

*Love in Time of War: Letter Writing in the Second World War.* By Deborah Montgomerie. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2005. 146 pp. NZ price: \$34.99. ISBN 1-86940-336-3.

SINCE THE 1970s, war letters have been used by historians for a range of purposes. Several historians such as Paul Fussell and Bill Gammage transformed the landscape of war history away from its military genre by using this valuable source in their research. The voices and experiences of soldiers became the basis of moves towards social and then cultural history, which explored questions such as the identity of soldiers related to the body, gender and masculinity and sexuality in war. More recently, it has been the terrain of emotional history that has captured the imagination of historians working with intimate material who wish to examine the ways in which lives were transformed through war.

*Love in Time of War* is situated within this cultural emphasis on the emotional history of war. Its focus is the home front and its purpose is to consider the ways in which through three case studies 'love' between husband and wife, son and mother, and father and children, was sustained during the separation which occurred during World War II. Montgomerie makes a compelling case to argue that these stories are not sidelines to the bigger picture of war, but in fact central to our understanding of its impact.

Throughout her portraits, Montgomerie weaves an eloquent and astute analysis which is cultural history at its best. Based on meticulous and detailed research, *Love in Time of War* offers a creative and original analysis which sheds light on not only these letters, but provides a new lens through which to consider the very experience of wartime itself.

The case of Bob Wilson — a single, childless young man with no dependents — who wrote letters home to his mother tellingly reveals the ways in which 1940s masculinity was not always hard edged and based in male culture. Wilson was also determined and keen to stay connected to home and as Montgomerie powerfully argues, a young soldier like Wilson in fact valued domesticity and family connections. The strategies which were employed in the letters are read through an analysis which is insightful and intriguing. Humour was an important inclusion in the letters sent back home; stereotypes of family and girlfriends were used in his letters. Montgomerie observes that the way of bridging the distance was by taking an interest in the wellbeing of people at home. The weather, events at home, the animals all rated mentions and consolidated his connection to his former life.

It comes as a horrible shock when the world of this family, so dominated by intimacy and love, is suddenly darkened by emotions of grief and loss. When Bob Wilson was taken prisoner in July 1942 and then reported missing, the letters stopped coming. The response of his mother, Rachel Wilson, was to continue writing to her son in desperation for a reply even though the chances of one increasingly diminished. This story provides a detailed picture of how the men who went to war idealized home. Even if they saw themselves as tough soldiers, they were pulled by the details of their former domestic lives.

The survival on the home front of war is encapsulated in the letters of Gay Gray, a professional woman and society figure, whose husband, Duncan Gray, enlisted in the war. She wrote to him regularly — every Monday — with letters of about 900 words each. Montgomerie sharply observes the way in which it was believed that these letters were a service to the war effort. Letters to men overseas boosted morale. But for Gray, they were more than simply a wartime propaganda exercise. These letters were a form of intimacy which also provided some hope for the future. Gray adopted some conservative approaches in her narratives such as an idealization of the pre-war period and concern with a post-war reunion. Through these letters, Montgomerie convincingly argues that Gray managed to keep intimacy alive in the marriage, and her letters show how one woman coped with wartime separation.

Finally, Jack Lewis embodied the family man who went to war. Through his letters, he constructed multiple identities — as a soldier, father, husband and son. His story reflects the ways in which mobilization was varied, uneven and unpredictable. He wrote lengthy letters once a week which were composed in a range of places and sites. Lewis used storytelling to make sense of his war and, like Bob Wilson, it was the domestic and home front for which he longed. The small details of the everyday life back home crossed time and distance in ways which gave him comfort in conditions of hardship.

The finest work in a field answers as well as raises significant issues. There are some further questions that the wonderful material and lively discussion in this book presents to us. The writing on emotions makes for a page-turning read, but love itself *as an emotion* — either as maternal love or matrimonial love — could have been further examined. The nature of the type of love letters written about here could have been conceptualized more fully and a distinction made between the different types of wartime love which is written about, lost or retrieved. The wider place of the expression of emotions in this society might have given a further context to understanding the separation of home and battlefield. Finally, what happens to love in the face of death? The type of death in war and the lack of a returned body effected patterns of love and loss, a point which may have been touched on to illuminate the specific nature of wartime emotions.

This book is a delight to read. It is beautifully illustrated with striking and carefully selected photographs. The stories are compelling. Through an astute and erudite reading, Montgomerie argues with flair for the ways in which letters consolidated relationships across distance. In doing so, she significantly contributes to our appreciation of the precarious survival of intimacy, love and emotional life during a time of death and destruction.

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*'Rats and Revolutionaries' The Labour Movement in Australia and New Zealand 1890–1940.* By James Bennett. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2004. 216 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877276-49-9.

IN THIS AMBITIOUS AND INNOVATIVE STUDY, James Bennett explores the rich vein of contact between the Australian and New Zealand labour movements in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Bennett tells a little known but important story. Australian activists helped form New Zealand's seamen's and shearers' unions. Australian unionists assisted the early West Coast miners' unions. Before the 1890 Maritime Strike, trans-Tasman links between unions developed in several industries and trades. There was substantial trans-Tasman migration, particularly in the mass seasonal occupations — seafaring and waterfront work, shearing, meat slaughtering and mining. Compulsory arbitration, introduced by New Zealand's Liberal government in 1894, became the model for later Australian Acts.

Towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, reformism and arbitration were losing their shine in New Zealand. Militants and socialists began to question the capitalist order. In John A. Lee's colourful phrase, 'In those pre-1914 days, at every smoko, at every few minutes of idleness at the pit mouth . . . a grim dungareed orator mounted the soapbox to bless the coming socialist dawn'. Chances were this orator was Australian.

Australian agitators became prominent in the New Zealand labour movement. The miners Bob Semple, Bill Parry and Paddy Webb were leaders of the syndicalist 'Red' Federation of Labor. Webb's friend and fellow Victorian Michael Joseph Savage was the