

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.

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*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.

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