

narrative and tidy organizational shape. Somewhere he now needs to contemplate more fully the difference between conservation and preservation. Furthermore, he is now better positioned than anyone else to answer the interesting question as to why the wilderness ideal, which caught on so early in the USA, took so long to gain currency in New Zealand. Probably his account is also a touch too whiggish in that it suggests things have improved because of human endeavour whereas any advance might have more to do with necessity than idealism. One is certainly left wondering if the petro-chemical pollution, depleted fish stocks and lakes poisoned by fertiliser runoff of the early twenty-first century represent much tangible improvement over the wanton destruction of forest a hundred years earlier. Certainly, Young has succeeded in avoiding the doom laden apocalyptic or declensionist tone which mars so much environmental history, but his account is probably a little too positive and comforting. A revised or second edition would benefit by moving away from the state and its records to concentrate on more peripheral organizations and less well-known individuals. The organic alternative in farming goes back further than the 1980s, for example. Future studies also need to examine Maori beliefs and actions rather more systematically. These are difficult matters but they are by no means impossible with Treaty claims, for example, providing much information on the Maori experience of environmental degradation and rescue. Like an earlier project in which I have been involved, more attention needs to be focused on sea, coast and waterways. Then there is the matter of overseas comparisons. How has the conservationist trajectory differed from that of similar societies such as Australia and Canada? The rich literatures on Britain and the USA also hold out some exciting comparative possibilities. The emergence of conservation as a popular cause needs to be related to wider sociological and cultural developments in a much more exhaustive manner.

Obviously, a single author working to tight deadlines could not have achieved all these tasks. Many of my reactions also relate to matters of tone and emphasis. My major criticism of this generally excellent start to understanding the history of conservation in the environmental and social laboratory of New Zealand is rather that the book could have been a little more analytical. Perhaps this expectation is unrealistic given that this is primarily a popular account, but there is no harm in encouraging authors to take a little time out from the busy whirl of researching and drafting to write a contemplative piece on some of the issues which emerge from writing commissioned history. True, professional historians have to move on to new projects to earn a living, but it would be good if they could prompt academic historians and postgraduates to push projects deeper and wider in this manner. Academic toilers in the archive and field also must attempt to relate the New Zealand story to the rapidly expanding international literature on environmental history.

With this caveat in mind Young still deserves considerable praise. Young has succeeded in doing this by revealing so much about what has been achieved as well as making clearer some of the large gaps that still exist in terms of what has yet be done. For this reason alone his excellent book represents a very important contribution to the future as well as the past of Gondwana/Aotearoa/New Zealand.

TOM BROOKING

University of Otago

Remembering: Writing Oral History. Edited by Anna Green and Megan Hutching. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2004. 182 pp. NZ price: \$44.99. ISBN 1-86940-317-7.

IN *REMEMBERING: WRITING ORAL HISTORY*, Anna Green and Megan Hutching have collated a range of essays as an 'introduction to the field of oral history that will also

suggest new ways of thinking about the original stories and how they are turned into written form' (p.vii). As recently as 1997, Eric Hobsbawm dubbed oral history 'a remarkably slippery medium for preserving facts'.¹ In reality the debates about the reliability of oral history have moved beyond the 'defence mode' imposed on it by statistically inspired researchers in the 1970s for whom 'validity' was all important.² Alistair Thompson, Alessandro Portelli and Penny Summerfield, among others, have explored aspects of narrative construction, composure, omissions, inaccuracies and silences and how they may be useful in interpreting the meanings people attach to their life experiences. The chapters in *Remembering* showcase the methods and theories associated with oral history and are flanked by the editors' contributions on practical, archival and ethical issues.

Using a case study of Frankton Junction, Green deftly works through aspects of oral history as dialogues, narrative, social context, recorded emotions, imagination and myth. In 'unpacking the stories' she makes the case for oral history as the means of accessing otherwise inaccessible experiences and suggests the need for 'sophisticated interpretive tools' if oral history is to be used to best advantage (p.22). Rounding off the collection, Hutching discusses the compromises involved in turning the spoken word into text. Lesley Hall deals with the need for an ethical approach to the collection and storage of oral narratives. She makes a particularly valid point about the need to provide the opportunity for future verification of interpretations of what is recorded in interviews.

'Cast Within Alternative Realities' deals with experiences of women involved in amateur dramatics in Te Aroha. Members of this drama group dressed in theatre costumes also feature on the front cover of the book. This interesting choice of cover suggests the multifaceted nature of oral history, and the forms and structures life stories may take, as well as the variety of possible interpretations. In writing that she was pleased to document 'a fragment' of the women's lives, Kay Edwards hardly does herself credit. Rather than portraying a 'fragment' she conveys the pervasiveness of the commitment to drama and acting throughout their lives. From their earliest days those participating in her study had links to performing arts and continued their interest through child-rearing and working lives. The analysis of these fascinating lives paints an intricate picture of small-town life in New Zealand since World War II and illustrates the use of oral history in recovering the lives of women engaged mainly in the domestic sphere.

Arguing for the uniqueness of oral histories, particularly Maori oral history, Danny Keenan analyzes the delivery of tribal whakapapa, traditions and history from the paepae during formal speechmaking. The rigidly structured and stylized format, designed for the transmission of Maori knowledge to the next generation, is, he suggests, an exchange that strongly asserts tribal validity and mana across the marae. In this context the form of the paepae governs the form the oral histories take and represents the uniqueness of Maori oral history. At the same time Maori oral history is shaped, like other oral histories, to serve different purposes depending on the prevailing circumstances.

Judith Binney shows how narratives recorded in a Maori community change to accommodate altered realities and, in the retelling, accumulate new characteristics until the originating causes of injustice are confronted. She addresses the impact of an oral history project on a community, how men's and women's narratives vary and how published material can influence the retelling of community histories. Combining archival sources, recorded interviews and repeat visits to Maungapohatu over a 25-year period, Binney charts how the stories have changed since her initial contact with the people of Rua Kenana Hepetipa in 1977 and predicts they will continue to do so in the search for a resolution of grievances 'widely shared' (p.35).

A community of a different sort is that of the Waitike Valley, near Rotorua, settled by those selected in a post-war farm ballot scheme. Jane Moodie found that the interviews provided a less triumphant view of life in Waitike Valley than previous publications

suggest. She compares and contrasts the narratives of men and women in the valley, and exposes marked differences in the ways they construct their narratives — men tending towards the legend of pioneer settler; wives towards a view of themselves as independent or rebel women resisting the status quo. The urban settlement of Hamilton East, largely Irish in origin, offered Cathy O’Shea-Miles an opportunity to examine the transmission of cultural identity from one generation to the next. Irish and Catholic appear to have been conflated in the minds of her interviewees. The influence of the Catholic clergy and Fr Michael Bleakely in particular contribute to the impression that priests and the church were the main agents of transmission of culture, not mothers and grandmothers as O’Shea-Miles suggests (p.79).

The dearth of written history on lesbians in New Zealand is compensated to some extent by Alison Laurie’s chapter based on interviews with Freda Stark and Beatrice Arthur. Stark was notorious as the lover of Thelma Mareo who was murdered by her husband, Eric Mareo, and infamous as the naked dancer at the Civic Theatre in Auckland. The result of these involvements was a high profile for Stark stretching from the 1930s to the present. Beatrice Arthur, in contrast, lived discretely for 57 years with her partner Bette Armstrong and, unlike the socializing Freda, it was not until the 1980s that this couple found a circle of other lesbians with whom to associate. Laurie’s insightful analysis of the recorded interviews takes account of the possibility of other narratives. Both Stark and Arthur constructed accounts of the past to accommodate their life experiences in a composed fashion whilst avoiding alternative versions.

Juanita Ketchel, a pioneer volunteer and working co-ordinator of a women’s refuge centre, explored the mechanisms that promote resilience in victims of violence. This long-term oral history project illustrates a practical use of recorded narratives. Interviews revealed techniques and personality traits that might assist others in understanding and combating the effects of abuse.

Michael Belgrave uses oral history to examine how individual choice and freedom have increased in New Zealand since World War II, while institutional freedom has decreased over the same period. Belgrave relates the life cycle of the Mater Hospital in Epsom (owned and operated by the Sisters of Mercy) to the wider globalization of health services, and the ‘changing relationship between public and private worlds’ (p.126). He makes interesting use of oral histories to identify the growing individuality of members of the Sisters of Mercy in Auckland and observes that this was in spite of the conformity expected within a religious order. Belgrave concludes that the individuality of religious sisters in this order in Auckland was expressed through their work.

Remembering: Writing Oral History shows the diversity and range of sources available to researchers and suggests a variety of approaches that might be applied to local projects. For a relatively small book (182 pages including good supporting illustrations) it provides a wealth of inspiration from which to draw.

GABRIELLE FORTUNE

The University of Auckland

1 Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, London, 1997, p.206.

2 Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives*, Manchester and New York, 1998, p.17.