for continuation of their dependent status. Even in those colonies where resistance to
the metropolitan state is greatest – New Caledonia being one – there remains majority
support for the status quo, with correspondingly less enthusiasm for no-strings
independence. There is a blurring of the line between dependence and independence,
and it may be that the last colonies have a more advantageous position than many a
decolonised nation state.

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Playing the Man: New Approaches to Masculinity, edited by Katherine Biber,
Tom Sear and Dave Trudinger, Pluto Press Australia Limited, Annandale, 199. Pp. vii
+ 249. $24.95 paper.

Popular understandings of masculinity in Australia have been under the shadow of
Russell Ward’s seminal Australian Legend for too long. The image of the man in the
bush: virile and engaged in hard manual work under the hot sun, is certainly a far cry
from the reality of masculinity in the suburbia that is modern Australia. Playing the Man
goes some way toward remedying this. It is edited by three PhD candidates who
‘thought that holding conferences was somehow commensurate with their ambition to
complete their theses’ and hence ended up engaged in ‘procrastination on the grandest
scale’ (p. 1). The collection of papers interrogates cultural manifestations of masculinity
and also serves as a showcase of postgraduate work. It tackles the vexed subject of
masculinity through topics as wide as bushwalking, Buddhism, masturbation, work,
sexuality, and cinema.

Katherine Biber’s statement in her essay on Australian cinema haunted me as I
read the collection:

We know that our heroes, having been fatally defeated by racism, or
corruption, or a simple misunderstanding are better off dead; in death
they are safe from the emasculating corporeal disappointments of
ageing, and from damaging the prototype of the composite national
man (p. 28).

The spectre of the destructive characteristics of the masculine hero – so evident in
male violence against others and themselves – set the tone for my approach to the
collection. Biber seeks to understand male hysteria and the constant performance that
masculinity entails: ‘We have killed these troublesome men to validate their claims to
heroism, but we have not eradicated the shadow of hysteria that looms between men
and mythic masculinity’ (p. 37). Biber is excellent in her exposition of the operation of masculinity in cinema and also illustrates how imperative it is to investigate masculinity in contemporary society.

There are four substantive sections to the book. The first, ‘Freeze the Play There: Film’, examines masculinity in cinema. The second is ‘Fields of Place: History, Place, Space’ investigating masculinity historically and in literature. The third section, ‘Dangerous Tackles, Reckless Behaviour: Il/legalities’ approaches masculinity in the law; while the fourth, ‘The Work Rate’, looks at the work place.

A collection such as this presents the reviewer with a difficult task – its breadth of material and approach is huge and hence sketching out the discursive field is difficult. At a most basic level Playing the Man is informed by feminist theory which is ‘the most compelling frame through which to view men and power’ (p. 12). This emphasis on feminism is important in light of the recent spate of titles examining masculinity through a psycho-biological framework. The essays in Playing the Man all accept the constructed nature of masculinity and investigate the way masculinity is shaped through its various cultural expressions. Beyond this, there is little unifying force in the collection – its subject material and the quality of analysis varies wildly. This makes the collection sometimes exciting, sometimes disappointing. Several essays, Biber’s in particular, are excellent, whilst a few others fall foul of the trap of citing all the right theorists while saying little that is substantive.

Playing the Man represents the future of Australian academia, and this is the book’s greatest strength. Its breadth is the breadth of Australian postgraduate study; its strength is in its diversity and the new intersections this diversity creates. As such Playing the Man comes highly recommended.

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The task of constructing a biography of Roy Douglas (‘Pansy’) Wright could not have been a simple one. At one level, the narrative describes one success after another; one fight after another – but of the man behind the mask of wit and ebullient style, we see few glimpses. Born in farming country in northern Tasmania in 1907, the ninth of ten children, ‘Pansy’ Wright became an extraordinarily successful medical scientist. His life is noted for his contribution to institutions such as the Australian National University, the Peter MacCallum Cancer Clinic and the Howard Florey Institute. When he died in