

immigration. This reader was regularly reminded when reading this book of how “Asia” and “Asians” have functioned in Australian history as that fantastical foreign body that, as Žižek argues, allows for the displacement of the inner antagonisms of a society. This was none more obvious than in Australian retorts to Asian criticisms of Australia’s treatment of its Indigenous population, which involved greasy blame-shifting: “It was argued that White Australia had absolutely no prejudice towards Aboriginal people; on the contrary, and rather sadly it was intimated, the Aboriginal people themselves were the problem” (p. 444). Much like it was asserted, by Menzies no less, that “colour prejudice was an imported disease whose carriers. . . were the Asian immigrants themselves” (p. 449).

According to Žižek (1989), a key step in working through the vexing knot of such a social fantasy is to identify fully with its symptom – that fetishised figure that it has produced to displace its own antagonisms and tensions – by recognising how the properties attributed to that figure are the necessary product of its very own society. One must, in short, recognise in the “excesses” attributed to the foreign body the truth about oneself (Žižek, 1989, p. 144). That the persistent Australian image of Asians as potential invaders who were colour prejudiced, racially antagonistic, avaricious and volatile as catalogued in this book suggests that there was much that Australia needed to work through as it edged into the late-20th century. “Yet down to the 1970s”, Walker laments, “there was scarcely any awareness that knowing Asia required a corresponding self-knowledge” (p. 457).

Have the lessons since been learnt? Has Australia worked through its Asian fantasies, which is to also have reckoned with its own unresolved issues? Surveying the terrain of public discourse in Australia at the time of this review in 2019–20, one can perhaps still detect the lingering shadow of the Australian paradox in the vacillating public commentaries on Asia and Asians. For instance, on the one hand, the desire to profit from bountiful Chinese markets and its burgeoning middle class; and on the other, periodic panics about insidious Chinese spies, dishonest Chinese international students, and so on. And amidst all this is Australia’s insistent self-regard as a “middle power” able to mediate between global powers’ claims on trade and sovereignty, even as it evades its own difficult questions of rising economic inequality and Aboriginal sovereignty. In light of this, Walker’s book might be suitably recommended as a timely history of the present.

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Arthur Mee: a biography

Edited by Keith Crawford

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The portrait adorning the cover of Keith Crawford's biography of Arthur Mee, journalist, editor and prolific children's author, depicts a gentle scholarly face. Silver hair is brushed back from an open brow, his mild blue gaze framed by rimless glasses. An illustrated book lies open in his lap. And yet his gaze is fixed on the middle distance, and his arms are folded less in repose than with more than a little defensiveness. It is the implied antagonism in this pose that encapsulates for me the career of Arthur Mee, as it is narrated by Crawford's biography. Crawford acknowledges the "ideological and personal paradox[es]" evinced by Mee's writing (xvi), and yet the biography frequently attempts to reconcile these polarities in order to portray Mee as rather more unequivocally progressive than he was.

The biography is informed by a substantial archive. Foremost are two caches of personal correspondence. The 700 letters sent by Mee and his staff to his close friend and mentor, John Derry (also a journalist and educationalist) between 1905 and 1936 are the backbone of the narrative. In covering the political, cultural and social changes in Britain over this time they provide a rich account of Mee's personal and professional life. The second, less extensive, correspondence is nevertheless highly significant as it comprises letters between Mee and Alfred Harmsworth, perhaps now better known as Lord Northcliffe, a titanic figure in developing the popular journalism still championed by such publications as the *Daily Mail*, which he co-founded. Beyond correspondence, the final archive comprises Mee's prolific writings for children. This work could have been drawn on in further detail as it is largely used as evidence for Mee's views on a range of topics such as the sentimentalisation of childhood (49), Social Darwinism (91–93) and popular culture (133–135). While the assumption that all Mee's writings for children reflected his own viewpoint is a reasonable starting point given the correspondence between views expressed in his publications and his private letters, the separation between the voice of narrator and author in his writing for children is methodologically important to observe.

After two chapters offering a brief chronological account of Mee's childhood and early career, Crawford adopts a thematic approach. Mee was born into a working-class family in Stapleford, just outside of Nottingham, in 1875. For Crawford, what loomed largest about Mee's upbringing was his parents' commitment to the nonconformist community of the Stapleford Baptist Chapel. Crawford explains that for Mee, "nonconformity" was an ethical structure that guided his personal and public life. Founded on staunch belief in biblical teaching, this creed espoused the virtues of "self-sacrifice, hard work, honesty and thrift" alongside the "militant rejection of gambling, tobacco and alcohol" (5). There is little evidence that Mee excelled as a student while at school or evinced the polymathic interest in the world that would characterise his later journalistic and editorial projects. However, in 1899 the Mee family moved from Stapleford to Nottingham and rather than enter the lace industry, then embroiled in industrial action, Mee found a position as a copyholder at the *Nottingham Daily Guardian*. Quick to pick up skills of shorthand and typing, within two years Mee became an apprentice journalist at the *Nottingham Daily Express*. Within just over a decade, Mee commanded the substantial salary of £1,000 per annum and was in the position to move his family to an impressive detached house in Kent, where his daughter Marjorie could grow up "amongst the little fairies" (20). The story of this journey is told in lively prose and provides a fascinating insight into Edwardian social mobility. It also gives tantalising glimpses at the possible compromises required to sustain this upward motion. In Mee's own words: "I can't do that: I have to think of my Career" (25). Readers are left to speculate what it was that could have potentially put him at odds with his then employer, the formidable Harmondsworth.

The remaining seven chapters are structured thematically and describe a range of the political, cultural and social forces that animated Mee's writing for children. In this way it mirrors Mee's own vision of his *Children's Encyclopaedia*—no alphabetical arrangement, but rather entries that reflect and address the peripatetic curiosity of a child. Mee himself explained that the encyclopaedia was inspired by the questions asked by his own daughter,

Marjorie (41). The thematic rather than chronological structure will be useful for researchers aiming to access Mee's experience of particular events, such as the First World War or his position on social and cultural phenomena such as the temperance movement or the work of empire building, but it makes for a slightly choppy reading experience for those seeking a narrative of the arc of Mee's life.

Despite Mee's purported reliance on Marjorie to generate topics for his publications, there is little in the biography about her reception of her father's writing, nor does a picture emerge of Mee's wife, Amelia (Amy), or her sister, Lena Fratson, who worked as his private secretary. Crawford acknowledges that this "fleeting" glimpse is due to the absence of self-authored material in the archive (120) and yet his own work certainly could have done more to establish their role in maintaining his household and supporting Mee's prolific output. What Crawford describes as "manag[ing] the home" through hiring "cooks and housemaids, mak[ing] cakes and darn[ing] socks" is of course the vital labour that made Mee's success possible (120).

Crawford does not shy away from the ways in which Mee enthusiastically embraced the racist and eugenicist thinking that characterised much "liberal" thinking and the belief in progress in the first half of the 20th century. However, in returning repeatedly to different versions of the notion that Mee was a man of his time, Crawford's account borders at times on an apologia for Mee's deep implication in the rhetorical structures that underwrote the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples throughout the Empire or those that justified the extension of relief only to those deemed the deserving poor. Crawford's description of the role Mee's faith played in his endorsement of "positive eugenics" (73) or his belief in Empire as a "compassionate" project to "civilise the uncivilised" (101) is uncomfortably uncritical. Children's literature, whether "encyclopaedic" or fictional, has long been a pedagogic vehicle for the inculcation of colonialist, elitist and ableist thinking. Crawford's own expertise in the field of the cultural work performed by children's textbooks could have been very fruitfully brought to bear on Mee's writings. *Arthur Mee* is a detailed portrait of a man who is arguably more interesting for his contradictions than for his achievements. I look forward to further work on the reception of his writings from scholars of Childhood Studies in "Greater Britain".

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Found in translation: many meanings on a North Australian mission

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Historians, writes Laura Rademaker, should be "skeptical of missionaries' overconfident claims that might lead us to think a 'colonization of consciousness' took place" at the Angurugu Church Missionary Society (CMS) mission on the Groote Eylandt archipelago, in Australia's north (181). The phrase "colonization of consciousness" is Jean and John Comaroff's term, developed in their 1991 book on Christianity and colonialism in South Africa. In her nuanced and deeply researched history of the Angurugu mission, Rademaker