

## Michael O'Leary

### Poem Notes

It is my aim as a poet/artist to give expression to my cultural roots coupled with my life experiences. My work reflects the lives of the people I have met and places I have lived throughout the land and the times I have lived in. I am a surrealist/dada artist and therefore my writing reflects both the inner and outer landscapes of my life. I grew up in Auckland, lived in Otago where I worked on the railway, and now I live in Paekakariki, north of Wellington.

#### ***On the Death of Your Mother***

This poem emphasises the close spiritual connection I have with a woman friend of mine who I have been in love with for many years. The poem is centred around the time her mother died and how I found out about it almost immediately. It states the practical nature of our aroha, with my having a car available for her use when she needed it, a car I had bought several years before when I lived in Dunedin and that I knew she would need some day.

#### ***Meeting Te Rauparaha***

This poem is about an extraordinary meeting I had on Paekakariki Beach with the great chief. I had been swimming and was drying myself off when I felt a presence beside me. Te Rauparaha started talking to me regarding some issues I was dealing with. He spoke in Māori and stayed for about five minutes.

#### ***Hone Tuwhare***

Hone and I were old drinking buddies from Dunedin days in the 1970s. We kept in touch over the years and did poetry readings at various places including Paremoremo Prison. We were both unusual in the poetry scene as we both had working class backgrounds and had worked on the railways among other jobs. This poem reflects my aroha for the loss of a valued friend.

#### ***Kia Aroha – Rima***

This poem is about a dream I had relating to the woman in the poem 'On the Death of Your Mother'. The dream suggests that she and I had met in a previous lifetime during the first missionary landings in NZ/Aotearoa and how we were our ancestors reliving an earlier time.

### Poet Notes

Michael O'Leary is a poet, novelist, publisher, performer and bookshop proprietor. He grew up in Orakei, Auckland, and has affiliation to Te Arawa iwi on his mother's side of the family. From an early age it was song lyrics that inspired him to become a writer. His Earl of Seacliff Art Workshop imprint (inspired by Andy Warhol's 'Factory', the Beatles' Apple label, and John and Yoko's 'Plastic Ono Band'), which he founded in 1984, has published some of his own prolific output as well as many other New Zealand writers. His first CD, Toku Tinihanga with Christchurch musician Trevor Bycroft and Dunedin Irish band Blackthorn, was released in 2005. The 240-page A-Z compilation, 25 Years of the Earl of Seacliff (Ed. Mark Pirie, 2009) documents Michael O'Leary's versatile and influential oeuvre. He lives in Paekakariki and is at present working with several Kapiti musicians to produce a CD of songs inspired by his poetry.

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## On the Death of your Mother

That morning I woke up and I put around  
My neck the black and white scarf  
Which several years ago I stole from your house  
As a close memento of you to wear

I had not worn this, my favourite scarf,  
For many moons so I knew something was afoot  
When Des came running by the Raumati shops  
Not a place I'm normally at on Saturday morning

And told me that your mother had died less  
Than an hour before I felt the scarf tighten  
The surprise was no surprise, this is the way  
We are, bound together but we must be apart

I spoke to your father and gave him my aroha  
And I tried to contact you and others all day  
All were travelling to or from somewhere  
All were out of touch through their journeys and grief

When you rang me in the late evening, saying  
You needed my car to take you home to Whanganui  
I felt neutral, even aloof, just waiting for the deluge  
Of thoughts and feelings which I knew would come

I met you off the train at Paekakariki Station at midnight  
And when we walked arm in arm along the platform  
That closeness and aroha I have only found with you  
Rekindled like embers left sleeping overnight

I kissed you goodbye and realised a fulfilled destiny  
The reason why I had bought a car at all  
Many years ago, had in my mind, been for you  
And now, when you needed it, it was here

It all fitted so neatly like a fate unknown  
Until its revelation, which is then shown  
To be so simple, and openly mocks us  
So deceptive and beguiling that it shocks us

I didn't need to go to the marae to farewell your mother  
As I had planned: my role was yet again to support you  
I cannot hold you . . .  
So I take off the scarf till the next time we say goodbye

### **Hone Tuwhare: a personal memoir**

E hoa, you have gone to the place beyond  
that tug-of-war which was your life: that  
struggle between North and South which  
even continued after you were laid to rest.

But it was always like that with you: they  
wanted you there while you were elsewhere.  
Both of us, we were different kinds of poets,  
Railway Workers first, comrades, drinkers

This koha ö ngä kupu ki aroha is from  
the centre: where the break in the rail  
lies. Paekakariki means Baxter whānau,

Campbell, Glover and a hundred others  
who hear the magic whispers of sensual  
kai-words, knowing it is ata-kahurangi in flight

Paekakariki, Waitangi Day, 2008

## Meeting Te Rauparaha

The early evening finds me  
Emerging from the water  
At Paekakariki Beach  
After swimming long and deep

The late summer colours  
Cover the sky and the hills  
I am alternately looking from  
Land to the seaward visage

Towards and beyond Kapiti  
My eyes straight to the horizon:  
He stands suddenly beside me  
He has heard I am with

A Raukawa girl, and he gives me  
A distant, yet easy blessing  
The beach towel over my shoulder  
Becomes his korowai as a koha

So, the great man who haunts  
This coast has visited me  
In friendship and aroha, and  
When I look away, he is gone

