

is not always scintillating, but the story is always fascinating thanks to the force of Muldoon's personality and the events of a particularly dramatic period in New Zealand history.

Some of the most interesting material is unexpectedly found in the foreign policy sections. Muldoon was a compulsive traveller and loved associating with world leaders. There are numerous delightful moments of high farce, such as when he had no dinner suit trousers minutes before a function in Paris, and when he delivered a speech in French and the assembled French dignitaries did not know what language he was speaking, or when he got himself jammed in a collapsed toilet in China. His wife Thea had to get Bernie Galvin to haul him out. Muldoon made a quip about 'the seat of government'.

There is much new detail, for example with the Moyle affair, the colonials' coup of 1980 that never happened, and the so-called constitutional crisis after the 1984 election. Gustafson reveals a surprisingly high level of smouldering opposition to Muldoon from his colleagues, and from quite early on, but one wonders how much of this is their talking brave after the danger?

Of Muldoon's more private life, we learn about his boozing. But Gustafson is far more reticent about Muldoon's alleged sexual promiscuity. He simply reels off a list of allegations and rumours in a paragraph. To suggest that probing further would be 'peripheral to political biography' is a bit of a cop-out. It was probably a courtesy to protect Thea and other family members who gave the biographer considerable support. Similarly Muldoon's painful, and at the time very public, difficulties with his son Gavin are not mentioned.

Overall, this biography is an extremely valuable account of the man and his times. It has some gaps as biographical explanation. Gustafson has tried to get behind and beyond Muldoon's personal nastiness, and see him instead as a failed conservative. I personally remain unconvinced and still regard him foremost as a failed personality. If you didn't like Muldoon then, and if you've mellowed a little since, reading this biography may revive old antipathies and bring back a few unpleasant memories. The Springbok tour remains a particularly tender spot. Certainly it is an evocative trip down memory lane for aging baby-boomers. For younger readers, the New Zealand social, economic and political landscape of the Muldoon era must now seem like very foreign territory indeed.

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Angel of the Anzacs: The Life of Nola Luxford. By Carole Van Grondelle. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2000. 232 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-397-6.

NOLA LUXFORD lived an exemplary life, in the sense that she fulfilled some of the dreams of her contemporaries and lived the twentieth century more thoroughly than most. Her greatest achievement was managing to move from small-town New Zealand to gain a footing in Hollywood and New York, making her own opportunities, and living much of the time by her wits. For the New Zealanders, mostly women, who devoured her regular columns in the *Free Lance*, Luxford was a glamorous figure who mediated between them and Hollywood. Yet she laid siege to the studios with only minor success. It was the lesser but equally new medium of radio that conferred more lasting celebrity upon her. During the Second World War Luxford made regular broadcasts which gave New Zealanders news of the war tailored to them. When these newscasts were discontinued, she found herself at something of a loose end in New York, where kindness to Kiwi servicemen on leave in the city led to her most notable enterprise, the organizing and running of the Anzac Club. Thousands of Australasian servicemen and their families had good reason for gratitude to Luxford for this item of outstanding war service.

Qualities that made Luxford notable, and the book more interesting than I expected it to be, were her indomitable nature and her willingness to leap into the unknown. She was an adventurer, who vigorously exploited every connection she could in her journey from nowhere to somewhere. What else could a girl from Hastings with style and beauty (not, alas, the most fashionable and marketable kind for her day, Van Grondelle tells us) and lots of organizing ability do? Two of Luxford's three marriages were disastrous, the second, which should have made her fortune, was positively macabre in its course. Yet she invites only a small amount of sympathy. What we are invited to feel is admiration at her ability to rebound. And I did. Admiration and respect for a woman who indefatigably pursued modernity, who was up with the play, who never hesitated to pick up a phone on behalf of a friend or even a chance-met acquaintance, who must often have seemed outrageous but was extraordinarily kind.

Why is a university press publishing such a biography? Luxford's claim to fame is modest in the grand scheme of human enterprises. She was the subject of a popular *This is Your Life* programme in 1986 and that, one would think, is where she best fits. There is a current fashion for telling at length the tales of the lives of fairly ordinary people to redress the 'Dead White Male' imbalance on the biographical shelves. Luxford deserves more than most to act as such a counterweight. Van Grondelle writes competently, if somewhat soupy at times. She has thoroughly researched the book, spent many hours with Luxford and read a voluminous archive of personal papers and diaries. The tiresome side of Luxford is not ignored. Her friends must sometimes have dreaded the sound of the phone. On the evidence her judgement of men was appalling (although we are told she was 'a good judge of character'). Van Grondelle conveys the context of Luxford's varied life extremely well, especially the traumatic effect of her parents' divorce in Hastings in 1919, which stripped the family of its social standing at a stroke, and Luxford's battle to survive in Hollywood in the twenties and thirties. This makes the book valuable as social history as much as biography. Luxford lived through most of the twentieth century in territory which many women dreamed about: California, Hollywood, New York, movies, radio. She was a minor star and her biography thickens our perceptions of modern experience.

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Left Turn: The New Zealand General Election of 1999. Edited by Jonathan Boston, Stephen Church, Stephen Levine, Elizabeth McLeay, Nigel Roberts. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2000. 312 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-404-2.

ORDINARILY, academic publications appear years after the events they describe and examine. Thankfully for political practitioners and general readers, however, Victoria University Press has once again promptly delivered another excellent post-election publication: *Left Turn: The New Zealand General Election of 1999*. The fruits of the most recent gathering at Victoria of political party members, news representatives and academics are neatly divided into five parts in the text: the obligatory introduction; political party perspectives; the media; voting trends; and electoral behaviour and results.

From Labour's Mike Williams to United's Mark Stonyer, insiders reveal all (well, mercifully not all) from their respective 'War Rooms' on their 1999 election strategizing and campaigning. That the conference took place in the backwash of the election is evident in some of the more colourful and flavoursome prose here. For example, Rod Donald could not help delivering some hustings rhetoric when he noted that, 'While National's dirty tricks campaign probably cost us crucial support and Coromandel itself,