The Forgotten Coast

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This book is for Camille and Rosalie,
for whom the forgetting can end, and for
Ema, who never forgot in the first place.

The lie of the sign, if I can put it
that way, is in what it doesn’t say,
in the facts it leaves out.

— Rachel Buchanan,
The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget

Contents

Prologue / 11

Start here / 13
5 November 1881 / 21
Putting things off / 50
Land / 56
Interlude / 93
Kate / 94
Vocation / 99
Are we there yet? / 115
Via dei Ss Quattro / 121
Zenith / 134
Nadir / 148

Homecoming / 152
Silence / 155
Bob/TB redux / 163
Death / 177
Conversations with the dead / 182
Reckoning / 198
Telling stories / 207
Beneficiary of injustice / 212
The hardest word / 216
Ending the forgetting / 220

Notes / 225
Acknowledgements / 252

Prologue

There are many possible beginnings to this book. I have chosen to start with an ending. It is Christmas Eve 2012 and my father is dying, unable to find his way back to us after heart surgery that had been described as routine but which quickly became complicated. There is a moment when we think we have him back; when it looks for all money as if he is about to make it to the surface. But his arms flail, his eyes do not regain focus and he sinks away into the depths.

He dies as he lived — quietly, with little fuss, not wishing to bother anyone. There are grace notes. The young priest who wears cherry-red Docs; the gentle phone call at 3 a.m. suggesting we make our way to Dad's bedside; my mother, whose tenderness and composure as her man leaves her I find breathtaking. I kiss his forehead and set out for the toilet with my sister Bridget, only to be called back. By the time we are with him again he has gone. Quietly. Without fuss. You'd almost not know. It is ten years since he died, and I often find myself back in that hospital room looking down at his broad forehead.

Ursula Le Guin talks about digging answers out, down there in the deep regions of the self.[1] Not an easy nor ever a brief process, but one which my father's death starts in me. You have to be wary of singling out particular events and saying: '*This* is when it began,' for doing that can give things a false sense of tidiness. But it can also prevent life from endlessly flowing through your fingers, and that is one of many things Dad's dying did. It dragged to the surface a process of reflection and introspection that may have begun long before but which by then was pointlessly meandering along. It began to come into focus in Hamilton Hospital on Christmas Eve 2012. Fathers, sons — and further back, behind those things, land, belief and belonging. That's what this book is about.

One last thing before leaping in. In the Tom Stoppard play *Arcadia*, Hannah says: 'It's wanting to know that makes us matter. Otherwise we're going out the way we came in.'[2] This is a personal account — I own it. From time to time I refer to my family. When I do so I invariably have in mind either my own family (Ema, Camille and Rosalie) or my family of origin (Mum, Dad and my sisters, Barbara, Bridget and Jane) rather than the wider network of aunties, uncles and cousins on Mum's and Dad's sides. I wouldn't presume to know, far less to speak for, their views on issues that, for me, remain troubling and unresolved. It is not my place to do that. It is, on the other hand, my place to make sense of matters that reach far back into my past — for I've no wish to go out the way I came in.

Start here

In a corner of a forgotten room in the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome lies a thesis on the intrinsic evil of the lie. It was written in 1932 by Richard Thomas Gilhooly, my great-uncle and a twenty-one-year-old student of the Pontifical Irish College. The work was submitted for a doctorate of divinity, the exam for which was exhaustive, stretching over two weeks and covering papers on dogma, speculative moral philosophy and church tract, as well as a public defence of the thesis. It was also exhausting, so exacting that at some point during his preparation for the ordeal Richard contracted the tuberculosis that was to blight his life and kill him before he turned fifty.

The bare bones of the story are that Dick — as he was called by everyone other than the Latins, to whom he was Ricardus — was twenty years old when he arrived in Rome from the Holy Cross Seminary in Mosgiel, twenty-one when he completed his doctorate, twenty-two when he was ordained a priest and forty-four when he died. But bare bones are never enough. Dick completed three degrees during the twenty-two months he spent living on the Via

dei Ss Quattro, just 400 metres from the Colosseum. At the time the doctorate of divinity was a four-year programme (and about to be bumped up to five), but he knocked it off in two.

Because he was two years shy of the official age for ordination he had to obtain a papal dispensation from Pius XI in order to celebrate his first Mass at the old Catholic cathedral on Buckle Street in Wellington. (The minimum age for ordination at the time was twenty-four years, although with the pope's blessing that could be reduced by eighteen months: Dick had to wait a year until he could even qualify for the dispensation.) He had been singled out by the Catholic hierarchy for post-doctoral study in the United States and England, but spent the second half of his life in and out of hospitals and catering to the parishioners of Carterton, Takapau, Masterton and Tākaka.

He has fascinated me for years, this priest-uncle of mine, and not only because of the appeal of a narrative arc that stretches from Pungarehu, the small coastal Taranaki town where Dick grew up and of which not much now remains, to the Eternal City and back again. Neither does the attraction entirely lie in the tragedy of a brilliant career wrecked by disease (although on this point Dick and I disagree: his later letters indicate he was quite content to come home to work in a local parish). Beyond the obvious there is something that happens when I use Dick as a lens through which to peer into my past. He refracts time, both forwards and backwards, in disturbing and compelling ways.

So do two other men, one who has always been with me one way or another and the second a much more recent arrival. The latecomer is Dick's father, Andrew Gilhooly, who was part of the armed force that invaded Parihaka in early November 1881 and who was, later, a farmer on the 'great knuckle' of land that had been confiscated from Māori — 'rebel' and loyalist alike — in 1865.[1] As bare bones go I find these ones deeply disturbing. They concern events that are at the heart of this country's understanding of itself but which remain bitterly contested, in interpretation if not in fact.

We may be a farming nation (even if most of us have nothing much to do with the land any more), but in Taranaki the ground on which that farming takes place was taken from the people to whom it belonged. So in recent years Andrew has come to intrigue me, too; but whereas I approach Dick with a clean, clear sense of anticipation, Andrew is someone I have to come to terms with. With him the need to understand is a compulsion rather than a pleasure, one that comes from his role in one of the defining episodes in the violent enforcement of colonial rule in Aotearoa, and from the significance that involvement holds for me today.

The third man, Bob, is my father. His real name was Keith, but I never heard anyone call him that. His family had a way with names: Keith was Bob, Dianne was Mickey, Betty was Tim. When we were kids Dad would say 'K is for Bob', which made no sense whatsoever. He was a gentle,

thoughtful man who spent the early years of his life in and out of hospitals and in a Masterton orphanage, and most of the rest of it dedicated to the family he had with Mum. Although he was in Wellington for only a couple of years while training to become a teacher, he was a 'townie' to my mother's people on the Coast.

He knew nothing about cars or carpentry and didn't have much of a shed, but he was good in a kitchen and could wash dishes with his bare hands in scalding water. His sense of humour was on the dry side of flinty: the first time he and Mum went to the cinema he bought her a box of Queen Anne chocolates but said he'd found it under the seat. She believed him.

He had a big and compassionate heart (although not a well one, as we would learn) and much preferred working with the hardcase kids from the forgotten parts of New Plymouth than the ones from the leafy suburbs of Vogeltown and Brooklands. He was good at that work, and when he died some of those kids, grown now, filed in and sat quietly at the back of St Joseph's Church in New Plymouth, slipping away as we carried him out. Especially in his later years, when his heart began to give up the ghost, Dad was a little like Owen Marshall's old man Trumpeter, 'watching one word out of sight before releasing the next'.[2]

Dad spoke a particular kind of emotional language, one born of the years spent growing up in an institution at a time when men used words to express themselves sparingly if at all. It was a language built on silence as

much as on words. For many years I misunderstood those silences. It has taken his death for me to realise that his was an eloquent tongue of love and affection — one I never really learned to speak with him.

I have always been surrounded by formidable women. I live in a family of women, my partner and our two daughters. All three are smarter than I am, and less naïve. I have three sisters and a mother, all highly competent in their chosen fields. I have, or have had, aunts, great-aunts, and grandmothers (neither of whom I met). And one of my great-grandmothers is pivotal to this story. Still, this book is largely about men, a choice that may sit poorly with some. But it is the men in my life I need to have words with at the moment, not the women.[3]

I don't pretend that this is a family history, much less one that is genealogically researched to within an inch of its life. For one thing, I don't have many of the foundational dates or events that often characterise the histories of settler families. The names of ships, dates of arrival and so forth are largely missing, and those that do slip in are unreliable from time to time. For another, especially in the early pages, I have no interest in telling a conventional settler narrative, one that speaks of thrusting progress and economic productivity but which dances lightly over the confiscation, theft and violence that made possible the good stuff. I am much more concerned with figuring out

the *un*settling effect that the arrival of my ancestors on the Coast had on the people who were already there.[4]

So, less a family history than an attempt to address a couple of questions that Rachel Buchanan poses at the end of her book *The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget*. Buchanan's impact on me owes much to her knack for using words in ways that bring me up short, and to the questions — explicit and tacit — she poses. On the last page are two final queries: What stories do your dead tell you? How do you see your past? I'd been struggling to explain to myself what this book was about, and having difficulty finding a way of fitting these three men into a single account. Buchanan solved the conundrum for me.

This book is about one man I love, a second I am fascinated by and a third who is at the heart of it all. It is a response to Buchanan's challenges. What I didn't immediately see was the relationship between the two questions: how answering the first would profoundly change my understanding of the second.

There is a small personal connection here, too. In the late 1970s Rachel played Dorothy in a New Plymouth Operatic Society production of *The Wizard of Oz*. My old and dear friend Bernard Leuthart played the Scarecrow and I was the Tin Man.[5] Rachel was younger, and I don't recall spending much time with her. Lately, though, I have read everything she has written on Parihaka that I can lay my hands on. Her work is important, razor-sharp and beautifully written, and it crops up repeatedly in these pages.

It is not as if I am sending stories of these three men out into the void, because of course there have long been family tales that frame each of them. Andrew the armed constable-turned-farmer, Dick the scholarly prodigy, Bob the orphan who had a family. But — and this is especially so with Andrew — these accounts are muted and often incomplete. Details are left out, forgotten or unaccounted for. This book is my attempt to fill in some of the silences that surround these men, and in doing so to better understand things that I am still trying to figure out for myself. Fathers, sons, land and lies. My own past, present and possible futures.

None of this is straightforward and much of it is fraught, because it entails interfering with family stories. These kinds of stories matter, for it is through their telling and retelling that we remember ourselves and 'keep alive those who only live now in the telling'.[6] That is the purpose of families' narratives: to give shape and coherence to things, and to launch memories of the past out into the future. They are both *of* a family and also *outside* of it.

But family stories can also be dangerous — far from anodyne and never neutral. They are a sort of public property: some are more or less sacrosanct, while others are battle sites, fiercely contested. These you tangle with at your peril.

I think it was W. H. Auden who talked of the 'biddable dead'; of the way in which we recruit particular memories of those who are gone and put them to work to ensure that

things are remembered *just so*. Sometimes that means not telling certain stories, or altering them so they are fit for wider consumption. Or remaining silent, hushed, as if this will help us 'deftly steer our way around the past'.[7]

We approach such accounts with caution and care, and often with trepidation. The more so when our own stories intrude on those of other people. Most of all, perhaps, when a thing long forgotten is uncovered in the telling.

5 November 1881

Shortly before 7 a.m. on 5 November 1881 my great-grandfather, Andrew Gilhooly, stood alongside 1588 other men waiting to begin te pāhua (the plunder) of Parihaka. As a member of the Armed Constabulary's (AC) No. 3 Company, which remained garrisoned at Parihaka until well into 1885, it is probable that he also took part in the subsequent destruction of the pā and its cultivations during the weeks and months that followed the invasion.

In this country you can no longer simply put statements like these quietly aside (although that is exactly what I have done for the better part of fifty years). They must be comprehended and made sense of. Above all else, for me, they need coming to terms with.

There are two parts to this. The first requires uncovering something of who my great-grandfather was, and how he came to be both in this country and a member of the AC. I have never known much about either. I am not an historian so I was unaware of the distinction between a person's past and their history until Rachel Buchanan introduced me to it. The first includes all those things we

have our own personal memories of, while the second captures the wider sweep of events we find ourselves caught up in. Andrew doesn't feature in my past. There are enough stories about his wife and kids to fill a paddock but I don't really know any about him. He's increasingly a part of my history, though, so I need to get to know him.

The second requirement is to set out why the AC were ranged outside the pā in the early hours of 5 November 1881. That matters because what came after Parihaka — for Andrew and for his wife Kate, for his son Dick, and certainly for me — makes a pale sort of sense until it is put alongside what came before. The 'very big stories' (the colonisation of Aotearoa) and the 'very little stories' (my great-grandfather's part in that process) are always intertwined,[1] and the step from high politics to the lives and times of individuals is not so terribly big. So I need to touch on the large historical truth in which the small personal truth about my great-grandfather sits.[2] In short, I need to both discover Andrew and bear witness to what happened under the mountain.

Andrew was an Irishman, and on Mum's father's side my family's time in this country begins with him. He was born in 1855, six years after the end of the Great Famine. One of ten children, Andrew was the son of tenant farming people who paid £26 10s a year to William Anderson Esq. for the privilege of working two small pieces

of land — one of 27 acres and the other only 2 acres (and separated by about half a kilometre) — in Ballynagreanagh, a small townland in Kilteely Parish, in the east of County Limerick and on the border with County Tipperary.[3]

He came to this country in 1874. I know he was still in Ireland in 1873 because there is an Irish court record indicating that on 5 July that year he was sentenced to a month in prison with hard labour, having been convicted of assault and rescue.[4] There are no details about the assault (or the rescue), but intriguingly his older brother John and his father, Hugh, were also tied up in the shenanigans. The three of them appeared together in the Limerick Magistrates Court on the same charge, pleaded guilty and were convicted and sentenced to '1 Cal Mnth with H. L.'.

That same day, one James O'Donnell was sentenced to three months in prison for receiving tuppence under false pretences. A Michael Roche pleaded guilty to stealing a penknife and appears to have been given three choices of punishment: pay a fine of £1 and costs of £1 6s, accept a fortnight's prison or submit to a dozen strokes of the lash. Wisely, he went with option one.

'Growing up in Ireland meant preparing yourself to leave it,'[5] and perhaps this brush with the law was all the encouragement Andrew needed to clear out to the other side of world, because five months after his brief spell inside he took assisted passage as a single man on board the New Zealand Shipping Company's 882-ton clipper *Wennington*. The hard labour had the same effect on John,

although he decamped to the United States.[6]

The *Wennington* sailed from Gravesend, on the Thames in Kent, on 21 January 1874 and arrived in Wellington on 25 May. Among the 294 passengers aboard were eighty Kentish villagers who thought they were heading for the province of Canterbury; indeed, some of them had originally applied to go to South Australia. Instead, they all wound up in Wellington.

The 124-day journey, during which three children died and ten were born, was an especially long one (on average the trip took around a hundred days). The ship had been so long overdue that, as the *New Zealand Mail* reported, among those waiting for her the impression 'was generally felt, though not expressed, that some serious misfortune had misfallen her'. It was eventually decided that an exceptionally large cargo of iron explained its protracted journey. In any event, the commissioners who inspected the ship 'found the immigrants to be a healthy lot of people, free from organic disease of any kind . . . all seemed well pleased with the voyage, and expressed themselves as quite satisfied with the treatment they had received'.[7]

Andrew Gilhooly is described in the ship's record as a farm labourer from Limerick, the portrayal that follows him through his military history. But he is also said to be twenty-one years of age, which makes him three years older than he should have been. Such anomalies aside, it seems certain that Andrew arrived here in mid-1874.

That appears even more plausible when I come across

a note written many years later by Andrew's youngest daughter, my Great-aunt Liz, in which she indicates that her father arrived in New Zealand with his sister Bridget. There is, indeed, a Bridget on the *Wennington* when it docks in Wellington — only her name is spelt Gluley. Bridget Gluley, a twenty-three-year-old dairymaid from Limerick. Say 'Gilhooly' and 'Gluley' out loud and they sound identical, so I suspect that this is a phonetic spelling, as might happen when a harried young shipping or immigration clerk takes a stab at spelling the unusual Irish name.

'Gilhooly' may not be the most elegant of names, but it comes from far back in the Irish past. It is an anglicisation of the Gaelic name Mac Giolla Ghuala ('son of the servant of Ghuala'), a subclan of the O'Mulveys. The homelands of the Mac Giolla Ghuala were the counties of Roscommon and Leitrim (there are records of three Gilhooly men who served as priests in Country Leitrim between 1461 and 1505), but Andrew's branch of the Gilhooly sept moved to Ballynagreanagh in Limerick in the eighteenth century. So the name may be a bit of a mouthful, but it has pedigree.[8]

The *Wennington*'s records show that Andrew got off in Wellington while Bridget travelled on to Westland, perhaps in order to be among other Irish, many of whom congregated in mining districts.[9] She is still there twenty years later. In 1892 the parliamentary record includes a document called 'Immigrants' Unpaid Promissory

Notes', which shows 'the number and amounts of unpaid promissory notes given by assisted immigrants now in the different Immigration Offices throughout the colony for passages from the Home-country'.[10] In Hokitika, B. Gluley still owes £1.

For years I blithely assumed that the Irish migrated in large numbers to Aotearoa. At school I was surrounded by them (Mum once estimated that fifty-two cousins of various familial denominations were with me at Francis Douglas), which may explain this misapprehension. In fact, the Irish made up only 20 per cent or so of those who migrated here from the United Kingdom between 1800 and 1945.[11] At its peak, in 1886, the Irish-born population of the colony numbered a little over 51,000 — around half of whom were Catholic — which comprised roughly 10 per cent of the overall population of half a million.[12]

To some extent this reflected anti-Irish — and especially anti-Irish Catholic — attitudes. For a sizeable portion of the population '"Ireland" represented not an oppressed homeland or a glorious cause but unrest, violence, disloyalty and the dangers of Roman Catholicism'.[13] Such attitudes were sufficiently entrenched to lead Keith Sinclair to conclude that New Zealand 'was the only British colony where it was both possible and conceptually necessary to completely purge the Irish from national and historical consciousness'.[14]

In the early waves of migration the New Zealand Company much preferred its migrants to come from

Protestant Ulster, while in the 1870s anti-Catholic discrimination in the allocation of assisted places by the government's agent-general in London, Isaac Featherston, triggered protests from aspiring Irish migrants. Featherston had form on this. In 1857, as the first superintendent of the Wellington province (he had also been the MP for Whanganui in the very first colonial parliament, represented Wellington for six parliamentary terms and served as a minister in the Fox governments), he had specifically asked the province's UK recruiting agents not to grant assisted passage to Irish Catholics. He was still at it twenty years later, politely explaining to the minister for immigration 'that I have always regarded the emigrants drawn from the North of Ireland as of a very desirable character'.[15] The inference is that people like Andrew and Bridget Gilhooly were not.

The broader politics of immigration at the time were also fraught. Speaking in the parliament in June 1870, Colonial Treasurer Julius Vogel thundered that '[w]e do not hesitate to declare that if, as has been proposed, the Imperial Government enter upon the task of directly exporting a portion of the idle masses, the Colonial Parliaments will have to jealously watch the class of persons sent out, and, if needs be, by legislation to prevent the Colonies from being converted into receptacles for the worst form of refuse population'.[16] There is no suggestion that Vogel had Irish Catholics in mind when he spoke, but plenty — Featherston and his ilk — would have.

I can't make up my mind on Vogel's position regarding the Irish. On the one hand, in the same month that Andrew Gilhooly arrived in Aotearoa — May 1874 — Vogel took it upon himself 'to impress upon [Featherston] that the character of the class of immigrants now arriving is a source of very grave anxiety to the Government, and is creating great uneasiness in the colony. I have already been officially informed that the shipment by the *Asia* to Dunedin includes a number of girls out of the Cork workhouse, some of whom are notoriously loose.'[17]

Barely a month later, however, he writes to Featherston again, offering '[a]nother suggestion which I desire you will give effect to, [which is] that a certain quantity of salt fish be in future shipped for the use of Roman Catholic emigrants, who, from the non-issue of this article of diet upon their fast days, are either deprived altogether of their dinners, or are driven, against their feelings, to transgress the rules of their Church'.[18]

So much for the small story of how Andrew Gilhooly came to be in this country. Now to an account of something altogether more consequential. Parihaka had been established in 1866 by Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi, both of whom were of Taranaki and Te Ātiawa iwi.[19] The pā became 'a haven for all dispossessed and a shrine for all hapū', attracting those 'amassed from the north, south and east, scattered by confiscation'.[20] At the time of its

desecration, Parihaka — named either for the 'lamentations of earlier occupants' or for its location between hills[21] — had a population of around 1500 and was said to be the most prosperous Māori settlement in the country.

It had a bank and bakery, was surrounded by extensive cultivations on which were deployed state-of-the-art reaping and threshing machines, and was organisationally capable of providing hospitality for the thousands who attended its monthly meetings.[22] The pā made perfect sense in the context of the New Zealand Constitution Act 1852, which set up the early New Zealand state and which clearly anticipated the establishment of territory in which Māori authority would prevail.

In mid-1878, however, the colonial government began surveying and settling Taranaki land that it had confiscated in 1865 under the provisions of the New Zealand Settlement Act 1863. Although the policy was ostensibly aimed at 'rebellious' iwi in Taranaki, the Waikato and the Bay of Plenty — that is, at people who had resisted the Crown's attempts to take their land — in practice, Māori who had not taken up arms against the Crown (including the people of Parihaka) or who had been its allies also lost their land.

In Taranaki, the administration of confiscated land descended into a 'mire of confusion', and by the mid-1870s most of the land had been effectively abandoned by the government.[23]

Not by its original inhabitants, however, many of whom

had moved back onto the land once it seemed clear that the government had walked away from it. (Ministers chose to see this differently, complaining of the difficulties they had had 'preventing the Natives from creeping back upon land which the Government were not at the time able to occupy'.)[24]

The surveys were seen as 'the sharp end of the otherwise blunt confiscation process'.[25] The first ones took place on Ngāti Ruanui land on the Waimate Plains in south Taranaki. Te Whiti, whose mana extended the full length of the west coast, ordered that the surveyors be removed from the plains, and so 'quietly, thoroughly, and good humouredly [Māori] packed up each survey camp, loaded horses and drays, and carted everything back across the Waingongoro'.[26]

The following year the government sought to lay the political groundwork for the survey and sale of the entire Taranaki area. In a 'symbolic assertion of proprietorship',[27] on 25 May 1879 Te Whiti and Tohu sent men to plough land on the Pitone Road near Oakura, where the Second Taranaki War — an attritional conflict that had less to do with disputed land purchases (as was the case with the first war at Waitara) than with land confiscation[28] — had begun.

In keeping with their pacifist teachings, the ploughers were unarmed, and over the coming weeks they also ploughed settler-occupied land at seven locations from Pukearuhe in the north to Hāwera in the south. The symbolism is pretty hard to miss: 'The sword had been