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Abstract
Rex Ingamells, the Jindyworobaks chief, was a teacher at Unley High School when I went there as a student in 1946. He resigned soon afterwards, leaving his legacy, a Jindyworobaks anthology of Australian verse, which produced in me an aversion to my native muse which was not completely eradicated until I discovered the poetry of Les Murray. Because of it, failed to benefit from the courses in Australian literature given by Brian Elliott at Adelaide university, a loss which I now regret. The fault was all mine; through complacency and compliance with the prevailing fashions in culture, I lost an opportunity available to few people at the time, for whatever might be said for or against the original Jindyworobaks, they must be given credit for insisting on the value and relevance of Australian literature in a world still prone to the cultural cringe, and there could not have been many schools and universities in the forties and early fifties which tried seriously to develop an appreciation of local culture.

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Survival of the Jindyworobaks

Rex Ingamells, the Jindyworobaks chief, was a teacher at Unley High School when I went there as a student in 1946. He resigned soon afterwards, leaving his legacy, a Jindyworobaks anthology of Australian verse, which produced in me an aversion to my native muse which was not completely eradicated until I discovered the poetry of Les Murray. Because of it, I failed to benefit from the courses in Australian literature given by Brian Elliott at Adelaide university, a loss which I now regret. The fault was all mine; through complacency and compliance with the prevailing fashions in culture, I lost an opportunity available to few people at the time, for whatever might be said for or against the original Jindyworobaks, they must be given credit for insisting on the value and relevance of Australian literature in a world still prone to the cultural cringe, and there could not have been many schools and universities in the forties and early fifties which tried seriously to develop an appreciation of local culture. I must admit that even with me, they did not wholly fail, for despite my youthful disrespect for many of the verses in that green and gold cloth-bound anthology, they helped to shape my image of an Australian landscape whose beauties inhere essentially in its stark barrenness and hostility to the white man, and this, I suspect, is an image shared by others of my generation, for years later, I recognized it as precisely Rob's vision of Australia in Randolph Stow's Merry-Go-Round in the Sea.

These personal reflections are not merely self-indulgent. They exemplify the persistence of certain Jindyworobaks notions, despite the negative impact and collapse of the movement itself, but it is something of which we would have remained unaware had it not been for Brian Elliott's astutely annotated collection of Jindyworobaks writings. Even the editor himself admits to being surprised at the discovery, and gives part of the credit to Les Murray, who once described himself as 'the last of the Jindy-
worobaks'. While it is true that Murray explicitly, but also half-jokingly, recognized in his own attitudes to the Australian environment a similarity to those of the original Jindyworobaks, Brian Elliott's book enables us to see that there was in the Jindyworobaks vision of Australia a truth unwittingly shared by a number of artists whose work fulfils its ideals more successfully than the verses of the acknowledged members of the movement did. The argument that their analysis of Australian culture was mistaken because it failed to inspire accomplished poetry is now seen to be false (as it always should have been, for just as the truth of its arguments is no measure of the value of a poem, so is a good poem not the test of the ideas that inspired it). Brian Elliott (with a little help from Les Murray) has demonstrated that Jindyworobaks was an idea more powerful than the group of poets who espoused it could cope with, or than anyone understood at the time. His book is therefore much more than just a well-annotated edition. It offers a redefinition of part of Australia's cultural history which enlarges our insight into the recent past and relates it to some of our current preoccupations.

In part, this is because some of the ideas which the Jindyworobaks struggled to express, or embody in their poetry, are now generally accepted, or at least seriously entertained. For example, they were conservationists who denounced in their verse, as well as in their polemical writings, the ecological damage wrought by white men in taking possession of the country, and they detected specious elements in that cluster of ideas and attitudes which came to be called 'the Australian Legend'. In both, they foreshadowed the themes of many recent poems and novels, plays and films. But beyond this, they diagnosed the cultural problem which developed out of European colonization in terms which are now unexceptional, not just in Australia but wherever an attempt has been made to transplant European culture. It was clearly re-stated recently by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood in a Meanjin interview:

...probably what Canada and Australia have in common [is] that they have had a physical environment which has been out of synch. with their cultural environment, because their cultural environment has come from elsewhere.

This is precisely the problem which the Jindyworobaks detected and tried to resolve through an art which respected 'environmental values'. Brian Elliott, writing with an insider's understanding of the movement summarized the programme in The Landscape of Australian Poetry:
We are sick in our minds because we are out of key with our environment ... the rest follows from the poet's efforts to establish a harmony.

The concept of *environmental values* which Ingamells developed as the basis of the whole Jindyworobaks effort rested on the perfectly accurate observation that Australians have an ambivalent heritage, and any venture in Australian culture had to recognize this and try to connect its two sides. This is exactly how Ingamells meant the word *jindyworobak* (which he glossed 'to join') to be understood. It denoted a programme which aimed to join the heritage Australians derived from Europe with their experience in an utterly different antipodean world, to create an authentically Australian culture. It did not (*pace* critics like A.D. Hope) advocate the denial of one side of this ambivalence for the sake of the other. The Jindyworobaks believed (as Brian Elliott understood) that this was not an option for Australian culture, but a necessity, since a failure to recognize and reconcile the disjunctive sides of the colonial inheritance entailed psychic, social and political disorientation, as well as cultural impotence.

Viewed in the light of current thought about the impact of colonization in the New World, these ideas would be generally endorsed, or at least seriously considered. They certainly underly some of the exciting and original literature and films recently produced in places like Australia and Canada. Yet a generation ago, when advocated by a group of young poets centred around Adelaide, they were denounced on all sides, and failed to inspire any outstandingly original creative work, at least by their exponents.

The failure was partly one of talent. Rex Ingamells, the founder and theorist of Jindyworobaks, had certain misgivings about his own talent, as a letter he wrote to Flexmore Hudson in 1941 (printed in this collection) reveals. Even at their best, it must be admitted, the Jindyworobaks never accomplished work as fine as Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* or Les Murray's *Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle*. Moreover, it could be argued that at the same time the Jindyworobaks were expounding their theories, there were artists producing fine work which revealed similar perceptions about the Australian experience, though they had no connection with the Jindyworobaks, who either remained unaware of them, or failed to appreciate their achievements. This is obviously the case with painting in the forties and fifties, not just in the self-conscious ventures of Rex Batterbee and the group of aboriginal painters around Albert Namatjira, with which he was associated, but more creatively in the landscapes of Nolan, Drysdale, David and Arthur Boyd. It is also
evident in music like John Antill's *Coroboree* and in the jazz of the
painter and musician Dave Dallwitz, who was working in Adelaide at the
same time as Rex Ingamells.

These were some of the successes of the years when the Jindyworobaks
were active. There were others, but it is difficult to point to literary
examples, especially in poetry. The modest talents of Ingamells and his
group were not fostered through fellowship with artists making similar
discoveries in other fields. Nor did they flourish through association in
the movement. Rather, they were crushed by the criticism which their
movement provoked on all sides. They were denounced by some
genuinely committed to the cause of preserving a respect for aboriginal
culture, like F.J. Letters, whose lively comments are printed in Brian
Elliott's collection, and conversely by others like F.T. Macartney who
proved, on the basis of pure intuition, the fundamental inferiority of
aboriginal culture, and confidently dismissed the Jindyworobaks in the
same breath as the cultural anthropologists Harney, Elkin and Strehlow.
They were attacked by those who maintained the essential European
customs of culture in Australia and on the other hand by those
committed to a different, and incompatible, view of the Australian
tradition.

Brian Elliott has provided a good selection of the hostile criticism in his
book, and this demonstrates a point already noticed by Humphrey
McQueen — that the Jindyworobaks were working in a climate of ignor-
ance. Much of what was said against them was simply wrong or
uncomprehending. This is certainly true of the line of attack which was
probably the most damaging, exemplified by A.D. Hope's scathing
review in *Southerly* in 1941. The Jindyworobaks, he argued, made their
first mistake in continuing to see Australia untouched by the white man:

> They call this the real Australia and they see the Australia we have made as an
> artificial and fictitious thing.

But the mistake here is all A.D. Hope's and it is hard not to see it as a
wilful distortion of the Jindyworobaks position. The Jindyworobaks, like
all Australian poets of their time, and even most writing now, could
envision a virgin Australia, and perhaps actually discover regions where
it survived, but they were only too acutely aware of how the white man
had touched it. The result in their eyes was neither artificial nor ficti-
tious, but really destructive, leading to the extinction of the environment
in which Australians of all colours had their being. This perception
followed from the fundamental Jindyworobak tenet, that a vision which
joined the European heritage with the environmental experience of Australians revealed the true reality of their condition. Neither A.D. Hope, nor any other critics at the time, seemed to understand this idea or its implications, and hence they falsely imputed to the Jindyworobaks the notion that they were trying to assimilate Australian culture, and especially Australian poetry, to Aboriginal culture. This mistaken idea persisted until the present day, and together with the limited success of their verse, was the reason for their banishment.

The attack along these lines, though successful, is ultimately trivial, because it is based on error. Much more interesting was the hostility which Jindyworobak provoked from those who continued to uphold the Lawson-Furphy tradition, by the thirties and early forties still the orthodox but already the most tedious strain in Australian literary culture. There is evidence in Brian Elliott's collection which suggests that Rex Ingamells tried to stir this up, by the unduly hostile attitude which he adopted to the *Bulletin*'s Red Page, and its editor, Douglas Stewart. It is easy to see why. The image of Australia which crystallized in the nineties, and was to be described in books like Palmer's *Legend of the Nineties* and Ward's *Australian Legend* was quickly penetrated by the Jindyworobaks as a delusive version of the Australian experience, and they wanted to reject it in favour of their own which represented the matter more truly. Strangely enough, Russel Ward, who actually contributed to the first Jindyworobak anthology a sonnet, cruelly exhumed by Brian Elliott, on shooting a kangaroo, paid no attention to the Jindyworobak criticism in his study of the Australian image.

One explanation for the Jindyworobak formulation of a programme to supplant the Lawson-Furphy tradition is largely overlooked by Brian Elliott, perhaps because he is so much part of it himself. He explores the historical dimension of the movement, suggesting that it was a response to the international and political pressures of the thirties, but he does not say enough about the extent to which it was a regional phenomenon. Of course, the so-called 'Australian' legend is also a regional phenomenon, which emerged in that eastern region of the country which was originally New South Wales, and South Australians were never able to relate to it sincerely. They had no convict heritage, no gold rush, few Irish settlers, no heroic bushrangers and a system of colonization which favoured the selector and therefore did not generate a powerful squattocracy or a large, nomadic, pastoral working class. The white Australian legend entered into South Australia only as an infection from the east. The vision which South Australians had of their country, at least at the time
the Jindyworobaks were active, when the states were a lot more isolated from each other than they are now, was shaped by the distinct history and geography of the region. Adelaide then was still a very small city, functionally more like a country town, not socially and environmentally divorced from the surrounding countryside, but still integrated with it through a network of commercial, social, family and cultural connections. A short journey by road or rail north or east of the state capital led into regions of semi-desert, and Adelaide was then, in the imagination of its citizens, and in fact, because of the railway, the gateway to the arid heart of the continent. These were prominent features in the South Australian's image of his world; they were the actual conditions of existence in Rex Ingamells' birthplace of Orroroo, a railway town at the edge of the settled districts, adjacent to Goyder's line, which separates the temperate coastal region from the eighty per cent of the state which experiences a desert climate and an erratic growing season. The theory of 'environmental values' which Ingamells formulated was therefore the natural result of his own environment and the impact it had upon his imagination.

In keeping then with their environmental experience and the theory which Ingamells developed, the Jindyworobaks dismissed certain aspects of the legendary Australia, in verses like Ingamells' own *Unknown Land*, *Australia* and *The Gangrened People* and put forward an alternative, more comprehensive vision of the country. The best expression of the rejection, as well as the Jindyworobak alternative, is Ian Mudie's poem *The Australian Dream*. It is important to recognize, in this piece, as in other writings by Ingamells and Mudie, that the received Australian legend was not rejected because it was limited in its application, and failed to account for their own perceptions as South Australians, but because it was false and delusory in the image it presented of Australia altogether, through refusing to include the inevitable dark side of the picture, as it is revealed in the destruction of Aboriginal culture and the natural environment (amongst other things). The Jindyworobak vision was therefore not a mere option: it was offered as a truer and more comprehensive account of the Australian experience, which included the legends associated with white settlement, but placed them in a broader context which revealed their ambivalence. Thus, Mudie's myth, in *The Australian Dream*, includes the land and the Aborigines, but also the pioneers, with emphasis on their negative impact on the country, the explorers, Eureka, and 'you brave wild Kelly's'. Altogether, it really is nearer the truth than the vision captured in the received legend of Australia at the time.
The Jindyworobak vision, then, shifted the emphasis in Australian history back to geological ages, reducing the role of white settlement, and advancing the importance of the aboriginal occupation of the country. Fundamentally, however, the Jindyworobak Australia is essentially geological, geographical, topographical and climatic, unpeopled by settlers, drovers, bushrangers, shearers and the like. As Ian Mudie put it in a comment in the *Jindyworobak Review*, extracted in Brian Elliott’s collection:

The poets found their original inspiration for the birth of a truly national poetry in the spirit-centres of the lonely and unspoiled Centre, where the land had not been completely raped, nor the Aboriginal occupation of the land been totally degraded to the level of the whites...

Despite the failure of the Jindyworobaks as a movement and the temporary triumph of the critics who misconstrued their aims, the relocation of emphases in Australian culture which these poets advocated has been quietly accomplished in the quarter-century since Ingamells’ death, as novels and films like *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* and *The Last Wave* illustrate. The virtue of Brian Elliott’s edition is its revelation that Jindyworobak was a focus of true perceptions about Australian culture which survived the death of the movement and continued unobtrusively in the work of many artists, including the fiction of Randolph Stow and Thomas Keneally, in compositions like Peter Sculthorpe’s *Sun Musics* and George Dreyfus’s *Sextet for didjeridu and wind instruments*, and pre-eminently in the poetry of Les Murray, whose work finally vindicates the Jindyworobak idea.

Les Murray may be the last of the Jindyworobaks because their ideas have become so widely accepted they need never be re-stated. He is certainly a major poet because of the way his work reveals the underlying value in a movement we all thought was dead, and thus re-orientates the Australian tradition. He has kept the inescapable ambivalence of the Australian experience steadily in view, and has therefore been able to speak more directly and unaffectedly than any Australian poet before him. This is the basic source of strength in his sure-footed poetic idiom which joins a recognition of the cultural implications (for a white poet) of using English, with an unclouded sense of the Australian environment, in just the way the Jindyworobaks advocated. One reason for Murray’s success and the Jindyworobaks’ failure, as poets, is that whereas they could not transcend their anger at the destruction wrought by white settlement, Murray found an orientation to the Australian past, and a
poetic voice, which actually achieves a harmony, and can celebrate the Australian condition without denying its dark side.

With this new anthology we can trace the outlines of the tradition which Murray's work re-focusses. It is a splendid addition to the sequence of books with which Brian Elliott has displayed the qualities of Australian literature, and the last and best outcome of the original Jindyworobak inspiration.