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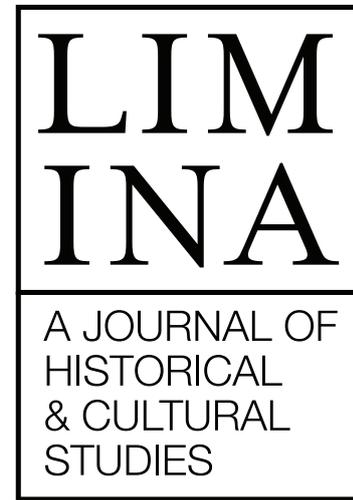
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Submitting to Limina

Information regarding the journal and how to submit can be found at <https://www.limina.arts.uwa.edu.au/future>.

Cover Image

In Dreames. Digital image by Brook Guidry

Straw, Leigh, *The Petticoat Parade: Madame Monnier and the Roe Street Brothels*, Fremantle, Fremantle Press, 2021; paperback, pp.200; RRP: \$32.99; ISBN: 9781760990558.

Academic, historian and writer Leigh Straw has become an authoritative and award-winning voice in Australian true crime, shining light upon the often-forgotten female figures of the genre. Having penned biographies of Kate Leigh, Dulcie Markham and Australia's first female detective Lillian Armfield, her latest title, *The Petticoat Parade: Madame Monnier and the Roe Street Brothels*, continues Straw's work uncovering the lives of fascinating, innovative and often controversial women.

The fair damsels who inhabit the Rue de Roe conceived the brilliant idea of a petticoat parade each afternoon for the entertainment of the tired and jaded travelers. And so it came about that every afternoon and evening the residents of the various villas in the Rue disported themselves on their verandahs, but with the advent of the hot spell petticoats were cast aside, and travelers had a vision of the fair demoiselles clad only in the flimsiest of flimsies (98).

This highly readable true crime biography is also a social history of Perth/Boorloo in the early twentieth century. At the center of the book is Josie de Bray, aka Madam Monnier, aka Marie Louise Monnier, a brothel madam who owned most of Roe Street from WWI up to the 1940s. Josie's life was truly remarkable and exhilarating, from surviving an attempt on her life by a returned soldier in 1917 to her establishments being at the center of underworld violence during the 1920s. An ill-fated returned to France before WWII to visit family saw her bombed and then captured by the Germans. Whilst she was a prisoner of war, she was still collecting rent from her brothels and when she finally made it back to Perth/Boorloo in 1947 she was rich, remaining so until her death in 1953.

The breadth and depth of Straw's research is not simply illustrated by an extensive list of notes and references, but more so in the fascinating and obscure historical facts and people that Straw weaves through her narrative. *The Petticoat Parade* is a keenly observed account of the way women who lived in the shadows of society used their ingenuity to carve out lives that challenged all notions of contemporary, white womanhood. As well as the women making their living off sex and sly grog, this also includes those who were sent to police them. Straw recounts one of the 'unintended benefits' of WWI had been the employment opportunities it provided for women, including in the traditionally male-dominated field of policing. After signing indemnity agreements which absolved the police department of any responsibility for their safety and welfare, the Women Police wore a hat and gloves, and the handbag they carried was their only form of protection. Fascinating to read are the eleven duties of the Women Police outlined in the Annual Police Commissioners Report of 1917 and how focused the Women Police were on prevention of crimes committed by, and against, young girls and women. Straw writes that, '[I]like the brothel madams themselves, the Women Police were powerful, in their own way. It often seemed as if they worked for opposite sides, but they too were keepers of the secrets of Roe Street' (83).

For all the ways in which Straw's work challenges the gendered nature of Australian crime histories, it shares with those narratives the same lack of First Nations people in the telling. The Whadjuk Noongar people who are the Traditional Owners of land on which Straw's narrative takes place are not mentioned by name and barely at all in general. Whilst I was engaged and fascinated by the stories told in this book, I continually wondered about this forgotten aspect of Straw's historical record.

Camilla Palmer

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