

**Tony Moore 2012, *Dancing with Empty Pockets: Australia's Bohemians, Miller's Point, NSW: Pier 9*. ISBN 978 1 74196 144 7 by Caitlin Noakes.**

The self-stated aim of Tony Moore's *Dancing with Empty Pockets: Australia's Bohemians* (2012) is to illuminate a tradition of bohemia in Australia. This is done by revealing the influences, interactions and relationships between seemingly disparate generations of self-identified 'bohemians'. While studies into the lives and work of Australian artists have been nothing short of comprehensive, the attempt to link generations of artists through a previously unidentified tradition of bohemia is innovative and ambitious. Moore, a lecturer in Communication and Media Studies at Monash University, traces these connections by offering a detailed definition of 'bohemian', as well as providing character studies of famous Australian bohemians to show how their biographies overlap with each other. Moore defines 'bohemias' as communities of artists such as writers, painters, musicians and film-makers. Further to that, however, Moore sees bohemianism as a tradition of strategies designed by artists to resist economic pressures that would devalue their work. The bohemian constructs and performs an identity which marks him or her as an elite in their field, with authority to attribute cultural capital (and, in turn, economic capital) to their own and others' cultural products. By reading bohemianism as a set of responses to changing economic climates, Moore unifies different communities and generations of Australian bohemians into a tradition, whether the climate they emerge from is the Depression of the 1890s, or the emergence of transnational markets in the late twentieth century.

The use of biography to meditate on different personalities also helps reveal a tradition of bohemia. The book begins with the life of Marcus Clarke, and shows how he introduced bohemian practices learned from his time in Paris to communities of writers in Melbourne. Comparisons and connections between European bohemias and Australian bohemias are often drawn, contextualising Australia's bohemian tradition as emerging from a European tradition. It is shown how Clarke's writings influenced the artistic and social practices of later artists, such as Hugh McCrae and Tom Roberts. The book frequently demonstrates how later generations of artists are influenced by the work of previous generations, resulting in the formation of traceable artistic lineages.

While Moore demonstrates how traditions can be read into successive generations of bohemia with consistent success, there are some opportunities for greater investigation that are missed. The focus of the book is Sydney and Melbourne with only occasional excursions into places like Adelaide and Brisbane. This choice directs

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the scope of the text at the cost to a greater cross-section of Australia's bohemians. Furthermore, the sections of the book covering nineteenth century bohemianism have a heavy focus on male, white Australians. While Moore explains the bohemian communities of the era tended to make exclusions based on race and gender, there are by Moore himself only passing references made to female artists like Louisa Lawson and Constance Roth. Among consideration of the communities of writers who gathered around the *Bulletin* and the *Argus* there is a brief nod to the *Chinese Australia Herald*. Including some discussion of how popular, masculine, white Australian bohemias may have been translated into feminine and/or Chinese-Australian bohemias might have provided a more panoramic consideration of the Australian bohemianism of that era, as well as keeping in the bohemian spirit of embracing countercultures and the underdog.

Moore's style of writing is entertaining and easy to read, and the argument is clearly explicated. It may serve well as reading for an undergraduate-level university student. However, there is some prior knowledge of theoretical concepts presumed of the reader. For example, Bakhtin's literary theory of the carnivalesque is applied to the reading of the constructed bohemian identity. The true value of *Dancing with Empty Pockets* lies in its capacity to interpret the social phenomenon of artist communities by innovative definitions. Moore provides a new way of imagining the lives and works of Australian artists, which will serve as a basis for further research.

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