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## Visiting the Neighbours: Australians in Asia

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sensitivity towards, and respect of, the Aborigenes' humanity, equality and cultures to correlate directly—the more, longer and later the exposure, the more humane the perception. Dawson quotes Rose Scott Cowen to this effect: “Indeed from what I knew of the morals of the people in ... bush townships I was often shamed to think that ... the aborigines in their wild state ... were far more virtuous” (139).

Often close-reading beyond Victorian respectability, expectations and textual marketability but also by citing straightforward opinions and observations by these women, Dawson makes a significant contribution to rewriting frontier history from the settler woman's perspective. By laying bare these women's denial as well as covert and overt acknowledgement of the agency, resilience, resourcefulness, assistance and friendship of Aboriginal men and especially women in the face of white colonisation, Dawson opens up a fertile area of academic research that begs further exploration.

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*Visiting the Neighbours: Australians in Asia*, by Agnieszka Sobocinska, Newsouth Books, Sydney, 2014, vi + 266 pp., \$34.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781742233895.

Given recent events, such as the centenary of Anzac, the development of a New Colombo Plan and the execution of two Australian drug smugglers in Indonesia, Agnieszka Sobocinska's *Visiting the Neighbours* is a timely study of the personal and political experiences of Australians in Asia over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Divided into nine chapters with brief, catchy and self-explanatory titles, Sobocinska through her lucid and vivid writing style marked by academic rigour takes the readers on a journey analysing shifts in the way Australians saw themselves in relation to Asia and Asians—their nearest neighbours. Although Asia contains many asias—geographically, culturally, ethnically and historically—Sobocinska clarifies that she is looking at the mainstream conception of the term as reflected in the works and engagement of travellers and tourists, as these “first-hand impressions can be more influential than academic or media accounts” (2).

The first chapter, “Imperialists”, provides a purview of European colonial expansion and the beginnings of colonial travel culture from Australia to Asia. Using the works of Laurie Falkner, Frank Clune and James Hingston, the chapter shows how the early Australian perceptions and encounters with natives were “refracted through an imperial lens” (17) and this form of colonial travel created a sense of entitlement especially amongst middle-class Australian travellers who, even after the death of Empire, craved for special treatment in Asia. Chapter two, “Fortune Hunters”, focuses on the complexities of trade, travel and diaspora as Australians realised that, despite the White Australia Policy, their fortunes still depend on Asian markets and economies. Sobocinska highlights this “waking up” to the region's opportunities through popular writer Clune's prophetic works, who asked Australians to

give up their imperial assumptions about Asia and “regard Asians not as backward ‘natives’ but as increasingly sophisticated customers” (38).

Chapter three, “Warriors”, takes us from Asian markets to the war fields with an exploration of the letters, diaries and POW accounts of Australian servicemen and women. Charles Pearson, William Lane and other writers often provided fodder to the rising anxieties amongst Australians through their best-selling invasion novels. In the post-war period, the Cold War dominated the official conversation. Chapter four, “Good Neighbours”, presents the politics of re-engagement with Asia through travel writing and fiction, in the work of Colin Simpson and Ion Idriess, as more and more Australians felt “personally involved in their nation’s foreign affairs” (80). With increasing Australian engagement, a growing concern for Australia’s future in Asia, and a better understanding of Asian people prompted the humanitarian turn in public diplomacy with a change in government’s foreign policy towards Asia. Chapter five, “Humanitarians”, charts the unleashing of well-meaning Australians, volunteers, aid-workers and high-profile individuals who “headed to Asia from the 1950s in the hope of improving the lives of millions of their [poor, backward and developing] neighbours” (102). This fascination with “volunteerism” sometimes was equated with enlightenment in the so-called cities of joys and sorrows (119).

Finding enlightenment or nirvana in the mythic East has been a recurring motive in Western writings. In the post-1960s, this was influenced by yogis, gurus, maharishis and monks’ teachings. Chapter six, “Seekers”, traces Australians’ search for Eastern spiritual wisdom and bodily pleasures alike through the literature of the hippie trail with “eat, pray and make love” as the mantra (143). The hippie era ended by late-1980s but with globalisation in the 1990s re-incarnated itself as the spiritual retreat and sex tourism industry “reflecting the longstanding Orientalist fantasies as well as gender inequalities” with a constant demand for Asian beauties in Australia (145). Australians who grew on a staple diet of colonial adventure, heroism, volunteerism and masculinity chose to chart their own adventures in Asia as discussed in chapter seven “Adventurers and Troublemakers”. These young men, and women, took the hippie trail and mass consumer tourism to a whole new level with organised orgies and rave parties on the beaches of Goa and Bali quite obviously to the disapprovals of the locals. These troublemakers and their supporters have used nationalist language to support their activities, which, according to Sobocinska, “points to complex undercurrents in popular Australian attitudes to Asia” (167).

With airfares getting cheaper and the rising value of the Australian dollar, travel to Asia has become a favourable option. Chapter eight, “Tourists”, focuses on Bali—the playground for Australian tourists. It shows how, despite controversies, political upheavals, natural disasters and terrorist attacks, the image of Bali as a paradise has not really changed in the Australian mind. This is also because of the ever increasing number of Asian–Australians and their connections to former or ancestral homelands—the focus of chapter nine “Sons and Daughters”. The shifts in migration policies and demographics are also reflected in the journeys and narratives of a new generation of travellers whose “lives are lived between and across borders, societies and civilisations” (191). Sobocinska concludes the book with “People’s Diplomats”, asserting that the more Australians travelled, “the more comfortable they felt in the

neighbourhood” which further supported the diplomatic endeavours and engagements (215).

We know it or not, Australians are not strangers to Asia, and have been in Asia as diplomats, doctors, missionaries, teachers, nurses, filmmakers, hippies, soldiers, seamen and travellers. Over the years, these travellers have helped in expanding an understanding of political, cultural, economic and technological changes in the Asia Pacific region. Keeping in mind the recent controversial events, high-level bilateral visits by officials, new strategic partnerships including those between Asian and Australian universities, and the Australian government’s re-engagement with Asia through its Australia’s place in the Asian Century debates, Sobocinska’s book is a valuable addition to a small but highly influential group of studies on perceiving and understanding Asia from an Australian perspective. This book is a must read for researchers, academics and policy-makers interested in Australian–Asian post-colonial relationship.

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*The End of the Homosexual?*, by Dennis Altman, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2013, 256pp., \$29.95 (paperback), ISBN 9780702249815.

The image adorning the front cover of Dennis Altman’s latest book, *The End of the Homosexual?* signals just how much has changed over the last half a century or so. Notwithstanding its political motivations, Banksy’s graffitied “gay bobbies” (depicting two male officers in uniform with lips locked and in passionate embrace), is emblematic of many of the institutional, cultural and political shifts that constitute what is arguably the most successful social movement of the modern era. Vestiges of discrimination and prejudice now appear on shaky ground as same-sex couples walk down the aisle in increasing numbers across western jurisdictions. This state of affairs seemed unimaginable if unwanted only a few decades ago. But things change. In this delightfully readable, highly entertaining and compelling memoir, Altman sets out to chart this uneven and contradictory social transformation as he reflects on more than 40 years of public and political life.

*The End of the Homosexual?* is divided into three parts which generally unfold chronologically. It focuses on a number of areas simultaneously to examine the dynamics of sexual citizenship and identity politics. What are its legacies, contemporary relevance and what challenges remain? One of the book’s key strengths is that it considers these questions from a global perspective, assessing traditional forms of sexual belonging alongside western structures of gender and sexuality. Altman’s ongoing interest in the “globalisation of homosexuality” takes into account the pace of social and political change elsewhere. Examples from Brazil, Israel, Manila and India, for instance, pepper the text even if much of author’s story lies in Australia and the USA.