

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-

per columns. This virtuosity was a part of the job — as she said, ‘never a woman or a dog passed in an alley but she or it mightn’t be a paragraph’ (quoted p.99). So there are paragraphs on beach costumes, the latest dance crazes, A.R.D. Fairburn’s first volume of verse, vagrant women, and waiting all night in a queue to buy a grandstand ticket for the third rugby test in 1937.

But if the examples that the editors provide in *Disputed Ground* are representative of her journalism, then Hyde’s paragraphs were astonishingly consistent in their critical scrutiny. Perhaps the effect is emphasized by juxtaposition of the selections. Nevertheless, Hyde is relentless in exposing contradictions, whether she is discussing fashion foibles or the Habitual Criminals Act or the government’s threat to destroy Maori dwellings at Orakei in the 1930s. Hyde did not simply search for journalistic colour: she found injustice and suffering wherever she looked, and she uncompromisingly reported what she found. A legless blood donor, for example, victim of a bush accident, lived in poverty, surviving on the regular sale of his rare blood-type. Hyde ended her item by suggesting that the Auckland Hospital Board could provide ‘more decent accommodation’, adding that ‘Strangely, Labour members of parliament have shown themselves unwilling to face the toil and trouble of a journey’ to the man’s residence, while ‘One in particular, an Auckland member for many years, and reputedly full of civic pride, suggested when approached by friends of Mr Christey that “Christey had better ring him up.” By no stretch of the imagination could the average person imagine a legless man in a telephone box, but there are evidently exceptions’ (p.293).

She was, unsurprisingly, especially sensitive to male mistreatment of women, the ethical double-standards, the sexual hypocrisy, the inadequate ‘money provision’ made for women and their children when husbands were sent to relief camps in the Depression, even the fact that though men who trained as pilots received a part refund of fees, ‘girl fliers’ did not: ‘The idea seems to be that men will earn their way in the event of another war, but that women are not so useful. As, however, it is almost certain that women fliers would be used for despatch work and other odd jobs should a war ever again eventuate, the distinction seems unfair’ (p.184).

While many of Hyde’s contemporaries no doubt saw her espousal of causes as quixotic, the introductory essays by the editors, which make up the first third of *Disputed Ground*, make clear the coherence of Hyde’s critique. Boddy’s ‘The Life of Robin Hyde’, carefully phrased, bare of moral condemnation, the most substantial biographical study thus far, properly places the singularity of Hyde’s travails within the social and political structures of her time. Hyde’s life was marked and marred by physical disability, poverty, unplanned pregnancies, and drug dependence: these problems were not the results of personal inadequacy but of being a woman in a society which disempowered women. It is particularly enlightening to read Boddy’s eloquent account of Hyde’s life alongside Hyde’s own discussions of ‘Less Happy Parenthood: The Problem of the Unmarried Mother’ (pp.198-201), and ‘The Veronal Menace’ (pp.256-60). Matthews’ essay, ‘The Journalism of Robin Hyde’, evocatively details the conditions under which journalists operated, how women journalists were marginalized, and how Hyde strove against such marginalization. Matthews also offers a close reading of Hyde’s journalism, carefully linked to the subsequent selections, indicating not only how her experiences were reflected in her writings but also how she generalized these experiences into a sustained critique of contemporary class, gender and ‘race’ relationships. Because the editors worked together on the essays, they complement each other neatly, showing how the public and private worlds of Hyde merged in her journalism, and, by extension, in her writing generally. ‘They have sacrificed self, ease and peace’, Hyde wrote in July 1939; ‘They have sacrificed because they believe as a nation that there are other and finer things

they might attain, against all odds' (p.393). She was writing about the Chinese people, but in a sense she was also writing about her own struggles.

Finally, *Disputed Ground* is a reminder, if implicitly and perhaps unintentionally, that much New Zealand writing has taken the form of journalism, and that while most such writing may lack the surpassing interest of Hyde's contributions, a good deal of New Zealand's cultural history will remain invisible until the painstaking work of investigation is performed. In this excellent volume, Boddy and Matthews demonstrate how careful attention to texts and the circumstances of their production can move beyond the simple retrieval of supposedly unproblematic evidence to an analysis of the nature of hegemonic structures and the ways in which they may be subverted.

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Peace People: A History of Peace Activities in New Zealand. By Elsie Locke. Hazard Press, Christchurch, 1992. 335pp. NZ Price: \$34.95.

IN *PEACE PEOPLE* Elsie Locke has compiled an 'introductory history to open up the field', as she puts it; drawing together accounts of a persistent strand of dissent in New Zealand society: of pacificism, resistance to conscription, anti-war protest, and opposition to militarism and military alliances. In 48 concise chapters she describes developments in these areas, from 'Maori Peacemaking' and 'The New Zealand Wars' through to her end-point of 1975 and 'Towards a Nuclear-Free Pacific'. *Peace People* thus provides a useful summary of a little-worked field in New Zealand; there are other books and theses dealing with particular issues and campaigns, but they are very few when compared to the shelves of war histories. As Elsie Locke comments, 'Heroes of war are celebrated . . . and their stories are told with honour and respect. Heroes of peace are largely unknown and quickly forgotten'.

In telling their stories she draws on a wide range of the historian's customary primary and secondary sources, but also, for most of the book, brings the added dimension of personal involvement. 'I was there', she notes, as she describes events and personalities from the 1930s to the 1970s. *Peace People* is written as historical overview rather than personal narrative or reminiscence, but it is Elsie Locke's own conviction and commitment to her cause which drive the book and her insights from direct experience which bring it to life.

Here the reviewer must declare a personal interest; I too recall being there in some of the later protest actions recounted in this book. Indeed, on the evidence of this book, many historians in their time have also been participants: Airey, Bassett, Chapman, Condliffe, McIntyre and Sinclair all appear in *Peace People*.

As historian and as interested participant, this book left me asking for more. In *Peace People* Elsie Locke has held her own voice in check to present a broad overview; let us hope that she will revisit some of the events and issues she summarizes, here, and write further on her own place among New Zealand's 'heroes of peace'.

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