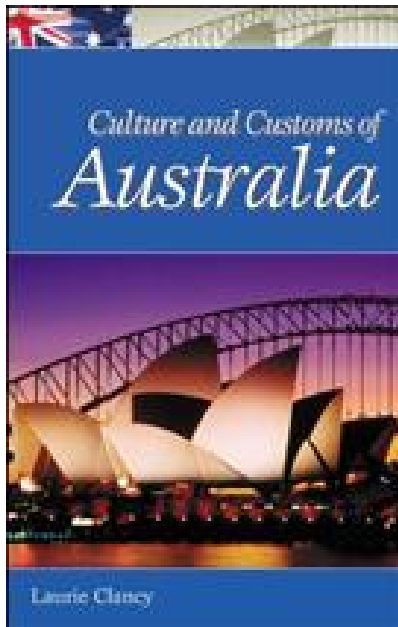


Culture and customs of Australia by Laurie Clancy. London: Greenwood Press, 2004, pp. 191, £25.99, hardback, ISBN 0 313 32169 8.



An addition to Greenwood Press's *Culture and Customs* series, Clancy's book is a general introduction which will prove extremely useful for secondary and tertiary students with little knowledge of Australia. Featuring a glossy colour photograph of the Sydney Opera House at night, the book is aimed at neither Australians nor serious scholars. Clancy divides his text into ten chapters, covering history, religion, education, national identity, family relationships, leisure activities, cuisine, fashion, literature, the media, performing arts, painting and architecture. The ten chapters are preceded by a chronology and followed by a helpful bibliography and index.

The title of the book is quite misleading, as the text contains little information regarding customs, focusing mostly on culture and history. Further, the contents of the book are biased towards high culture, such as literature, opera and painting. The most dominant aspects of contemporary Australian culture, such as sport, popular music, film and television, receive little attention in comparison to the cultural pursuits favoured by the elite minority. For example, less than three pages are devoted to popular music, whereas theatre receives almost five pages, and opera, ballet and classical music have five more pages devoted to them. Painting and architecture each receive an entire chapter, totalling almost a fifth of the book.

Despite containing much useful information, the chronology focuses almost exclusively on Australian history since European settlement. Of the more than sixty entries, only one concerns an event prior to Cook's arrival. Likewise, chapter one, 'The Land, People and History', devotes fewer than four of twenty-eight pages to Aboriginal history. However, it is evident from Clancy's use of language throughout the text that he believes Aborigines have been treated deplorably throughout Australian history. He describes European settlement as an 'invasion' (p. 2) and states that: 'Massacres and the rape of aboriginal women were common' (p. 14).

Clancy, who teaches creative writing at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, often uses Melbourne for examples; Perth, Adelaide, Hobart and Brisbane are hardly mentioned. Apart from the mandatory photographs of kangaroos, Uluru and the Outback, most of the photographs have Melbourne subjects, such as the Shrine of Remembrance, the Queen Victoria Market and Flinders Street Station. In addition to a few typographical errors, the book contains some factual errors. For example, the chronology mistakenly claims that Queensland was 'formed as a separate state' in 1859, while in chapter one, Clancy correctly writes 'Queensland was proclaimed a colony in 1859' (p. 6). In the next paragraph, he incorrectly describes Adelaide as the capital of 'the state of South Australia' (p. 6). In fact, there were no states until federation in 1901, just colonies. Clancy refers to Peter Carey and Frank Moorhouse as 'younger writers',

although they are both in their sixties. Additionally, Clancy gives incorrect dates for both Midnight Oil's 'Beds as Burning' and Cold Chisel's 'Khe Sanh'.

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