

## BOOK REVIEW

Tredinnick, Mark. *The Blue Plateau: A Landscape Memoir*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2009.



*The Blue Plateau* is a series of reflections on the Blue Mountains, their history, geography and geology, and on the people who have made these mountains their home.

Mark Tredinnick - poet, essayist and teacher of writing - draws on the memories, books and photographs of people who have lived in the mountains for far longer than he has, and puts these together into what he describes as "an artistic – not a journalistic, scientific or academic – endeavour ... not a social or natural history of the place ... a kind of divination, an experiment in seeing and listening".

Tredinnick tells the story of the mountains through its inhabitants: the Gundungurra people who were there first and remain still; the numerous families who tried, some successfully, some unsuccessfully, to tame the land; the firefighters and stockmen; and through his own experiences as a young academic trying to fit into a rugged landscape far from the city.

In sections entitled Valley, River, Catchment, Scarp, Pasture, Fire, Home, he traces the stories of the Kanimbla Valley and the Kedumba Valley, of Dargan and Cox's River. In telling the stories of these places he relates the stories of the people whose lives are intimately entwined with the mountain plateau; in listening to the stories of the inhabitants he hears the voice of the land.

Stories of settlement and struggle, of hopes and disappointments, of fires and floods, of births and deaths, of despair and endurance. May Maxwell's pragmatic diaries, a series of twenty little books, recorded the details of her life in the valley during the 1960s and 70s: "Tuesday, 7 August 1973. Fog early then sunny. Men drafting & drenching steers fixing fences. Les got into strife with steers at Kedumba Crk while Brian cut a load of wood for himself." From his place at Dargan, Henryk Topolnicki related how he became a refugee and left his home in Poland to make another home in a place where he could "start to breathe, and ... see hope for the first time embodied". He found this on the blue plateau. In this creative work, the stories of the people are interspersed with discussions of the bush, of creeks and bushfires, of language and of life.

And finally, the author's reflections on his experience of writing this book make for moving reading: "a place is all the interconnected stories, relationships, energies, and forms of life at play in it, including one's own being there, the memories, dreams and desires one has known there ... to witness one's place, or even just to do one's work under the influence of that place, is to draw a picture of one's soul. And to lose sight of one's place is to lose sight of one's self."