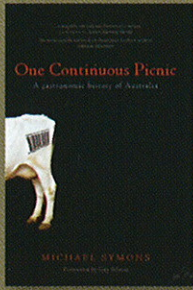


BOOK REVIEWS

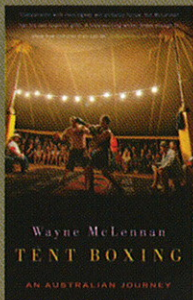
WORDS PAUL ROBINSON



ONE CONTINUOUS PICNIC

Michael Symons (MUP, \$33)

Celebrating its 25th birthday, this gastronomic history of Australia has been updated to address the 21st century. From mutton rations to meat pies it's been a tortuous journey. In colonial days we relied on long-distance takeaway. Now providores supply superb fresh produce to fine dining restaurants aplenty; but iconic Australian brands disappear offshore and hordes worship at fast-food temples. Something to sink your teeth into.



TENT BOXING

Wayne McLennan (Granta, \$28)

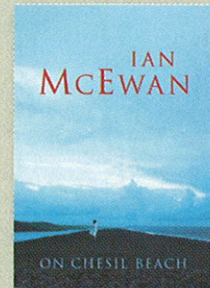
The arrival of the boxing tent in a country town was cause for celebration. To the beat of the drum, these travelling troupes of mainly Aboriginal fighters would challenge all comers to a hearty stoush. Ex-boxer McLennan signed on as a general dogsbody to one of the few tents still operating in Queensland. An insight to a vanishing Australia and the exclusive fraternity of hard-bitten "showies" who play by their own rules.

ON CHESIL BEACH

Ian McEwan (Jonathan Cape, \$30)



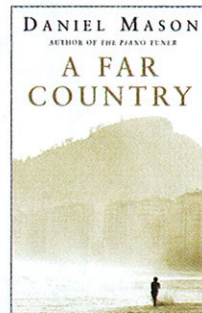
In the not-quite-swinging-yet '60s, a young couple spectacularly fails to consummate as the bride realises there is no way she can lie back and think of England. Edward and Florence's courtship has been idyllic, yet with so much left unsaid – and in the depths of emotion, there be dragons. McEwan masterfully chronicles how this tender, tentative romance transforms into a honeymoon in hell; how one hasty decision can reverberate for a lifetime.



COMPANY

Max Barry (Scribe, \$30)

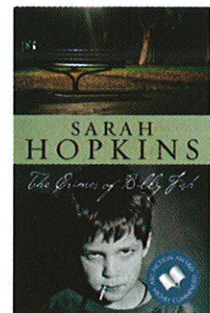
Jones is the new boy at Zephyr Holdings. He's not sure what he does, in fact, he's not sure what anybody does, although it seems to involve selling intangibles to other departments. Lifts only stop at certain floors, the CEO is invisible, there are no humans in HR and a stolen doughnut can lead to a witch hunt. It's a shell game, keep your hands in motion and no-one will be any the wiser. Jones begins to investigate, unwittingly shaking up the whole house of cards. A wicked satire on management practice and corporate culture.



A FAR COUNTRY

Daniel Mason (Picador, \$33)

In a remote South American village everyone is a slave to sugar cane. The monotony of backbreaking labour is relieved only by famine and conflict. For Isabel, who "sees further", the walls between real and spiritual worlds are gossamer. Following her brother to the big city, she finds her quest for survival has just begun. Mason's prose is lush and descriptive, evocative of that same American dustbowl experience of the 1930s Depression portrayed by John Steinbeck. But it tends to drift. Intensely atmospheric without a balancing substance.



THE CRIMES OF BILLY FISH

Sarah Hopkins (ABC, \$23)

Billy Fish is fresh out of jail – again. This time he's on parole, on methadone and has a place to stay till he gets back on his feet. Trouble is, Fish doesn't know anything but drugs and crime, the vicious treadmill that will see him back inside before too long. Unable to discard a damaged childhood, his only solace is his sister Rose, who's always been his rock. But when Rose's child is killed, his rock crumbles. Fish has to decide whether to be there for her. An authentically gritty, provocative tale of a man clawing his way out from between the cracks.



WHAT I'M READING

MAT McLACHLAN author of *Walking With The Anzacs* (Hachette)

"Somewhat unsurprisingly, I've just finished Les Carlyon's *The Great War* (Macmillan). It's an outstanding work. Carlyon has one of the best narrative styles of any Australian writer and also a wonderful ability to connect with the characters in his books. His quotes from letters, diaries and other personal sources make this book a really special read."