

Hoyle Boyd

The Great, Great Australian Dream, by Robin Boyd. Pergamon. Recommended price \$5.95.

BOOKS

Hang on mate!

She'll be right... if we can catch up

THE LATE Robin Boyd must have loved the Australian people — he put up with so many things about them that made him wince.

But he told them why — if they cared to listen.

From the 1950s, when he began to complain in print about our shortcomings, he lectured in his quiet, mannered tones.

Now, tragically, he is dead, but his words pursue us.

His last book, published posthumously, scarifies the revered Australian tradition that "she'll be right, mate."

She flaming well won't, retorts Boyd.



Many things and attitudes anger him. In a book of satirical fantasies, he hits at what he sees as crippling illusions about the Australian way of life.

There's the matter of the way we talk. He says Australians often can't communicate adequately with each other because they are afraid of ridicule if they use the English language fully.

They are even loathe to discuss the Australian

accent for fear of being judged snobbish. And yet many of our disc jockeys sound like refugees from Nashville!

Hectoring, lecturing and satirising, Boyd seems to be arguing that, as a people, we have yet to grow up.

But what seems to have bugged him most in his last year was what looked like the sheer hopelessness of the situation for which Boyd blames our origins and physical isolation.

He also notes with pain an almost slothful, mathematically predictable time lag of 15 years for U.S. innovations to be accepted in Australia.

It took 15 years for television, first black and white, then color, to reach us.

The same period lapse occurred before the acceptance of air-conditioning ("whazzermatter with yer," my sweltering non-conditioned relatives used to berate me whenever I went back to share a Perth heat wave

with them, "you goin' soft or sumpin'?").

Boyd says it took as long for us to cotton on to most other new approaches in the design of buildings, appliances, equipment or furniture. The reasons, usually said to be economic, lie much deeper, he contends.

The delays are conscious, he says. They are obeying an unwritten law enriched in the Australian psyche.

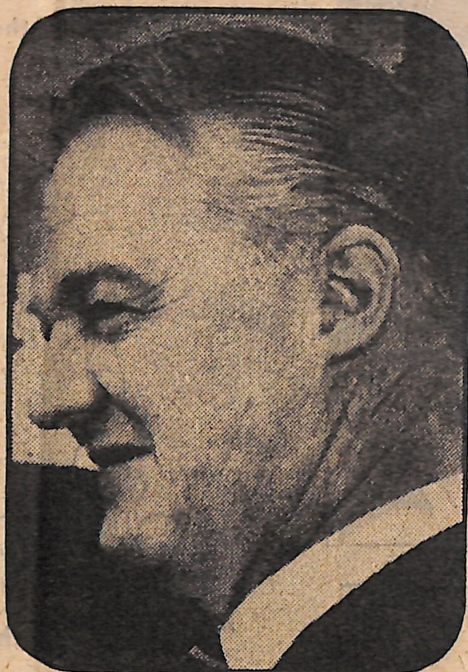


Boyd claims that the authorities who uphold the delays, fully supported by the Australian community, know as well as anybody that they are fighting the calendar, that change is inevitable. But they don't want to be involved personally in it — and the community won't push them.

Our leaders in every field "keep in touch" with world trends — but they are not really members of the club, just politely tolerated honoraries. They are too far removed, physically and philosophically, from the roots, the sources.

Some readers will roar a applause for Boyd's findings, others will hoot their disagreement. But most will squirm acknowledgment that he has touched some raw spots.

Not all the satire is successful. Here and



ROBIN BOYD . . . his words pursue us.

there it falls very flat and in other places flogs obviously dead horses.

But other shafts go home. I liked the one that pillories a Boys' Own Paper kind of romantic chivalry dear to many Australian males.

It concerns a U.S. travel industry executive with morbid passions who has an "abo shoot" set up for him in the outback.

His guides' consciences

seem unmoved until he takes aim. Then one of them knocks the rifle from the American's grasp and beats him up.

"What did you do that for?" another guide asks.

He is told: "The dirty rotten Yankee. You know what he done? He aimed at the women and kiddies."

Keith Connolly