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‘Amanda Laugesen, Australia in 100 Words’

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Amanda Laugesen, *Australia in 100 Words* (NewSouth Books, 2024), 288pp. Paperback. A\$32.99. ISBN: 978-1-7422-3790-9.

This truly is one of the most unique books that I have ever reviewed. In it, Laugesen selects 100 words which she thinks are of resonance or significance when it comes to Australian history and culture. This is no small task, but Laugesen is more than up to it as she is a lexicographer and the director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre at the Australian National University and chief editor of the *Australian National Dictionary: Australian Words and Their Origins*. Therefore, Laugesen is uniquely qualified to produce a book such as this and she does a remarkable job. The 100 words she selects range from 'deep time' to the 'Voice'. It includes well-known Australianisms such as 'dingo', 'dinkum', 'fair go', 'democracy sausage', 'mateship', 'lucky country', 'ocker', and 'bogan'. But she also has other significant terms either regarding Indigeneity, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation such as 'Country', 'frontier wars', 'Invasion Day', 'New Australian', 'Sheila', and 'Mardi Gras'.

Due to limitations of space, I will briefly discuss some of the words selected in the book outlined at the end of the previous paragraph. The first entry I read is 'Country' and I think it was very appropriate as Laugesen points out it is one of the most important terms for First Nations in Australia as the relationship between them and the land on which their traditional territories are is so fundamental to their worldview. The entry on 'New Australian' was of particular interest to me personally as my doctoral research explored migration and Australian government policy towards migrants in the post-Second World War period. As Laugesen quite rightly points out the Minister for Immigration at the time, Arthur Calwell encouraged 'old Australians' (Australians of Anglo-Celtic origin) to use this term for the new arrivals from Europe rather than other derogatory terms that were in circulation at the time.

The term 'Mateship' has had a very interesting history in Australia and can claim to be a truly unique Australianism. Laugesen highlights that for much of its history it was considered a very positive word to symbolise a close connection with a friend. However, in recent decades it has been approached with much more cynicism especially when politicians appear to use it for electoral purposes. But despite this a recent survey showed that most Australians regarded 'mateship' as an integral part of Australian national identity. The term 'lucky country' is also another interesting one as it traces its origin in Australian lexicon to Donald Horne's famous book *The Lucky Country*, with Horne using the term ironically, but its subsequent usage in Australian English has been in the literal sense to signify the many things that Australia is blessed with, i.e. good weather and plentiful natural resources.

The term 'Sheila' is an excellent example of power dynamics when it comes to language, i.e. the term is used *by* Australian men *to* describe Australian women, it is not a term generally used by the latter to refer to themselves, and the former usually use it in a derogatory way. This illustrates an important broader point that Laugesen makes: the majority of the 100 words highlighted in the book reflect the dominant position of white, Australian men in Australian society. The entry on the term 'Mardi Gras' also offers a very useful overview of the way in which derogatory language was also used against LGBTQ+ people in Australia for much of its history. The annual Sydney Mardi Gras Parade might today be seen as an international symbol of Australia, but it has

been a very long and difficult journey to get to this point, and the fight against continued prejudice towards LGBTQ+ Australians goes on.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. It truly is one of those books that once you pick it up and start reading it you cannot stop and put it down. It is extremely engaging and the entries on the different 100 words selected are interesting in themselves but collectively they also have much to say about Australian history and culture. So, it is a multi-dimensional book. Once you finish reading the book you cannot help but think what the future holds in store for Australian English. I think we can safely say that the very colourful and descriptive language will produce more fascinating words to add to the lexicon in the years to come. I highly recommend this book, and it will appeal to both specialist and general readers.

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