

number of passengers and crew, while Samuel Plimsoll's campaign to stop overloading was only secured in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1875, the same year as the *Cospatrick* story made the new year headlines. Clark's research has left no stone unturned, much detail being presented in six full appendices — which makes the absence of a bibliography and rather idiosyncratic referencing more to be regretted.

The two authors negate each other in key areas of their arguments. Where Clark is happy to confirm the contemporary condemnation of the *Cospatrick* (and all of 'Vogel') migrants as 'mere off-scourings of the towns' (p.56), Hastings accepts the revised view that these were skilled and quality people. But he accounts for the *Cospatrick's* fire in the old orthodoxy (the contemporary inquiry); terms Clark rejects. In both books the richness of contemporary illustration, story, verse, song, sketch, drama and engraving testifies to the impressive hold the sea voyage had over contemporary individual and collective imaginations. Cabin passenger Mary Dobie's sketches made on the *May Queen* in 1877, included in *Mountains of the Sea*, are splendid. The sea voyage in all its diversions and tribulations is clearly a topic ripe for further exploration in late Victorian culture as they remain solely in the realm of the illustrative here. A view from the sea is always valuable to an island history and both these books tell a good story, one worthy of 'old' and 'new' salts.

CHARLOTTE MACDONALD

Victoria University of Wellington

Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872–1914. By Jane Stafford and Mark Williams. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2006. 350 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-522-7.

NEW ZEALAND LITERARY CRITICS HAVE LONG LABOURED under the weight of the masculinist tradition of cultural nationalism instigated by the 'reality gang' composed of A.R.D. Fairburn, Allen Curnow, Charles Brasch, Monte Holcroft, Keith Sinclair et al. It is a weight which even feminist and postmodern critics have failed to truly shift, despite a range of strategies. Too many commentators are still comfortable with the suggestion that New Zealand literature only really began during the economic depression of the 1930s, when our (mostly male) writers began to suffer enough to produce art worthy of comparison with the outside world. Here, it is suggested, our literature finally developed to a stage broadly comparable with our rugby. In *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872–1914*, Jane Stafford and Mark Williams present what must surely be one of the most stimulating and intellectually satisfying contributions to our literary history in the past two decades precisely because they succeed in undermining this myth of origins, using a brand of writing that makes the work as useful for cultural historians as it undoubtedly will be for literary critics.

While it is difficult to tell whether the displacement of the cultural nationalist narrative of our literary history was the ultimate *raison d'être* of the book (it is clear that the authors are motivated by a variety of purposes), there should be no doubt that Stafford and Williams have hit on its most fundamental weakness: an insufficiently historical attention to the writing of late colonial New Zealand which has led to anachronistic judgements based on personal antipathy and, in some cases, outright prejudice. On more than one occasion the authors point to an inability of literary critics to move beyond simplistic denunciations of *Maoriland* writing, the convincing implication being that they have found the way — through a blend of cultural criticism and historicism — around this literary–historical impasse. The book signals a recognition that the Victorian era in New Zealand literature demands serious attention and that we need to start viewing the poems

and stories of this era as ‘literary artefacts’ rather than evidence of a literary pre-history. The effect of this attitude is laudatory to anyone raised on the myth of cultural nationalist origins. By focussing on the various historical contexts of the texts (biographical, cultural, imperial) the authors reinstall late colonial writing to a respectable position within our literary canon, and simultaneously offer it as both the beginning of a local literary tradition and a rich store of evidence for the first stirrings of nationalist sentiment. It is clear, moreover, through their reference to historians like Jock Phillips (who pointed out the importance of *Maoriland* writing in 1983), Miles Fairburn, James Belich, Tony Ballantyne and Michael King, that Stafford and Williams are aware of the historiography surrounding this period in our history, and are willing to engage with it.

Aside from the presentation of what I would call a ‘traditional’ literary history, the key to the success of *Maoriland* lies in the authors’ attention to historical context. Alfred Domett, Jessie Mackay, Henry Lawson, A.A. Grace, Katherine Mansfield, Edith Searle Grossmann, Blanche Baughan, William Satchell and Apirana Ngata are all discussed in relation to their personal backgrounds and the competing cultures of late colonial New Zealand, Australasia, the British Empire and the world at large. There are three particularly striking contributions to our understanding of our past, however. Firstly, the rehabilitation of female writers from a sexist narrative of ‘lady versifiers’ towards a more clear-sighted one which acknowledges their commitment to the suffrage movement, free thought and an engagement with the global intellectual culture; secondly, the identification of strong antimodern tendencies across late colonial New Zealand, which acted to fuel a widespread penchant for archaism, primitivism and, therefore, cultural appropriation; thirdly, the identification of a strong Ossianic and Celtic component to *Maoriland* writing, most notably in the writing of Jessie Mackay. Although some writers (like Alfred Domett, Henry Lawson and William Satchell) did employ tropes from the imperialist–colonialist school, Stafford and Williams convincingly suggest that attempts to portray Maori as archaic were often motivated by an attempt to create an autochthonous literature within the Celtic rather than the imperial tradition. The authors overtly support Donald H. Akenson against James Belich on this point (in terms of literary culture at least), providing literary evidence that the complexity inherent in British Victorian life was present on the edges as well, and that tidy narratives of centre and periphery, ‘Britishness’ and empire-loyalty dissolve under close inspection. Even the ‘Dying Race’ conceit is given more shape and literary nuance.

Stafford and Williams are always ready to admit the darker story behind *Maoriland* writing, however. The writing is evidence of cultural and economic colonization, hypostasized into (in the main) contrived stories and poems which lurch between sentimental racism and outright hostility. *Maoriland* provides intellectually assured guidance, though, noting simply that ‘the conjunction of destruction and nostalgia [was] distinctive of the period’ as a whole. *Maoriland* writing becomes evidence of an exceedingly complex cultural exchange characteristic of settler cultures around the world, and typical of that confused transition in Western culture from late-Victorianism to modernism. And herein lies the only real weakness in the book for historians, which is the — wholly understandable — weight given to literary criticism and critical theory that a broader readership may not be so well versed in: the inability of contemporary critics to get around the ‘windmill giant’ that was Allen Curnow and the cultural nationalists; the positioning of Mansfield as Victorian-modernist rather than merely modernist; the attention to close textual analysis; the unselfconscious employment of literary-critical terms. Nevertheless, there is a lot going on in this book, and if it at times stretches its boundaries with yet one more potential insight, it never claims to be doing more than opening up a fertile area of scholarly enquiry for further inspection.

JAMES SMITHIES