

Kaka Point,
November 28, 1978.

My dear Pal, Bill - I hope
you & Kirsten had a good
walkabout over your beloved
Te Waahi Rauarua - Mivikihiri.
I recall being with you, in Tai Tokerau.
SHAPE-SHIFTER No pain, Man.

I sing you a mini Waiata
I gargle it out like a Tui
Kia ora & kia kaha!
Will my apooha - nui,
Hone Tuwhare (fushen shymon)

Hone Tuwhare

Illustrated by Shirley Grace

As Jane Bonnor
of GODWIT PRESS, writes
me in Auckland by
D&C of this month, for
the launch of yet
another printing of NO
ORDINARY LUNCH (sorry, Suni)
Will call in or way back
from Auckland.

Love to you, your Muan, Kirsten
and your Holy Whaanau, & for
the "Koha" jersey.

LY me, "Tarsey man"
do you know that?

I got a Collection
of democ jerseys
starting from my 70 Bilt-
day, out at Shirley's place,
D&C 10.

Hey Bill, thank you, Bro, etc.
I love ya,
Cahit, I've disfigured yr Gpy!

INTRODUCTION

If you haven't read a lot of Hone Tuwhare's poetry, this collection is a good place to start. Here you will find the kind of poems that have made Tuwhare widely and joyously read for thirty years.

If you have read a lot of Tuwhare over some or all of those thirty years, you'll enjoy a ramble through this new collection. You'll get echoes and variants of your favourites, and new directions. Although these poems are published for the first time here and most of them are new, some were written many years ago. Hone and I thought of running a sweep to see if you could guess when the older poems were written, but not even Hone knows for sure. He's keeping the prize, quiet days in a Kaka Point crib, closest neighbour Tangaroa, for himself. And he's polished off the bottle of McCallums and the marinated mussels that might have been for the runner up.

If, like me, you hear Hone's voice when you read his work on paper, you'll enjoy these poems even more.

If you've read this far and haven't read any of the poems yet, time to do that.

When I first worked with Hone Tuwhare, setting up public and educational readings in Auckland and Tai Tokerau, he used to refer me to academic reviewers who had said generous things about his work. As New Zealand's first major poet who hasn't had to overcome or deny a university education, he's had an odd relationship with critics and academics. Some, mainly writers themselves, are old mates. But it took others years to acknowledge and admire what Hone was up to.

In 1975 a reviewer wrote of his "oratorical success." Tuwhare was "picking his way between rhetoric and throw-away idiom," had "fine sensual detail" but was often "too slack verbally."

Perhaps it took Bill Manhire in the book *Dirty Silences* to provide a legitimate analysis. He described Tuwhare's "code-switching effects ... He can sound within the space of a couple of lines as if he's both at church and down at the pub."

By 1988 Apirana Taylor could explain that Tuwhare "makes the language itself a celebration" and that "there is a serious note behind the gut tickling."

The most intense and entirely successful Tuwhare reading I've

heard was at Auckland University in the late eighties. Hone had been doing a busy round of schools — unpredictable and hard work. While we waited for the university reading Hone had a couple of pies and three cups of tea in silence. This was the performer's preparation.

There were about 80, mainly English honours students, crammed into a small tiered room. Albert Wendt introduced "one of the large figures in the literature of your country" and Hone relaxed into a powerfully intimate display of his words in the air. His velvety gravel voice sorted through simple, known lines: "I know you stop only to talk/ not to the cruel metal road/ but to a stone ... a solitary ... stone." Lines that he often just let flow were today held with a rising inflection that made one listener sob: "... people who are also looking for something more ... real, more ... permanent ... maybe, than dying." In this close space Hone refreshed lines that were almost too well known, gave them what he often called "due weight." Without the need to project his voice, some lines came as a vigorous stage whisper: "... and on the sand-hill/ wry wind fluting/ the bleached ... bones ... marrowless." The conclusion to *Rain* was unsentimental, adamant: "But if I/ should not hear/ smell or feel or see/ you/ you would still/ define me/ disperse me/ wash over me/ rain."

The general reader (of whom Hone has more than most New Zealand poets) and many critics have always understood what Hone was telling us. *No Ordinary Sun*, *To a Māori figure cast in bronze outside the Chief Post Office, Auckland* and *Monologue* became anthems. Who cares about an analysis of their style? *The Old Place* and *Child coming home in the rain from the Store* recall our own treasures.

Hone gets a kick out of literary recognition but he gets even more out of interest and appreciation from working people. He had struggles in the welding shop in the early days but was inspired by his Scots mate's pleasure in *Monologue*. He still reads it with a Scottish accent (after checking first that there are no real Scots in the audience). Hone recalls that when he read a new poem to a Berlin barmaid "She was so chuffed I got a free beer." In a 1980 review Robin Healey said Tuwhare was "simply and vividly in touch with non-human life" and "showed respect for pace, movement and the surfaces of ordinary life." You'll find plenty of both in this collection.

You'll also find straight ahead love poems, passionate ones that ought to inspire old jokers nowhere near as old as old Tuwhare and

you might decide that some of his earlier poems were actually love letters. Many poems rework Hone's closeness to trees, wind, sun and sea, especially the sea, but often now as images for their own sake, not to illuminate a message. There are tantalising poems to and about people he knows, and respectful liberties taken with Māori gods and myths. *Balloon* is a character narrative of the sort Hone tends to think of as prose rather than poetry.

This is a full volume and Hone doesn't get around the country as much as he did, so we are unlikely to hear him read many of the poems in this collection. But I've enjoyed his voice in my head. The lines in the final section of *Kiwi Point* might get the word by word, fulsome Tuwhare force that celebrates the union of life, love and food: "Come, Sooty Shearwater, harbinger of good medicinal tucker. Eat well — and mate well — so that your woolly, roly-poly progeny will thrive in their thousands for us: and Amine, to all that."

He might race through *A hongī for you too, Spring*, allowing himself to run out of breath just as his feelings run short of words at the end of the poem. The ending of *I take your pulse*, "maybe soap/ each other all over'n under", might fade into a guttural blanket of promise.

At his live readings Hone reads a relatively narrow selection of poems. He likes to rehearse them in advance, to decide on "the particular phrasing ... the vocal sense ... lifting the words off the page." The more intimate poems are heard on selected occasions. Some works, mainly those written primarily for political protest, he once said were not really "poems" and he reads them only on request. A school student once requested *Making a Fist of it*. It's not a poem he chooses to read (although he does the Afrikaans voice with scary conviction) and he couldn't find the page. The student offered her crumpled and annotated copy of *Mihi*. Hone studied it. "Looks like a race book ... notes all over it ... corrections are they?"

And as he reads you feel that he's still pondering his choice of words. Usually he's revelling in an unusual usage, but once (while reading *Tangi*) he went back over a poem: "I think there's a bad line in there — 'green pathos' — bullshit."

It's not unusual for Hone to send a draft of a new poem to friends, just to see what they think. Or he'll read it down the phone, perhaps to hear for himself how it sounds. Often these test runs are on his non-literary friends. He just likes to hear poems, even if they are written by

others. Once he phoned me and the first sound I heard was the marvellous Tuwhare voice reading back to me a poem I'd written and sent him. Improved it no end. If you haven't heard Tuwhare reading his poems, try to find Gaylene Preston's excellent 1996 film portrait. You'll hear him sing there too.

Hone's vocalising somehow releases the other senses at work in his poems. He tells young writers to employ all of the five senses, "Then, if you get it right another sense comes into play." Because his poems seethe with taste and smell, I often enjoy Hone's visual, painterly angles.

I've always thought that *Hotere* is one of Hone's finest works. It is considered yet passionate, descriptive and respectful. The poem ends with a tribute to Ralph Hotere's "superb orange/ circle on a purple thought-base" on the cover of Tuwhare's 1970 volume, *Come Rain Fall*: "I shake my head and say: hell, what/ is this thing called love/ Like, I'm euchred, man. I'm eclipsed?" You'll find the final word again at the end of *Salvaged* in this collection. There's a lot of Tuwhare's heart and art in this little poem. And I can hear him rolling juicily the perfect word 'furtive' in: "with one/ red rose — furtive,/ among the groceries." You'll find Hone's admiration for painters also in *Kākā Point* and *Norfolk Pines on Pakiri Beach*. And in the latter his care for trees, regardless of their heritage.

God's day to you too, tree has echoes of *No Ordinary Sun*. It is more hopeful, less lofty in its theme and less slight than it appears. Hone sent an early draft of this poem to my mother, a year or two older than Hone and living exposed to the same Otago southerlies, and suggested to me a few days later to "Look after her. Old people, y'know."

I know you'll find something in this collection to add to (or begin) your storehouse of Tuwhare. Give a copy to anyone you know who doesn't have a line or two from Hone inside them.

From a poster inside my front door, a life-size head of Tuwhare peers the length of my home. It's a poster for Jim Moriarty's production of Hone's play, *On Ikaka Moor b' aht at*. Hone is wearing his snazzy cravat. He often squints at me, trying to work out what the hell I'm doing out there. Mostly, though, he's saying, "Whatever you're up to, good on ya mate. Bewdiful." Good on ya, yissell, mate. Arohanui.

— Bill Lennox