

The Contest for Rugby Supremacy: Accounting for the 1905 All Blacks. By Greg Ryan. University of Canterbury Press, Christchurch, 2005. 240 pp. NZ price: \$34.95. ISBN 1-0877257-36-2.

IN THE HARD FOUGHT BATTLE for the label of border closest to my house, Wales is pipped at the post by Worcestershire, but only just. The upshot is that as a possessor of a New Zealand accent, broken chromosome and more than passing academic interest in sports history and studies it is nearly impossible for me to escape the predominant local myth that in 1905 plucky Wales brought the mighty All Blacks to their knees to establish a rugby-inspired bond between Wales and New Zealand. This notion is dearly held in the introspective worlds of rugby union in both countries. There is a demotic sense of what could be seen as a form of proto-post-colonial bond of not-really-English rugby rivalry. This spirit, this rugby zeitgeist, shapes much of the Welsh-sourced writing, both populist and scholarly or critical, dealing with sporting relations between the two countries.

This fantasy is powerful not only in Wales. The Deans (non) try in the 16 December 1905 test match has been elevated in the dominant myth to become one of the founding moments of New Zealand-ness, and Deans's response to the 'try' being disallowed as a marker of New Zealand masculinity. I doubt that the 'try' has much significance for young New Zealand men, but for those of us ensconced in middle age it was part of the growing into manhood, and quotidian tensions of the Wales–New Zealand rugby rivalries of the 1970s if not later were a central part of our (Pakeha) national–masculine experience.

Greg Ryan's mission to debunk the myth is therefore welcome. Like all myths there is a central core of actuality, a significant element of forgetting, and potent leavening of obfuscation: in the case of 1905, it is not a question of whether Deans scored or not — to even ask the question is to perpetuate the myth. Rather *The Contest for Rugby Supremacy* has many of the characteristics that we have begun to associate with Ryan's work: rigorous archival delving, close attention to a context that is not just concurrent with the events in question that also frames them, and a vigorously pursued argument with the goal of demythologizing and demystifying. There is no sense of uncertainty about Ryan's analysis, about where he stands, and about what he thinks about the literature surrounding the issues he is exploring.

Ryan has presented a case that considers the 1905 tour in the context of the social and institutional development of rugby union in New Zealand, that deals with the fall out from the tour, including the challenge from the less-than-amateur Northern Union (later to become the Rugby League), and the difficult colonial and imperial relations resulting from the tour (including the strained relations between the NZRFU and the various 'home' unions as well as between the NZRFU and its constituents). In doing so, he has drawn back many of the obfuscating shrouds contributing to the mythology of the tour and the All Blacks as a historical institution, as well as revealed and evaluated the elements that make up the core of actuality.

He makes his case through a tightly argued narrative, and along the way shows a sceptical attitude towards existing scholarly and more popular literature. In this sense, the volume is conventional in its historiographical form, and — in the schematization recently advanced by Doug Booth — straddles both constructionist and reconstructionist categories. The contextual focus comes close to telling the story of the tour 'as it really was', while the vigorous engagement with previous analyses of events surrounding the tour, especially as they link to elements of New Zealand's images of masculinity and national identities, are close to the story of the tour 'as it essentially was'. The dominance of both these Rankean strategies makes the case more reconstructionist in style and form.

For the most part, the book is well presented. There is an insignificant number of typographical errors, it is sturdily bound and attractively (if a little drably) packaged. The illustrations are suitable but poorly integrated into the volume. I understand the economic imperative to bind photographs on glossy stock in a separate section — but they appear at the beginning of the final substantive chapter, and there are few in-text markers of relevance, with the result that they neither supplement nor complement the argument. The biographical appendix is extremely useful.

In terms of Ryan's iconoclastic mission there is little doubt that the image of 1905 needs to be debunked, and that the starting point of this evaluation of both events of the tour and the tour's historiography is the sort of what really/essentially happened that holds together Ryan's narrative. The problem is that Ryan's narrative does not adequately engage with the after-the-event mythical deployment of the tour. In presenting an argument that is so powerfully rooted in the 'really/essentially was' approach, Ryan's attempts to disprove the analyses advanced by previous writers invoking the tour, especially Jock Phillips and Keith Sinclair, miss the mark and reveal the weaknesses of empiricist approaches to myth-slaying.

Ryan misses the mark in his rejection of Sinclair's and Phillips's cases in two key ways. First, neither of them claimed to be analyzing the tour in itself. Instead they assessed how the tour-as-event was deployed in the language of New Zealand national identity or the image of the Pakeha male. Phillips, in the preface to the first edition (1987) of *A Man's Country?* (the edition Ryan cites), makes clear that it is not 'a history of male behaviour . . . [but] . . . of ideas, of stereotypes and images' (p.viii), yet Ryan's argument seems to be that Phillips is wrong about 1905 because the events were in 'reality' different. If anything, his argument can be read as validating Phillips's assessment of 1905 in that Ryan shows the role of the tour in the image of the Pakeha male relies on the deployment of a core of actuality accompanied by an obfuscation of context to construct a particular image that is remarkably consistent with the image of the Pakeha male advanced by Phillips. It is worth noting that Ryan's rebuttal of Phillips's claim that in the late nineteenth century 50,000 men played rugby in New Zealand is compelling: the figure is simply not plausible. A similar case of endorsement of argument could be made for Sinclair's analysis of the role of the tour (specifically the Deans non-try) in New Zealand's national imaginary as the 'Gallipoli' of New Zealand sport. This is not to deny the legitimacy and accuracy of Ryan's critique of subsequent authors who have used both Phillips and Sinclair as sources for 1905 as it 'really/essentially was' (*mea culpa*).

The second way Ryan misses the mark is not one of content but of tone. In the 20 years since Sinclair and Phillips made the cases Ryan critiques we have seen significant developments in our understandings of New Zealand's social, cultural and sport histories (Ryan has been a major contributor to these developments), in part because writers such as Sinclair and Phillips staked out the territory and put into the public domain the sort of sacrificial arguments which Ryan seeks to overturn. While we should in the, at times overly polite (maybe even passive aggressive), world of New Zealand history encourage vigorous argument, we need to retain a generosity of spirit and can only hope that in 20 years' time our tomes may provide the next generation's sacrificial texts and arguments.

The weakness in Ryan's critique of Phillips and of Sinclair is not to suggest that he is necessarily wrong, but to suggest that his approach is not best suited to the debunking of myth. He needs a more nuanced assessment of both cases. Myth-slaying historians have a rich literature from which to draw: one of the best is Marina Warner's *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* — 60% the life and death of Jeanne la Pucelle, 40% the afterlife of Joan; 60% historical reconstruction, 40% textual deconstruction. Exploring the essential/reality of an event does not necessarily best expose or undermine its deployment in cultural and social mythology, mainly because the tools of constructionist

and reconstructionist empiricism are, for the most part, unable to unpack the textual and discursive uses of the event in subsequent political, social and cultural worlds. Ryan has given us the first part of this debunking and staked out a territory for the critique of the myth. In doing so he has been for the most part successful in walking the difficult line between minutiae of the demands of rugby-history-anoraks and scholarly critique, but his methodological tools let him down. He set out, according to his introduction, to slay the 1905 Jabberwocky: he has found it, but his weapons allow only a flesh wound. As a result, he has given us a life and death of the 1905 tour, but little of the afterlife: the historical reconstruction is solid; the textual deconstruction is absent. We need him to begin a subsequent volume deconstructing the mythology on the basis of this rigorous and valuable empirical base.

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Climates of War, New Zealand in Conflict 1859–69. By Edmund Bohan. Hazard Press, Christchurch, 2005. 288 pp. NZ price: \$44.99. ISBN 1-877270-96-2.

OF THE SIXTEEN DECADES THAT HAVE PASSED since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, the third was by far the most difficult. Maori fought Pakeha in the central North Island in a series of conflicts, while behind the lines politicians railed against the constraints on their ability to address issues related to Maori and bickered among themselves over the shape of New Zealand constitutional arrangements. It was a time of uncertainty and upheaval in some parts of the country, though in other places, untouched by war, economic development continued bolstered, in the South Island in particular, by the discovery of gold in 1861.

The causes of the inter-racial conflict have been addressed by a succession of historians, including Keith Sinclair, B.J. Dalton and James Belich. Perceiving, however, that there have been ‘few attempts to place the wars in context, either in New Zealand’s developing society or, least of all, within the wider British Empire and world’ (p.10), Edmund Bohan seeks to fill the gap with this study. He focuses on the years 1859–1865, when conflict erupted in Taranaki and the Waikato between forces comprising mainly imperial soldiers and some Maori tribes.

Having published biographies of three of the key players in this drama — Edward Stafford, James Edward FitzGerald and George Grey — Bohan suggests that his purpose is to provide ‘some kind of synthesis’ (p.10) of these works. This is both a strength and a weakness in his approach to the topic. Bohan’s forté is the politics of the period, and he is strong on the political infighting that characterized New Zealand’s fledgling democracy. He brings out well the struggle between those committed to a centralist vision of a New Zealand state and those who defended the provincial structure or favoured separation. In exhaustive detail, he traces the attitudes and intrigues of the colonial political élite as each parliamentary session unfolds. He brings to life the main personalities involved, and often provides little-known details about them or their inter-relationships. His account is a valuable reminder that, despite the distractions of war, much was achieved in the creation of the state during this troubled decade.

The weakness derives from a tendency to over-estimate the capabilities of the colonial politicians, especially Stafford (the premier when the hostilities began), for whom Bohan’s sympathy is patent. Indeed, he begins with an alibi for Stafford: an extensively described overseas tour. The crucial mistakes that led to war, Bohan notes, were made in his absence in the northern hemisphere. Whereas Bohan repeatedly points to Stafford’s admirable qualities, he is much less sympathetic to his successors as premier, William