

When Angels Call
By Craig Cormick, Stephen Harrison and Hal Judge, *Aberrant Genotype*
Press, 2001.
Reviewed by Robin Davidson

Gothic pictures, postmodern poetry and political yarns combine to form this short book published with funding from the Capital Arts Patrons Organisation.

It is an intelligent, soul-searching book from the heart of middle class Canberra, that deals with the relationship between white and black Australia, privileged and poor Australia, and between Australia and the tragedies of war-ravaged countries around the world. Remarkably, it tackles these issues with wit, grace and style.

The poems of Hal Judge will be familiar to many Canberra readers through performances at venues such as the Gypsy Bar and Tilley's Devine Café. It is high time that Judge's poems were collected between two covers, and this is a fine start. His language is hip, sharp and slick, peppered with high tech and post modern references, which highlight the pathos of his subject matter. Encounters between black and white Australia are rendered sensitively, with wit and no pretence of coming from any point of view other than that of a curious white.

The Mad Truth seems to typify Judge's work. Lines include: 'I called at the office./ The department had been floated and leased back.../ The Queen was not astonished./ She's a fridge magnet... /I took a package/ a brochure/ and accumulated parking fines...'

Unlike the Queen, I am astonished, by how prolific Cormick is, and how varied his work is. *When Angels Call* includes ten of his political short stories. Some are plain silly, but all are well written and the best are profound. The book is worth buying just for the story *Svebrenica*. It is a poignant and clever interrogation of how we feel about watching tragic events from distant countries on our TV screens, and the importance of knowing and remembering the stories of massacre.



Reel

Between the words sit Stephen Harrison's images — some chill, some cute, some clever. Some reproduce better than others, but the recurrent images of Ned Kelly and angels are striking, and weave their way through the pages to tie the book together, making it a beautiful object.

Angels recur through all works — prose, pictures and poems. They vary widely in their characters and purposes, but help to give the book sense of a whole work, rather than a collection of unrelated pieces.

I read an article years ago that said the way for a reviewer to damn a book was to call it 'important'. But at this time of questioning our national identity and the identity of our city, mostly by the privileged, a book that investigates privilege in a world of hunger, violence and dispossession is important. Much of the volume feels as if it is exploratory, searching for the language and metaphors to describe its ideas, and grabbing at bushrangers, advertising brochures, TV news, Christian icons, science fiction and computing. It feels like an experiment — an important experiment, that is also witty, readable and beautiful.

Robin Davidson is a freelance writer and theatre worker.

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