

to the viewer. While, of course, the intentions of an artist do not necessarily determine the primary meanings that paintings have in particular social and cultural contexts, McCahon's choice has led to readings of his work ranging from the ingeniously far-fetched to those disconnected from the earth. For instance, in a conference paper about five years ago, his *The Promised Land* (1948) was embedded in a perspective featuring the foundation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 and its consequences for the Palestinians! Brown's approach is sensibly different: to characterize the paintings in terms of their demonstrable contexts of use and interpretive community, and a lifetime's knowledge.

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Home: Civilian New Zealanders Remember the Second World War. By Alison Parr. Penguin, Auckland, 2010. 292pp. NZ price: \$50.00. ISBN 9780143203841.

ALTHOUGH MILITARY HISTORY is a perennial favourite in the nonfiction bestseller lists, the less dramatic stories of the home front have been relatively ignored. Alison Parr's *Home* explores the war experiences of New Zealanders who stayed behind during the Second World War. This book uses an oral history methodology and aims to give voice to the stories of ordinary men and women. An introductory chapter outlines New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War both at home and overseas. The chapters that follow are organized thematically around different aspects of the home front experience, ranging from wartime recreation and relationships to the experiences of conscientious objectors and the ongoing effects of war on returned servicemen.

An award-winning interviewer, Parr based *Home* on 19 in-depth oral histories that have been deposited in the Oral History Archive at the Alexander Turnbull Library. Her authorial presence is non-intrusive. Each chapter is introduced with brief explanatory notes, highlighting themes and linking together related material. Yet considerable work has gone into editing transcripts so that the narrators' voices are readable and provide a valid representation of their conversational styles. *Home* succeeds in giving evocative insights into what it was really like to live through the Second World War in New Zealand. The narrators' words are by turn funny, informative, practical, surprising and heartbreaking. Their immediacy is sometimes startling. For example, Marian Beech describes taking a bath after hearing of her brother's death in a plane crash: 'I got into a bath the next morning at my mother's place and they had a califont and the califont made a funny sound like the wind whistling and I remember lying in that bath and I was in tears. And that whistling in the califont, just like a plane. It was like an aeroplane. I'll never forget that. I just couldn't get out of that bath fast enough.' (p.211)

At times Parr devotes considerable space to individual stories. In 'Mae and Bill' (pp.270–3), for example, Mae describes how her husband experienced ongoing depression, nightmares and flaring violence as a result of his wartime experiences. Her words offer a powerful insight into the long-term effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Home provides fresh perspectives on the home front and complicates well-worn stereotypes. The American 'invasion', for example, is popularly associated with glamour, romance, free nylons and 'jealous Kiwi blokes'. Parr covers these themes, but also highlights the role of Kiwis in providing a family away from home for lonely and war-weary US troops. The oral histories reveal that wartime romances were as much about patience and level-headed restraint as passionate farewells. They also highlight the diversity of individual experiences. While some narrators were very fearful during air raid rehearsals, others found them a bit of a lark. The use of oral testimony in *Home* reminds us that people's experiences of historical events are mediated by their individual situation, personality and relationships.

One shortcoming of this book — from an academic historian's point of view — is

the lack of analysis and critical reflection on oral history methodologies. Parr's minimal intervention means that there is little in-depth explanation of why and how individuals responded as they did within a particular historical context. Moreover, Parr's generalizations may be open to dispute, given that they are based on a limited number of interviews. This book does not deal with the contentious issues of reliability, memory and construction of narrative, which preoccupy oral historians writing within an academic context. Of course the response to these criticisms might be that *Home* is not targeted at academics. Such issues are not necessarily important to general readers and so it is understandable that they would have been omitted. Nonetheless, the role of memory in storytelling is an extremely significant question and one that could have been addressed and made accessible to a broad audience.

On a more positive note, the production of this book is outstanding. Many local history texts are attractively formatted and well-illustrated, but *Home* takes this to a whole new level. Indeed, its appearance is positively seductive. The use of sepia ink, buff paper, thick end covers and the frequent use of illustrations enhance the reading experience and ensure that the book will appeal to interested, non-specialist book-buyers. Throughout *Home* authorial comments are printed in brown ink, whereas the narrators' voices are printed in black in a larger, bolder type. Margins are generous, giving the book a spacious feel. The care and attention given to *Home's* layout make it aesthetically pleasing to handle and an effortless read.

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The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget. By Rachel Buchanan. Huia Publishers, Wellington, 2009. 291pp. NZ price: \$45.00. ISBN 978-1-86969-399-2.

PARIHAKA. IT HAS A POWERFUL HISTORY and legacy stemming from its invasion in 1881 by government forces. Many New Zealanders were introduced to its history through the work of Dick Scott and Hazel Riseborough, as well as the paintings of artists such as Ralph Hotere and Tony Fomison, amongst others. Parihaka's history, its people and their experiences have been told through a wide range of formats from the moment the settlement came to the attention of Pākehā in the mid-nineteenth century. The diverse modes of storytelling, of how history is packaged, told, constructed and memorialized, is the subject of *The Parihaka Album*.

The Parihaka Album is a smart and impressive book. It is graceful, attentive, personable and highly readable. This is not, however, the history of Parihaka retold and recast; instead, it is an 'album' of memories, a loving portrait of families, and a clever and careful study of New Zealand history. Rachel Buchanan's book started as a doctoral thesis at Monash University, but it then became a personal journey of discovery, which she eloquently describes in the opening pages. She quickly realized on her first research trip to Parihaka that a purely academic research mindset was not going to be a useful approach. Initially, states Buchanan, 'I planned to collect oral histories from Parihaka residents, histories that would enrich, contradict or unsettle the largely Pākehā-created written record about the place' based on a research approach framed by a Foucauldian analysis (p.6). Buchanan, in this statement, really asks: who do we write history for? Research involving people, she cautions, needs to be considerate of them; it requires listening to all kinds of sounds: waiata and whaikōrero, for instance. One needs to 'seek depth' and 'pursue relationships' (p.7), a process of researching anathema to a trained journalist used to researching and writing with speed.

Foucault's influence certainly marks this book, but that does not mean it is inundated with post-modern jargon. Buchanan has written for her community and her family. Nevertheless, her approach to sources, the attention to silences and attempts to uncover