main line of Davidson’s argument, it is difficult to see how APEC shapes up like the European Union which in many ways does exercise powers and responsibilities formerly the province of nation states. APEC is a loose coalition of states with radically different cultures and traditions; Australia is not yet required to deal with issues like the Euro or the European Parliament. I suspect that in Davidson’s view we would make it a mess of them if we did.

This is a book where our society is assessed, but not always fairly.

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Maritime strikes, economic recession, ‘restructuring’, long-term unemployment, foreign debt, racism, debates about land ownership, taxation, and republicanism: the political terrain of the 1890s seems awfully familiar. A time when ‘Mammon’s Castle’ was indeed unsteady, Australia’s nineteenth-century fin de siècle was a period plagued by many of the social, political and economic tensions that command our attention today. Bruce Scates’s engaging study of the radical political and cultural imagination of these years is therefore both valuable and timely. Though concerned to provide the kind of ‘thick description’ that attempts to furnish contextually appropriate understandings, Scates is also concerned with the meaning of the past for the present: to help us today ‘to envisage a new nation’.

Scates’s study emerges in the context of much other historical work on this period. As he recognises in his brief but useful historiographical survey, historians have frequently turned to the 1890s as a source of ‘solace’ or ‘inspiration’ (p. 4). Those writing during and immediately after the Second World War, for example, sought there the foundations of Australian equality and democracy. There have been others, however, who noted ‘the dark side of the dream’. Manning Clark underlined the racist and xenophobic arrogance that underpinned much of Australian nationalism, and ‘New Left’ writers have continued this iconoclastic tendency. Humphrey McQueen’s A New Britannia, for example, emphasised the racism, militarism and authoritarianism of the 1890s: ‘the exclusionary politics of the early labour movement and the failure of its vision’ (p. 5). Furthermore, in the 1980s and 1990s, feminist historians such as Marilyn Lake have noted the ‘masculinist context’ of radical culture, and the ways in which the ‘class war’ intersected with the ‘sex war’. More recently, however, historians such as John Docker have once again attempted to capture the vibrancy and excitement of what remains for many a ‘liminal age’.

Scates’s work largely falls into this latter category. Focussing on the ‘visionary, inspired and infectiously enthusiastic’ radicals who saw themselves as
harbingers of change in the 1890s, Scates’s aim is to provide ‘a new history of nineteenth-century radicalism: a fresh attempt to retrieve the vision of what Lawson first styled the true republic’ (p. 6). Arguing that these radicals were not ‘creatures of romance’, but those whose prospects were thwarted by the depression, Scates suggests they were largely of an ‘indeterminate social strata’ drawn from the middle and working classes (p. 201). More an urban ‘society of *emigrés*’ than Lawsonsque bush heroes, these, Scates claims, were ‘radicals in their own right’, who formed the basis of an oppositional culture (p. 6). Thus, Scates’s main concern is with what made these people radical, and he looks for answers among their ‘incomplete and scattered dialogue’ (p. 8).

Scates begins by exploring the ‘world apart’ of radical culture, delineating his three main radical groups: the Georgite single taxers, the socialists who rallied behind such groups as the Australian Socialist League, and anarchists such as David Andrade and J. A. Andrews. His next chapters examine: ‘the politics of reading’; ‘the rise and fall of radical politics’; ‘communal settlements on the land’; ‘the culture and politics of mass unemployment’; and, finally, ‘women, socialism and the politics of gender’. Of most interest, perhaps, are Scates’s chapters on the contexts and conditions of reading, on the unemployed, and his discussion of socialism and the ‘woman question’. Scates is particularly good at evoking the ambience of this very ‘readerly’ radical milieu: at suggesting the ways in which radicals created themselves through the interactions between literature and life. He notes the difficulties women and the working class had in gaining access to literature. To subscribe to a library, or to buy a book, meant, for many, to go without meals or sorely-needed new clothes. Yet reading was a central part of radical culture. While recognising the role of institutions where texts were produced and procured, Scates skilfully charts the book’s journey beyond the library and bookshop towards a ‘sociable community of readers’, emphasising the power both of personal and shared reading experiences. These experiences, he argues, demonstrate the ways in which readers exercised the ‘power of appropriation’ (p. 203).

Scates’s discussion of the unemployed movements of the 1890s forms part of his attempt to shift emphasis away from formalised movements—union politics, Great Strikes and the emergence of the Labor Party—to the political culture of public protest and the street. It is here, Scates argues, that we find those hit hardest by the nineties depression. Scates examines the ‘rhetoric, ritual and tradition’ of street protest: what E. P. Thompson called ‘the theatre and counter theatre of plebeian demonstration’. He also looks at the measures taken by the poor and unemployed to counteract harsh and indifferent authority. From 1892, for example, Melbourne’s Salvage Corps attempted to ‘salvage’ goods confiscated when tenants could not meet rental payments. Attempting to reclaim the belongings of Clarinna Stringer of Tyne Street, Carlton, in 1892, the Corps launched an attack on the premises of a local auctioneer, flinging stones and smashing windows. More frequent, and harrowing, however, are tales of the ‘stupor of poverty and despair’ (p. 141). William Farrell’s diary charts his personal demise, and points to the ways that long-term unemployment destroys both body and spirit (p. 141):

26 March No work today, still drinking. I went to give myself in
Scates also examines the rhetoric of manhood that dominated the discourse of street protest, with, in John Docker’s words, its ‘ideal of male martyrdom’ and ‘romanticisation of violence’. He then turns to discuss the forms and activities of women’s protest. Charity was frequently the site of women’s struggle, Scates argues, but he also recalls the marches in which hundreds of ‘wives and mothers’ demanded work for their ‘husbands and sons’ (p. 158).

Scates’s attempts to draw out a feminist dimension to nineteenth-century radicalism are not as successful as his efforts to restore the political vision of other radical groups or movements. Though he notes the ‘new political spaces’ that single tax, socialist and anarchist culture opened up for women (p. 202), and emphasises the ways in which single taxers in particular tried to secure women’s franchise and admit women to party membership, his discussion tends to concentrate upon male political space within this radical culture. Moreover, one remains unconvinced that those who called for the return of women to their ‘natural’ domestic sphere were, even among socialists, in the minority. Although Scates rightly challenges the idea that the socialist movement was exclusively a man’s movement, totally uninterested in feminist demands, many male socialists remained wary of the ‘fraud of feminism’. Yet, Scates’s point that radical organisations were never purely political in their orientation, but were also ‘vibrant social centres’, in which women participated as ‘political beings’, underlines the fact that ‘[w]omen alongside men claimed their place in the public domain’ (p. 200). Scates stresses that we should not dismiss radical culture as ‘masculinist’; in doing so, he argues, ‘we impoverish history and we diminish ourselves’ (p. 200). And indeed some of Scates’s most interesting work explores the ways in which much socialism involved the questioning and reconstruction of masculinity. His re-reading of William Lane’s The Working Man’s Paradise, and re-evaluation of Lane’s early ‘feminism’, is particularly useful in this regard.

There are a number of other minor ways in which Scates’s A New Australia fails to completely satisfy. Discussions of radicals’ attitudes to Aboriginal poverty and dispossession are few and far between; the work tends to concentrate on the south-east corner of Australia; and the description could at times have been even ‘thicker’, with more context and extracts from diaries and letters. Those looking for the roots of current republicanism might also be disappointed, though Scates notes that his subjects’ hopes for a new Australia were ‘much more radical and comprehensive than independence from Britain’ (p. 2). Perhaps this is why Walter Crane’s attractive ‘Garland for May Day’ (1895) graces the cover, but it seems a shame that an Australian image could not have been found for a book dedicated to a ‘New Australia’.

Scates’s work is, however, important and valuable. Well-written, engaging and persuasive, one concurs with his judgment that we should be wary of taking the
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'Short step from establishing the failure of radical social movements to questioning whether there were any truly radical social movements at all' (p. 206). Scates's 'more contingent kind of history' successfully rejects these kinds of antitheses—capitalism versus socialism, self-improvement versus radicalism, men's versus women's political interests—that obscure what Robert Gray has called 'the real play of historical possibilities at the time'. Ultimately, Scates's reconstruction of the vibrant radical culture of the 1890s, his attempt to recall, for a 'New Australia', the 'half remembered' dreams of single taxers, socialists and anarchists, reminds us that these 'dreams' are worth our attention.

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Frank Broeze's book, Island Nation: A History of Australians and the Sea, is an account of practically everything connected with the seas and coastline which surround Australia. It is a broad survey of all things oceanic, from early Aboriginal fisheries and colonial overseas trade to today's container cargoes, maritime unions and surfing culture.

It begins with the importance of naval strategy to the British Empire and Australia's place in that strategy. Australian historians reading Island Nation may be surprised (and perhaps relieved) to find that the 'Foundation debate' has been concluded. Broeze assumes that the debate about why Botany Bay was founded, which dragged on through the 1970s and '80s in Australian history circles, is finally over. Broeze declares Geoffrey Blainey and Alan Frost (among others) the victors. Like them, Broeze argues the British claimed New South Wales not simply to 'dump' convicts, but rather to pre-empt the French and provide an alternative route for the China tea trade in times of war. Broeze admits, however, that this sea-inspired founding of Sydney was somewhat contradicted by the initial prohibition put on boat-building to keep its convict labour force from escaping. The prohibition did not last long as 'within a generation Sydney would become a vibrant regional entrepot' (p. 31).

This inter-regional trade declined towards the end of the nineteenth century as Australia retreated from its Asian and Pacific neighbours. Broeze traces 'White Australia's' pursuit of British immigrants and erection of tariff walls to protect itself against cheap coloured labour. Australia's loyalty to Britain in commerce was paralleled in defence. The Royal Australian Navy was founded, according to Broeze, to fight Britain's wars in faraway seas. These conflicts soon came close to Australia's shores, however, as an expansionist Japan captured all German colonies north of the equator during World War One and most of Southeast Asia and the Pacific during World War Two. Britain's declining maritime power at this time is perhaps best seen in Broeze's description of the gigantic bluff of the