

after enduring the chest-thumping indignities of the Pacific Solution, the *Tampa* refugees were subsequently processed, some were declared *bona fide* refugees, and some now live in Australia. In my sad, silly country, to own up to the civilities that we practise is believed to be a green light to people-smugglers.

This very uneven collection exhibits a variety of approaches to the study of the use of history in the shaping and justification of policies. As some contributors' equivocations about 'forgetting' demonstrate, the editors have not been theoretically demanding. However, there are useful essays on the recent past of Australia and New Zealand (by Beaglehole, Nicholls, Neumann and Tavan) to be found here.

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Possession: Batman's Treaty and the Matter of History. By Bain Attwood with Helen Doyle. The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2009. 415pp. Aust price: \$54.99. ISBN 978-0-522-85114-4.

BAIN ATTWOOD'S EXPLORATION of John Batman's role in Australian history, his treaty and his place in settler histories of Melbourne is a monumental book, appropriate for a work which is concerned with monument as history and history as monument. It is certainly a beautiful book, superbly illustrated, designed and printed, thanks to the financial support of the Miegunyah fund. But, far more than this, Attwood largely fulfils the pretensions of the book's title in discussing the matter of history. He does this by expanding a particular event in Australian history into a much grander discussion of the way that history in that settler society has played an important part in the dispossession of Australia's indigenous inhabitants and its repossession by European migrants.

The treaty Batman supposedly negotiated between a group of Australian speculators and the headmen of the Kulin people in June 1835 has always stood out as an anomaly in the history of Australian settlers' relationships with Australian indigenous peoples. Whatever sins Batman might be accused of — and there have been many — at least he and his partners recognized that Aboriginal people had a title to the land. At the same time, many other Australians were starting the great land rush for New Zealand, hoping to buy their estates off their Maori owners. Batman and his speculators had their claims rejected by the British and colonial governments, whereas the New Zealand 'old land' claimants were rewarded limited grants.

However, Batman had another history. A note in his journal, following a boat trip up the Yarra River, stated that: 'This will be the place for a village'. This became for many of those taking possession of Melbourne the prophetic inspiration for Marvellous Melbourne, granting Batman the role, although contested, of founder of the city. The history of Batman's treaty was largely ignored, other than to show Aboriginal society giving way to European superiority, while his role in advancing the heroic possession of the land for civilization and Australian progress became paramount. Troubling details in both histories could be left out or explained away. Batman was a convict, a drunk and a womanizer. He died painfully of syphilitic complications. He probably was not even on the boat going up the Yarra and the treaty he negotiated claimed far more than anything he could have bargained for in the time available.

Concepts of possession and forgetting adapted from anthropology together provide the unifying framework for a consideration of how Batman's treaty and expedition were conceived and their later use to legitimate European claims to land ownership according to European law. Attwood explores the mixed motivations behind the treaty negotiations, showing the influence of 1830s humanitarianism and William Penn's North American treaties. He draws on a finely detailed understanding of the contingencies of Colonial Office

policy as it influenced decision-making in the mid-1830s. Attwood then shows the extent to which the Aboriginal aspects of this story were quickly filtered out to be replaced with a settler narrative. Attwood explains this as forgetting, an excision of uncomfortable aspects of the narrative which could lead to consideration of Aboriginal dispossession.

Attwood may hope that remembering dispossession will insert questions of the legitimacy of Australia's origin into popular debate, but his own book shows the difficulty of achieving this through the writing of history. For although Aboriginal history is testimony to the re-emergence of Aboriginal peoples in the present, the attempt to reconstruct what their ancestors thought they were doing in meeting and dealing with the band of European explorers and their Aboriginal companions from New South Wales in 1835 is beyond the tools of orthodox historical sources. An oral history had grown up around Batman by the 1930s, but its detail was as malleable and political as the foundational settler myths. There is little in the historical record to explore the Aboriginal history of Batman's expedition and its consequences. Attwood is unfortunately left with only a series of surmises about the nature of Aboriginal responses, based on generic understandings about Aboriginal relationships with the land. This allows him to explain how similarities between the Kulin's *tanderrum* ceremony and those involving European land purchase could allow a very different understanding of the same events by both parties. However, these are as much political principles as historical explanations. The principles deny the concept of ownership as used in the European world, and see relationship-building and treaties as key parts of Aboriginal identity, the maintenance of continuity with the land and diplomacy. Such principles comprise the standard responses of indigenous communities anywhere to the assault of European settler societies.

While aboriginal responses to Batman cannot be reconstructed from the voices of specific Aboriginal participants themselves, Attwood manages superbly to show the intense European political debates over indigenous rights in the 1830s. These debates are rich and nuanced and give both words and identity to the European actors, but none of this is possible for the Aboriginal participants, whose names are all we can know, and then only for a few. In New Zealand, where debates between tribal leaders have so often come down to us in their words and sometimes in their own writing, it is often much easier to explore the politics occurring on the indigenous side of contact.

There are politics to this book and those politics provide the volume with a great deal of its heft. Attwood is calling on Australia to accept the reality of its dispossession of its indigenous peoples, and while doing so he shows that the more recent histories of Batman — Batman the agent of genocide, Batman the fraudster and even Batman the drunken womanizer — exhibit some of the same tendencies to prefer political myth over historical rigor. It is this quality and complexity of argument which is the book's huge strength.

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Reading 'Madness': Gender and Difference in the Colonial Asylum in Victoria, Australia, 1848–1888. By Catharine Coleborne. API Network, Curtin University, Perth, 2007. 219pp. Aust price: \$35.00. ISBN 978-1-920-84534-6.

Madness in the Family: Insanity and Institutions in the Australasian Colonial World, 1860–1914. By Catharine S. Coleborne. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009. 256pp. US price: \$80.00. ISBN 978-0-230-57807-4.

FOR SEVERAL DECADES NOW, historians of medicine have been exploring various themes in the history of the mental hospital, from the social context of confinement to the clinical treatment of patients. A generation ago the scholarship in the field was polarized between those who characterized the mental hospital as an imperfect step towards more