But Wait, There’s More offers an overview of the Australian advertising industry during the twentieth century. The text has been adapted from a doctoral thesis that its author, Robert Crawford, completed at Monash University in 2002. Crawford’s book is an ambitious one, and it contains many fascinating and nuanced insights. There are also some areas throughout the text that clearly deserved further discussion.

Crawford’s book opens in 1900, when advertising in Australia was in its infancy. During this period, the relatively small number of advertising agents in this country faced an uphill battle trying to dismantle their “shady” image as purveyors of “dishonesty and deceit” (6). They also had a limited number of outlets (usually newspapers) in which to advertise. Crawford covers the growth and achievements of these agencies through two world wars, various rises and falls in the Australian economy, and the changing (though frequently sceptical) attitudes of consumers towards advertisements. But Wait, There’s More concludes in the year 2000. By this stage, advertising had been transformed dramatically by “technological developments” such as the television, VCR and the internet (255).

Crawford’s central argument is that the “significance” of the advertising industry in Australia has been overlooked (5). “Over the course of the twentieth century,” he observes, this industry “went from a disorganised collection of advertising agents eking out an existence on newspaper commissions to a multibillion-dollar enterprise” (5). Advertisers have had to overcome persistent negative perceptions about their profession, as well as a range of broad-ranging social, economic and technological changes in or-
order to continue “convert(ing) audiences into consumers” (3). In other words, the ongoing success of the Australian advertising industry has been “neither assured nor did it come easily” (5).

Crawford’s decision to focus primarily on advertising agencies is a wise one given the breadth of his chosen topic. As he puts it, these agencies have been hugely important because without them there would have been “no advertising industry” (4). His prose is, though, interspersed with reprints of advertisements that circulated throughout Australia during the twentieth century. These include a 1930s advertisement that contains the slogan “drink beer … it’s good for you!” (93), the “Life Be In It” ads featuring the slobbish “Norm” that first appeared during the 1970s (181), and the 1980s AIDS advertisements that featured the scythe-wielding “Grim Reaper” (227). The inclusion of these advertisements provides a unique insight into the different images and messages that have been used to sell products over the years.

Overall, I found the section dealing with advertising during the 1930s to be the strongest. This decade saw the rise of the ‘Great Depression’ within and outside Australia. Crawford thoroughly explains the various strategies which advertisers adopted to sell products during this “time of economic hardship” (70). I also liked the comparison he drew between advertising and the cinema. Crawford argues that “in the way that the cinema offered a temporary reprieve from daily hardships … advertisers presented fantastic and fanciful images” (73). These included images of nubile men and women frolicking on sunny beaches. Such imagery, he writes, “contained an obvious message – consumers could partake” in a trouble-free and financially stable existence “if they consumed the correct brand or product” (73).

Also, Crawford’s analysis of women and advertising in Australia is extremely astute. That “women were recognised as an important and lucrative market from the industry’s earliest days” is no new insight (150). Crawford charts the changing attitudes that advertisers took towards female consumers throughout the twentieth century, and the responses of feminists towards the use of demeaning stereotypes of women in advertisements. Additionally, Crawford points out that by the 1990s, a considerable number of women had jobs within advertising agencies. They were still, though, unlikely to occupy senior positions within these agencies and this has been cited as one reason for the persistence of the aforementioned gender stereotypes in advertising imagery (165).

Problematically, a large portion of But Wait, There’s More focuses on the first half of the twentieth century. Crawford even includes a whole chapter on “famous admen from 1900 to 1950,” despite the fact that these dec-
ades are given ample discussion in several other chapters (33). Conversely, he only briefly mentions the changing nature of advertising and consumers in the 1990s. I refer specifically to his discussion of the internet. I agree with Crawford that the internet has “emerged as a key advertising medium” which “(i)n many ways differs little from past advertising forms: spam emails for junk mail … sponsored banners for press advertisements” (256). Yet he does not go a step further and explore the myriad similarities and differences between these “forms.”

Consider, too, Crawford’s reference to the emergence within the 1990s of ‘generation X’ (broadly defined as men and women born between the mid-1960s and the late-1970s). Crawford correctly points out that members of this so-called “generation” were “characterised by (their) jaded and altogether cynical view of the media industries” and were thus “difficult” for advertisers to sell products to (257). He does not, though, mention that the concept of ‘generation X’ was devised by advertisers to describe a young and media-savvy social group. Crawford does not mention the various techniques advertisers used to market products to this group. Nor does he discuss the creative ways in which media-savvy consumers of all ages have responded to such advertising (I am thinking here of practices such as “culture jamming,” which has been most famously analysed by Naomi Klein in her 2000 book No Logo).

Finally, I was struck by the frequent comparisons between advertising and prostitution. Crawford quotes the author Bryce Courtenay (himself a former “adman”) as arguing that “(a)dvertising men are whores …. Servants to people who know less than us, we are obliged to do what we are told, and we invariably back down in a fight” (3). Similarly, in the Foreword, Phillip Adams writes half-jokingly that advertisers are “whoring in a very big brothel” (iii). There may well be some similarities between the selling of one’s creative and intellectual services and the selling of one’s sexual services. However, there are also many important differences between them. In not suggesting these differences, Crawford risks endorsing the simplistic and politically dubious stereotype of advertisers as corporate “hookers” (iii).

As a whole, But Wait, There’s More offers an engaging perspective on the trials and tribulations of the Australian advertising industry between 1900 and 2000. The text does, as I have suggested, focus primarily on the first half of this century. Nevertheless, Crawford’s book is still a fitting testament to the survival skills that advertisers have developed and which they will no doubt continue to utilise through the twentieth century.

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