

Ourselves in Primetime: A History of New Zealand Television Drama. By Trisha Dunleavy. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2005. 340 pp. NZ price: \$49.99. ISBN 1-86940-339-8.

WHO REMEMBERS *A GOING CONCERN*, a South Pacific television drama screened weekly in 1975 and 1976? Not I. And with not a single episode surviving we cannot be reminded. New Zealand has not been kind to its local television drama. Much is forgotten soon after broadcast. Many, indeed most, of the earlier examples have not survived. Dunleavy does good service in restoring to our collective memory at least their identity and broadcasting record. The field is too large for her to consider them all. Her selection is sound and we are given a fine sense of the nature and the changes over the years in the country's productions. This work does not pretend to be a complete record. But there is a wide coverage of what has been broadcast and some that were not. The strength of this work is its recording and critical appraisal of these productions. *The Alpha Plan* (1969), *The Park Terrace Murder* (1976), *Hanlon* (1985) and *Duggan* (1997–1999) are but four examples in a long line of television dramas that have been a major part of New Zealanders' entertainment and a significant addition to the country's artistic and cultural heritage.

This history is fascinating and well presented. While the first local television drama was screened in 1963 it was not until the end of that decade that the NZBC had any real regard for the genre and a continuing commitment to it. Regarded as an expensive luxury, it was neglected in favour of cheaply imported British and American counterparts. Drama was saddled with a policy that what there was should be made in house. Independent productions were not welcome.

It was the next decade, the 1970s, that saw local drama mature and become a topic of divisive political debate. *Pukemanu*, in 1972, marked the change. It was of increasing competency and reflected a New Zealand that the audience recognized and appreciated. It indicated, especially with its bi-cultural cast and script concerns, that local productions could make observations that furthered our understanding of ourselves as a nation. *Close To Home*, screening in primetime twice a week from 1975 to 1983, provided the training ground for the cadre of skilled people needed to provide continuing television drama. And in 1977 *The Governor* provided what to this day is the best example of local television drama's ability to enlighten and to offend. A wonderful feature of that decade's re-evaluation of racial history, it attracted a larger audience than any local drama before or since, but was also a focus in the Muldoon-led attack on New Zealand television generally. Muldoon and *The Governor* together made local drama overtake current affairs as the dangerous element in New Zealand television. In the new climate of political antagonism and financial austerity, South Pacific Television's 1976 kidult production, *Hunter's Gold*, showed the road for the following years. Lighter dramatic concerns with the possibility for international sales became the dominant focus.

For drama the critical change in the new broadcasting order of the late 1980s was the acceptance of, indeed the need for, independent productions. The strength of in-house production was shown in highly different ways by such excellent dramas as *Erebus* and *Gloss*. But the NZBC's unconscionable refusal to allow independent productions was finally seen as wrong. It was abandoned only slowly and reluctantly in the 1980s until the redoubtable Julian Mounter was appointed to lead the way. In the 1990s, with the changed commissioning structure provided by New Zealand On Air, independent production gained the lead role. However, it was accompanied by another less welcome change: the dominating programmer. Greg McGee contrasted 'the old days when writers were trusted to come up with ideas' with the new order where 'programmers think they know what the audience needs and so you get . . . '.

There are sub-themes in this history, of which the rise of Maori films is the most significant. Barry Barclay noted in 1990: 'We will know what a Maori film is when we

get a chance to make more films'. Dunleavy charts television's large contribution to that change. Her discussion of the rise of bi-cultural drama is a real strength in this work.

I have doubts over various of Dunleavy's judgments. As one instance, the first television dramas were not well received by the local audience. Dunleavy puts the non-supportive, often antagonistic, reaction down to a cultural cringe. My own argument, the work, alas, unconsidered here, is that the late entry of local drama meant inevitably raw productions were presented to people who had happily watched bad local television years earlier but were no longer naïve viewers. Dunleavy wears her heart on her sleeve. She sits firmly in the camp of writers and producers with little time for the efforts and values of policy makers and administrators. She has marked views on aspects of New Zealand history. There is the 'notorious' Governor Grey, the Chapman report is 'tragically' ignored. Readers may or may not agree with such judgments. Certainly few are well supported. But these are minor quibbles with a work that covers considerable territory, much of it relatively uncharted. Television drama is of great interest and consequence but, by the nature of its transmission, soon fades from memory and is often lost. Dunleavy provides an excellent counter to that and her book is a welcome addition to the literature on New Zealand's television history.

PATRICK DAY

University of Waikato

Tackling Rugby Myths: Rugby and New Zealand Society 1854–2004. Edited by Greg Ryan. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2005. 247 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877276-97-9.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO *TACKLING RUGBY MYTHS*, penned shortly after the All Blacks' semi-final elimination from the 2003 Rugby World Cup by a superior Australian XV, Greg Ryan highlighted the anxiety felt by many New Zealanders at the All Blacks' continuing failure to succeed in the showpiece tournament. Central to that disquiet, he wrote, 'is an assumption that the long established unity, continuity and invincibility of New Zealand rugby has been at least eroded, perhaps even sabotaged by forces acting contrary to the best interests of the game'. This collection of essays deals with that angst, identifying limits and deficiencies in the existing historical writing on rugby in New Zealand, and questioning deeply held assumptions about the nature of the 'national game'.

Tackling Rugby Myths is unusual for an edited collection in that four of the 11 chapters plus the introduction are written by one author, Greg Ryan. Two of Ryan's chapters confront directly the myth that the heartland of New Zealand rugby lies in the provinces, where generations of hard and hardy rural men, Colin Meads the exemplar, shaped the culture of the game and guaranteed New Zealand's supremacy. Armed with convincing, detailed data on the composition of All Black teams of the past, Ryan shows the predominantly urban origins of the All Blacks before World War II. 'Contrary to the myth, urbanisation and centralisation were the key determinants of continuity in New Zealand rugby', he explains (p.46). This urban orientation remained largely true throughout the post-war period. Consequently, popular explanations of the repeated All Black failures of the late 1990s — such as the claim that New Zealand men have lost their hardness as a result of the insidious spread of Auckland's cappuccino culture — culminating in the 1999 World Cup semi-final loss to the crotch-grabbing, eye-gouging French, are misplaced. Given the selective memory that underpins popular understandings of the All Blacks' 'invincibility', such explanations derive from 'a set of myths and clichés that holds no relevance to the actual nature of New Zealand rugby at any time during the twentieth century' (p.172). Ryan's other chapters explore the early history of Maori rugby and the vexed issue of the South African connection and its implications for Maori