William Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature, 1940–1970*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2007, ISBN 9 7807 0223 5436, viii + 312 pp., $45.00.

The *cliché* of Brisbane as cultural desert has discouraged detailed explorations of the city's rich cultural history. As William Hatherell's corrective to this relative neglect points out, Brisbane citizens of the 1940s did not feel they were inhabitants of a cultural desert; rather, living in a pre-suburban concentration around a vibrant — if occasionally seedy — city centre and struck by an influx of foreign influences brought by the war in the Pacific, people engaged in a diverse set of cultural activities. Hatherell's range of knowledge about Brisbane's cultural history is possibly unmatched. He places the creativity of the 1940s in the context of the flowering of literary and dramatic culture in the 1930s, yet he defends his chosen chronological limits of 1940–70 in thoughtful terms, noting that while all dates are arbitrary there are particular reasons why these years form a coherent period. He also allows that such dates often operate in a retrospective way — the most famous example being David Malouf's *Johnno*, published in 1975 but containing loving descriptions of the Brisbane of three decades prior.

Hatherell chooses to concentrate on 'high' literary and visual culture, and buttresses this choice ably, noting that our concerns about 'high' and 'low' culture would have made little sense of the creators of the time. And he is admirable in bringing a demographic perspective to understanding how creative cultures are born. He notes that Brisbane obtained relatively fewer non-British migrants than other Australian cities, inhibiting the development of bohemian cultures where otherness was valued, and that the sheer rapidity of population increase meant a centripetal spreading of the city into vast suburban developments after World War II. The ousting of the long-term state Labor government for the agrarian-dominated coalition in 1957 ironically replaced a paternalistic but slow-moving government with one which had strong authoritarian instincts but which unleashed developmental forces with unpredictable effects.

Though no cultural desert, Brisbane was indeed a small pond, and one of the interests of the book is to see a wide cast of characters interacting with each other and with the 'threat' of modernism. Brisbane becomes one of the last holdouts as modernism fails to maintain a foothold in Clem Christesen's *Meanjin*, is fought off by the conservative Queensland Authors' and Artists' Association, and is attacked by influential Catholics such as James Devaney and Martin Haley, who oppose its obscurity and intellectuality. *Meanjin* departed for other (and perhaps friendlier) climes in 1945, but modernism's flag continued to be carried by the State High School-produced magazine *Barjai*, which had a close association and significant membership crossover with the progressive Miya studio. Laurence Collinson, Barrie Reid, Thea Astley, Charles Osborne and Barbara Blackman are names associated with these groups. The significance of these alliances and the roles of individuals within them may be debated, as Hatherell notes (pp. 126–27), but they did embody a special form of Brisbane eclecticism, wherein radical bohemians and

Eliot-worshippers, social realists, Communists and Catholics were never greatly distanced from each other.

Barjai-Miya forms the most conspicuous, if loose, artistic grouping of the period; as Hatherell argues, the Brisbane scene is probably more notable for its individuals than its groups. The remarkable Professor James Duhig, atheist, medical specialist and academic, emerges as one of the financial supporters of *Barjai*, a patronage that would have disturbed his uncle, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, if he had not already been sufficiently put off by his nephew's rationalist views. Hatherell notes that Rodney Hall's biography of another remarkable individual, John Manifold, made available the myth of the internationally recognised poet who chose to live at Wynnum, the well-born Cambridge graduate who elected to be a Communist and the high-art *aficionado* who collected bush ballads. Hatherell digs deeper into the myth and shows how Manifold's interest in bush ballads typifies his attempt to rediscover the left-nationalist artistic tradition best exemplified by the 1890s and to rejuvenate this tradition via the Realist Writers Group.

Hatherell's fine book draws out one of the great paradoxes of the creative history of Brisbane — artistic exiles such as Malouf, Porter and Harwood can be much more engaged with their experiences of Brisbane in memory and on return than those, like Manifold or the artist Jon Molvig, who chose to stay. This is an enviably accomplished work, moving seamlessly from cultural history to poetic analysis to demographic and historical concerns. In observing the cultural complexities of a city that has been sidelined by the tedious Sydney–Melbourne debates, Hatherell has brought a fresh perspective and discovered new material that will form the basis for future studies.

— Simon Ryan