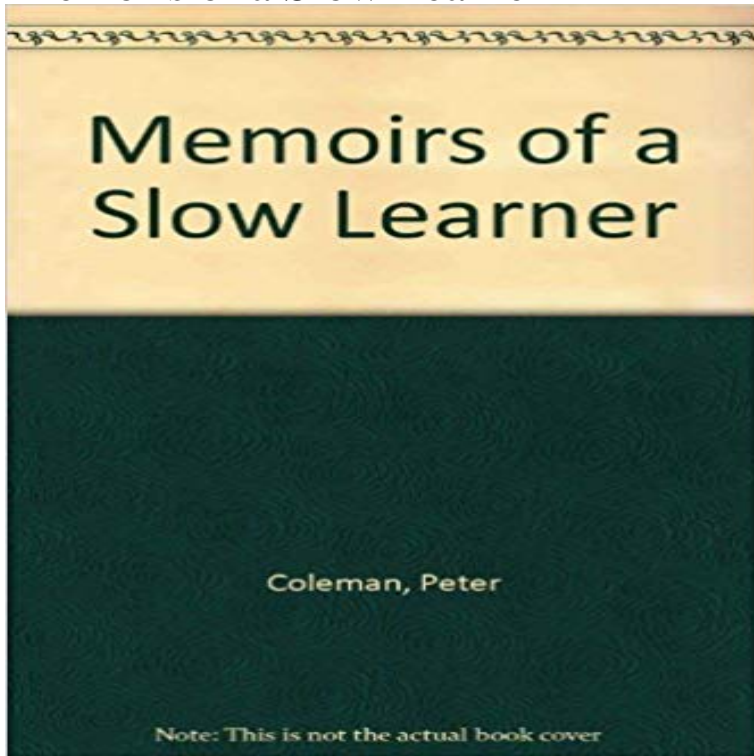


## Memoirs of a Slow Learner



Part autobiography, part cultural history, some will read *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* as a comic anatomy of the corpse of Australian small-l liberalism. Others will see in it a journalistic record of the times. Yet others a moving personal statement. It is a unique departure in Australian autobiography. Commenting on this new edition, Coleman writes: Looking back across twenty years I see more clearly than I did at the time that the real origin of *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* was my immersion in the poetry of James McAuley (my co-editor at *Quadrant*.) I had already written one response to his work and genius, *The Heart of James McAuley* (Connor Court). His autobiographical poems moved me deeply, especially his *Letter to John Dryden*. It distantly echoed a similar family background to mine (freethinking father, Protestant mother), a similar education in a secular state grammar school and Sydney University, infatuation with Marxism, mysticism and Christianity. But whereas McAuley found a resolution of his quest in the Catholic Church, I persevered with secular liberalism, in the belief that imagination and feeling could still moisten its parched landscape. Several writers published rejoinders to McAuley's poem - Jack Lindsay, Amy Witting, A.D.Hope. *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* was mine. It could be called *A Letter to James McAuley*. In the years since I have come to accept many of McAuley's criticisms of my liberal secularism - many but not all. I am now more sceptical of the freethinkers who influenced me in my youth such as the philosopher John Anderson and far less sceptical of church leaders who deplored their influence. The conversation continues.

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