
A collection of essays addressing aspects of the nexus between popular culture, law and feminism is likely to engender interest across a broad spectrum of scholars engaged in socio-legal theory. *Romancing the Tomes* will not disappoint, providing distinctive, original and thoughtful contributions. Three factors mark the book as worthy of particular consideration – firstly, its contributors adopt a lively, provocative style which is hugely readable (you could take this book on holiday) yet delivers sophistication to serious issues. Second, the collection ranges over a great variety of topics, providing proper pause to the intellectual community in realising the scope of links between popular culture, law and feminism. Lastly (and this point derives in part from those foregoing), although the declared foci of the title may well appeal to very particular sectors of the academic community, it provides material of significance for all thinkers – whether primarily ‘social’, ‘political’, ‘cultural’ or ‘legal’ in their discursive identity – concerned with the currents which create our civilisations, from reception theory to cyberpornography, from the creation of the judicial imagination to the interconnectedness of fact and fiction, violence and love. Though the title denotes ‘feminist’ concerns as a clear strand throughout the book, the topics justify the view that feminist issues affect the entire social fabric. In other words, while a potential market is clearly flagged by the title, the book also contains more than enough material to challenge and discomfit those for whom links to ‘culture’ and ‘feminism’ might carry scant gravitas compared to ‘law’.

This review can provide only a brief indication of the range of issues encountered in *Romancing the Tomes*. With the three strands of popular culture, law and feminism in mind, the chapters explore the challenges posed to law by popular culture, the inescapable nature of processes of interpretation and the philosophical and textual prejudices underlying evidential process. Media such as the film *Pretty Woman* (with Grbich rendering a fascinating account of parallels between the modern romantic

text and mediaeval land holdings in the coming to being of power) and the book *The First Stone* (encapsulating a political doublethink still trailing feminism, as outlined by Genovese) provide sites of historiographic retrieval. The real practical difficulty facing the law in attempting to regulate the “borderless” world of cyberpornography is explored incisively by Baron, whilst a cautionary and tragic tale of cycles of exploitation via the internet is the subject of “Jail Babes” (Davies and Cook). The final section, entitled “Fictions of the Real” explores the promotion of certain (and unrepresentative) gender archetypes in the interface between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ claimed by the (Canadian) ‘True Crime’ genre (Strange and Loo); and the motivations and beliefs generated (and fed) by the large readership of crime fiction (Turnbull).

The book is divided into six sections, while the pause between chapters holds an alteration of register and genre in the form of poems contributed by M.J.C. Cronin – an attractive shift, though an occasional note on topics explored by the poems would have been welcome. Margaret Thornton’s “Introduction” provides a foundational exploration of the worlds of the popular and of law, demonstrating the very real and unexpected intimacies obtaining between those two seemingly disparate worlds. Terry Threadgold reflects, with theoretical breadth, upon the conventions through which law claims conceptual independence from cultural influences whilst at the same time being a product of culture, of the “scapes” with which to picture the world and the reading strategies available to read the world. The phenomenon presents most ironically in the continuous loop whereby law derives evaluations from popular culture, then asserts sufficient independence to proclaim meanings for popular culture and its creatures (that is, us). Isabel Karpin further explores this phenomenon, unearthing the substrata of meanings generated by popular culture, germinal to all citizenry, including the judiciary.

Several chapters descry lessons for the universal from the particular – Rosanne Kennedy in looking at the juristic prejudices concerning differing texts in the trial of Madeleine Smith, Seuffert through the oddly schizophrenic social engagement between romantic love and domestic violence, and Perera on the “alternative genealogy” provided by the institutionally and politically challenging folk texts of Indigenous Australians. Diane Kirkby provides a materially grounded legal history in her intriguing study of the great contribution to the social fabric provided by working women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the recreational world of the pub – a contribution often actively undermined by the law. In contrast, Margaret Thornton melds theory through her trenchant application of Baudrillard to the unconscious waltz between stereotypes of self,