

Editorial Introduction: Nga ra o mua



JUDITH BINNEY has been an important presence in the New Zealand historical profession and an incisive contributor to this journal for more than three decades, both as an author and an editor. Judith's books — *Legacy of Guilt*, a now-classic history of the missionary Thomas Kendall; *Mihaia*, an innovative study of the visionary Maori leader Rua Kenana; the experimental collection of oral histories of women linked to the prophet Te Kooti Arikirangi, *Nga Morehu The Survivors*; and the magisterial biography of Te Kooti, *Redemption Songs* — redefined and reinvented the biographical form so central to twentieth century New Zealand historiography.

Judith's essays, however, are not so well known. So when the *New Zealand Journal of History's* editorial board began discussing how best to mark both Judith's retirement from the University of Auckland and her retirement as editor of this journal we decided to depart from the model used in the volumes published in honour of Keith Sinclair and Keith Sorrenson. Instead of commissioning essays from Judith's students and colleagues for a festschrift, there seemed to be no better tribute to her and to her contribution to New Zealand history than to gather together some of Judith's essays, supplemented with an overview essay from Damon Salesa, a former student of Judith's who now teaches at the University of Michigan.

Thanks are due to the many people who helped with the preparation of this volume. The editors of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Auckland University Press and the University of New South Wales Press all kindly gave permission for material to be reprinted. Barbara Batt, our indefatigable administrative assistant, handled the preparation of the text with her usual professionalism. The National Library of Australia and the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, assisted in providing copies of key images, and granting permission for their reproduction. Dave Small of the Turnbull Library pointed us to an engraved copy of the map examined in 'Tuki's Universe', Raewyn Dalziel, Judith Bassett, Elizabeth Caffin, Kerry Howe and Sebastian Black all assisted at key points.

Rereading the essays they seem as fresh and salutary as ever. Each demonstrates how good history is built on disciplined inquiry, systematic research and close-grained analysis. They also show how good writing, spirited argument and that indefinable quality, flair, embellish and amplify a historian's empirical findings. The sum of the essays as a whole, too, is greater than that of the individual parts. Judith's distinctive voice, her acute awareness of the responsibilities and limits of the historian's role as interpreter of the actions of others, her sharp eye for a telling image and her over-riding concern for the textual and cultural integrity of her subject matter, are all highlighted as mainstays of her scholarship. There are surprises too; the demographic and statistical analysis that is the backbone of the Maungapohatu article is not

generally remembered as part of the Binney oeuvre. The essays about Thomas Kendall and William Yate remind us that she is a historian of Pakeha as well as Maori.

‘The life of any good written history’, Judith boldly argued in her essay on Maori oral narratives and Pakeha written texts, ‘may itself be only ten or 15 years’. These essays give the lie to that prediction, reminding us that the past is rich, strange, sometimes indeterminable, but, despite the challenges of postmodernity and post-colonial theory, perversely knowable. In the same essay in which she declared written history to have a relatively short shelf-life, Judith called readers’ attention to the way in which for Maori ‘the past is seen as that which lies before one, “nga ra o mua”, the days in front’. In this collection we see how Professor Binney has laid our pasts, Maori and Pakeha, male and female, shared and separate, before us. We hope there are many more essays to come; this collection is intended as both retrospect and prospect. The days in front will, we hope, continue to bring forth new ideas and fresh challenges.

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