

Tribute to Hone Tuwhare

Barry Brickell

One day in 1975 at Port Chalmers, Ralph introduced me to Hone. I didn't know he was a poet, but was told that he was a welder and boilermaker. So I asked him to make me a boiler.

Oh shit! I gave him a beer mug that I had made and fired in the studio that Ralph had built for me. It was meant to appease the insult.

Knowing very little about poetry, I blundered on making pots and stamping made-up phrases into them using a fine old set of letter-stamps that Ralph had rescued from a defunct printing factory. I made a boiler for Hone, suitably inscribed from local clay but it blew up during the firing, shattering into several fragments. Was this a token reminder or subtle message that one should not try to appease the gods? I began to read Hone's words and was reminded of an albatross with wings outstretched and soaring. It would alight in unexpected places, showering humour, wicked fun and generosity where it was not always known.

He did not deserve to die just three days after Hillary and three years his junior. No state funeral will ever grace the passage to immortality of a cultural icon in the face of more popular achievements. He would have laughed with incredulity at the very thought.

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