narratives for publication in ways that revealed their concerns about experience that might contradict Scripture or bring the revival into disrepute.

Not surprisingly, this emphasis on experience had implications for gender roles. While Hindmarsh notes the growing number of women’s conversion narratives produced during the eighteenth century, and discusses the ways in which women’s experiences were validated through such narratives, he does not explore the broader consequences of this for evangelical understandings of gender. Scholars such as Phyllis Mack and Diane Lobody have noted that the language of the early evangelical revivals, with its emphasis on emotional sensitivity, was conventionally feminine. Hindmarsh does not address this aspect of the narratives in any detail. More obviously, he finds examples of Baptist women being urged, often against their will, to speak in church of their conversion experiences. Seen against a background of conventional prohibitions on women speaking in church, these examples suggest that the rise of the conversion narrative had great significance for the experience of women in evangelical communities.

While much of the book will be of particular interest to religious historians, Hindmarsh places his analysis in the context of broader themes, which make his conclusions significant for any scholar of modernity. As he notes, the increasing importance of conversion narratives within eighteenth-century religious cultures is a sign of broader changes regarding attitudes to the self and personal experience. While conversion itself was given great significance among seventeenth-century Puritans, the publication of an individual’s conversion narrative laid them open to charges of vanity and self-promotion. Among eighteenth-century evangelicals, however, conversion narratives were increasingly welcomed as the evidence of God’s amazing international work of revival. Clearly this phenomenon is linked to the broader interest in self-fashioning during the early modern period. Where other scholars have seen conversion narratives as simply a spiritualised version of the more secular autobiographies that the period produced in such numbers, Hindmarsh argues for the conversion narrative as a distinct genre that resists many of the conventions of the modern autobiography. Unlike the typical account of the ‘self-made man’, which emphasised personal achievement, conversion narratives emphasised the central work of God, not self, and gave great importance to the evangelical community into which the self was converted.

Hindmarsh is openly sympathetic to the evangelical experience that emerges from these accounts, arguing that conversion narratives bear ‘witness to a religious understanding that was only ever a vector of the Enlightenment, and that did not succumb to the pathological elision of community, contingency, or faith that is typical of the modernist autobiography’ (p. vi-vii). His clear desire to defend the subjects of his analysis at times makes him uncritical: he does not, for example, provide any serious engagement with the questions raised so famously by E.P. Thompson, regarding the role of conversion in creating subservient fodder for the factories of industrialising England. On the other hand, his sensitivity to the experience of the subjects of his analysis makes for a closer
and more insightful reading than many scholars of eighteenth-century England have offered.

As Hindmarsh notes, the particular contours of eighteenth-century evangelical experience were shaped by cultural context. He ends his account with an exploration of the fate of the conversion narrative in the missionary context. He demonstrates that missionaries took the conversion narrative with them in their endeavours, and expected that the experience of their converts would replicate their own. But local converts, while accepting the gospel message, experienced conversion within a different cultural framework. Often their experience, to the confusion and occasional distress of the missionaries, did not fit neatly into the conventional conversion narrative. Hindmarsh’s findings in this chapter have great relevance for historians of mission.

As a detailed exploration of the experience of early evangelicals, and the ‘narrative culture’ that shaped their expression of that experience, this book provides many riches for those interested in early evangelicalism. By placing evangelical culture within broader trends in the early modern world, Hindmarsh also makes a valuable contribution to English cultural history. While a closer engagement with questions of gender could have produced further insights, Hindmarsh has produced a book that adds much to our understanding of early modern religious experience.

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Within Australian academic circles John Hirst has long performed the role of self-styled maverick, boldly asserting the primacy of old-fashioned commonsense against faddish ‘-isms’ and the excesses of the ‘liberal’ historical mind. A Reader in History at La Trobe University, he has published widely on Australian social and political history, with a particular emphasis on the importance of Australia’s British origins and European heritage. Sense and Nonsense in Australian History brings together essays produced over the last thirty years to form a wide-ranging collection that encompasses the major themes in Australian history, and includes long essays as well as short review-style pieces on influential historical texts. It contains essays on the pioneer legend and the development of the colonies, the growth of egalitarianism, the Gallipoli landing and the republic debate, each addressed with Hirst’s trademarked centre-left ‘objectivity’, and features a new piece on the recent history wars and Aboriginal policy.

True to his reputation as ‘the gadfly of Australian history’ Hirst, though rarely churlish in his disagreements, at times appears unnecessarily combative and his concerted ‘objectivity’ somewhat staid. Hirst’s adversarial tone is pervasive and occasionally becomes irritatingly haughty as is most evident in his rather curmudgeonly attack on the Australian feminist history Creating a Nation, in which he reveals his profound scepticism of any method
which errs from orthodox socio-political inquiry. His piece on the Gallipoli landing is similarly problematic, with Hirst feeling the need to bolster the image of Australia’s impressive military prowess, dismissing any consideration of the long-term cultural implications of the Anzac legend. Moreover, there are times when Hirst’s thirst for the commonsensical borders on pedantry, as is largely the case in his criticism of the term Anglo-Celtic to refer to settlers on the grounds that it is ‘offensive’ (p. 13). While Hirst’s combativeness, cloaked in the language of moderation and fairness, may annoy some, the majority of the essays remain wide-ranging and informative. Hirst is strongest on the development of colonial Australia and deftly traces the nature of the British influence in the formation of Australian social institutions and culture more widely. When Hirst eschews close analysis of other historians’ work to explore his own questions it is difficult to quibble with the result, as is the case with his authoritative account of colonial life and his excellent summary of the republican movement. Furthermore, his consideration of relevant colonial literary sources is especially pleasing.

Though the collection is quite lengthy (at 325 pages), only one previously unpublished essay appears, ‘How Sorry Can We Be?’, a provocative attack on what Hirst terms ‘the liberal imagination’ (p. 86). For Hirst any movement for the Australian government to apologise for conquest and colonisation is seriously misguided, not only because it is impossible to truly regret the formation of Australian society, but because the movement to apologise rests on the notion that there are other more palatable, less violent means to dispossess a people. The essays abounds with easy digs at liberals whose ‘decency knows no bounds’, though his assertion that our focus should be not on fuelling guilt over conquest, but on making amends for the government’s policy of removing Aboriginal children from their families, is welcome. Hirst’s intervention in the history wars is particularly notable for this emphasis on the Stolen Generations, which has often been neglected in an obsessive, morbid focus on body counts and frontier massacres.

However, Hirst’s criticism of Kate Grenville’s Commonwealth Prize-winning novel of contact, The Secret River, is a most disappointing aspect of his new essay. Somewhat puzzlingly, Hirst attacks Grenville for her anachronistic image of settlement and frontier violence, as if novelists have access to a more accurate mode of representation, untainted by personal caprice, emotion or factual slights of hand. Hirst takes particular issue with Grenville’s portrayal of her settler protagonist, William Thornhill, as experiencing a fraught ambivalence about the presence of the Aborigines in the Hawkesbury region. For Hirst, such feelings of reticence or regret towards settler-indigenous violence can only be the product of a contemporary, liberal mind, one that erroneously ascribes conflict to misunderstanding. ‘Actually’, Hirst writes, ‘if aborigines had earlier understood the settlers’ intentions there would have been more violence and sooner’ (p. 86). This may be so, and Thornhill’s interiority certainly fails Hirst’s accuracy test, but his own assessment of the novel also fails. He is wise to interrogate Grenville’s often quite naïve incursions into the history wars, but he is a little foolish to neglect the crucial role of literature in
granting individuals’ access to the imagined past. Novelists, unlike historians, remain largely free from the constraints of factual accuracy (though not from accountability), and it is this freedom that allows Grenville to create such an engaging character. That someone may read *The Secret River* and be prompted to think more critically about Australia’s colonial past should ultimately be applauded, not decried on the ground of lack of fidelity to sources.

If viewed overall the collection is somewhat patchy and readers would be ill-advised to read it cover to cover. However, it offers a neat snapshot of Hirst’s oeuvre and provides a highly accessible way to engage with the work of one of Australia’s most prominent historians. At times Hirst’s devotion to a mythical academic ‘middle-ground’ can appear to stymie a fuller appreciation of less traditional historical approaches, and a less measured reader will find the collection almost excessively moderate. Although this is, perhaps, Hirst’s gift to Australian historiography: his ability to freely criticise work across the entire spectrum of historical and political opinion, to maintain a decisive contrariness against the most doctrinaire and dogmatic elements within contemporary Australian society.

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British abolitionism has been the source of intense historiographical debate almost since its first great legislative success in 1807, when the slave trade was banned by parliament. Two competing explanations emerged, one that praised the movement as a triumph of ideals, and another that attributed its success to structural economic shifts in British capitalism. In the twentieth century, Marxist-inflected analyses of the abolitionist movement emerged, exemplified by Eric Williams’ spectacular assault on the pretended virtue of the abolitionist heroes in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Debate on the relationship between abolition and capitalism persists in modern scholarship, with the proliferation of increasingly sophisticated studies from David Brion Davis, James Walvin, Seymour Drescher, and Thomas Haskell.

Adam Hochschild evades much of this controversy, producing instead a superbly researched narrative account of the origins, progress, and eventual triumph of the abolitionist movement. For Hochschild, abolition marks nothing less than a grand, unmitigated victory of ethics over interests. The champions of the anti-slavery campaign are presented as the prototypes for modern day social justice activists, pioneering the techniques that contemporary human rights and development non-governmental organisations now rely on. Slavery’s economics are invoked only insofar as they were a major impediment to abolition.

As a narrative history of the course of abolitionism, *Bury the Chains* is outstanding. Hochschild’s prose is highly effective, interlacing short