

end of the war gave way to the life of the displaced person in post-war Europe. Then there is the hope — and realisation of that hope — of a new life sponsored in New Zealand by members of her family who had emigrated pre-war. Fearing anti-Semitism here, they had taken on what could be termed the Antipodean Marano identity of orthodox Christians.

The second half of the book is of the life of Clare Galambos and her aunt in post-war Wellington. If the first half is an account of European horror, the second is really an insider's experience of life in the NZSO. It is also the story of her relationship with a Swedish musician 30 years her senior, who in himself would be a fascinating subject for a biography: an amateur boxing champ, 25 years a film composer, musician and band leader in Paris; tours of inter-war South America; an accompanist to Edith Piaf. The experiences of the NZSO in these formative years have been told elsewhere, but this second section also points to the possibility of a collection of insider accounts that would add to a deeper understanding of the orchestra and cultural life in a small nation.

The episodic nature of this review is a reflection of the text. The narrative is fragmented and broken into 11 chapters, each named for a musical movement. It is a fascinating story, a horrific story, a redemptive story, and one that also tells of the limits of art and music to heal the scars of deep trauma.

The astute reader may note a caution in what I have written and this would be correct, for this book suffers from a question of pitch. As I read I wondered who was the book aimed at, who should be its ideal reader? It is not those who read the NZJH for the history is already known. Historians of the Shoah are not so likely to read of life in post-war New Zealand, while historians of post-war cultural life and the émigré community possess their own specialised interests. The writing is solid and accessible, but it is not an academic history. The numerous photographs mean that often it feels like flicking through a family album. But then I thought of my 14-year-old daughter Harriet, who has had a long-standing interest in the period. So I gave it to her and her brief report was most enthusiastic — and probably the best endorsement that it could be given:

*The Violinist* was a fascinating read about a musical Jewish girl during World War Two. I have read a wide variety of novels set in this era and this autobiography has been the best. It was easy to follow and how the Jews were treated was more exposed, that is not censored as is usual, which made it a raw but fascinating read. The second half of her life in New Zealand was interesting, but not as much as the first half. Living in this household I already know a lot about life in New Zealand at that time, but I know all of my friends do not. So I believe that this book should be part of the reading curriculum in high schools for years 11-13.

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*Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest.* By Wade Davis. The Bodley Head, London, 2011. xiv + 655pp. NZ price: \$39.99. ISBN: 978-0-375408-89-2.

FOR MANY NEW ZEALANDERS, the exploits of British mountaineers Mallory and Irvine are a footnote to what many still regard as a defining moment in New Zealand's history: Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's successful ascent of Mount Everest in 1953. To the extent to which Mallory and Irvine's endeavours have featured at all in our popular culture, it is as potential challengers to Hillary and Norgay's title of being the first men to reach the summit. When Jeffrey Archer's 2009 book, *Paths of Glory*, postulated that Mallory and Irvine may have reached the summit before Hillary and Norgay, some New Zealand media expressed outrage. One editorial, headlined 'Jeffrey Archer's insult to Sir Ed', berated the author for taking 'a swipe at Sir Edmund Hillary's legacy'.<sup>1</sup>

The story of Britain's interwar exploration of Mount Everest has been told in some

previous publications, but the magnificently written and researched book *Into the Silence* offers a new lens on the 1921, 1922 and 1924 British expeditions to Everest. The product of ten years of research, Wade Davis's book situates the expeditions within their broader historical context, rather than focusing on the debates over whether Mallory and Irvine reached the summit in 1924 (this subject being only briefly discussed in the epilogue). His primary concern is to understand the expeditions on their own terms. For Davis, the key is to understand the impact of the Great War upon the soldiers who survived its horrors, because 20 of the 26 British climbers on the expeditions had fought in the war. Whereas death in Western society today is generally regarded as a tragedy occasioning profound grief, for the soldiers who had lived through the war death was but 'a frail barrier' that men crossed, 'smiling and gallant, every day'. 'They had seen so much of death', he argues, 'that life mattered less than the moments of being alive' (p.573). To that end, Davis intersperses his narrative with potted biographies of the key individuals, explaining, where relevant, how they had been affected by the war. For explorers like Mallory and Somervell, the attempts to scale Mount Everest offered a fulfilment that everyday life could not provide, especially in post-war Britain where there was such a deep divide between those who had served and those who had not. Indeed, the Great War played a part in determining who was selected for the expeditions. One of Britain's leading climbers, Richard Graham, was, Davis argues, omitted from the 1924 expedition because he had been a conscientious objector.

The expeditions themselves emerge as being both organised and innovative in their planning (particularly in the much-debated decision to utilise oxygen) yet simultaneously undermined by curious selection of personnel who turned out to be unsuited to the task. *Into the Silence* reveals as much about the workings of the British Empire as it does about the expeditions themselves, yet the author is careful to avoid caricaturing the expeditions as foolhardy imperial follies.

Although written for a general readership, Davis's work is based on meticulous research. He quotes extensively from both the written reports and private correspondence of the personnel of the expedition and Tibetan accounts. In so doing he gives readers a detailed insight into the personal quirks and prejudices of the people on the expeditions and their unvarnished opinions of each other. For New Zealand readers, the experiences of George Finch, an Australian climber, afford an interesting insight into the ambiguous position of 'colonials' on British expeditions. Having fought in the Great War, Finch's allegiance to the empire was unquestionable. Davis, however, argues he was never fully trusted by the hierarchy of the Royal Geographical Society. Finch was left out of the 1921 expedition, ostensibly on medical grounds, but also, the author suggests, because of his Australian heritage and the legal entanglements surrounding his divorce from his then pregnant wife. Selected for the second expedition in 1922 he pioneered the use of oxygen in high-altitude mountaineering and, accompanied by Geoffrey Bruce, reached 27,300 feet in his attempt on the summit, the highest altitude then reached by man. He appeared the logical candidate to accompany Mallory on the 1924 expedition, but was again omitted from the touring party. After completing his speaking obligations on behalf of the Royal Geographical Society after the 1922 expedition, Finch gave some additional lectures in Switzerland to supplement his income and after involving lawyers in asserting his legal rights on the matter, he lost favour with the selection committee.

Although sympathetic towards his subjects, Davis does not gloss over the influence of social class and racial prejudice in the expeditions. The opening chapters of the book skilfully outline the values of Victorian and Edwardian public schools which so profoundly influenced society. They also discuss contemporary attitudes towards sexuality, in particular homosexuality. Such material could become sensationalistic, but Davis utilises it to provide context rather than titillation for the reader, and indeed he discounts suggestions Mallory's motivation for Irvine as a climbing companion was

influenced by physical attraction. The book also includes verbatim accounts of how the British personnel perceived the indigenous peoples they encountered, particularly their often-expressed antipathy towards Tibetans. Although such writings may shock some modern readers, they were far from unusual for their time. The strength of the book is that it avoids simplistic renderings of the expeditions along class and postcolonial lines. A much more nuanced approach is apparent. It emerges that although the Royal Geographical Society espoused the lofty virtues of amateurism, Hinks drove a hard bargain in negotiating private sector funding and media rights for the expeditions. The commercialisation of Mount Everest, often lamented in present-day accounts (which presuppose an unsullied era), was clearly evident at least as early as the 1920s.

Calls for multi-vocality and reflexivity notwithstanding, history is never more effective than when it is based on comprehensive research and tells stories in their nuanced complexity. Engagingly written, well-illustrated and magnificently researched, *Into the Silence* achieves this superbly, transporting the reader into the world of its subjects and giving an insight into the inner workings of human beings under extreme stress.

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#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/2263259/Jeffrey-Archers-insult-to-Sir-Ed> Accessed 1 August 2012.