

intramural dispute over the future of Australia's polity, to essays by those who left, expatriates such as Germaine Greer and Clive James. What they are in earnest about is no longer – anxiously or triumphantly – Australia. They 'reflect upon the Australian experience' (Salusinszky's category for inclusion) more by their leaving of and distance from it, than by what any longer they know with authority.

The Oxford Book of Australian Essays contains – near the end of the selection – Helen Garner on the fate of *The First Stone*, by which Salusinszky may be signalling where he stands in that acrimonious and unresolvable dispute. Last of all, bringing matters to a graceful conclusion, is Michael McGirr. Youngest of those whom Salusinszky has enlisted, at the well-trying age of 36, McGirr reflects on the move to make a saint of Mary McKillop, and of how she – and indeed all of us – might be remembered. 'Memory', McGirr writes, 'is inhabited. Remembering means to embody. It means to take into your own person, your flesh and your faltering gait, the unmiraclous meaning of someone else's simple stories.' With eloquent plainness, this expresses some of what Salusinszky's authors achieve. He has marshalled them to splendid effect. This is one Oxford Australia compendium that deserves to have a life in the community. There it should be – without apology – 'for schools' as well.

PETER PIERCE

Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life, edited by Jenna Mead. Milsons Point, NSW: Viking/Random House, 1997. Paper \$19.95.

It's now over two years since Helen Garner's *The First Stone* was published, producing widespread media controversy, healthy sales, and offering an aestheticised and potent refrain for anti-feminist diatribes. Remember the Op.Ed columnists' frenzy, the amusing though depressing sight of what Mark Davis in *Gangland* describes as 'the usual suspects' (for example, Manne, Faust, Henderson, Doogue, McGuinness, Arndt, and so on and so on) holding up *The First Stone* as 'hard' evidence of the excesses of feminism and its role in the general decay of Western civilisation? So Jenna Mead's edited anthology, *Bodyjamming*, provides some timely, welcome and dissenting voices to Garner's raising of some questions about sex and power (and the neo-conservatives' answers).

Bodyjamming's collection of essays form a 'considered response to', and 'a new kind of conversation' concerning the moral, cultural, and political debates/panics that *The First Stone* engendered. Or, as Mead explains, 'One of the tasks of this collection is to speak of women and their concerns by coming up with languages that are meaningful now.' The diversity of contributors (for example, academics, students, one of the Ormond complainants, cartoonists, a journalist, a Senator), their approaches, and styles ensure that this aim of a meaningful language, or accessible counter-discourse to represent women, is generally met.

However, if *The First Stone* at times seemed more about Garner's psycho-sexual anxieties or writerly quest than the Ormond College case, then *Bodyjamming* too shares this weakness of focus. A number of the essays, while interesting in themselves, seem only tangentially related to Ormond or Garner. And while the book's three-part structure: sexual harassment, feminism, and public life, does correspond with the three major debates opened by the Ormond case and *The First Stone*, one still gets the impression that some of the contents are just too general in import to be much more than filler material. This is a disappointment with the book, since the mainstream media debate concerning sexual harassment, political correctness, or feminism in general, has been largely controlled by reactionary or conservative forces huffing and puffing the same tired old wisdoms, and *Bodyjamming* should be a critical opportunity to win back some political and discursive space. Anyone who has followed the debates in feminist journals and magazines can attest to the fact that there is no short-

age of creative and provocative challenges to *The First Stone*, and that these articles deserve a wider audience made possible by a publication like *Bodyjamming*.

Yet the essays that do engage with Ormond and/or Garner provide insightful and powerful counter-narratives and mappings of the political, cultural and moral issues surrounding *The First Stone*, and more than justify reading *Bodyjamming*. For example, Mead was one of the university feminists to whom the young women complainants turned for advice. Not surprisingly, she was a major target of Garner. Thus her introductory essay gives an insider's account of the events that were missing or obfuscated in *The First Stone*. Mead also analyses the media representations of Garner and the Ormond College case, particularly how they utilised the language of scandal and melodrama, and powerful archetypes of vengeful daughters and dangerous, seductive young women.

Another insider's view is given by one of the Ormond complainants in 'Sticks and Stones'. Finally, one of those silent and elusive angry young feminists speaks, but alas, not to Helen Garner. The complainant writes with a surprising amount of restraint and clear-sighted analysis, as she describes what it was like to exist at '[t]he centre of a media and public furore'.

One of the most valuable outcomes of *Bodyjamming* is that Mead (and a number of the other contributors such as Ann Curthoys) contextualises the controversy in terms of intellectual movements, historical shifts and political realignments:

it was not until 1995 that the effects of [feminism's] changes came into public view — because at this point what had been legal, educational and historical changes came under media scrutiny as serious cultural changes. Pursuing a complaint of sexual harassment, in 1992, came to be seen, in 1995, as all of a piece with political correctness by both the right and the left.

A similar emphasis on contextualising the debates and panics of *The First Stone* is present in Mark Davis's essay, 'Crying in Public Places: Neoconservatism and Victim-Panic'. Davis gives a critical mapping of contemporary attacks upon Australian feminism that borrow the logic and rhetoric of U.S. commentators/critics of feminism, and that are another emanation from a cultural elite (both within and outside feminism) that attempts to control public discourse and debate. Rosi Braidotti's 'Remembering Fitzroy High', while vitriolic and often unfair to Garner, does provide an intellectual and ideological history to Garner and her media support crew. *The First Stone*'s strangely dated mix of Jung, Marcuse, and libertarianism is an important underpinning of the text, and one that Braidotti draws out, though it is debateable whether such a personalised savaging of Garner's past role as radical school teacher is constructive criticism, and it does no justice to Braidotti's internationally-respected reputation as a feminist philosopher.

One of the best contributions is from Matthew Ricketson, who concentrates on the generic conventions that organise *The First Stone*, particularly Garner's aim to write New Journalism and her reincarnation as a 'premier journalist'. Ricketson's focus on the textuality of Garner's account charts the slippage amongst the journalistic, novelistic, and autobiographical techniques of the text, a slipperiness that contributed to the book's attractiveness, yet also allowed many suspect points and assertions to go unnoticed and unchallenged. Her version of New Journalism is found wanting by Ricketson:

If Garner's journalism stands out for its literary style and keen observation, her research and argument undermine it. Garner spent two and a half years on *The First Stone*, but she appears to have devoted more care to the writing than to the research, which has taken her not much further than one of her newspaper or magazine pieces.

Jenny Morgan's essay also reinstates and critiques a central element of *The First Stone*, namely, sexual harassment, which became submerged or distorted in the hegemonic 'commonsense' that prevailed in the opinion columns and talk-back radio. Her overview gives a dispassionate account of how sexual harassment is defined in legal

terms, how anti-sexual harassment policy works, who actually makes the complaints, and why sexual harassment is a crucial issue for equality of the sexes and women's claim to citizenship. As such, it cuts through the anecdotal, sentimental and quasi-mystical take on sexual harassment that Garner propagates.

So while *Bodyjamming* has some uneven, or at least peripheral, moments, it is worth reading for a number of reasons. First, there are the essays that challenge *The First Stone* by making visible submerged details, discourses and narratives, or by locating the text within wider sociopolitical shifts. Second, the more 'general' essays in the book are readable and eclectic markers of current feminist thought and politics. (And Judy Horacek's cartoons are very witty distillations of a feminist counter-discourse of sexual harassment, thus upsetting another favourite stereotype of humourless feminists.) As a whole, *Bodyjamming* shows us the tensions and regroupings in Australian society as refracted through the bodies of young women and feminism.

MARGARET HENDERSON

Gangland: Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism, by Mark Davis. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997. Paper, \$16.95.

It's a long time since I read a book by torch-light, but Mark Davis's *Gangland* drove me to just such lengths the first time I read it. It's an exhilarating discussion of Australian literary culture, or as Meaghan Morris describes it in a cover blurb that is for once actually true, 'unputdownable'. The book is overtly and even ostentatiously polemical, sometimes contradictory, sometimes repetitive, with the broad social sweep of precisely those commentators whose work Davis critiques. Where it differs from the work it engages with is in its assembly of a compelling body of evidence to support its readings of contemporary cultural politics. But *Gangland* is also a profoundly depressing book, in its portrait of an Australian media and cultural world in which simple questioning, let alone active dissent, prompts paranoid vituperation in the language of the American extreme right, albeit vituperation that is repackaged as homegrown 'debate' in what are generally called the 'culture wars'. Crucially, 'At the centre of every narrativisation of this "war" is a middle-aged white male figure whose previously taken-for-granted authority has been questioned' (172). An upbeat finale doesn't change this overall impression.

The principal aim of *Gangland* is to critique the use of 'generation' as one of the most significant axes of difference in the 'culture wars' of the eighties and nineties. It's argued that 'Generationalism ... is a saleable commodity, providing the sort of "us versus them" spectacle that is the bread and butter of marketeers and conservative sectors of the media' (26). Somewhat cheekily, Davis suggests that 'what this elite most needs to be saved from is their own logic of generationalism, with its relentless narrative of replacement' (171). The book insists on the material effects of this binary pattern of representation, providing a mountain of evidence that punitive attitudes to young people cause suffering, particularly in terms of access to education and employment. And when we read of former Minister for Education, Employment, and Youth Affairs Amanda Vanstone attacking students protesting increased university fees as "selfish little brutes squealing like stuck pigs" (4), it's less easy to think, as some readers might, that Davis should 'lighten up' and take the denigration of young people less seriously.

Gangland is a study of the contemporary cultural debates clustered around so-called 'political correctness', victim feminism, censorship, the universities, and literary theory. Its title is taken from a headline, 'Gangland Victoria', and indeed this is an overwhelmingly 'Melbourne' book. It is reminiscent of John Docker's *In a Critical Condition*, which Davis claims as a predecessor, although he might equally have cited Michael Pusey's *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*. In addressing these cultural