



Rabbit Syndrome: Australia and America

Don Watson

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In the fourth Quarterly Essay Don Watson takes an analytical look at the ways in which the Australian imagination has always been dominated by America. Why are they so much better than we are? Even when it comes to producing books like the Updike "Rabbit" sequence that tell us what we are like? Why are they also a land of executioners who have nevertheless created the least bad empire the world has seen? Can we really expect to be deputies to America? And what about our own sacred story (the progressive one) that we have sold for the sake of the Americanisation of our own society? If we can't have a friendly independent relationship with America, why don't we go the whole hog and join them? In a dark, brooding, moody essay, Don Watson plays on the paradoxes of Australia's feeling about America and offers a scathing view of an Australian culture that is asking to be engulfed by its great and powerful friend because the mental process is already so advanced. This is a brilliant meditation round a set of paradoxes that are central to our long-term anxieties and hopes.

"... this is a Quarterly Essay that plays on our most fundamental fears, including the most terrifying of all, that we shall cease to exist because we have never been."

Peter Craven, Introduction

"The Australian story does not work anymore, or not well enough ... to hang the modern story on ... The most useful thing is to recognise that ... we took the biggest step we have ever taken towards the American social model. And this has profound implications for how we think of Australia and how we make it cohere."

Don Watson, Rabbit Syndrome

Rabbit Syndrome: Australia and America Details

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Andrew Rodda says

An interesting comparative analysis between the U.S and us.

Cataluna6 says

An interesting comparative look at Australia & the US. I went to an author talk for Watson's new book 'The Bush' on Tuesday evening and it was interesting to hear him mention some of his thoughts shared in these essays - that we as a nation tend to pretend that awful things didn't happen when European Settlers first arrived here. That our history with the Indigenous peoples was a peaceful handover, instead of the massacre(s) that it really was. I'm looking forward to reading more from Watson, I bought The Bush on Tuesday night, but I'd also like to learn more about the history of Australia - the good and the bad.
