

means ANZUS and therefore defence cooperation, but every alliance has political and economic sides to be explored. *The Partnership* would be far more well-rounded and present a much stronger argument overall if those non-military aspects of the alliance were examined in greater detail.

On the whole, Sheridan's new book is an enjoyable read with many fascinating glimpses into the day to day workings of the Canberra–Washington link. No doubt Sheridan's unmasked and widely recognised political persuasions are the reason he was given such tremendous access to senior Australian political and military figures to conduct his research, but it is also the reason he fails to ask the tough questions on the less positive and non-defence related alliance issues.

Reviewed by Andrew Robertson

*The Education of a Young Liberal*

by John Hyde Page

Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2006  
328pp \$32.95  
ISBN 0522851762

John Hyde Page's book *The Education of a Young Liberal* is a very hard book to hate. And as a proud member of the Liberal Party's WA Division I tried very hard. Indeed, it is probably a mistake to have a member of any political party review such a book because of the several reviews published to date, each goes immediately to its accuracy and political meaning.

Liberals cannot easily forgo a sometimes depressing obsession for introspection. As I am no exception, this review will also stray into the 'is it all true?' and 'what does it all mean?' territory. However, before the navel gazing it seems only fair to comment on the book as entertainment.

It appears Hyde Page's career in politics is all but over and he is now studying law. In a profession that necessarily places a high value on confidentiality, the book's whistleblowing may handicap a legal career. However, none of this should be cause for concern because the author has a clear talent for writing and a gift for characterisation. Whether accurate or not, the several pages devoted to Peter King and Malcolm Turnbull leave the reader with a sense that he has been privy to some deep insight into complex and textured

human beings.

Considered as a memoir, the writing has little of the self-serving obviousness of Mark Latham's 'diaries' and far more of the honest self-appraisal of Alan Clarke's famous and fabulous contemporaneous political journals. Like Clarke, Hyde Page writes with a wondrous ability to lay bare his own oddities of character and to describe with real wit his follies and those of his fellow travellers.

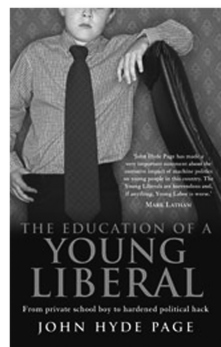
The way the book really worked for me, however, was as a novel.

This is not meant to be a criticism of the type that several reviewers have already made: that the book is little more than a collection of exaggerated reminiscences which, like most good sophomoric stories

meant to impress girls, may have some tenuous basis in factual events but have taken on a life of their own over time.

Whether this is a fair criticism is difficult for a Western Australian to judge. Many of the names

have been changed for reasons that defamation silks would no doubt be able to explain in detail. This is both funny and frustrating. Whilst reading I was continually ringing an acquaintance formerly involved in the NSW Division to decode the references (I will call that person simply 'the Dutchman'). However, unless the reader has personal knowledge of the actual people, their real names are of little other than curiosity value. As an aside, it is notable but of indeterminate significance that some people are given regular run of the mill pseudonyms, while others such as



'Chewbacca', 'Electric Chair' and 'Delphi' get the cooler football club nicknames.

In any event, by presenting the work as a factual memoir rather than simply writing a work of fiction based on his experiences, Hyde Page may have lost an opportunity to create a great Australian novel. While based on memories and partly diarised events, the work as a whole has the drive and rhythm of a great road novel. Indeed, when reading *Education* I was struck by its similarities in both style and substance to the recent lawyer's tale of professional disillusionment in Richard Beasley's novel *Hell Has Harbour Views*. *Education* has some gigantic anti-heroes and gets close to unconsciously generating its own novel-sustaining plot devices worthy of any Grisham.

It may have been that, with a little tweaking, the whole work could have been transformed from an episodic memoir to a fine piece of fictional linear story telling. Had it been written as a novel it could easily have been a first rate potboiler that would have drawn the reader into a new and unusual world in which they could have been nothing other than incredibly interested to know how the hero and his partner would emerge from their adventure.

If it had have been a novel, what would have made it truly memorable is that the two main characters would have possessed none of the drawn familiarity found in a Grisham or Archer novel. Rather, Hyde Page may have finally delivered an authentic and complicated urban Australian anti-hero.

As portrayed by Hyde Page, his dark mentor Mike Braddon

(seemingly a single real person protected thinly by the cloak of an ordinary AKA), is a compelling character. In fact, the Braddon of Hyde Page's *Education* is reminiscent of the epic anti-hero Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. There has been much literary speculation regarding whether there was a neat divide in *On the Road* such that Dean Moriarty was exclusively a representation of the real person Neal Cassady and the narrator, Sal Paradise, an exclusive representation of Kerouac himself. Or whether, Moriarty represented a wish list of rebellion that Kerouac himself so aspired to that he fused his own personal desires into the Moriarty character. So it might be that *Education's* Braddon is not just a representation of a single Liberal rogue but also an infusion of some of the excesses of Hyde Page himself. Either way, Braddon and Hyde Page are as engaging and interesting a pair of adventurers as have ever appeared in Australian literature, only they are sadly confined to the realm of the semi-real.

As to whether the politically interested reader can draw any sound academic type conclusion (or any conclusion at all) from the Braddon and Hyde Page road trip through the Liberal Party, will depend on perspective and personal experience. I would suggest caution on this front.

Latham has grasped the book as evidence of all that he perceives to be ill in the world of Australian 'machine' politics. However, it does not appear that, as a memoir, the book actually exposes any ultimate truth of political life behind the velvet rope of the Australian political party. And in

fairness, I wonder whether it ever lays claim to such a task.

No doubt there were individuals whose experiences ran parallel to Hyde Page and Braddon and whose experiences were less negative (or maybe even positive). Indeed, Hyde Page generously describes such redeemable characters at several points in the book. So ultimately, whether the mechanics of party life are corrosive or enriching depends on who experiences them and how and with what level of maturity they respond to them.

On this point Hyde Page's description of the 'types' of Liberal members is instructive. Hyde Page's caricatures of Liberal members as hacks, stacks, the geriatric or insane is funny and in many ways perceptive. However, it fails to recognise that Hyde Page himself was none of these when he joined. Hyde Page joined because he was interested in what he saw or perceived to exist in the Liberal Party. Indeed, on several occasions Hyde Page appears to acknowledge that whether he became one or other of the types he describes was as much about him as the party that he joined.

Reviewed by  
Christian Porter