

useful for those wanting access to the literature in French. The book is intended to be a brief, synoptic introduction to its subject, a summary of present knowledge. That in itself is a fairly bold enterprise, and one in which I think the author has been conspicuously successful.

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*An Eye for Country: The Life and Work of Leslie Adkin.* By Anthony Dreaver. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1997. 288pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 0-86473-319-4.

'PROF COTTON got up to annihilate me but found he had to agree with much of my thesis . . . . Fyfe kindly congratulated me on what he called a very good effort — the highest praise from him. So 36 years later it seems that I have vindicated my thesis' (p.207). Leslie Adkin confided this personal triumph to his diary in May 1947. While revealing something of the bitter debate which often raged in local scientific circles, this statement also provides a valuable insight into the rich and varied life of one of our little-known intellectual forebears. In *An Eye for Country*, Wellington teacher and historian Anthony Dreaver recounts in fascinating detail the life and times of Leslie Adkin, geologist, photographer, anthropologist, archaeologist, historian, tramp, husband, father, and meticulous field-worker.

Adkin was in many ways the epitome of the 'amateur scholar' — one of the unacknowledged players in our intellectual history. Although largely self-taught and mainly active outside professional and academic institutions, he made important contributions in the fields of New Zealand geology, anthropology and local history. Adkin was born in Wellington in 1888 and lived most of his 76 years in the Horowhenua region. He contributed four books and over 50 published papers to New Zealand science. A critical student of nature, he glossed over nothing and all details were subject to his close scrutiny. Adkin seems, however, to have had difficulty accommodating himself to the increasing professionalization of the scientific disciplines. He remained a lone wolf, who resented the authority endowed by a university qualification. While he was respected in geological circles, Adkin's contribution to archaeology was more equivocal. Dreaver notes, for instance, that his death did not even rate a mention in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, a publication that Adkin had long supported. Adkin was no latter-day Elsdon Best: his relations with Maori existed on a very formal and impersonal level. He seems to have had little interest in the contemporary situation of Maori and had no qualms about appropriating tribal knowledge to form a theory of cultural succession; as Dreaver notes, 'the "tradition" Adkin professed to protect was that of Smith and Best, rather than of the Maori people who were its heirs' (p.254). He was first and foremost a scientist, empathizing with the landscape rather than its inhabitants. Adkin's photography, however, reveals a more personal side. While he found much of his inspiration in the environs of the Horowhenua region, Adkin's photographs are of people, not just landscapes. Surprisingly engaging, they are often humorous and at times curiously personal. A keen tramp, he also mapped large tracts of the Tararua Ranges.

*An Eye for Country* provides a personalized perspective on the colonization of the New Zealand landscape, through the processes of redefining, examining and exploring its terrain. Dreaver's portrayal of Adkin recalls Kerry Howe's biography of Tregear, where

Howe argues that in the progression from wilderness to security, obscurity to influence, and exile to acceptance, Tregear epitomized the development of New Zealand nationalism, where colonizing is 'the sense of discovering, defining, examining, interpreting, understanding, occupying, organising, possessing, controlling: in a word, domesticating'.<sup>1</sup> A generation later Adkin, too, was similarly engaged in the domestication of the New Zealand landscape. In a variety of ways, his many interests related to the land and its structure.

One of the challenges of writing biography can be fitting the 'themes' into a 'life', making sense of a mass of detail and placing it in a historical as well as a personal context. Dreaver has succeeded on all counts. *An Eye for Country* is structured around a life chronology in which Adkin's personal life is deftly intertwined with his scholarly ambitions. 'The Interestingness of Existence' describes his first forays into the world of science, while the final 'Legacies' chapter recounts Adkin's contributions to New Zealand science. One chapter, simple titled 'Maud', gives an engaging portrayal of Adkin meeting his future wife and their subsequent courtship.

This stunning biography might well be subtitled 'An Eye for Detail', given the careful work of both its subject and its author. Beautifully produced, the book is studded with a selection of Adkin's photographs (worthy of a separate volume in themselves). In his portrait of Adkin as a self-taught scholar, driven by a pugnacious Kiwi spirit, Dreaver has made a real contribution to our cultural and intellectual history. The reader is left with a strong sense of Adkin's drive and determination, built on imagination and memory, unsupported by formal university training. 'What Adkin discovered was felt in the body, measured by an ache in the back and by dirt-begrimed hands, mentally sorted and polished during a prodigious day's work on the land, and recorded at midnight on a farmhouse table' (p.252).

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1 K. R. Howe, *Singer in a Songless Land: A Life of Edward Tregear 1846-1931*, Auckland, 1991, p.11.

*Stick Out, Keep Left*. By Margaret Thorn. Edited by Elsie Locke and Jacquie Matthews. Auckland University Press/Bridget Williams Books, Auckland, 1997. 130 pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 1-86940-143-3.

READING MARGARET THORN'S autobiography made me think about a good friend who died in 1997. Born a generation later than Thorn, Joy Colquhoun's life paralleled Thorn's in a number of ways. Both married, brought up three children, and were behind-the-scenes activists in the cause of women's health, economic justice and peace. Both believed passionately in socialism and were active in Labour party politics. Elsie Locke, the friend to whom Margaret Thorn entrusted her memoirs, comments in her introduction that she is 'fortunate in being able to revive the ear of memory'. I too can hear Joy's voice, and it transforms the dulllest of written records. In the case of both women, oral history may have preserved that articulate passion more effectively than a conventional, largely chronological autobiography. Despite this, the editors of *Stick Out, Keep Left* are to be congratulated on the meticulous annotation of the text, and the useful (if rather dry)