

cultural, emotional — within New Zealand society are bridged and diminished in what is always the work of a great humanist.

Furthermore, this collection charts ‘the making of a New Zealander’, who in a letter to Denis Glover (20 September 1937) notes the tension of the modern writer who seeks to express the new society: ‘It’s queer — I live mainly with the people I draw my material from, but these people read True Detectives. As far as the people who (I hope) read my writing, a whole heap of gold clocks wouldn’t drag me into mixing with them if I could possibly avoid it’ (p.16).

This tension was — and remains — a consistent one in New Zealand art and letters, wherein the writer/artist exists in creative tension with a lower-middle-class society. Seeking to express the society around them for a readership who seek to differentiate themselves from what they read and view, the writer/artist in a small modern nation exists in a liminal position. Yet this is precisely what makes the insights of writers, poets, painters and composers so important and productive for the historian. In their attempts to represent the age and nation they exist within, they expose the tensions and experiences of the society in new ways. The cultural history of a nation is intimately linked with the social history, for the culture expressed and created is in response to the society. There is also the tension in adapting the international to local conditions, and conversely reinterpreting the local through what would be now termed global changes. So in these letters, as well as literary and cultural discussion and gossip, we gain insights into lives of gay and lesbian men and women here and abroad, changes in food, and changes in society such as the identification of Auckland as a Polynesian city with its own forms of apartheid.

Yet amidst all of the riches we are most centrally reminded of the gifts of Sargeson as a writer. Magnificent and invaluable as this book is as a resource, an entertainment, a cultural artefact and a history, most importantly it has sent me back to re-reading Sargeson’s stories and novels.

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*On Dangerous Ground: A Gallipoli Story*. By Bruce Scates. University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2012. 263pp. NZ price: \$45.99. ISBN: 978 1 74258 393 8.

THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY stood for progress and affluence. Significant industrial and domestic developments were taking place, although initially horse-drawn carriages were more prevalent than motorcars, electric lighting was a luxury and the aeroplane industry was in its infancy. The age of promise was fleeting though, and lives were irrevocably changed with the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, which sparked a four-year catastrophe.

Few individuals understood the complex chain of events that contributed to what was termed the first global war. In England, and in her dominions abroad, ordinary people believed a military victory would bring further prosperity and a more egalitarian epoch. Rousing assurances from those in power suggested that men should fight not so much to alienate the enemy but to expand the possibilities of civilisation. Romantic and idealistic views abounded, as reflected in comments such as the war could be ‘amusing’ and offer opportunities to ‘picnic on the grass’ (p.140).<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately these attitudes failed to consider the wider context which smouldered with tensions over alliances, nationalism, imperialism and militarism. Nor could those caught up in the mayhem have envisaged that their first-hand experiences would fascinate twenty-first-century historians and novelists, a few of whom have written across both genres.

Eminent Australian historian Bruce Scates is a case in point. His academic articles and non-fiction texts, radio and television commentaries and battlefield tours have already made substantial contributions to our understandings of Gallipoli and its significance to Australian, New Zealand and Turkish military history. As a first-time novelist, Scates offers in *On Dangerous Ground* a fictional depiction of the themes which inhabit his academic work.<sup>2</sup> Fusing fact with fiction, this ambitious novel concentrates on the Australian experience, spans three time-periods and follows three storylines. Visual representations augment the text in the form of maps, art work, photographs and newspaper clippings.

Scates employs multiple perspectives to convey the realities of war and its aftermath. First, the tragic consequences for Lieutenant Roy Irwin and nursing sister Elsie Forrest during the 1915 Gallipoli campaign; second, the psychological legacies that define artist George Lambert, historian C.E.W. Bean and soldier Harry Vickers who return in 1919 to Anzac Cove to solve a mystery; and finally, the determination of present-day, naive young historian Dr Mark Troy to preserve a battle site amid political and diplomatic interference and the competing agenda of the wily, ageing Professor Evatt. Cast as Troy and Evatt's go-between, forthright Vanessa Prichard from Army Intelligence believes the government's limited resources would be better spent on current concerns such as providing water for people living in disadvantaged countries. Scates makes use of these different and competing voices to express in novel form an emotional range of experiences previously unavailable to him during the writing of history texts.

His powerful 1915 fictive narrative effortlessly transports readers into its military vortex, while the 1919 strand, which explores the role of memory and memorials, invites reflection on the futility of war, the relationships that developed between Anzacs and Turkish soldiers and the impact of unresolved loss on those who served at Gallipoli. Conflicting personal and political perspectives inhabit the 2015 thread, enabling Scates to draw attention to the complexities inherent in remembrance. Underpinning the entire novel is the notion of reconciliation and what it signifies to individuals and to groups.

Readers of multi-voiced novels invariably favour some storylines over others, usually because they identify with particular periods, characters, themes or events. Also, while novelists strive to sustain reader engagement across an entire work, individual responses often depend on the authenticity of characters' motivations and actions as perceived on the page. The aliveness of Scates's writing and the sensitively constructed internal and external worlds of his male characters in the 1915 and 1919 strands of *On Dangerous Ground* make compelling and satisfying reading. While the 2015 storyline successfully portrays political differences and offers in-depth insights into the work of a rigorous historian, some readers may find the personal interactions between Troy and Prichard a little forced and descriptions such as Prichard's 'plunging neckline' (p.81) and her 'high heels clicking over the parquet floor' (p.139) verging on the clichéd. This section may have exerted more force if it had focused solely on Troy's professional efforts to preserve the peninsula from road works because the contentious issue of disturbing the graves of those who died in this eerie place has sufficient pathos to sustain a storyline.

In contrast, the accounts of Bean, Lambert and Vickers landing at Anzac Cove, and their subsequent exchanges, form a major part of the backbone of the novel. Their observations provide readers with a strong visual sense of Gallipoli. Descriptions of particular note include: 'I trace the sharp ridges plunging to the sea, plot the course of broken ravines, scan the buckled shoreline' (p.3), and 'A gull wrestling with the wind careers above us before plunging like a dead weight into foaming madness, flight and form extinguished in an instant' (p.4). The death of Irwin is also beautifully wrought: 'As Irwin prepared to shout his final order, a shell flew in towards them. A second later, he felt his body lift into the air. Sightless, weightless and strangely unafraid, he soared above the chaos of the battlefield' (p.202).

A further strength of this novel is the way characters, through acts of remembering, convey the shift in public consciousness that occurred after the war as the true cost became apparent. The chasm that existed between what those who served thought they had been fighting for and the shattered, embittered world they found themselves inhabiting has, in the last decade, attracted the attention of various historians, including Janet Watson, whose work on loss and disillusionment also speaks to key themes articulated in this novel.<sup>3</sup>

These themes run like scars through the narrative, adding texture and depth to the emotional landscape of fictional characters such as Harry Vickers. Despite suffering shell-shock, Vickers is sent back to Gallipoli to face his demons. Similar military decisions resulted in significant emotional consequences for soldiers whose wellbeing, like that of Vickers, was reprehensibly damaged by the rigors of wartime service.

Grounded in historical narratives, this novel has much to offer. Readers will invariably expand their knowledge of the experiences of Australians who served in Gallipoli and gain further insights into the journey of reconciliation that inextricably binds the families of Anzac and Turkish soldiers. Scates also demonstrates a masterful understanding of on-going commemorative issues that shroud this dark period in our history. For these reasons alone, *On Dangerous Ground* makes a worthy contribution to First World War literary fiction.

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#### NOTES

1 For further information on this topic see Julien Benda, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*, trans. Richard Aldington, Boston, 1955.

2 For example, Bruce Scates, *A Place to Remember: A History of the Shrine of Remembrance*, Melbourne, 2009.

3 For additional information on loss and disillusionment see Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain*, Cambridge, 2004.

*The Visitation: The Earthquakes of 1848 and the Destruction of Wellington*. By Rodney Grapes. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2011. 192pp. NZ price: \$50. ISBN: 978 0 864736 86 4; *All Fall Down: Christchurch's Lost Chimneys*. By Geoff Rice. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2011. 244pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN: 978 1 927145 10 4.

YOU ARE SLEEPING PEACEFULLY when suddenly you are awoken by violent shaking and a deafening roar. People are screaming. You leap to your feet and frantically check bedrooms for children. Now your entire household, and your neighbours, spill onto the street in various states of distress and undress. The shaking under your feet as more aftershocks roll leaves you feeling quite bewildered and helpless. This experience was felt not just by the people of Christchurch when the first of the earthquakes struck on 4 September 2010, but also by the people of Wellington back in 1848. The similarities, despite the time differences, are quite startling.

Earthquakes and the destruction they wreak have played a major role in shaping and reshaping the physical and emotional landscape of New Zealand society. These two books, while both dealing with earthquakes, are quite different in focus. Rodney Grapes has produced an interesting mix of contemporary accounts and science to document the 1848 earthquakes that destroyed much of Wellington, while Geoff Rice has provided an informal account of the diverse chimneys that were lost during the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010 and 2011.