

The WHITE Album Readings

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Winter Readings 2008 : edited by Mark Pirie :

Gemma Claire : Evelyn Conlon : Bill Dacker : Marilyn Duckworth :

Rob Hack : Richard Langston : Will Leadbeater : Harvey Molloy :

Michael O'Leary : Mark Pirie : Harry Ricketts : Helen Rickerby :

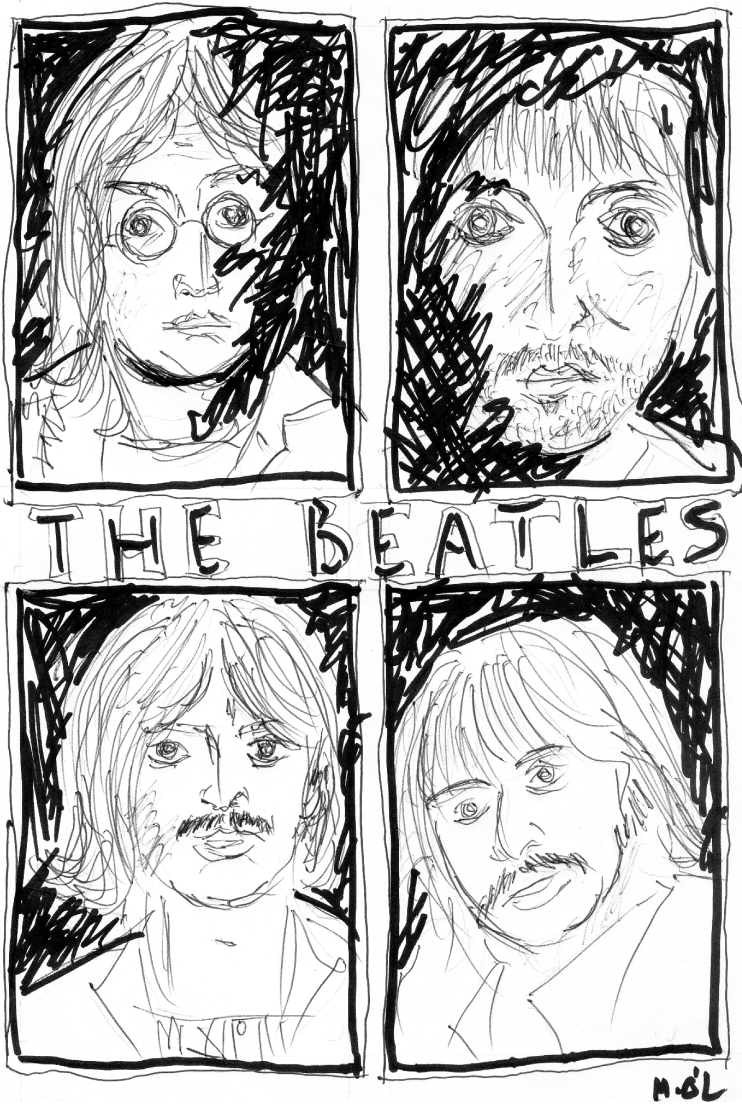
Nelson Wattie : F W N Wright :

Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop :

The WHITE Album Readings

“I told you about strawberry fields
You know the place where nothing is real
Well here’s another place you can go
Where everything flows...”

- The Beatles



“And if you want some fun –
take Obladi, Oblada, hey!”

- The Beatles, ‘Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da’

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Winter Readings 2008

Edited/Compiled by Mark Pirie



**Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop
Paekakariki
2008**

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The WHITE Album Readings is a collection of poems celebrating the Winter Readings at City Gallery, Wellington, presented by HeadworX, E.S.A.W., Wellington City Council, City Gallery, and Poetry Archive Trust, 20 August - 3 September 2008.

The readings marked 10 years of HeadworX Publishers in Wellington. The anthology is dedicated to the British rock band The Beatles.

- Mark Pirie, editor/compiler

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Michael O'Leary's 'A Sonnet for Ché Guevara' first appeared in the anthology, *Che in Verse* (Aflame Books, UK, 2007) and 'While Your Guitar Violently Wails' first appeared in *T.A.B.ula Rasa* (Original Books, 2001).

Mark Pirie's 'Note for a Blues Man' is from *Trespassing in Dionysia* (Original Books, 2008) and 'My Father's Library' is from *Bottle of Armour: Early Poems/Lyrics 1992-93* (Original Books, 2008). Harry Ricketts' poems are from his collection *Your Secret Life* (HeadworX, 2005).

Drawing of The Beatles on pg. 2 is by Michael O'Leary

Cover and concept is based on the Beatles' self-titled album (1968) that came to be known as The White Album.
This year is the 40th anniversary of this album.

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State Highway 16 revisited

“Can money pay for all the days I lived awake but half asleep?”

– Primitive Radio Gods, ‘Standing outside a broken phone booth’

To speed along it is to get away
from now, into years already gone by;
in time capsule towns and bland, pleasant skies,
forever preserved are my used-up days.

Of being driven, I think as I drive,
quickly, though as a kid it took hours.
Onto the land, moments softly shower
and are soaked up; here, the past stays alive.

The importance of infusing this place
with new experiences is immense.
Now could be wasted in reminiscence;
only in doing does one leave a trace.

Keep on keeping on is what I believe
and yet, I long for what can’t be retrieved.

She dreamt

She dreamt she lost a silver baby,
but not in the predictable sense.
He didn't bleed from her, mournfully;
he dropped from her wallet like 50 cents.

She searched and searched, but he was lost;
easy come, easy go is the fate of loose change.
You must mind your baby, never mind the cost –
such selflessness is both joyous and strange.

Perhaps a rather indifferent mother
would think 'so what? I'll just get another.'

For Cairo, At Three Years Old (2008)

Your face is as wide and luminous
As a pale desert.
Soft eyelashes from epicanthic folds
Cast shadows on waiting cheeks,
A bird's outline falling far below
On to distant dunes –
They are the feathers
To your swooping eyes.
Your face is a collision of continents
Where paths meet in the sand
And time finds itself.
When I stroke your forehead,
The warmth and softness
Transport me to imaginings of
The hills you haven't yet seen
And the continents you will walk upon,
Their sand under your wandering feet.

Leaving Day (2005)

At first, you must have been there
Because my wrists stretched around your neck
And you were warm, in full colour,
We were breathing the same air.

It was still for a moment;
But I think you'd already left,
Even before you moved
And were spilt across the pavement,
Scattered like mercury.
You slipped through the gaps of my fingers,
Through the pores of my skin,
While I stood uselessly like an unfinished word.

That gate had moved but had made no sound
Your shadow had barely brushed the ground.

Evelyn Conlon

Lines From The Great Journey – He Mata Au No 3

An end always now, now not always an end, a beginning always now,
now not always a beginning, through tributaries survived, some places

and peoples created upstream, known still, death keeping you here
in ways not expected. With the monster you fought which did not die,

in the river you are still part of the river you fought for still rising
and falling, beating time, binding tributaries of the great song

and dance, game and quest, the choiring flow sometimes keening, sharp
with life aware of depending on death, sometimes the lullaby entrance

to the island stillness of sleep that has to be sometimes kept in the keep
of a tower, sometimes the resonating wail rising from killing fields

where monsters transform, grind against each other, bruising and crushing
bodies, shifting people river to river, shifting river courses, souls transfixed

in endurance and payment of dues to the monstrous, sometimes both
transfigured in the paths opened with joy, sorrow and shame in making it

when others, though part of the rushing and the turning and the tipping,
didn't, sometimes one for the other holding positions with judgement

set in mockery and cynicism justified by rewarding riches of body,
here and now, or destinations of glory for souls always beyond horizons,

dreadful combinations of poverty of soul with riches of soul with poverty
of body with riches of body with poverty of soul with poverty of body

and their downstream somewhere, sometime down the line through the over
world of riches and the underworld of poverty descent of effects and affects

where one person's body and mind redemption turns out of another's
damnation or damnation there the price of a redemption here, through

pride and prejudice the not understood that protects the power of the great
and those who seek greatness the watershed turned into a course

by faultlines, deadlines, bottom lines, and punchlines and the same old
passing of the buck, keeping the true reckoning, true deadlines, true

bottom lines, safely in the past or ahead until they are dead and turn
the flow away leaving memorials to all the dead like the cold beauty

of the marble wall with my grandfathers name and nearby the tombstone
with carved into its surface – A Soldier of the Third New Zealand Rifle

Brigade, Known Only To God, above bones that just could be his, placed
in that poppy rearing earth with Peter Miller and Frank Kinney

and what dreams did arise to trouble the decades of the living century
that followed and carried us to this wake where I join you with them.

Bill Dacker

Adultery with The Seraph From San Diego

I woke to find the archangel Michael
Sprawled on the spapool deck
Getting a moontan
Basting his long limbs with spoonfuls of Milky Whey –
And spent a moment searching for his wings.

Earlier you and I had meant to fly
In the cold white dark
I'd watched you Daedalus
Preparing wax – arranging
Quills in graduated sequence
Your fingers practised, flecked with middle age.

We lifted above the waves
Like a drawn sigh
But knew our Ovid – too well
And fell
Predictably out of the scalding sky.

So when I confessed the archangel Michael
You couldn't believe
I'd break our mid-life trip
To hitch a ride
On the wings of some young seraph.

Disbelief is the easy choice for a realist
But I have to believe today
The velvet thongs of sky
Tugging in my armpits.
Flurrying me away.

Marilyn Duckworth

Viagra

He remembers
Cunt like a pink moth
A silk flower
A feather duster
All flown,
Done and dusted.

He dreams Lost Property
Ladies handbags
This one a pink moth whirring
And this unfolding petals
While a feathered purse
Flaps on his hand –
No.

Somewhere a clasp
Snapdragoning on finger
Ouch
Cutting off all that spending
Power

So?
Who needs?
Money is the root
The root of all
Handbags.

Marilyn Duckworth

Lambton Quay

Shadows shorten, while lunchtime locals veer past sound bites, bargain bins and bank machine queues. Hobby boutiques with Italian leather and French silk survive another winter. A clatter of trolley poles anticipates a sigh from fare payers and a moan from threadbare brakes. Vertiginous towers house scented salesmen applying esoteric formulas to untapped phone markets. Below, around wobbly tables, on pock marked pavements, cigarette smoke and interjections spill from caffeine habitués, dressed in shades of black.

Here it is more elite than effete.
Discussions less about leaving wives,
more about leaving their mark.
Where there's no time to give,
and even the air wants to be alone.

Rob Hack

Remember ?

That cute laugh
You could hear it here.
Like she was being tickled.

Don't know.
Maybe the tv, or something.
No, they didn't have a phone.

My old man used to say, 'a laugh changes you.'
Something like that.

It's quiet over there now
Don't miss the yelling though.
Sp'ose I should've gone over.
Mind you.

Dahlias weren't they?
Those red flowers.
Beautiful. And that climbing rose.

I peeked over the fence.
Everything's dead.

Yeah she did smoke a bit.
Probably why her laugh was so cute.
Oh....did I?

I knew a d j once who smoked to sound sexy.

Rob Hack

Shark Fin Soup

Our first meal out together
was Chinese in north Dunedin.

It was so exotic the flowers
on the silk vest of the waitress

the two white towels on the plate
picked-up with silver tongs.

Our faces steamed –
we were so fresh.

The waitress bowed.
I'd never seen such politeness;
it made me want to be polite.

This bowl-clinking intimacy,
this silken air behind the curtain.
My ordinary town did not exist.

Only the gentle weaving movements
of your arms, and me, spooning shark fin soup
into my astonished face.

Richard Langston

Mrs van Zandt

In my second year
of high school,

I remember a mother
taking hold of me,

and how I could feel
her face on my face

as she held my head
in her hands,

and shaking her head
at how fast I was changing

from a boy into someone
in-between,

I tried not to squirm
as she held on

and looked at me,
her marvelling face.

And only now
I understand how

a motorbike stopped
her own son's life,

and one place she could find
the changes in her son's face

was in mine.

Richard Langston

Martini Meditation

Sitting in
a San Francisco bar
I drank a dry martini
but hated that olive
the bartender
bobbed on top
and spat it out
the moment
I put it in my mouth.

What in hell
had I been doing there, anyway,
with such wild desire
packed in my suitcase
crammed with unfinished plays
and poems
that sounded as if
they had been written
by someone else.

But I still held
these romantic notions
about how I was going
to storm London
like some latter day
Dylan Thomas
with a tie like a waterfall
and a booming voice
that was going to reverberate
throughout all
the capitals of Europe.

Will Leadbeater

**A Variation on ‘The Red Wheelbarrow’ Poem
by William Carlos Williams**

Don’t always rely
on others
to carry your load:
push your own barrow –

and it doesn’t
have to be ‘red’
or ‘glazed with rainwater’
and you can forget about
‘the white chickens’.

Will Leadbeater

Nanosphere

The Enemy of the World
watery eyed, unkempt,
finally captured after months in a hole.

A lab coat prods his back dentures
with a disposable spatula. How
slow & compliant the prisoner moves
like a rest home inmate.

In this cosmos his capture
shall be eclipsed by news
of the accidental discovery of the end of time

as weightless above this Earth
from the station console
Irina checks the Doppler shifts
from the Sombrero, Andromeda, closer Tau Ceti.

Aware of the pressure of the moment
she pauses to gaze at the withered fingers
of a passing river delta
then tells Control her final confirmation:

the expansion is over & the big crunch has begun
the slow seven billion year retrenchment
from universe to nanosphere.

Her news crosses the twittering
of the only known radio intelligence:

0800 chatline numbers
psychic advice lines
impending Serbian elections
weather updates
body counts
Chinese operas
Marilyn's slow turn in a hall of mirrors
Chico & the Man.

The day's journeying calls roll out
within the bounded horizon of vast contracting dot.
There is only so much time. And time is running back.

The children watch television in the dark.

Albedo

A terminator line
cuts the moon

like a millionaire cake
into two sharp slices;

white & black.
The earth casts a shadow

across its monochrome twin
who turns so perfectly

in step with our dance
we never see her move.

A vast blanket
of frozen regolith

covers the scarred
brightside face

smashed by a million
meteor punch-ups

& throws
a wash of pale light

over the black tar roof
of the outside laundry

Harvey Molloy

While Your Guitar Violently Wails

(to George Harrison)

Despite the high-walls fortress
Of your many-roomed mansion
It seems that living in a convent retreat
Could not keep the madness out

The Beatle-Witch which you
Had become in the mind of a fellow
Liddypoolian was to be extinguished
As an aspect of evil in the material world

Like John, you had become a single fantasy
Of someone's over-rich, heat oppressed mind
Which sought to find the sense of utu
For your success and failure

George, the quiet one, almost eternally silenced
By an eighteen centimetre blade
Beware of sadness and the written word
Which comes back to haunt those who

Scoop it from the cauldron – who sew
The chords of discord in a song

Michael O'Leary

A Sonnet to Ché Guevara

(For his place in Popular Culture)

'Looks a lot like Ché Guevara,' I heard David Bowie say
Ernesto Guevara de la Serna, otherwise known as Ché
Was tired of witnessing widespread poverty and oppression
Hopped on his bike and headed towards the Revolution

His travels and readings also led him to view liberation
As not for one country, but borderless. His conception
Became disenchantment as the *Realpolitik* in Cuba too
Began to make Castro's ideals seem to ring untrue

Irony is the meat and blood of life and love and pop
Culture also. Lennon's take on Leninism and Mao -
Hate 'Ain't going to make it with anyone, anyhow'
But 'posterboy Ché' and 'Moondog Johny' lives both stop

By a bullet: Ché, murdered on Lennon's birthday, his last words can
Be for both of them, 'Shoot, coward, you are only going to kill a man'

Note: This sonnet was written in 1997 when Guevara's body was exhumed from its communal grave in Vallegrande and returned to Cuba. The 30th anniversary of his death was celebrated across Cuba. (Ché died on the 9th of October, 1967, John Lennon's 27th birthday.) Ché was 39 when he was shot, John Lennon was 40 when he was shot in 1980.

"Why did they think that by killing him, he would cease to exist as a fighter?" Castro said at the ceremony to mark Ché's reburial. "Today he is in every place, wherever there is a just cause to defend."

Michael O'Leary

Notes for a Blues Man
(In memory of Robert Johnson)

six string
 head on
 neck

play
 your soul
 taking

anecdote
 with a
 black man's

fingers
 and decide
 at the

crossroads
 an album
 of

blue notes
 for an old
 traveller

or a
 discarded
 lover

waiting
 to buy
 back his

soul...

1994

Mark Pirie

My Father's Library

I opened the door
To a myriad of books
Where my father had found pleasure
In the past

I broke the palisade
Around his library of books
To discover the treasure
From his past

I hesitated, then strayed
Inside his library of books
Where reading was leisure
In the past

I sought my father's pride
Inside a myriad of books
To make a measure
Of his past

And through his library of books
I sense what the past can bring
And what the content of books
Mean; as I read them, they sing

1993

Mark Pirie

New worlds

He is small under the sky
He is in a strange place, a foreign land

Can the people be trusted?
Can he trust himself?

Everything is greens and blues
here is water, here is shelter

It is not a home
even when he meets her

He meets her in a swamp, in a river
on a mountain, in the valley

Look, she says, here is the sky
I give it to you

He cannot keep his hands off her

She takes him to the thick grass
Here are my hands, my feet, my mouth

Yes, he says, and he is touched

When he leaves, she follows
she stands in front of the fire, she sacrifices

‘Wait two months, and then tell her I’m dead’

‘I have no name now’, she says, or doesn’t
say – she has no language left

Her clothes are not even her own

A new hand comes into her darkness
pulls her into green

It is the same place, but it is new

‘Why are you crying?’
I must be happy, she says

It is not true, but it might as well be
In this new light, there is hope

In her new dress, her new body
she steps on the deck, into the ocean

Everything is browns and greys
as she falls into the city

She knows which way is up, which down
She was right to trust herself

This is a strange place, a foreign land
She is small under the sky

Helen Rickerby

Memory inspection

Miss Scribble reminds you to tuck
in the present with due attention

to hospital corners; to fold
your thoughts, placing them, neatly of course,

under your pillow. Memory
inspection will be at three a.m. sharp.

Anyone found with their nostalgia
hanging out or holes in their regrets

will be made to copy out five
hundred times: "The past is out of bounds."

Harry Ricketts

Then

(for Andrew)

Then there are those who still
can't accept or believe it. I mean,
you were so fond of the kids
the two of you (that at least was true),
so happy together.

Susie, for instance. Sure
you were the model couple, she fought
to catch that bouquet (lillies?)
thrown sky-high in the sun; but now blames you
that she's still all alone.

Or Martin. He's never
gotten over it. He rings, he emails,
he won't let it go. Was it
background, he wonders, boredom or bed?
What was it you wanted?

What indeed? Love, I suppose,
though it sounds ludicrous, looking back.
And to grow up – whatever
that means. And then just to shoot out the lights,
go dancing in the dark.

Harry Ricketts

Mozart's Journey

The taste of death is on my tongue.
Evening is. The sun has gone.

I sense the music's passing.
I'll take my meal in the Silver Snake.

The snake, the fangs, the tongue.
Where is Tamino, dragon-slayer?

The moon is shining a silver sheen.
The stars are dimmed by it. Cool.

The game will be over before
I have enjoyed my skill.

The sweetest hours of life
Flow past us like a dance.

And life was sometimes sweet,
At least it started well.

I cannot change my fate.
None of us measures our days.

I must not leave my song
Of death unfinished.

Already friends are dropping tears
Into my ready grave.

My friends I will return
And lift you up towards the sky.

It's good you're here, dear Sophie.
Tonight you can watch me die!

Your eyes are shining. Lips are strong.
The taste of death is on my tongue.

Nelson Wattie

The Art of Translation

In a language spoken
On another planet
Interweaving
A distant double star
Far, far from here,
A beautiful poet wrote
Of a hairy, determined flower
Yearning out
From a deep crevasse
Towards the purple light.

Its desperation was overcome,
At least in part,
By its spirit,
And differently by the cold
Sand and burning
Light that tortured
Its twisted body.

When I came to translate
The beautiful poet's distant verse
Into my local Chinese,
So grounded on continent and village,
I sang, stilly and finely,
Of a wounded ox
Pulling my overfilled cart
Slowly, painfully,
Through a clogging
Mud-baked field
To save the children I love
From pitiful starvation.

Nelson Wattie

No Further Than

The sentiments and the romance
 No further I elaborate ;
Than Ptolemy VIII commands.

 The sentiments and the romance
That filled his heart like any man's ;
 Beyond his years evaporate.

The sentiments and the romance
 No further I elaborate.

Garden Walk

To walk by day the garden overlooking
 The sea ? was to the aged pharaoh's liking ;
With Moschus : his court poet stepping by him
 Still ready : to recite many a poem.
 Thoughts of his mother often occupy him.

Acknowledged by Aegeas as his son ;
 Did Theseus for his mother : Aethra send ;
Who as his housekeeper in Athens lived
 In fit estate thereafter ; much beloved.

Physkon remarks ; his brother : Philometor
 Just so acknowledged their dear mater
By choosing so apt a cognomen
 As Mother lover for his regnal name.

Physkon the tales of Theseus Moschus recounts.
 But pharaoh the hero's good sense and prudence scants.

Mine was a life -: Physkon observed ;
 Through all vicissitudes preserved
As pharaoh viceroy exile still ;
 I like : to think with flair and style.
That Theseus was a foolish fellow.

Such an example who would follow ?
Too stubborn wayward and too loyal
For good : to ensue to a royal.

I keep my kingdom ; and avoid
Having my enemies invade.
In hope our dynasty continues
Decades another nine or ten ; use
Such policies ? is my advice.
What matters otherwise crime or vice ?

Moschus, tell me again the tale :
The tally of Theseus's wives.
Woman's the hand that weaves the web of life.
Who says ? Physkon or Moschus ? poet or politician ?
Central these issues to the human condition.

No more, no more the tale relate —:
Cries Physkon, cruelly desolate.

Best known of all the classic tales,
So far awash
With grief in its details ;
I leave off thus at Physkon's wish.