



NZJPH5

NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HISTORY
TWENTYSEVENTEEN



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

COVER IMAGE

Debra Powell, *Being Both*, 2014
Watercolour and pencil on paper

The patu parāoa belonging to Rahapa Power (Te Hauata) of Ngati Apakura, is part of the Te Awamutu Museum Collection (collection number 15231.1). In 1847, at the age of twenty-two, Rahapa married Irish-born farmer Thomas Power, forming one of the first Māori-European families in the Te Awamutu region. At the request of Governor Grey, the couple worked together to introduce local Māori to European farming practices. This taonga, originally carved in whalebone, has been playfully reimagined here as a hybrid object, blending together traditional aspects from within the worlds of Rahapa, Thomas, and their five children. *Being Both* was created for the Te Awamutu Museum's exhibition *Reimaginings*, whereby a group of nine artists were invited to select objects from the museum collection as a source of inspiration. The resulting artworks were shown between 12 December and 15 February 2015.

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NARRATIVE INQUIRY: WRITING HISTORIOGRAPHY.

Celine Kearney.

Traditional western historiography encourages the writer/researcher to take a distanced, objective stance. From this stance the writer/researcher becomes the dominant analytical voice in the resulting text. This commentary reflects on an alternative approach to writing history, an approach that is better positioned to give readers an opportunity to understand and perhaps empathise with individual experiences, be that as a facet of a wider event, or of an issue under inquiry. This is an approach which I used recently in the practice-led PhD I completed in 2016, where I used narrative as both method and text to explore how people with Scottish and Irish backgrounds, residing in Aotearoa New Zealand, lived out their cultural connection to their northern hemisphere homelands. A narrative inquiry, 'Southern Celts: An Investigation of how People with a Celtic/Gaelic background live out their Traditions in Aotearoa New Zealand' was planned as an exploration of the discursive construction of culture and identity.¹ Over time however, I also came to understand the inquiry as an exercise in historiography. This commentary explores issues which relate to the practice of narrative as a contribution to more mainstream historiography, specifically the explicit presence of the researcher/writer in the text, and issues of memory and perceptions of truth. Finally I reflect on the importance of the reader or audience in narrative inquiry as an approach to history.

'Southern Celts' is constituted by an artefact, and an exegesis analysing the process involved in the creation of the artefact. The artefact took the shape of a book of interviews. In selecting interviewees I was informed by cultural theorist Chris Weedon's understanding of cultural identity as 'neither one thing, nor static... constantly produced and reproduced in practices of everyday life, education, the media, the museum and arts sectors, the arts, history and literature'.² Reflecting this, among the twenty-five interview narrators were business people, speakers and teachers of Gaelic; musicians, singers, writers, a documentary maker, a carver, a sculptor; sports people; a genealogist; a Treaty of Waitangi educator and two people who work in the museum sector. Participants' interview narratives were rich in detail about themselves as individuals, their families and communities, geographical and cultural, as well as wider social and political issues from national and international perspectives.

¹ Celine Kearney, 'Southern Celts: An Investigation of how People with a Celtic/Gaelic background live out their Traditions in Aotearoa New Zealand' (unpublished PhD thesis: Victoria University, Australia, 2016).

² Chris Weedon, *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging* (New York: Open University Press, 2004), p.155.

The narratives are represented as full-length interviews in the artefact, preceded by an essay which tells my own family story and my experience of living in Ireland. In the essay I ask what there is in this country now in concrete ways, and in the psyche of Kiwis, that could be a legacy of our Celtic/Gaelic forebears. I describe a series of my own road journeys around New Zealand in an attempt to answer this question, but I also reflect on some of the more problematic issues associated with personal and family narratives, observing that,

memory is selective. The stories we are told about our past are often exactly that, stories that reflect the teller's perceptions more than comprehensively recounting details of the event or of the individual. But that does not diminish the value of the stories.³

The opening personal essay introduces the inquiry and also provides the frame for the interview narratives that follow. Each interview process followed the same set of questions, which were designed to encourage participants to reflect on Celtic/Gaelic influences in their past, present, and possible futures. Interviewee responses were diverse: some systematically addressed each question in turn, while others told their stories using other reference points; one read excerpts from her poetry and short stories, illustrating how integral these are to her sense of identity. These were integrated into her interview narrative.

The explicit co-construction in narrative inquiry differs from traditional Western historiography. In 'Southern Celts' the artefact was co-constructed through the opening essay which positioned me as participant, as well as researcher and writer, alongside other interviewees. Each interview narrative was also an example of co-construction in that my questions were intentionally open-ended, which allowed interviewees to shape their responses.⁴ It was this process of co-construction that led to the inclusion of song lyrics and poems in some of the interview narratives. Although each interview was co-constructed in the present, each of the narratives was also rooted in the past; as narrative theorist Catherine Reissman describes, utterances carry 'the traces of other utterances, past and present, as words carry history on their backs'.⁵ Narrative philosopher Paul Ricoeur's understanding of historiography also supports the methodology adopted in 'Southern Celts'. As Ricoeur writes, 'it is always a

³ Kearney, 'Southern Celts', p.11.

⁴ As a participant I also gave my own opinion on a response to a question at times, which can be discouraged in more mainstream research.

⁵ Catherine Reissman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008), p.107.

community, a people, or a group of protagonists which tries to take up the tradition — or traditions — of its origins’ where ‘historiography is the passage into writing, then to critical rewriting of this primordial constituting of tradition’.⁶ Following Ricoeur, I view the ‘Southern Celts’ interview narratives as ‘a passage into writing’ of the living out of Celtic/Gaelic traditions here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

‘Southern Celts’ narratives cover many of the same issues as Angela McCarthy’s more traditional and complex historiographic texts concerning the Scottish and Irish in New Zealand. McCarthy’s *Personal Narratives of Irish and Scottish Migration 1921-1965* utilises lengthy excerpts from letters; *Scottishness and Irishness in New Zealand since 1840* utilises ‘insider and outsider’ perceptions of characteristics of Irish and Scottish identities in that she draws on the experiences articulated by Irish and Scottish individuals as well as a range of wider social observations.⁷ In contrast, interview narratives in ‘Southern Celts’ are universally ‘insider’ perspectives. While ‘Southern Celts’ explores the discursive construction of cultural identity, and McCarthy focuses on ethnic identity, we share a similar underpinning perspective in that both McCarthy and I believe that ‘identities have multiple and fluid meanings.... [which are] shaped and determined by the wider environment’.⁸ McCarthy suggests that more engagement with multi-generational descent groups is necessary in the exploration of Irishness and Scottishness, echoing Canadian scholar (of Irish background) Donald Harman Akenson’s suggestion that a multi-generational approach has the potential to be more productive than a simple focus on ‘emigrant’ history.⁹ ‘Southern Celts’ interview narratives provide this in vivid detail, where a Waiheke Island-based sculptor of Irish background tells three generations of his family story: his father’s arrival in New Zealand, his own story of the influences of his father on his art, and one of his children who completed her PhD in Ireland and worked at University College Dublin before her untimely death. Another narrator, Ann Corry, owned Helean Kilts in Dunedin from 1989 to 2012, and tells a family story of Scottish great-grandparents through the generations through to her

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, ‘Narrative Time’, *Critical Inquiry*, 7, 1 (1980), p.189.

⁷ Angela McCarthy, *Personal Narratives of Irish and Scottish Migration 1921-1965: ‘For Spirit and Adventure’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Angela McCarthy, *Irishness and Scottishness in New Zealand from 1840* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.6.

⁸ McCarthy, *Irishness and Scottishness in New Zealand from 1840*, p.5.

⁹ Ibid., p.11; Donald Harman Akenson, ‘No Petty People: Pakeha History and the Historiography of the Irish Diaspora’, in *A Distant Shore: Irish Migration and New Zealand Settlement*, ed. by Lyndon Fraser (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2000), p.18.

own daughter. Charlie Dunn, former heavyweight champion boxer from Te Rarawa iwi in the Hokianga, starts with his Irish great-great-grandfather who married the daughter of a local chief, and speaks of the next five generations of his family.

One of the distinctive features of a narrative inquiry like ‘Southern Celts’ is that — unlike in more traditional historiography — the narrator occupies the same three-dimensional space as the participants. This three dimensional frame: time (past, present and future), place, and the intersection of the personal and social, was developed by narrative theorists and educationalists D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly.¹⁰ Within this narrative frame my story and those of other narrators in the artefact are equally ‘lived and told stories’.¹¹ I explained how I was the granddaughter of three Irish-born grandparents and one Aotearoa New Zealand-born Irish-immigrant grandparent, whose father came from County Derry. I described my family’s journey to New Zealand and included excerpts from letters my maternal grandfather wrote to my grandmother while he was in New Zealand and she was still in Ireland. This allows the reader to gain insight into my background as an investigator and a participant, and how this might have influenced or shaped the artefact and exegesis. My identity as a ‘Southern Celt’ shapes my engagement as a researcher and writer, therefore there is no pretence of being an objective inquirer. Acknowledging all this breaks down the subject/object, self/society split of more traditional qualitative research and writing, and of traditional historical genres.¹² The practice-led methodology enabled me to do this through using ethnographic and autoethnographic methods and insights.¹³

Personal narratives have been criticised in academic research, such as by Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont who have suggested that the use of autoethnography has led to unreflective use of personal accounts in qualitative research.¹⁴ If narrative methods are not used explicitly, and rigorously scaffolded, then there can be a perceived lack of reliability of personal memory

¹⁰ D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

¹¹ Ibid., p.60.

¹² Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

¹³ Robin Clair, *Expressions of Ethnography: Novel Approaches to Qualitative Methods* (Albany: State University of New York, 2003); Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont, ‘Rescuing Narrative from Qualitative Research’, *Narrative Inquiry*, 16, 1 (2006), pp.164-172.

and consequently the perception of a lack of ‘truth’ in personal narrative. In response to such criticism, narrative inquirer Arthur Bochner describes the kinds of truth that stories of family record, or individual memories construct, as ‘emotional, dialogic and collaborative’.¹⁵ In Donald Spense’s work on meaning and truth in psychoanalysis, he suggests the distinction between ‘narrative truth and historical truth’.¹⁶ Autoethnographer Tessa Muncey acknowledges this when she writes that shared family memories do not necessarily contain verifiable truth. She asks whether disagreeing about the details of an event should call a memory into question.¹⁷ For me these two truths can be held together, one not necessarily negating the other, because family and community stories help to construct our lives. They are important in their own right, despite inaccuracies of memory.

Furthermore, as Ricoeur posits, narratives are constructed both *within time* and *within memory*.¹⁸ Building on this insight, narrative theorist Elliot Mishler called these chronological and non-chronological dimensions of time ‘the double arrow of time’ which encompasses the physical world and the world of human consciousness. For Mishler the double arrow is integral to the process of ‘how conscious and reflective persons re-present and re-story their memories of events and experiences’.¹⁹ For me these are reasons why co-constructive approaches to story-telling that preserve three-dimensional space are necessary. While any narrative may have a tendency to reify an individual’s life in the snapshot of the written narrative, the focus on time as one of three frames of narrative analysis requires the constant consciousness of time, and the consequent acknowledgement that the participant narrators’ lives may change, as might the researcher/writer’s, in the process of the inquiry. By the time I had completed the inquiry I felt grateful to have collected several interview narratives, as two of the participants had died and several had retired. I agree with Catherine O’Shea Miles who used oral history as a method in her research,

¹⁵ Arthur Bochner, ‘On First-Person Narrative Scholarship: Autoethnography as Acts of Meaning’, *Narrative Inquiry*, 22, 1 (2012), p.161.

¹⁶ Donald Spense, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth* (New York: Newton, 1982).

¹⁷ Tessa Muncey, *Creating Autoethnographies* (Los Angeles; London: Sage, 2010), p.102.

¹⁸ Ricoeur, ‘Narrative Time’, pp. 180-81.

¹⁹ Elliot Mishler, ‘Narrative and Identity: The Double Arrow of Time’, in *Discourse and Identity: Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics*, ed. by A. De Fina, D. Shrifin & M. Bamberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.36.

Celine Kearney.

and identified the challenge of recording individual histories 'before the generation disappears forever'.²⁰

Having reflected on the explicit presence of the researcher/writer in the text, and related issues of memory and truth, the final issue I will focus on is the role of the reader. Readers are an influential component of narrative, as they bring their own experiences and understandings to the text, and long interview narrative allows them opportunities to do this. The reader or audience thus becomes a 'co-participant'.²¹ Clandinin and Connelly suggest that the narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses, but rather creates texts which, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications.²² Ken Plummer writes, 'for narratives to flourish, there must be a community to hear... for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history... [where] the one — community — feeds upon the other — story'.²³ It is the community of readers then who carry these stories into the future, enriched through their own understandings. This narrative methodology offers mainstream historiographers opportunities to co-construct texts which potentially provide deeper insights into aspects of the identity of the narrator, and so an opportunity for readers to empathise with individual stories and their narrators, within the wider analytical frame of an inquiry. Readers too as 'co-participants' bring their own experiences and understandings to the texts, so adding further layers of insight. My aim for these narratives is for them to reach as wide an audience as possible, and echoing Bochner and Riggs I hope that readers will engage with the narratives and think *with* them rather than just think *about* them.²⁴

Celine Kearney teaches academic literacies to students with English as an Additional Language who are preparing for undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Based at the Centre for Languages at Wintec Institute of Technology, Hamilton, she is interested in the construction of cultures and identities, and also how this influences language acquisition.

²⁰ Catherine O'Shea Miles, 'Irishtown: Hamilton East 1864–1940', in *The Irish in New Zealand: Historical Contexts & Perspectives*, ed. by Brad Patterson (Wellington: Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, 2002), p.149.

²¹ Arthur Bochner and Nicholas A. Riggs, 'Practicing Narrative Inquiry', in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Patricia Leavy (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 195-222.

²² Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry*, p.42.

²³ Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), p.87.

²⁴ Bochner and Riggs, 'Practicing Narrative Inquiry', p.207.