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Miguel Pina e Cunha
*Universidade Nova de Lisboa*
mpc@novasbe.pt

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**A woman of influence: science, men and history**, by Ann Moyal, Crawley, Western Australia, UWA Publishing, 2014, xi + 201 pp., A$34.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781742585970

In *A Woman of Influence*, Ann Moyal, the successful and well-known Australian historian and independent scholar, presents a revealing collection of personal reflections on members of her family, friends and the colleagues she has met over a long life. Moyal has deservedly earned the status of elder in the Australian scholarly community. She has made significant contributions to many aspects of Australian history, specifically to the history of science in nineteenth century Australia. Moyal's work covers a wide historical scope. She has written on topics as diverse as the history of telecommunications in Australia and the scientific controversy over the classification of the platypus. In fact, a page at the beginning of this volume lists an impressive 11 books by Moyal, all single authored.

Of specific interest to *Prometheus* readers is the fact that in the early 1980s, Moyal was influential in the foundation of the journal with the late Don Lamberton, Stuart Macdonald (currently the general editor) and Tom Mandeville. With hindsight, it can be seen that Moyal's interest in history was a welcome addition to the broad range of disciplinary inquiry favoured by the founding general editor, Don Lamberton. In 2007, Moyal was awarded an honorary DLitt by the University of Sydney for her contributions to history (60 years after graduating with an Arts degree from that institution). Moyal has made her mark on the Australian scholarly landscape and *A Woman of Influence* provides a reflective insight into how this contribution was shaped. This latest work can be read in conjunction with an earlier auto-biographical effort, *Breakfast with Beaverbrook*, in which she explores her relationship with Lord Beaverbrook (Max Aitken, the Canadian media magnate, UK Cabinet Minister and historian) during the 1950s, when she worked as his research assistant (Moyal, 1995).

For anyone interested in what it takes to be a truly independent thinker and public intellectual in a male-dominated world, Moyal's reflective stance is a good place to start. Moyal does a marvellous job in exploring themes that are fundamental to human relationships and meaning: love, work, the search of knowledge and the search for a sense of meaning from life. 'Historian' is only one of the labels that can be comfortably placed on Moyal. The term 'independent scholar' appears equally appropriate. Her relationship with universities and with some academics has been strained, which makes her life story and reflections all the more interesting. She has a passion for ideas as well as a desire to criticise and undermine the barriers created by gender inequality and 'mini men' as she calls them. Moyal is an

advocate for both a new, less gender-discriminating world, but also one aware of its links to the past. It is an interesting and intriguing mix.

The book's introduction provides a clear guide to what Moyal is trying to achieve. While this work follows on from *Breakfast with Beaverbrook*, it takes a different direction. What can be gleaned from the wisdom that comes with age is what Moyal has in her sights in *A Woman of Influence*. Having said this, the book is not a self-congratulatory tome. Far from it. The book is also about others and about scholarly culture. A revealing quote from Michael Ondaatje's (2007) *Divisadero*, included opposite the title page, sets the tone of the book: 'Everything is biographical. There is a hidden presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives'. This is a very insightful theme, well tested by Moyal.

Moyal declares at the beginning of the book that she is a historian, but perhaps more a teller of stories where the telling of the story is just as important as the story itself. Evidence of this lies in the book's narrative themes. Moyal writes with the intention of being personally reflective, but with a desire to set things out chronologically. These are the essential elements of good biography. The result is a book that is highly readable with delightful prose. Initially, I had thought the title to be mildly presumptive, but upon reflection it is in keeping with her agenda, the telling of a story. Finally, Moyal is a romantic, in love with historical figures from the past, but equally enamoured with the present. This combination makes the book a work of wisdom.

The book's chapters, while broadly chronological, progressively build a nuanced picture of Moyal's life and reflections. Chapter 1, 'A sense of place', is about family and origins, and establishes Canberra as central to her life and experiences. The chapter begins with the sentence 'I have been in love with Canberra for over sixty years'. The various images evoked about Canberra are reflected in Moyal's life – something distinctly Australian (a bush capital, distant, remote, developing), a source of political power (history in the making, but not short-sighted self-serving politics), and a centre of science and learning. Chapter 2, 'Being a historian', reveals how writing history has been a beacon for Moyal throughout her life. Her recollections of life at Sydney University in the late 1940s are recounted as a realisation, following her return from the UK and working with Beaverbrook, that little had been done on the history of science in Australia. This is partly chronological, but also a reflection of how one thing led to another through the lens of time and hindsight. The chapter provides a revealing insight into the relatedness of knowledge, people and events that can shape an individual life. Chapter 3, 'The yellow rug – the story of a marriage', is a deeply emotional account of the ups and downs in her 30-year marriage to the late Israeli physicist, Joe Moyal. It reveals the incredibly complex nature of human relationships, for which there is no straightforward response, except for love. Chapter 4 picks up a theme of recovery and new direction. A stressed personal life in the 1990s gives way to a new venture with Moyal as one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia (ISSA) in 1995. Moyal places herself in the frame, so to speak, in the creation of ISSA and also as founding honorary editor of *Prometheus* in the early 1980s (p.37). This is Moyal asserting herself in the narrative. She is clearly disenchanted with the constraints imposed on academic historians by universities. The romantic side of Moyal's multi-dimensional character reappears in Chapter 5 with her account of a late love, a story about an exciting relationship with a

new man in her life, whom she mysteriously calls 'M'. The chapter is as emotionally charged as the preceding one on her marriage to Joe Moyal.

Chapters 6–11 can be broadly catalogued as reflections on Moyal's life among historians and others. Notable figures are the Australian historians Keith Hancock and Manning Clark. Chapter 7 is devoted to Manning Clark's outstandingly talented, Dymphna, less recognised than her husband. Consistent with Moyal's appreciation that women are not afforded the respect and accolades they deserve, she explores Dymphna's powerful intellect. Dymphna appears content with never having a place in the sun. This is a mildly sad story, offset somewhat by Moyal's obvious admiration of Dymphna. Alan Moorehead and Eleanor Dark receive a chapter each before Chapter 10, 'A long chain of clever people', reflects on a number of prominent Australian scholars and politicians. Moyal pays tribute to the contributions of the Australian politician Barry Jones and the late Don Lamberton, as being way ahead of their time in promoting an awareness of the information society and the economics of information. These chapters are revealing as they show that ideas, embodied in people, are important in shaping new themes of thought. Social and economic development has its own relentless (but hardly deterministic) trajectory, but from time to time thoughtful story telling can provide valuable insights and opportunities for reflection. Quite often, the wisdom of what they have to say is ignored, left waiting to be revealed at a later time. This is shown in Chapter 11, which deals with the writing of Moyal's popular book on the platypus. In *Platypus: The Extraordinary Story of How a Curious Creature Baffled the World*, Moyal recounts and unravels a nineteenth century scientific controversy, namely the debates on the classification of the platypus (Moyal, 2001). She reflects on how this book was written and, in keeping with her style, the public acclaim and international recognition it received.

Chapter 12, 'The bottom line', demonstrates that the pursuit of scholarly objectives is a luxury in the face of family and personal crises. It is an emotional story about her free-spirited sister (Mimi) and her battle with a cancer that ultimately claimed her life. This chapter is weighty enough for any life story, but Moyal bounces back with a lively account of her writings on the colonial geologist, the Rev. W. B. Clarke. This is a refreshing change of pace. Chapter 14, 'Only connect', can be best described as a chapter on friendship and the importance of a meaningful life. It focuses on two of Moyal's friends, Jenny and Wilma, with very different backgrounds. The chapter picks up on Moyal's work in the late 1980s and early 1990s on the importance of the telephone to the social fabric of Australian society, especially how women communicate and maintain family links. The richness that Moyal has found in these friendships is a testimony to her ability to sense what is truly important in human relationships and communication.

Chapter 15 is about old age. Here Moyal cites De Beauvoir, Voltaire and Monet among others to make the point that while ageing is inevitable, with it can come great opportunities. It catches up on us, leaving us wondering what foreign country we are in. Moyal is well aware of this and recommends a practical approach by always having projects to work on. A positive mental outlook is essential too and one of Moyal's exemplars is Dame Julian of Norwich. When confined in a cell during an outbreak of the Black Death, Dame Julian greeted everyone with the spirited words: 'All will be well and all manner of things will be well. Go forth gladly and gaily' (p.163). Chapter 16, 'Out of the west', is about the academic and former vice chancellor of the University of Western Australia, Fay Gayle. Moyal admires

Gayle's courage and the determination she showed in leading a major university, the University of Western Australia (UWA), in the face of opposition and discrimination. Fay Gayle died in 2008. It is fitting that UWA Publishing is the publisher of *A Woman of Influence.*

Chapter 17, 'Waving to Beaverbrook', brings us back to a man who had a major impact on Moyal's personal and professional life, Lord Beaverbrook. He died in 1964 at the age of 85. One sees how Moyal has taken a lead from Beaverbrook throughout her life by questioning the powerful, having several irons in the fire, and taking risks. It is in this chapter that one gets the feeling that Moyal has been leading us on all the time. As Beaverbrook put himself in the frame, so too has Moyal. The title of this book, *A Woman of Influence*, is therefore not a presumption, but a bold statement of how Ann Moyal has pitched her life. She has played her part enthusiastically, entertainingly and provocatively.

A review of *A Woman of Influence* may seem incongruous in a journal that focuses on innovation. It is not. Moyal's book is a reminder that it is just as important to be open to innovation and change in our personal lives as in the economy and in organisations. Moyal's life is a life marked with successes and failures. It is also one of a person not afraid to innovate, experiment, take risks and speak out.

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Richard Joseph
*John Curtin Institute of Public Policy, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia*
rajoseph4342@hotmail.com

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