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
passages of historical quotation with brief anecdotes illustrative of the cultural milieu of eighteenth-century England. Conventional academic writing often seems insufficient for communicating the dramatic quality that defines so many of the landmark episodes in the story of the anti-slavery campaign, and it is in these passages that Hochschild’s ability becomes most apparent. Thomas Clarkson’s awakening to the necessity of abolition, at the roadside near Wades Mill, is perhaps the best example of the author’s narrative facility. Descriptions of the horror of the sugar plantation are sickeningly evocative, especially when quoting from the understated planters’ manuals, which relate the atrocity of slavery with the most studied unconcern. Even letter-writing, petitioning, and the everyday bureaucratic minutiae that characterized so much of abolitionist activity is made compelling.

*Bury the Chains* is impressively expansive in both chronology and geography. Hochschild addresses the main thrust of British abolitionism in both its popular and parliamentary forms, the impact of French Revolutionary politics, the slave rebellions of St. Domingue, the Sierra Leone Company, and even the 1832 reform of the franchise. An extensive biographical portrait is given for many of the major anti-slavery icons: Clarkson, the ‘moral steam engine’ of the movement, Granville Sharp, the foremost defender of Africans in England, and William Wilberforce, the leader of the parliamentary wing. He also acknowledges the contribution of lesser-known figures, and reclams the role played by women, including the militant Elizabeth Heyrick. The Clapham Sect ‘Saints’ are given prominent mention, though the author is clearly unsympathetic to their narrow humanitarianism. An immense body of historical events are arranged into a strong and compelling survey of how the slave trade, and slavery itself, were eventually suppressed.

For the academic historian, however, such an approach is somewhat unsatisfying, particularly when Hochschild makes tantalizing reference to research with clear relevance to profound historiographical questions. The most frustrating instance of this is when he attributes the unique resonance of anti-slavery campaigning in England to the population’s experience of impressment, the abduction of young men to serve on Royal Navy warships. This fear of abduction, the foundation of slave procurement, facilitated a strong sense of empathy that was not present in the other slave-trading states. It would have been extremely worthwhile to locate this fascinating and novel argument in the broader debate of why abolitionism found sympathy where and when it did, as well as its implications for the limits of that sympathy. Greater analysis of why anti-slavery triumphed, as opposed to the means and process by which it did, would have made this a considerably more useful academic text, while preserving much of its general appeal. Hochschild’s previous work, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, has demonstrated that such a synthesis is possible.

The success of the anti-slavery campaign is one of the most extraordinary events in modern history. Although Hochschild’s insistent assertions of the movement’s contemporary relevance are occasionally unsubtle and distracting, his fundamental argument is sound. Abolitionism marked the foundation of a mode of thought that sought to connect the
morality of everyday economic activity to distant and abstracted injustice. Animal rights, anti-poverty, and environmental activism are all predicated on such a connection. The relative failure of those movements, compared with the rapid success of abolition, is a depressing testament to a global society that is vastly more interconnected in communication and trade, but seemingly less capable of acting on the ethical aspects of this interdependence.

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While accepted definitions of the word myth are ‘a baseless popular belief’ (Heinemann Dictionary), a ‘fictitious thing’ (Oxford Dictionary), and a ‘delusion’ (Macquarie Thesaurus), David Potts chose to shade this term grey, as used in the title of his book, The Myth of the Great Depression. This work has two clear aims: to ‘explore the myth (usual story)’ of the Great Depression, and tell the ‘positive experiences’ of the Great Depression, which have up to now been denigrated or excluded completely from ‘the myth’ accounts (p. 4). Potts’ overriding aim was ‘to present a balanced history of the Depression as informatively as I can and in tune with the voices of those who lived through it.’ (p. 6).

In order to fulfil his first aim, Potts spent an inordinate amount of time retelling ‘the myth’ version, as written by people he labels ‘left wing Marxist historians and novelists’ (p. 334). While he was comfortable using their work, in order to find fault with it, he chose not to use the bulk of the Great Depression research undertaken by Geoff Spenceley, whose book The Depression Decade: Commentaries and Documents (1981) has been the accepted Victorian Certificate of Education Australian History text for many years. Spenceley also wrote the thought-provoking A Bad Smash: Australia in the Depression of the 1930s (1990), an overview work in the ‘Themes in Australian Economic and Social History’ series. Erik Eklund’s Steel Town: the making and breaking of Port Kembla (2003), and John Shield’s edited volume of All Our Labours: Oral Histories of Working Life in Twentieth Century Sydney (1992), both of which incorporated oral history and an examination of the Great Depression, are other notable works overlooked by Potts.

Potts’ second aim, to tell the ‘positive experiences’ of people who lived through the Great Depression, harks back to this theme flagged by him in a 1990 journal article; in it, he discussed what he termed ‘A Positive Culture of Poverty’.4 He found substantial evidence of this in twelve hundred interviews conducted by himself and his own students over many years (p. vii). He again cited much evidence of ‘happiness’ in The Myth of the Great Depression, it is a key theme running through this work. To my knowledge, no other study of the Great Depression contains sixty-seven page references