

The New Zealanders: A Story of Austral Lands. By J.S.C. Dumont d'Urville, translated by Carol Legge. Victoria University Press, Wellington 1992. 367pp. NZ price: \$39.95.

FIFTY-TWO years after Marion du Fresne's ill-fated expedition to New Zealand in 1772, the *Coquille*, under the command of Duperrey, sailed to New Zealand. Jules Sebastian Cesar Dumont d'Urville (1790-1842) was second in command to Duperrey. Although they only stayed in New Zealand from 13-17 April 1824, this short visit gave d'Urville the inspiration to write a novel, based on his experiences, on return to his native France.

When d'Urville made this voyage to New Zealand in 1824, he sailed in the wake of theories of the Noble Savage, which romanticized the pristine state of 'primitive' societies. At the forefront of the new sciences, ethnology promised a method of seeing other societies for what they were, rather than as they were idealized. Dumont d'Urville, as a scholar and scientist, was very much a product of this age. But as an educated member of the minor nobility, d'Urville also indulged his penchant for classical literature, along with his interests in exploration and ethnography in *The New Zealanders*.

D'Urville's own classical education is evident in the text, which adapts the form of Virgil's epic *Aeneid*. Described as a fictionalized ethnography, the novel has an inflated tone; a style designed to complement the heroic themes and deeds of the characters. For instance, the first paragraph of each chapter apostrophizes a virtue or abstract concept, which the exploits of the characters in the novel then illustrate. Small wonder then that *The New Zealanders* held little interest for the nineteenth-century reader with an appetite for the contemporary.

The New Zealanders is a story of war, jealousy, love and revenge, fraught with the conflict between the forces of good and evil. The principal character in the novel, Moudi-Pangui, is the fictionalized persona of the historical warrior chief Murupaenga. Moudi-Pangui personifies all that is good, exhibiting every virtue and quality which d'Urville saw in the Maori people. His arch-rival and enemy, Chongui, based on the infamous Hongi Hika, embodies all that is bad. Both Moudi-Pangui and Chongui, as the protagonists of good and evil, are more fully developed than the remaining characters, who appear in one-dimensional supporting roles.

The most substantive part of *The New Zealanders* is the section of Reference Notes to the novel — an appendix of extended footnotes — which constitute almost half of the entire text. Here d'Urville has the opportunity to elaborate on various aspects of Maori life, obtained both from his own brief observations and his considerable reading of earlier voyages to the Pacific. He tells of warfare, cannibalism, tattooing and burial customs, taken from missionary records and the writings of previous visitors to New Zealand.

The issue of the authorship of *The New Zealanders* will be of particular interest to the historian and literary critic alike. In his preface, d'Urville denies responsibility for the novel, claiming it to be the story told to him by a sailor he met on his return from New Zealand. Although it seems that he was accompanied by such a person on the return voyage, the evidence suggests that d'Urville himself composed both the novel and the accompanying endnotes. By employing this literary device, d'Urville distanced his own name from the novel, lest his reputation as a scholar, scientist and explorer should be tarnished by his brief foray into fiction.

Carol Legge has made an impressive work of translating and editing d'Urville's manuscript to produce this first published version of *The New Zealanders*. Until Legge's doctoral thesis, from which this edition is derived, Dumont d'Urville's own draft of the text — written in both his and Mme d'Urville's handwriting — lay unpublished in the French National Archives. Moreover, the issues of concern to d'Urville continue to be

discussed. Even in the context of the late twentieth century, d'Urville's allegorical tale of conflict and adaptation in a rapidly changing society has lost none of its validity.

GISELLE M. BYRNES

University of Auckland

The Guardians at the Gate. The History of the New Zealand Customs Department. By D. McGill. Silver Owl Press, Wellington, c1991. 207pp. illus. NZ price: \$39.95.

THIS COMMISSIONED sesquicentennial history of the New Zealand Customs Department is written by popular writer and journalist, David McGill. The tone and content of the volume will be appreciated by the general lay reader but from an academic perspective it is disappointing.

The book begins with a couple of chapters on the early years of the customs service. The following sections cover a broad chronology dealing with illegal distillations and brews, tobacco smuggling, the opium question, the impact of the two world wars, and closing with postwar themes such as pornographic material, drug smuggling and a look at the application of technology to the department's work.

The book is couched very much in personal terms. We hear, for example, a great deal about George Cooper, the first Collector of Customs, and the manner in which he invested customs revenue in private land speculations before disappearing secretly. The verbosity and alcoholism of Stephen Carkeek and the crusading efforts of Hugh Cordery, both collectors, are similarly highlighted. While there is undoubtedly merit in the personal approach, it might have been balanced with more on the changing organizational structure of the Customs Department. The structure of management, for example, receives only very brief attention on a couple of occasions.

Nonetheless, there is much of interest and indeed fascination contained in each chapter. The link between opium prohibition and racist immigration policies against the Chinese is brought effectively into perspective. There is a worthwhile discussion of the application of new technology to the administrative and surveillance work of the customs service, creating what McGill describes as an 'electronic supermarket'. Liberalizing attitudes towards pornographic literature are given careful attention particularly for the decades following 1950 when Henry Foster, Collector of Customs for Napier, remarked of Joyce's *Ulysses* as 'one of the dirtiest I have seen, written by a mental defective'. While examples of this nature can serve to illuminate a book, this particular work has a tendency to descend into the anecdotal. There are sections in most chapters which read rather like a long list of seizures including many of very little general interest. There is also a somewhat annoying tendency to communicate in colloquial and over-used phrases while the absence of footnoting will frustrate scholarly readers.

McGill has produced many interesting photographs, drawings and other documents which help to illuminate the story. Overall, this study tells us much about the changing nature of the work of customs and the main characters involved but it leaves the institution itself disappointingly in the shadows.

SIMON VILLE

Australian National University