Welcome

Hello and welcome to the third issue of Poetry Notes, the newsletter of PANZA, the newly formed Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa. Poetry Notes will be published quarterly and will include information about goings on at the Archive, articles on historical New Zealand poets of interest, occasional poems by invited poets and a record of recently received donations to the Archive.

The newsletter will be available for free download from the Poetry Archive’s website:

http://poetryarchivenz.wordpress.com

Mark Pirie on J H E Schroder’s New Zealand cricket poems

Wellington poet/critic/publisher Mark Pirie discusses the New Zealand cricket poems of J H E Schroder.

J H E Schroder (1895-1980), New Zealand poet, journalist, educator and broadcaster, was best known as a mentor and editor to younger writers. As literary editor of The Sun and The Press newspapers, he published and encouraged writers like Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan, A R D Fairburn and R A K Mason. Little known, however, is his role as a New Zealand cricket poet, mostly in comic rhyming forms.

Schroder played cricket from high school days to senior level representing Canterbury College and West Coast. His second collection of verse, Yet Once More (Pegasus Press, 1969), includes half a dozen cricket poems. It was written in the 1960s (after the publication of Leslie Frewin’s influential The Poetry of Cricket anthology in 1964) and after retirement from his position as director of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service. Four of these poems (‘Operator’, ‘Pitch Please’, ‘Echoes from Lancaster Park’ and excerpts from ‘Basin of Words’) feature in A Tingling Catch. They seem to stem from Schroder’s extensive cricket listening. ‘Echoes from Lancaster Park’, referring to the Christchurch cricket ground, mimics radio commentator Jim Reid’s thick Scottish burr, while ‘Basin of Words’ contains snippets of radio commentary from Plunket Shield matches in the 1964/65 First Class cricket season at the Basin Reserve, Wellington. Other cricket poems not included in A Tingling Catch are ‘Commentary’ (which references Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch) and ‘Erstralia Fair’, his Ashes poem. Again these poems draw on Schroder’s commentary listening and criticism of cricket commentary broadcast on radio at the time. It is possible there are more uncollected Schroder cricket poems published in The Press in the 1970s. It’d be nice to gather them all some time in the future. In the meantime, I’d like to share with you the two further poems not included in A Tingling Catch:
Reflected that his happy thought
The journalist in jubilation
"Failed to connect," and used it gamely.
The "elegant variation", namely,
To bring a classier sort of term in –
Vermin (Such common words!) rodents or
Of saying instead of rats and mice
As Quiller-Couch called the device
to him the "elegant variation" –
And not in vain; for there occurred
Sought to avoid the obvious word,
Reporting that a batsman missed,
Long years ago a journalist,
Commentary
Test, 11-15 January 1963, won by Australia.
Note: Australia vs England, Ashes series, Third Test, 11-15 January 1963, won by Australia.

J H E SCHRODER

Erstralia Fair

Third Test, 1963

Oh to be there,
In Erstralia fair,
With Johnny Moyes,
Michael Charlton, Bob Richardson, Brian Johnston, old
Uncle Ray Lindwall, and all!

Then I’d smell on the air,
The native air
Of Erstralia fair,
Each delicate flower
From the broadcasting bower,
Unfiltered through our
Transmitting tower.

How much sweeter there
In Erstralia fair
The accents sweet
Of the four Erstralians,
Antidotes
To a single alien’s
English notes.

Oh joy of joys,
To be there, to-day…
To be, as I say,
With Johnny Moyes,
Michael Charlton, Bob Richardson, Brian Johnston, old
Uncle Ray Lindwall, and all –
All on the air
Of Erstralia fair.

Note: Australia vs England, Ashes series, Third Test, 11-15 January 1963, won by Australia.

Commentary

Long years ago a journalist,
Reporting that a batsman missed,
Sought to avoid the obvious word,
And not in vain; for there occurred
To him the “elegant variation” –
As Quiller-Couch called the device
Of saying instead of rats and mice
(Such common words!) rodents or vermin
To bring a classier sort of term in –
The “elegant variation”, namely,
“Failed to connect,” and used it gamely.
The journalist in jubilation
Reflected that his happy thought
Success unthought-of, too, had brought.
Not only had he reached his aim,
In writing of this tedious game,
To find in prose, that obdurate medium,
Some way to alleviate the tedium
By substituting in his story
New words for old ones, stale and hoary;
But he had freaked a touch of wit –
“For failed to connect!” the barb of it! –
And, more, his phrase had just the right
Near-technical flavour to delight.

Oh yes! I sympathize. This young
Reporter, hitherto unsung,
Had cause to jubilate. But I
Would hang him, hang him high.
For what to him was just a trick,
Trick of the moment, now is slick
Compulsive formula; and sick
And tired I am of commentators,
Filled with this undivine afflatus,
Who never, never say “He missed” –
No, won’t, can’t any time desist
From following my innovator,
That toiling hack, that tired narrator
Of hits and misses, catches, drops,
Boundaries, snicks, and lucky stops,
In “failed to connect.” But now it’s not
“Elegant variation.” What
Wearies the air? “Failed to connect.”
Sometimes, at least, we might expect
In commentary dialect
Short, simple “missed.” It’s never heard:
“Failed to connect,” the unfailing word!
Its use is merely automatic,
Sanctified, unpointed, dull,
Stupid, monotonous, and null.

Now touchy, idiosyncratic
As may be my reaction, that
Is hostile and relentless. What
Can explain why men of sense reject,
In favour of this “failed to connect,”
A brisk and sturdy monosyllable,
Its place by naught so lively fillable?
I groan, I snort, I generate
Against my friends the commentators
Such positively murderous hate,
I’d toss them to the alligators.
“Failed to connect”: its little joke
Is joke no more but iron yoke.
“Reid took a swing at that one, but
Failed to connect...” “Motz tried a cut,
A sort of chop, failed to connect,
And...” ‘On and on! And who object?
None that I’ve heard of; only me,
A singular minority.

But I am in a dangerous mood
And give fair warning, harsh and crude.
Let me get at a commentator,
No matter which. I may not rate a
Bradman or a Cowdrey, no,
But still can deal a lusty blow.
Spirit I have; I have a bat,
I have a pair of ears; and at
The first use of that phrase; I strike
Fiercely, together, man and mike.
And, may I add, I don’t expect
To hear him comment, “Failed to
connect.”

Note: Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch’s famous cricket poem extract was ‘Not Out’: ‘I see the rapport of the wicket-keeper and umpire; / I cannot see that I am out. / Oh! You umpires.’ Motz in the poem is New Zealand player Dick Motz.

Schroder also published collections of his newspaper essays: Remembering Things (1938) and Second Appearances (1959) as well as a book of his radio talks on language. The Ways of Words (1969), his first collection of poems, The Street and Other Verses (Pegasus Press, 1962), contains his most well known poem, ‘The Street’ (anthologised in Quentin Pope’s anthology Kowhai Gold) as well as an interesting introduction by poet and critic Niel Wright placing his work in a mainly Georgian literary context. Wright refers to this Georgian influence as distinctly belonging to the Schroder-Marris school of poets (that also includes Wright’s own poetry and Ruth Gilbert’s poetry) in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Mark Pirie’s A Tingling Catch: A Century of New Zealand Cricket Poems 1864-2009 was recently published by HeadworX. He is co-organiser and archivist for the Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa. His poetry will appear in Issue 14 of the online journal International Literary Quarterly (UK).

Rail poems by John Maclennan

Earlier in the year PANZA published a collection of New Zealand rail poems. The following rail poems by John Maclennan were sent into us by Mary Bell Thornton. Maclennan was her grandfather. He died in 1911 at age 41. He was a published poet and his obituary claimed him as ‘the labour poet of New Zealand’. He was a fitter and turner with the railways. We have included two of his rail poems. Mary sent us eight poems in total. PANZA has one book by him, Neptune’s Toll. We greatly appreciate Mary’s correspondence.

AN ANVIL SONG
Concerning the steam hammer in the Addington works

It stands all grim
In the smithy dim,
In feats of labour skilled,
With its arm at rest
On its anvil breast
And its cylinder lungs unfilled.
With its Feast of scrap
On the big heap’s lap
Or piled by the furnace door,
In a frame of wood
And its big tongs, slewed
By the crane, on the iron floor.
A giant, there
In the smoky air
It rests, till the watchman comes,
To poke and drag
At the bars and slag
Till the smelting furnace hums,
And the forge is manned,
And the forgers stand,
A pale, but a jovial throng,
In singlets light,
Who straight unite
In waking the Anvil Song.

Their arms are stripped,
And the scrap is gripped
In the tongs, and the furnace glares
In the forger’s face,
As he finds a place
In the heat for his giant wares;
Then the big doors meet
On the glaring heat,
And greedy fires are fed,
Till the scrap comes out,
With a forger’s shout,
And drips by the anvil bed.

The blows are light
Of the piston bright
On the dazzling pile agape,
Its tap! tap! tap!
Till the molten scrap
On the anvil breast takes shape.

The forger knows
His work, and the blows
Increase with stupendous roar,
Till at last they crash
With mighty dash,
And bed in the cooling ore.

There are men in the light,
And men in the height,
Controlling the noisy steam;
But clear in the blaze,
Or dim in the haze,
They people a clamorous dream:
And every ghost
In the dream has a post,
And a voice in the weird refrain,
And silence falls
On a scene that calls
For the molten slabs again.

For the song that’s dear
To the forger’s ear
Is heard when the fires are white,
And the heat comes out
With a surge and a shout,
And the cylinder proves its might.
‘Tis a song profound,
Whose theme is bound
In massive chords, and strong,
And glittering sparks
From the piston marks
The bars of the Anvil Song.

THE ENGINE CLEANER

If you met him in the shadow,
You’d take him for one of the shades
With his hands black,
And his face black,
And his dungarees as black as the ace of spades.

From dark till light he’s cleaning,
With kerosene, colza and waste,
And a caper or two
And a scraper or two
And a grater or two to grind down the<br
And his face black,

He’s booked to clean a “Scotchman”
The South Express just in
With her wheels grimed
And her stack grimed
And the dome of her as black as a burnt out whin.

He starts in the pit with his “contract”
And out and in he crawls,
His head is grease
And his heels grease
And a gloss of grease covering his overalls.

He tackles the dome in the morning
The rest of the job is done
The rods are bright
And the cranks are bright
And the brass of her will glint in the morning sun.

The cleaner goes home to his breakfast
A soot-bag walking in shoes,
He’s earned a rest
With the very best
Why, the job he’s got would give ten in twenty the “blues”.

Classic New Zealand poetry

This issue’s classic New Zealand poem is by Walter Charman. Charman spent time living in Hataitai and working in Wellington. He observes: “Every morning in the [Hataitai] tunnel I prepared against the oppression of office restraint by yelling poetry and songs against the tunnel thunders of
Niel Wright on
Mark Pirie as
Romantic Satirist

I became aware of Mark Pirie as a figure on the local literary scene in Aotearoa a good few years ago because of the prominence he gained as the principal editor of the well presented literary magazine JAAM.

I read none of Mark Pirie's books of poetry until The Blues on the occasion of its launch in 2001. I recorded my impressions in some notes which I mean to append to this essay when they turn up again in my papers.

I have since read most of Mark Pirie's books of poetry but I do not intend to comment on them individually at length. Instead I will offer some general comments on his poetry to date.

Early in his literary career Mark Pirie identified himself with the X Generation. My impression of this generation in literature is that they prefer realistic writing. Perhaps as a generation they had no more troubles and are no more adventurous or reckless in relationships than any other, but they certainly seem franker in their reports of their early life struggles and problems.

So it is not surprising that in his poetry Mark Pirie has written extensively about the love life of the young. I don't know whether he writes from observation, imagination or experience, and it does not matter, but in fact his romantic writing seems to be distinctive indeed.

Mark Pirie uses a verse style for his love poetry (as much else) that is spare and brief. It is unrhymed. His love poems tend to be worded from the viewpoint of a young male relating to a young female. The presentation is quite bluntly realistic, but there is usually a surreal angle dropped into the text.

Much of Mark Pirie's verse outside the love poetry is overtly satiric, and even the love poetry has a satiric edge, so it is quite appropriate to describe Mark Pirie as a romantic satirist. However all his writings can be seen as social comedy. I do in fact think that the romantic satire is the finest element of Mark Pirie's poetry to date, and indeed very fine work. There would be several dozen pieces scattered across his first six books that fall under the heading of love poetry written as romantic satire. I would actually like to see all this material collected and published as a separate book on its own. It might be that it would be too much of a good thing.

But I suspect in fact it would read as a substantial and impressive treatment comparable to A E Housman's Shropshire Lad or even Heine's whimsical love poems as an expression of the Weltschmerz of Pirie's generation as those works are of Housman's and Heine's.

Love poetry is an important part of poetry as a whole. There are poets who seem incapable of writing love poetry and offer very little of it, for instance Allen Curnow, or even more surprising William Wordsworth. It is not easy to write love poetry, and even poets who make a point of doing so find it hard to come up with. So there is a real value in a volume of love poetry such as Mark Pirie has produced and has available to be collected as a separate publication. Such work doesn't grow on trees and is to be treasured highly. Michael O'Leary is particularly admired for his ability to write convincing love poetry.

I do think it was one of the historic prospects that people of the X Generation would come up with fine love poetry. Mark Pirie for one has done so.

As I understand it, Mark Pirie is still in his thirties, so he is still a young man. His love poetry goes back it seems to the earliest days of his poetry writing 18 years ago. So it is very much an achievement of youth.

And why not, since his subject is young love, or love with the intensity and innocence of youth but the knowingness and irony in it of a real poetic talent? One gets the impression that other topics increasingly have come to occupy Mark Pirie's books of poetry with the passing decade. Mark Pirie is already an outstanding editor and publisher, and as such is to be compared strongly with Noel Hoggard and Denis Glover. I leave Hoggard out of consideration here because his poetry has never had a large import. But it is...
worth noting that Denis Glover wrote and published his own poetry for twenty years from 1931 before his poetry really commanded and received acclaim with the collected Sings Harry and Arawata Bill sequences in 1951 and 1953. Although some of Glover's poems prior to 1950 were anthologised, it has been forgotten that until 1951 Glover's standing was as a printer and publisher, and his poetry was largely satiric in quite a rough and ready way. In other words Glover hardly counted as a serious poet before 1950. Thereafter he went on to write an extensive bulk of poetry which is consistently Georgian in its techniques. Denis Glover was affectionately regarded as a poet and man by J H E Schroder (see his sonnet to Glover). My own view is that Glover's Georgianism was the worse for a slapdash craftsmanship, so that Glover's poetry from 1950 on looks like a wrecked oeuvre, but nevertheless it should all of it including the newspaper poems be collected in print. I am sorry that Denis Glover's literary executor, his son Rupert Glover has not furthered such an outcome so far.

My point in the comparison between Mark Pirie and Denis Glover is that as in Glover's case Mark Pirie might not really achieve his major literary production until 20 years on the literary scene, that for 20 years he too like Glover may simply count as a minor satirist until finally striking a mother lode maybe ten years on from now. That may be so.

But in fact there is nothing in Denis Glover's corpus comparable to Mark Pirie's love poetry dating from his earliest youth. So while in some ways Glover and Pirie look alike as publishers and satirists, in other ways Pirie may well prove to have had a literary accomplishment in his youth of a far higher order. Why should this be so?

I suspect it is due to the influence of Louis Johnson's poetry. Mark Pirie got to know and admire Louis Johnson's poetry very early on and went on to write his MA thesis on Louis Johnson. So there are strong sympathies on Pirie's part for Johnson's approach to poetry. In terms of style Mark Pirie is the opposite of Louis Johnson. Pirie's verse is spare, cut down, uncluttered, whereas Louis Johnson's verse is noticeably voluble in words and ideas. It may even have been a natural reaction to Johnson's overflowing abundance that turned Pirie to the succinct poem. But in fact when you discount differences of style there is much in common between Pirie and Johnson.

Principally for a significant portion of their poetry those similarities are these:

- There is a strong drive in both men to be realistic in subject and presentation.
- There is also a persistent fund of intelligent reflection, both men showing effective imagination, in Pirie's case often as surreal touches.
- There is in both men a very deep insight into and persistent attention to the love relationships of men and women.

My impression is that the best of Louis Johnson's love poetry has yet to be collected from the magazines where it appeared in the early 1960s and has yet to be published in book form. So just how intimate and convincing Johnson was in treating such interrelations people forty years later may overlook, but as a conscientious student of Louis Johnson's literary work it may well be that Mark Pirie was someone in the know in this regard from the early 1990s. If so, once more credit can go to Louis Johnson for his good works and influence as a poet, editor and critic.

F. W. Nielsen (Niel) Wright

Bibliography:

Pirie, Mark, Shoot (Christchurch: Sudden Valley Press, 1999).
- No Joke (Christchurch: Sudden Valley Press, 2001).

Niels Wright’s The Pop Artist’s Garland: Selected Poems 1952-2009 was recently published by HeadworX. He is co-founder and administrator for the Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa. His poetry will appear in Issue 14 of the online journal International Literary Quarterly (UK).

New publication by PANZA member

‘A Tingling Catch’ is the first anthology of New Zealand cricket poems to be collected. This substantial volume traces the history of cricket poetry in New Zealand from 1864 to 2009 spanning 145 years of New Zealand cricket. It brings together verse and song by some of our best poets – past and present. From Samuel Butler’s classic
description of the visiting All-England XI in 1864 to Arnold Wall’s widely
known First World War piece, ‘A Time
Will Come’, to the ‘underarm incident’
of 1981 and more recent cricket poems
that feature current members of the New
Zealand team. ‘A Tinging Catch’ is
presented with notes by editor and
cricket follower Mark Pirie and a
foreword (a poem) by well-known
cricket historian, former national
selector and former President of NZ
Cricket, Don Neely. It contains over
100 poems and songs and features a
wide variety of forms and styles from
rhyming poetry to free verse and is sure
to appeal to cricket lovers and poetry
readers of all ages.

About the Editor

Mark Pirie is the author or editor of
over 20 books, including the anthology
of ‘Generation X’ New Zealand writing,
The NeXt Wave and (with Tim Jones) a
prize-winning anthology of New
Zealand Science Fiction poetry,
Voyagers (one of the “Best 100 Books”
of 2009 in the NZ Listener). He has
been a cricket watcher and enthusiast
since he was a boy
and has played social grade cricket
for two Wellington clubs, Wellington
Collegians Cricket Club and Hutt
District Cricket Club.

Recently received donations

Ila Selwyn – 3 titles
Alexandra Gilbert – 2 titles
Jack Ross – 7 titles
Letter to James K Baxter by Stephen
Oliver (from Stephen Oliver)
after the Buddhist comes to call
and summer, Hauraki plains chapbooks by
Owen Bullock (from Owen Bullock)
Raewyn Alexander – 11 titles plus
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Gillian Cameron – 31 titles
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(from Peter Andrews)
Alistair Paterson – 200 titles
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Nicoles World by Noeline Gannaway
(from Noeline Gannaway)

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Aotearoa (PANZA)

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poetry, with around four thousand titles
from the 19th century to the present
day.

The Archive also contains photos and
paintings of NZ poets, publisher’s
catalogues, poetry ephemera, posters,
reproductions of book covers and other
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NZ poetry books (old & new)
Other NZ poetry items i.e. critical books
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poetry event programmes, posters
and/or prints of NZ poets or their poetry
books.

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• Inspirational talks on NZ poets
• Video/DVD/film screenings of
documentaries on NZ poets
• Readings/book launches by NZ poets
• Educational visits for primary schools,
intermediates, colleges, universities and
creative writing schools/classes.
• The Northland Writers’ Walk (in
planning)

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