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THE EUROPE WE LEFT BEHIND

Fault Lines

By David Pryce-Jones

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RRP – \$30 pb

Reviewed by Anne Henderson

Without doubt, the all-time lasting image of the twentieth century is and will remain the Holocaust – the systematic program of Hitler’s Nazi Germany to exterminate Europe’s Jews. Coming after the cosmopolitan years of the 1920s and the German Weimar Republic’s open and liberal milieu, the contrast is difficult to take in. All of which is a cautionary tale for those of us who trust in the safety of our democratic systems and pluralistic institutions.

Now, in a seamlessly written memoir, drawing on material over generations from an eclectic extended family, an elite mixture of Jewish and Gentile forebears, aristocratic, industrialist, military and intellectual, and loved ones from eccentric lovers to devoted nannies, writer and commentator David Pryce-Jones has woven a personal history of more than a century of European life.

With the dominance of Christianity across Europe for a millennium, Jewish life in Europe faced programs and persecution. But, by the late nineteenth century, with the Austro-Hungarian empire wealthy Jews found themselves, as Pryce-Jones describes, “increasingly free to meet everyone else on equal terms and so make what they could of their talents”.

On his mother Therese (Poppy) Fould-Springer’s side, David Pryce-Jones is a descendent of such Jewish families. Mitzi Springer, his Viennese maternal grandmother, was the only daughter of industrialist Gustav Springer. While Gustav inherited wealth from his father, he made an even larger fortune from buying up shares in the Vienna financial crisis of 1873. His interests were finance, railways and coal mines. His estates were to be found in Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and France.

Writes Pryce-Jones: “Gustav’s extravagance was legendary. Mitzi would remember the luxury of their private train, and his habits of sending his shirts to be laundered in Paris.” Gustav’s homes were grand structures – as were those of his daughter and her first husband, Frenchman Eugene Fould. All gone long since with the Nazi Holocaust, these great monuments, writes Pryce-Jones, “have something empty and haunting about them, as though to reproach what happened to those who once lived in them.”

As for all upper class Europeans of the time, marriage was the social force of connections and class. Mitzi’s children made marriages on their own terms out of personal attraction – helped by the lure of Mitzi’s wealth. The eldest Fould-Springer daughter, Helene (Bubbles), married Spanish diplomat Eduardo Propper de Callejon, a Catholic. Pryce-Jones’ father Alan was Welsh, the son of Harry Pryce-Jones, an honoured military man and Vere Dawnay, daughter of Colonel Lewis and Lady Victoria Dawnay. The youngest Fould-Springer daughter, Liliane, married her childhood friend Elie de Rothschild.

As David Pryce-Jones writes, his father Alan, educated at Eton, “grew up with the sense that he was numbered among those with the means and the standing to be able to live as they pleased”. David Pryce-Jones was of school age before he became aware that his origins were Jewish. And then it was only after anti-Semitic comments by (what had been) his beloved prep school teacher, Miss Earnshaw. His mother, Poppy, had never practised Judaism nor taught him about it.

For Alan Pryce-Jones, coming into contact with the wealth and pleasure of continental life among the Fould-Springers and their influential social set in Vienna, and meeting Poppy Fould-Springer, was enough to abandon his male lovers for the more traditional life of man and wife. While he was very fond of Poppy, in fact devoted to her, he could be quite frank in his letters and diary about his need for the freedom a wealthy

family connection would give him. Before marriage, he was careful to play down Poppy's Jewish background in letters to his parents: "The Springers are, I'm sorry to say, Jews, and cousins of the Rothchilds, Goldsmids, Goldsmid-Rothchilds... but are really very, very, *very* nice."

Mitzi's marriage settlement for Alan and Poppy was generous – "Poppy would be acquiring a British passport and the sweet little couple's wish to live in Meidling [Springer family mansion in Vienna] spared her the complication of getting money out of Austria." Alan describes a comfortable landing as husband – "We are to have Meidling plus the two cars and about five servants ... four rooms, two bathrooms, and the big central hall of the house for a dining room... We shall have about £2000 a year clear, and allowances for children." This was 1934.

Alan and Poppy Pryce-Jones brought two worlds together – Mitzi's wealth and aristocratic European connections and Alan's what his son calls "a roll call of the smart set" among British and continental intellectuals and the upper classes. This on the eve of the late 1930s and 1940s that would end it all.

As Hitler's storm troopers took over the streets of Germany, Alan and Poppy took off for a honeymoon of luxury. "It is unlucky that we look so very rich," Alan wrote, "We arrive with a mountain of luggage, in huge fur coats of obviously the best fur." His account to his friend Patrick Kinross of arriving at one family destination appears much like royalty being met. At the end of the account, Alan writes, "It was almost as much to be her [Mitzi's] son-in-law as to be Poppy's husband that I married the girl. That, by the way, could not be going better."

Reading history backwards – from beyond the aftermath of World War II – it is easy to berate appeasers like Neville Chamberlain and most of the leaders of the free world in late 1938-39. However, despite the carnage of World War I, Europe remained a democratically pluralistic centre of both intellectual and capitalistic freedom in the terms of its time. Bonds between families and colleagues across national boundaries flowed back into life between the UK and continental Europe after 1918. To witness the changes in Germany after the Fuhrer came to power in 1933, was not always to understand what would take place beyond 1938.

After Oxford in the late 1920s, Alan Pryce-Jones, as his son writes, "had no money and put a great deal of his natural talents into getting in with the right people". His homosexuality was "his early passport to social and literary success". At Oxford, he became one of Harold Nicolson's lovers; setting off to the south of France in 1929, Somerset Maugham took him up. John Banting, Brian Howard, Eddy Sackville-West, Maurice Bowra, Hamish St Clair Erskine, Sandy Baird, Robert Pratt-Barlow (Bobby) - who became David Pryce-Jones' godfather - T E Lawrence, the names dot the pages. In all these connections, there was also Mitzi's second husband Frank Wooster (for whom she became a Christian). Frank had been the lover of Mitzi's first husband Eugene. "Homosexuals make the best husbands," claimed Mitzi.

This somewhat inbred and complicated collective made money, set the pace of literary and art fashions and generally pursued their pleasure as they found it. Living in England after 1940, Poppy's only relative was her cousin (through the Ephrussi connection) Elizabeth de Waal whose grandson wrote *The Hare With Amber Eyes*. Like David Pryce-Jones, de Waal charts European history through this extraordinarily gifted and privileged network of extended families.

What was happening to Europe with the rise of Nazism and the Hitler takeover of Germany came only slowly into focus. The violence of totalitarianism might have taken over Russia and its satellites but could such a phenomenon really take over cosmopolitan Europe?

In Vienna in early 1934, Alan wrote of tear gas bombs thrown into a cinema he had gone to and then moved on, without comment, to write of the parties he would attend, ending with the best to come at the Fould-Springers "from six to six". David Pryce-Jones acutely describes the set his forebears and relatives belonged to as "not quite Jewish and not quite Christian, not quite Austrian and not quite French or English, not quite heterosexual and not quite homosexual, socially conventional but not quite secure."

By 1940, Mitzi and the family were once again concentrated in France, based at her beautiful chateau Royaumont (seen on the book's cover) and in Montreuil. While David stayed in the care of his nanny Jessie

with remnants of the extended family, Alan and Poppy made it to London. As Frank Wooster had advised Mitzi, who disapproved of her eldest daughter's choice of Spanish diplomat for a husband, "a diplomat can come in handy". It would be due to Eduardo's daring act to issue hundreds of Spanish visas to endangered French Jews that secured the Fould-Springer's escape. Eduardo was demoted as a result.

Using escape routes to South America, Canada, Morocco and eventually England for the five-year-old David, the Fould-Springer extended family survived the Holocaust while thousands of French Jews were sent to their deaths in extermination camps. Pryce-Jones sums up the way his older Fould-Springer relatives saw themselves:

To the end of their lives, they were unable to put into words that they had been dicing with death. They believed that people like them were essentially immune to persecution and murder. Bad things were what happened to the poor, to Jews unable to call on lawyers and bankers. They couldn't imagine that the Germans and a good many French made no such distinctions about Jews and were determined to kill the lot.

David Pryce-Jones has written ten novels and thirteen non-fiction books. Increasingly, he admits, he became more interested in non-fiction than in writing novels. His time as a small child in Morocco, as he and his nanny Jessie fled the Vichy French, opened his mind to Arab society which he continued to find fascinating. The world that unfolded in his mature years threw up issues that involved him more than just from his interests as an academic, writer or commentator. He had lived its contradictions and its extremes. At 16, his mother Poppy died of cancer, but the Fould-Springer family remained thick around him. Meanwhile, in his intellectual life as writer and lecturer, Pryce-Jones found himself often ostracised for his views that rejected fashionable and left leaning positions. At other moments, he registered crude anti-semitism among individuals he came to know in the ranks of the British elite.

At Oxford, Pryce-Jones found A J P Taylor both provocative and personally menacing but it was only when researching his book on Hitler fan Unity Mitford – following the publication of Taylor's *The Origins of The Second World War* that partially exonerated Hitler – that Pryce-Jones witnessed Taylor's actual admiration for a Hitler supporter. Taylor was dining with Oswald Mosley and took Pryce-Jones along so he could capture something of "one who had made history". Pryce-Jones records that "Mosley was even more conceited and unrepentant than Taylor. The more Mosley defended his Hitlerite past, the more Taylor fawned on him."

With his father setting a literary pace as editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* and his own intellectual circles expanding, David Pryce-Jones rubbed shoulders with British elites generally. At unexpected moments, he registered the worst of generational dislike of Jews and those descended from Jewish parents. As Alan became enamoured by *Spectator* owner Ian Gilmour's mother-in-law, the Duchess of Buccleuch, David noted that Gilmour himself a progressive Conservative MP had no time for Jews – "his resentment of Jews was obsessive, ignorant and snobbish". Ian's father-in-law, the Duke of Buccleuch, had presented Hitler with a pair of Sevres vases on his fiftieth birthday in April 1939 – "Only Jews could conceivably object," the Duke told Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, but they did not count.

And then there was Harold Pinter. Dining with Harold and Antonia Pinter (nee Fraser), Harold asked Nadira and Vidia Naipaul if they had made friends since arriving in England. Vidia said yes, David Pryce-Jones. Pinter stormed out of the room saying he would not listen to such a thing, "only returning to pop his head around the door and bark, 'Besides, he's a Zionist'"

The question of the State of Israel took this anti-Semitic underbelly to a new level. "How to survive," writes Pryce-Jones of his relatives, "now was the question. Was the loyalty demanded by nationhood merely emotional, even tribal? Poppy and her family might think themselves assimilated and secular, but to everybody else they were still primarily Jews."

Sitting beside Israeli hero Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion who had taken him to a Mapai Party meeting in Israel, Pryce-Jones was given Ben-Gurion's candid view that the worst anti-Semitism was in France –

“bigotry was endemic and the French incurable”. Whatever the truth of Ben-Gurion’s view, in David Pryce-Jones’ *Paris in The Third Reich* the collaboration of the French with the Nazis, including the deportation of French Jews, is laid bare.

Fault Lines is a deep stream – from chance meetings with and personal insights on celebrities like Greta Garbo and many significant and not so significant others to a complex inspection of family ties in an age when many children grew up separated from parents for much of their childhood. But through this deep stream runs a dark, more overarching dye that has coloured the human condition for most of the past century. In searching for answers, David Pryce-Jones captures it in explaining his work *The Closed Circle*:

My sense at the time [1989] was that the general public in the Muslim Middle East had expectations for a better future, one with justice instead of enforced obedience to a ruler without mercy. The Closed Circle posits that this must happen one day. Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s seizure of power, the assassination of Anwar Sadat, the whole grisly chain of bloody causes and even bloodier effects means that this time of justice is postponed until reason overcomes superannuated religious and social codes; that is to say indefinitely. Communists tried to destroy Jews; the Nazis then had their turn at it; and now that Arabs and Iranians are operating more or less freely they put themselves next in line for genocide, intent on killing off the Jewish movement of national liberation.

As he puts it, what David Pryce-Jones seeks to do in *Fault Lines* and much of his writing is to examine “what makes people believe the extraordinary, irrational things they do believe and then act upon”.

Fault Lines is a work of art set around a personal labyrinth that, in perfect pitch, explains the world most of us have lived with for most of a century.

Anne Henderson is Deputy Director of The Sydney Institute and author of *Menzies at War*, which was shortlisted for the 2015 Prime Minister’s Award for Australian History

THE EASTER RISING – OR UPRISING? – AFTER 100 YEARS

Eamon de Valera: A Will to Power

By Ronan Fanning

Faber & Faber, 2015

ISBN 9780674660380

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The Seven: The Lives and Legacies of the Founding Fathers of the Irish Republic

By Ruth Dudley Edwards

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Reviewed by Gerard Henderson

Eamon de Valera (1882-1975) was the only leader of what Irish nationalists like to call the 1916 Easter Rising not to be executed by the British. The seven members of the self-appointed Provisional Government who signed the Proclamation of the Irish Republic were all shot in the execution yard at Kilmainham Gaol in May 1916. Namely, Thomas J. Clarke, Sean Mac Diarmada (who Gaelicised his name from John Joseph McDermott), Eamonn Ceannt, Patrick H. Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Joseph Plunkett and James Connolly. Another eight were shot at Kilmainham and Roger Casement was hanged at Pentonville Prison in August 1916. Clarke and his colleagues were buried in a mass grave at Arbour Hill Cemetery. Casement's body was returned to Ireland in 1965 and he is buried among the celebrity dead at Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery.

All up, some 2000 Irish took part in the Easter Rising. Some 200,000 Irish served in uniform during what was called the Great War of 1914-1918. The former, some of whom aligned themselves with Germany, have been remembered through the (Irish) ages. While the latter, until recently, have been all but forgotten – as were the 50,000 Irish who fought with the Allies during the Second World War, at a time when Ireland was officially neutral.

In late April 1916, Clarke, Pearse and Connolly were by no means heroes. They had led a rebellion against Dublin Castle, the centre of British authority on the island of Ireland. The retaliation by British forces had seen many civilian deaths along with the destruction of large parts of Dublin, one of the most important cities in what was then the British Empire. Some of the rebels – including Ceannt and Constance Markievicz (nee Gore-Booth) killed Irish policemen.

By April 1966, however, there were few Irish who would query the wisdom of the Easter Rising. The execution of the 16 rebels half a century earlier had the unintended consequence of making heroes out of men and women who were little known in 1916 and who held no elected office. As Ruth Dudley Edwards points out, the Irish Jesuit Fr Frank Shaw S.J. wrote an article for the Jesuit journal *Studies* in 1966 regretting the fact that the Irish “who preferred to solve problems, if possible, by peaceful rather than violent means” and who criticised the “revolutionary ideas” of Clarke and his followers were regarded as “unpatriotic” and “unmanly”. The *Studies*' editorial board did not have the courage to publish Fr Shaw's article until 1974, almost a decade after it was written.

Yet by April 2016 the revolutionary ideas of the 1916 rebels were being considered in wider context. For The Dead of 1916 did not simply involve those who fell in the rebellion against British rule along with those who were executed. As Edwards writes:

Pearse didn't think of killing for Ireland, but dying for it. The immediate casualties were 450 dead and 2,600 injured, of whom 116 were soldiers, 16 policemen and 242 civilians (of whom 28 children were from the slums). During the same week, more than 500 Irishmen were killed by a German gas

attack on Irish lines. Only 76 rebels died...but...they would become the only deaths that mattered in the national narrative of martyrdom.

As Edwards documents, The Seven possessed an “absolute moral superiority” along with “an ambition to achieve some kind of immortality”. Clarke was part of a long Irish tradition which embraced the political violence of Wolfe Tone (1763-98) and Roger Emmett (1778-1803) – both of whom were strong on rhetoric but weak on strategy and who encouraged the young to tread the same futile path. It was Clarke and his Irish Republican Brotherhood (which grew out of the Fenian movement) who was the driver of the Easter Rising. Clarke had served 15 years in a British prison for terrorist bombings in Britain in the late 19th Century.

Clarke always wanted control, not status. Since he faced a return to prison if found to be involved in further acts of rebellion, he operated through Mac Diarmada. Clarke was a Protestant, Mac Diarmada a Catholic. Crippled with polio at the age of 26, he had considerable courage – as did Clarke who managed to stay sane in spite of spending most of his prison time in solitary confinement.

Ceannt, a Catholic, worked as an accountancy clerk. He is the least well-remembered of The Seven. Pearse is perhaps the best known of the Irish rebels of 1916. He was the subject of Edwards’ 1977 biography *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure*. Edwards presents evidence to suggest that Pearse was a sublimated pederast. A shy person by nature, he never took advice from anyone. Pearse was a Catholic and a poet.

So was Joseph Plunkett, a TB sufferer who was friend of Pearse and MacDonagh. MacDonagh wrote plays and books. Like Pearse, MacDonagh was into blood sacrifice – unlike Pearse, he had a degree of self-deprecation. James Connolly was an atheist and a socialist who was a failure at business and completely uncompromising. As Connolly went about his revolutionary tasks, Mrs Connolly took to begging to feed their children. Ceannt and Connolly were the only two of The Seven with military experience. But both had hopeless judgement – believing that the British would not use artillery against the rebels, who had taken over the General Post Office and other key positions in Dublin, because British capitalists would not destroy property. Much of Dublin was razed during the uprising.

None of The Seven believed that the Easter Rising would overturn British rule in Ireland. In the end, they embraced Pearse’s view that “bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing”. All rejected the path to independence (i.e. Home Rule) which Irish nationalists were on in the early 20th Century but which had been suspended following the outbreak of the Great War. The post-mortem triumph of The Seven led to the demise of John Redmond’s Irish Parliamentary Party.

The execution of The Seven, all of whom died bravely, left de Valera as the most senior surviving member of the Easter Rising rebels. De Valera immediately assumed command of the nationalists but was voluntarily in the United States during much of the War of Independence (or Anglo-Irish War) against the British, which commenced in January 1919 and ended in July 1921 with the truce that led to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921. Michael Collins was the leader of the rebels at the time – who were referred to as the Irish Volunteers and/or Irish Republican Army.

Ronan Fanning, whose father knew but did not much like de Valera, is fair to the man the Irish called The Long Fellow (on account of his height). However, he is critical of de Valera’s refusal to go to London to negotiate the Treaty or even to involve himself with the signatories (who included Collins) during the negotiations. As Fanning recognises, de Valera’s “cardinal sin” was his rejection of The Treaty and his consequent culpability for the Irish Civil War – when anti-Treaty forces went to war with the democratically elected government of the Irish Free State.

Collins died during this conflict between the Irish. The Irish Civil War was fought between the Provisional Government (which became the Irish Free State) and Irregulars (the Irish Republican Army). It ran between June 1922 and May 1923. There were about a thousand fatalities – 77 of whom were executed by the Free State government.

Like so many of the 1916 rebels, de Valera was possessed of a dogmatic authoritarian nature and believed in the cleansing power of blood sacrifice. He claimed to know what the Irish people thought by examining their own heart and once declared: “The people had no right to do wrong”. He also declared at Thurles, during the Civil War, that it might be necessary for his supporters “to wade through Irish blood, through the blood of the soldiers of the Irish [Free State] government and through, perhaps, the blood of some of the members of the [Free State] government in order to get Irish freedom”. De Valera was jailed by the Free State government for a year, following the end of the Irish Civil War.

Following his release from prison, de Valera gradually embraced democratic politics and was involved in the formation of the Fianna Fail party. He became prime minister of Ireland after the 1932 election, with the support of the Labour Party. As prime minister, de Valera acted decisively against the rebels of the Irish Republican Army, his erstwhile comrades in arms. He had little interest in economics and finally left Irish politics in 1959, much as he had found it decades previously.

In 1933, de Valera declared that the “the Irish genius has always stressed spiritual and intellectual values rather than material values”. A decade later, in a St Patrick’s Day address, he described his ideal Ireland as consisting “of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to things of the spirit”. This de Valera depicted as “the home of people living the life that God desires that man should live”. It is not at all clear that the good people of Ireland shared The Long Fellow’s utopianism. Many voted with their feet and emigrated to Britain, and beyond, to experience some of the material values denied to them in de Valera’s utopia.

When he believed it necessary, de Valera was willing to stand up to the Catholic Church. However, this only occurred with respect to the Church’s attitude towards matters relating to the Irish Republic. As Connor Cruise O’Brien has written, “on issues like divorce, contraception, obscene literature, there was no question of standing up to the Church because Mr de Valera – a Catholic, in the traditional sense from rural Ireland – agreed with the Church on such matters”.

The Australian Catholic political activist B.A. Santamaria never visited Ireland and showed no interest in de Valera. However, his attitude to politics was similar to that of The Long Fellow. Santamaria clashed with some members of the Catholic Hierarchy on politics but, before the Second Vatican Council, readily followed the teachings of the Church on faith and morals. Santamaria’s only disputes with the Hierarchy on faith and morals occurred when he believed that the Church was becoming too liberal by watering down some traditional teachings.

Santamaria was close to the Irish born Daniel Mannix, the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne between 1917 and 1963. Mannix was a long-time supporter of de Valera and hosted him at Mannix’s residence in *Raheen* in Melbourne when – at the invitation of the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne – he visited Australia in 1948. Mannix makes a brief, albeit important, appearance in Fanning’s biography.

Fanning describes Daniel Mannix as “arguably the most important” of de Valera’s allies in the Catholic Church “because he was the most high ranking in the clerical corridors of power”. According to Fanning, at a meeting in 1925 in Rome, Mannix advised de Valera that he should accept the status quo and seek election to the Free State government so that he could participate in the political development of Ireland.

Also, Mannix and Monsignor John Hagan (rector of the Irish College in Rome) prepared a document advising how de Valera could enter the Dail (i.e. the Irish parliament) consistent with his political and religious beliefs. At the time, Sinn Fein (the party to which de Valera then belonged) had an abstentions policy with respect to the Dail in that its members refused to enter the Dail since all Irish parliamentarians at the time were required to make an oath of allegiance to the King.

In time, de Valera accepted the line of advice provided by Mannix and Hagan and found a way to rationalise his decision to take the necessary oath of allegiance in 1927 and lead his party back into the Dail.

What’s fresh about Fanning’s book is that he documents that the British did not really want to retain its ports which were handed over to the Irish government at the time that the 26 counties of Ireland became fully

independent (during de Valera's prime ministership) in 1938. The six counties in Ulster remained – and remain – part of the United Kingdom. For his part, de Valera agreed never to allow the use of Ireland as a base from which another nation could attack Britain. In fact, de Valera's government gave secret support to the Allies during the Second World War – despite its leader's indiscretion in expressing condolences to Germany in April 1945 on the death of Adolf Hitler.

What's fresh about Edwards' book is her support for the democratic tradition in Irish politics which co-existed with the revolutionary tradition but which has enjoyed little support among the men and women who created the nationalist myths – principally by means of false history, poetry and song.

Ruth Dudley Edwards was born in Dublin and attended Catholic schools. As she describes life as a child in Dublin in the 1950s:

Occasionally, Grandmother would arrive home in late afternoon and announce portentously: "I have had tea with Mrs Tom Clarke and she says the Pearses think they own 1916". I did not really follow what this was about - it would take a while for me to grasp that men I had been told were heroes and martyrs were not mythical beings but real people with living relatives who were not always in harmony.

In my primary school, where teaching was through Irish and the ethos was intensely patriotic, there were reverential references to *Éiri Amach na Cásca* (the uprising at Easter) or *Aiséiri na Cásca* (literally, the resurrection at Easter) as the heroic climax of 800 years of nationalist struggle. We were told that afterwards there was a war of independence against the British, which we won. History seemingly came to an end in 1921.

We were told nothing at school about the casualties of 1916 or the subsequent war: the dead who mattered were those executed by the British, particularly Patrick Pearse. Nor were we told about the bitter civil war following the Anglo-Irish treaty, or the seventy-seven men executed by Free State forces. And if Northern Ireland was ever mentioned, it was as a bit of Ireland that was ours, and we would get it back some day. No one ever seemed to go there or know anything about it.

Edwards has focused on the Irish men who voluntarily supported the Allies (including Australia) between 1914 and 1918. Like Australia, there was no conscription for overseas service in Ireland during the Great War – those who successfully fought the aggression of Imperial Germany in both nations during the Great War did so voluntarily.

Tim Pat Coogan's *Michael Collins: A Biography*, published in 1991, did much to restore the reputation of the man who, unlike de Valera, took the responsibility of attending the Treaty negotiations in London and did his duty in securing the best possible deal for the Irish nationalist cause.

A strength of Edwards' book is that she focuses on Bulmer Hobson, who has been virtually written out of Irish history. Hobson, a Quaker and a member of the IRB, warned of the extreme danger in mounting an uprising against British rule during the time of the Great War – especially since the weapons expected from Germany had not arrived. Hobson declared that "no man had a right to risk the fortunes of a country in order to create for himself a niche in history". This was a critique of The Seven and their supporters – in particular Clarke and Pearse.

On Good Friday 1916, Hobson – along with Eoin MacNeill and J. J. O'Connell – drafted a countermand of all Pearse's orders concerning the planned uprising. Hobson was kidnapped by the IRB and not released until Monday evening – after the insurrection had commenced. Thereafter, as Edwards writes, "he would be shunned and airbrushed out of the nationalist narrative". But Hobson was correct – as was Casement who advised against the Easter Rising since he believed it could not succeed.

Hobson was devoted to what the German sociologist Max Weber termed an ethic of responsibility. The likes of Clarke and Pearse were committed to an ethic of ultimate ends. The evidence suggest that what was

achieved at the time of the 1921 Anglo-Irish treaty could have been attained without the violence of Easter 1916 – in other words, the ethic of responsibility would have done.

Ruth Dudley Edwards and Ronan Fanning – along with the likes of Tim Pat Coogan, Owen Dudley Edwards, Roy Foster, Connor Cruise O’Brien and Charles Townshend – have done much to challenge the Irish nationalist mythology which grew out of, and thrived upon, the Easter Rising. Their approaches, however, are different.

To Edwards, “the main result of violence from 1916 was to exacerbate tribal hatred on the island and leave it with two confessional and mutually hostile bourgeois states with many tens of thousands of refugees, isolationism, poverty, bigotry and philistinism”. She states that Irish democracy survived “because first the Free State and then de Valera’s Fianna Fail suppressed the irreconcilables [i.e. the IRA]”.

To Fanning, de Valera achieved “greatness” due to his conduct of Irish foreign policy. He maintains that “without Eamon de Valera Ireland would never have achieved independence so quickly and certainly would not have achieved it before the Second World War, the only international crisis that has so far threatened to overwhelm the independence of the state”.

Yet Fanning acknowledges that the great catastrophe in de Valera’s life turns “on the six years between the truce of July 1921 and his leading his republican followers back into the Dail in 1927”. Fanning regards as “incontrovertible” the change of de Valera’s critics that his cardinal sin was his rejection of the Treaty and his consequent culpability for the Civil War. It remains to be seen whether the centenary of the Irish Civil War will be remembered in 2022.

Gerard Henderson is the author of *Santamaria – A Most Unusual Man* (MUP 2015)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES – WITH RUPERT MURDOCH’S MAN ABOUT TOWN

Making Headlines

By Chris Mitchell

Melbourne University Press 2016

ISBN: (Paperback) 9780522870701

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Reviewed by Ross Fitzgerald

For years from the mid-1990s onwards I wrote a regular column for Chris Mitchell when he ran Brisbane’s *Courier-Mail* and then, from July 2002, when he was editor-in-chief of *The Australian*. This was the case until he retired from his extremely demanding editorial position in December 2015.

My experience is that Mitchell genuinely believes in freedom of speech and in the free play of ideas. Indeed, I can’t remember a single instance when he tried to prevent or influence me to stop or change my column, which ran every second Saturday in *The Weekend Australian*, even though what I wrote may have been diametrically opposed to his paper’s editorial stance or policy. This included my writing a series of articles defending protectionism, not just in relation to safeguarding our nation from pests introduced from overseas, but also for Australia keeping some forms of economic protection in the manner of tariffs.

But memory’s a funny thing. In his tell-all, highly revelatory and often hugely indiscrete memoir, *Making Headlines*, Mitchell writes: “Then opposition leader Tony Abbott mocked prime minister Gillard’s figure in front of fellow dinner guests, journalists Greg Sheridan and Ross Fitzgerald.” Mitchell continues: “Tony even stood up in the middle of dessert to ape Julia Gillard’s walk for us all in the middle of a discussion about Germaine Greer’s Q&A critique of the Gillard derriere.”

The truth is that, although my wife Lyndal Moor and I were definitely present at this dinner, I have no recall of this happening . But perhaps I’d briefly left the dinner table. But Lyndal has no memory of this either.

However, I do clearly remember a late December dinner at Kirribilli House, hosted by Tony and Margie Abbott, at which the prime minister asked those present, including Anne and Gerard Henderson who had recently returned from England, for frank advice about what he needed to do to improve his government. Mitchell is correct in stating that, as is often the case, my response was direct and unambiguous. The long-term editor in chief puts it thus: “Ross answered first - with his customary blunt honesty: ‘Get rid of Peta Credlin.’”

I then explained that, as prime minister, Abbott needed a few friends who would speak to him freely, unmediated from Credlin’s interposition and interventions. As Mitchell and his wife Cathy, as well as Lyndal, agreed the lack of frank and fearless advice was a major factor in how and why a man who had been so in touch with the electorate in opposition could have become so out of touch so quickly.

However, my impression is that the Hendersons remember their comments that evening somewhat differently from those quoted in the book.

As well as canvassing his close contacts and dealings with past prime ministers, editors and media CEOs, there are a number of purely personal revelations in ‘Making Headlines’. For example, while I had known that Chris Mitchell had been brought up by his widowed mother who had left Germany in 1954, I had no idea that, in 1964, just after his eighth birthday, Chris had actually witnessed his father drown in the Hawkesbury river, north of Sydney.

Of all the prime ministers with whom he had dealings, Mitchell is particularly revealing about fellow Queenslander and erstwhile friend Kevin Rudd whom, to Mitchell’s later regret, he persuaded Rupert Murdoch to let *The Australian* back for PM in the final election editorial of the 2007 campaign. Although

Rudd is nominally still the godfather of his son Riley, Mitchell as with many others had a massive and terminal falling out with arguably Australia's most narcissistic political leader.

Mitchell also writes in intimate detail about the flawed prime ministership of Tony Abbott who, to his credit, Mitchell still regards as a deeply decent person.

After he moved back to *The Australian* in mid 2002 to become its editor-in-chief, Mitchell had decided to focus on indigenous affairs. This involved the first-rate investigative work of *ex-Courier-Mail* reporter Tony Koch, as well as that of leading Aboriginal spokesman and activist Noel Pearson and brilliant writer and researcher Nicolas Rothwell who uncovered and brought to unflinching public gaze endemic alcohol and other substance abuse and widespread sexual assaults on indigenous children often at the hands of older Aboriginies.

And the coverage was not universally focused on the negative. Our leading national newspaper also brought to public attention many stories of Aboriginal success, including reporting hundreds of illuminating tales of young indigenous people succeeding in school and tertiary education.

In doing so, *The Australian* inquired: "Why should the brightest white kids get scholarships to private schools but not the brightest Aboriginal kids?" And while symbolic measures - including constitutional recognition of our first peoples - might have their place, the paper editorialised that it is surely far more important that black Australia wins a fairer economic deal from modern society. As Mitchell writes, "It was an unusual debate to be led by a capital city broadsheet on the centre right of politics."

In a key chapter entitled "Rupert, My Boss", Mitchell confides that on federal election night, 21 August 2010, he and his wife to be Cathy Rushton were invited to a party in Sydney's trendy East Balmain. The guests were overwhelmingly Labor Left or Greens voters who regarded Abbott as a demon and who resented Cathy's intimate relationship with a Murdoch editor.

On top of this, if they hadn't known already, they became aware that Abbott and Chris were friends and that Cathy had liked him since their time at Sydney University. Things got worse when Cathy blurted out: "I don't know why you all vote Green. Chris says the Greens want to introduce death taxes." The frigid atmosphere became even chillier when Cathy expressed pleasure that, after having defeated John Howard in Bennelong in 2007, Maxine McKew looked likely to become, as proved to be the case, a one-term MP.

Moreover, almost all of the audience, largely comprised of what Mitchell describes as "a band of progressive, wealthy lawyers and media types", were extremely hostile to Abbott and to anyone who worked for Rupert Murdoch who that night, while the party was in full swing, regularly rang Mitchell from New York to keep in touch with an election that the Opposition leader nearly won.

Unsurprisingly, things were never the same again with that group. This was despite the fact that a number of those present at the 2010 election night party had been friends with Cathy and her children for almost four decades.

This very much mirrors my own experience after I wrote a series of articles for *The Weekend Australian* in which I expressed some considered support for Abbott and talked up his chances of being elected PM. As a result, a number of long-time friends, and academic colleagues, crossed me off their Christmas mailing list and have never been in contact with Lyndal or me again!

As Mitchell so aptly puts it in Chapter Six of his compelling and controversial expose of Australian politics and culture: "They are not a tolerant tribe, the modern Left. "

Professor Fitzgerald, a columnist with The Australian, most recently co-authored the political/sexual satire Going Out Backwards: A Grafton Everest Adventure. Professor Fitzgerald is currently researching and co-authoring, A Dozen Soviet Spies Down Under?

THE PSYCHIATRIST AS POET

White-out: selected published poems 1986-201

By Saxby Pridmore

Lacuna, 2016

A\$20.53 (Book Depository price, free worldwide delivery)

Reviewed by Geoffrey Lehmann

Saxby Pridmore is a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Tasmania and the author of text books and many academic papers. I know of only one other Australian poet who is a psychiatrist and that is Craig Powell. Powell was born in the same year as I was, 1940. Judging from references in his poems Saxby Pridmore was born about a decade later. He has a poem "1965", where he says this was "my first year down in Brisbane/ From the bush".

It is not unusual for medical practitioners to become writers. William Carlos Williams, one of the greatest American poets wrote poetry and practised medicine for more than 50 years. Peter Goldsworthy, one of our best poets and a fine novelist, has had a dual career as a medical doctor and writer. Somerset Maugham and Conan Doyle are well known English examples, and two of the very greatest Russian writers, Anton Chekhov and Mikhail Bulgakov, were doctors.

I subscribe to the Poetry Foundation's free poem a day internet service. As the Poetry Foundation is based in Chicago, the poems sent out are usually by Americans. Something I do when I click on the emailed poem is go to the poet's biography. Many of the recent poets are graduates of creative writing schools, and are themselves teaching creative writing or professionally engaged in literature as academics. I find this depressing. Where do their poems come from if their only life is poetry?

This is not a problem for Pridmore. His poems emerge from his many other lives as father, son, husband, psychiatrist and observer of life. Many "selected poems" are presented in their order of composition (or the reverse). Pridmore has not done that here, although he has alerted to reader to the date of first publication and the name of the periodical.

The 194 poems are arranged thematically and the book broadly starts with poems about family life, then has some graphic pieces drawn from his experience as a psychiatrist – several of his academic articles are about suicide – and finishes with more general poems. There is only an occasional reference to poetry.

Avoiding the order of composition approach was a good decision. Stylistically the poems are all cut from the same species of timber. The earliest poem was first published in 1986 and I cannot detect any great change in style since then. Pridmore's style seems to leap like Athena fully armed and formed from the brain of Zeus, which may be appropriate for a psychiatrist poet.

I may be wrong, but I have the impression that Pridmore decided to become a poet perhaps in his mid-thirties, and did not undergo the painful apprenticeship of the teenage poet who writes hundreds of awful poems, with a handful of sparklers, gradually finding her or his way (more often "her" now, than "his") towards a personal and idiosyncratic style that reflects the styles of predecessors and grows beyond them. (Many of course don't get there!)

The poems of poets who undergo this traditional apprenticeship in effect tell the reader: "Here I am, and this is how I am new and different." The American poet Mark O'Brien spent almost all of his life in an iron lung. He begins one of his extraordinary poems:

I scream

The body electric,

This yellow, metal, pulsing cylinder

Whooshing all day, all night

In its repetitive dumb mechanical rhythm.

O'Brien's two opening lines refer to a famous line of Whitman's: "I sing the body electric", which in turn refers to Virgil's famous "Arms and the man I sing".

Committing himself to poetry in mid-life without a great deal of literary baggage Pridmore's poetry lacks this type of resonance. His poetry belongs very much to the here and now, and that is a strength as well as a limitation. In his very best poems he is able to write succinctly and sculpturally. Here is an example:

Shelling

A cockle,

halves locking

as a carapace, is washed up.

A child

walking, finding

this sarcophagus, picks it up.

The acquisition

of armour

by innocents, is growing up.

This is an almost perfect poem. (I'm inserting the humanities marker's "almost". You cannot get 100 out of 100 in the humanities, that is only for mathematicians.) I correct myself. It is a perfect poem.

The title reverses expectations. My mother used to "shell the peas", but here "shelling" refers to putting on a shell. The three verses fit together like the halves of the cockle shell, as first verse ends with a "washed up", the next ends with "picks it up", and the last verse ends with "growing up". The poem reflects what is happening to the child. The reader's horizon expands from shell, to child, to a tightly phrased aphorism that is a surprise ending. No word is wasted. Marvellous!

Another very good poem is this:

Harrington Richardson

Thunder from his gun

Sent a leaping hare

Spinning in the air.

He broke it. Smoke wisp with

The sting of fire-crackers

And lob-bobbed a new load in.

There was no knife.

Sandpaper fingers
 Ripped the skin and belly open.
 Holding the head and back legs
 A single wobble-board flick sent
 The guts into the grass.
 He pushed one ear up inside his belt
 And knotted them on top.
 Now there was one each side.
 He had them facing out, so
 His trousers wouldn't get grubby.
 He was your grandfather.

In this case the humanity marker's "almost" in front of "perfect" may be appropriate. The second verse is a bit obscure. "He broke it" I think refers to the gunshot breaking the hare, not the grandfather. The third line of this verse is a bit wilful. But the remaining four verses (as well as the first verse) are very, very good. The portrait of the grandfather with two hares hanging from his belt, one on each side, facing out, is memorable. "Grubby" is the mot juste. And the last line, with its surprise, that this tough-as-old-boots shooter is the grandfather of a person to whom the poem is addressed, and (presumably) the father-in-law of the poet, is a sudden injection of humanity.

The high point of this book is "Kursk", a poem about the Russian naval disaster in 2000 when there was an explosion in the *Kursk*, one of the largest submarines ever built, the boat was disabled and 118 men died at the bottom of the Barents Sea. The poem begins:

We only have one torch.
 We are keeping it off
 Most of the time.

The following six verses are variations on the first verse, as Pridmore builds up the tension in simple, three line verses, about the men waiting for rescuers who do not come (while Putin was holidaying on the Black Sea – not a detail that Pridmore mentions). The poem finishes much as it began:

We have faithful wives waiting.
 We only hope
 The batteries won't run out.
 We only have one torch.
 We don't want to die
 In the dark.

“Kursk” has been anthologised in Les Murray’s *The Quadrant Book of Poetry 2001-2010* and should continue to be an anthology piece in years to come.

Not every poem is at the level of humanity Pridmore achieves with “Kursk”. “Common psychiatrist” is a grumpy old man poem in which the speaker of the poem has a whinge about his patients. There are a good many poems that are expressions of irritation or a spur of the moment observation in which Pridmore is more interested in getting something off his chest than creating a poem. I have noticed this is often a defect in the work of poets who start writing later in life and have not undergone the traditional apprenticeship. Self-expression trumps craftsmanship.

Pridmore would have had a much better and more rigorous book if he had trimmed it down to 70 carefully revised poems rather than 194. That would have been a good score over 30 years for a person with a life outside poetry. T. S. Eliot and Phillip Larkin were effectively full time poets, but had a relatively small published output, partly because they were great discarders.

The final poem in Pridmore’s book is a useful example of what I am saying, and is carelessly written. Its subject, but not the title of the poem, provides the title of the book.

What a time!

Carbon paper blue, black, red and green

And stamps, Olympians, trains and Queens

All here well before me.

I survived

Carbon paper, but stamps’ll limp along

Long after I am gone.

I’m a soul brother of

White Out. I remember when that came in.

Now, it’s getting hard to get, and I’ve

got this filial feeling we’re going out together.

The last line of the first verse is awkward, the following line is a bit conventional, and “filial” is a mistake for fraternal.

The third and final verse is:

My grandfather saw cars come in.

And I saw computers

The biggest stride we’ve ever strode.

What a time in history!

I want to be buried in a 3D printed coffin.

I have a problem with the third line of this verse. “The biggest stride”? What about fire, the wheel, plumbing, the internal combustion engine, antibiotics, to name just a few? Non-poets use the term “poetic

licence”, but for many poets this is anathema. I also have a problem with the next line. Poets aim to present the “Ding an sich”, the thing in itself, rather than talk about their perceptions. The last verse would be improved by removing the third and fourth lines. Despite my criticisms, this is a delightful and intelligent poem and one of the 70 odd that are worth preserving.

I’ll finish on what I think is one of the high points of Pridmore’s book. You will notice that the lines of the second verse below are shorter, and rhyme, as the pencil has been sharpened.

The pencil sharpener

It’s a bit disconcerting, the pencil fits in snugly

But sticks out at an angle to the housing.

You check and reassured start twisting gently

Wood thinner than women’s underwear crawls over your fingers

And as long as there are no jerks or withdrawals

It continues a virgin ribbon.

The lead is shaved of powder to pin point tall

And the smell of Californian cedar is not forgotten.

It’s all in the position

Of a tiny blade

In a confined space.

Completing the mission

For which it was made

A salute to the human race.

The last three lines don’t quite live up to the precision of the three lines that immediately precede them, and could improve with revision. But this poem shows why Pridmore’s book is well worth reading, albeit with a blue pencil handy.

Geoffrey Lehman is an award winning Australian poet – most recently the 2015 winner of the Prime Minister’s Award for Poetry for his anthology Poems 1957-2013

MUSIC FOR ALL AGES - ON THE COUCH WITH DR LICHTER

The Secret Magic of Music - Conversation with Musical Masters

By Ida Lichter

Select Books Inc 2016

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Reviewed by Anne Henderson

It could be said that music is a human's most primal intellectual experience. Music is emotional and appeals to the youngest mind through its sensations of sound and beat. Babies can make a beat before they can make the sound of a word. It follows that making music, like language, can be developed in humans not only to communicate but to extend emotional connection, intellectual understanding and intimate pleasure.

None of this should surprise. But in Ida Lichter's *The Secret Magic of Music – Conversations with Musical Masters* what does surprise is her ability – through the many conversations she has had with conductors, performers of chamber music and a handful of administrators – to use words to convey the emotions, the pleasure and the intellectual engagement that is found in the experience of great classical music performance. Reading this book is enough to make one take out a season's subscription to the Sydney Opera House or chase through the web for the best of classical musical festivals on offer.

The “conversations” are not recorded as such. Lichter fashions each chapter around one or two individuals dividing her collection into sections - conductors, instrumentalists (pianists, strings, oboe), voices, collaborative artists and administrators. Her introduction to each individual forms as a brief biography after which she offers an appreciation of music through their eyes from what they have told her. In doing this, Lichter combines her own musical sense with the intellectual experience of a great musician. Each cameo builds on the ones before, taking the reader on a pleasurable but intellectually engaging trip much like the pleasure and engagement of a great performance.

Lichter's line-up of interviewees is impressive. Most have performed in Australia, attesting to the depth of musical performance on offer Down Under. Vladimir Ashkenazy, conductor and pianist and, what Lichter describes as, “one of the most illustrious living musicians” found the music conservatory was “an island of sanity” as colleagues and citizens were sent to prison or incarcerated in psychiatric hospitals in Soviet Russia. In his island conservatory, Ashkenazy was “driven to comprehend the world of various composers and transmit their message as faithfully as possible”. He believes that Beethoven and Mozart could translate their inner world and understanding of human existence into a message through sound.

Israeli instrumentalist Amihai Grosz who began his studies on the viola at the age of eleven now performs with a 1570 Gasparo da Salo viola on loan from a private collection. He says, “In music you surrender to the art. We are bound by many rules in society but music has no borders, hierarchy or constraints regarding interpretation, listening and response.” Violinist Donald Grant studied in Scotland going on to rank among the world's finest musicians with the help of scholarships. He became co-founder of the Eliza String Quartet which has enjoyed global acclaim, winning the highest rating on BBC Radio's *Building a Library* in September 2009. He tells us, “During periods of stress, we have a greater need for music to provide an escape from everyday life, or to tap into more positive feelings. It does not have to be joyful. Even the most melancholic music can make us feel better by accessing our emotions.”

There is a recognition, for many of Lichter's performers, that music can transport its listeners in ways other media cannot. Angela Hewitt, who started learning the piano aged four and gave her first performance aged five, believes it is possible to feel in touch with a higher presence through music and that such spiritual connection is attainable, especially through Bach. Buddhist, Catholic or any other practitioner of religion, she says, can reach this state through music. Although she recognises that while any audience can respond to Bach, it is not so easy for Asian performers to tackle Bach with no understanding of Western church music.

One Easter Sunday, Hewitt played an Easter hymn for patients at a home where her father lived, many of whom had Alzheimers. A patient who had not spoken for two years suddenly began to sing all the words of the hymn bringing the audience of carers and patients to tears. Music retention is held in a different part of the brain from other forms of memory. Many of the contributors to Ida Lichter's conversations were able to demonstrate the healing potential of music.

Throughout the conversations, the acknowledgement that performers of classical music are the custodians of a treasured and heritage collection is pronounced. Pianist Aleksandar Madzar, born in Belgrade in 1968, says that classical musicians have a responsibility to keep the many centuries of art music alive, not only for its intrinsic value, but also for the collective bonding it gives listeners. At one level musicians are entertainers but they "could also be envisaged as priest or messengers" he tells Lichter. This notion of custodianship is shared by younger Australian performers like violinist Dimity Hall and her husband, cellist Julian Smiles. They believe children need to learn about the importance of music as part of culture and that "when children's curiosity about music is switched on, it is self-perpetuating, but if activation is insufficient there is a danger the art could decline, even within a generation".

This theme that classical music has a significant part to play in the world's mindset and condition is explored by a number of contributors. That classical music is not easily attractive to the young and modern society in general is both deplored and debated. Pianist Paul Lewis has performed as a soloist with the greatest orchestras of the world. He says:

Today, people demand immediate benefits, usually those of a larger, faster, noisy and more colourful variety. These attitudes can be seen in television programs that encourage attraction to the loudest, most accessible disposable content that shuts out depth and contemplation. Schubert could not be further from these values, which encapsulate so much popular culture and mainstream media. He reminds us of our basic need for more introspective engagement with the world, and many people respond to this message.

There is discussion in these conversations, also, as to whether music and its degeneration into the electronic sounds of decades of pop music could be responsible for the discordant mood of many among the young in our modern world. This is by no means concluded in any scientific way but various possibilities are advanced.

For all that, there is agreement that music is not always a panacea for good. Lichter's musicians have the highest regard for their art and exhibit nothing but positive good in their work, but their views on this could be summed up by Russian pianist Evgeny Kossin who is sceptical about any ethical claims for the art of music. Kossin might wish it had moral value but he sees no evidence for that – after all Nazi leaders were no less evil for listening to music and Stalin liked certain poetry and opera. Music, he says, is morally neutral although emotionally powerful.

Emotion is a word most attached to the views on music in these comprehensive conversations. As the musicians reflect it is clear that the emotional charge is not only between composer and performer but also between performer and audience. Lichter can explain this sometimes by analysing technique and often by recording personal experience of various performers she has talked with.

All up, the engagement of any one performance in music, at such a high level, draws on energies at many points of the compass. The black notes on a white page are an intricate combination of physical tones and sounds that need to be mastered by a trained mind and physique, as well as interpreted artistically in the rendition. Beyond that, the listeners have their part to play in the performance, affecting the performer with their interest, or lack of it, even their silence. In this, Lichter, and many she speaks with, believe that only the live performance can truly capture the full experience of great classical music.

Andreas Loewe, Dean of Melbourne and Fellow and lecturer at the Melbourne Conservatorium and Katherine Firth, Head of Academic Programs at Trinity College and researcher on the relationship between music and poetry, believe Bach is pivotal in the development of religious and secular classical music. In

Bach's time, the music played would be specific to venue. For much of Bach this meant being heard in in church. Today, too often, music lovers hear performance in recordings, film or via livestream. This means they miss "the experience of sitting in an audience and responding to a piece of music as a group". They example the sound of Richard Strauss' famous *Also Sprach Zarathustra* where an audience can feel the vibrations before the music is audible so that, as these vibrations build, "the listener is already at a high pitch of excitement by the time the timpani and trumpets sound out" for its opening.

Ida Lichter studied piano performance and theory before taking up a career in medicine, specialising in psychiatry. She has worked in the area of performance anxiety which led her to the field of therapy for musicians who were trying to master symptoms inhibiting their ability to play in public. She writes, therefore, from a basis of experience in both music and behavioural research. The conversations cover a vast range of issues around classical performance and the challenges facing classical music performance in the twenty-first century. In spite of the rock and pop culture, classical music is thriving among many groups, and it finds renewed opportunities again and again, whether in movies or in the latest popularity for music festivals in unusual locations.

Perhaps the last word should go to double bass player Kees Boersma who puts it simply:

Music is one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity and a high point of civilisation. It brings out the best in the human spirit by touching that part of us which is only accessible through music. Can music change behaviour? Perhaps not directly, but it is definitely enabling.

Anne Henderson is deputy director of The Sydney Institute. Her most recent book, *Menzies at War*, was short listed for the 2015 Prime Minister's Literary Award for History.

POLITICS AND THE LAW – A LIFE AT THE TOP

Tom Hughes QC: A Cab on the Rank

By Ian Hancock

The Federation Press, 2016

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Reviewed by Paul Henderson

The author of this biography of Tom Hughes, Ian Hancock, has previously written a considerable amount of material on Australian history and politics. He is a fellow editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and has written numerous books and chapters of books in a range of publications. This includes books on the New South Wales Liberal Party and the former premier of that state, Nick Greiner.

Ian Hancock's *Tom Hughes QC: A Cab on the Rank* is a very scholarly work. Over the 350 pages there are hundreds of footnotes and the bibliography is extensive. As a result, the book is a very detailed account of Hughes. There are many references throughout the text to the extensive diaries, notes and letters kept by Hughes himself and members of his family, which have been used as source material.

Religion appears to have played a major part in the Hughes household when Tom was growing up and after Tom left school. There was a strong Catholic influence on his life, with weekly masses, rosaries said after dinner and morning and afternoon prayers. The family regularly prayed for Hughes when he was serving overseas in the air force during World War 11.

It is obvious that Tom's father, George, had, and wanted to have, an influence over the former's career. Tom returned to school at St Ignatius' College (a Jesuit school) in Sydney for a second year in Year 12, as many students did in those days. However, his father withdrew him at the start of the year when he was not made school captain. In a big statement, George claimed that the school had yielded "... so readily to the miserable policy of disillusion that has bred the ruin that we face today", this being a reference to the world scene in 1943. (Tom Hughes removed his own son in his second last year at the school because he thought he would do better elsewhere). Ambition in the Hughes family went from one generation to another.

When Tom was training in England in 1942 as part of the Flying Boat Squadron, George was also involved in contacting senior instructors at the base to ensure that his son could reach the required level of expertise. Later, when Hughes returned to Australia and applied for a Rhodes Scholarship, his father became effectively his campaign manager, helping Tom sort out who would be his best people to write references for him.

Time and time again throughout the book Tom comes across as being very ambitious, whether it being in the armed services, as a member of parliament or at the Bar. There is nothing wrong with this and, while he made many friends, nothing got in the way of his personal ambitions.

In his early days at the New South Wales Bar, Hughes was very hard working, in the belief that barristers must be like a taxi and take "any cab on the rank" providing the client could pay the financial fee. He was involved in some big cases, becoming a silk in 1962. He thrived at the Bar and, like his days in the army which involved "useless night patrols", he became bored if he was not kept active.

At different places throughout the book, Hancock hints that Hughes was an egotist. He thought he should have had a higher rank in the navy during World War II. In an interview in 2014, he can recall a comment made to him more than 50 years prior by former prime minister, Robert Menzies when Hughes first entered parliament. Menzies said "my boy, you have a future here". He described opponents of Prime Minister Gorton as "termites". In a eulogy at Gorton's funeral in 2002, with former Prime Minister Fraser in the congregation, he criticised the role played by Malcolm Fraser as an opponent of Gorton.

During his career, Hughes at times wrote about not getting enough work at the Bar, even though he was charging high fees and was getting plenty of cases. He did not hold back in discussing the performances of some judges and barristers. He described one barrister as "... a strange mixture of dishonesty, stupidity and ... a complete lack of knowledge." (page 269) In a defamation case which he lost, years later he would still say "... that the Court was wrong". He had a strange mannerism of looking sideways, rather than looking at the Bench, when addressing the Court.

Hughes was interested in politics from the early days being a strong anti-communist and disliking the Chifley Government's attempt to nationalise the banks. He won the seat of Parkes in 1963 on Democratic Labor Party preferences. He was re-elected in both 1966 and 1969. He was a member of the "mushroom club" who were strong supporters of Prime Minister Gorton.

Gorton promoted Hughes to become the Attorney-General, a senior ministerial posting. Hughes had to deal with the tricky issue of possibly prosecuting people who were encouraging soldiers to lay down their arms in Vietnam. Some of the anti-war demonstrators went to Hughes' home where violence broke out in the street. Hughes was seen in his front garden holding a cricket bat, to defend himself and his family if they had been attacked.

All this time when in Parliament, Hughes remained at the Bar. He defended the Australian Government, which had denied a passport to Wilfred Burchett. He appeared in the Trade Practices and the Concrete Cases. After he was sacked as a minister by Prime Minister William McMahon, Hughes retired from politics and returned to the Bar full-time.

Rightly, a significant amount of the book discusses a number of the famous cases in which Hughes was involved, most of which he won. One case he did lose on appeal, was his defence of Leigh Ratten, who had been found guilty of murdering his wife.

Hughes successfully defended a Fraser Government minister, Eric Robinson, in the Robinson Royal Commission. Hughes' attention to detail was seen when he cross-examined a witness for three days. He defended the Murdoch and Packer press on different occasions, some involving issues of defamation.

Other cases included defending people such as Lionel Murphy, Elizabeth Evatt, Clive Lloyd (who had been accused of possibly throwing a cricket game), Reg Austin (a rugby league player on a defamation issue), Rupert Murdoch, Robert Holmes a Court, Alan Jones, John Laws, Jane Maken (the elder sister of the Duchess of York) and Gina Reinhart. As the legal costs rose and the media became more careful, the number of defamation cases diminished.

As said earlier, Hancock's book is meticulous in its detail. As someone, who lived through the political and legal issues that Hancock outlined, it is interesting to read. Reading the in-depth arguments and counter-arguments in legal cases and the lists of all the names of judges and counsels for both sides, should be interesting for readers with a legal background. However, on occasions, there is too much detail and the lay reader may find this overwhelming.

Also, it was obvious that Tom Hughes kept extremely detailed accounts of just about everything. Whether it is necessary to include in this book the places he visited during World War II, the restaurants at which he dined in his working life, what he ate and drank and the people who attended these occasions, is debatable. The reader can lose the big picture.

Tom Hughes was a powerful figure at the Bar, meticulous in preparing for and being involved in cases. His prose was eloquent and, at significant times, such as on commemorating his 50 years at the Bar, Hughes' colleagues spoke well of him. Ian Hancock's book covers his career comprehensively.

Paul Henderson is an author and historian

PASSAGE TO PUSAN – ONE MOTHER’S 15,000KM JOURNEY TO FIND THE FINAL RESTING PLACE OF HER WAR HERO SON

An Australia Now Forgotten – Thelma Healy’s War

By Louise Evans

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RRP – \$33 pb

Reviewed by Anne Henderson

Writer and journalist Louise Evans has covered many stories in her professional life but admits she was surprised to discover the most extraordinary story of all was the one she found among her own family. The story of her grandmother Thelma, mother of eleven surviving children, abused wife and plucky adventurer.

One of the most enriching developments in historical writing in the late twentieth century has been the curiosity in students and historians about records of the lives of what we might call ordinary people. For it is, often, only in the tales of these lives that we find the full picture of an age, a people or a nation.

Australia, in the first decade of the twentieth century was a pearl in the British Empire collective, a prosperous workers paradise for a majority and a land where citizens viewed war as always happening somewhere else. However, World War I would bring the harsh realities of war to vast numbers of Australian homes and families and the Depression of the early 1930s would jolt much of the good times complacency in this prosperous young nation.

In her memoir of a family, which is *Passage to Pusan*, Louise Evans has captured the tenor of those decades that matured Australia, through the 1920s to the 1960s. An Australia where war and hard times went hand in hand with a plucky determination to endure, even prosper. Through the story of the young war hero Vincent Joseph Healy and his mother Thelma, Evans explores the impact of war on Australian families and the heart rending bonds of family ties that built a young nation. It is not surprising that Australia’s war memorials are among the best in the world.

Passage to Pusan is centred on the Korean War where Vince Healy, Thelma Healy’s first born, is killed in battle aged 24. Vince is the tall, handsome eldest in a Healy tribe of eleven kids where their father has spent a large part of his married life staying at the office or living in boarding houses and hotels as a regional bank manager, preferring this to spending time with his family. Vince became the stand-in father figure for the family, and a protective force when Mick Healy joined his family and dealt out unreasonable beatings with his thick leather straps.

Pusan, where Vince is buried in a military grave, becomes a focus for Thelma as she endures loss and continuing hardship, all her married life rearing her lively brood against the odds, for most of it on nothing but a miserable allowance from her absent husband. Thelma’s quest, over the decade which followed Vince’s death, was to travel the more than four thousand miles to Pusan, in South Korea, and be with her Vince for one last time.

Vince had been not only Thelma’s first born but also the reason she married – having become pregnant to the Catholic Mick Healy as a single girl from a respectable and well-to-do Protestant family in fashionable Sandgate, Queensland in 1925. The consequences were a quiet wedding six months pregnant, estrangement from her family and a precarious domestic life with Mick bearing thirteen children.

Louise Evans has pieced the story together after hours of family conversations and interviews and after steadily extracting memorabilia from a large extended family where pieces of the puzzle had been stored, unceremoniously, in drawers and cupboards and forgotten. The one item that sparked Evans’ initial interest was Thelma’s diary record of her trip to Pusan in 1961. Her day-by-day recordings opened up a vista on a determined ordinary woman making an extraordinary journey.

From all this, Louise Evans discovers no ordinary woman in Thelma. A woman who went from comfort to penury and disgrace in the arms of a man who would become a domestic ogre. The old Queenslander they eventually made their home would fill to bursting with children, as grass widow Thelma managed day-to-day to feed and clothe her brood. In the telling, Evans recreates an Australia long forgotten but in a way that does not denigrate or belittle.

There were few material possessions but Thelma kept a well managed home making do at her sewing machine (where she sat the day her young daughter brought the telegram conveying news of Vince's death), re fashioning hand-me-down clothes, cooking from what she could buy cheaply or pick from the garden and seeing that all her children attended church on Sunday and school on weekdays.

A few loose pennies might be found for a movie, a ride to the beach, whatever could be grabbed by way of fun in between the struggles the Healy family faced. In time, the older siblings added small amounts to the family budget, so that the picture that emerges is one of a vital gang of individuals who never let hardship stand in the way of their future. In November 1955, after Mick Healy had left home finally, Thelma took her abusive husband to court and faced scandalous newspaper reports to win a larger share of his earnings. Even so, she was forced to take a job in a pineapple cannery to make ends meet. But, having stayed legally married as Catholics did then, when Mick died of a massive heart attack in 1957 Thelma inherited his bank pension. The family celebrated.

The pivot of Evans' book is undoubtedly Vince. From the many letters he wrote home and the pictures he sent, his time in post-war Japan seemed, to his family, to be a great adventure – his letters omitted the ghastly things he saw so as not to upset them. But, from there, the next step for Vince was Korea. No Korea, said his mother. No, Mum, said Vince. But he had already volunteered. And, within six months of arriving in Korea, Vince would be one of the casualties, shrapnel spearing his brain as he carried a wounded mate to safety.

For Vince and other young men of his day, war took them beyond their home shores for the very first time. For many it *was* an adventure, at least at the outset. Two of Vince's younger brothers would follow him into the army, one would be seriously wounded in the Vietnam War. Thelma, along with so many other parents, waved them off and held their thoughts to themselves as they waited for their sons' return.

The war the world seems to have forgotten is undoubtedly the Korean War. Yet it played a significant part in Australia's developing identity. Coming so soon after the Second World War – which for Australia was very much a war of the Pacific – Australians were ready for the call to arms in the fight against encroaching totalitarian Communism. The US was now as close an ally as ever Britain had been. Fighting under the UN flag, Australian diggers met the elements of a Korean peninsular war in the bitter cold of winter 1950-51, outfitted in summer strength uniforms facing treacherous mountain terrain. It was said at the time that the death-inducing winter was the diggers' biggest enemy.

For a few months, thanks to some Brisbane newspaper reports showing Vince in his army uniform, and one reporting he had held off the enemy single-handedly at a post, Thelma's eldest became a local hero. The kids cut out the extracts and celebrated their "famous" brother. Then, suddenly, he was gone forever. War had taken their hero and protector.

Thelma's "passage" to Pusan, in fact, begins with her unfortunate marriage, the birth of her first born and the life she made for her many children against the odds. Her actual journey to Pusan brings her closure. *Passage to Pusan* is, in many ways, quintessentially Australian, so much so that it becomes a gritty memorial to an Australia we shall not see again.

A FASCINATING AND HIGHLY ENTERTAINING LOOK INSIDE A POLITICAL SCANDAL

Weiner

Directors: Josh Kriegman, Elyse Steinberg

Starring: Anthony Weiner, Huma Abedin, Sydney Leathers, Lawrence O'Donnell.

Released: 2016

In Cinemas Now

Reviewed by Paige Hally

Passionate, charismatic and unfortunately named Congressman Anthony Weiner was once a rising star in US politics. Before he developed a reputation for sleazy online behaviour, he was known for his impassioned speeches fighting for the middle class, particularly after a video of a fiery outburst berating Republicans for blocking healthcare funds for 9/11 first responders went viral in 2010. Shortly afterwards he experienced a different kind of internet fame when a mis-posted photo on Twitter prompted a sexting scandal that forced him to resign.

The documentary kicks off in 2013 as Weiner attempts to clean up his image and run for New York City Mayor. The film - made by Weiner's former aide Josh Kriegman and Elyse Steinberg - was intended to document Weiner's comeback. Initially that's what it does. While the press only want to discuss the scandal, much to Weiner's frustration, his supporters easily forgive him. With the support of a devoted campaign team and his wife Huma Abedin (former Hillary Clinton aide currently serving as vice chairwoman to her presidential campaign), Weiner rockets to the top of the polls and appears to be winning an uphill battle.

That is until a second scandal emerges, with more accusations of explicit messages long after the initial scandal broke. The cameras keep rolling and we see the scandal develop as Weiner, his wife and his betrayed staff attempt to get the trainwreck of a campaign back on track. Weiner allows the filmmakers an extraordinary amount of access and it makes for a painfully intimate documentary. We see the campaign team losing faith as Weiner scrambles to turn things around and the increasingly strained relationship between Weiner and Huma.

While Huma is always present in the film - often quietly seething in the background with crossed arms and rolling eyes - we don't gain any insight into why she continues to support her husband. This is ultimately not surprising for someone with a notorious and self confessed reluctance to appear in the public eye. Disappointingly we also get very little insight from Weiner into the motivation for his behaviour - other than one semi-confessional scene - which is the film's only major limitation.

Weiner is frequently very funny. At times it feels like less like a documentary and more like a cringe comedy or an Armando Iannucci satire, particularly in one scene where Weiner avoids being ambushed by a fame-hungry sexting partner named Sydney Leathers - the only person who the film treats with real contempt.

Despite his indiscretions, Weiner is immensely likeable. We see examples of what a skilled, passionate politician he was which makes watching his self sabotage all the more frustrating. The documentary is largely objective, if somewhat sympathetic to Weiner, and it's the media's treatment of the scandal that comes off looking the worst. Many politicians careers have survived worse behaviour than anything Anthony Weiner did, but with a last name that lends itself to puns so easily and a ridiculous online pseudonym, Weiner never really had a hope of escaping the scandal. Though it is extremely entertaining to watch him try.

HAM FUNERAL

Ham Funeral

Written by Patrick White

Directed by Ariella Stoian

Tuesday 26 - Saturday 30 July 2016

PACT Centre for Emerging Artists

CAST

The Young Man - Mitchell Why

Alma Lusty, the Landlady - Penny Day

Will Lusty, The Landlord - Lynden Jones

The Girl - Sonya Kerr

First Relative - Dominica Nicholls

Second Relative - Ben Gageler

Third Relative - Chris McKay

Fourth Relative - Emily Burke

First Lady - Madeline Clouston

Set Designer - Phillip Rowe

Costume Designer - Azure Schofield

Music Composed by Hence Therefore

Stage Manager - Kate Gogolewski

Photography by Stephen Godfrey

Reviewed by Nathan Lentern

Traipsing through a minefield of taboos, Patrick White's *The Ham Funeral* is shocking and challenging in 2016. That it was written in 1948 speaks lucidly to White's flare for moral ambiguity.

The production centres around two disaffected and despondent antiheroes, a poet wracked with ennui (Mitchell Why) and his landlady Mrs Lusty (Penny Day) who has fallen out of love with her slovenly husband (Lynden Jones) and out of patience with her life of menial tasks and Spartan comforts. The poet perceives excitement and liberation in the enigmatic boarder who rents the room across the hallway from his own (Sonya Kerr). Mrs Lusty perceives it in the poet. She also sees in him the son she lost in childbirth who would now have been around the same age. She develops a confused combination of maternal affection and lustful hunger for the younger man who in turn alternates between arousal and revulsion at her advances.

When Mr Lusty abruptly dies, the poet becomes even more deeply interwoven into Mrs Lusty's affairs. Mrs Lusty declares that her late husband is to have a lush and decadent funeral with ham - the same food as their wedding. The poet is dispatched to round up the late Mr Lusty's residents, whereupon he meets two homeless women searching bins for treasures before they flee the scene howling "murder" after discovering a foetus in there.

At the funeral, Mr Lusty's relatives taunt Mrs Lusty with the knowledge that she had willed his death and even contemplated his murder. Their bullying is vulgar and relentless yet effective at exposing the darker demons of the widow's character. Our poet, who by this stage is the only remaining character with which we can remotely empathise, is torn between sympathy and disgust.

This production as a whole stirs emotion and concern in its audience though when placed under a microscope there are shortcomings with individual elements. In some cases, this is the fault of nobody in particular. White's prose is often both ornate and euphemistic, requiring intense concentration and a degree of deciphering at the best of times. But when a truck rumbles past, a forgivable mumble becomes a source of consternation. And when it becomes difficult to hear White's florid little soliloquys, his painstakingly chosen words are robbed somewhat of their delicacy. But when you could hear you were occasionally left

with the impression that the performer, particularly Mitchell Why, wasn't entirely confident in the meaning of White's lofty language – at times the dramatic flourish, the emphasis, the pointed look to the audience just didn't seem to match the actual words that left the speaker's mouth.

The play could almost be broken into two forms of dialogue: Conflicts and reflections. The conflicts were when the performance was at its finest, sizzling arguments, caustic invective, sickening bullying and soul crushing pain. The eponymous Ham Funeral scene was all this writ large as the revolting relatives all swagger and delight mock and taunt the confused and flustered Mrs Lusty, turning their sordid innuendos on the poet when he intervenes to defend her. The reflections on the other hand fall flat. Delivered mostly as soliloquys by Why and Day, they tend to be lengthy, repetitive and predictable.

The highlight was the enigmatic girl that lived in the room across the corridor. Witty and spirited, she was a confident foil for our poet's neurosis. Their exchanges through the wall though excruciating for the poet were a delight for the audience. Emotional, adroit repartee between two young, intelligent wordsmiths. I only wish White had given her more dialogue.

Despite some specific shortcomings, *The Ham Funeral* works as an overall performance. What we are made to feel is less clear, these flawed yet sympathetic antiheroes create no shortage of internal conflicts. The set is appropriately dank and musty, while our poet's neat and bookish outfits cut an effective contrast with the more slovenly and old homely attire of the Lusty's enhancing his sense of non-belonging.

A special mention must go to Lusty's relatives in particular the first relative Dominica Nicholls whose swaggering nastiness is so vile and so triumphalist as to fill the audience with nausea.

On the whole *The Ham Funeral* was a solid production. It made us think, it must us feel and it challenged our preconceived certainties in a provoking and grimly amusing fashion.

OUT OF BOUNDS

Out Of Bounds

Written and directed by Jonathan Solomon

PACT Centre for Emerging Artists

Cast:

Amy Field- School Secretary

Chrissie Antoniadis- School Principal

Daniel Asher Smith-Teacher

Jade Alex- Beautician

Morgane Stroobant-Pushy Parent

Nicholas Carter- Photographer/ Real Estate Agent

Reviewed by Nathan Lentern

Enter the world of an exclusive private school principal who is barely holding it all together. Overworked and underloved, butted and buffeted by pushy parents and rival principals, she's come to rely heavily on the sage counsel of her pampering hairdresser. Things reach breaking point however when a poison pen scandal sees parents threatening to end her career. With the aid of her downtrodden school secretary, a hunky geography teacher and the wily beautician; our embattled hero must pull out all the stops to head off catastrophe.

Out of Bounds is a quaint concept for a play. While some of The Sydney Fringe's offerings are overly ambitious in their attempts to unpick the mysteries of life, love and the universe and serve up a convoluted mess in the process, this play is simple, clever, funny and well made. And having nailed these fundamentals it is then able to slip in a few incisive social commentaries along the way.

The plot is ultimately a cute old fashioned cosy school whodunit, which when supported by likeable and interesting characters like this makes for a truly delightful production. The story moves along quickly and clearly, anticipation is built skilfully before reaching an enthralling crescendo and when the cast takes a bow I am amazed that a full hour has passed.

Chrissie Antoniadis as the school principal was spookily believable. All frazzled and wired, she oozed young, overwhelmed professional. She was in many ways a perfect lead; realistic and relatable enough to draw us in to her universe and empathise with her plights but saddled with a good dosage of neurosis to lend her a comic edge.

Jade Alex as the hair dresser was brilliant with her catlike combinations of affection, manipulation and feigned vulnerability. There was something deliciously conniving about the way she used her salon as a sort of panopticon tower of gossip, subtly wielding enormous influence over her gullible clientele all the while maintaining a humble altruism. Her eventual role as a hero of sorts after earlier being written off as a benign friend serves as one of the nice little social messages tucked away neatly within the folds of the briskly moving plot. The imperious, wealthy and influential professionals are all ultimately outmanoeuvred by an unassuming beautician with a strong moral compass and a healthy amount of common sense.

If there is a chink in the armour it is Morgane Stroobant as the socialite and pushy mother. It's not that she's a weak character, she's just not right for this play. She's cartoonish and hyperbolic in a subtle and nuanced universe. It's difficult to take her seriously when she is so hammy and our heroes are so dignified. Consequently, her attempts to inspire anxiety in our principal don't really resonate. The idea that such a formidable professional could be so easily bullied by this oaf lacks credulity. And her flaws which are intended for comic affect are over the top and lose their potency as a source of humour. It's a shame because in spite of these weaknesses, plenty of green shoots still pushed through. If only they had dialled her down a little she could have been fascinating rival for our principal.

Two men play small but significant roles. Asher Smith is a hunky teacher who has been cuckolded by his high flying banker girlfriend. Though he has some romantic chemistry with the principal he serves mainly as a sounding board for the more eccentric characters to talk through their issues. He's there mostly to make nervous and quizzical faces at the audience as women become hysterical before him though he shows a few kooks of his own, notably his vanity over how he appears in tight fitting clothing.

Nicholas Carter is a chill photographer who comes in to do the official school portraits. He adds little to the show, just a bit of zen counsel intermingled with predictable metaphors about photography.

The stand out was Amy Jayne Field, so mouse like and self-doubting. Terrified of her boss and intimidated by her, she lurches from disaster to disaster in tragically hilarious fashion that just makes her instantly loveable.

The show has a running purple theme, all the characters have shades of purple as their names: Violet, Indigo, Lavender, Magenta and all wear at least one, often more, purple articles of clothing. There might be some links to be drawn between the vane and kingly colour and the pomp and ceremony of the exclusive private school but if so it is a tenuous link. On the whole the purple motif makes the simple set a little more grabbing aesthetically – which is a perfectly legitimate reason to do it – but adds little else.

Out of Bounds is a joyful and heart-warming tale about standing up for yourself and accepting that you can't please all people at all times. It is a treat to watch.

BACK TO BITE YOU

The Wharf Revue 2016: *Back to Bite You*

18 October- 23 December

Jonathan Biggins, Drew Forsythe, Phillip Scott and Katrina Retallick

Reviewed by Nathan Lentern

The Wharf Revue has returned for another year and with an Australian election having just passed us by and an American election just around the corner there was much to discuss. Creators Jonathan Biggins, Drew Forsythe, Phillip Scott and Katrina Retallick open with a clever Roman motif, loosely based upon the assassination of Julius Caesar. We witness the apostles of the fallen emperor, Antonius Abbottus, lamenting their late leaders demise and planning his restoration. In this we are treated to Romanized parodies of Eric Abetz, Kevin Andrews and Cory Bernardi. In alternate skits we enjoy Turnbull loyalists such as George Brandis and Arthur Sinodinos attempting to get assurances from Julie Bishop and Scott Morrison that they will stay loyal to Turnbull. The loyal Brandis and the vacillating Bishop are also approaching independent and crossbench politicians such as Bob Katter, Pauline Hanson and Jacqui Lambie on Turnbull's behalf.

The Roman power struggle is perfect as an overarching narrative. The show's creators use the format to flesh out some inspired caricatures, the best of which was Derryn Hinch as a victorious gladiator, waving his sword triumphantly before an adoring colosseum. The show dipped in and out of the main plotline to a few sideshows including a clever skit in which Bill Shorten receives elocution from George Bernard Shaw's genius creation Henry Higgins and a faux commercial for Bitter Victorian starring Kevin Andrews and this approach works well. The little sideplots gave the show nice shifts of pace while the plotting and subterfuge at the senate gave the show some nice direction to keep us focussed on where we were going. Then at about the two thirds mark this formula was abruptly abandoned.

The Australian parliament as the Roman Senate was replaced by two long and largely uninterrupted stories about life in the UK after Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump in the US. Though both news stories were worthy inclusions in an annual revue and the American segment in particular had a couple of neat flourishes, neither went close to approaching the quality of the Australian focussed start. I can sympathise with why they would choose to dedicate such a great portion of the show to these overseas antics. With Australian politics being so fluid and unpredictable, being able to bank something that was more or less predictable several months ago such as the Trump nomination and the Brexit result would have made planning the show a much more realistic task.

Understanding the rationale however does not make for a more entertaining show. To get to the heart of the problem we need to better understand where the Wharf Revue shines. The highlight of the night for me was near perfect portrayal of the late Bob Ellis. A 5 minute skit in which the talented yet erratic Ellis continued his well-known blog "Table Talk" from within the pearly white gates was masterful. I sat mesmerised as I watched and listened to Bob's deep, pontifical drawl, as Forsyth intermingled Ellis' lush verbiage with his puerile invective in a fashion that was impeccably Bob. As reclined happily in my seat listening to Bob shamelessly name drop Gore Vidal and Neville Wran, I reflected that whoever wrote this particularly monologue understood their subject perfectly. It incorporated so many of the tiny little nuances that contributed to making the complete ensemble that was Bob Ellis such a delightfully ludicrous character in real life. We could tell that Ellis was not merely a man who the creators had witnessed act inappropriately a handful of times on television but someone they had observed with delighted interest over decades.

There was no such refinement in Trump and Clinton, and at any rate the pair was sidelined for most of it. The main focus of this drawn out interlude was a trio of Republican officials deciding who to support, initially becoming enthralled then horrified by Trump's dynamism. These characters were flat and

unimaginative, aside from a few polite giggles at some clunky double entendres these skits were watched largely in silence.

The Brexit material contained similar weaknesses. The team elected not to go for impressions at all despite the generous real life offerings from eccentrics like Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn, instead they focussed exclusively on how ordinary Brits were getting on in life after Brexit. This approach done well can be sublime, but it is certainly a more challenging. For a show like this to sustain itself for ninety minutes its protagonists need to have at least some fascination about them. This is understandably a much more difficult task when the characters are drawn from scratch rather than parody which provides a handy template from which to start. Nevertheless, the characters were weakly drawn and the humour mostly undergraduate. A few clever jokes about Brexit and a few more lewd innuendos saved this scene from bombing, but it was more *Are You Being Served* than *The Gillies Report*. Sadly, they would have been better off just doing a hammy Boris Johnson impression for five minutes.

Still there's more than enough gold for it to be worth the admission albeit not enough to fill out a consistently high quality ninety minutes. It's tempting to say they ought to have stripped the show of most of its international content and elected for a sizzling hour rather than a yo-yoing ninety minutes but then Brexit and Trump are so deliciously ripe for the picking it would seem almost criminal to completely ignore them.

The musical numbers were generally very strong. All four performers are likeable comic actors with great energy and vocal ranges. The clear highlight was a duet with Jacquie Lambie and Pauline Hanson singing "I'm a woman". On the other hand a couple of Phillip Scott's solo pieces were a bit dry. His song about the plebiscite in particular was more polemic than comedic.

To fill out 90 minutes with topical satire is a tall task and *Back to Bite You*, for all its shortcomings largely achieves this. Though there is certainly room for improvement, audiences would be hard pressed to find more satirical ribaldry packed into an evening anywhere else.

THE YOUNG PRETENDER

The Young Pretender

Directed by Marg Nagle

13-17 September

New Theatre

By EV Crowe

Cast:

Ryan Bown: Charles III

Shaun McEachern: Donald

Madelaine Osborn: Flora

Reviewed by Nathan Lentern

Bonnie Prince Charles seeks to restore the *House of Stuart* to the throne of Great Britain. Proud, idealistic and cavalier he takes extraordinary risks without hesitation, so sure in his own convictions that he never pauses to consider that defeat is a genuine option. But when defeat comes he must confront the consequences of his brashness and reflect on the path to his fateful decisions.

The Young Pretender, written by EV Crowe is an intriguing character examination of a reckless and charismatic rogue. It involves a fair bit of assumed knowledge so newcomers to Scottish history might find themselves fumbling around for an understanding of the broader political context that lay before them but even they would be intrigued and beguiled by the fascinating character around which this play revolves.

The show is broken into three acts; each one being used to illustrate a different side of our hero's personality. In the first we see an exuberant, almost delirious Charles on the eve of the Battle of Culloden spurning entreaties to de-escalate the situation and enter into peace agreements. It is here where Charles is at his most mesmerising and where Ryan Bown truly excels. Recalling memories of the late, great Rik Mayal, Bown bounded across the stage a rarefied mixture of impetuous narcissism and foppish buffoonery. All this swishing of limbs and cocking of heads could look comically stupid from a lesser actor but Bown clearly knows, and trusts his ability, understands his character and commits to its eccentricity. Coupled with dashing good looks and chiselled, muscular figure he cuts very image of a charismatic war hero. The result is magnificent; we laugh, we are inspired and, at times, we are horrified. The opening act of *The Young Pretender* is one such act when the perfect script is married with the perfect actor and we the audience may just recline and enjoy.

The jaded and earnest Donald (Shawn McEachern) is an excellent foil for the swashbuckling Charles, painfully trying to get his friend and king to see sense. The actors have excellent on stage chemistry and we all feel Donald's exasperation as he implores Charles to heed his advice while the latter natters on comically about trivialities that have distracted him.

In Act II the comedy is gone. Bonnie has fled for his life after humiliating defeat and has sought out Donald's daughter, Flora, (Madelaine Osborne) to report her father's demise. Here the dynamic of the opening scene has been turned on its axis. Bonnie is broken and ashamed. He is stripped to his underwear and hobbles on stage with awkwardness and self-doubt, his earlier flamboyance now a distant memory. Our humbled hero is juxtaposed with the spirited Flora who has embraced the Jacobite ideal with more fervour than Bonnie ever did. Incensed by the circumstances in which he has returned she makes his admission as excruciating as she possible can by challenging him at every juncture with his own chauvinistic rhetoric. Nothing else matters except winning she reminds him. They had been led to believe that winning was inevitable she reminds. They had sacrificed everything because they were assured they would win she reminds him. Bonnie largely accepts her censure with a few feeble challenges; this is his penance and he endures it stoically.

Osborne is terrifying. Her Jacobite zeal blazes in her eyes and rings out in her piercing cries. Strikingly beautiful and impossibly sure of herself, her characterisation is utterly formidable. Bown show his versatility

by becoming this wreck of a man just as convincingly as he portrayed him in full flight. Despite his athletic physique he looks weak, he plays with his hair uncertainly, he avoids eye contact, he hunches as he walks. From the moment he enters the stage we are left with the impression that this is a man who is embarrassed by his own very existence.

The final act is set at the beginning of the Jacobite uprising. It recounts when Bonnie and Donald first met and the former's attempts to recruit the latter to the cause. Here we see a third Bonnie. An optimistic and hopeful young idealist, positive but not delusional. He is spirited but has not yet been consumed by narcissism. On a couple of occasions, he is actually forced to rein in Donald and impress upon him that a return of the Stuart's, while desirable, is not a panacea to all his problems. We also see a very different incarnation of Donald. The wired lieutenant from the opening Act is now a humble and good natured farmer. He is interested and sympathetic to Jacobism. The show ends with the two of them in conversation, speculating happily about the wonderful things that will happen once the Stuarts take back the throne.

The Young Pretender is not a typical historical play. Though set in 1745 it adopts (mostly) modern wardrobes and dialogue. Artistically, this makes a lot of sense. This is not so much an historical retelling of events but a character study and the contemporary parlance allows us to glean a unique insight into this tragic figure. And the insight we get is sobering. What is the difference between Shakespeare's Henry V (the character not the play) and EV Crowe's Charles III? The main difference is that Henry won. The hubris in the face of defeat is often associated with great military generals pulling off legendary victories but what of the generals for whom fate doesn't intervene? What of the Kings who fight against the odds and the odds prove to be correct? *The Young Pretender* tells that story and it tells it with beautiful poignancy.

The use of the modern dialogue also allows our protagonist to occasionally slip into the more florid arcane language to emphasise his poncier flourishes. The modern wardrobe too gives us insight into what kind of character we're dealing with. Costume designer Caitlyn Hodder is genius in her creations of outfits which set tone and context far more effectively than any period costume could. The arrival of Bonnie on stage in kilt, singlet and Doc Martins, the Cross of St Andrew shaved into his hair, provided an instantaneous glimpse into the soul of our protagonist.

For anyone hoping for a thrilling ride through the Jacobite uprising *The Young Pretender* will be a disappointment. That is not what this play is. This is a deconstruction of a charismatic, eccentric and fatally flawed leader. And it is exquisite.