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## CONSUMING PASSIONS

### *City of Bookshops*

Melbourne has always had a reputation as a city of bookshops. The uncharitable might say it has something to do with the weather - all those dismal damp days we spend stuck inside. The locals prefer other, more intellectual explanations; but whatever the reason, it is still true that the city has an outstanding range of bookshops.

For a start it has the *International Bookshop* (17 Elizabeth St, Melbourne, phone 614.2859), sadly now Australia's only major left bookshop. It's a bit hard to find at first, hidden away on the second floor of a shabby city building, but it is well worth the trouble.

International and Australian politics, socialist and feminist theory, contemporary culture, gay politics and literature - it has a range of books and magazines unequalled in this country.

While you are there have a look at the records - folk music from all over the world, with a strong feminist leaning - and the secondhand books and pamphlets where there are always a few gems to be found.

The rest of the city centre isn't a wasteland either. Among the big general shops and the discount barns full of books that should never have been printed on trees that should never have been pulped, there are some good ones.

*The Greens Bookshop* (247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, phone 654.4833), attached to the Environment Centre, is not large but carries an interesting, largely Australian, selection on environmental issues. It also has an excellent range of T-shirts and posters.

Another city shop worth a particular look is the *Paperback* (60 Bourke St, Melbourne, phone 662.1396). It is a general bookshop, but has a touch of quality to its selection of contemporary literature, and carries a good range of books on history, politics, philosophy, and much more. Located near the centre of the entertainment area, it's open till 11.30 at night if you are into evening browsing. And it's next door to Pellegrini's, still the best coffee bar in the city.

For those with other things to keep them busy in the evenings, the *Little Bookroom* (185 Elizabeth St, Melbourne, phone 670.1612) might be worth visiting. On its shelves you'll find more books for children of every age than you have ever seen in one place before. A lot of them are the usual tedious mulch, but the range is so broad you can always find something worthwhile without trouble.

A stroll around Fitzroy can also be rewarding if you are looking for sustenance for the mind. *Shrew Women's Bookshop* (37 Gertrude St, Fitzroy, phone 419.5595) has an excellent range of books by and about women, both fiction and non-fiction, in a light and pleasant shop that doubles as an information exchange for women.

A few minutes' walk away is *Friends of the Earth* (222 Brunswick St, Fitzroy, phone 419.8700). The bookshop takes up part of a converted factory, and provides a pleasant place to browse though all the gloomy titles on the greenhouse effect and other impending disasters. That is not all the shop stocks, though. Current political and social issues, both Australian and overseas, are covered and there is a small but lively selection of fiction.

Further along the street is the *Grub Street Bookshop* (317 Brunswick St, Fitzroy, phone 417.3117). It is mainly a secondhand shop, but one of the best in Melbourne, well organised and labelled, with a good range of political titles along with lots of literature. One of its strengths is its material on Latin America, both fiction and non-fiction, an area which they are trying to expand even further.

From there it is a short walk across to *Kalkadoon Bookshop* (94 Smith St, Collingwood, phone 419.3361) recently forced to move from the city by rising rents. When it moved its emphasis changed a bit, so there is not so much on China now, but a lot on Australian history and politics, especially Aboriginal issues. It's also the place to go if you are looking for Eureka flags, and all the other bits and pieces the Australian Independence Movement made popular.

Alternatively, just one suburb away is *Readings Records and Books* (338 Lygon St, Carlton, phone 347.6633). The shop has changed a bit with its shift down the street, and probably with the change in character of the suburb to an inner city alternative to North Balwyn. But it is still a very good place to find the best of contemporary fiction, including a lot imported from the US, which you won't usually see anywhere else, and you can readily see from the window display the extent of its support for new Australian writing.

Of course, if you are out for an afternoon stroll, the best place in Melbourne to do it is St Kilda, and it also has a shop that provides many good hours of browsing. *Cosmos Bookshop* (112 Adland St, St Kilda, phone 534.4568) is a bit of an institution, but like *Readings* has changed with its move into new premises. Mainly for the better - some of the atmosphere may be gone, but it is a lot easier to find what you want, and the range of stock is big enough so that you should be able to, whether it's a good novel or something on current political questions.