Martyn Lyons. *The Uses of Literacy in Colonial Australia*
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Martyn Lyons has had a distinguished career in the field of book history with significant contributions to the history of readers and reading. Co-authored with Lucy Taska, his *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading, 1890–1930* (1992) broke new ground in developing an understanding of reading practices in Australia by focusing on the reading of everyday Australians. His subsequent research on reading and writing practices in France further demonstrated the value of looking beyond literary or elite readers to understand society on a larger scale than literary histories allow. Lyons's latest book, *The Uses of Literacy in Colonial Australia* (2026), adds to his body of research by foregrounding the range of everyday literacies that developed in the wake of European settlement and the introduction of print to the continent. Drawing on a variety of published and archival resources, Lyons presents a rich and diverse reading and writing culture that provides a firm foundation for future researchers to build on.

Lyons's account of the diversity of reading and writing cultures in Australia is enabled by a large corpus of autobiographical documents from across Australia, including journals, memoirs and bodies of correspondence. Lyons mines these sources for evidence of everyday reading and writing practices, but also evidence of the cultural, economic, institutional, and political networks that enabled reading and writing materials to circulate within Australian and beyond. These personal and individual accounts provide an approach for understanding why and how the authors of these documents wrote about the act of reading. Rather than following previous histories that have treated writing and reading as distinctly separate activities, Lyons demonstrates how the two activities are intimately linked, a writing impulse often driven by reading and vice versa. The prevalence of reading in Australia that Lyons describes challenges myths of Australia as primarily a sporting, outdoor nation. This is reinforced by the inclusion of not only solitary reading, but occasions where books were read aloud around campfires to reveal how the literate and illiterate could engage in a sociability often hidden in accounts of solitary and individual reading experiences. Building on his corpus of autobiographical narratives and drawing on a rich vein of Australian literary and book history, Lyons reveals what and how Australian readers actually read, augmenting previous histories of reading that have extrapolated reading practices from what was available to readers on library shelves.

The Uses of Literacy in Colonial Australia contains thirteen chapters and three "deep dives" that present the findings of more focused case studies. Lyons covers a broad range of reading and writing experiences, including on ships, in cities, on farms, and in prisons. This range of experience brings to light various levels of literacy in public and private spaces, providing a nuance that frequently escapes conclusions based on statistics and evidence drawn only from official records. It also expands the view of Australians as voracious readers of British books at the edges of the Empire. To this dominant mode of reading, Lyons adds first-hand experience of engagement with American and European fiction and non-fiction, also demonstrating the growing engagement of readers with Australian content. These reading experiences included poetry and religious texts, providing further indications of Australian readers' broad range of taste and appreciation. Lyons shows how this range and diversity was pronounced in country areas due to different levels of access to books and reading and writing cultures, and was further complicated in the entanglement of oral and print cultures in the case of First Nations readers and writers. The three "deep dives," "Ethel Turner as Romance Reader," "Joseph Jenkins's Australian Diary: 'Carving up my own Monument,'" and "The

Cooper Family Correspondence" provide models for future historians of reading and writing by making the most of available autobiographical and archival records.

The ongoing expansion and diversification of Australian literacy is seen in the increase in correspondence enabled by the development of transportation networks and the establishment of post offices across Australia. Lyons describes this as a "writing revolution" with parallels across the world, fuelled by emigration from Europe that led to new emigrants writing "home" about their experiences in a new land. The "epistolary literacies" manifested in letters, postcards, and greeting cards further diversify our idea of colonial literacy by including in history even the most intimate correspondence. This mode of literacy further expands the range of writing and reading experiences captured within broad scope of *The Uses of Literacy in Colonial Australia*. The range of autobiographical texts Lyons has used to support his observations and arguments about colonial literacy and the rich narratives of reading and writing experience that Lyons has gathered in this book remind me of UK RED, the reading experience database that presents similar examples of reading experience in other times and places. Martyn Lyons's *The Uses of Literacy in Colonial Australia* suggests a way forward for future research on the convergences and entanglements of reading and writing in Australia's colonial and transnational print and reading cultures – and, perhaps, the AUS RED that Patrick Buckridge was working towards more than a decade ago. This book demonstrates the value of expanding the idea of literacy to include what Lyons calls "feral readers," readers who do not conform to the expectations of dominant discourses about literacy in colonial Australia. By drawing attention to a range of autobiographical documents and foregrounding the uneducated and semi-literate, Martyn Lyons has given us a more comprehensive account of colonial Australian writers and readers that I hope will inspire other historians of writing and reading to continue what he has started.

Roger Osborne, James Cook University