Is Geography Destiny? A poet's interlinked journeys of discovery

Miriel Lenore

Abstract

The last decade has been a time of exploring Australian 'identity'. For me the question became how to live here where my roots are and aren't. Is place a determinant of identity? I began my journey by visiting the places of origin and destination of my Anglo-Celt immigrant great-grandmothers in Northern Ireland, England, NSW and Victoria.

I was in Ulster at the time of the Marching Season and saw many links to the religious intolerance my grandmother displayed and later overcame. The resulting book, drums & bonnets was published last year.

Class and gender were key issues linking my Sussex grandmother's places of origin and destination. Dog Rock, the resulting book, is due out in October.

One of the questions I faced was, why write poems instead of biography or a travel book? Part of the answer is that I am a poet. Part is that the economy of poetry gets to the essence of the search. (Journeying is always a search.) My second problem was how to manage linking the journeys of two people (myself and each grandmother) over 150 years? The solutions were different. In drums & bonnets the themes of intolerance and violence were a sufficient link. In Dog Rock, a more bucolic scenario, where religion is less traumatic and farming more central, I have used two voices – mine and the grandmother's imagined voice. That raises the problems biographers face about fact, interpretation, fiction. I plan to end with reading something from each book as illustration.