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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

Wallabies at dusk and Shyness

Mark O'Connor

WALLABIES AT DUSK

On this beach of dead shells, sea bones,
the estuary's cemetery, a pair of them lap.
Startled, the nervous ears come up
forked and twitching like a diviner's rod
dowsing the shoreline for lethal sounds — those
faint steady fumbblings before the rifle-crack.
Twin Bennet's wallabies, unshot and ignorant of Bennet
and now, as it turns out, lovers.
My approach lifts their ears, then their shoulders erect.
Will they trust me as part of their gentle world
to lap on side by side?
or bound from the hellish thunder stick?

Now they forget me, and stare on out
— at their lake where the sun darkens into extinction.

SHYNESS

The forest is full of well-kept paths
going all the right ways
but you need to stoop to use them.
And always in the distance are the shy ones,
hiding in bushes or crouching in disused barns,
lying up in dry creeks, and waiting
for you to go away.

At twilight they hobble into the open,
upright and brazenly watching you,
twinned ears notched against the sky.
The feeding ones lower their arms
with a rower's shrug, drop their heads
behind round rumps and shoulders,
and become brown stones on a dry grass plain,
stones that multiply at dusk,
small mobile hummocks snatching at grass.

After the dark you will hear them
making great paddock-long trips with steady elastic thumping
— that sound of Australian soil slapped hard by double pads.
Darkness has come, the old folk rule again.

Witi Ihimaera

INTERVIEW

Jane Wilkinson interviewed Witi Ihimaera in Rome on 20 September 1984.

Waituhi is the first Maori opera. Do you feel there is a contradiction in expressing the need to preserve traditional Maori values in an art form that does not exist in traditional Maori culture, or is this an indication that in order to survive Maori values and culture must to a certain extent undergo a metamorphosis and absorb elements of Western culture?

Perhaps it's strange to call *Waituhi* an opera because what we've tried to do is to adapt the operatic form to Maori music and to New Zealand, so