

**A translation of Hone Tuwhare's poem 'Martin Luther King'**

**Selwyn Muru**

Auckland, December 2008.

**Mātene Ruta Kīngi**

Kei Vietnam tētahi pū hou; kua whakaritea tōna nei reka ki te reka o te mīere pī. E ai ki ngā rongo, ka pakū mai ana te pū nei, ka rere porotiti haere atu ngā matā kia puta i te tinana o te tangata; kotahi pūtu kē te whānui o te kōhao ka kitea atu.

Engari i te rerenga mai o te kariri nama toru kore kore ono ka pākarukaruhia tō kauae e Kīngi. Engari kāhore i mutu mai i konā: ka parau haere atu ki te whakamaroke i te wai mongamonga i roto i ō moemoeā.

Te kariri rā, kāre i mōhio mai ko wai au i porotehi rānei, te mīnī hoki. I tō hōrapatanga ki te whenua, kātahi tō ira tangata ka wepua whakamuritia ki te piriona tau, kia rite ki te ika kakaru.

Kia mau mahara mai e Kīngi i te taenga mai o te rongo kua hemo koe, ka huri ngā whaiāipo katoa o te ao ki te whakatoratorā i a rātou, ka tahuri ki roto i ō rātau moenga, ka whakawahangūtia ngā rerio katoa.

Engari anō rā koe; he koi he mataara. Kāore koe i pai ki ngā kupu whakaparahako a ngā kiri mā pērā i te Matua Kēkē Tamati me te Upoko Pakete, he kupu whakaiti katoa i te kiri mangu. Nāu i kerī te hōhonutanga o te mana o tō iwi. Mai i te tāone nui o Parimīngihama, huri rauna noa i ō whenua, ka titia atu e koe tō kakī ki waho; kia whakapuarengia atu tō pīki māngai mangu ātaahua, ka pānuitia e koe ki te ao whānui ngā parekura kikino i mahia ki ngā iwi o Vietnam. Ka hīkoi haere koe me tō patu, he moemoeā: ō moemoeā, kāore i tautokohia e ngā kiri mā o Amerika. Ka kaha atu tō whakapuaki i ngā kupu tapu o te paipera, me te takahi a te kiri mā i te kiri mangu, ka kārangirangi kē atu ngā kiri mā, ki a koe. Tā rātau whakahoki, kei ia mātou te ture, arā Te Whakapuakitanga o te Mana Motuhake o Amerika. Āe, ko te take tēnā i puhi ai koe e Kīngi.

I mua atu i te titorehanga mai o te māramatanga i ō kamo, ka inoi koe i tētahi waiata tino reka. Kāore i tukua mai tēnei. Tīnikara ki roto i aku uaua; te kāta tari tūpāpaku, e ngunguru ake nei i roto i aku taringa.

## **Martin Luther King**

In Vietnam they're using a new rifle shell  
that's a real honey. It describes a tumbling  
parabola that could punch a hole in you  
a foot square, check?

But when that 30.06  
made a bloody mash out of your jaw, it didn't  
stop there: kept ploughing right on through to  
drain the marrow out of your dream.

That bullet wasn't meant to grunt an apology,  
the meanie. When you slumped down, mankind  
was hurled back a billion years, to a  
jellyfish.

Let's face it, King: when news of your death  
came through, lovers all over the World  
turned each other on, rolled over and turned  
the radio off.

But you were hip. And you never did fancy  
fancy-names like Uncle Tom or Handkerchief-head.  
You really dug the scene, man. From Birmingham  
on you stuck your neck out; opened your big  
black beautiful mouth to protest about the high  
cost of dying in Vietnam. And you marched

armed only with a dream: a dream held aloft  
in your red-hot parable-picking hands. Hell,  
your continued existence had become an untidy  
question mark sloshed across the American  
Declaration of Independence. Yeah: and that  
is why they shot you, King.

Before your light was snuffed out, you asked  
for a song sung real sweet: hell,  
this ain't much. Treacle in my veins: death-cart  
rumble in my ears.

Hone Tuwhare.