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***Rangatira* (2011) by Paula Morris: insider and outsider appropriation**

Abstract:

The critical portion of my PhD investigates the ethical concerns of reimagining recent historical family and national narratives by New Zealand authors. Paula Morris's novel *Rangatira* (2011) reimagines the journey her tupuna, Paratene Te Manu (Ngati Wai), took with thirteen Rangatira from Auckland to England in 1863. In examining Morris's novel, I apply Adam Zachary Newton's framework of narrative ethics, which foregrounds the power hierarchies within the text and the ethical ramifications of an author's choice of narrative strategy. While the tour organiser, William Jenkins, exhibits a lack of intersubjective knowledge in choosing the Rangatira to take to England, and with his appropriation of the party's cultural practices, in this discussion I focus on the second form of appropriation in the novel, which occurs in Gottfried Lindauer's studio. While Lindauer's portrait of Paratene offers an opportunity for productive difference, this is undermined by Lindauer's artistic interpretation. The portrait renders Paratene passive, yet Morris does not answer the political implications of the inaccuracies and interpretation of art, instead she leaves the reader to evaluate the ethical divide between insider and outsider appropriation.

Biographical note:

Rebecca Styles lives in Wellington, New Zealand. For the creative portion of her PhD at Massey University she is writing a novel based on family history. For the critical portion she is examining recent New Zealand women's historical fiction (Morris, Wong & Morey) that explores family history within a narrative ethics framework.

Rebecca completed a BA (Hons) in English at the University of Otago, and a MA at the International Institute of Modern Letters (Victoria University NZ) in 2011. She has had several short stories published in New Zealand journals and anthologies.

Keywords:

Family history – historical events – narrative ethics – Paula Morris – appropriation

The research for my critical component grew from my need, as a writer, to understand the ethical consequences of writing a family history, and the authorial decisions I make to communicate that history, especially in relation to mental health. Ennis, the son of Irish and German immigrants to Dunedin, New Zealand, was my great, great Uncle. In 1926 Ennis suffered from a psychotic delusional episode and killed his best friend in the Railways Hotel in Dunedin. Ennis handed himself into police after the act, and after a trial where he was declared criminally insane, spent the rest of his life in Seacliff Asylum, north of Dunedin. Ennis's life was a family secret, only discovered when my mother started to investigate our family tree. Learning about Ennis sparked my curiosity as to the factors that lead to mental decline in men in the early twentieth century, what the mental health system looked like in that era, what treatments – if any – would have been available to Ennis, and, generally, what day-to-day life in the asylum would have been like for Ennis.

In my initial conception of Ennis's story I wanted to write from his perspective to understand his mental decline, and give him a chance to speak after so much familial silence. While the historical record gave me information about what Ennis did, the limitation of history is that it does not reveal an individual's train of thought. I can surmise a certain amount but I can never know what he was thinking. This is where imagination bridges the gap between what is known and unknowable. But bridging this gap carries with it ethical risks, and introduces the following question: how can I write about the experience of severe mental illness with accuracy and empathy, and without turning Ennis into a caricature?

Wayne C. Booth poses the question, 'What are the author's responsibilities to those whose lives are used as "material"?' (130). Booth cites Philip Roth whose Zuckerman novels (1979-87) answer the question by saying that 'art justifies all' (130). While Booth thinks that Roth's answer is lacklustre, he does not answer it himself. Instead he says that while the question is pertinent for a writer, it may not arise for a reader who may have no way of knowing the 'truth' of the people used for 'material' (125-26). While ethical critics often discuss whether a particular text will harm someone else, or whether the author has provided ethical support for the reader, Booth's discussion highlights the connection between writer, character, and reader and their ethical responsibilities to each other. In order to respond to these ethical questions, I wanted to discover how contemporary female writers in New Zealand negotiate this ethical relationship for themselves.

In this paper, I will discuss one recent New Zealand novel based on family historical narratives, Paula Morris's *Rangatira* (2011). I will approach the novel by way of the principles outlined in Adam Zachary Newton's *Narrative Ethics* (1995), which foregrounds the relationships between characters within the text and the ethical ramifications of an author's choice of narrative strategy. Newton proposes that 'narrative ethics implies simply narrative *as* ethics: the ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalising person, and the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness and reader in that process' (11). In order to explore the transactions between life and art, and between reader and text, Newton builds upon Gerard

Genette's narrative modes to offer a three part system of narrative ethics. The first, *narrational* ethics, or 'saying' – a term Newton borrows from Levinas – refers to the 'formal design of the story telling act, the distribution of relations among teller, tale, and person(s) told' (25). To investigate narrational ethics is to analyse the system of exchanges between tellers, listeners and witnesses, and the 'intersubjective responsibilities and claims which follow from acts of storytelling' (18). Narrational ethics looks at the connections between the characters in the story, the author and their focalised narrator, and readers.

One of the key terms of narrational ethics that I apply is Newton's use of the term face-to-face in which Newton explains that intercultural recognition is only achieved by acknowledging our physical ethnic markers. Newton defines this acknowledgement as productive difference. Newton analyses texts – by Crane, Melville and Wright – using Levinas's concept of ethical transcendence which, in Newton's interpretation, involves a 'scene of recognition which forms around the acknowledgement or repudiation of a face' (183). This scene illustrates that the face can signify 'a material focus within a textual field of representation' and can represent the face of social (in)justice (183). Acknowledging or repudiating a face within a novel has political implications for others of the same ethnic grouping in society (183). Newton explains that the novels he analyses show how the social structures of policing and repression have projected the image of a monster onto the African American face (183). While one outcome for intercultural recognition is to see the self beneath the face, Newton believes this is utopian, and instead believes that productive difference can only be achieved when we acknowledge our different physical markers – when we see each other face-to-face (184).

The second system of ethics Newton discusses is *representational* ethics, an approach that concentrates on the unfolding of character, 'the sea change wrought when selves become either narrating or narrated' (25). Representational ethics asks what the gains, losses and/or risks are when 'selves represent or are represented by others' (18). Newton borrows from Levinas in his belief that fiction is an essential doubling of reality which ties 'acts of representation to responsibilities' (19). The power of fiction to represent others, and act as a way of 'knowing' means that fiction is subject to ethical responsibility (19). Newton believes there is a 'slippage between mimetic, synthetic, and thematic aspects of character can actually *de-realise* a person in text' (129). Rather than a character representing a 'real' person, the character can be reduced to a copy, type or analogy for the text. This 'stripping back' of person, as Newton calls it, reduces the person in the representational space so they become an aesthetic form that effaces their personhood (132). In between the covers of a book, a person can be reduced to an aesthetic object by the author.

Newton's third ethical system, *hermeneutic* ethics, is a 'narrative inquiry into the extent and limits of intersubjective knowledge in persons' reading of each other, and the ethical price exacted from readers by texts' (25). Newton argues that prose fiction is subject to an ethics because one of the discursive worlds it inhabits is an ethical one, which 'resembles features of everyday communicative experience' (25). Newton proposes, through hermeneutic ethics, that a reader is responsible for 'getting' the text, but Newton notes that in 'getting' the story, the reader can also lose the 'person

as “real” (19). He warns that the way a person is appropriated or allegorised ‘endangers both intimacy and ethical duty’ (19). What Newton means here is that the person becomes a type rather than an individual, and this transformation, in turn, distances the reader from the very person they are trying to exercise an ethical duty towards. One of the reader’s ethical responsibilities is to respond to this paradox. Therefore, reading carries responsibilities to understand the story, whilst also understanding that in ‘getting’ the story the reader may lose the characters as real. It is this paradox, Newton argues, readers are responsible for responding to (19). His humanist response highlights the transactive connection between life and art, between reader and text.

Morris’s fourth adult novel *Rangatira* (2011) recreates aspects of the life of Morris’s ancestor Paratene Te Manu (Ngati Wai) in two narrative frames. The first frame, in the novel’s present, relates Paratene’s life during 1886 in Auckland. It narrates his frustration and foreboding of the Land Court, and the period of sitting for his Gottfried Lindauer portrait. The second frame of the novel recounts Paratene’s voyage to England in 1863 with a group of Rangatira from the far north of New Zealand. The historical tour party was organised by William Jenkins, a Wesleyan from Nelson who worked as a religious teacher and caretaker at the Wesleyan mission in Cloudy Bay. Jenkins’s aim for the tour was to enlighten the minds of Māori about European life, and to reveal England’s power and resources by taking them to England’s principal cities and manufacturing sectors. In order to pay for the tour, the Rangatira would assist at lectures in England by giving ‘illustration of their manners and customs’ (Mackrell 25). Paratene relates some information about the tour to Lindauer, whom he refers to as ‘the Bohemian,’ during sittings for his portrait. After the sittings, Paratene retires to the Native Hostel in Auckland to write about the tour.

*Rangatira* illustrates the tension between Paratene’s sense of injustice, arising from the appropriation of his land, stories and customs, and his enthusiasm for sharing his knowledge and culture through the principle of reciprocity to create a bicultural vision for New Zealand. Morris posits Paratene in the role of artist/writer to mediate this tension and highlight the differences between forms of insider and outsider appropriation. The following discussion employs Jonathan Hart’s definition of appropriation as ‘the making of what belongs to one individual or group into the property of another individual or group. That something can be tangible or intangible property. The appropriating can be achieved through ventriloquy, translation, or dispossession of land and other property. It can be figurative or literal’ (138). While Jenkins’s lack of intersubjective knowledge is illustrated in the novel through the choice of Rangatira to take to England, and his appropriation of the Rangatira party’s cultural practices. In this paper, I will discuss the second form of appropriation in the novel, which occurs in Lindauer’s studio. Lindauer wishes to capture and manipulate Paratene’s image to portray him as ‘the last of the ancient warriors’ (18). Lindauer’s portrait offers the possibility for an accurate reflection of Paratene’s face, for his intersubjectivity to be acknowledged, yet this opportunity is undermined by Lindauer’s artistic interpretation. The portrait renders Paratene passive, yet Morris does not answer the political implications of the inaccuracies and interpretation of art. This raises ethical responsibilities for the reader.

Lindauer's portraiture challenges Newton's conception of the 'face' as central to the narrative construction of otherness. Newton applies Levinas's concept of ethical transcendence to convey how the acknowledgement or repudiation of a face in a narrative can be a metonym for the 'body politic within a field of social representation – the face of social (in)justice' (183). The face of the Other in a narrative can express the concerns of the Other in society. Newton believes there is a choice between two mechanisms for intercultural recognition of this kind. The first is utopian because it involves looking past the face to see the 'self lying just beneath the skin', and the second is based in what he describes as 'productive difference' which is an acknowledgement of our respective physical markers to bring about intercultural recognition (184). It is the latter category that Newton focuses on for his analysis, because 'faces are always marked, sized, coloured', and he believes that we can never 'see "face to face" if that means a faceless universalism' (184). It is only by acknowledging different faces that we can see the 'self' of Others.

A recurrent theme throughout Morris's novel is the representation of the Rangatira in visual art which expresses the power imbalance between the Rangatira party and Jenkins: as outsiders, he and the artists as are appropriating culture and problematising what could be an opportunity for productive difference. In England, the touring party have their photograph taken for visiting cards, in which they have to 'pose in [their] native costume,' and the cards become a commodity to be purchased by the public (97-8). They also have their portrait painted by Mr Smetham, commissioned by the Wesleyan Missionary Society, in which Paratene and Horomona only recognise Jenkins's image (261). Jenkins 'was in the centre of things... In this picture he was an important man' (261). Whereas Paratene is a 'small figure on the edge of things,' Wiremu Pou was standing 'at the heart of the picture, gesturing to the sky as though he could see a vision of God' (262). The positioning of members of the Rangatira party in the image does not take into account the status of the individual as New Zealand Rangatira. While the photograph objectifies the Rangatira and commoditises their cultural artefacts, the painting also posits the party as savages who have been converted to Wesleyan Christianity. What both images have in common is the lack of control the Rangatira party have over their composition. Visual art reinscribes the Rangatira as colonised subjects as opposed to a relationship of co-dependence which could lead to acknowledgement of productive difference.

In Auckland, Paratene commissions Lindauer to paint his portrait in order to redress the power imbalance portrayed in images produced in England, and to assert his subjectivity and the possibility of productive intercultural difference. Yet, in the painting Lindauer has not recognised Paratene's subjectivity as it is reflected in his moko and therefore cannot see him face-to-face. As in the case of Jenkins's relationship with the group of Rangatira, the painter's ignorance of Tikanga inhibits productive intercultural difference. Paratene wishes to take control of his image so that it reflects his status and whakapapa: 'In this painting I will not crouch on the edge of things, or avert my eyes. People will look at it, and see my moko, and know who I am' (55). While Paratene is 'looking straight ahead' in the image, his moko is 'not quite right, the way the Bohemian has painted it' (253). Although Paratene is facing the viewer, which suggests agency, the painting has not achieved his aim because the

moko is distorted, and it is through the moko that viewers can see his lineage and status. The inaccuracy of the moko, then, calls into question the Bohemian's ability to read moko. Paratene says that the Bohemian, 'can't read Maori faces any more than he can read Maori books' (254). The moko is a language of its own that Lindauer cannot interpret or copy for the painting. Lindauer's artistic interpretation of Paratene's moko reveals a lack of productive difference which inhibits the intercultural recognition that Paratene sought in commissioning the portrait.

The painting of Paratene instead posits him as a figure of antiquity, thereby avoiding the realities of British colonisation and Paratene's political agency. Lindauer's reiteration of Paratene's ancient warrior status suggests that he wishes to capture an imagined distant past rather than an accurate portrayal of Paratene's recent past or present existence. While Paratene has renounced his fighting days in the present frame of the novel, he notes that as a young man he fought alongside Hongi, and in those battles he did not wear a ngore, but a tatua (29). Paratene explains to Lindauer that during battle he only wore a tatua so he could be 'fast and unencumbered, ready to fight' (101). A tatua is a belt which, in Paratene's case, he placed a patu or mere for hand-to-hand battle (Keane, and Morris 101). From a British perspective, Paratene and his taua were essentially naked during battle. Paratene notes that, 'The missionaries said it was indecent' and that when the party touring England were asked to wear 'our native costume... in England... nobody ever means a tatua' (101). The ngore cloaks represent a desired romantic nobility that is relegated to an imagined ancient and peaceful past, while the tatua represents the Māori capacity for combat. The tatua represents conflict (inter-tribal and against the British colonisers) and political agency that the romantic drapery of Lindauer's static images avoids. Painting Māori as figures of romantic antiquity idealised the past and avoided confronting inter-tribal warfare (that involved cannibalism) and the negative effects on Māori during British colonisation. Lindauer's painting renders Paratene as passive rather than a man of political agency and action which posits him as a colonised subject.

However, the novel's assertion of hybridity complicates the straightforward historical narrative of Pakeha oppression and appropriation. One example of this complication may be found in framing the novel's chapters with religious epigraphs, thereby hybridising the Bible to enact a relationship of reciprocity between Māori and Pakeha Christians. Paratene was baptised into the Anglican Church by Henry Williams and gave up the 'old ways' of life; the customs he grew up with (211). At the lectures in England he echoes the Christian message saying, 'I want to speak of Christian love, the best thing in the world' (213). However, he starts questioning the Christian belief system and the double standards he observes in England. One of the double standards that captures Paratene's attention is Jenkins' desire for the party to perform haka and songs in their cloaks: 'In other words, everything the missionaries had made us promise never to perform again' (44). Another conflict with Christian beliefs that Paratene observes is the widespread poverty of London. Paratene questions why the missionaries are not helping people in their own capital city, rather than helping those in New Zealand. After being approached by a beggar, Paratene says, 'Why were so many English missionaries in New Zealand, when the work to accomplish here, in London alone, was so mountainous an undertaking? The poor souls in this city were

much worse off than the poorest of the poor in New Zealand (131).’ Paratene questions Christianity, and uses the Bible as ‘a site of political negotiation... that opens up an interaction or dialogism of the powerful/powerless, and it is this site... which enables another distribution of meaning’ (Bhabha 115). In its hybridised form, Christianity is not imposed onto people as if onto a blank slate. Rather, Paratene acknowledges both his Christianity and Tikanga and attempts a dialogue between them to distribute a new meaning in his writing that allows for productive difference.

Morris uses the painting as a narrative frame to illustrate Paratene’s passivity in contrast to his agency in writing his own narrative. Yet, the political implications of the inaccuracies and interpretation of art are left to the reader’s assessment. Paratene recognises that the inaccuracies in the image are due to Lindauer’s artistic interpretation. He writes, ‘He is an artist, not an historian. He has painted his version of my face just as Smetham did in London. I suppose that what I’m writing down this week is my version of the trip to England’ (254). Paratene posits himself as an artist in the writing of the trip, and as an artist figure he excuses the inaccuracies of art that occur through an artist’s interpretation and appropriation. While Paratene acknowledges his subjectivity in his recollection of the tour, he also excuses any errors that he may have made during his appropriation of the trip to England, saying, ‘if Wharepapa were to read it, he would disagree with half of what I say’ (254). Despite his frustrations during the tour, and the impending appropriation of his land, Paratene understands the artistic interpretation of his (and the Rangatira party’s) image in art from outsiders as well as his own appropriation of the tour into a narrative. However, the political implications of the inaccuracies and interpretation of art are not explored in the text. Instead, the onus is on the reader to evaluate the risks and benefits of artistic interpretation and appropriation.

Relying on the reader’s evaluation of the risks and benefits of artistic interpretation and appropriation means that the artist transfers the ethical responsibility of the work onto the reader, whilst continuing to use the stories and images from within, or from outside, of their culture which could potentially cause harm. Newton explains the transfer of responsibility from the author to the reader using Velasquez’s painting *Las Meninas*: the artist ‘sits at the apex of a representational triangle... invisible as such, but twice reproduced through mirror effects’ (20). The artist is both inside and outside of the image looking out to implicate the audience in responsibility for the image. Newton applies this ‘looking out’ to prose fiction to convey that response is an ethical act. In reading a story, the authority for it changes from the author to the reader (21).

While the reader may debate the risks and benefits of artistic interpretation and appropriation of image and stories, the productions have already been circulated so the potential harm is harder to retrieve than if the stories and/or images had not been released. Māori film director and writer Barry Barclay notes that once a story is released publicly questions of fairness, privacy, obscenity, defamation or incitement can be generated, which could be avoided if appropriate clearances are given to the author at marae level prior to publication (171-173). Relying on readers to evaluate ethical concerns about cultural appropriation abdicates the author of their responsibility to gain appropriate clearances – in Morris’s case from the marae where the story is circulated – prior to publication. Morris, by focusing on Paratene, elicits

the reader's ethical responsibility towards him as a real-life person, and as readers we see the risks of cultural appropriation to Paratene's subjectivity.

Paula Morris has engaged with the theme of cultural appropriation in her previous work. Ann Pistacchi has analysed how Morris's Māori characters in her first three adult novels, and the short story, 'Rangatira,' 'identify and challenge, and at the same time are often complicit with, instances of Pakeha appropriation of indigenous stories, lands, and cultural artefacts' (63). While Paratene and the party agree to go to England and to stage lectures, their initial co-dependence with Jenkins in the dissemination of culture turns into complete appropriation. Jenkin translates and interprets their stories, and sets the rules for the lectures to enable his appropriation for commercial gain, and to enhance his own status in English society. Paratene's act of reciprocity attempts to temper this appropriation and make it equitable, however his exemption of artists to recreate and interpret images and stories brings into question the role of the artist, and in particular, Morris's role as a writer who is interpreting a family story.

There are ethical risks in appropriating stories from your own culture. One of the risks is losing the force of the story in its retelling. The risks of appropriating stories from one culture to another is explored by Barry Barclay in his discussion of Peter Walker's *The Fox Boy: The Story of an Abducted Child* (2001). Walker recounts the story of Ngatau, who was abducted by government troops during a battle with Titokowaru's forces in 1868. Three years later, Ngatau was 'taken into the house of Sir William and Lady Fox' to be educated and join English society (Barclay 167). In the book, Walker relates the intimacy between Lady Fox and Ngatau; and Barclay explains that the 'secret' information that Walker shares about Lady Fox and Ngatau was carried down through oral traditions by one family, rather than through public records. In its retelling, however, Barclay questions whether the story 'is lost in some way, if it is perverted or squandered, then it may lose its force for the people of the future' (169). Prior to Walker's re-articulation of the story, it was a 'secret' story, a treasure for the one marae to share on appropriate occasions. Now the story is public and belongs to everyone. Barclay explains that there are 'within Maori groups precious fact-based story heirlooms which are passed on in the oral tradition from generation to generation. An outsider appears and overnight tribal story heirlooms may be carried away into another tradition altogether' (170). An outsider appropriating a story takes it out of its cultural context and influences it with another. At the same time, there are risks in not sharing stories between cultures. The late Matiu Mareikura, filmmaker and member of the Film Commission, for instance, said, 'We've got to be able to tell our stories, or else we'll vanish. We aren't anything without our stories' (qtd. in Barclay 169). While retaining stories within marae means they keep their intent and meaning, by keeping them within an oral tradition, tells risk losing these stories forever.

Morris's opinion about her 'right' to share her tupuna's story aligns with Mareikura's perspective. Morris, in an interview with Pistacchi, says that a cousin did question her right to tell Paratene's story. While Paratene is Morris's tupuna, Morris is from a lower branch of the family, with a different marae. In the interview with Pistacchi, Morris said,

It's better that the story of his life be made public through a work of fiction, however partial and subjective and 'untrue' elements of that story would be, inevitably, rather than held in ever-decreasing fragments of passed-down history at his home marae. The man [Paratene Te Manu] who goes to England (against the wishes of his relatives), who chose to sit for Lindauer, who chose to tell his life story at the request of a Pakeha [James Cowan] is not someone who wanted to live in secret. Seeing his portrait last week in the Auckland City Art Gallery storage facility made me even more resolved to engage with his story. I don't care who wants to tell me I can't (77-8).

Morris asserts that her re-creation of Paratene's story in writing will ensure its longevity whereas the marae environment may, over time, lose elements of his story. She also notes that Paratene made parts of his life public, and was an active agent in the dissemination of his life story and image, which she believes validates her decision share his life in fiction. Morris also argues that 'If we deny permission to our own, then a 'real' outsider... will swoop in at some point and tell our stories for us' (qtd. in Pistacchi 63). Morris recognises herself as part of Paratene's whakapapa, and as an 'insider' and feels she has a 'right' to re-create and share Paratene's story before an 'outsider' does.

Although Morris believes she has the right to re-tell Paratene's story, she does hint in the novel at lapses of memory that occur in the re-constructed narrative that could allow for re-interpretation of Paratene's story, and leads readers to question the validity of Morris's reconstruction. Paratene says that, 'the more I think, the less clearly I remember, and the less certain I am ... I don't know what I remember and what I was told, or what we pieced together afterwards when the place and our memories of it were distant' (117). Paratene's admission of memory lapses and indecision as to whether he was in attendance in particular scenes conveys how the narrative of their journey has been constructed over time. It suggests that its accuracy was always questioned because the main actors cannot remember the specifics of their journey. These gaps of memory also suggest that elements of the story are already lost through oral reiterations. At the same time, such gaps allow for varying interpretations of the journey, whether from Paratene's perspective, or from another Rangatira. The self-consciously acknowledged construction of Paratene's story calls to mind Morris's conflict about her insider/outsider status, and leads the reader to evaluate the ethical divide between insider and outsider appropriation.

Narrative ethics is a useful tool for approaching New Zealand historical fiction about family history because it looks to the risks and losses of appropriating family for use in fictional narratives for the author, their subjects, and readers. Narrative ethics is a humanist response that highlights the interconnection between life and art, which can have political implications for the collective rather than just the individual or family portrayed in fiction. A study of narrative ethics highlights the relationship between characters within the text, as well as how those characters influence readers and their ethical imperative in the real-world for the future. For a writer, it ensures they acknowledge the ethical implications of their work, not just for their own family, but for collective understanding.

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