nowhere. Plato showed in *The Republic* that political utopias cannot be realised. The important thing is to keep moving, thinking and striving for our impossible goals.

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One of the startling things about the University of Melbourne is its self-obsession. The University has an almost mediaeval sense of self-containment and self-fulfillment and it is quite possible to undertake a degree there, pass from student activist to academic and end up dean. The University even possesses its own history unit, which is surprisingly active. These books add to the ‘mystique of Melbourne’ by taking its past as their topic; surely no other Australian university has produced so many books about itself.

Having declaimed against Melbourne’s narcissistic tendencies I should explain that these books are collections of the work of emerging historians deliberately writing history for publication. Their exploitation of the University of Melbourne’s archives and their investigations of topics derived from their student experience is a display of pragmatism rather than parochialism. The decision to allow the easily available University sources to direct the overall subject of the books was wise. Although the skill displayed in putting together the narratives contained in these books tends to disguise the range of primary sources used, a glance at the footnotes for each piece reveals hours spent in the archive and crouched over microfilm. The University of Melbourne’s archivists must have been delighted at this flurry of activity.

The subjects investigated by these authors vary widely. There are a number of well-written pieces of women’s history contained within the collection. Women’s early involvement within the University receives attention and the University’s first woman graduate, Bella Guérin, MA, is accorded an article of her own. These pieces are notable because they avoid anachronism. Their authors are aware of the danger of misunderstanding historical figures by applying inappropriate titles, a point well-made by Rebecca Wilson in her article about Dame Ada Norris. Interestingly women are retrieved and the role of women at the University of Melbourne receives examination. These books are evidently too brief to contain the definitive history of women at the University, but they do contain useful portions of that history.

Other characters are also retrieved from the recent past. Professor Maurice David Goldman emerges as a sympathetic character and a talented academic. By examining his contribution to both the University of Melbourne and Melbourne’s Jewish community Georgina Meyer exposes the outside forces acting on the University, contradicting any perceived imperviousness of the University of Melbourne to world events. During the 1930s and 1940s the University of Melbourne gained a number of Jewish academics forced to flee the war in Europe. The University’s debt to these refugees can be seen as a theme running through these books – Leonhard Adam and Frank Knopfelmacher also have their considerable contributions to the University explored.

Jeanette Krongold, who explores his personal collisions with both fascism and communism in his native Czechoslovakia, treats Knopfelmacher sympathetically. Her skill in

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penetrating Knopfelmacher’s sometimes violent political outbursts in order to judge him fairly is confirmed by the view of him that appears in Jeremy Sear’s article ‘Steedman’s Farrago: Booze, Girls, and Battles with the Anti-Communists’. Sear’s article is one of a number investigating student radicalism at Melbourne during the 1970s and he deftly depicts both the deliberate posturing and the real talent of Pete Steedman. Harry van Moorst and the Wizard also make appearances in the pages of these books, once again exposing the influence of outside events on the enclave of the University. The war in Viet Nam fuelled student radicalism in Melbourne.

Later student activism is also explored. Kelly O’Dwyer makes a strong case for the emergence of right wing activism within Melbourne University during the late 1970s, once again exposing the permeability of the University of Melbourne to external politics. A similar argument about the changing nature of the University’s students is put forward by Helen Dullhunty in the second volume. Protest by Melbourne’s foreign students also receives attention, reinforcing the notion that while the University of Melbourne attempts to establish a protected academic environment and is proactive in researching its institutional past the notion of a university as almost a state in its own right cannot hold true in the twentieth century.

It is worth noting that these books do not only contain biographies of people associated with the university and analyses of political controversies. There are interesting attempts at other types of history — intriguingly there are two articles about buildings and an article about the University’s early computerisation. There is also, in a couple of the articles, a sense of the topic taking an unexpected turn. This is particularly evident in Kate Cummin’s article — although she writes about the trials of basing research on assumptions that prove to be unfounded her real topic is the joy and unpredictability of primary source research. All the authors whose work is published in these collections have experienced that joy and succeeded in having the results published. They deserve praise for dealing well with sometimes difficult subjects.

These books contain well-written and accessible portions of the history of the University of Melbourne. They achieve the aims of their authors — firstly by merely being published but, more importantly, by producing original and readable histories drawn from primary sources. The topic they pursue is specialized but useful — the University of Melbourne does have a rich history. These books form a useful introduction to it for foreigners such as myself.

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‘Imagine the flavour’ wrote ‘A Lady’ to the Argus in anticipation of the 1867 Royal visit, ‘of a sandwich eaten in the presence of Royalty and to the sound of music’. The presence of vice royalty also could and did more frequently impress its transcendental effect upon the colonial

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6 Peter O’Toole, ‘Power to the People?: Harry van Moorst, SDS and Student Activism’ in A Chequered Past: Pieces of Melbourne University, 75-84; Rachel Juhasz, ‘Who does the Wizard Think He is and What on Earth is He Doing?’: Ian Brackenbury Channell’, in Melbourne University: Characters and Controversies, 159-170.
8 Helen Dullhunty, ‘Militant Apathy: Whatever Happened to Student Activism?’ in Melbourne University: Characters and Controversies, 149-158.
11 Kate Cummins, ‘Voices of Dissent: Looking for P. G. Wodehouse in the Farragos of the 1930s’, in ibid., 33-44.