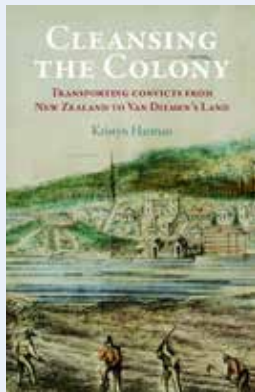


## + REVIEW

### new zealand books by paul little



**CLEANSING THE COLONY: TRANSPORTING CONVICTS FROM NEW ZEALAND TO VAN DIEMEN'S LAND**  
KRISTYN HARMAN (OTAGO UNIVERSITY PRESS, \$35)

It will come as a surprise to many that, like the Mother Country, New Zealand once used the penalty of transportation to Australia to deal with its transgressors: at least 110 of them over about 10 years.

It wasn't so much that this was a secret, merely that very few people – and Harman pays them credit there – had bothered to look closely. Now she has provided a full and fascinating account of the practice.

To over-simplify what was behind it all: New Zealand was a place for good settlers; Australia was a place for bad 'uns. Hence it made sense to send our rotten eggs to be among their own kind. This was most ironic, given that in these very years, Her Majesty's representatives and any number of self-starting brigands in New Zealand were indulging in land theft on a grand scale that went unpunished.

As Harman works her

way through the roll of the transported to tell many of their stories, we encounter numerous incidental pleasures – such as finding out that the adjectival form of Van Diemen's Land is Vandemonian, and seeing the deployment of the adverb “burglariously”, as in “burglariously broken and entered”, which will be a boon to anyone ever needing a rhyme for hilariously.

Those were different times: it's mentioned disapprovingly and in passing that, on one occasion, two female prisoners “had been engaged with the men and a fiddler in getting up a dance”.

Finally, it has to be said: what a terrible title, one through which you have to peer to discern the actual subject of the book. “Cleansing the colony” clearly conveys one impetus to transportation, but it doesn't describe the overall phenomenon, which has been relegated to the subtitle. So let me put my money where my mouth is: *Trans-Tasman Time: When Australia was a New Zealand Penal Colony, or Doing Time in Tasmania: When New Zealand Sent its Convicts to Australia*. I venture to say these would have been more accurate and saleable titles.

#### LOW LIFE: SHORT STORIES

MICHAEL BOTUR  
(NZSHORTSTORIES.COM, \$27.99)

In this collection of tales, Botur ambles around territory previously occupied by Bukowski, Wells, Tower and other chroniclers of the



louche life and finds himself right at home.

The first sentence gives the flavour of much febrile prose (and low-rent subject matter) to come: “Bipan, that dickhead from Nepal who regulates the adhesive levels on each glue gun in the factory, he keeps changing the radio station to R&B and after 20 minutes of R. Kelly you have him against the wall with the nozzle of an air gun in his face and you're telling the dude, Dude: you mess with Skynrd one more time, you're goin' home in an ambulance.”

Botur wields this demotic vocabulary, and these agitated rhythms, combined in collages of invective and obscenity, with much skill. It's a neat trick that's easy to stuff up, but he consistently gets it right. In the story quoted above, the protagonist quits his job because the songs on the radio tell him to. But once out there, he discovers the world is a harsh place and rock 'n' roll dreams really don't come true.

Although a lot of the people in these stories are in and out of jail, and freedom of any kind is not something they take for granted, not all the characters are at the bottom of the heap. The “you” at the centre of “InsAngel” is someone who buys fountains and ride-on mowers – so why wouldn't he become obsessed with a performance/con artist who bludges fags from



#### PICTURE THIS I

GORDON WALTERS:  
NEW VISION, EDITED  
BY ZARA STANHOPE  
(AUCKLAND ART  
GALLERY TOI O TĀMAKI  
AND DUNEDIN PUBLIC  
ART GALLERY, \$79)

In the minds of many as simply the artist who painted those clever, slightly op-art koru paintings, Gordon Walters stands reassessed as much more in this comprehensive volume. It accompanies an exhibition of the same name that can currently be seen in Dunedin and will be on show in Auckland until July.

The title gives a subtle tip of the hat to the eponymous Auckland gallery that sponsored his work and that of so many important contemporaries. The book features eight essays covering such matters as biography, Walters' relationship to European modernism and his often controversial use of Māori iconography.

Best of all, however, are the reproductions of work – from a career spanning more than half a century – which confirm the range and greatness of his achievement.

tourists while pretending to run a half marathon?

“Granny Frankenstein” offers an update on the criminally inclined seniors of *Arsenic and Old Lace* in a screwball comedy about a little old lady who turns out to have a knack for selling P. It’s a small, comic masterpiece and the perfect conclusion to a remarkably satisfying collection.

**BECAUSE EVERYTHING IS RIGHT BUT EVERYTHING IS WRONG**  
ERIN DONOHUE  
(ESCALATOR PRESS, \$24.99)

This is young-adult fiction, but the emphasis should definitely be on the second half of that label, given the sophisticated issues tackled – notably adolescent mental health and suicide. Caleb is a teenager with problems. Inevitably. If he didn’t have problems, this wouldn’t be young-adult fiction, it would be science fiction.

He begins the novel experiencing symptoms of classical alienation, such as not feeling at home anywhere, including home. His identity is slipping away from him to the point where his mother says, “It’s like... he’s not even there.” We join the story as he starts back at school for his final year.

Caleb has trouble with a writing exercise about what he did over summer, because he didn’t do anything over summer. He stayed in bed, experiencing a vague dread he calls “The Fear”.

Things take a turn for the better when the cool and confident Casey Stevens turns up. He likes her and she seems to like him.

But his problem continues to worsen and he knows it. Faced with questions about what he’s planning to do after school, he observes,



“How am I supposed to function outside high school when I can’t function in high school?”

Caleb’s family, please note, is normal – hence the book’s title. His situation is poignantly contrasted with that of his little brother, who inhabits a healthy, societally sanctioned fantasy world involving much construction of Lego rockets.

The novel is explicitly described as semi-autobiographical in its treatment of mental health, but it is much more than a case study. It’s a sensitively told, all too plausible tale that even provides us with the ultimate reader treat – a surprise ending that is also satisfying.

**GROWING MORE THAN GRASS: CLEVER, CREATIVE, RURAL KIWI WOMEN**  
HEATHER KIDD  
(BATEMAN, \$39.99)

The activities undertaken by the 20 women in this book range from such intrinsically rural activities as running a shearing gang or establishing a peony farm to undertakings that are rural only insofar as they are being conducted outside a big city, such as felting.

As an account of country women pioneering and achieving in a variety of fields, it is no doubt intended to be

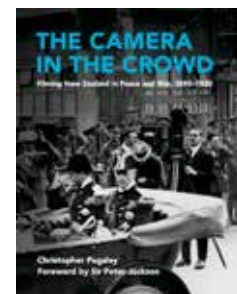


inspirational – and it is – but one can’t help wishing it were better written.

Kidd spends quite some time telling us things we don’t need and would be unlikely to want to know. Discussing Monique Neeson and her very desirable-looking blankets, for instance, she writes “the origin of blankets is not crystal clear” but informs us they are “popular with the military” and handy at picnics. Neeson is typical of several of the women in the book who rose to the challenge of a rural downturn by starting a business to help support their families. The more the subjects are allowed to speak for themselves in these pages, the more engaged in their stories we become.

A book focusing on rural women might also have been expected to confront more directly such issues as battling sexism when competing in traditionally male fields, which shearing gang boss Sarah Higgins surely must have.

Hannah Wallace impresses as the first woman to win Young Māori Farmer of the Year, but when we are told “farming is quite literally in Hannah’s blood”, we have to say that is simply not true. On the contrary, farming is quite metaphorically in Hannah’s blood. In fact, you couldn’t find a clearer example of what a metaphor is.



**PICTURE THIS II**  
THE CAMERA IN THE CROWD: FILMING NEW ZEALAND IN PEACE AND WAR, 1895-1920, BY CHRISTOPHER PUGSLEY  
(ORATIA BOOKS, \$80)

Military historian Chris Pugsley details the first quarter-century of film in this country with his usual thoroughness and readability. Not only does the text-rich volume relate in detail the history of such pioneering efforts as film of the 1905 All Blacks returning to New Zealand, it also does as much as a non-digital work can to let us see them for ourselves.

Projector icons in the margins throughout provide links to the films discussed. There’s even a movie in the book, consisting of thumbnail pictures of the Auckland Expeditionary Force in 1914, in the bottom right-hand corner of each spread, that can be flipped to recreate the film. The many still photos in the book are almost equally fascinating, especially as digital improvements to battered images of times gone by now make them as clear as they were when taken.

## ✦ REVIEW

**new zealand books** by paul little

## NOTES & QUERIES

*In Criminal Justice: A New Zealand Introduction*, edited by Jarrod Gilbert and Greg Newbold (Auckland University Press, \$59.99), the editors aimed to provide the first book covering the basics of our criminal justice system, as Gilbert explains.

**NORTH & SOUTH:** This is a textbook, so is there anything in it for the general reader?

**JARROD GILBERT:** It was the intention to ensure all the contributors wrote in a way that would appeal to a wider audience, because it's an area of enormous importance but too often ruled by emotion rather than intelligence.

**N&S:** Did those contributors take much wrangling to get to that point?

**JG:** The contributors are a combination of academics and practitioners. We've got [NZ Herald journalist] David Fisher and [senior lecturer] Tara Ross writing about media. We've got the Children's Commissioner writing about youth justice, and the Superintendent of Christchurch police writing about policing. It's a real mix. There were two criteria to be involved: you had to be an expert and you had to be able to write. Sometimes it was a bit of a trade-off, as some academics are not known for being the easiest to read, but reading it back when it was printed, I was pleasantly surprised it had a nice flow.

**N&S:** Some academics actually welcome the chance

to talk directly to people.

**JG:** We don't do it enough. Many exist in an ivory tower and write for their peers, which may be eight people, and they're satisfied doing that. I think it's important we reach out into communities, because communities are affected by the issues in this book. If we leave it to the media, there's a picture that can be painted that doesn't resemble reality.

**N&S:** Do you think these pieces will provide a context for people to apply to what they get in the media?

**JG:** Without question, people who read this book will see the justice system differently and consume news differently. Up to 20% of news is crime related. That's an enormous percentage and not all crime is equal. We tend to focus on violence, sex and celebrities, which can give you a distorted picture of the world. But if you're aware of that, you can make educated decisions about how you respond. At the moment, our lives can be dominated by a fear of crime, when crime rates are dropping.

**N&S:** That truth can be quite inconvenient for some people.



Paremoremo maximum-security prison, Auckland. New Zealand has one of the highest prison-population rates in the world.

**JG:** Yes – and it's not just the media, where false perceptions occur. The political narrative tends to hype things up when it's convenient.

**N&S:** Resulting in a focus on jail as a solution?

**JG:** The chapter on sentencing shows that for certain categories of crime, if you do it once you'll go to prison. We're very good at using prison and have a frighteningly high rate of incarceration. That's 60% higher than Canada, and I'm sure we're not 60% more wicked. The country has for a long time seen prison as an answer.

**N&S:** You, in your work with gangs, and co-editor Greg Newbold have both been close to the wrong side of the law. Has that had an effect on the book?

**JG:** In other areas, we don't always agree and we argue about various things. But when it came to this book, I can't remember us having

a single conflict on anything, right down to the cover – perhaps because, in some ways, there's an obviousness to what needs to be told. If anyone at all was doing an intro to criminal justice, I suspect it would look very much like this.

**N&S:** Is there a mood for change in how we handle criminals and justice?

**JG:** If we were designing the criminal justice system from scratch now, the system wouldn't resemble the one we have. It's occurred patchwork and piecemeal. Some of the initiatives we undertake are only going to tinker around the edges, because aspects of the system itself are the problem. But in saying that, we have to acknowledge the underlying principle and structure is very good and something to be proud of. Western democratic ideals of justice are as good as any humanity has come up with, and they should be protected from politicians. +