

**Brigid Magner. *Locating Australian Literary Memory*. Anthem Press 2020
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What is the Australian literary memory? And what are the appropriate signifiers of a collective memory? Why do we often shun our literary heritage? Why are we so blind, contrary and eccentric in the ways we choose or fail to choose to commemorate our literary history in Australia? It has always seemed odd to me, in such a materialistic country, that so little remains of our authors in their regions, towns and in the cities, and that there is so little literary tourism. However, we are not without memorial spaces and monuments, but whether an author is remembered seems a chancy business in this country. It seems to have very little to do with calibre, reputation and much more to do with the vagaries of local council politics and community sentiment. For example, Judith Wright has a small but inspiring native garden named after her in the centre of Armidale, but there is nothing else in the New England region in the way of physical markers, to remember her origins, presence or contribution to literature and Australian life.

Brigid Magner explores this strange and idiosyncratic feature of Australian cultural expression, in an informative study of literary heritage, offering a comprehensive account of the ways in which Australians remember ten now absent authors, beginning with Adam Lindsay Gordon and moving through a range of writers, to finish with a focussed consideration of monuments to David Unaipon, one at Raukkan in South Australia and another still in the making, to be installed at Tailem Bend. Magner's approach is both practical and intellectually curious: she is open to the contradictions that abound. Her criteria for selection of authors for the essays is not fully explained in the introduction, emerging more tentatively in the detailed chapters that follow. She does explain, however, that at the time of writing, commemorative memorials to Indigenous writers are 'almost non-existent' (15), and reveals that she travelled the country looking at monuments, houses, ruins and graves in an effort to understand how Australians connect the way they read with material remains. Magner declares that the memorials she visited tend to reflect enduring myths about the Australian identity or character, whereas internationalists such as Christina Stead (honoured with a plaque near her childhood home in Watson's Bay Sydney) and Patrick White (remembered in commemorative lawns overlooking Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra) are frequently forgotten, and she doesn't discuss these cases. Magner has attempted therefore to examine monuments to authors both popular and high literary, writers for children as well as the 'usual suspects' as she refers to Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson. Magner has selected houses, huts, statues, sanctuaries, graves and the multiple sites of literary commemoration for authors such as Joseph Furphy in the Riverina, and what she calls 'living memorials' in the well conserved houses of Katharine Susannah Prichard and Eleanor Dark.

In exploring the home of Henry Handel Richardson, Lake View at Chiltern in Victoria, Magner touches on some of the most interesting elements of literary memory and ingeniously she quotes several instructive recollections of a visit to the house by Helen Garner who went there with Axel Clark, when he was writing his biography of Ettie. On a dull and cloudy day Garner remembers looking at the closed house and Clark's response 'Bleak, isn't it?' (55). Garner admits to an immediate physical sense of what it would have been like to live there as a child, and Magner takes this gloomy sensation further to remind us of Richardson's desire for escape.

Gerald Murnane's visit to the house is also strikingly recorded by Magner because of the way he was vividly reminded through the touch of a warm brick in the house, of the sensation of touching the hands of his late wife just after she died, revealing that she had suffered the

ravages of mental illness, like Richardson's father, whose isolation is rendered in *Ultima Thule*. Magner therefore powerfully illustrates the way the visits evoke a visceral memory and connection that for those writers help to understand the writer's life and their own. Although HHR only lived in the house for less than a year, Magner goes on to describe the way she wrote about the house in her unfinished memoir *Herself When Young*, and the marital strains that infused the home. She draws our attention to Walter Richardson's own distress in a letter: '... the practice is gone & is now a farce [—] there is no money and no sickness!'—a reference to the fact that patients were avoiding the ministrations he offered because of 'the increasingly eccentric Dr Richardson' (58).

There is a reassuringly unsentimental tone in this study (mirroring that of writers such as Prichard towards her house, Greenmount), an awareness of the layering of memory and tribute that corresponds with the material remains and monuments. Magner captures the controversy around the statue of Henry Lawson unveiled in 1931 in the Domain, Sydney. People were put off by the palpably feminine stance of the figure of Lawson in bronze. It was Miles Franklin who delivered a speech at the memorial in 1942 and recreated the man who was 12 years older than her and 'the perfect big brother of our dreams.' Magner reminds us of the way Franklin talked about this 'hero,' 'superman' and the 'beauty of his eyes, his clothes, his children' and her plain speaking recognition of the man 'who makes Australians see "our own sun . . . setting red and real and near at hand"' (81). It is these elements of the book that illuminate the construction of literary memory in vivid prose and provide evidence for the uses of monuments. As Magner demonstrates, Franklin argued that 'monuments were really for the living rather than the dead but given Lawson's "divine understanding of human frailty, his gentle sympathy for its shortcomings, he would have understood"' (81).

Magner offers a fine essay on the houses of Prichard and Dark, and an absorbing account of 'statue mania' in relation to the memorials to Pamela Travers, the journalist, poet and author of the *Mary Poppins* stories. In presenting information about statues Magner seems to shy away from description and interpretation of them as works of art, instead focussing on their provenance, funding and social context. We learn that the statue in Maryborough Queensland—the statue is of Mary Poppins the character, not Travers the author—was the result of fundraising by a group called the Proud Marys, and is a centrepiece of literary activity and cultural tourism to the region.

The inclusion of a chapter on David Unaipon is most welcome in this study. Magner discusses the life at length, the publication of Dreaming narratives, Unaipon's adjustment of Creation stories in order to engage white audiences and his unstinting commitment to developing harmony between Indigenous people and whites. He was a celebrity by 1922 with his first Creation narrative 'The Story of the Mungingee' was published in *The Home* in 1925. The appropriation of a manuscript written by Unaipon entitled 'Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines told by David Unaipon' is explained here and Magner notes the difficulties he had in preventing such theft due to 'not being a full Australian citizen' (195). The complications of the 'repatriation' of his moral rights as author are also explored in this chapter. That Unaipon was not remembered for so many years brings Magner to her point about the dearth of monuments to Indigenous authors, and a discussion of the Unaipon Cottage at the Kanmantoo estate. While this chapter on Unaipon is well researched and makes a strong point about appropriate placemaking practices, it is a shame that Magner offers minimal literary analysis about Unaipon's writing, in contrast to her potent literary commentaries that appear in the chapters on the memorials of Richardson, Prichard and others, in this topical, carefully articulated and handsomely produced monograph.

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