

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

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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 Parimingihama, 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 puhī 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.