

Mattoid-Grange Manuscript Service

Report on the Manuscript: "Julia and the Moonbirds"

Submitted by: Mark Cornell

Set predominantly in the fictional town of Portmagee on Victoria's south-west coast, and charting the fortunes of a group of teenagers from their early music obsessions to the establishment of a band, The Moonbirds, and their international success with time in England and the US, "Julia and the Moonbirds" is a most interesting tribute to creativity that presents, as well, an intriguing re-examination of two decades (the 60s and the 70s) in, mostly, Australian popular culture alongside a richly-modulated hymn to the spirit of landscape, sea and nature. With a very feisty title figure and an equally left-leaning narrator set to interrogate most conventions, rules and social-cultural arrangements, and not only in the business of growing up and determining one's way, this narrative mixes idiosyncratic and rebellious behavior with a moving affirmation of fundamental values based in friendship and the land in ways that exceed vagaries of time and experience.

Mark Cornell writes lyrically about landscape. With appropriate reference to history's layers, and specifically to indigenous and Celtic cultures and perspectives, his south-west is a place in which the past is ever-present. Generational intersections combine with older archaeological, geological, meteorological and racial formations in ways that ensure rich lines of influence and the irresistible importance of memory, dreams and dreaming. This is the homeplace to which his main characters are attached and to which they return, both metaphorically and literally. Even as they grow older and as The Moonbirds travel, to England and the US, they take a powerful sense of place with them. It shapes their identity and it informs their music. As their predominant creative expression, music offers not only a means of escape from repression but associated opportunities too for personal exploration, relationships and the formation of identities.

On with the music. A compelling short history of key movements, groups and performers through two or three decades of popular music in the twentieth century establishes the wider context for The Moonbirds' growth and development. There's enthusiasm and knowledge in the process and it's interesting to see this take on music and its culture(s) as a source both of criticism and preservation, of satire and nostalgia. Groups and fashions change but the passion continues.

While the narrative structure is basically chronological, presenting the main characters from adolescence to maturity, flexibility is introduced in the narrative voice in the sense of an older or further perspective incorporating and situating specificities of the local and present. This is at no cost to the energies of idiomatic language or to the confusions of adolescent behavior. The title figure, Julia King, and the narrator, Shane McNamara, are fine creations, the one aggressively rebellious and talented, the other a multi-faceted register who is by turns driven and reflective, one to convey the full force of idiomatic language, sharp disenchantment and the uncertainties of sexual growth and longing alongside a wide range of sharp cultural reference and the attempt, amidst the hectic, to understand.

"Julia and the Moonbirds" is a racy social document with its "insider" information on creativity, growth and self-expression in a particular place and at a particular time in Australian experience. Exploratory and questioning, often critical, it nevertheless affirms values to be found in relationships and linked with the profound and formative effects of place and community. This is an engaging, often very

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moving, story of individuals making their way through the thickets of uncertainty, temptation, desire, deception and occasional success as they experience moments of joy and sadness, triumph and disaster.

Dr Brian Edwards