

is married to Joe, an artless stockbroker. The comparison between these two men could easily have been clichéd and overdone. However, at his best Perlman adds ambiguity to the story making us sympathise with, and dislike, both Simon and Joe.

Seven Types of Ambiguity is driven by an urgent and desperate narrative remarkably maintained via seven different voices. The book inventively consists of a central story told in seven parts by seven different characters, all in the first person. The most authentic voices were the male characters, with Perlman not always as convincing with his female story-tellers. Apart from the first part of the novel, which is engagingly told by the psychiatrist, the best sections tell the sorry story of two highflying stockbrokers, who lose both their riches and their families while pursuing the 'big deal'.

As with his first novel, *Three Dollars*, Perlman explores the impact of the political economy on personal lives, how children are cared for, and the deterioration of relationships. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, however, is a much deeper and more sustained meditation on these subjects and, quite simply, a much better piece of fiction than *Three Dollars*. In the final sections of *Three Dollars* the characters seemed suddenly incidental to Perlman's critique of the human consequences of public sector retrenchments and the urban impact of economic rationalism. His latest book is just as politically concerned but the characters sustain their place in the narrative.

Seven Types of Ambiguity is an important Australian novel that deserves a wide readership. It is a fine piece of art and an appeal to the romantic life of passion and integrity. The character that embodies this siren call to beauty in the novel is at times so self-indulgent and obsessive that, in comparison, a life of compromises and submission to circumstances seems sensibly grown-up and even noble. Ultimately, however, the book indulges the sweaty-palmed teenager in all of us.

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REGULATING LAW

C. Parker, C Scott, N Lacey and J Braithwaite (eds); Oxford University Press, 2004; 289 pp; \$185.00 hardcover.

The concept of 'regulation' means different things to different people. The burgeoning field of scholarship known as 'regulatory studies' or 'regulatory theory' is no exception. It has its origins in the so-called 'Chicago School's' attack on the US model of legal regulation and control of industry. But regulatory studies has come to embrace a number of different perspectives on the role of the state and other organisations and institutions in shaping the social and economic activity in the period following the collapse of the post-war consensus in the early 1970s. It can now be said to be 'concerned with how various forms of regulation, including law, govern social interaction'.

The topic of 'regulation' is a timely one, especially for a labour lawyer. At the same time as the Howard government complains of over-regulation of workplaces and talks about 'deregulation' of labour markets, its solution is to come up with a legally prescriptive re-regulatory agenda. Of course, this re-regulation is conducted for a particular purpose, namely exclusion of trade unions and specialist tribunals from the role of social protection in favour of market regulation.

Enter regulatory theory, which has the potential to provide a critical and intellectually rigorous perspective on regulation, a necessity in the deconstruction of the rhetoric of 'deregulation'. *Regulating Law* is a collection of essays which endeavours to re-examine some of the main subject areas in law from a regulatory perspective, or as the editors describe it, 'through a regulatory lens'. Accordingly, contract law, financial regulation, corporate governance, families, work, torts, criminal law, property, competition, administrative law, constitutional law, and international law are all subjected to regulatory analysis. The contributors were asked to consider 'what it means to see law as a form of regulation and as something that is regulated by other forms of regulation', for example, economic instruments such as financial

subsidies. Questions are asked about the effectiveness of law as regulation, about how responsive law is to other forms of regulation, and about the coherence of law when viewed through a regulatory lens.

Some chapters engage critically with the value of regulatory theory to legal scholarship, such as Jane Stapleton on 'Regulating Torts', and Peter Cane on 'Administrative Law as Regulation'. Other chapter authors accept that regulatory studies provides a new and potentially useful form of analysis, and use questions or approaches derived from it to explore their subjects from a new angle. I have to admit I enjoyed the latter approach more than the former. For example, in their chapter 'Regulating Work', Richard Johnstone and Richard Mitchell take the opportunity to examine the historical evolution of labour regulation. Their conclusions demonstrate that to suggest that work can somehow be 'deregulated' is misleading. They find that regulation of the labour market by the courts and the state has existed for centuries. Therefore, to suggest that 'private' regulation of work through contract has been 'invaded or overturned' by a twentieth century "regulatory" state is to misrepresent the historical position'.

Regulating Law will most likely be of interest to those interested in socio-legal scholarship and in the role that law might play in advancing progressive causes. Some might question whether regulatory studies add anything to existing socio-legal studies. The conclusion to the book claims that the difference between regulation and 'law in context' approaches is that with regulatory studies, it is regulation, rather than law, which is the focus. In a world where the complexity and diversity of regulation appears to be increasing, the conclusion states, both legal theory and regulatory theory are bound to assume greater importance. I am inclined to agree. At the very least, as chapter author Nicola Lacey suggests in the context of criminal law, a regulatory perspective may prompt lawyers to look again at many of the legal arrangements that we take for granted, and to 'interrogate' their various kinds of social significance.

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