

it does appear, is studied, forced, and awkward.

In summary, then, what can one say of this novel? Clearly the author has recorded experiences that have been deeply felt: the narrator's pain is evident throughout. Also, the author has set down several episodes that might, reorganized, form a novel. As the book stands, however, it is confusing, awkward and much too long.

At the beginning, the author thanks both the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council for grants given to her while writing Sandbars. This acknowledgement is puzzling and unsettling, for one must wonder on what basis such work is given assistance. Surely writing such as this would be much better served by being given to an exacting editor who would cut it by approximately one half. It is dismaying to think that this is but the first of a projected (and presumably funded) trilogy and that, once again, public money is subsidizing work that requires revising, pruning and disciplining long before it reaches print.

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The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia, 1788 to 1975 MIRIAM DIXSON. Penguin, Australia: 1976.

This history of women in Australia does not deal with the occasional salient female whose life is considered distinguished enough to be recorded among those men whose efforts are noted and interpreted in the general histories of Australia. Rather, the writer traces the social circumstances of the settlement of Australia, along with the effects of penal settlements and colonial life, on the way Australian women and men have come to regard each other.

Within Australia, past images of the typical Australian have been shown to derive from those writings which have caught the people's fancy, and remained steadfastly representative of what Australians want to believe about themselves and their forebears. These images have generally presented the male as tall, sun-bronzed, rugged, lean, resistant to authority, with a wry kind of humour, rough and ready manners, and not very talkative. He was capable of making do in an inventive way when out of proper materials, tolerant of poor workmanship as a result, and preferred other men to women for companionship. He worked hard for himself but not for his boss, loathed pretension of any kind (especially of displayed and genuine excellence--in-

tellelectual, economic or social). This mythical Australian has about 25 synonyms for girls and women, none of them flattering. He treats them as different and inferior sorts of human beings who can keep the house in order, get meals, feed and mind the kids, and is good for brief functional sexual encounters. Tenderness, empathy and style are totally absent in this "typical" Australian's relationship with his woman.

Miriam Dixon has painstakingly sifted through documents, starting with the early days of settlement in 1788, in order to discover how these patterns and codes of behaviour have been established. She is particularly interested in exploring traditions specific to her country. One of her major premises is that: "Men like women less in Australia than in any other community."

Most of the women present at the founding of Australia were convicted felons. During the years of transportation of convicts to the colony, only a small proportion of women would have been free women--the wives of officers or ministers of religion. These convict women had been reduced to degraded conditions in gaols and shipboard life before reaching Australia; and thereafter were in wretched circumstances; without decent food, clothing and shelter. They became the mothers of thousands of children whom they could not bring up decently because of the lack of an established community, of

schools and churches, shops and skilled older people who maintain the mores of village life. Hence women from the very beginning suffered from bad reputations, poor self concepts, victimization, scant education and few skills.

Immigration programmes tried to redress the balance of females to males in colonial times, but exacerbated the indignities. Dr. Dixon quotes the case of 221 Irish orphan girls who left Plymouth for Port Adelaide, 17 July, 1848. On the voyage more than half the girls started to menstruate for the first time. Not a single piece of extra cloth had been provided for the shipload of adolescent girls. The surgeon had difficulty(!) with all the washing and hanging out of clothes and linen, "these important duties interfering(!) somewhat with the seamen's notions of clean decks and trim rigging."

So, in addition to the founding mothers having poor self-concepts and unclean body-images, there is the extreme powerlessness of being bonded and being young.

Compounding this is the nineteenth century ethos of the dominant father figure, and the power structure of the old men holding the strategic positions in government, politics, knowledge, skills, property and commerce. It is easy enough now to account for the low esteem in which Australian women are held.

The strength of this book lies in several sources: First, the writer has a clear perception of the elements in the contemporary pattern of male/female relationships in Australia. Secondly, Dixon has ably used modern psychological and sociological theories to wrest a more satisfying meaning from descriptions of how Australian men and women treat each other.

Thirdly, by tracking down those documents which detail the historical processes she demonstrates the burden of history and helps to explain why Australian men reject women so that "we short-change each other pathetically, stunting possibilities for fellowship and the kind of sexual joy that can only go with a rich sense of shared humanity."

Finally, and very briefly, she indicates a way out of the vicious circle of deprecation and self-deprecation that has evolved while men have managed the world. "Men and women finally belong with each other. So after those women, for whom it is necessary, rediscover their worth in autonomous female groupings, they haven't much option but to move out and help men off the hook where they've pinned themselves."

Maureen Baker,
Sydney, Australia

Fenwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English Village.

MARY CHAMBERLAIN. London: Virago Press, 1975. Pp. 186.

"Few people hear a women's tale"
It is the stories and songs of the ploughboy, farm labourer and poacher that are told again and again. The experiences of the women who worked together on the land--picking stones, weeding potatoes, gleaning the harvested cornfields--are left in the pages of the occasional diary or of the government reports that were commissioned to explore the extent of women's and children's work in English agriculture. Rarely, too, are the women's own stories repeated; rather it is the opinions of the churchmen, the teacher or the bureaucrat that explain what such hard work does to a woman: ". . . not only did landwork 'almost unsex a woman' but it 'generates a further pregnant social mischief by unfitting or indisposing her for a woman's proper duties at home.'" (Report of the Commissioners on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, 1867, cited in Fenwomen, p. 17).

The glory of eluding the gamekeeper, successfully firing a farmer's hayrick, or joining the agricultural union and then finally going out against the local farmers was for the men, not the women. They were left behind in