



## Dancing in My Dreams: Confronting the Spectre of Polio

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To cite this article: Vicki Luker (2017) Dancing in My Dreams: Confronting the Spectre of Polio, Australian Historical Studies, 48:2, 316-317, DOI: [10.1080/1031461X.2017.1302292](https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2017.1302292)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2017.1302292>



Published online: 19 May 2017.



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On a more positive note, Martin references industrial and media systems of production that locate country music within the political economy of its national-yet-international sensibility.

Despite the criticisms, excellent new research is offered in *Yodelling Boundary Riders*, especially in the second half of the book about the LeGarde Twins, the rise of anti-Americanism, novelty acts such as the Schneider Sisters and Aboriginal singer Dougie Young, as well as *Spurs*, a magazine usefully mined by Martin for an understanding of late 1950s Australian country music. Discussion about the nomenclature of the music itself, as it traversed hillbilly to country to bush ballad to folk and on to Nashville and Tamworth, especially the annual Country Music Festival, suggests a richer set of concerns that require more analysis, especially the appeals of the bush ballad to authenticity. The book would be instructive as an introductory text for undergraduates learning about popular music history, offering suggestions for research trajectories as an introduction to country music and its meaning in Australia.

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***Dancing in My Dreams: Confronting the Spectre of Polio.***

By Kerry Highley. Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2016. Pp. 262. A\$39.95 paper.

This book tackles the polio epidemics that swept through Australia and much of the sanitised richer world for about half a century, until the 1950s. The title 'Dancing in My Dreams' comes from the story of one sufferer who used to imagine her inner self dancing above her splinted body, limbs 'lithe and free like those of a fairy being' (110). I had finished my second reading on a coach trip back home when an elderly lady sitting next to me asked whether my book was a 'good read'. I said 'Yes'.

Kerry Highley's work is multilayered. At bottom is the medical history of polio, the persistent mystery of polio's cause and route of

infection, and the discovery – littered with mishap, suffering and death – of effective vaccines invented respectively by Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin. While this may be the least important layer, because so much has already been written on these themes, they are deftly treated here too, especially in chapter eight.

Another layer concerns therapeutic approaches to the crippling effects of severe polio. The author counterposes two stories. One revolves around Dr Jean Macnamara, from Victoria, who was best known for the orthodox treatment of polio-induced paralysis, whereby patients were splinted and immobilised for a long time. Schematically speaking, this approach was doctor-authorised, and required the patient's passive compliance. The other features Sister Elizabeth Kenny, redoubtable but puzzling. She was best known for the promotion of the 'Kenny method', by which, ideally, the patient moved the affected body-parts and re-educated muscles, with the support of heated sand bags and dedicated nursing. Macnamara and Kenny can symbolise the hardening authority, in Australia, of 'the doctor' and medical professionalism versus 'the nurse' and alternative approaches. While Macnamara was made a dame, Kenny lost standing in her own country but in the end won huge acclaim in America. The divide symbolised by their opposition was eventually bridged by 'cooperative interaction' (109), but this came too late for most Australians affected by polio, and was anyway superseded by the use of vaccines.

The most important layer tends to the lived experience of polio-sufferers and their families. As the author explains in her acknowledgements, the history of medicine in Australia needs their stories. And here the author must be commended for her adept use of first-person accounts, including those gathered by Victoria's PolioNetwork and New South Wales's Post-Polio Network, and numerous internet sites. One can sense Kerry Highley's personal motivation. No doubt the prologue's small girl at Manly Beach in Sydney one Wednesday afternoon in 1952, called away from some pale, thin, splinted children at the water's edge, was Highley herself. The interlacing of so many words and memories from people who had contracted polio is a piercing wonder of her book. The faces and limbs in the photographs also haunt. While the interwar years were marked by

several major polio epidemics, the highest incidence of polio per 100,000 population in Australia was between 1951 and 1953; many readers, whether children of the vaccine era or otherwise spared, may well know people who manage their polio-induced paralysis today or who live with other effects of their much earlier polio infection.

Finally, the author, with characteristic lightness of touch, invokes the paralysed body. In one respect, this invocation follows the 'turn to the body' in scholarship over the last generation, scholarship that handles past and present cultures of health and disease. But in this book 'the body' is more than a now standard academic convention. The pathos and plight of the paralysed body remind readers acutely of the experience of polio, so often a child's, and so often marginal to the focus of medical histories. While the author demonstrates scientific mastery and an extensive research base, it is her sensitivity to lived experiences and to legacies of polio, her judgement, and her ability to draw together so many threads that impressed this reviewer. Highley gave the word 'cripple' new meanings for me.

Fault-finding is hard. Yes, once or twice the author repeats some lines of expression, and occasionally one might wonder where a work cited in the bibliography was used. But these quibbles are trivial.

Overall, the book certainly rewards a second read. Many are the ironies worth reflecting upon, not least those of gender suggested by the opposition between Macnamara and Kenny themselves. Yet the voices of polio-sufferers transcend all else. The polio kids on Manly Beach have been honoured.

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### ***Australian Religious Thought.***

By Wayne Hudson. Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2016. Pp. 248. A\$39.95 paper.

The hope, according to Wayne Hudson's preface, is to have 'brought together a substantial body of research and addressed some of it

in innovative ways' (viii). The book amply succeeds on both counts, synthesising a vast spread of material, in a wonderfully thought-provoking presentation.

The overall project is to draw attention to the often-overlooked quantity and quality of Australian religious thought. Refreshingly, Hudson reminds readers that: 'it is a mistake to try to read the historical record in terms of one self-evident "secular". On the contrary, in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia, the nature of the secular was what was being worked out' (66), and could involve various configurations of anti-clericalism, civil religion, personal engagements with the sacred in the landscape or in social movements, and more.

Instead of a single chronological narrative, the book is divided into six thematic chapters, each treated from European settlement to the present. Three of the six are explicitly to do with the tension between religious and its other, however construed: 'Shapes of Disbelief' (chapter one) helpfully distinguishes disbelief from unbelief, pointing out the 'strains of disbelief in ... religious thought' (2); 'Sacral Secularity' (chapter two) examines 'the tendency to associate the secular with sacral characteristics, while acknowledging its relative autonomy from ecclesiastical control' (61); and in 'Postsecular Consciousness' (chapter six), 'postsecular' means not "'after secular", in the sense of a linear movement', but 'a sensibility that accepts secularity in relevant domains, but evidences openness to what is beyond a strictly secular horizon' (197–8).

Of the remaining three chapters, 'Religious Thought and Philosophy' (chapter four) concentrates on academic philosophers who have worked on their discipline's relationship to religious thought, and includes both those who worked to establish religion's implausibility and its defenders. So that leaves just 'Religious Liberalism' (chapter three) and 'Theology in Development' (chapter five) dealing mainly and directly with themes that many readers would intuitively recognise as 'religious'.

In fact, the question of what counts as 'religious', central (as Hudson acknowledges) to recent work in religious studies, is one that he disavows at the outset. Hudson prefers a 'contextual understanding of "religion" and "religious"' that, he says, 'avoids over-precise definitions that preempt the field that needs to be explored' (xix).