



Spare the Rod

Michael Kelly
did not get along
with the brothers.

particularly with Brother
Sebastian — grey haired
& a long way from

venerable — who was
known as Noddy &
should in all charity

have been retired
a year or two back. 'Kelly!'
he'd yell &

all hell would
break out in the
choirs of Heaven

& in the third
form one afternoon
when Michael was

caned on the hands
arms, legs &
neck — breaking

the assault only
by running away, sobbing.
otherwise it was a fine day

John O'Connor

Working Voices, J. O'Connor / E. Mould,
Hallard Press, Auckland

Review

Working Voices

Eric Mould and John O'Connor

Eric Mould's opening poem, *Thirteen savs* was chosen to flag the chief theme of this collection - that many of the poems in it are responses in the lives of working people.

The fact that his experiences often have a country setting give his poems a perceptible New Zealand flavour. Combine this with a Kiwi idiom and the result is a good New Zealand poem:

It's Dog Trials day.

This is good, balanced writing, suitably low key, not over reaching. The poet does not overplay his hand. Yet other poems of the genre such as *String*, have an interior complexity which lends them a more intricate dimension.

The second poem *Kotuku* (in *CS News* October 2003) introduces the kind of poem in which an observer brushes against a subject in the natural world. In this case whimsy, delicacy and occasional elegance generate delight. Other such poems have a calligraphic quality.

Two or three of the poems (e.g. *Burying a sheep*) are litanies of details or episodes in country settings which don't go anywhere. But most of this genre are successful, especially when a long memory transforms events.

Among poems partly independent of the book's central theme as those which present relationships such as *Surface effect*, the understated *It's written down somewhere* and *Whyte & Mackay* in which a remembering voice builds up pressure behind the narrative.

Others (*Touching & tasting*, and the remarkable *Axiom of the third power*) break free from local axioms and constraints. These would be very good poems in any place of language.



John O'Connor is represented by three clusters of poems. *The mechanical piano* comprises 14 thumbnail sketches of school days; *Six sketches, I M* depicts a set of humble characters; the third group of poems, *Public bar*, presents monologues of conversations.

The school day poems are memorable. they are fine capsular flirtations with memories of another time and place, recalled with precision, tinged with irony, and firmly underpinned by physical detail -

the poplars moving
in chorus & Sister's dark habit

quietly rustling —
the particular smell of the cloth

These are backward-looking poems, glimpses through memories keyhole. The situations were those of the children: the musing, ironic, narrative voice is that of the adult who survived to tell the tale.

Six Portraits contrasts the declining situations of its characters with the not always expressed dreams which once lit their way. They didn't hope for much, but, as Bev's neighbour said

'there's more to
life than chips an' housie.'

Pensioner is the most complete of these unpretentious parables of those who were trampled or cheated by life.

The monologues of *Public bar* have the immediacy, accuracy, dryness and funny-sad tone of language gracefully reported.

Personally, I prefer the other groups of poems: the first where the poet memorably records his school day experiences, and the second where, with restrained compassion, he entered the inner world of some people who measured the successes of their lives by the teaspoonful.

John Weir

Former lecturer in English at University of Canterbury. Edited *Collected Poems*, James K. Baxter (Oxford University Press 1979). Currently compiling *Baxter's complete prose works*.

Interview

Drawing on Claire Beynon, Dunedin artist

It's a long way from the baking heat of the high veld to the enclosed snowy hills of Dunedin, yet Claire Beynon's cloud, sea and sky-scape pastel works touch anyone with an eye for the brooding emotion and subtlety of light and landscape. Her evocative works are known to Christchurch arts patrons through the Arthouse on Montreal Street. Claire was born in Johannesburg, South Africa and emigrated with her husband (a locum at Dunedin hospital) and three children in November 1994. She was a finalist in the Cranleigh Barton drawing awards in 1999 and 2003 and runner up in 2001. As well as her art, Claire loves literature and combines poetic and visual images to a high level of professionalism in both media. Her poem "The Mystery Sonatas"

won the 2002 NZ Poetry Society international competition and she was a guest poet at the Christchurch WEA poetry reading in September.

Drawing remained a primary focus for Claire following earlier MA studies in printmaking at the Chelsea School of Art (London), suspended after the sudden death of her brother. After London, and marriage, there was no access to printmaking materials, so the artist threw all her energy into drawing. *"There's something quite primary about drawing. With printmaking there's a lot of process involved. The exhilaration is in the immediacy. I approach drawing fast, unconsciously, spontaneously, I have a passion for it. Drawing has the same possibility as painting, but remains the 'poor cousin' and I'm on something of a mission to elevate it alongside the other grand media such as sculpture and painting."*

This desire is well represented in recent exhibitions (pastel and charcoal drawings *Altered Ground*, Ashburton Art Gallery May/June; *In Conversation*, Arthouse, November 2002) where large framed pastel works exude a subtlety of colour and atmospheric luminescence equivalent to any oil or water colour exhibition.

JS: Is there a conscious link between poetry and visual image for you?

"My notebooks are equal parts writing and imagery. The two are inseparable parts of me, expressing different aspects of me. Writing is very visual and there exists an Expressionistic link."

It seems to me you use land as a vehicle for the spiritual...

"While working in South Africa, the land was ever present but not that familiar. Coming to New Zealand, the land stood out. It was a new environment. In putting new roots down in Dunedin, a new discovery came into my art

as I familiarised myself with the landscape around me in a way I had not done back home. The spiritual sacredness of the land is largely overlooked today in art. We're so high tech., fast-paced, so busy we don't see. The land is so powerful and it's linked with the drama of weather and atmosphere which are deeply emotive aspects. Weather can be a metaphor for the psyche, for temperament, erosion a metaphor for life. I believe God's Spirit resides in the land. I'm interested in the emotive aspects of land.

McCahon is often a reference people make to my work, but it's not one I make. I sense a kindredness with him, regarding ideas and a search for essence, but there is no visual connection."

What about art and faith for you?

"Art and faith are parallel searches for me, a journey synonymous with the other. I grew up in a traditional Anglican background and did the Scripture Union, World Vision thing as a teenager. I lost a brother through violence and that challenged everything. It dismantled everything I'd known and I'm rebuilding and reassembling. Several of my works are about that ongoing search, a spirituality without meaninglessness, removing constructs that make us safe so we arrive at the raw essence of what is real."

Are you saying art should be narrative?

"It must communicate, otherwise it has no purpose, if it's not clear. It's essential in my view that work can be revisited. Art needs an access point so viewers can find their own space."

Claire Beynon is currently showing in the Waitaki River Group show, Peter Rae gallery, Dunedin.

John Stringer

O Te Waitaki wild and free. Ake Ake Ake, Mary Horn, 2003, oil on canvas, 98 x 126cm, Artists Against Aqua exhibition, Temple Gallery, Dunedin, December 2003.



Seven - a Meditation for the Waitaki River, Claire Beynon, 2003, slate tiles, 520 x 2390mm, Artists Against Aqua exhibition, Temple Gallery, Dunedin, December 2003.



Untitled, Alisaundre van Ammers, 2003, acrylic on gessoed board, 450 x 700mm, CoCa exhibition, November 2003.