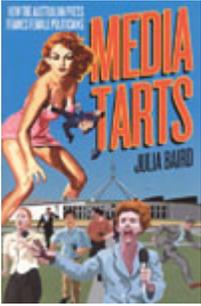


Media Tarts: How the Australian Press Frames Female Politicians by Julia Baird. Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2004, pp. 330, A\$32.95, paperback, ISBN 1 920769 23 4.



How many of their women in politics in recent decades can Australians identify, and how many of them can non-Australians identify? Here is a less than comprehensive list of those mentioned and often discussed in this book: Florence Bjelke-Petersen, Cheryl Kernot, Natasha Stott Despoja, Meg Lees, Carmen Lawrence, Kate Carnell, Julia Gillard, Tanya Plibersek, Marise Payne, Nicola Roxon, Joan Kirner, Rosemary Follett, Bronwyn Bishop, Jenny Macklin, Clare Martin, Cathy Jenkins, June Craig, Jackie Kelly, Marie Bashir, Amanda Vanstone, Susan Ryan, Janine Haines, Margaret Guilfoyle, Rosemary Foot, Kirstie Marshall, Rosemary Kyburz, Kathy Martin Sullivan, Yvonne Chapman, Prue Leggoe, Wendy Machin, Janice Crosio, Joan Child, Ros Kelly, Ann Symonds, Deirdre Grusovin, Gracia Baylor, Laurie Oakes, Valerie Callister, Edna Roper, Janet Powell, Sandra Nori, Yvonne Henderson, Jean Melzer, Shirley Walters, Susan Ryan, Ruth Coleman, Lynne Kosky, Wendy Jones, Gabrielle Harrison, Danna Vale, Virginia Chadwick, Kay Setches, Barbara Wiese, Kirsten Livermore, Kate Lundy, Anna Burke, Jacinta Collins, Roslyn Dundas, Dana Vale, Julie Bishop, and the best known in and outside Australia, Pauline Hanson. Full chapters are devoted to Florence Bjelke-Petersen, Natasha Stott Despoja of South Australia, Carmen Lawrence of Western Australia, and Cheryl Kernot and Pauline Hanson of Queensland.

The author is an accomplished journalist, a subeditor and columnist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*. She has a PhD in history from Sydney University. The book is loaded with data and, as seen noted above, with names. It is not an academic study but rather is composed in a sort of racy and colourful journalistic style. Baird's main source is personal interviews, though she was refused by Pauline Hanson. There is no doubt that it is a fine contribution to recent Australian politics and will probably have wide appeal.

The titles of the book and of some chapters are somewhat sensational and tasteless. There are chapter titles such as 'The Cover Girls: "Forget policy, I've got great legs!"', 'Cheryl Kernot: from Wunderfrau to whore,' 'Sex and the "Stiff Dick" Syndrome,' and 'How to Succeed in Politics Without a Penis'. Certainly one of the core ideas of the Baird book is to show, with plenty of examples, the often rude ridicule and vicious remarks from other politicians and sometimes from the media itself. Should not then the author be a bit more circumspect in her lead titles? To be sure she also cites that men in Australian politics have often been targets of merciless ridicule. Should women expect not to be? Generally the main prejudice they have faced is the view that women should stay at home to be

obedient daughters, wives, and mothers or seek appropriate careers such as nursing or teaching, but not to be in the political scene for which they are innately inept. This all is well and clearly presented by Baird.

A more chronological account of women's political rights would have enhanced this book. The author uses Margaret Thatcher's Australian visit in 1976 as a starting point. This energized more Australian women to enter politics. 'Newspaper editorials constantly asked where our own Thatcher was, while reporters did their best to find a local version of her' (p. 14).

At this time there were no women in the House, six in the Senate, and one in the Cabinet (none in the shadow cabinet). To go further back, between 1950 and 1965 there were none in the House. When the 1980 election took place there were four women in the House of which only one served more than one term, but there were twelve in the Senate. In 1982 this had increased to fifty-eight women MPs and by 2004 it was sixty. In 1990 Carmen Lawrence became the first woman premier (Western Australia). These data are extracted from various parts of the book's text.

The question to ask for those who are acquainted with the growth of women's rights in Western and mature democracies is if Australia is mainstream. Apparently yes. Do Australian women encounter greater opposition and ridicule when standing for politics? To a certain extent, yes. Maybe this is because Australians tend to be more outspoken and sometimes this translates into more insensitivity and even rudeness. It might also be a more male oriented society.

We have a most readable book loaded with information. It is useful for recent Australian political history and emerging women's rights. Each chapter has several dozen helpful endnotes and there is a most welcome thirteen-page bibliography. But it is deplorable that this book with so many names and events has no index; therefore my listing of numerous names in my first paragraph. While its readership will be basically Australians this book should also be useful outside of Australia, especially in Women's Studies.

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