

of reading — and not reading — specific genres, authors and books, and reading them in different ways, with greater or lesser frequency, and with differing intensities of response. Her strategy is perhaps more opaque in its purpose than it needed to be, but I cannot myself see how else Wevers could have created the conditions for such an illuminating interplay than by ‘front-loading’ her study in the way she has.

This interplay is especially fruitful in Chapter Five (‘What They Read’), where a generous sampling of titles is considered. Wevers claims, I think with some justice, that the historiography of reading ‘has paid almost no attention to content’, and in this chapter she shows repeatedly how content — specific plots, characters, settings and sentiments — reflect and mediate the lives of Brancepeth readers. It is pleasing to note here the influence, in Wevers’s pointed and well-crafted story synopses, of one of the most engaging of the forgotten pioneers of the history of reading. Amy Cruse, like Wevers, saw her work on readers and reading as the platform for a new way of writing literary history.

Undoubtedly, though, the presiding influence on the second half of the book is H.J. Jackson, whose wonderful 2001 study of ‘marginalia’ (a plural noun, by the way) is here applied and extended with imaginative rigour to generate ways of interpreting the annotations, comments, underlinings, food stains, finger smudges, scorch marks, and pressed flowers in the library books. Even the books’ dilapidation and disappearance can be made (if at times a little speculatively) to yield real insights into the reading culture, not just of Brancepeth farm, but of the colonial society of which it was to some degree a microcosm. In this respect, especially, Lydia Wevers’s book constitutes a real advance in the historiography of reading.

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A Man for all Seasons: The Life and Times of Ken Douglas. By David Grant. Random House New Zealand Ltd., Auckland, 2010. 493pp. NZ price: \$45.00. ISBN 978-1-869793-89-0.

KEN DOUGLAS WAS A MAJOR FIGURE in New Zealand trade unionism through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Now aged 75 he is by no means retired, although most of his activity now takes place in the local context of Titahi Bay and the Porirua City Council. A biography of Douglas, then, will inevitably be a study of the history of New Zealand trade unionism through turbulent decades. In this, David Grant has succeeded admirably.

The early chapters are a detailed and sensitive study of Ken Douglas’s early life, and emphasize the vitality of the Wellington working-class culture into which he was born. Commitment to the union was taken for granted in Douglas’s family, and most of his relations were also firm supporters of the Labour Party. If it was a culture which emphasized the dignity of work and the importance of mutual support, it was frequently a life of material hardship. These early chapters are a significant contribution to labour history after 1918.

Some of the paradoxical dimensions of Douglas’s character appeared early. The politically conscious working-class lad nevertheless thoroughly enjoyed his years at the bourgeoisie’s Wellington College, and seriously contemplated a career in the army. Throughout the book, Douglas’s capacity for insensitivity as well as generosity is explored in due context. If Grant deserves credit for an even-handed discussion, his subject also deserves credit for honest reflection.

Douglas rose rapidly through the ranks of the drivers’ union. For Douglas, and his comrades in the union, his own skill as a driver was an important dimension of his credibility as a trade unionist. No one reading these pages will doubt that driving is skilled work; another useful point made is that while union membership was legally compulsory, enforcement was entirely up to union officials. Some did not bother; Douglas was a very active unionist.

Even during the Holyoake years of so-called consensus, the National government found unions a convenient scapegoat, and Tom Shand's reputation as a liberal and progressive Tory is brought into question by Grant's discussion of the 1962 Cable dispute over wages. Again, in 1965, the Wellington Drivers' Union found itself threatened with the full force of the law for aggressively pursuing wage claims against the largest employer in the province. On the second occasion, unlike the first, the union won, but Grant's strictures on Shand's confrontational attitude are clearly justified.

For someone who occupied a key position in the Federation of Labour (FOL) and its successor, the Council of Trade Unions (CTU), for so long, it took Douglas some years to secure a position on the FOL executive. An element in the FOL mistrusted him because of his communist politics, even though he convincingly maintained that he kept them separate from his union responsibilities. Only in 1977 did Douglas join the executive, and he was secretary from 1979. Even more than his activism in the drivers' union, his FOL role brought him into frequent and sustained conflict with Prime Minister Robert Muldoon. Here Grant contributes a valuable discussion of the state of industrial relations during the Muldoon years. Inevitably, other works will be needed to give the whole picture, but Grant's treatment of the issues is wide-ranging and balanced. Even those with a good knowledge of the period will learn from these chapters, and many will be usefully reminded of the mass power of the trade union movement, even in those difficult days.

Like many trade unionists, Ken Douglas looked forward to the election of a Labour government in 1984. Grant's argument is that the speed and comprehensiveness of Roger Douglas's right-wing agenda left his namesake feeling 'angry and cheated'. Perhaps, too, there was the beginning of a period of political uncertainty. No longer, it seemed, could the industrial and political wings of the labour movement profess similar aims as they had always done, despite frequent tension. Rapidly increasing unemployment further weakened the unions. Ken Douglas's approach was to engage as constructively as he could with senior ministers, and he shared the view of some that the unions' organization needed to be modernized. Already, he was beginning to perceive that the rules of the game set in the long post-war settlement were changing. It was this growing tendency to consider broader economic perspectives that would lead some to believe that Douglas was shifting to the right, and indeed selling the movement out.

Nowhere was this controversy more bitter than around the 1991 Employment Contracts Act. The Bolger government's vicious legislation came shortly after Douglas had overseen the merger of the FOL and the Combined State Unions into the CTU, of which he was elected first president. Some unions strongly opposed the merger, and again Grant's discussion of the debate is fair and comprehensive. Faced with the Employment Contracts Bill, many unionists vocally advocated a general strike. Douglas continues to be criticized on the left for not having called that strike. His response — given ample airing here — was that it was not up to the CTU president to make such a decision. In fact hundreds of thousands of workers did demonstrate and take strike action in protest against the Bill, but the affiliated unions in the CTU, where each union's voting power reflected the number of its members, did not support a general strike. Grant points out that there was a white collar-blue collar division on the issue and notes that Douglas was something of a focus for the militants' anger. No doubt Douglas drew a lesson from 1913 and 1951, that (as Erik Olssen has said) the conditions for a successful general strike are the conditions for a revolution. Douglas preferred to play a long game, holding the line so far as possible and positioning the union movement to take on a greater role as a social partner in economic management and growth.

In espousing this approach, which dominated his decade at the head of the CTU (and justified his increasing involvement in the boards of State Owned Enterprises after 1999), Douglas the communist had become a Scandinavian social democrat. It is on this question — that of the development of Douglas's political thinking — that Grant's book is least

satisfactory. That may well be because Ken Douglas himself has (with all respect) never resolved the contradiction between espousing strong, independent and democratic mass trade unions as a key feature of civil society, and espousing the cause of Brezhnevite communism. To make this point is not to demonize the Soviet Union, nor to resort to Muldoon's crude red-baiting (Muldoon was just as derogatory of Pat Kelly, who was never a member of the Socialist Unity Party). Grant provides a comprehensive discussion of Douglas's political activities, and of the sometimes complicated footwork in which he had to engage over Czechoslovakia and Poland, but the enigma remains. For all that, Grant makes it abundantly clear that the proudly self-educated Douglas became an increasingly astute and subtle thinker about political economy in the New Zealand context. This biography is a significant contribution to contemporary New Zealand history.

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Mad or Bad? The Exploits of Amy Bock 1859–1943. By Jenny Coleman. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2010. 382pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 978–1–877372–71–1.

FOR FEMINIST, GENDER, AND SOCIAL and cultural historians of a certain age, Amy Bock is infamous. Best known for cross-dressing as Percy Carol Redwood and marrying Agnes (Nessie) Ottaway in 1909, Bock has made frequent appearances in history theses, publications, lectures and essays since the 1980s. She now has an entire book devoted to her exploits, or, as the cover and spine of Jenny Coleman's book, but not the title page, state, her life and exploits.

It is doubtful if any subsequent researcher will discover facts about Bock's life that are not detailed in *Mad or Bad?* Coleman has followed every lead, tracing not just Bock's life, but also the life stories of various family members, including her convict grandparents. The lack of a 'convict stain' in New Zealand was claimed by Bock's contemporaries as one of the differences between New Zealand and the colonies across the Tasman, but as Coleman notes, it is not known whether Bock was aware of her grandparents' pasts. Why then begin the book with their stories? And although Bock's mother's mental illness and death in an asylum was known by Bock and by those prosecuting and defending her for various crimes over the decades, it is unclear what Coleman's purpose is in detailing Mary Ann Bock's illness. In the Epilogue the question is asked, 'A lunatic inheritance?' (p.315), but as with most of the questions raised, the answer is hard to decipher.

Coleman sets out the book's aim in the Prologue: 'I wanted to go past the media sensationalism of the Percy Redwood episode and ask who was the *real* Amy Bock and what was the story behind her life of fraud and false pretences?' (p.11). Those interested in the Redwood episode, therefore, have to wade through chapters on Bock's grandparents and parents, her childhood in Tasmania and Victoria, her work as a rural school teacher in Gippsland, and her numerous run-ins with educational authorities and, increasingly, the law in Victoria. And that is all before her move to New Zealand in 1884. While Coleman's research skills are impressive, her ability to synthesize and draw the reader's attention to the most salient events in Bock's past is not well honed. The catalogue of letters Bock wrote to the Education Department of Victoria does not make for inspiring reading. While she was busy falsifying school attendance records and otherwise acting in unbecoming ways in her role as a school teacher, Bock was also embarking on a life of petty crime, appearing in court on several occasions, charged with committing fraud and false pretenses. But the archival trail must have run cold, for Coleman offers little comment on or context for these court dates.

After another brush with the law, Bock was released on a good behaviour bond owing