



Wellington Fool

By Mark Pirie



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Fool* inside album photo.

Clouds : an essay

joni mitchell thought
of clouds as if they were
a metaphor for life and love;
sometimes you can't see
clearly till they're gone.

in Wellington all the clouds
have been and gone; it's
another fine day, but yesterday
the clouds took over, breathing
thunder and rain into our lives.

at times I think joni feels what
can't be explained, why we love,
why we live, and why the clouds
(knowingly) come rolling in,
covering us - and then they're gone.

Election 2005

Another day, like any other,
only it's not supposed to be
really. Someone's hoping to change
the Government - it's not me, though.

Like the Ozzy Osbourne song
has it: *'I don't want to change the world
but I sure don't want the world
to change me.'* Yet, having said that,

Ozzy has it half-right: the world changes
regardless. Those people flushed away
in New Orleans know the bigger
picture. Here, it's mostly about

lowering taxes, stopping marijuana
from being decriminalised, criminals
from learning 'Art', more policing, and
cutting hospital 'waiting' lists.

I go to the polls regardless, cast my vote
like the rest, all the while remaining skeptical.
Another song, Dylan's 'Blowin' in the wind',
enters my head. It's just another day, *or is it?*

Roots

(i.m. Maui Dalvanus Prime, 1948-2002)

Dalvanus dies. At least it's made
the news. *'He was a Maori joker*

wasn't he?' a man says reading aloud.
I think back to the '80s. Where was

I when the Patea Maori Club topped
the charts? Somewhere near Hawera

I think, visiting my Great Aunt, or in
Stratford on a trip, moving down those

long wide streets of dairy town,
working class New Zealand, and unaware

of the frigid existence of many.
Now, older, it comes back in the form

of Dalvanus's corpse. The last of '80s
Kiwiana perhaps. Another icon

dipping down like the cattle flung dung
or that typically local tele-setting country sun.

A U2 poem
(For Therese)

on the way
to the airport

my sister
driving;
me, flyin'
goin' home

a U2
song came
on the radio,
a request
and a dedication
to a girl,
'Sometimes you
can't make
it on your own',

'cause,
as the DJ
said,
*'you don't have
to go it alone'...*

it was touching
but also a teasing
end to my stay
as I lined up
for Heathrow
departure

it seemed
Bono
was there,
as he's inclined
to do,
singin' me
into
the clouds,
bulleting
the blue
sky.

Heathrow, London

To Tom Clark

1
Sonic Youth should write
the soundtrack for your book
Paradise Resisted

it's a road map, kind of like
Made in the USA, the film, and your poems
are short and punchy enough

to have Thurston, Lee and Kim adding
the effects, that creepy
Apocalyptic aura

back then,
they, of course,
were checking out Manson

getting into gore,
and blaming it all on drugs
out in the desert

in *'Death Valley '69'*...

2

as a kid I collected baseball cards
used to swap them with a friend
down the end of 'easy street'

later, as a student,
your poem 'Baseball and Classicism'
became one of my faves

until then I didn't know how it was done -
the use of popular culture in literature
but *with* intelligence

older, I no longer collect baseball cards
there's no takers for swapping where I live
instead I collect poetry, ideas

but I still go out walking
with Eurydice in those 'Elysian Fields'
as much as I can

Lift Poem

*They have their fates, whether to rise and fall,
And when their numbers come up, they get out.*

- Howard Nemerov, *Fictions*

Each morning, the people come and go
talking not of Michelangelo.

The people though are well dressed,
Sprightly, always neat. And *stressed* -
yes, they seem to be. But never mind

this is *life* and work *is* life. It's a bind
they know too well: Keep up the dates,
mark your calendar, lunch with 'mates',
put your 'life' on the back burner,
forget love, rise to the top, it's a page turner -

this daily walk to the lift of dreams;
keep getting in, eventually light streams.

Tourist

On the street corner:

A young Japanese man, same age as me.

‘Which way, please, to the War Memorial?’

Do you know - where is War Memorial?’

‘That way. Cross over - then go straight
down the street. You’re here,’

I say, pointing to his map.

And I think, he must’ve flown

So far, such a distance

To see it, that bare place of remembrance:

Of soldiers and families, little threads of history

Binding together who we are,

Our aspirations and our failings.

Yet, at the end of his journey, what will he think,

Where will his thoughts run and for whom

Does he mourn – for the dead?

The living? Or just for Hope and Peace,

A new generation?

I watch him go, crossing the street,

Then he turns, remembering.

The Gift

Thinking back to a party
some ten years ago, and in the bedroom

this guy I knew was dealing 'cool'
like a shark avoiding the bait

his teeth at the ready. For twenty minutes
he dealt the cards and never

said a word while several others
attempted to beat him. They couldn't

of course, and after they left
in shock or was it awe, he turned to me

said "I'll show you a good trick,"
and he did - it was a privilege just to seem him

at work. I said, "Do you ever play
for money?" and he looked at me saying,

"Don't like to use my gift in that way."
Then he left the room, staunch,

and joined the party, a girl at
his shoulder.

A Writer's Madrigal

(After Charles Bukowski - for Geoff Cush)

And when he came home he closed shut the door.
There was just silence, no shouts, no cheap whore.
This wasn't Los Angeles but Thorndon -
A bit of a duffer is Wellington.

Looking around he reached for his wine,
There was no other way to pass the time;
TV/video, yes, but never mind
It was all a part of his daily grind.

Not a lot of action, not much to do.
So, he sat down to read a book or two.
This was, after all, the place where he worked,
And here they'd find him whenever he died.

Finally, he thought, he'd then rate a look,
And have his remains in some godly book.

Fragments on a Marae

(For Apirana Taylor)

1

Stepping on to the marae,
I sit by the wharenuī,
eyeing up the ancestors –
the tekoteko of madness above me:

Who are you Pakeha?

Why are you here?

Do you come

to challenge?

They eye me, they issue
their wero. I eye
them back. I am unafraid of
history and utu.

There is only aroha left
in this slow-ticking heart.

2

Inside,

I look across at Titokowaru,

his carved face, his mana hanging beneath:
von Tempsky's corpse,

yet, even the Great Warrior himself was
humbled, imprisoned, left in a cell,

until Hine-nui-te-po equalled him finally
inside her terrible womb.

Te Herenga Waka Marae, Wellington

New Year's 2005

*Do you know what grief the rain brings?
When gutters resound with the sad music of the falling rain.
And the lonely feel a sense of loss when it rains
Endlessly ... like bleeding, like hunger,
Like love, like children, like death
Is the rain...*

- Al-Sayyab, 'Song of the Rain'

After New Year's waking
to rain, all day, *rain*...

it made me think of pain, gentle pain:
of love, loss, the heart in

a deluge, a flurry of malcontent.
Could it've been the thousands

washed away in
Sri Lanka, Thailand, Phuket?

Desire gets so easily disjointed.
But last night, a girl was drowning

in light, in front of me,
and it reminded me of you:

her breast-shape, top open,
revealing a honey likeness:

dark hair, dark-brown eyes,
hair tied-back, welcoming,

sexy, delicious.

I thought of all this, of people lost,

as the performers spun their records,
lights shimmied, and the dancers

bared themselves to the rhythm,
to the night, to the drink,

to the mind's rain that
drenched me, like those washed

far out to sea, and drowning I was,
as I knew this girl was not you.

In Quiet

(A poem with Berrigan near the end)

Reading Ken Bolton's
latest it 'dawns' on me

that three writers
have sent me homemade tapes,

especially for me,
in my 'lifetime'.

This is good
because the tapes themselves

are good.
I think of making this into

my next poem,
but remember Ken once told

me I should "keep things quiet"
especially about O'Hara.

I'm thinking he meant here
O'Hara's *Poems Retrieved* collection

but no matter
I can "keep things quiet", sort of.

Well, the first tape
was from Sam Hunt;

a tape of Charles Bukowski
'reading', the one where he tells some angry surfer kids

down the back to back off,
"I'm packing a piece!"

And they *do*, they back off, or so I hear on the tape.
The second was from J.,

she always makes great compilations
"*Good taste in music,*"

she said to me at the airport recently,
and I *believe* her, I do.

And, finally, from Ken
- some "blues".

I had it in my car for weeks;
"*I want to love you*" was the title of one of them -

the tapes. But perhaps I should "keep *that* quiet".
And so I do...thinking of Berrigan's *Sonnets*

like how to write *those*, or even just to write like *him*.
Or even like Koch? I don't think they'll tell me though,

as Ken might say,
"*They're keeping it quiet.*"

And so I thank them and sit down
to read them both again *in quiet*.

At Sargeson's, Esmonde Rd
(with Riemke Ensing and Bill Trussell)

Turn the key, and there you are.
It's just a crib, but what a memory
it holds. Four walls, a ceiling
and shelves with books, filled as ever with
pages of godlike words. If there was a sign
it would read: 'FRANK LIVED HERE'. Indeed.

But now it all seems a long time ago.
On the walls today are photos of people
who hold laughter and drinks between them.
The literati, Frank, have all danced with you -
or so it seems. After your death you left ashes
in an Ireland poem, and fragments of life
enlivened in an Ensing book. King
wrote the bio and let's not forget
those marvellous stories *you* gave us.

Here in the cottage, I look for a sign of life
but I'm afraid your four walls
are about to rot. If this were Chaucer
you would be Troilus, watching the great towers burn,
and searching endlessly for the mythical,
the gay Criseyde.

Yes, it seems, your place has seen better days,
so I'm sure you'll forgive me, when I sign my name,
for all I can add to your visitor's book is: 'Deathly'.

highway

1

driving through the dark
back to town, past rusted tracks
Dire Straits and Knopfler's guitar
on 'Industrial Disease'

the family, all of us
together in the car
we're 'going home'
returning from holiday:

beach, sand, sun, new scars,
words, conversations on our minds
some happy, some sad
just the four of us together

2

older, looking out the window
a friend lighting up
someone yells, someone screams
the wind lets in the night air

we're journeying back,
the city won't let us sleep,
on our way back, to more bars
and painting up the town

in the back are laughing girls
picked up from a party we were
just at, drunk, no doubt,
and one has her hand across my lap

3

the same stretch of road again,
this old highway, tonight
thinking of all the times
I've driven this way

all those lovers, families,
friends, people, fighting,
talking, loving, under night
all those words spoken

and all those left unsaid
and thinking too of all those
like me, who've driven this way
lost in the dust, this highway...