

But This Is Our War. Grace Morris Craig. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.

Grace Morris Craig's book, *But This Is Our War*, is a fascinating collection of letters and diaries from Craig's youth. They depict, in a colourful and dramatic way, one family's experience of the Great War of 1914 to 1918, an event which not only interrupted, but irrevocably altered, the lives of a generation of Canadian youth.

The book, which is well edited, readable and coherently brought together by Craig's narrative, is an admirable accomplishment for a woman of any age, but clearly a tribute to a woman of 90 years. *But This Is Our War* chronicles a young woman's life as it moves from the gaiety of pre-war Canadian life, to the grim realities of war.

Craig begins by describing her youth in Pembroke, Ontario, as the daughter of a CPR engineer and the centre of much social activity. From the tennis parties, to the extended vacation in Western Canada, life takes on an unreal and fanciful quality in Craig's recollections. She portrays her family life as one happy event after another, and does not deal with any of the tensions and personal ambivalences which inevitably mark youth. The effect of her father's long absences during work on the CPR line are not dealt with, nor is her understandable resentment and disappointment at the rejection of her application for admission to the University of Toronto's School of Architecture, a rejection that was based on her sex. (Following the war, Craig went on to become Toronto's first woman architectural "draughtsman," and much later in her life became a successful painter.)

Grace Morris and her family were ardently pro-British and the young Grace supported the Union government in 1917 because of its commitment to conscription, feeling that the Province of Quebec must do its share in the war

effort. In fact, Grace headed a committee in Pembroke devoted to convincing the newly franchised women relatives of servicemen to vote in favour of conscription. Unfortunately she deals only peripherally with that experience, and explains that she did this at the request of her father, who was at this time mayor of Pembroke.

During the war, Morris sent endless letters and packages overseas, not only to her brothers but to many friends and acquaintances. She knit socks, made bandages, helped her parents entertain soldiers from the nearby military camp at Petawawa, and worked one day a week in the canteen. She even made a trip to England to visit her brother following news of his temporary blindness due to shell shock. Like many Canadian women, Morris's life was centered around the war effort, and it is unfortunate that she gives us so little detail of her own feelings as she adjusts to a life in which she must cope with the work, the worry, the fear of losing loved ones, and the separation which war brought.

Morris appears in *But This Is Our War* as the dutiful daughter *par excellence*; however, we may question the accuracy of the account, due to its lack of detail and the tendency to use the book as a family memorial, omitting any references to the negative and anti-heroic aspects of their lives.

When war breaks out in 1914, and the carefree life suddenly ends, with the departure of Grace's brothers and friends for military service, the book's focus of attention shifts away from Morris's participation in the war effort at home, to the impressions of her brothers and friends serving overseas. This collection of letters from war-torn Europe, seen from the eyes of young, frightened soldiers gives us a fascinating look at both the psychology of the soldier, and the day-to-day conditions of war.

The letters, especially those from Grace's youngest brother, very poignantly and person-

ally detail the effect of trench warfare on the men. Young Basil Morris's pleading for letters from home, the gradual replacement of youthful enthusiasm for weariness with the constant fear, the lack of rest, and the mud of the European trenches, give us a good picture of homesick and confused boys fighting a war which had scarcely any meaning in their lives, once the romance of adventure had worn off. In one letter, young Basil explains that, here, in the trenches, there was no one to give one comfort and sympathy, and his longing to be home with his parents and sister, is strong and undisguised. We even learn such mundane features of trench life, as the value of having a cat in one's trench-home in order to keep out rats and mice.

These letters also tell us, most articulately and eloquently, the way in which the men coped with the idea of death; how they became, of necessity, almost callous to the loss of comrades and family, and how they learned to live with the fear of their own death.

Unfortunately, *But This Is Our War* does not balance the beautifully detailed picture of the soldier's life, with an accurate and realistic account of home life during the war. In this sense, the book can scarcely be considered women's history, as it sadly tells us very little about the author herself. By so eloquently eulogizing the heroism of her soldiers, and passing quickly over the lives of the women left to wait for their return, the author of *But This Is Our War* tells us whose war it really was.

But if the book is poor women's history, it is an admirable piece of oral history of the World War I period, told from a soldier's viewpoint. One must keep in mind, however, that this book deals only with the lives of wealthy middle class boys who were sheltered from much of the agony of the overall war experience. Although Basil was involved in trench warfare, he had a much more comfortable life than many, being an officer and an engineer involved in tunnelling

operations. The young officers whose correspondence makes up this book did not suffer from the demoralization of unemployment, which was high during the early war years and prompted many men to enlist, nor following the war when many returned servicemen came back to a country which did not seem to need them anymore.

Morris's description of Canadian pre-war life as a gay adventure, may be true to her personal experience, and/or remembrances, yet it is hardly representative of the average Canadian young woman. The British loyalty and unquestioning support of the war effort displayed by the Morris family and reflected in *But This Is Our War*, may have been typical of many middle class, Anglo-Saxon Ontarians, but was in no way typical of all Canadians. Despite the limited view presented in *But This Is Our War*, Grace Morris Craig's book is readable, interesting, well-illustrated and a notable contribution to Canadian social history.

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Louise Michel. Edith Thomas. Translated by Penelope Williams. *Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980.*

The name of Louise Michel - "petroleuse" and "communard" - has been etched on the banners and in the traditions of both communism and anarchism. For them, Louise Michel has assumed a somewhat mythical status which