Westerly Articles in Electronic Form

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accidentally hit a six at a social game of cricket. The success of this satire can perhaps be gauged by raising the eyes from this invented world to find that in 1988 we have a Prime Minister who brings a winner's smile back to the Labour Party just as things are turning sour by hitting a hole-in-one while playing golf with some mates — his bodyguards.

While the satire is powerful and vicious, and the images are as clear, surprising, and physical as they were in *Just Relations*, this is, like Gerald Murnane's book, a work that takes the great risk of depending on the power of its writing to keep the reader reading.

More relentless than poetic in his style, Murnane uses a confessional tone to, once again, overturn traditional expectations. Despite every step towards confession, he is drawn further away from, or perhaps closer to the impossibility of revealing secrets:

> . . . if it were not by definition impossible for me to tell my reader where I am at this moment, I would write on this page that I am at this moment in another world but that the world where I am is in this one.

Taking a step back from the question of why these books were published, we could wonder why they were written — what readers did the writer have in mind? Gerald Murnane quotes Hemingway at the beginning of his book: "I believe that basically you write for two people; yourself to try to make it absolutely perfect . . . Then you write for who you love whether she can read or write or not and whether she is alive or dead." Rodney Hall lists the friends who supported and guided him through the writing of his novel. Both of these books are, in their different ways, about love, and both of them are obviously lovingly written for the zealous reader.

Kevin Brophy

Kate Grenville, *Joan Makes History*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1988, 285pp. $22.95.

Joan Makes History, Kate Grenville's new novel, has already made its own publishing history. Widely and glowingly reviewed, it seems set to become a landmark text in Australian writing, in part because it reaches beyond the narrow category "literature", among others to history, to oral literature, to serial writing and to myth. It raises and speaks in its many female voices to the issues that have vexed this Bicentenary year in Australia, exploring them with verve and wit.

Two kinds of history are being made here — or one kind of history is being made, written, in two different narrative modes. One narrative is the fictitious story of Joan, conceived in the first year of the century, on an immigrant ship, "mean and cramped". (p.9) Her conception (which in its narrative position and its description inevitably recalls, and mocks, Tristram Shandy's) is the result of the celebrative lust of her migrant parents. It takes place on a blazing afternoon as, significantly, their ship "passes between the headlands that were the gates to a new life". (p.9)

Another narrative interleaves this Joan's. It's the multiple, shifting dramatisation, in a series of "Scenes", of a number of Joans who together represent Everywoman. Sometimes black and sometimes white, upper or lower class, mistress or maid, this Joan's history is the secret, unrecorded, intimate history of women in Australia. A Joan is always present at the moments that mainstream Australian history has chosen to record and that Australian culture commemorates. Her presence remakes that history.

Joan is Captain Cook's wife as the *Endeavour* sights the continent that will become known as Australia; she's a convict woman on Phillip's fleet who escapes through a hatch of her prison ship so that her "unsavoury toe (is the first to touch) the Great South Land". (p.38) She's an Aboriginal woman, one of a group who meet Flinders and his party when he's forced ashore on his circumnavigation of Australia; she battles to help clear and crop the unfamiliar country, is a washerwoman on the goldfields, a servant of prosperous settlers who laugh as aborigines take and eat their arsenic-laden flour, a Governor's wife during the 1855 gold rushes, and so on.

This many-faceted Joan's history ends when, as the wife of a small-town mayor, she attends the Official Federation celebrations, at about the same time as the other, continuously fictitious Joan is born. What this Joan's friends don't know, the Prologue tells us, is that she, too, is "every woman who has ever drawn breath: there

has been a Joan cooking, washing and sweeping through every event of history, although she has not been mentioned in the books until now". p.5

Transcribing as it does the underside of traditional history, Grenville's novel questions the meaning and construction of that history, as social and feminist historians have. In the last manifestation of the Joans in the dramatic "Scenes", Joan, "the wife of the Mayor of Castleton, a mother of six, and grandmother of three" walks home with her husband from the first Opening of the Australian Parliament. She rehearses what she will tell of this event to her favourite grandchild, Alice. It will be "all the things no book would ever mention . . . peculiar, lopsided, absurd sorts of things that we would tell her". (p.261) Without these things, Joan muses, history is all wrong. And the things she will tell Alice are essential; they comprise "*your inheritance*". (p.262)

All the Joans have a sense of their own unrecognised difference, and yearn to discover a destiny. The twentieth-century Joan wishes "not to marry history, but to make it" (p.49), while the episodic, nineteenth-century Joan, working in one of her lives as a photographer's assistant, feels as such she has "a hand in the machinery of life . . . as I never had as simply the wife of Henry." (p.205) These female desires for autonomy and power are traditionally thwarted by a gendered social structure, which ensures, too, that women are included in history only in secondary roles. Finally, and ironically, *Joan Makes History* undercuts both the notion of power and the nature of the masculine hegemony inscribed in traditional history, as it authenticates and celebrates those areas of life, like love and domestic relationships, that are conventionally assigned to women.

A movement towards this alternative idea of history impels the continous narrative of the twentieth-century Joan. She is born, grows up rebelling against her parents' values, gains a university education, discovers her sexuality, becomes pregnant, marries, miscarries, leaves her husband almost on a whim, and proceeds, as she thinks, to make her history. Joan transforms herself into Jack, but this history soon palls, since no-one recognises its daring.

This is when Joan gains her insight: her escape from a more common female destiny is not only misguided, but it mistakes the true meaning of history. Back with Duncan her husband, pregnant again and happy, Joan considers that she's "looked into the face of destiny and found it cold." (p.224) Her story ends as she says goodbye to her young daughter Madge, whose growing-up has been recorded in a series of snapshots, frozen moments of history only her parents can read, and who seems to her mother independent, confident, capable of making any history she chooses. Yet Madge is Joan too, and as she drives away her mother, Joan, listens "until the roar of Joan's imperfect engine could not longer be heard." (p.279)

This book questions the gaps in history, created by its failure to include women (as well as other minority groups) in its narrative. *Joan Makes History* heals those gaps with its imaginative re-writing of an Australian history. Images of penetration, of expulsion and birth, of growth and development, and of transformation, common to women's lives and to the history of colonisation, link all the Joans' stories and implicitly suggest a different kind of colonising. Elements of the major story are repeated in the fragments that intersperse it. And Joan's physical appearance provides the other major linking device. She is plain of face and small of bust — why, is not entirely clear. Perhaps it is to render her androgynous. It does point up the nature of the representative Joan's function as anti-heroine.

Part fable, part myth, part novel, part history, *Joan Makes History* illuminates the role of women in the history of the Australian continent, in a way that uncovers history's paradoxes. It will allow neither easy questions nor conventional answers of that history. Post-Joan, no Australian history will ever be the same.

Delys Bird

Henry IV — Part 1, ed. E.A.M. Colman, 1987; and ***Hamlet***, ed. G.A. Wilkes, 1984; (The Challis Shakespeare) Sydney University Press.

Sydney University Press continues its publication of the Challis Shakespeare, named after John Henry Challis, the nineteenth benefactor of the University. Recently to hand are *Henry IV Part One* and *Hamlet*. This series is claimed to be the first modern one produced specifically for the Australian reader, especially