

***Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire: An Exploration*, edited by J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1996.**

***Disreputable Profession: Journalists and Journalism in Colonial Australia*, by Denis Cryle. Rockhampton, Qld: Central Queensland UP, 1997.**

Periodicals are amongst the peculiar characteristics of the present age: emanating from the womb of circumstances, and imbued with the vitality of existing events, they direct the current of living thought and active energy, and give a form, a tone, and a hue to society.

*Colonial Times* editor, Robert Montgomery, was in no doubt of the dynamic role journalism would play in the life of his society. These prescient words written in 1840 anticipated the burgeoning nature of the British press and its rise, during the following three decades, to become the paramount organ of social and political opinion, both in England and her colonies. As conduits of the events and, perhaps more importantly, the tenor of their times, periodicals and newspapers have come to be prized by scholars as valuable repositories of information about the lives and events that shaped the past. The history of the press itself offers a unique perspective into the environments which engendered its myriads of offshoots.

For a long time the academic establishment looked down its nose at journalism as an expression of history; as a research tool journalism lacked credibility because of its ephemeral nature, its populist appeal, the somewhat raffish reputations of many of its exponents and, particularly, the difficulty of organising it within a scholarly framework. The daunting quantity of material offered has always been a problem for scholars attempting to impose some kind of order on the mountainous clutter that represents the prolific outpourings of the Victorian press. In 1966, the inaugural year of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, Michael Wolff's paper "Charting the Golden Stream" optimistically called for a comprehensive subject directory to complement the groundwork begun by the Poole's and Wellesley Indexes: the "Golden Stream" representing the rich mine of history he hoped to explore. Wolff's aim was to simplify periodical research and give it the credibility of a systematic approach. In 1989 another article significantly titled "Damning the Golden Stream" (*VPR* 3 1989) revealed that his dream of finding a reliable conduit into the Victorian press was over. He had given up, crushed beneath the sheer weight of the statistics he had announced so optimistically twenty-three years before: "I have on my books 12,000 titles for the years 1824-1900 . . . 1,750,000 issues . . . 5,250,000 articles."

The editors of the two volumes under review are well acquainted with the riches to be found by researchers of the press, and with the difficulties associated with an embarrassment of those riches. Both books, in their own ways, seek to address the problem—not in the "mother country," but in the colonies. *Periodicals of Queen*

*Victoria's Empire: An Exploration* concentrates on providing an investigative overview of periodical literature written in English in "far-flung colonial societies," with discrete chapters written by home-grown experts in the field. It is the first time such a comprehensive listing has been attempted. *Disreputable Profession: Journalists and Journalism in Colonial Australia* eschews any attempt at a general overview, aiming instead to introduce "analytic breadth and depth" into its study of the nineteenth-century Australian press by focussing on "a cross-section of detailed case studies" of individual journalists and the range of interconnections these studies produce. This book is primarily a history of various sections of the press manifested through the careers of seven journalists; it aims at quality not quantity and is designed to introduce readers to a much richer journalistic and cultural context than the "potted" portraits that have, apart from a few exceptions, passed for press history in Australia.

The publication of *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire* comes at a time when there is intense scholarly interest in empire and colonisation. No study of colonisation could ignore the power wielded by the press of the day on the issues of the day: journalism is a crucial factor in the study of the development (and the decline) of empire. The purpose of the book is to flag the periodicals of the colonial period, and to provide information about the guides available for research; reflecting the interests of its editors in research practices and resources, it is designed to actively encourage research. This is not surprising, since apart from Canada, whose comprehensive section represents generous funding from government and commercial sources, the entries are notable for the small amount of interest shown in colonial journalism by the "colonies." New Zealand acknowledges the poverty of its research suggesting "a low academic estimation of their significance." India submits a rudimentary listing, all the research being done alone by one academic who found the well-equipped National Library of Calcutta unwilling to microfilm rare periodicals even though they were crumbling to dust before its eyes. South Africa reveals that the only bibliography covering a broad section of their nineteenth-century periodicals comprises three typescript pages put together by student librarians from the University of Cape Town.

The "Guide to Research" in the Australian section (the only one I can comment on with some knowledge) reveals the paucity of indexing in this country up to the present. (La Trobe University began a Periodicals Indexing Project in 1991 but according to the guide no results have yet been published.) It also reveals the lack of general research in the area; hardly any of the research posted is later than 1980. (Although to be fair, in the introduction to his book, Denis Cryle does report on some new work, including his own, that is being undertaken). Unfortunately, the guide has been put together without proper annotation and without checking the reliability of the material offered. The index to the *Queenslander*, for instance, turns out to be a literary one (surely this should have been pointed out), and the card indexes of "some of the shorter magazines" (not very helpful) which are listed as being held in the English Department of the University of Queensland cannot be found there. This could refer to some card indexes held in the Fryer Library; if that is so, these indexes are very rudimentary and need an overhaul to earn attention as serious research tools. One index

that could have been mentioned is a microfiche edition of the card index to the *Town and Country Journal* (1870-1814) completed in 1982. The library holdings should be updated to include the significant collections of nineteenth-century periodicals in the State Library of Victoria and in the library of the University of Queensland. These are merely preliminary investigations, I'm sure others could offer more advice about how to make the Australian guide reflect the actual state of affairs. If ever a book had a message (for contributors as well as readers) this one has: RESEARCH!

In his introduction to *Disreputable Profession* Denis Cryle reveals that he too is on a crusade to encourage investigation into the colonial press. Cryle seeks to wrest nineteenth-century journalism from its position as an inferior literary form and establish journalism history "as a distinctive field within cultural history." He is strongly aware of the social, economic and cultural conditions which produce journalism and mould journalistic careers. The paradoxical nature of the title of his book reflects the oddly fragmented social identities of the journalists who appear in its pages at a time when a respectable journalist was an oxymoron. Although linked by their "disreputable profession" these men pursued disparate careers that covered a wide range of colonial experiences, thus providing the reader with a panorama of social, cultural and political history from a number of vantage points: the convict press is represented by Edward Smith Hall, the radical press by Edward John Hawksley, the more sophisticated world of Melbourne and the *Age* by James Harrison, the rough and tumble of the regional and mining press by George Dunmore Lang, the confrontationist editor by Thadeus O'Kane, the elitist press by William Coote, the literary editor by George Loyau. Apart from Cryle, who is the author of three articles, other contributors include Sandy Blair, Marion Diamond, Rod Kirkpatrick and Elizabeth Morrison; all press historians of some note.

The formula of *Disreputable Profession* certainly works, particularly when Cryle's masterly creation of the broader picture in his introduction is taken into account. This book justifies all the hard work amongst the mountains of newsprint and murky microfilm readers. It proves that nineteenth-century journalists and their journalism can be brought to life, and that journalism history is indeed itself a reputable profession. Some of the lustre fades, however, because of poor editing: numerous typos, two in one line and another just below on page four, and many others too numerous to elaborate—in the age of spellchecks this is unforgivable. Also, the punctuation is inconsistent and often incorrectly assigned, or not assigned at all when it should be (poor "however" suffers badly in this way). And just one more quibble: why were no women chosen for case studies? Surely one "disreputable" woman journalist could be found among the plethora of females who made a living out of journalism in nineteenth-century Australia?

**Judy McKenzie**

---