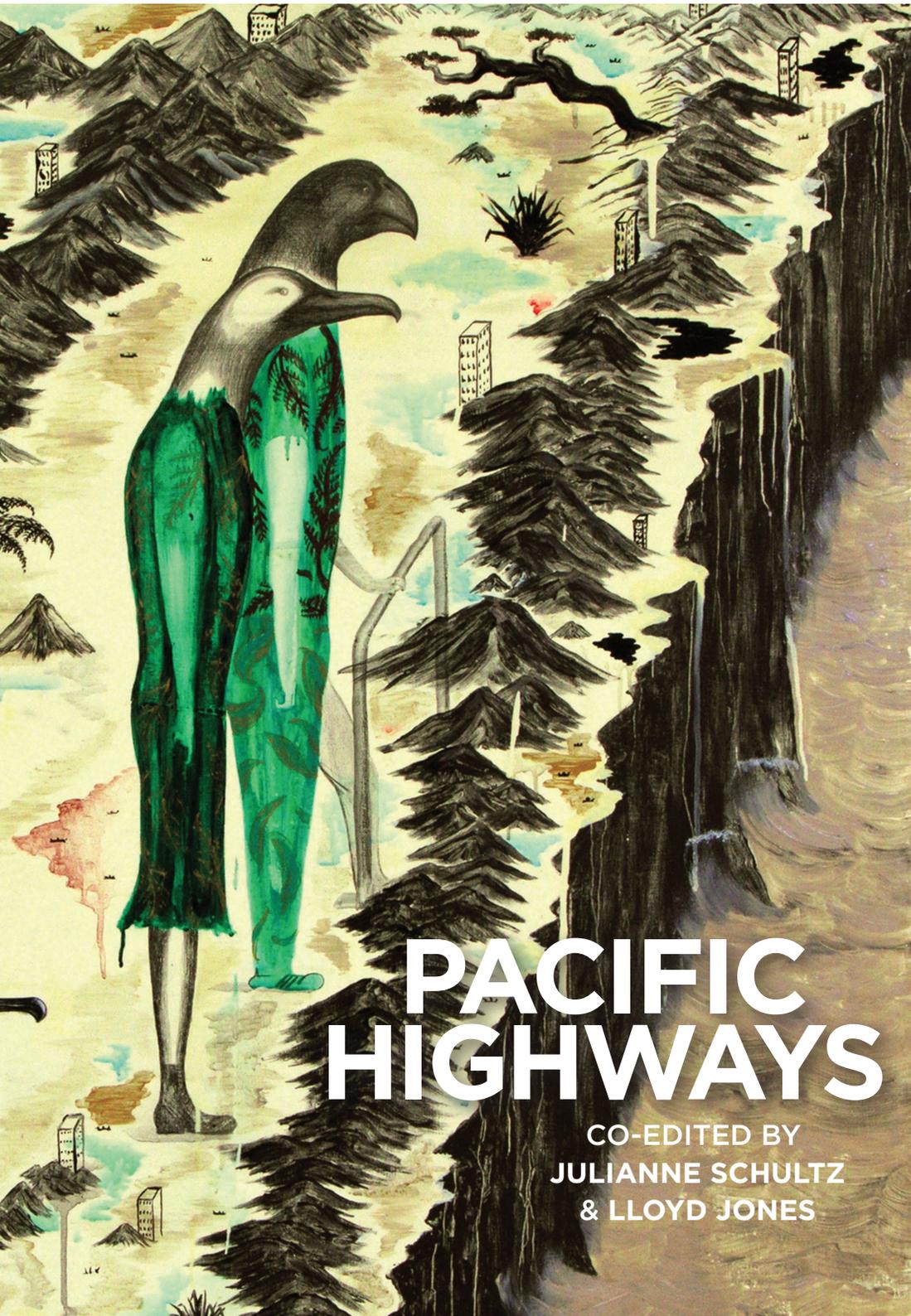


**GriffithREVIEW**43

A QUARTERLY OF NEW WRITING & IDEAS

Volume 2



# PACIFIC HIGHWAYS

CO-EDITED BY  
JULIANNE SCHULTZ  
& LLOYD JONES

GriffithREVIEW43  
**Pacific Highways**  
**Volume 2**

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FICTION

# Nocturnal

Owen Marshall

**WALKING** was a solace. The mild exertion, the sense of at least physical progress, the distraction of a changing scene, all a temporary relief from the sad house in which his father lay dying. Night and day occasioned different modes of movement. In the latter he was brisk amongst his fellows, as if he too had purpose and a rendezvous, while in the darkness he tended to mooch, often finding himself turning corners without conscious decision, or standing blankly before a building that had nothing to recommend it. In darkness the town suburbs were insubstantial, each quiet house much like another, their individuality cloaked by silence and lack of definition.

Night walking encouraged a mild voyeurism, glimpses of unselfconscious domestic life framed by windows and bathed in soft, yellow light, or flickering in the blue haze of television, as Simon paused unseen.

In a front flat an old woman in an apron, clipping the foliage of her pot plants with scissors, and with the solicitude usually reserved for attention to a child. A family laughing soundlessly at the screen, and their gaze directed there rather than at one another. The modern kitchen in which a husband was urgently voluble, and his wife critically immobile, holding a cup and staring into the darkness where Simon stood. The blond girl in the red bathrobe who had a foot on the coffee table to enable her to paint, or file, her toe nails. A bay window with three long-haired cats posed close to the

glass: so still that only the head swivel of the middle one at the last moment of Simon's passing, proved that they were flesh and blood. The vignettes were like Vermeer paintings, lit from within, at once symbolic yet contained, and strangely uncommunicative.

Only once in the night walks did any of the people he observed move from their own world into his own. While on his way home not long before midnight, the pale street lights made plain a man riding in the middle of the otherwise deserted road. He pedalled cautiously, one hand steering and the other balancing a long pipe on his shoulder. A water pipe it seemed, and it undulated before and behind him although he cycled slowly. His shadow created a strange double image when he was exactly half way between light poles, and then closed up again as a single figure.

Noiselessly he passed, until when turning left at the corner he lost his balance and fell with a great clatter and a single cry, the heavy metal pipe clouting him as he went down. Simon stood still for a moment, expecting some reaction from the surroundings, but nothing came. The street was empty and silent again.

The man was sitting up when Simon reached him. 'Fuck,' he said with emphasis. He was small, elderly, with a walrus moustache from Victorian photographs. 'Fuck, and I almost made it,' he said. 'I'm just round the corner.'

'We better get off the road I suppose,' said Simon, but the guy stayed put, feet outspread, rubbing the back of his head.

'The bloody thing gave me a fair wallop,' he complained. It had, yet part of Simon's spontaneous reaction had been amusement, for he was often enough the victim of everyday misfortunes to appreciate the discomfort of others.

'I'll take the bike if you like,' Simon offered. The handle bars were no longer aligned with the front wheel, which made it tricky to push, and the mudguard pressed on the tyre.

The old man stood up and clumsily hoisted the pipe onto his shoulder again. It must have been at least six or seven metres long, and had a raised joint about half way, like the belt of a garden worm. 'That's kind of you,' he said and set off, still well out on the road, until he came to his driveway. Simon followed at a calculated distance, so that the veering pipe didn't give him a

swipe as well. Even so, he had to be careful not to step into the front wheel of the bike as he pushed it awkwardly beside him.

‘Gavin,’ the man with the pipe said after he’d lowered it beside a thick border of lavender that gave a heady scent to the warm night air. Simon introduced himself in turn, and readily gave up the bike. ‘Ta,’ said Gavin, and then, ‘Fuck,’ as even in the poor light he saw the extent of the damage. He leant it on the side of the house. ‘You’d think I could pedal quietly home this late without a bloody drama.’

‘Ah well, you’ve got it here now.’ Simon turned to go.

‘Would you like a beer?’ and as if he’d pushed a button, the light came on in the small porch of the house and the door opened. A younger man in jeans came onto the step. The hair on his crown was fluffed up, as if he’d just risen from drowsing on a sofa.

‘Is that you, Dad?’ he called.

‘The bloody pipe fell on me, but we’ve got it here now,’ said Gavin. ‘Bring us out a couple of cans will you.’ Gavin was pretty limber for an old guy who had been hit by a pipe. He sat down easily on the concrete border of the drive, and Simon did the same, his back pressing into the stalky lavender and so increasing the fragrance. He had nowhere better to be at midnight in his home town. Gavin worked his head tentatively, then smoothed his soft, salt and pepper moustache with gentle downwards strokes, although it was the back of his head that had been struck. ‘I won’t tell him the bike’s stuffed,’ he said. ‘He uses it to look for work.’

‘The handle bars might come right with just a good yank,’ Simon said.

‘It’s cooler out here,’ said Gavin, as his son came from the house. He had a thin strip of beard at the centre of his chin, and wore a candy stripe shirt. The two didn’t go well together, giving him the appearance of a circus goat. He handed over two cans of beer, nodded without a word to Simon, as if it were customary for his father to be hosting a friend after midnight on the concrete kerb of the drive.

Gavin waited until his son had gone back inside, before taking a first mouthful. ‘You know bi-polar?’ he said.

‘I know of it.’

‘He’s bi-polar,’ Gavin said. ‘He’s down at the moment and so hasn’t much

to say. It's a very different story when he's up. Anyway, here's cheers.'

'Cheers.' The beer was cold, and Simon felt the first mouthful all the way down. The lavender was so pervasive that its aroma replaced the flavour of the drink in a slightly disconcerting way. 'Thanks,' he said.

'So you're from round here? I've never spotted you before.' After taking a mouthful, Gavin smoothed down his moustache again. Even in the dim light its archaic nature was plain, covering not just the upper lip, but drooping low so that nothing of his mouth was visible at all until he spoke.

'I come from here originally, but I'm just back visiting my parents. My father, Warwick Davy, is an accountant here.' Local people usually responded when Simon mentioned his father's name, but not the old guy.

'Uh-huh,' was all he said, and then, as if they'd been discussing his son's condition for some time, 'Yeah, this bi-polar thing is a real big dipper. He couldn't live by himself and get by. It would be either prison, or the bin. You don't know whether to laugh or cry: well you do really but it doesn't help.'

'Didn't they used to call it manic depression?' Simon said. His own mood was rather elevated. He had a lavender beer, a companion whose troubles were of no concern to him, yet served as distraction from his own. No pipe had fallen on his head. It was pleasant to be relaxed in the night and talking idly of a new affliction.

'I think it killed his mother. She couldn't take the ceaseless worry of it. You never know what's next, and he's a bugger for going off his pills and not letting on. He'll save the world one minute, and the next be threatening to do himself in, or some other bastard.'

'It's a day by day thing I suppose, and never goes away,' said Simon. 'But he's lucky to have you for support.'

'Mostly you wouldn't know it.'

'I guess he'd soon notice if you weren't around.'

'That's about the size of it.' Gavin lifted his head to the mysterious sky and gave a long sigh that ruffled his moustache and seemed as much from satisfaction with the beer as despair at the family predicament. For a moment Simon thought he might contribute sorrows of his own, but decided rather to be a listener.

So the two of them sat a little longer embraced by darkened lavender

on the rim of Gavin's drive, and with stoical nonchalance the old man told of his family circumstance. As passing confidant Simon was apprised of all most personal in the lives of people quite unknown to him. Gavin's son had once taken to a Welsh pony with a machete, claiming it was the horse of the Apocalypse, and another time insisted that Beelzebub was tapping on his bedroom window. His affliction had driven his mother to her death. How was it that so much strangeness and fearful possibility existed in a humdrum world?

Almost abruptly Gavin stood, plucked the empty can from Simon's hand, and said he'd better go inside. 'You never know what's going on with him,' he said.

'Well anyway, it's a credit to you, and thanks for the beer,' said Simon glibly as they moved apart.

'What you don't face you can't recognise,' Gavin said. 'It's like your own arse: you carry it all your life, but couldn't pick it out in a crowd.' Simon couldn't think of an adequate reply to such profound wisdom.

ON HIS WAY home he travelled some of the streets he'd walked as a boy, to and from school and roaming with friends. The air was still welcoming though cooling somewhat, but something in the reduced light of midnight made him think of winter in Central, rather than summer. The frozen grass of the July playing fields would crush like cornflakes beneath his shoes in the morning, and he knew never to touch iron railings with bare hands. A garden hose left lying on the lawn would snap like a candy stick with just a kick. Simon could recall the white frost on the full fleece of the sheep, the dark, glittering hoar frost draping the fruit trees, the mist sprites dancing on the surface of the broad river. The creek pools would hold the ribbon weeds as if in crystal, even small bubbles motionless in their ascent. No winters now were as those winters of childhood. Cold then came full circle, and burnt as fire did on the exposed skin.

In the summer night however, walking was pleasant. Alex is a quiet town, and the more natural sounds were seldom lost for long. Simon could hear the last of the wind in the gardens and trees, the furtive rustle of a hedgehog, even a small snapping noise that came from high on the electricity poles.

Moonlight was turning the river to mercury. Few places still showed lights, but from the window of a brick town house close to the road, he had a final glimpse of his fellow citizens. A squat man in short pyjama bottoms grazing from his fridge. The faint, alien light from within isolated him there in the darkened kitchen, accentuated the furred hair of his chest, the corporeal solidity of his bare shoulder, the sausage or somesuch he held like a thick pencil, the stoop of him as he looked for more even as he ate. And then he closed the fridge door and vanished absolutely and for ever, leaving just the blank screen of the window.

By the fence of the trucking firm Simon came abruptly on a large, black dog standing beneath a sign on the footpath verge. The dog stepped out silently in front of Simon in a custodial sort of way, and they stood and looked at each other. 'Okay,' said Simon, 'I dare you to bite me, buster. Go on you black bastard, bite me.' It was challenge not so much to the animal, as to the trivial malevolence he'd come to expect from everyday life. 'Bite me,' he urged, but with increasing conviction that there was no threat, and when he walked past, almost brushing the shaggy coat, the dog just turned its head and watched him, almost, it seemed, with regret at the parting, a disappointment that their separation of species denied the possibility of true comradeship.

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Owen Marshall has held fellowships at the universities of Canterbury and Otago, and in Menton, France. He was awarded one of three 2013 Prime Minister's Awards for Literary Achievement (Fiction). His novel *Harlequin Rex* (Vintage, 1999) won the Montana New Zealand Book Awards Deutz Medal for Fiction. Marshall is an adjunct professor at the University of Canterbury, which awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters. In the 2012 Queen's Honours he received the CNZM for services to literature.

# The New Zealand voice

Points of difference

Laurie Bauer

**EVERY** so often we can hear recordings of famous New Zealanders of the past: Hillary at the conquest of Everest, former prime ministers Holland or Holyoake. Sometimes we hear professional broadcasters of the same era, or even earlier. Their voices always come as a shock. If we didn't know who we were listening to, we might not recognise them as being New Zealanders. Unless we were there at the period, their voices carry nothing we can relate to, nothing to remind us of home if we come across them while in London or New York. They belong not only to some other time, but to a place we do not recognise.

There's a real sense in which that is true. At some point during the twentieth century, not with a sudden jump, but by small steps, the allegiance of the New Zealand voice has shifted from London to our own shores.

In the early 1960s it was still common to hear New Zealanders talk of England as 'Home' (the capital H surely justified), even if they had never set foot outside Australasia. To use the word 'Home' in that way today would be to call attention to a rather outdated attitude. Political commentators see the split as occurring at the time that Britain joined what was then the Common Market and what is now the European Union, and reduced trade links with New Zealand. Linguistically, the change was already under way by that time.

By the time Britain joined the Common Market, huge changes had already affected the English voice and the social structure it reflected. Two wars and an incredible loss of life, changes in industry and business, had

shifted opinions about old money and new money and made the country far more egalitarian than it had previously been.

In the early 1960s the Beatles even managed to make a Liverpool accent fashionable. The young had economic power, and were changing the face of the country in ways that would have been unthinkable a generation earlier. With all these other changes, the voice of England changed. The BBC of white ties was yielding to a BBC that condoned regional accents; the debutante quack was going the way of the debutante; the pukka sahibs of the late '30s had become the boring old codgers; and an Eton and Oxford accent was as likely to be viewed with suspicion as with reverence in much of the country.

But New Zealand was not up with the play. To the extent that New Zealanders had a picture of the ideal English accent (and even by the 1970s most of them has a very poor image of what the upper-class Englishman or Englishwoman sounded like), it was of an accent that was at least a generation out-of-date in the Northern Hemisphere. A good English accent sounded 'naice', but New Zealanders did not recognise and could not imitate the new version of it. Instead they had to invent their own 'naice' voice, one which allowed them to say 'market garden' or 'Arthur's Pass' with the tongue forward in the mouth, unlike the old swallowed vowels of upper-class southern England, and allowed them to open their mouths more to say 'oh!' than ever used to be the case.

THIS MUST HAVE been something of a shock. If you listen to British war-movies set in the early 1940s, the upper-class men and women had vowels in words like 'trap' and 'dress' that were very similar to those of New Zealanders of the same period. Since the 1960s there has been change on both sides: English people have opened their mouths more in saying these vowels, and now sound much more northern than they did all those years ago, New Zealanders continued with the same development, and the sound of the vowel in 'dress' has become much more like the sound of the vowel in 'fleece' than it was at the end of the war.

Other things have changed, too. The famous vowel in 'fish and chips' for which we are so mocked by the Australians, did not become a central part of the New Zealand pronunciation until the 1960s. The difference between

'beer' and 'bear' began to vanish at about the same period, but its disappearance did not become very obvious until rather later. The intonation pattern that makes New Zealanders sound as if they are forever asking questions, even when making statements, was first described in New Zealand in 1965. And 'worry' being pronounced to rhyme with 'sorry', and the John Key 'shtrong' for 'strong' are much more recent than any of those.

Things changed in England, too. Pronunciations like 'orf' for 'off' and 'clorth' for 'cloth' vanished rather more quickly than in Australia and New Zealand, where they are occasionally still heard, though mainly from the elderly. The so-called 'Estuary English' of the late 1980s, with its increase in glottal stops and its socially indeterminate vowels, arose and conquered. The sounds of 'th' started to vanish among the youth in major cities, replaced by 'f' and 'v' in 'fink' for 'think' and 'bruvver' for 'brother'. The result was that the two varieties of English started to move further apart. When I played a clip from a New Zealand news broadcast to a class of British undergraduates recently, they had real difficulty in understanding it at all.

SO FAR I have assumed that there is just one British English and just one New Zealand English. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. As the changes described above have been taking place, we have also been coming to terms with a range of New Zealand Englishes, including those that reflect the new social class structure in New Zealand (not, this time, in England), and new racial identities. We recognise a number of Māori Englishes as well as Pākehā Englishes, identifiable by their vowel sounds, a handful of consonant sounds, their rhythms and the quality of the voice in which they are presented.

The main differences between Māori comedian Billy T. James and the Southern Man of the Speights beer advertisements are less the vowel and consonant sounds than the rhythms and voice quality. Linguists have been slow in identifying these new varieties because it is so hard to find groups of speakers who are homogeneous enough linguistically to provide a solid model.

We do know that the rhythms of read news on Māori radio stations are different from those on stations with Pākehā announcers and listeners. We

also know that the intonation heard in rural Taranaki is demonstrably different from the intonation heard in central Wellington, but whether that is the rural-urban divide or a specific Taranaki dialect in the making is harder to determine.

In Auckland, the presence of large numbers of Pasifika people is leading to an identifiable variety of English, which is not found elsewhere in the country. One such feature is the rather more whistley quality of the 's' sound heard from Pasifika speakers. Some people claim that Aucklanders are sounding more and more like Sydneysiders. Since the Pasifika voice is currently one of the strongest influences on the development of current Auckland that would be surprising. But since people have been making the same claim about Auckland since the late nineteenth century, perhaps we need not take these claims too seriously.

What we can say is that, as all these developments are added into the mixture, the New Zealand voice is becoming less like the English voice from which it derived, and that what sounds familiar and homely to us (or to the English) is changing fast. Broadcast snippets from the not-so-distant past allow us to appreciate how far we have come in a remarkably short period of time. And all of this has happened in a period when we have radio, TV and movies to keep us in touch with the Englishes spoken elsewhere in the world. It is hardly surprising that when the Latin-speaking empire broke up, the languages that developed from Latin soon become mutually incomprehensible. The same will not happen to English in our lifetimes, but there are signs that despite modern communications, it could go the same way.

What will the New Zealand variety sound like then? There are too many variables to tell. We could not have predicted the emergence of 'shtrong' for 'strong' ten years ago. But given that upper-class varieties of languages throughout the western world pick up changes from the lower-class variants in example after example, perhaps we can look forward to a period where Lynn of Tawa, who lampoons lower-class accents, will sound genteel.

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Laurie Bauer FRSNZ first studied phonetics as an undergraduate at the University of Edinburgh. He came to New Zealand in 1979, and has worked at Victoria University, teaching Linguistics, ever since. He is the author of more than a dozen books, most recently, with two collaborators, of *The Oxford Reference Guide to English Morphology*.

# Poetry as social action: An experiment

Success on a small scale

Ya-Wen Ho

**WHEN** I received an invitation to propose a presentation for the Poetry as Social Action symposium, my first thoughts were, *Aha, I recognise this desire for poetry to be relevant and responsive to the difficult conditions of the world* and *Oh no, I remember how this went for relational aesthetics*. One of the art world's recent experiments with art as social action, relational aesthetics was all the rage in my second year of art school. Everyone was excited to build relationships, foster communities and practise cultural relativities through making and participating in relational aesthetic art works. But by the following year, we were only using the term ironically. We were disillusioned and not quite sure why.

Claire Bishop nails the 'why' in her essay *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*:

[...] the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as a whole and of community as immanent togetherness. There is [...] no inherent friction since the situation is what Bourriaud calls 'microtopian': it produces a community whose members identify with each other, because they have something in common.

Without friction, we had fizzled out among hollow catchphrases.

Interested in opacity and new ways to construct meaning, poetry seems to occupy a cultural niche similar to contemporary art, and by extension, share similar risks of becoming irrelevant to those which do not identify with its microtopian community. But I did not want to speak about microtopias. I wanted to speak about what poetry could do against frictionless irrelevance. I wanted to test Bishop's theory by experimenting with poetry as social action.

But what form should this experiment take?

Something my publisher, Susan Schultz of TinFish Press, said in passing sparked me off. I confided in her that I wish I could converse off-stage with the same confidence as I read on-stage. She replied, with witty pragmatism, something to the effect of 'speak in your poetic form all the time then'. My honours supervisor Lisa Crowley also once identified speech as a space for critical actions. Encouraging more friction to be in my art practice, she suggested I grunt instead of speaking throughout a peer critique. It was liberating to realise that I could: nothing stops me from speaking in poetic form (or grunting) except my deeply internalised understanding of language conventions.

The delineation of poetry as a subset of language acts relies on these language conventions, these contextual frames – we recognise a haiku from its form, we recognise poetry from the podium, the microphone, the semiotics of the page. None of these markers exist in everyday speech, making it an ideal experimental space. It so happens that my poetic practice grafts well onto speech. The poems in my first book, *last edited [insert time here]*, are a series of aural folds: the last syllable of the preceding line folds to become the first syllable of the following line and so on, until one wished to stop. An aural fold plays on homophonic sounds and deconstructs words. An aural fold is a seamless surprise. An aural fold ruptures a listener's expectations.

Aural folds underpin the experiment: for each weekday of August, 2013, I chose a word I expected myself to use frequently that day and aurally folded that word into another. For example, on Thursday 1 August, 'Hi' was aurally folded into 'Hei/degger said', such that when I would have said 'Hi, it's nice to meet you', I would say 'Heidegger said, it's nice to meet you'. The experiment is akin to performing a search and replace on a real-time, live-streaming text

co-authored by everyone I have verbal contact with. I also set up a Facebook page, *Poetry as Social Action: An Experiment*, to document my interventions, reflect on encounters, answer questions and ask some of my own.

Just before each aural fold, I would experience a great desire to conform, to draw no attention to myself, to upset nobody. I came to have a fresh appreciation of how 'normal' is always contextual. The experiment ruptures contextual normalities and provoked a Facebook user's protest: 'The rules aren't clear – substitute a line of poetry for a different expression? A load of cobblers – like the cobbler's children you are the last to have shoes!' I had to google the figure of speech to figure out this user seemed to be calling me a poor poet, or at least a poet who is the last to know 'good' poetry. This anger revealed that the disruption of the social contract of language is intensely felt; that users of language are heavily invested in its smooth operation. I was concerned, but also bolstered – I must be doing something right, here was friction!

However, friction is difficult to maintain over time, especially in a highly regular environment. The blocky contours of my routine were monotonous: class, work, home, class, work, home. Social occasions were exceptions, not norms. Weekends resounded with silence; planned interventions went unperformed because I interacted with no one. This lack of interactions with new people limited the scope of the experiment but left me resolved to change.

Routine also meant another frame was soon found to contain the experiment's disruptive potential, that of the game. One of my early interventions was 'e/mail-order brides'. I hypothesised the alteration of 'email', a common but seriously meant word in class, would provoke some interesting reactions. My hypothesis was correct, but not as I expected. The complications of conjugating the alterations ('*yes, I have sent him an e/mail-ordered bride already*', or '*I e/mail-ordered her a bride*') meant I did not always perform the intervention correctly and my classmates turned this into a game of diligence. They would ask me leading questions to try and catch me forgetting or incorrectly performing an intervention, which I often did. The gamification of the experiment nullified its antagonism but fulfilled its potential to alter social behaviours.

Erroneous performances and mishaps happened, but sometimes, I chose to withhold an intervention out of unease. 'Sor/re/wind' was an intervention I could not perform even once because I felt thinking about my poetic practice

while apologising would introduce an opportunistic and counterproductive distance. Understanding this uneasiness took time. Uneasiness also arose from the conflation of incompatible identities – that is, Ya-Wen as poet is somewhat compatible with Ya-Wen as student but almost entirely incompatible with Ya-Wen as worker. Each intervention requires an instantaneous identity switch, yet some identities are so coded that any rupture is much more noticeable and scarier to commit to.

The outcomes were different from what I expected. The experiment pushed inwards on me, the embodied performer, significantly more than it pushed outwards into the world. This is not to say the experiment has failed, rather, I would argue it has succeeded. The experiment made me acutely aware of every language transaction I made throughout August, acute to the point of discomfort, and provoked me to re-evaluate my relationships in detail. The experiment affected others fleetingly, but me deeply. Social action occurred at the scale of one person.

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Ya-Wen Ho writes to participate, to be more than a consumer of culture. She founded a literary journal, *Potroast*, while completing a BA/BFA(Hons) conjoint at the University of Auckland. She is most herself in the overlaps between zines, poetry and design.

POEM

## Memory of a fish

Gregory O'Brien

*For Felix, recently returned from the Kermadec Islands*

'This earth that bears you up is a handful of sand [yet] it holds The Flower Mount and Dog Mountain without feeling the weight of them; Hoang Ho, the river, and the oceans surge and the earth loses not a drop of their waters, holding them in their beds, containing the multitude of their creatures.' *Confucius/Ezra Pound*

'It is the aim of every ship-master to prevent his vessel running aground or coming into uncontrolled contact with jetties and quays or with other vessels.'  
*The Dumpy Book of Ships & The Sea*

An albatross never flew  
in a poem by Charles Baudelaire  
nor gulped saltwater and fish

and the nation of Chile  
never dipped its beak  
into the Pacific

but for a tray  
of ginger slice  
and the steaming, volcanic teapot

we shared, mid-ocean,  
on this north-facing slope  
while birds grazed

the fruit-laden lawn  
and a tui hopped  
blindly towards us

its head stuck  
inside a grapefruit.  
I imagined you

long-spined, musically  
inclined, breathing into  
your melodica –

mournful phrases  
cut adrift, far  
from home

counting each note  
just as, last October  
south by Raoul Island

126 whales accounted for  
a single morning of the annual survey.  
The same way we followed

the northerly migration of  
shipping containers from the MV Rena  
wrecked that same month

on Astrolabe Reef.  
Hours before the collision,  
Noel had phoned

from Napier, watching  
the vessel leave harbour  
with its swaying

container-towers and  
erratic navigation. It was as if,  
he observed, the children

had driven off  
with the family car. But no one  
said a word

as it steamed out  
of the deregulated harbour  
sailing forth into

deregulated night  
navigating by a sky of  
hapless constellations. Or was it

the shades of politicians past –  
ondines, mermaids – guiding our vessel  
with such precision

onto the rocks – those free-  
marketees, cutters of corners  
at whose hands too, it was

a shorter night  
than it might have been  
on Astrolabe Reef.

~

The night before you sailed I dreamt  
the far end of an island flickering  
like a television

on the blink, around which went  
a school of fish-like men  
singing as they swam:

'Roxanne', 'Gloria', 'Amelia'...  
random  
women's names. Only then

I realised  
these were neither  
women's names

nor were they  
songs; they were  
the names of ships

at sea. Next thing  
waves were dissolving  
the names, and the ships

were breaking into  
smaller, rectangular versions  
of themselves –

red, white, yellow – and  
these I recognised as cargo  
from the Rena

sinking  
into an oil-black  
ocean.

~

It was the last day of spring but  
who was counting; it would be  
the summer of equations

47,000 tonnes of  
the container ship Rena  
350 tonnes of bunk oil

in the ocean; 420,000 litres  
of crude upended on  
the deregulated undersea;

300 oiled birds revived  
or not, each day in  
the charitable seaside tents

of Papamoa; 2008 blackened  
penguins, shearwaters, petrels  
scraped off the Bay of Plenty

foreshore. But who wants to know?  
A Whakatane fisherman finds  
a juvenile minke whale

caked in oil, floating near  
White Island, but says nothing. In this  
summer of statistics, only

the wash-ins are recorded;  
the ocean is left to dispose  
as it does

of the rest. Among local fishers  
no one dared mention  
a dead whale – who could afford

to have the East Cape  
fisheries  
shut down? Not even

with the Rena  
coming apart  
at the seams and

the sea bed covered  
in millions of  
glass beads from yet another

broken container – a glimmering  
carpet rolling north,  
then changing direction

as tide or current dictates. And  
hovering nearer the surface  
a score of deer pelts

export-stamped, transfixed  
like kites or else  
breast-stroking shorewards

the waves  
stained white from  
a thousand busted sacks

of milk powder. How many barrels  
of toxic or  
radioactive material now lay

off Astrolabe Reef was anybody's guess  
because no one knew  
in the first place, where they had been stowed.

Neither the quartermaster  
nor the night-watchmen  
on the darkened bridge, those blind men

overseeing nothing – we took this  
on board, the two  
of us, we counted and surveyed

the depleted fish population,  
the 10,000 mislaid shipping containers  
reportedly sailing the world's oceans

at any one time, the 4,500kg of plastic  
unknowingly fed to albatross chicks  
each year by their parents

and the eighteen ships which  
each day, on average  
explode, sink, collide

capsize or are run aground  
abandoned  
or set ablaze.

In these darkest, deregulated days,  
you and I came  
at last to the 11,000

orange trees of Raoul Island  
or what remains  
of them; last season's tally

126 whales of a morning, breaching  
and travelling, and the woman  
we met at Bowen Galleries

earlier today, who recalled  
from her time on the island, a Russian-flagged ship  
among the first Kermadec charters – this was in

the mid-1990s. Among the paying voyagers  
an elderly man who  
while stationed on Raoul

a half century earlier, had often swum  
with one particular groper –  
a mature fish, he had told her

larger than a grown man.  
On his first night back  
on the island, he fell

into an argument with  
the current residents as to whether  
or not fish were

sentient beings, the island crew  
entrenched in the view that  
fish had no memory.

Unlike whales. In the face  
of this, the recent arrival  
stated his intention – gesturing

towards his wetsuit and oxygen  
tank – of being reunited with  
the giant groper remembered from 50 years earlier.

~

Clumps of oil like  
fruit fallen  
from a black tree

all manner of debris  
washed as far north  
as Coromandel: a Mustang car,

contents of a family home  
an extensive range of  
Astrolabe wines. As I write this, Felix,

my desk is cluttered with  
wooden slats, remnants  
of the Rena we collected from Waihi Beach,

a cardboard sign in  
a child's hand:  
'Help Us Save Our Beach

From Ashlee.' It was here  
last January we watched  
graders shunting shipping containers

along the foreshore, presided over  
by security guards  
in cowboy hats, while surfers rode in

on milk-white waves, oblivious  
to the No Swimming signs  
and the sharks which,

attracted by the cargo  
of rotting beef, had moved, in numbers  
in shore. It was another kind

of whiteness you spoke of,  
half way up the Kermadec Trench,  
steaming north on

HMNZS Canterbury, your vessel  
redirected to investigate  
an unidentified, floating mass.

Midnight, what appeared, from the bridge  
to be an ice-continent  
was later confirmed 'a pumice raft'

the size of a small African nation.  
As the Canterbury  
ploughed its way

through this translucent island  
you dreamt onwards  
accompanied by the clunk, rattle

and squeak of a billion pressurised, aerated  
rocks (eventually traced back  
to an undersea volcano

just south of L'Esperance, an  
eruption two weeks earlier).  
Sleeping your pumice-enriched sleep

in a windowless room, while  
the ship's hull was being  
tended, polished, seen to, in your dreams

you were walking directly beneath  
the pumice raft, striding  
across the ocean floor and gazing up

at this long white mineral-cloud  
just as, on another morning  
further south, you might have looked up

from your sea bed and beheld a milk-whiteness  
leaching from the broken containers  
of the broken ship Rena.

~

It moves me, the immobility  
of the young, you and  
your friends on the aft deck –

Lily, Asia, Susanna  
Tre – your feet dangling  
nonchalantly above

undersea citadels, cathedrals  
coral spires – it  
moves me, your capacity

to go places yet remain  
so utterly where  
you are. Albatross-like

you glide from one thing  
to another, as a great bird  
traverses the Kermadec waters

dependent on a  
    steady breeze, not so much  
as moving

a muscle. Without wind, however,  
    these same birds loll around  
mid-ocean for days, waiting

for a breeze to set them  
    running, web-footed  
across the water's surface

to regain the air. It is out here  
    you are offered a crash course  
in the rising and falling world

with your fellow baskers and bathers,  
    pedestrians of a running sea  
surveyors of this bird-weary ocean –

it is you who are pursued  
    by these numbered whales  
rectangular

islands and diving birds  
    just as the old man  
washed back up on Raoul

was pursued  
    by the memory of a fish, and  
on account of which

his hosts took him each day  
    to a carefully calibrated  
point offshore, directly

out from Fishing Rock. And  
while the locals  
dived or sang

their loud songs, he hovered beneath the boat  
treading water and  
waiting. Each day yielded a host

of lesser species, uninterested  
shark-life, any number  
of Demoiselles, Moorish Idols

not to mention urchins, anemones  
zooplankton and gastropod  
but no sign of the groper. On his final day, however

tank-time almost up, the old man  
in the company of three other divers  
was about to resurface when

slowly, as if  
from nowhere  
a dark shape

came towards him.

What might have been  
a shadow or oil-slick

was, in fact, an ancient fish  
encrusted in barnacles, weed and  
an indefinable sediment.

~

It was a wave  
that delivered us  
to this rock and a rock

that placed us, shaken  
but unbroken  
back upon that wave.

At Fishing Rock, everything inclines  
seawards, the horizon's  
shifting population of knotters

and basket-cases, all-night  
dance parties on the bridge  
of the Rena, and those politicians

who would mine the clouds  
for minerals, who would  
fish dry land if they could

or sell the sea back  
to itself. We need to remember, Felix  
we're all cast-offs, blow-ins

especially here on Raoul Island, with its  
crater lakes and  
this north-facing lawn upon which

a tui is still trying to dislodge  
the grapefruit from  
its head.

And next morning  
once again  
you are all hands

back on the wide, awakening  
sea, on the aft deck  
your tuneful fingers

resuming the melodica. With your  
appropriately entangled lines  
you play

the keyboard at the centre  
of the ocean, in the depths of which  
the goblin prawn tends

its undersea volcanoes and  
a swordfish smokes a  
mineral-enriched pipe.

In such company, I arrange  
a rendezvous directly above  
the Kermadec Trench, between the southward

migrating whales and the northward containers  
of the Rena, as observed from  
the Rope Room of the Otago

where all these things are tied  
together. This way the poem  
ends, Felix, is rowed out beyond

Raoul Island, where an old man  
in a diving suit hovers amidst the green  
constellations of a green undersea

and towards whom a silhouetted form glides  
closer and closer,  
its fins barely moving, its nose  
pressing softly into

his chest – a gesture of unspeakable  
familiarity – dog-like  
the groper nuzzles him. With the back of his hand

he strokes the fish's head, at which  
the other divers  
simultaneously turn away

to resurface as discreetly  
as they can  
as if not to ruffle anything.

And when, ten minutes later, the old man  
finally ascends the rope ladder  
airless, spent, he tumbles

onto the floor of the inflatable and  
lying on his back  
stares upwards at these, the hardy men

of Raoul Island, with their tattoos  
and beards, their  
isolation and disbelief, all of them lumped

speechless in the boat  
wetsuits peeled back, their eyes  
red, faces and necks wet with tears.

August 2012 – March 2013  
Raoul Island – Waihi Beach – Santiago, Chile

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Gregory O'Brien is a Wellington-based poet, essayist, painter and curator, whose recent publications include a collection of poems, *Beauties of the Octagonal Pool*, and a monograph on painter Euan Macleod (Piper Press, Sydney, 2010). An earlier meditation on oceanic matters, *News of the swimmer reaches shore*, appeared from Carcanet (UK) and Victoria University Press in 2007.

# The lobster's tail

On the path to immortality

Chris Price

**ALTHOUGH** its etymology stretches back to the Old English *lopestre*, and beyond that to a corruption of the Latin *locusta*, both the form and the meaning of the word 'lobster' have remained remarkably steady throughout the centuries. Some words that have lived in the world for a similar length of time have spread and branched, occupying new habitats and discarding old. Look at the many uses of the word *husk* if you want an example. The lobster, however, has remained the lobster, a singular term for a singular creature.

Asked to consider the lobster, many people's thoughts might turn to gastronomy: thermidor, bisque, *homard américaine*. But the lobster I first think of is Thibault.

∞

Thibault was a blue-black Breton lobster of the species *Homarus gammarus*. He was also a blue-blooded creature – the presence of copper in his blood made it so – and when he walked under the shady trees of the elegantly manicured Jardin du Palais Royal, located just behind the Comédie Française, he wore a blue silk ribbon. Rescued from the nets of La Rochelle, he had arrived in Paris as the domestic companion of a young translator and poet, member of a coterie of young writers who would come to be known as the Petit Cénacle.

Defending his choice of Thibault over the more usual pets, Gérard de Nerval asked, ‘Why should a lobster be any more ridiculous than a dog? ...or a cat, or a gazelle, or a lion, or any other animal that one choses to take for a walk?’

He singled out their quiet, unobtrusive qualities. ‘I have a liking for lobsters. They are peaceful, serious creatures. They know the secrets of the sea, they don’t bark, and they don’t gnaw upon one’s *monadic* privacy like dogs do. And Goethe had an aversion to dogs, and he wasn’t mad.’ Dogs, today, are *interdit* in the Jardin du Palais Royal.

∞

As zoologists know and poets may be only half-aware, ‘the lobster’ is not an undivided entity. Under the carapace of that single word lies a branching Linnaean order. When David Foster Wallace considered the pain of the lobster in the titular essay of his 2005 collection, he focused on *Homarus americanus*, another of the clawed lobsters that are the prototype for our cartoon images of creatures with eyes on stalks and outsized pincers. In England, Nerval is known primarily for his lobster, whereas in France, it has not occupied such a dominant position in the author’s mythology. On that side of the Channel, Thibault hides in a crevice, whereas in England he strolls about in plain view, almost obscuring his owner. As Wallace remarks, ‘there’s much more to know than most of us care about.’

∞

Some lobsters are nomadic, others migrate. Migrants adopt the methods by which the West was won. Walking or running across the open seafloor, and hence vulnerable to attack, they follow the leader in a long train, each lobster using its antennae to maintain contact with the one in front. The formation reduces drag, and therefore requires less collective effort. The final lobster is the train’s rear guard, delegated to do battle with any predator that might attack from behind. When threatened as a group, the lobsters circle their wagon-shells and turn outwards to defend themselves.

∞

An English churchman who became a soldier was said to have ‘boiled his lobster,’ due to his change of colour from clerical blue to redcoat. Lobster-tail armour was a flexible construction of overlapping metal plates used in the eighteenth century. Rather than encasing the soldier in a rigid canister, it moved with the occupant. The lobster itself is even more flexible, moulting periodically to upsize its armour.

∞

‘A profound thought is in a constant state of becoming; it adopts the experience of a life and assumes its shape,’ writes Albert Camus. An artist’s creative output ‘is strengthened in its successive and multiple aspects: his works. One after another they complement one another, correct or overtake one another, contradict one another, too.’ This thought appears in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus’ attempt to determine once and for all the correct response to Hamlet’s famous question in the face of the pointlessness and humiliations of human existence: is the better part of valour *to be, or not to be*, when after all *he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin?* Or, in Camus’ own formulation, ‘Does the absurd dictate death?’

∞

King Sisyphus fostered both navigation and commerce. In one tradition, says Camus, he was wise and prudent, but in another he was ‘disposed to practice the profession of highwayman’ by plundering the ships that plied his waters. Zeus ordered Thanatos to chain up the avaricious king down in Tartarus, the lowest realm of the underworld – but Sisyphus the cunning turned the tables by imprisoning Thanatos instead, so that for a time, no human being could be killed. (*Death, thou shalt die.*) The gods could not tolerate this, for it rather spoiled the fun of battle to leave no corpses.

∞

A painted lobster is the second that comes to mind. The painter was Tupaia, the master sea artist (a period term for a navigator) of Raiatea who guided

Captain Cook on his 1769 expedition throughout the Pacific Islands, then travelled on with him to New Zealand and Australia. In New Zealand, Tupaia painted a triple portrait that shows a cloaked Māori figure handing a lobster over to a European in coat and hat. We can assume that, as an item of trade, the lobster was not given a pet name, but today we can identify it as one of the Palinuridae, the clawless family of spiny lobsters that play the violin.

∞

Palinurus, from whom this family takes its name, was Aeneas's pilot and, like Tupaia, an experienced navigator. But one night, as Aeneas and his Trojans were sailing towards Italy, Palinurus fell asleep at the wheel (*the darkness surrounds us*) and tumbled overboard. He survived drowning to be washed ashore four days later, but was then swiftly murdered by the local tribe, who left him naked and unburied on the beach.

∞

All creation is ended by blind fate, says Camus. 'If something brings creation to an end, it is not the victorious and illusory cry of the blinded artist: "I have said everything," but the death of the creator which closes his experiences and the book of his genius.'

∞

Instead of claws, Palinurids have very long antennae with thick, spiny bases that are sometimes used to club or pincer prey. Most family members have a flattened and ridged protuberance misleadingly called the 'plectrum' at the base of the antennae. Rather than functioning like a guitar pick, as the name suggests, the lobster's plectrum serves as a kind of violin bow, producing sound by friction: when drawn across the 'file', a lump near the lobster's eye covered in microscopic scales or shingles, it produces a loud, raspy buzz or squeak, which scientists believe is meant to warn off predators.

∞

‘To be true,’ writes Camus, ‘a succession of works can be but a series of approximations of the same thought. But it is possible to conceive of another type of creator proceeding by juxtaposition. Their words may seem to be devoid of inter-relations, to a certain degree, they are contradictory. But viewed all together, they resume their natural groupings. From death, for instance, they derive their definitive significance.’ The lobster moults, and must hide while its new carapace hardens. During this period, however, it can still play the violin in self-defence. ‘But perhaps the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity it provides him of overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality.’ It seems superfluous, in the twenty-first century, to object to the artist’s gender in this scenario, but perhaps this kind of heroism does have a peculiarly masculine cast.

∞

Camus takes a moment to decry the ‘thesis-novel’, a work that is ‘inspired by a *smug* thought’ and written ‘to demonstrate the truth you feel sure of possessing’. Ideas, he says, are the contrary of thought. ‘Those I am speaking of or whom I imagine are, on the contrary, lucid thinkers. At a certain point where thought turns back on itself, they raise up the images of their works like the obvious symbols of a limited, mortal and rebellious thought.’ The spiny lobster’s tail flicks under its body to propel it backwards when under attack. The sound of its violin-playing may be a warning to predators, but the lobster itself is deaf to its own music.

∞

Tupaia’s lobster would almost certainly have belonged to the Palinurid species now known as *Jasus edwardsii*, or the red rock lobster. It is one of the *silentes*, that small group of spiny lobsters who do not play the violin, for they lack the equipment.

*Jasus caveorum, edwardsii, frontalis, lalandii, paulensis, tristani.*

Lobsters come conveniently packaged for trade. The specimen Tupaia depicted was passed hand-to-hand in a transaction in which there was nothing for the lobster but death. In his watercolour, the lobster is tethered with a flax cord rather than a silk ribbon. The cord suspends it in mid-air like a child's wind-up toy being reluctantly shared. The figure about to receive this living food parcel wears a black frock-coat with silver frogging, grey breeches, stockings and black shoes. One of his hands extends forwards to grasp the creature, whose antennae point directly at him. The other seems to have a napkin draped over his outstretched palm, like a black-clad waiter in a formal dining establishment, one that might feature *homard americaine* on its menu. History records, however, that the cloth being proffered in exchange was actually tapa cloth, a much stiffer proposition than a table napkin. Its colour is not white, but oatmeal.

For several centuries the Māori, the lobster, and the waiter were anonymous, but in 1998 the waiter finally acquired his true name. He was in fact Joseph Banks, gentleman scientist at the time of Cook's voyage, later President of the Royal Society —

*Nay, he upon Societies who thought,  
To learning's Stock a deal of Treasure brought,  
Dragging Obscurity so deep to day:  
Making the Dame turn out her bag,  
Concealed beneath her inky cloak...*

In Nerval's day the French zoologist Henri Milne Edwards (his father was English) produced his three-volume *History of Crustacea*, which became the standard text on the subject. Milne Edwards held senior positions at the Paris Museum, the Jardin des Plantes and the Sorbonne, and he pioneered scuba diving with an air pump, a modified fireman's helmet and lead sandals that enabled him to walk on the sea-bottom in Sicily, and observe and collect

specimens there. It was he who christened the packhorse lobster, New Zealand's other lobster species, *Palinurus verreauxi*. (One hundred and sixty years and several taxonomic shifts later, this lobster has its own genus, *Sagma-rius verreauxi*.)

∞

The Linnaean name for Tupaia's lobster, *Jasus edwardsii*, was selected in honour of Henri's son Alphonse, who was also a student of the spiny lobster. While *Jasus* are mostly stay-at-homes, not venturing further than five kilometres, some populations migrate up to one hundred kilometres, and at least one is known to have travelled four hundred and sixty kilometres. It is now believed that lobsters are 'true navigators' – that is, they use the earth's magnetic field to determine their position. This despite the fact that their nervous systems are not complex. Boundaries are useful to classification, but some will always stray beyond them.

In New Zealand, lobsters are more commonly referred to as crayfish, although strictly speaking the word crayfish (*Paranephrops planifrons* and *zealandicus*) applies only to the native freshwater species or koura, the word for lobster entered in Banks's Māori vocabulary list, assembled no doubt with Tupaia's help. Koura are more closely related to the clawed lobsters of Thibault's order than to the spiny lobsters found in New Zealand's coastal waters.

∞

The lobster is a solitary creature, a crevice dweller that prefers darkness. This is true, but not always. There are times when it needs to be found, or to congregate. The negotiation of hiding and finding will determine its longevity. A lobster in the Monaco aquarium is as old as I am, perhaps older.

There is a Slavic proverb that 'The young lobster learns his manner of walking from the old lobster.' When they go out walking in their natural habitat, young *Jasus* lobsters are at risk from the appetites of cod, sea bream, wrasse, scorpion fish, conger eel, small sharks and octopuses. Their elders need only fear the larger sharks, and grouper. Although eating the young means eating

the future, for reasons I can't quite explain, eating an ancestor seems the far greater crime.

∞

Hunger for the unobtainable leads to voyaging, but virtual geography knows no boundaries. Concerning the secrets of the sea: the migration of the Caribbean lobster is on display in the international aquarium of YouTube. Who would have guessed that they are such elegant and collaborative sprinters? How satisfying it is to have seen them travel. And yet –

∞

If all secrets can be discovered without voyaging, what becomes of longing? Perpetual hunger is a fate to be avoided, but there is also discomfort in being perpetually replete. Some voyages are undertaken in order to bring things to light; most are made with the intention of disclosure. Of Milne Edwards it is recorded that 'he did not hesitate to risk his life' on the underwater walks from which he brought back news of the sea floor and its inhabitants.

∞

In 1944, a book of autobiographical fragments called *The Unquiet Grave* was published under the nom de plume Palinurus. The book took its title from a ballad in which a young man mourns for his dead lover by sitting on her grave 'for a twelve-month and a day', but much of it is a paean of nostalgia for a period of married happiness spent in sunny pre-war France, a happiness subsequently wrecked (although the book doesn't tell us so) by its author's marital infidelity, which is repented here at leisure.

Among his previous incarnations – which include Aristippus (a hedonistic philosopher who was also shipwrecked), lemur and melon – he has been a lobster, claims our literary Palinurus, and he invokes his crustacean avatar as a friendly spirit guide on his dive into the underwater world of depression: 'Ancestor, my old incarnation, O *Palinurus Vulgaris*, the Venetian red crawfish, langouste, or rock-lobster, whether feeding upon the spumy Mauretanian

Banks, or undulating – southward to Tenerife, northward to Scilly – in the systole and diastole of the wave: free me from guilt and fear, free me from guilt and fear, dapple-plated scavenger of the resounding sea!

∞

Tupaia's picture resembles an equation or a diagram, with the lobster as some previously unconceived mathematical sign that mediates between the two human figures. It is not a plus sign, although that is one function of the encounter. Nor an equals sign, although from a contemporary viewpoint it's tempting to read it that way. The lobster is a third term, mysterious but nonetheless verifiable, and external to both parties, something they can point to and agree upon in their calculations about one another. It is the beginning of a shared language. It both connects the figures and distances them. If there were a Buddhist mathematics, it might define this term as 'not two, not one'.

∞

'Any thought that abandons unity glorifies diversity,' writes Camus. 'And diversity is the home of art.' The future president of the Royal Society and his companion Daniel Solander, a Swede who had studied under Linnaeus himself, would glorify the diversity of the species they collected on their journey in their magnificent *Florilegium*, based on the drawings of Cook's other artist, Sydney Parkinson. None of them lived to see the *Florilegium* completed, however — the first complete, full-colour edition did not appear until 300 years after their voyage. Their botanical specimens had travelled back to England pressed between discarded proofs of *Paradise Lost*.

∞

Foundation Seamounts rock lobster, Cape rock lobster, St Paul rock lobster, Tristan rock lobster//*Justitialongimanus*//African spear lobster, Oriental spear lobster, Japanese spear lobster//musical furry lobster, Indo-Pacific furry lobster//Madagascar Ridge spiny lobster, Cape Verde spiny lobster, Natal spiny lobster, European/common spiny lobster, southern spiny lobster, pink spiny lobster//Asian blunthorn lobster, Buffalo blunthorn lobster, American

blunthorn lobster, Unicorn blunthorn lobster, Japanese blunthorn lobster// Caribbean spiny lobster, Aka-ebi, Western rock/spiny lobster, brown spiny lobster, white-whiskered spiny lobster, green spiny lobster, spotted spiny lobster, scalloped spiny lobster, blue spiny lobster, California spiny lobster, Japanese spiny lobster, smoothtail spiny lobster, longlegged spiny lobster, Hawaiian spiny lobster, Ornate spiny lobster, Easter Island spiny lobster, pronghorn spiny lobster, mud spiny lobster, royal spiny lobster, Chinese spiny lobster, painted spiny lobster//Chilean jagged lobster, Cape jagged/deepwater lobster//Banded whip lobster, red whip lobster, Arabian whip lobster, velvet whip lobster//Packhorse/eastern spiny/rock lobster.

∞

Lobsters are fearsome, handsome creatures, savage little living gods of our unconscious, totems of fury and unrepentant ugliness, half-fish, half-insect, living in the liminal space between ocean and pot, taking on their most vivid and attractive colouring only in death, before which they are far better camouflaged. It is painful to see them, as I once did in Oxford's covered market, corralled in a small bare tank with their claws bandaged so they can't damage one another out of stress and ill temper while waiting to be plated. (Pain being a relative term, not susceptible of objective measurement or comparison.)

∞

The solander box or clamshell case is a book form the Swedish botanist invented for the storage of rare and precious maps, manuscripts, books and other documents. The box has a flexible spine that lies flat when open, and the bottom 'lips' slide inside the top lips of the box when it is closed. It may be lined with felt or padded paper.

∞

When *The Unquiet Grave* was a publishing success, Palinurus abandoned the thin disguise of his pseudonym and revealed himself to be Cyril Connolly, successful literary editor, serially unsuccessful novelist, chronically

melancholy fellow. In one telling, Palinurus falls asleep because he was drugged by the Gods. In *The Aeneid*, he remains at his post, but the tiller is ripped from his hands by a powerful surge of the ocean. Connolly's Palinurus has taken on the coloration of his author's melancholy condition. He does not believe, writes Connolly, that the navigator fell overboard by chance, bad luck or divine intervention. 'Palinurus clearly stands for a certain will-to-failure or repugnance-to-success, a desire to give up at the last moment, an urge towards loneliness, isolation and obscurity. Palinurus, in spite of his great ability and his conspicuous public position, deserted his post in the moment of victory and opted for the unknown shore.'

∞

Some voyages are undertaken in pursuit of knowledge, others in hope of profit. Today voyages are often undertaken in order to be written. The writing may be an attempt at the getting of wisdom, but it also has the goal of getting cash. Sometimes intentions are thwarted or reversed. When the privateer Alexander Selkirk set sail around the world he risked his life to acquire wealth, but being cast away on a remote island forced the getting of wisdom upon him instead, and the written account of his experiences is said to have inspired *Robinson Crusoe*, the first English novel.

∞

In 2012 the novelist Jonathan Franzen travels to the island of Alejandro Selkirk, off the Chilean coast. Renamed in the 1960s as a ploy to attract tourists, it is still known to the locals as Isla Más a Fuera, or 'The Island Further Away'. Franzen's stated purpose is to assuage his discontents in the aftermath of a soul-leaching book tour and to deal with the loss of his friend David Foster Wallace, who had committed suicide in 2008. On the final leg of his journey to the island he travels aboard a lobster boat with some 'adventurous botanists'. In a welcome Wallace might have devised for him, he is greeted on arrival by 'breathtaking quantities of flies' and 'A dozen or so lobsterman shacks huddled at the bottom of a tremendous gorge,' from which 'competing boom boxes pumped North and South American music through

the open door...pushing back against the oppressive immensity of the gorge and the coldly heaving sea.'

A man just can't strand himself in the landscape the way he used to. But Franzen is determined to try. He hikes up to one of the island's highest points through a ravine 'lush with maquis, an introduced plant species that is used to repair lobster traps.' He is getting away – as far away as the twenty-first century will allow.

The lobsters that inhabit the coastal waters of Alejandro Selkirk are *Jasus frontalis* and, like their New Zealand relatives, they are *silentes*. In 2001 the minimum legally permissible size for a lobster caught in these islands was 11.5 centimetres, down from 15.5 centimetres in the 1950s. In Selkirk's day, or so Diana Souhami claims in her book on the island, they were three feet long. Lobsters were once 'cheap as chips', as the English say.

∞

The first sentence of *The Unquiet Grave*: 'The more books we read, the clearer it becomes that the true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece and that no other task is of any consequence.' Many writers, Wallace among them, have signed on for that doomed voyage, with its ever-receding destination. Like Sisyphus rolling the impossible rock ever upwards, only to watch it roll back down again just as he approaches the summit.

∞

The phase box is a simpler form of the solander box, used to store books while they are being conserved. In an antique wooden matchbox resembling 'a tiny book with a sliding drawer,' Franzen carries with him to Más a Fuera some of Wallace's ashes.

∞

Selkirk, sailing master on the privateer the *Cinque Ports*, told the ship's captain he would rather be put ashore than sail further on board a ship he deemed

unseaworthy. Although Selkirk soon thought better of his decision, the captain took him at his word, put him ashore and sailed on. The worm-eaten *Cinque Ports* was later lost off the coast of Colombia.

∞

When Aeneas visits the underworld, the ghost of Palinurus approaches him, pleading that Aeneas arrange for his bones to receive a proper burial so that he may cross the Wailing River and rest in peace. At the climactic moment of Franzen's adventure, after the rigours of weather and landscape have confounded his aspiration to see the extremely rare songbird he's been chasing at some personal risk, and he has nonetheless been rewarded on return to camp with a moment of spectacular beauty, he is finally ready to scatter the ashes.

'At the end of the promontory, I came to a pair of matching boulders that together formed a kind of altar... I opened the box of ashes and threw them up into the wind. Some bits of gray bone came down on the slope below me, but the dust was caught in the wind and vanished into the blue vault of the sky, blowing out across the ocean.'

This is as close to the Romantic sublime as Wallace will get, vanishing into infinity on earth. In what may be the most apt tribute to his friend, however, Franzen acknowledges the impurity of the moment, mixed as it is with his distracting desire to photograph the 'celestial beauty of the landscape' and regret at not having seen the rare bird.

∞

Before his death, Sisyphus instructs his wife to dump his body in the public square instead of giving him a proper burial. In one reading this is a genuine test of her loyalty; in another, it's a cunning pretext to seek leave from the underworld to revisit his wife and chastise her. Of course Sisyphus then remains in the sunshine, deaf to the Gods' threats and warnings to return below.

Despite the punishing mode of his going (rope, patio), Wallace got the burial love dictates – but not without some anger mixed in. Anger at the damage done to the ones left above ground (the wife whose job it was to find both the body and the neat pile of unfinished manuscript, and to dispose appropriately of both). Anger at the abdication of responsibility. Anger at being abandoned without warning. *I don't want him at peace*, writes the wife. It is the living, I think, who must cross the Wailing River.

∞

When Franzen has exhausted anger and solitude, he boards the boat back to Selkirk's companion island, Robinson Crusoe (formerly Isla Más a Tierra, the Island Closer to Land), in the company of two skinned goats, an old lobsterman, and over a thousand lobsters. But he can't fly back to the Chilean mainland – the cargo plane is so full that even the co-pilot's seat is occupied by cartons of lobster. And so Franzen is temporarily stranded on Robinson Crusoe, but at least he has a book to read: *Robinson Crusoe*.

Is an artfully constructed voyage the same as something that 'just happens'? Does anything, for that matter, just happen, or *shall we & / why not* forget such distinctions, and simply acknowledge that all human voyages are impure? Even Camus suggests that 'a man defines himself by his make-believe as well as by his sincere impulses.' Mixed motives, dirty silence: are these not the things that make our make-believe not only possible, but necessary?

∞

After exploring the coast of Australia, Cook turned for home with Tupaia still on board. The Tahitian navigator and roving ambassador saw the port of Batavia, but he would never see London. He died of scurvy on the island of Kuyper, then in Dutch possession, part way towards England on the longest voyage of his life. The ship's other artist, Sydney Parkinson, records that he was buried on the island of Edam, now Damar Besar, about eleven thousand kilometres from his home island of Raiatea. The jungle has long since covered Tupaia's grave. Parkinson too died before he reached home,

and was consigned, as they say, to the deep. Tupaia's pet lorikeet, acquired in Australia, made it all the way to the other side of the world, where it lived on in Marmaduke Tunstall's menagerie.

∞

'At the moment of death,' writes Camus, 'the succession of his works is but a collection of failures. But if those failures all have the same resonance, the creator has managed to repeat the image of his own condition, to make the air echo with the sterile secret he possesses.'

∞

An aspect of human-lobster relations not touched on in Wallace's essay is eyestalk ablation. Apparently, snipping off the lobsters' eyes at the base of the stalk produces much-increased growth. It also leads to lower survival rates, and 'adverse behavioural and colour changes'. Removing just one eyestalk may produce better results.

∞

Before long, nothing will be invisible, no island remote, no creature unclassified, no thought unspoken (*because I am / always talking*). No *silentes*, only *stridentes*. And yet, as long as they are still available, personal encounters will always have their unique charms and hazards. In 1988 a diver complaining of earache was found to have a puerulus (post-larval phase lobster) lodged in his ear.

∞

Franzen suggests that 'arguably, in one interpretation of his suicide, David had died of boredom and in despair about his novels.' (For the past decade Wallace had been struggling with the 'novel about boredom' that was published posthumously, in a text assembled by his editor, as *The Pale King*.) 'When his hope for fiction died, after years of struggle with the new novel, there was no other way out but death.'

Not everything, even in the life of a writer, can be accounted for by writing. Still, writers naturally turn to other writers. Wallace was reading Camus shortly before he deserted his post – or was swept overboard.

∞

In case of emergency, you need a plan to stay connected with those closest to you, and someone to guard your back.

∞

At the ends of our chromosomes are DNA sequences called telomeres, which protect them in much the way plastic tips protect the ends of shoelaces, preventing them from fraying and sticking together, and enabling cells to divide. Telomere shortening is a key factor in the genetic deterioration that causes ageing. In *Homarus americanus*, the enzyme telomerase is switched on in every cell, and as a result they have no telomere shortening. They continue to grow and reproduce throughout their lives, and show no discernible signs of ageing. We have no idea, say the scientists, how long these lobsters might live if they did not succumb to disease or predation. Some of these scientists are exploring the potential routes to immortality.

On the other hand, cancer cells also achieve longevity by circumventing the process of telomere-shortening. And it is unlikely that Thibault walked far or survived long in Paris – unless his poet sought advice from Milne Edwards on how to keep him. Nerval chose to take the same exit as Wallace, as it happens, at about the same age, and for similar reasons.

∞

Last year global warming – or so it is thought – produced a lobster glut in America, yet despite the low prices paid to lobstermen, it remained a high-cost item in restaurants. *New Yorker* writer James Surowiecki suggests this is because lobster is a less a commodity than a luxury good – in other words, price is determined by perception as much as availability. If it's cheap on today's menu, how can restaurateurs sell it at a premium tomorrow, when

supply decreases and the price goes up again? Plus, an expensive lobster thermidor makes other menu items look more reasonable. When it comes to lobster, says Surowiecki, price setting is a ‘surprisingly complex attempt to both respond to and shape what customers want.’ In this it resembles the art market and the wine market, those Elysian fields governed by the arcane values that pertain when one reaches the tip of the pyramid of human needs.

∞

‘The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is but one, which he concludes is inevitable and despicable.’ Arguably, in one interpretation of *The Pale King*, Wallace was trying to find his own way of saying yes to the meaningless labours of Sisyphus, the absurdity of existence. ‘For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory’s eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.’

Out of clear-eyed and level-headed despair, divested of the false consolations offered by God or the Gods, Camus answers Hamlet’s question in the affirmative. The last sentence of *The Myth of Sisyphus*: ‘The struggle towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.’

∞

Having justified the choice of existence over self-annihilation, Camus died in a car crash.

It is unlikely that Selkirk ever set foot on the island that now bears his name.

∞—∞

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gérard de Nerval's thoughts on lobsters recorded by Theophile Gautier in *Portraits et souvenirs littéraires* (Charpentier, 1875), trans. Richard Holmes, *My Fantoms*, (Quartet, 1976). David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster* (Little, Brown, 2005). Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (Vintage, 1991). 'Peter Pindar', lines from 'Sir Joseph Banks and the Boiled Fleas', *The Works of Peter Pindar*, Vol 2 (Walker & Edwards, 1816). Cyril Connolly, *The Unquiet Grave* (Horizon, 1944). Jonathan Franzen, 'Farther Away: "Robinson Crusoe," David Foster Wallace, and the island of solitude' (*New Yorker*, April 18, 2011). 'Death, thou shalt die', John Donne, Holy Sonnet X; 'because I am / always talking', 'the darkness sur-rounds us' and 'shall we & / why not', Robert Creeley, 'I know a man' (*Selected Poems*, University of California Press, 1991). 'I don't want him at peace', Karen Green, *Bough Down* (Siglio Press, 2013). 'Dirty silence' is a phrase coined by Bill Manhire in his essay of that name on diction in New Zealand poetry.

I am also indebted to the following authors: John Booth, *Spiny Lobsters: Through the Eyes of the Giant Packhorse* (Victoria University Press, 2011); Joan Druett, *Tupaia: the remarkable story of Captain Cook's Polynesian navigator* (Random House NZ, 2011); Bruce Phillips (ed.). *Lobsters: Biology, Management, Aquaculture and Fisheries* (Blackwell, 2006); Diana Souhami. *Selkirk's Island* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001); James Surowiecki, 'Clawback', *New Yorker*, August 26, 2013. Adam Summers, 'The Lobster's Violin', <http://faculty.washington.edu/fishguy/Articles/Lobsters-Violin.html>. Information on Henri and Alphonse Milne-Edwards comes from Booth and a number of online sources.

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POEM

## Vague shapes on the horizon

James Brown

‘Not-Knowing’ is a great essay by Donald Barthelme about writing. From his imaginary desk in my imaginary room, the horizon’s known curve slips into the unknown. Those distant ‘Lego’ shapes might be ships leaving or approaching the mouth’s safe haven. Like a good novel, you can’t see the movement, but an hour later you look up and everything’s changed.

As a boy, Don loved Lego. Big shapes, little shapes. Curves from squares. His crowning glory – an Indian uprising. He saw a reusable world; his parents, a future architect. He studied technical drawing, but couldn’t rule a horizontal line to save himself. Worse, he blamed his tools. Some years later, in what became his only rugby game, his mannered side-step caused his borrowed boots to fall apart (or vice versa). He found his struggles instructive. Hilarious. ‘Good workmen have good tools,’ muttered his father.

His father disliked rugby because the forwards didn’t run into gaps, but back into the opposition. ‘Not back in,’ he’d bellow at ESPN. On his bicycle, if Don saw a gap, he took it. Sometimes the traffic parted like he suspected the Red Sea probably hadn’t but, hey, he wasn’t about to ‘fragment’ his family over it. Then the steel wave returned and some *lumpwelt* in a Legacy would try to go straight through him [close space]. Giving cars to New Yorkers, he thought, is like giving \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. DIY. Would you like a war? Yes ( ) No ( )

DIY is your thing. Why pay someone who knows  
what they're doing? You can always blame  
the previous builders. Look what they've done.  
Go on. Make it up as you go along.  
Not knowing creates an intriguing door knocker and  
in walks the new gerbil. Not knowing  
when to stop, however, is a New Zealand driver.  
Surely you can do better.

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James Brown's latest poetry collection is *Warm Auditorium* (Victoria University Press, 2012). He has been a finalist in the Montana New Zealand Book Awards three times. He teaches the Poetry Writing workshop at the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University and works as a writer at Te Papa, New Zealand's national museum.

POEM

## Grey matters

James Brown

When it comes to grey areas,  
I think of greyhounds racing  
on a misty night in Yorkshire  
where my grandfather was a bookie  
– their sleek floodlit forms daggers  
in pursuit of a pretend bunny.  
My grandfather leaned back,  
said ‘Dogs aren’t horses’,  
and set his odds accordingly.

Most weren’t fooled, he told me,  
by the white cloth bundle  
– always one honest one  
lolloping bored at the back  
and most content to run with the pack  
untroubled by primacy at  
some arbitrary human cut.  
‘The winner,’ he said, tapping his head,  
‘isn’t necessarily the quickest.’

He then told me a story  
about seeing two greyhounds attack  
a small domestic dog  
that someone had – ‘Lord knows why’ –  
brought to a meet.  
One locked onto the poor pooch’s neck  
and the other its rear  
and they pulled it and pulled it  
in half.

Whether this proves or defies  
the Wisdom of Solomon,  
God only knows, and even though  
I've quizzed Him (and my grandfather) about it,  
and many other similarly murky areas  
that continue to trouble the world,  
wise men, it seems, chalk up the odds  
but tend to fall quiet  
when the favourite doesn't come in.

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## ESSAY

# Inherited responsibilities

On matters of national significance – *he Kōrero*

Patricia Grace

*E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā hau e whā  
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou  
Tēnā tātou katoa*

**I WANT** to take the opportunity today to speak to you about my ancestor Wiremu Parata Te Kākākura. Telling about him will enable me to discuss a piece of land to which I have legal title. It will allow me give my reasons for objecting to the intention of the Minister of Lands to take this property, under the Public Works Act, for the building of a section of new expressway. The new road is said to be of ‘national significance’.

Te Kākākura, one of the main players in the establishment of the township of Waikanae of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was born on Kapiti Island in the 1830s. His mother Metapere Waipunahau was the daughter of Te Rangihiroa of Ngāti Toa and Pohe of Te Āti Awa. His father was a whaler and trader, named George Stubbs, who died when Te Kākākura was a small child.

Metapere Waipunahau, being born of high-ranking parents, was a woman of standing in the Waikanae district. She was respected and deferred to both in tribal affairs and in matters to do with land. When men went to war it was under her mantle that they made their preparations. It was under her mantle that they were made *noa* on their return of which more later.

It was his mother's status and responsibilities that were inherited by Te Kākākura, and which he did his utmost to live up to during his lifetime. He and his wife Unaiki Whareangi had eleven children, the eldest of whom was my great-grandmother. In the 1850s Waikanae was owned and occupied mainly by Māori who set up vast cultivations. Round Tukurākau, where Wiremu Parata lived for many years, were acres of wheat fields as well as a large flourmill near the Waimeha River. Beyond the estuary were cultivations of other crops such as barley and oats. Several Māori ran large flocks of sheep. Wiremu Parata's flock on Kapiti Island numbered sixteen hundred. These farmers were advantaged by having a communal workforce, all of whom enjoyed prosperity for some years.

At that time settlers were putting pressure on government to buy Māori land, but government attempts at purchase were refused. The government's response was to establish the Māori Land Court, set up with the main purpose of acquiring land from Māori. But, owing to multiple ownership by Maori, land deals were difficult for the Crown to negotiate; so individualised titles were brought in to law.

Wiremu Parata Te Kākākura was one whose name was attached to Waikanae legal land titles, but though the new law potentially disinherited hundreds of Māori, he still considered that land was for the benefit of all. Also he was enthusiastic about any development that he saw as beneficial to his people, and because of this, in 1884, he donated land to allow the railway to go through Waikanae. It was after the completion of the railway that his wharenuī, Whakarongotai, at Tukurākau, was moved nearer to the line on the western side of the line, and Māori settled round it.

Te Kākākura allowed a considerable amount of land on the eastern side of the railway to be sold to *Pākehā* to enable them to settle and set up small businesses, including a post office and general store. This was land which his own people had no use for themselves, though they held fast to the fertile coastal regions. Te Kākākura donated land for a government school to be built on that eastern side for settler benefit and had a strong wish for Māori and *Pākehā* to live side by side in equality.

Waikanae became known as Parata Township after the passing of the Native Township Act, which empowered government to set aside land. Reserves of no more than twenty per cent were put aside for Māori.

IN THE EARLY 1870s Te Kākākura entered parliament as an elected member for Western Māori. His desire was that Māori and Pākehā members work together for the benefit of all, and he worked tirelessly to have Māori grievances, regarding land confiscations, addressed.

In 1877, citing the Treaty of Waitangi, he took the Bishop of Wellington to court over a breach of contract between Ngāti Toa and the Anglican Church, where the Church had agreed to build a school for the youth of Ngāti Toa in exchange for land. Though the church gained the land, it failed to establish a school. Wiremu Parata lost the case when Judge Prendergast ruled that the Treaty was a 'simple nullity' signed by 'primitive barbarians'. It was after this that Māori attempts to have the treaty recognised in law constantly met with failure.

Two decades later, a church that had been built on land at Tukurākau, was moved to the present site, close to the railway line, so that it could be used freely by both Māori and Pākehā, and early in the new century Wiremu Parata presented it to the Anglican Diocese. He is buried in the grounds of the church.

His is an impressive gravesite with a monument more than two metres high, bearing at its top a carved bust of the man. In the vault itself, buried with Te Kākākura, are the many, many *taonga* which he had inherited, or which had been gifted to him during his lifetime and which denoted his standing among his people. Because grave robbing was a concern in those days, an armed guard protected the site, day and night, until the work had been done to secure it. Te Kākākura has been memorialised also in one of the church's stained glass windows. This cemetery is still in use today, and is where my Waikanae relatives are taken when they die. It's quite an experience to take the short foot journey, following the casket from the *marae*, through the alley between shops, across the main road and over the railway line to the burial site, while police and wardens overrule traffic lights until the cortege has passed through. It is the same passage taken by the flag-draped gun carriage bearing the remains of Wiremu Parata a century earlier. Timetabling ensures our crowd of mourners doesn't meet a train on the way across. In the years following his death, as the nation's prosperity dwindled, land was gradually alienated from Māori by new laws, sales, stealth, public works activity, business and building development. Many Māori became impoverished

during the worldwide depression. As they were not eligible for government work schemes or benefits, they often had no choice but to use land to pay off debts to shopkeepers.

BECAUSE I'VE BEEN reported as saying that the new road will go through a burial ground on my property, I wish to divert for a moment to discuss the interpretation of the phrase *waahi tapu*. First of all it is the word 'tapu' I'd like us to think about. 'Tapu' is often translated, mistakenly in my view, as 'sacred'. This is misleading. When I asked my nine-year-old granddaughter what she thought the word meant she said 'illegal'. Though 'tapu' is not a matter to do with the law of the land, I thought her response was much nearer to the mark than the 'sacred' interpretation. 'Tapu' describes 'restricted as to access' 'boundaries' 'items of special use' 'no-go zone'. For those who understand and accept the term it will weigh on the conscience if they choose to disregard it, or on the consciences of those who fail to defend it. It can apply to persons, objects, lands and waters.

It may be illustrative to describe the meaning of 'tapu' by looking at its opposite, which is the word 'noa'. Because 'tapu' has been translated as meaning 'sacred', its opposite 'noa' has been translated as meaning 'profane.' But 'noa' means 'ordinary' 'not restricted' 'available'. Before men (and sometimes women), went to war, there were ceremonies which made them tapu or under restriction. War was their *only* work for a period of time. When they returned from war there were ceremonies that made them noa. They were cleansed, freed physically and psychologically from war. In being freed from 'tapu' they did not become 'profane' they became 'ordinary', and could go and tend to gardens, food gathering, the affairs of normal life. The term 'waahi tapu' is usually taken to mean cemetery or burial place, but this definition is too limited and needs to include what could be described as historic places and archaeological sites. It is with these explanations in mind that I continue. But before I do, I'll mention that the road *will* be taking in a corner of a designated, registered burial ground, though not on my particular section. The land in question, as part of the area known as Tukurākau, is where Wiremu Parata and his people settled and lived for many years. It is waahi tapu, being where people lived their lives, harvested resources,

established their *wharenuī*, their *wharemate*, their *urupā*, their homes and gardens. It is where they constructed their birthing shelters, buried the *whenua* and secreted the *pito* of their offspring. It is where they discussed, negotiated and made important decisions for life and survival. It is a historic place, a place of archaeological interest and is likely to include an area of human interment. I say ‘likely’ because we have been told that burials took place in the upper parts of the land – which makes sense to me because it is the high, safe ground.

MY FATHER AND two of his sisters inherited shares of the land through their mother Pohe Onepū, who had inherited from her mother Metapere Parata. My father and his sisters decided to partition their shares to facilitate payment of rates, which had, and have, been kept up over the years.

Partitioning, at considerable time and expense, took many years of negotiation, planning and research and was not completed during the lifetime of those who had begun the process. My two cousins and I took over this work and finally went before the Māori Land Court in November 1997 to finalise the partition.

Present in the court on that day was Mr Riki Pitama, trustee for the majority of other block shareholders. He had come as a potential objector to the partition. When we assured him that it was not our purpose to sell the land he did not forward his objection.

We were able, of course, to sell land within the *whānau* without alienating it, and eventually this was what my two cousins wished to do. I purchased their portions assuring them it was not my intention to sell. Thus, I became sole guardian of the land for future generations. This is ancestral land – inherited land, which brings with it inherited responsibilities.

It may seem that because I’ve spoken mainly of the past that I am living in the past, and that my reasons for objecting to the new road are to do with sentiment. This is not so. Though I do feel strengthened by the values and the actions of the ancestral past, I know that what they did was with their people and their descendants in mind. They are my role models in this regard.

I take *kaitiakitanga* seriously. Also, I do not have a mandate, from my children, to dispose of this land. Nor do I have a mandate from any extended whānau, descendants of Te Kākākura, to sell it.

WIREMU PARATA IN his time was a great benefactor who gave generously to public works and development. The land block known as Ngārara West, of which my land is a small portion, is the only remaining piece of what were vast holdings in Waikanae.

Te Kākākura acted always to preserve the independence, power, prestige and land of Māori. It is through his generosity, and his strong desire and advocacy, that Waikanae had its bicultural beginnings. However, I believe strongly that our whānau, through its ancestry – through Te Rangihiroa and Pohe, Metapere Waipunahau, Wi Parata Te Kākākura, Metapere Parata, Pohe Onepū – has given enough.

So the question I have now is: Why take more Māori land? Why Māori land yet again, especially now that the Crown, the Waitangi Tribunal and *Iwi* are working so hard to put past mistakes behind us? There shouldn't be any further alienation of Māori land, particularly of sites of historic importance, cultural importance, 'national significance', which I believe Ngārara West to be.

*Nō reira. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou, ki a tātou, tēnā tātou katoa.*

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This is an edited text of a speech delivered to a Māori Land Court Hearing in November 2013.

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Patricia Grace has written several novels and short story collections and in 2005 received New Zealand's top literary award. In 2008 she was the recipient of the Newstadt International Prize for Literature.

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