

**David Bird. *Nazi Dreamtime: Australian Enthusiasts for Hitler's Germany.***

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Australia has long been seen, by both Australians and outsiders, as a place that escaped the ideological turbulence of the twentieth century. Books like Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958) and Donald Herne's *The Lucky Country* (1964) positioned Australia as a placid, practical, consensus-governed refuge from a conflict-ridden world. Australian fiction, necessarily, saw it differently. No one could read Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) and not see resemblances between the paternalism of Sam Pollitt and that of worldwide authoritarian regimes (even if the setting was transposed to the US). Equally, few could view the portrayal of Mordecai Himmelfarb in Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) and not understand that his plight was a result of Nazism and the Holocaust. But the politics of Australian intellectuals are generally seen as being of the benign, democratic left, with a few dedicated communists (Katharine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny) to spice things up, but nothing more than that. Australia is not associated particularly with intellectuals of the anti-democratic Right.

Bird's information-laden, vigorously written book on Nazi sympathisers in the Australian intelligentsia explodes those myths. Of these Nazi sympathisers, the case of P.R. Stephensen was the most tragic. 'Inky' Stephensen, as his very nickname indicates, was at the centre of Australian writing and publishing in the 1930s. Stephensen cut a swath through the Australian intelligentsia in this era, starting out the 1930s as a Communist, ending as a crypto-Fascist, and making many attitudinal stops along the way, including Lindsayan vitalism, though Stephensen soon enough, as Bird diplomatically puts it, 'forfeited the good will and intimacy' (57). In retrospect, Stephensen's ideological odyssey might seem tactically imprudent as well as morally flawed. But, as Bird acutely points out, there was a fairly long period of waiting between the Nazi ascension to power in Germany in 1933 and the outbreak of war in 1939, and there were years like 1937 where Nazi Germany even attained a 'modest respectability' (68) as conditions seem to have stabilised, and *Kristallnacht* and the march of spurious annexations had not yet begun. In this atmosphere, Stephensen promoted a barely concealed anti-Semitism amid a stress on Australian distinctiveness, a mode of 'national, self-defined' (180) thought that would be in sympathy with the spirit of 'national rebirth' in Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Bird usefully tells us that, as of 1938, there were 27,500 Jews in Australia; and Stephensen's rhetoric seemed to blame them for all the supposed ills Nazism in general did: 'dissidence, cosmopolitanism, democracy' (69), all those qualities which were the antithesis of the militaristic and anti-democratic white Australian dreamtime that Stephensen advocated. In this, Stephensen was abetted by the editor and publisher W.J. Miles, the 'Sydney Kookaburra' to Stephensen's 'bunyip critic.' Even though the majority of Australians never came close to endorsing the Australia First movement that Stephensen spearheaded, it did garner some respectability in mainstream circles. In 1939, then-Prime Minister John Lyons agreed with Stephensen that H.G. Wells was a dangerous radical and that Hitler and Mussolini were reasonable men who, whatever their quirks, should not be demonised. If there were thus areas of crossover with the democratic right, there were also continuities with various lefts. Not only were many Australian Nazis former Communists like Stephensen, but the leading female participant in Australian Nazism, Adela

Pankhurst Walsh, described by one of her contemporaries as ‘a screaming rat-bag if there ever was one’ (92) was the daughter of the suffragette activist Emmeline Pankhurst. Equally, when the Sydney academic Christopher Brennan corresponded with Mallarmé at the turn of the century, we see this as a pleasing instance of Australian cosmopolitanism. When the Melbourne-based Romance-language scholar A.R. Chisholm had a correspondence with the right-wing *Action Française* leader Charles Maurras, that relationship was just as cosmopolitan, but far less pleasing.

Chisholm and Stephensen were delegitimised once the war began, and, given Stephensen’s talent and energy, his disastrous political swerve was a big loss to Australian literature and culture as a body. But some others involved in pro-Nazi sentiment in these years survived the war culturally speaking, including Jindyworobak poets such as Rex Ingamells and Ian Mudie. Mudie not only joined the Australia First movement, becoming more or less its Poet Laureate or ‘Song Man’ (289) but also used ‘Australia first!’ as a salutation, à la *heil Hitler*. Ingamells, the most philosophical of the Jindyworobaks, never went quite so far but his enthusiasm for the Australia First movement sadly accelerated as the war went on, only ending after the Japanese attack in 1941 and the fall of Singapore. Xavier Herbert was never a Jindyworobak, but shared with these writers an interest in Indigenous culture; Herbert is quoted by Bird as saying that he would rather help Aborigines than Jews and Slavs in Europe. The Jindyworobaks ‘accepted the Aboriginal concept of Dreamtime (*Alcheringa*) as a fitting symbol’ (166) for a (to whites) larger white Australian Dreamtime. If Australian atonalism means throwing off the British and identifying with a land-based empire rather than a seaborne one—in rejecting the necessary cosmopolitanism of the British Empire—then does it mean an inevitable identification with the land-based empires of the twentieth century in Germany and Russia? Did the Jindyworobaks’ identification with Aborigines and the emphasis on ‘soil’ (166) mean that any championship of the Indigenous or opposition to British imperialism is taunted with Fascism? That Ingamells, in the 1950s, swung over so easily to Anglophile Royalism suggests he was interested in big ideas that would link Australia to the rest of the world, but did not really care what they were in practice. But the association of Indigenous Dreamtime with *Blut und Boden* will not hold up. In New Guinea, collaborationist leaders like Paliau Maloat embraced the Japanese, at least for a time; in India, pro-Nazi leaders such as Subhas Chandra Bose commanded a lot of support for what even their enemies conceded was their genuine anticolonialism. But Aboriginal Australians seemed to have vigorously opposed Nazism. The Indigenous activist William Cooper’s 1938 protest to the German embassy in Melbourne about the mistreatment of the Jews is not recorded in Bird’s book, but shows that actual Aborigines behaved very differently from their white so-called champions.

Bird’s account makes D.H. Lawrence’s novel *Kangaroo* (1923) seem less a *jeux d’esprit* and more a prophecy of a world that is not too far from coming to pass. In another way, it gives crucial background for the juxtaposition of German and Aboriginal history in Alex Miller’s *Landscape of Farewell* (2007). Although Bird provides cautionary tales of intellectual credulity in the cases of Stephensen and the Jindyworobaks, heroes also emerge from his account: Max Harris, who stood firm against any sort of Fascism and whose championship of modernism in *Angry Penguins*, however vulnerable to jest and hoax it may have been, was a genuine attempt to resist a facile organicism. A.D. Hope, also, had no sympathy for Stephensen or his ilk. Hope’s classicism, long sneered at as retrograde, had the eminent merit of a resistance to meanings grounded in soil or ideology. When we understand that the very different stance of Hope and

Harris were honed and defined in an ideological cauldron where sympathy for totalitarianism was much bruited, we can view their thought more broadly and capaciously.

On the other hand, though, Bird tries to tarnish some heroes whose light remains mostly undimmed. Miles Franklin was friends with P.R. Stephensen and his wife Winifred and an Australian nationalist, but she was cosmopolitan, feminist, and a social activist, and never agreed with Stephensen's views after 1933. Bird depicts the Flemish father-in-law of Manning Clark, Professor Augustin Lodewyckx, as thoroughly unpleasant, a man who could have fitted in well in the unseemly ideological world described in the early portions of Evelyn Barish's *The Double Life of Paul de Man* (2014). Bird cogently argues that Lodewyckx' biography on the University of Melbourne website tries to cover up this fact. Nor did Lodewyckx ever express 'any public regret' (206) for having been an apologist. But how does this apply to Manning Clark, who married Lodewyckx' daughter Dymphna? A person cannot be held accountable for the politics of their spouse's parent, and Bird admits that if Manning Clark had any wayward political tendencies, they were towards the Left. As many hits—some of them even deserved—as Clark has taken from various directions in the past twenty years, that people like Bird are still lining up to thwack him indicate that he retains his status as Australia's most compelling historian. There is the danger of fallacious inferences here. Just because Manning Clark and Miles Franklin *knew* Fascist sympathisers does not mean they *were* Fascist sympathisers. Equally, that people who were Australian nationalists or believed attention should be paid to Indigenous lore and symbols evinced enthusiasm for Nazi Germany does not mean that everyone with those identities can be tied to Nazism.

Bird writes in the tradition of books such as Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims* (1981), exposing horrible mistakes made by intellectuals who should have known better when presented with the allure of political power or ideological certainty. Bird's tone is more polemical than scholarly, more accusatory than analytic. One can hardly blame him for feeling contempt and loathing for people gulled by or actually sympathetic towards Nazi ideology. But too often the book seems a dossier of what people did wrong, and not a more nuanced understanding of how embedded totalitarian proclivities were, in the dominant discourses of the era. (Also, although the documentation of this book is impeccable and the apparatus scholarly, the index, for such a detailed book, is lacking, being really little more than a list of names.) Bird has compiled an impressive and sobering account of just how successful Nazism was in the seemingly placid Great Southern Land. It is a book that paves the way for future, more intellectually focused histories of Australian intellectuals and what the late French historian François Furet called the 'totalitarian twins'—the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

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