

almost two months. It is hard to imagine anyone nowadays letting a nine-year-old ride such a distance solo through the Snowy Mountains.

In spite of the inclusion of these real-life details, *The Great Arch* is 'not a fictionalised biography', as the author acknowledges (p. 339). Rather, it is a beautiful blend of fact and fiction with beautiful, lyrical writing – for example, when Ralph describes his first taste of an olive: '... as parched as the place it came from. Ancient and salt as tears'. (p. 53).

As an enjoyable blend of factual information and a creative recreation of a former age, Hastrich's second novel is up there with Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* and Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* – and like her first novel, *Swimming With Jellyfish*, well worth the read.

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**Intimate Ephemera: Reading Young Lives in Australian Zine Culture**, by Anna Poletti, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2008, 310 pp., \$39.99 (e-book), \$49.99 (paperback print on demand), ISBN 9780522855654

Any academic choosing to focus on perzines by young people – that is, on zines featuring personal writing by those in their teens and early twenties – is faced with several conundrums. Anna Poletti outlines these at the beginning of *Intimate Ephemera*, a book which looks specifically at young Australians' perzines. Firstly, she asks, can one subject the products of young lives and subcultures to analysis without robbing them of their vitality? Secondly, what should be the main point of one's focus: the zines themselves, or the subcultures or networks through which they are produced and distributed?

Poletti's answer to this second question informs her response to the first. As she sees it, it is impossible to treat perzines as a means of gaining direct access to young people's subjectivities and subcultural communities. Instead of treating them as sites of authentic youth sensibilities, Poletti argues that we should focus on their peculiar qualities as narratives of youthful experience. Throughout *Intimate Ephemera*, she advocates for a literary perspective on perzines rather than the sociological approach informing most studies of zines to date. And by focusing on zines as texts, she argues that it is possible to avoid that sense of intrusion and imposture so many sociologists feel when attempting to study youth culture. In her view, approaching perzines as a reader rather than an ethnographer or cultural 'expert' allows one to sidestep such tricky ethical and methodological problems.

Caught up in Poletti's approach to perzines are longstanding debates about the relationship between discourse and experience. Poletti's approach to these debates, heavily weighted towards the former rather than the latter, will obviously please some readers more than others. Her key concern is to interrogate the discourses which produce the young 'self' in perzine self-publishing (p. 35). Certainly her focus on the way that perzines draw attention to their own self-fashioning, whether through their narrative strategies and modes of production, lends weight to this approach. (Poletti looks at the use of cut'n'paste collage, for example, through which zine producers insert words or images from other texts into a written piece, as an

active disavowal of a unified or 'authentic' self. A similar point is made by the impermanence of the zine, printed on cheap paper, usually hand-stapled, and sometimes even distributed in throwaway coverings such as discarded fast-food wrappers). Given Poletti's theoretical orientation, however, the book is likely to be most attractive to scholars or life-writing, DIY publishing, blogs, young people's memoirs and narratives of depression as literary forms than it is to scholars of youth studies or sociology and cultural ethnography.

For my own part, as a lay reader affiliated with history rather than the disciplines just mentioned, the main value of *Intimate Ephemera* is the spotlight it places on a form of hand-made, non-commercial publishing being practised by young Australians today. In the midst of the relentless attention given to the association of youth and new media, it is salutary to be reminded that such low-tech endeavours still exist. The perzines which Poletti writes about are often distributed via snailmail to personal contacts, or as gifts or trades-in-kind. As such, they also remind us how conditioned we literate adults and academics are to think of publishing as a commercial, mass-produced enterprise.

In *Intimate Ephemera*, Poletti shows us that this does not always have to be the case. She also argues that forms of publishing which refuse the logic of mass-production and permanence require new techniques of reading and analysis. This is a challenging claim, and one that makes this book worth considering regardless of one's perspective on the relationship between discourse and experience.

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**The Other Anzacs: Nurses at War 1914-1918**, by Peter Rees, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2008, 363 pp., \$59.95 (hardback), ISBN 9781741755497

Journalist war histories are in many ways the bane of the academic war historian. They have a tendency not only to simplify war history, but to repeat traditional understandings of the war experience in ways that do little to advance public appreciation and discussion of war and its effects. They are usually heroic in their outlook, focused tightly on military combat, and littered with blind spots and errors.

Some of these faults are readily apparent in Peter Rees *The Other Anzacs*. He suggests that 324,000 Australians enlisted for service in World War I – in fact it was closer to 417,000, 331,000 of whom embarked. He doubles the death toll from World War I to 20 million, he quotes Ellis Ashmead Bartlett's famous and fanciful account of the Gallipoli landings as if it was accurate, and he appears also to be blind to some of the sexual euphemisms employed by the nurses when writing in their diaries.

But the great virtue of Rees' work is that it contributes to the vast array of popular histories about Australians at war in ways that are likely to expand, rather than simply reinforce, public understanding of the war experience. Rees covers a rather neglected topic and relies heavily on primary sources, mainly in the form of nurses' letters and diaries, both of which give his work an originality and freshness sadly lacking in most lay histories of Australians, and New Zealanders, during World War I.