

Gideon Haigh, *The Summer Game*. Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1997. Bibliog., illus. pp. 356. \$39.95.

Haigh's book opens with Lindsay Hassett's Australian cricket team making its unhurried progress around South Africa in 1949/50. The sixteen-day crossing of the Indian Ocean on board the *Nestor* had provided the team with a leisurely opportunity to develop a sense of cohesiveness; deliberately leisurely, as there were 76 days before the First Test of the series. It closes with Ian Chappell's exclamation of 'Shit!' as he was told of his elevation to the Australian captaincy to replace the summarily deposed Bill Lawry in February 1971, and his vow to his wife: 'The bastards won't get me the way they got Bill'.

It has been conventional wisdom that those 21 years were a period of minimal change, wedged in between the departure from the playing field of Bradman and the coming of Packer cricket. Of course, it is noted perfunctorily, there were some highlights on the field, such as the hideously doctored pitch at Old Trafford in 1956, or the tied Test at Brisbane in 1960. It is, however, this notion of the 1950s and 1960s as a period of cricketing quietude that Haigh wishes to challenge.

He argues that this period is one of dramatic change which begins when Australia and cricket victory were synonymous: after all, it took a month short of five years and 26 Tests for Australia to experience defeat after World War II. It ends with the balance of world cricket power having shifted to the extent that South Africa had cantered home four-nil in a Test series. It also ends just as the first one-day international is played and with captains such as Bill Lawry and Ian Chappell being prepared to give increasingly frank expression to the players' unwillingness to be treated as chattels by the Board of Control. Within six years the turmoil of Kerry Packer's incursion into the senescent world of Australia's cricket

administration would be in full swing. In this context, *The Summer Game* provides the milieu and conditions from which the turmoil of 1977 emerged and is a companion piece to Haigh's examination of the phenomenon of World Series Cricket in *The Cricket War* (1993).

Haigh opens his book by lamenting what he sees as the tired stereotypes of the 1950s and 1960s which are trotted out as representations of the period: watch any Peter Luck collocation of x-Fabulous Years consisting of dollops of Cinesound Newsreels and Haigh's point is obvious. Indeed, there is a sense in which the cultural elites of Australia have remained, until recently, content with a kind of Edna Everage view of the fifties and sixties where the mere mention of Moonee Ponds or Norm's job at the Dried Fruits Board were enough to produce a superior snigger at what was seen as suburban dullness and conformity.

Such a stance ignores the rich cultural production of the earlier of those two decades. A random gleanings of the literature of that decade produces titles such as Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* (1950), a high water mark of social realism in Australian writing. There is also the mature poetic achievement of R D FitzGerald's *Between Two Tides* (1952), Vance Palmers incisive cultural analysis in *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954), and *The Tree of Man* (1955), the novel in which Patrick White began in earnest his physical and spiritual exploration of Australia. Robin Boyd's *The Australian Ugliness* (1960) and Donald Home's *The Lucky Country* (1964) offered a trenchant analysis of Australia far removed from the smug self-satisfaction which is alleged to have engulfed all aspects of its life.

The sixties, too, are often constructed as having begun in the latter half of the decade with the appearance of the mass movements against the Vietnam war and the wider challenge to established authority in all of its forms.

The dangers inherent in this cavalier dismissal of a significant period of Australia's recent past have been highlighted by John Howard's appropriation of the fifties as the Liberal Party's Garden of Eden, replete with images of stability and tranquillity contained behind a white picket fence. Ironically, he was simply giving us the simplification of the era referred to above, just as distorted but now savagely misleading in its political context.

There are, however, signs that the situation is changing: the special focus of the latest issue of *Australian Historical Studies* is seen in its subtitle

The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the Fifties. Just as the essays and reminiscences are an attempt to rectify the neglect of the period through sustained analysis, so Haigh's book is a detailed, fresh and thoughtful account of the forces operating on Australian cricket in the fifties and sixties.

The book's worth and interest lies in the way Haigh transcends the who-scored-how-many approach which has been rendered superfluous by Ray Webster's superb two volume *First-Class Cricket in Australia*. While Haigh does not ignore totally what was happening on the field, he is more interested in showing the various contexts in which it was taking place which takes the book far beyond the endlessly-repeated score card.

Thus, for example, government policy could have a direct effect on cricket and its players. Compulsory national service, which was introduced in November 1950, caused such inroads into the numbers of players available for grade and district cricket that Bill Jeanes, secretary of the South Australian Cricket Association, approached the Minister of Defence, Phillip McBride, to ask for Saturday afternoon release for cricketers in uniform. Haigh also points to the wider ramifications of war service on Australian cricket at Test level when he discusses the way the 1953 team to England was divided between the older, gregarious, ex-serviceman who relished their survival and wanted to enjoy life and cricket to the full, and the younger team members who were green in terms of life experience and who had not been crucially affected by the experience of war.

It is one of the great pleasures and rewards of this book that the wider contexts of cricket are so clearly charted in such a convincing and unforced way. After the wonder and gallantry of the 1960/61 Test series against the West Indies, there was much talk of the unifying effects of cricket within the Commonwealth and its position as an emblem of all that was fair and decent. Haigh juxtaposes this rhetoric with the continued presence and application of the White Australia Policy and the fact that the Anglican Dean of Melbourne used a sermon preached during the Fifth Test to raise fundamental questions concerning the moral consistency of showering adulation on cricketers who would not be accepted as citizens. The same Dean, Dr Barton Babbage, was to become a leading figure in the Immigration Reform Group, which was formed in Melbourne only a year later.

The figure of Robert Menzies looms large in this wider context of cricket. Prime Minister for much of the period, his delight in cricket and

the pleasure he derived from the company of cricketers are noted, as is the puzzling lack of interest in this dimension of Menzies by many analysts. It is easy to lampoon Menzies' devotion to cricket as simply another index of a laughable Anglophilia but Haigh's work shows that he displayed considerably more insight in promoting the interests of Australian cricket than did many of its administrators.

There is a strong case for arguing, as Haigh does, that Australian cricket has often been successful despite its officialdom. Dominated by middle-aged and middle-class men who had given a lifetime of usually honorary service, Australian administrators often came to see themselves as the custodians of the permanent traditions and values of the game which had to be protected against the transient self-interest of groups such as players. In the light of events over the last Australian summer, one could ask despairingly how much things have changed.

Another delight of this book is the way in which the voices of cricketers are woven into the tapestry of the text so that we get a fascinating and multi-faceted picture of what it was like to play cricket for Australia in the fifties and sixties. The domestic strains which long tours could cause, religion, politics and sex are all canvassed, as are the cultural and political shocks which tours to countries such as India and South Africa could bring. Brian Booth speaking candidly of his Christian faith and its relationship to his role as an Test cricketer makes powerful reading, as does the account of the tragic disappearance of Pat Crawford from cricket by the time he was 24.

Haigh writes both lucidly and stylishly and his prose is both readable and elegant. He avoids the besetting sins of writing on sport: on the one hand, there is the hype which operates in endlessly-repeated images of war such as 'clash', 'showdown', 'battle', while, on the other, there is the dead hand of academic stodge which makes an innings by Greg Shipperd seem like a Haydn minuet. Here is Haigh describing the Indian-born South Australian leg-spinner, Rex Sellers, and his departure for England in 1964: 'Shortly before joining Simpson's team on the Orcades, he received an official envelope from Canberra: prime minister Menzies had expedited his Australian citizenship. Sellers was a full-fledged Australian on his way to being a full-fledged Australian cricketer.'

The substance of the book is complemented delightfully by the handsomeness of its dust jacket. Here, beautifully coloured in period tones, is the portrait of Keith Miller, taken during the 1950/51 season by

Ross Freeman of *Sydney's Daily Telegraph*, which hung in Menzies' office at Parliament House for many years. It was Miller who encapsulated an important image of Australian cricket of the period as being essentially debonair, athletic and carefree, the examination of which is part of the purview of this book.

In their article 'Beyond National Sport: Sociology, History and Postmodernity', (*Sporting Traditions*, vol. 12, no. 2, May 1996) David Rowe and Geoffrey Lawrence admonish much of Australian sports history for its 'celebratory or approving (as opposed to explanatory) orientation. Political, economic and social de-contextualisation seemed to be the price only too willingly paid for close historical description.' Haigh demonstrates that these oppositions are not pre-ordained as his book offers a substantial analysis of the forces mentioned by Rowe and Lawrence that does not attempt to erase the contribution of individual sportsmen and administrators to the period which he examines. In so doing he sacrifices neither analysis nor accessibility and thus confirms his position as one of Australia's most intelligent, informed and evocative writers on cricket.

Warwick Franks
School of Social Science and Liberal Studies
Charles Sturt University — Mitchell
Bathurst