. (What did they all do?)

The original *Memorials of Sergeant Marjouram, Royal Artillery, including six years service in New Zealand during the late Maori War*, was published posthumously in London in 1863. This new abridged edition has dispensed with some (but not enough) of its 'repetitious Victorian religious piety', and retained all that was of value to the student of military history. But again that is not enough. *Sergeant, Sinner, Saint, and Spy* is much less about matters military than it is about Marjouram's earnest efforts to reclaim his fellow soldiers from the service of Satan. It may in fact be of more interest to the social or religious, rather than the military historian.

Even in edited form this diary consists largely of pious proselytizing and Victorian sentimentality, relieved here and there by descriptions of Taranaki under siege. Marjouram is concerned to reform the drunken, dissolute, blaspheming British soldier, by means of both education and temperance, and lead him to salvation through the practice of evangelical Christianity. But many of those he sought to save resisted his efforts until they feared they were staring death in the face. Then, to his great satisfaction, strong men would tremble, shed tears of shame and repent their evil ways. But his greatest reward, 'better than any gift this world could bestow', came from witnessing the distress of his eight-year old daughter as she wept bitter tears at not being good enough to God, at her need for a new heart. His own heart was overjoyed at this 'pleasing confession of an early sense of guilt'.

Marjouram came to New Zealand as a corporal with a small detachment of the Royal Artillery at the end of 1855. He had signed up with the military at the age of sixteen, and died at thirty-two. In between he succumbed to the demon drink, then reformed and became a devoted Wesleyan. His career as a sinner spanned less than four years, and as a saint a little over nine years. As a 'spy' it consisted of a couple of one-day reconnaissance missions; he hardly merited the title, especially when compared to such practised hands as the missionaries Whiteley, Riemenschneider, and Morgan.