

Jean Batten: The Garbo of the Skies. By Ian Mackersey. Warner Books, 1992, xi + 465pp. NZ price: \$19.95.

WHEN JEAN BATTEN arrived in Auckland on her marathon flight from England in 1936 thousands waited at the airport to cheer her, and thousands more lined the streets leading to the city. Similar welcomes were afforded her in the many other centres where she landed during her series of record-breaking flights between 1934 and 1937. Yet this brief burst of glory was quickly followed by obscurity. Jean Batten died alone in Majorca in 1982, her body unclaimed by friend or relative, and was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave.

Ian Mackersey's biography seeks to rescue Batten from neglect, and pays tribute to her as an outstanding navigator and a highly accomplished pilot. The book is the result of a prodigious piece of detective work. Mackersey uncovers new sources, traces and interviews Batten's former friends and associates and helps solve some of the mysteries which had surrounded her private life and her final disappearance. His achievement reflects his interest in aviation history, his journalistic skills and experience, and his dogged determination to solve a puzzle. The result is a fascinating book, and one which sets the record straight on several points.

In describing Batten as 'the Garbo of the skies' Mackersey refers not just to the beauty shared by these two contemporaries but also to their similar experiences. Both had scintillating but brief careers in the public eye, and both became recluses, living frugal and restless lives, never marrying or settling down. Mackersey is clearly fascinated by Jean Batten, though he admits his ultimate failure to understand her. The Jean that he reveals to us is a complex figure. She was convinced of her own importance and could be calculating and ruthless. However, the complexities of her position as a woman in a man's world were partly responsible for the behaviour she exhibited. As Batten herself realized, the controversy over her Tasman crossing (for instance) was largely due to the fact that she was a woman, and that 'Australia, like New Zealand, was very much a man's country' (p.239).

Characteristics which would have been taken for granted in men, therefore, were condemned in Jean Batten: obsessive determination to achieve her goals; ambition and competitiveness; disregard for the feelings of others; the search for fulfilment through public achievement rather than in private life. Batten was an enigma largely because she failed to conform to the contemporary image of womanhood. This issue deserved fuller consideration, and the answer provided by Mackersey's consultant psychologists is not satisfactory. They explain Jean as a male *manqué*, a woman with an androgynous or even male personality: 'In her gonads [...] she would have had a dominance of male androgens where, with most women, our estrogen gets firmly in the way and makes us nest and want to stay in one place quietly and breed!' (p.174). According to these psychologists, Batten's competitiveness, her search for acclaim, her utter focus on her goal, and her sex drive (which they assume emphasized physical pleasure rather than emotional satisfaction) were all symptoms that she was 'a not very "biological" female'. And Jean's mother, with whom she shared an extremely close relationship and who encouraged and supported her daughter's ambition, was probably 'androgynous' too! (p.179).

It is unfortunate for our understanding of Jean Batten that Mackersey was not familiar with feminist critiques of the social sciences. These critiques emphasize the androcentric bias which sometimes masquerades as 'objective fact' in these disciplines, and which is illustrated so clearly in this example. This psychological assessment defines 'normal' female behaviour extremely narrowly. It constructs all women as reproducers and nurturers of men, with no possibility for 'womanly' self-expression or personhood beyond biological function. The androcentrism of this theory makes it impossible to

understand Jean other than in male terms, and according to male-centred criteria. This does Jean Batten no service, and detracts from a fine piece of detective work in reconstituting her life history.

SUSAN GROGAN

Victoria University of Wellington

Where the Heart Is: A History of Barnardo's in New Zealand / 1866-1991. By Mary Collier-Holmes. Barnardo's New Zealand. Wellington, 1991. 127pp. NZ price: \$19.50.

WITH *Where the Heart Is* Mary Collier-Holmes has provided a comprehensive account of the evolution of Barnardo's in New Zealand. She charts the organization's development from its initial beginnings as a channel for New Zealand benevolence to British orphans, and other disadvantaged children, to its eventual emergence, in the late 1960s, as an active purveyor of child welfare services in New Zealand. This evolution was slow and dependent on a reluctance to recognize that New Zealand children also required aid despite the entrenched view that New Zealand was a land of plenty and thus in no need of Barnardo's services. In tracing this development Collier-Holmes provides an exhaustive narration of the organization's changing aspirations, structures, supporters and personnel. The narrative is enlivened by photographs of past and present Barnardo's workers and supporters, and by some rather whimsical illustrations at the beginning of each chapter.

Yet there is little attempt to locate the history of Barnardo's within the context of developing statutory or voluntary child welfare services in New Zealand, and indeed governmental and other charitable organizations are mentioned only when they impinged on the activities of Barnardo's itself. Nonetheless, *Where the Heart Is* contains an interesting account of an English organization, which gradually became an autonomous and resolutely New Zealand enterprise whose philosophies and services were increasingly predicated on local needs and conditions.

SHAYLEEN THOMPSON

Australian National University

The Intervening Years: a New Zealand account of the years between the last two visits of Halley's comet. By Neil Begg. John McIndoe, Dunedin. 1992. 216pp. NZ price: \$39.95.'

NEIL BEGG'S roots lie in the comfortable certainties and sense of duty of Presbyterian Otago. His great-grandfather dedicated Dunedin's First Church in 1873; at his private school in the 1920s small boys pelted each other with gumnuts in the name of Continuance or Prohibition. The well-developed social conscience of the family was typically expressed through the profession of medicine. As well as Neil Begg himself, his brother Charles, his father and two uncles were doctors.

Part of this book is about medicine, but by no means all. There are several main