

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

to her 'moral insanity' (p.120). She resigned from her teaching position and moved to New Zealand. Judicial records in New Zealand must be better than those from colonial Victoria, for the book's focus turns to Bock's swindles, her court appearances and numerous spells in jail. Again, the tedium of reading about every occurrence is overwhelming. It is a pity that this book lacks contextual details that might allow us to understand not only how Bock managed to pull off her frauds (the use of IOUs seems to have been commonplace), but also their relative scale: what did £41 buy in 1909?

Finally, in the seventh chapter of a nine chapter book, Bock appears as Percy Carol Redwood and the stage is set for her most notorious swindle. Although this is the first case where Bock is known to have impersonated a man, questions about why she might have dressed in men's clothing do not cloud the two chapters devoted to the Redwood case. The final chapter details Bock's post-Redwood life, when she moved to the New Plymouth area, married a man and spent a number of years out of court before returning to her scamming ways.

For those wondering what all of this means, and who the *real* Amy Bock was, the brief Epilogue poses the question 'Mad or Bad?' and notes that over the years Bock has been explained away by her 'lunatic inheritance', that at times her legal defence argued that she suffered from kleptomania, that more recent analysis has suggested she was a 'pathological liar', and that there have been various attempts to 'claim' Bock as a lesbian. To the extent that Coleman stops asking questions and attempts to offer some answers, she seems to reject the lesbian claim, have sympathy with the pathological liar interpretation, and find the evidence in support of kleptomania partial at best. In the end, Coleman is happiest to label Bock a 'confidence artist', call her a 'consummate performer and entertainer' and conclude that she 'was, and remains, a bit of a hard case' (p.327).

Amy Bock swindled and lied her way through life. She acquired goods under false pretences from small-business people and those she befriended. In the current climate we might refer to people like Miss Henderson, the 'hard-working young woman' who lent Percy Redwood her life savings of £41 (p.199), as 'mum and dad investors'. Few of us would regard Hanover Finance's Mark Hotchin 'a bit of a hard case', even if he donned a wedding dress and married Eric Watson. It is remarkable that this is almost the sole authorial conclusion of *Mad or Bad?*

After reading *Mad or Bad?* I am none the wiser as to who the *real* Amy Bock was. But then, Coleman said she wanted to ask the question; she did not say she wanted to answer it. The author has provided some of the detail behind Bock's life of false pretences and fraud — too much in the case of her time as a school teacher; not enough in terms of her relationships with those on whom she allegedly spent her ill-gotten gains. But in many ways, Coleman achieves what she sets out to do. It is a pity her aims were not more ambitious.

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No Fretful Sleeper: A Life of Bill Pearson. By Paul Millar. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2010. 380pp. NZ price: \$59.99. ISBN 978-1-86940-419-2.

FEW ACCOUNTS OF NEW ZEALAND's cultural ethos have resonated quite so strongly as Bill Pearson's 'Fretful Sleepers'. Published in *Landfall* in 1952 and for a second time in 1974, Pearson's essay exposed what he felt to be the reality for 'any man deemed to be different' — a marginalization that was as much a 'denial of life itself' as an embodiment