

for women were dictated by ideologies of race and gender. Brookes's gender analysis is in fact pivotal to the book; she finds the key factor that determined women's health status was being Maori, and that New Zealand's reputation as a healthy country was only possible because Maori health problems were ignored. Health strategies failed to reach Maori women, just as the tuberculosis campaign did, because concerns with the gender order of separate spheres and population growth took precedence. The final two essays on women's health lack the strength of the contributions by the seasoned campaigners. Writing on the impact of medicalization on women's experiences in childbirth in the inter-war period, Charlotte Parkes documents the 1930 'Hands Off St Helens' campaign led by Seddon's daughters to keep medical students out of the state maternity hospitals — but, regrettably, she neglects the counter-campaign by middle-class women for the continued admission of students in the hope that better training would raise standards. As a result, while women's experiences are recorded, this is a somewhat one-sided account. The final chapter, by Fay Hercock on the medical takeover of the Family Planning Association, is still in dense thesis prose and in need of rewriting. So much more could be done with this topic than a step-by-step narrative of the confrontation between the NZBMA and what began as a lay organization, including the linkages with fertility patterns and women's changing attitudes and roles.

All told, this is a valuable collection which has already proved its worth in an Honours course and in undergraduate teaching. *A Healthy Country* suggests exciting possibilities for future work in New Zealand history; there is much to do.

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The Not So Poor: An Autobiography. Edited by Annabel Cooper. Auckland University Press, 1992. 163pp. NZ Price: \$24.95

IN 1934 JOHN A. LEE, the well-known Labour Member of Parliament, published a novel, *Children of the Poor*, a thinly-disguised description of the poverty and squalor of his own Dunedin childhood at the turn of the century. His mother, Mary Isabella Lee, was apparently deeply offended by his description of their family life, and in response she wrote her own version, a compilation of notes and narratives made over a period of time describing her life between the 1870s and the 1920s. It is this manuscript that the editor has so well prepared for publication, and by so doing she has provided us with a source of inestimable value in terms of the insights it provides into the life of a working-class woman at the turn of the century. The role of the family economy; the frequent domestic violence; gender expectations; and the transience of those constantly on the search for work and cheap housing, all emerge from Mary Lee's account of her life.

In the excellent introduction, Annabel Cooper places Mary Lee's experiences within a wider context. She points out that while John A. Lee attributed his family's poverty to their economic and class position, Mary Lee ascribed her poverty to individual weaknesses, particularly alcoholism. Not her own, but that of her mother and husband, both of whom squandered precious resources upon drink. In consequence, Mary Lee continually struggled to retain a life of respectability despite the desperate straits in which she often found herself.

Annabel Cooper has chosen to use minimal editorial intervention, and this does not

always make the text easy to read. However, we are helped by the extensive annotation which provides the necessary background to make sense of the wide range of contemporary references. *The Not So Poor* is strongly reminiscent of a transcript of an oral history interview. In the text the chronology is imprecise, and the stories often function as discrete narratives within the broader tale. The decision not to change the text was the right one, for Mary Lee's voice speaks vividly to the reader. This is, strangely, also true for what she has left out of her story, and leads us to one of the more fascinating aspects of the text.

At no point does Mary Lee mention either the assistance received over many years from the Charitable Aid Board, or the birth of her last illegitimate child, Kathleen. Again, this is where the analogy with an oral history transcript seems to have resonance. Historians such as Luisa Passerini have written extensively about the 'silences' of oral testimony and the need for individuals to make sense of their lives within the context of collective myths. Perhaps Mary Lee believed, or wished to believe, that she had triumphed over adversity (who among us does not?) and consciously or unconsciously excised those parts of her life that did not fit or were too painful to remember.

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Disputed Ground: Robin Hyde, Journalist. Introduced and selected by Gillian Boddy and Jacqueline Matthews. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1991. xii, 412pp. NZ price: \$34.95.

IT WAS LONG customary to speak slightly of Robin Hyde's journalism, and to regret some of the influences her journalism had upon her verse and novels. In 1945, for example, J.C. Reid referred to 'a certain cheap flashiness and brittle slickness' which he saw as 'a hangover from her early journalistic work'. Hyde herself at times expressed contempt for much of her 'journalistic stuff' and affected to 'despise' the wryly-titled *Journalese* (1934); but as Gillian Boddy and Jacqueline Matthews demonstrate in *Disputed Ground*, Hyde's journalism has a broad significance in political and cultural terms which renders facile aesthetic judgements rather beside the point.

In *Disputed Ground*, the editors offer 80 selections from Hyde's journalism, almost all of which have been relatively inaccessible hitherto. The pieces range chronologically from 1925 to 1939, covering virtually the whole of Hyde's brief working life. Some are short paragraphs ('pars'), others extended essays. Ten are extracted from *Journalese* (the only volume of Hyde's prose which has not been republished in recent years), there is a generous selection from the columns of the *New Zealand Observer*, several contributions to progressive publications such as *Woman To-day*, *The Working Woman*, and *Tomorrow*, and pieces culled from various mainstream New Zealand newspapers and periodicals, including *Truth*, the *Dominion*, the *Mirror*, the *Christchurch Press*, the *Wanganui Chronicle*, *New Zealand Railways Magazine*, and *New Zealand Radio Record*. The selections, meticulously edited, are arranged thematically into seven sections: 'squirting ink' is about the practice of journalism; other sections deal with women, literature, peddlers of spiritual and physical cures, political matters (parliament, party politics, poverty, prisons, drugs), cultural identifications (including the tribulations of Maori), and 'international' topics (mostly her experiences in war-ravaged China). But these characterizations scarcely indicate the kaleidoscopic subject-matter Hyde turned into newspa-