



ESAW
CHRISTMAS
SURPRISE
2014

M.O.

EARL OF SEACLIFF CHRISTMAS SURPRISE 2014

Edited by Mark Pirie

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F W Nielsen Wright (Friend of the Family)
Mark Pirie (Friend of the Family)
Rowan Gibbs (Friend of the Family)
Harry W Emmet

**Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop
Paekakariki
2014**

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Michael O’Leary, F W Nielsen Wright, Mark Pirie,
Rowan Gibbs, Harry W Emmet

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*You may be a boy and you may be a girl
You may be bald and you may have a curl
You may dance a jig, waltz, or do a twirl
But wherever you are in the world
It's Christmas Surprise from the Earl*

MICHAEL O'LEARY

From DIE BIBEL

Chapter iv Art school, Margaret Street, Ponsonby

13: Art school was a real liberation for me as studying at university had been a few years earlier. I moved into number 8 Margaret Street where David Eggleton was living. He and I had met the year before when he and the Bailey (not Bewley) brothers were involved with a production at Auckland University called 'Stomach Cabaret'. I was asked to join in this satirical/anarchic extravaganza and I had to utter the immortal words 'God is not mocked' through a megaphone off stage.

14: The first room I had at number 8 was a small sunroom the size of a closet and it had a single bed that was on a 45 degree angle because both legs were broken on one side. Eventually I moved into the largest room which had a mezzanine bed and a huge bay window that looked out on to the butchers across the road.

15: This was one of the craziest and most amazing houses I have lived in. Situated at the top of College Hill, it was a dead end street in every way, including that which The Kinks wrote about. It had eight rooms and was totally dilapidated. Bob Dylan's 'Desolation Row' played all day and night on our record player and became an anthem for the way we lived. Because I was the one who went to work I ended up paying most of

the bills and rent. The landlord offered to sell it to me for \$2000 but because I was opposed to owning property at the time I turned him down. Oh well, as I always say 'you live and don't learn'.

16: The rent was \$25 a week and we often struggled to find even that. Our house had some quite eccentric people and practices. 'Mad Mike' was a character who would spend the day wandering around the place muttering a sort of incantation and Eggleton and I would follow him in a kind of half awe-struck, half bemused manner. Mike would gain a kind of notoriety in the late 1990s for dressing like a 19th Century Māori, complete with top hat, and he walked into a Dunedin art gallery and attacked a Goldie painting. I still get a Christmas card from him each year.

17: There was our butler, Hennings, a viola player who later played with the Symphony Orchestra with Wilma Smith who I got to know later on and who my cousin Josephine Harris played cello with in the orchestra also, but at Margaret Street Graham Hennings was always stoned and couldn't afford to pay the rent, so I made him our butler/come man Friday, and I used to lock him in my room, where there was a music stand, and I wouldn't let him out until he had done his viola practice. This is when I first took on the mantle of the Earl of Ponsonby, the first manifestation of the Earl of Seacliff.

18: I spent much of my time working on my own art works, mainly using oil paints, mixed media collages and a lot of drawing, especially cartoons with my quirky sense of humour and the absurd. One painting I worked on for quite a while was an image from a photograph of my friend Jackie Gilmore, one of my fellow students at art class. She took up a lot of my thoughts and we would often go together to Albert Park after class and sit among the great tree roots and talk in a kind of fantasy language. I really loved her and I would sometimes go and visit her home in Epsom, an experience I used to feel was like a palpable surrealism. For quite a few years I would write a poem for her on her birthday which always involved a platypus, a random surrealist manifestation of unspoken affection. I still don't know what to write about her after all these years and even though things went badly when I recently tried to get in touch with her again I still feel a love for her. The last platypus poem is (Psalm 1). You might say I have been *staggering along the Via Dolorosa in search of beauty* much of my life.

19: Anyway, back to ART. I began to do art events like taking the last money from my bank account and setting fire to it while singing 'God Save The Queen' at the Kiwi pub one night. It was around this time that I decided my life would be my main work of art. I was close to another woman friend at the time. Janet Bayly was at Elam studying photography, she lived in Arch Hill and we would explore a lot of places together around

the Ponsonby/Grey Lynn area. I did a painting of her jumping over a fence and called it: 'The Leaping Madonna – a little known work by Leonardo da Vinci, found recently in the subway at Glen Innes Railway Station.' Janet loved a song by Donovan called 'Jennifer Juniper' and echoing a line from it she used to say how she too wanted to ride a 'dappled mare' with 'lilacs in her hair'. In recent years I have been in contact with her again as she lived for a while in Paekakariki and now runs the Mahara Gallery in Waikanae. Sometimes I go on the train to visit her and we went to the movies for her 2013 birthday.

....

24: Some of the literary and art books I was reading around this time included 'Selected Poems' by Apollinaire, 'Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp' by Pierre Cabanne (a book which Francis Pound and I used for one of his art history classes when he was a tutor at Otago Polytechnic later in the 1970s: we read the text to the class with me taking the part of Duchamp, while Francis read the part of Cabanne), 'To Hell with Culture' by Herbert Read (which ended up at the bottom of a building site the day I bought it, being out on the town with some drunken artist friends we looked at the title, and with a theatrical gesture threw the hapless book into the Jaws of Mammon), and Joyce's 'Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man'.

25: Margaret Street had three other houses which were peopled by similar ‘alternative’ people as well as us at Number 8. While our house was considered to be the most eccentric the other three were more conventional ‘out of it’ residents, druggies, bikers etc, and the whole street was often referred to as ‘Hippie Hotel’.

....

30: One evening I had been at an opening to a show at Auckland City Art Gallery when I bumped into Tony Fomison who I knew from around the art scene with street artists like Ruffo and Dereck Snoch. Tony told me he had nowhere to live so I invited him back to stay at Number 8 until he found a place. He ended up staying for quite a while and Paul Joseph, my friend who lived around the corner, had a great time mocking some of Tony’s more eccentric characteristics. Right-right-right, yeah-yeah-yeah.

31: When Tony died in the 1980s John Pule and I got drunk in his honour and then went to the Art Marae at the Gow Langsford Gallery where Tony lay in state. Pule and I fell asleep in each other’s arms next to Tony’s coffin amidst a sea of other mourners. When we awoke the morning of the funeral I said to Pule: ‘Bodies everywhere!’ We then all went to lay our old comrade to rest at the cemetery.

32: Towards the end of 1974 I decided to leave Auckland. Margaret Street was being raided by the drug squad a lot and I got sick of being woken up in the middle of the night as they carried out another senseless raid. Also, one night I was over at Number 6 when the dealer came to deliver drugs to Stereo. He drove a very stylish Jaguar and obviously had a very profitable business. During the deal I noticed that his jacket had opened unintentionally and revealed that he was carrying a revolver. So I thought it's time to leave. I had long ago given up the idea of going to Elam, instead of learning how to be an artist I felt more like living the life of an artist.

33: I borrowed some money and flew to Dunedin without telling anyone. Apart from my Cessna adventure I had never flown in a plane before and as I went to board the aircraft I looked at the date on the newspaper stand. It was Friday the 13th. Good or bad luck, we'll never know, but I began my first stint of living in Dunedin in a flat full of Auckland ex-pats at 140 Albany Street, including Michael Williams, Paul Joseph et al.

(Excerpt from DIE BIBEL mit apocrypha (Illustrated)
by Michael O'Leary, Being the Authoritative History
of Dr Michael John O'Leary, The Earl of Seacliff,
ESAW, 2014)

ROWAN GIBBS

Précis: WHEN HARRY MET MARION

Harry Emmet (born Henry William Denby in London in 1858) had a successful stage career in New Zealand, Australia and America between 1876 and his early death in New York in 1896. He arrived in Lyttelton aged 18 in August 1876 and first went on stage in November that year, touring round New Zealand and then Australia. He was known for his versatility - actor, comedian, singer, stage manager, journalist, playwright, librettist, song-writer and poet. In Dunedin in 1876 he took part in the first public performance of ‘God Defend New Zealand’ and in 1885 wrote the libretto for ‘Angelica’, advertised as the first New Zealand opera. He travelled to California via Hawaii in 1886, then moved to New York where he lived in “Tin Pan Alley”, continuing to act and writing plays, poetry, and a host of popular songs, before succumbing to alcohol and tuberculosis the day after his 40th birthday.

An account of Harry’s career, and those of his two actress wives, Marion Melrose and Irene Leslie, and many other stage people whose paths he crossed, is given in *When Harry Met Marion*, by Rowan Gibbs (Wellington: Smith’s Bookshop Ltd, 2014; 9780987668424)

HARRY W EMMET

PARTNERS IN POVERTY

How do we come to be partners,
 When we ain't got a cent in the world?
Well, it isn't the gaudiest colors
 That cut the best figure unfurled:
It isn't the loftiest mountain
 That brings the most good to the creek;
And the tie that's the truest and strongest
 Is oft 'twixt the humble and meek.

There ain't no offense meant to you, sir,
 Because you're arrayed in fine clothes.
It was honor that kept us such partners —
 That's riches that very few knows.
We mates had a poor ruined cabin
 Beside an old broken-down claim;
As for eating — we'd almost forgot to —
 And drinking was only in name.

But sometimes came a bright girlish creature,
 And brought enough food to exist;
We'd just learnt to love her like fathers,
 When we heard she'd been suddenly miss'd.
She'd fled from her home in the camp, sir,
 With a stranger, both handsome and rich —
Then we soon got so weak and so weary
 That we scarcely knew t'other from which.

It's a hard thing to sit still with hunger,
 And know you must meet him each day.
We were too old to look after work, sir,
 Also crippled to wander away.
But one night we heard "Thud!" at the cabin,
 And we opened the door, and look'd round;
There she was, sir, all damp and bedraggl'd —
 Our darling — full length on the ground.

We hurried her in, and in whispers
 She told us her story at last —
'Twas the old tale of love and desertion,
 Through which so many angels have passed.
She knew she'd done wrong, but we couldn't
 Reproach her as dying she lay;
But we just held her hands and each other's,
 And listen'd to all she'd to say.

She gave us a package, and told us
 'Twas marriage lines. Asked us to find
The boy babe from her they had stolen,
 When wicked love ceased to be blind —
And a wondrous strength seemed to come o'er us
 As we solemnly knelt by her side,
And in her cause swore to be partners —
 Faint, she smiled back her thanks, and — then died.

She was buried by some of the people;
 And then we marched out on our vow:
Old paupers, we tramped the world over,
 And we've just kept on tramping till now.
Want to look at the package? Well, here, sir;
 What's that you say? She was your — what?
Your mother! Thank God; then, we've found you;
 We knew that the truth must be got.

Keep on shaking hands? Yes! Oh no, sir,
 'Tain't money as pays for our will;
'Twas gratitude forced us to find you,
 And we're partners in poverty still.
Remember that she was an angel!
 Good-bye, sir, we've only one claim —
That there's some as does goodness by stealth, sir,
 And blushes to find it out fame.

San Francisco, March 19, 1887

(From *San Francisco Wasp*, 19 March, 1887, page 5)

MARK PIRIE

GEORGE BONNER

(After reading Malcolm Knox's *Never a Gentleman's Game*)

George Bonner gave it a bash;
In days when over the rope meant five,
And six was out of the ground.

George Bonner gave it a bash;
Had wanted though to be a stylist;
Yet he was there to play with dash.

George Bonner gave it a bash;
In days when over the rope meant five.

*George Bonner, the big-hitting Australian, was an 'original' in that mode before contemporary players like David Warner, Chris Gayle or New Zealand's own Corey Anderson. No one could hit the ball farther than Bonner in his hey-day in the 1880s. Although he wanted to play more artfully and scientifically, his team mates wanted George to hit out.

(From *The Cricket Society News Bulletin*, UK, September 2014)

NEWTOWN PARK

(Football in the '80s)

I remember Newtown Park
on cold, winter days,
sitting up in the grandstand
with my mate John.

The crowd was chanting
“*C'mon DB Spats!!*” and
Mal Dunford was at the centre of
Wellington United's defence.

Who could forget his
strong headers as he climbed
above the shoulders of
opposition strikers.

Those were the days of
the national football league,
that we watched with keenness
on Sunday afternoons.

Declan Edge, David Chote
and Mike McGarry were
some of the visiting stars
that drew us in to watch.

Newtown Park was our heart
of football in those days.
Many a good winter afternoon,
we spent up in the stand.

(From *broadsheet 13: the football issue*, launched at
the Embassy of Brazil, 2 July 2014)

THE RESCUE

Pyramid of the Great Diviner, Uxmal, Mexico, 1979

After racing my sister to the top, we reached
the summit's urn-like shell and sat down to catch
our breaths, while a boy across from me walked
round selling *Coke* to the tourists. Here looking out across
the Mayan city lit by the late afternoon sun
everything seemed different. Before us stood the valley
and around it the wind's brambled messages
gusted across the facade of the Chac's temple
before ending with a faint whistle by rock
Chimeras jutting sullenly into the air.

We must've been there for some time, until we got
the call from our guide it was time to head back.

But, as I got to the steps and looked down,
I grew scared of the drop. I stayed at the top dead still.

‘Hey kid!’ a friendly American voice said,
‘It’s easy, turn your back, take one step at a time,

and don’t look down!’ He came over
with my Dad and they moved in behind me;

then we took it a step at a time, all the way down
to the base of the plumed serpent, my mother and sister

mere dots on the distant ground, while the rest of our party
gathered round, cheering my somewhat late arrival.

(From *Poems for My Father*, The Night Press, 2014)

THE PYRAMIDS

Walls of mystery entranced age’s enmity
Leading to Aztec walls, imprisoned.
Let puzzled minds awaken and see
Aztec pyramids are alone, christened.

Over dying earth of history’s ardour,
Aztec nemesis escapes their pyre
Where a lost tribe’s sacred armour
Is submersed in colonial fire.

Living amongst modern protection
The souls' redemption seems to confide
A threat to the chastity of Hyperion
Who guards the rights of Aztecs who died.

The strong precocious standing sentinels
Live alone as spectacular rock citadels.

June-July 1993, an original draft of 'The Pyramids'
published in free verse form in *Trespassing in
Dionysia* (Original Books) and *Valley Micropress*.

THE HAYMAKER

A boy drove his tractor in his room.
His dad was ploughing fields outside.

The fresh hay he could smell
As if he was making hay inside.

(From *Valley Micropress*, November 2014)

F W NIELSEN WRIGHT

FROM FISH HOOK POEMS

JUST ABOUT

The moon just about overhead
Drops moonshine on our window sill.
Lamplight pollutes the neighbourhood.
The moon just about overhead
Is held in veneration
For its soft light reflecting sun.
Lamplight is hard ;
Its source unseen :
Power generation
Whether by circuit or by cell.
The moon just about overhead
Drops moonshine on our window sill.

WYATT

Poet whose middle name is (W)riot ;
 He sleeps in peace and quiet
In a world awry at all points.
 Poet whose middle name is (W)riot ;
Rings infinite verbal change to triad
 On war and war's disquiet.
Poet whose middle name is (W)riot ;
 He sleeps in peace and quiet.

ELEGANT FRAMES

What is poetic aesthetic ?

I would say elegance ;

Given an audience empathetic.

What is poetic aesthetic ?

In comic, sardonic or pathetic

Framing of cultural slogans.

What is poetic aesthetic ?

I would say elegance.

HOWEVER MUCH

Muse has me at her beck and call ;

However much we squabble.

I'm working up another book.

Muse has me at her beck and call.

So far I have my balance back ;

I can the further wobble

From side to side ; the while I warble.

Muse has me at her beck and call ;

However much we squabble.

HIM MUST

Tis not enough : to admire Shakespeare.

Him must one's artwork match.

Who truly strives with his seeks par.

Tis not enough : to admire Shakespeare.

No exercise for art's sake spare.

But lay on overmuch.

Tis not enough : to admire Shakespeare.

Him must one's artwork match.

AXIOLOGUS

An ancient man yet still alive,

I read the world with Marx and Smith

To scientific a belief.

An ancient man yet still alive

I wear my heart upon my sleeve,

Too voluble a wordsmith.

An ancient man yet still alive,

I read the world with Marx and Smith.

OFT IN

Off in the night I wake :

To write a fish hook poem.

I find it awkward work.

Oft in the night I wake ;

Author disturbed in earthquake weather ;

By thoughts that occupy him.

Off in the night I wake :

To write a fish hook poem.

WHOSE ONLY

To exercise poetic skill :

Has always been my aim :

And do so on the smallest scale.

I exercise poetic skill

In accordance with no man's school ;

Whose only pupil I am.

To exercise poetic skill :

Has always been my aim.

So wins delight the sum

With all its parts congruesome.

ODE TO INDUSTRY

First Britain changed over to coal.
 And coke replaced charcoal ;
Ere had unplanned
Human rapacity ;
World wide exhausted ;
What natural capacity
Existed
In water wind timber and land.