

Marina Larsson. *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009. 320 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-921410-55-0.



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Between 1914 and 1918, 416,000 Australians, four out of every ten eligible men, enlisted for war. Of these, nearly 60,000 were killed. Australia's participation in the First World War, and especially the ill-fated landing at Gallipoli in April 1915, is popularly lauded as the birthplace of Australian national identity. The fallen Anzacs[1] were commemorated in public rituals of mourning, notably a new national Anzac Day, and on over 5,000 memorials and cenotaphs erected in almost every population center.

It is probably impossible to accurately estimate the number of veterans impaired during the war, but as a indication, ninety thousand veterans had received disability pensions from the Commonwealth by 1920. These "shattered Anzacs" occupied a liminal space in the Australian psyche, denied the heroic status of the fallen, but often unable to fully reintegrate into society.

In *Shattered Anzacs*, Marina Larsson joins a growing field of scholars who examine the experiences of these impaired and disabled veterans. Previous studies, including those by Stephen Garton and Kate Blackmore, have focused upon veterans' interactions with repatriation agencies, medical authorities, and government departments. *Shattered Anzacs'* major innovation is to expand the analytical focus beyond the soldiers and their

dealings with official bodies, to their families, kin, and the social worlds in which they lived. Claiming that families made up the "building blocks of the nation," Larsson gives the wives, parents, children, and siblings of disabled veterans a starring role in this often insightful and always touching study.

Larsson casts a wide net in defining her subjects. She doesn't distinguish between veterans who acquired transmissible diseases, physical wounds, or psychological impairments, nor is she concerned whether these were sustained during, or simply "aggravated" by, the war. Instead, she adopts an "integrated model that recognizes both the physical and social dimensions of disability," arguing that her approach enables us to "productively shift our historical gaze between disabled soldiers and the cultural words in which they lived" (p. 20). The strategy works well, and serves as a useful means of exploring how impairments disrupt other social and cultural categories such as class and gender.

Shattered Anzacs follows a broadly chronological format. Each chapter is organized under a series of headings, and, while the subsections do not always gel together as coherently as I might have liked, they allow Larsson to span a diverse range of topics in a relatively

compact space. Her narrative is driven by a series of microhistories, vignettes really, which are informed by an impressive range of sources, spanning thousands of letters drawn from a large number of private collections, veterans' case files, photographs, the popular press, and a handful of oral history interviews. Larsson reads her primary material against the grain, skillfully negotiating the silences and ambiguities found in her sometimes opaque and challenging sources. Overall, Larsson draws a rich and imaginative sketch of the lives of veterans and their families.

The first four chapters follow a similar format. Chapter 1, "War wounds as Family Wounds," begins with a discussion of soldiers' motives for enlisting, then moves to soldiers' experiences of being wounded, the prospects of long-term disablement, and the manner in which soldiers communicated their emotions to families and kin. Drawing for the most part upon letters between soldiers and their families, Larsson examines the competing conceptions of gender, patriotism, civic and familial duty. Larsson argues that soldiers' letters were paradoxically both instruments of concealment and instruction, providing an "emotional template to guide family reactions to their 'changed man' on his return" (p. 59).

Chapters 2 through 4 examine the experiences of veterans on their return from war. Ranging from disabled soldiers' experiences of love and marriage, to their employment prospects, social and economic situations, and to the experiences of their careers, Larsson provides a series of poignant insights into the social and cultural worlds of the veterans. The common thread Larsson finds amongst her many case studies is that soldiers' disablements resulted in "a shared process of adjustment and reconciliation within the privacy of the home, which involved â| kin" (p. 89). The presence of an impaired veteran in a family group challenged preconceived notions of manliness and independence, and could upturn typical gender power relations within a household. Families adapted and negotiated lifestyles apart from the male breadwinner model: "within disabled soldier households, the financial burdens of war were typically shared and managed collectively, even if to the outside world it appeared that the disabled soldier was on a journey towards 'independence'" (p. 119). Typical of these portraits is that of Gordon Mackay, a veteran who "was not bedridden, but suffered war-related health problems," and lived as "a stay-at-home father ... [who] undertook typically female domestic responsibilities" (pp. 130-131). Larsson's sensitive use of the historical imagination always provides useful insights, but her decision to focus upon

microhistories, some of which are so brief as to be mere glimpses, sometimes detracts from the strength of her overall argument.

While the book's four chapters cover a broad range of impairments, family circumstances, and so on, the next two chapters are tightly focused studies of specific impairments, and are, in my opinion, the most successful sections of the book. Chapter 5 examines families and mental hospitals. Traversing ground very familiar to historians of psychiatry, Larsson explores the manner in which veterans' families managed their relationships with institutional superintendants and government agencies. In common with families of civilians with psychiatric illnesses, the families and kin of veterans were proactive in arranging their relatives' institutionalization or release, and influenced superintendants' decisions to offer, for instance, trial leave from a hospital. Larsson suggests that a common factor amongst families of veterans was their insistence that their kin be treated in dedicated repatriation facilities, rather than in the mainstream mental health system. This, she explains, was partly influenced by economics: veterans' facilities were known to be better funded and maintained than the often atrocious general mental hospitals. However, she also convincingly argues that families wished to distinguish between "the civilian insane," popularly stigmatized, and their own relatives, who suffered from "shell shock," and similar ailments. Her insights in this regard raise important questions concerning the agency of family members when arranging for a relative's care.

Chapter 6 deals with tubercular veterans. As bearers of a transmissible impairment which spread readily amongst the civilian population, and especially amongst the immediate family members of veterans, Larsson argues that tubercular veterans occupied a marginal position in postwar society. Using the hitherto unaccessed records of the Tubercular Soldiers' Aid Society, she details how veterans were taught that self-government was key to the disease's management. Whole families were corralled into a preventative regime which involved the maintenance of "scrupulous cleanliness" and airy environments (p. 189), and Larsson once again reveals the stories of families deeply involved in the physical and spatial management of their impaired relatives: separate beds on porches or in tents in backyards, the fastidious keeping of separate cutlery and domestic objects, and so forth. As in the previous chapter, Larsson also details veterans' negotiations with government departments, public health bodies, and charitable agencies while managing their conditions. In this chapter, however, her study

is enriched by her exploration of the bonds of community developed and shared by tubercular veterans through associations such as the Soldier's Aid Society and its journal, *The Optimist*.

Chapter 7 marks a return to chronology. Beginning in the Depression years, Larsson suggests a new class of "burnt out" veterans gradually emerged: those who had seemingly escaped the war unharmed, but later manifested new, often unspecified ailments such as "weakness" and "thinness and debility" (pp. 209-210). She finds that impaired veterans represented a disproportionately high number of unemployed during the period. Through the 1930s the number of pensionable veterans also increased, and Larsson argues that still larger numbers were rejected from repatriation schemes. Once again, Larsson's suggestion is that families as a whole shared the burdens of impaired veterans, and we are treated to another series of moving, but occasionally disjointed, family portraits.

The final chapter deals with the death of impaired veterans, and their memorialization by family members. Making excellent use of the large number of studies which have previously explored the intersection of citizenship and national identity with commemorative rituals, Larsson examines the marginal position of the families of veterans who experienced "delayed deaths": deaths related to war injuries which occurred many years after the official cessation of hostilities. As the focus of Anzac Day gradually shifted from a day of mourning to a day of national celebration, a growing number of families were disenfranchised from the war's memorialization, and their disabled relatives were excised from official celebrations. Larsson explores the different ways in which families resisted this marginalization and created their own rites of mourning, through funerals, the placing of headstones, and other activities. She also examines attempts by the Australian War Memorial (Australia's national place of commemoration) to include veterans in the official Roll of Honor: a process ultimately abandoned, with a large number of veterans dying after 1921 being recorded upon cards intended to form a supplementary roll book. As it is, Larsson notes, these cards remain in the memorial's storerooms, "something of a hidden honour roll for the postwar disabled dead" (p. 262).

Shattered Anzacs is stylishly written, and the timbre of Larsson's prose keeps the reader engaged throughout. In keeping with the personal nature of her stories, Larsson painstakingly names every veteran and family mem-

ber encountered. While to an extent this usefully humanizes her cast, I wonder if she would have been better served by adopting the occasional anonymous "one veteran" or similar. As it is, the significant players in the book are often lost amongst a cacophony of pseudonyms and named bit players. It is common to be introduced to five or six individuals on a single page, never to encounter them again.

I also have some slight reservations regarding the testimonies of her eleven oral history informants. While they do offer a useful insight into some intimate moments that might not otherwise have been gleaned, questions arise as to the representativeness of Larsson's sample and to the accuracy of their childhood recollections. In an appendix, Larsson explains her recruitment process: advertisements calling for people with "childhood memories of a family member ... who returned with a disability" printed in the newsletters of the Returned Serviceman's League and Legacy (both returned veterans' associations) (p. 273). Larsson admits she has some concerns about informant self-selection, but seems to disregard any other potential difficulties, such as the intersection of myth and memory, and so forth. Working in a field which, in Australia, has made some significant contributions to the problematic nature of oral histories—most notably Alistair Thomson's *Anzac Memories* (1995)—it seems an oversight that many of these practical and theoretical concerns are disregarded. I would like to have seen a more sustained critical engagement with these testimonies.

Her theoretically uncritical use of the oral histories is representative of a wider lack of scholarly engagement that is both a strength and a weakness of the study. Although Larsson adopts the language of disability history, and is clearly aware of its methods, she doesn't critically engage with other work in the field. Similarly, she makes little reference to the growing body of international studies of impaired veterans of this and other engagements. This is a shame, because I believe Larsson's work has something valuable to offer to international scholars of war and disability.

Shattered Anzacs is not revolutionary. And, to disability historians, her argument that whole families are touched by disability is unsurprising. But still, this is a very good book, lifted by Larsson's poignant, insightful, and beautifully written microhistories. Larsson paints a vivid picture of life amongst impaired and disabled veterans, and shares the suffering, challenges, and the triumphs of their family members in trying to cope within a society often unsympathetic to their plight. In do-

ing so, Larsson spans gender history, economic history, social and cultural history, the histories of welfare and medicine, and, of course, disability. Her study should take a well-deserved spot on the shelves of disability historians.

Note

[1]. “Anzacs” is the term commonly used to describe troops from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

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