

mark pirie

OLD HAT



Mark Pirie's new book, *Old Hat*, is a collection of triolets, or extended epigrams, covering a wide variety of subjects, including sport, history, literature, childhood, biography, contemporary events and film.

Figures as wide-ranging as Cleopatra, the World Cup winning All Blacks, cricketer Gary Sobers, baseball star Babe Ruth, Formula 1 driver Ayrton Senna, writers Dorothy Parker and Margaret Mahy, sprinter Usain Bolt, musician Bob Dylan, and Jack and Meg White of the rock duo The White Stripes come to life in its pages.

"[Pirie] displays a wicked sense of humour and a cunning sense of style." – Bill Direen, *New Zealand Listener*

OLD HAT

OLD HAT

A book of triolets



Mark Pirie

HEADWORX
WELLINGTON

Acknowledgements:

Some of these poems first appeared in:
Books in the Trees blog (NZ), *ESAW Christmas Surprise* (NZ),
Side Stream (NZ), *The Wellingtonian* (NZ),
Tingling Catch blog (NZ), Ron Palenski's *Touchlines*
(NZ rugby poetry anthology) and *Valley Micropress* (NZ).

*Thanks to Niel Wright for his
enthusiasm for this book and
his knowledge of the triolet form.*

Dedicated to H W Gretton (1914-1983)

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Popular light verse writer Wendy Cope in her selected poems, *A Cure for Love* (2008), includes half-a-dozen triolets and notes them as a rhyming French form (consisting of eight lines) that dates back to the 13th century.

UK writers such as Austin Dobson (1840-1921) have used the form and there has been an anthology of triolets written in English up to the 1890s. Cricket poet George Francis Wilson once wrote 'An Over of Triolets'; one for each ball bowled. To me, the triolet is an extended epigram on a subject.

In 2008, while I was editing Niel Wright's *The Pop Artist's Garland: Selected Poems 1952-2009*, I wrote the first of these triolets, 'King Arthur'. Wright has been for many years one of our foremost trioleteers. The triolet is, as he describes, his present 'femme fatale'.

There have been other triolet writers in our literary history dating back to the late 19th century, including Frank Morton, S G August, John Pine Snadden and H W Gretton. Gretton's 'Triolet' in *The Spike and The Old Clay Patch* (3rd edition, 1949) was republished recently in *Essential New Zealand Poems* (2001).

Triolets were popular like other French verse forms (roundels, villanelles, rondeaus and ballades) till the late 1930s. The villanelle is still used in contemporary New Zealand poetry. The earliest triolet I know of in New Zealand is by the Australian poet H Peden Steel and was published in the *Southland Times*, 2 August 1889.

While my own experiments with the triolet have been 'occasional', I decided to collect them in a single book so they could stand alone in contrast to my other works.

My triolets are a variation on the traditional triolet – which is usually comic – and as Niel Wright has observed

are experimental with their use of the form (e.g. I have sometimes repeated either the second or third line at the end and written lines mostly in syllabics. Traditionally it is the second line repeated at the end). Some aren't comic. Some don't rhyme and are free verse triolets.

I have used the triolet to comment on personal, political and public events, including the Great War and other moments in time such as sporting triumphs, biographical summaries and childhood reminiscences.

Generally, the language I've used has been plain, hard-hitting and direct. The triolet form suits my simple, economical style.

'King Arthur' was published first in the *ESAW Christmas Surprise* 2008 and 'Learning Maths in Afghanistan' has appeared in *Side Stream* 27 (December 2010). 'The Piri Weepu Blues' was in *Valley Micropress* (June 2012). 'The White Stripes' appeared on Tim Jones's blog *Books in the Trees* (24 April 2012). Two of the cricket triolets 'Norwood Room' and 'Martin Guptill' appeared in *The Wellingtonian* earlier this year. Two of the rugby triolets 'The Cup' and 'The Wandering Bard' will appear in Ron Palenski's collection of New Zealand rugby poetry, *Touchlines*.

Mark Pirie
Wellington
July 2012

PROLOGUE

A BIRD

A bird comes to visit me,
While I work on poetry.

With feathers of an angel,
A bird comes to visit me.

Its eyes are clear like crystal,
With red-coloured feet, a small

Beak, it comes to visit me,
While I work on poetry.

PART ONE

IN THORNDON

Birds call and cats fight;
I sit and listen
In Thorndon at night.

Birds call and cats fight;
It's nearly moonlight
Here where trees glisten.

Birds call and cats fight
In Thorndon at night.

OLD HAT

I saw a man with an old hat,
He looked kinda like Bob Dylan;
He was playing a twelve-bar blues.

I saw a man with an old hat,
He was tapping, playing the blues,
Blowin' hard, he was freewheelin'...

I saw a man with an old hat,
He looked kinda like Bob Dylan.

IN CHILDHOOD

Luke Skywalker's the Jedi knight,
But there are more heroes to invoke;
It's good versus evil in childhood.

Luke Skywalker's the Jedi knight,
Harry Potter's the wizard's light;
Each fight a dark Lord they must revoke.

Luke Skywalker's the Jedi knight;
It's good versus evil in childhood.

KING ARTHUR

(For Niel)

In childhood I revered Arthur
And the legend of Camelot:
With Merlin and Guinevere.

In childhood I revered Arthur -
His magical sword Excalibur -
Till to Avalon he was at last.

In childhood I revered Arthur
And the legend of Camelot.

BABY-SITTING

Put kids to bed, sit in lounge,
Dim the lights low, telly on.
That part was easy, a breeze.

Put kids to bed, sit in lounge...
But, their lights come on, not out;
Two boys run in and about.

Put kids to bed, sit in lounge,
Dim the lights low, telly on...

EASTBOURNE

A place of sunshine, summer days,
Picnics and fun for families...

A place to bathe in the sun's rays:
Surfing, sport, swimming, summer days,
With bush walks viewing dappled bays,
A place you went on the best days,

A place of sunshine, summer days,
Picnics and fun for families...

THE WORLD

(A street person's thoughts on the current global financial crisis)

"The world's stuffed.
We in NZ know it.
Everywhere's stuffed.

The world's stuffed:
Africa, Middle-East,
US, Asia, Europe.

The world's stuffed.
We in NZ know it."

BLANKET MAN

(In response to Blanket Man voted into the Top 5 List of Wellingtonians in a recent *Capital Times* poll)

Will there be a ban for Blanket Man?
He's haunting Courtenay, he's the man.
Looks a lot like someone called Tarzan.

Will there be a ban for Blanket Man?
He's haunting Courtenay, he's the man.
He's "filth" but will filth hit the fan?

Will there be a ban for Blanket Man?
He's haunting Courtenay, he's our man.

PRIVATES, WWI

In the death books,
they would write "sickness", at sea
for the young Privates.
Better that than (on land): "syphilis".

Theirs no battle fought: lost at land or sea.
For the young Privates
in the death books,
they would write "sickness", at sea.

DOT COM

We've got your number, we're Dot Com.
This takes minutes; we protect you.
We talk with you - and your PC!

We've got your number, we're Dot Com.
Don't ever call us, we call you.
We fix with you - and your PC!

We've got your number, we're Dot Com.
This takes minutes; *we protect you.*

PORT ROSS

(After reading Andrew Fagan's *Swirly World Sails South*)

Small yachts in a strong tailwind sail quick.
Nothing like beating out to Enderby.

Across the harbour, waves wresting below,
Small yachts in a strong tailwind sail quick.

You pay respects to old wrecks, the sailor
Graves of history; but note their failure.

Small yachts in a strong tailwind sail quick.
Nothing like sailing out of Enderby.

NELSON

(For Laura)

Today, there was snow in Nelson
Covering the hills; a lace cloth.
I thought of you, below, at work.

Today, there was snow in Nelson.
You and your dream-life of writing:
Novels, poems made; a day's work.

Today, there was snow in Nelson
Covering the hills; a lace cloth.

PART TWO

THE CUP

McCaw lifts the Webb Ellis Cup;
Tired joy is on their faces:
It's a hard road to win the cup.

McCaw lifts the Webb Ellis Cup,
Captain Fantastic holds the cup;
The pain of winning leaves no traces.

McCaw lifts the Webb Ellis Cup;
Tired joy is on their faces.

*Rugby World Cup Final, Eden Park, Auckland,
23 October 2011: New Zealand 8 v France 7*

THE WANDERING BARD

*i.m. Ernest L Eyre, poet and life member of the
North Shore Rugby Club*

Ernest L Eyre: a bard no-one sings,
A man who could spin it like the best;
His words dotted down between the sticks.

Ernest L Eyre: a bard no-one sings,
Knew the oval game of rugby best;
And wrote verse, thinking popular best.

Ernest L Eyre: a bard no-one sings,
A man who could spin it like the best.

OTHER GAMES

(at the opening of the 2011/12 club cricket season)

Other games go on around you,
Catches caught, wickets taken.
A play can make or break you.

Other games go on around you,
All results can affect you.
A play can make or break you.

Other games go on around you,
Catches caught, wickets taken.

NORWOOD ROOM

In the Norwood Room, pictures hang;
Great deeds of art captured.
Cricketers in their prime - well hung.

In the Norwood Room, pictures hang.
Azhar's "silky elegance" captured;
Lara, Hadlee, Cairns, Sobers all hung...

In the Norwood Room, pictures hang.
Great deeds of art captured.

*Basin Reserve, Wellington,
Sunday 18 December 2011*

THE CHAMPION

A ball went through W G Grace's beard
Then ricocheted for four more:
The Great Cricketer, Champion.

A ball went through W G Grace's beard.
"What are ye at?" W G was sore.
Ernest Jones was quick, and what's more...

A ball went through W G Grace's beard:
The Great Cricketer, Champion.

MARTIN GUPTILL

Guptill is our new star,
He gets the runs by far.
He'll add by six or four.

Guptill is our new star,
He flashes to the score,
Strokes it clean, hard and far.

Guptill is our new star,
He gets the runs by far.

THE BABE

The pitcher aims to strike.
The Babe sends it from the park:
Home runs only, no strikeout.

The pitcher aims to strike;
He wills the Babe out,
He wants the Babe to strike out.

The pitcher aims to strike.
The Babe sends it from the park.

GARY SOBERS

Gary Sobers learnt with soft balls at Lilliput;
His strokes were the more colourful from it.

In Barbados cricket was all to Gary; and
In childhood he played, practised and practised.
His style wasn't taught by an English text;
But Gary became a leading world great.

Gary Sobers learnt with soft balls at Lilliput;
His strokes were the more colourful from it.

THE PIRI WEEPU BLUES

*Ain't it hard to be an All Black,
I've got the Piri Weepu blues...
I'm Hutt City's Man of the Cup.*

*Ain't it hard to be an All Black;
Remember last year and the Cup?
The Blues? Yeah, yeah, we won the Cup!*

*Ain't it hard to be an All Black,
I've got the Piri Weepu blues...*

KIERAN READ: TAPE MAN

(Written after observing Kieran Read's tackle on Quade Cooper during the 2012 Bledisloe Cup Test, Eden Park, Auckland...)

No need to 'Bring back Buck',
Now Kieran's in the ruck.

Read gets there, hits 'em hard,
No need to 'Bring back Buck'...

Read's our man; a taped up
Buck - rock solid at 8.

No need to 'Bring back Buck',
Now Kieran's in the ruck.

NO. 1

Usain Bolt sprints to the finish line,
He's No. 1, with a record time.

Calypso cool, happy-go-lucky,
Usain Bolt sprints to the finish line.

Looks across at the youngsters behind,
Still sprinting hard for the finish line...

Usain Bolt is at the finish line;
He's No. 1, with a record time.

RACING CARS*

i.m. Ayrton Senna, F1

Racing cars, I never crashed or burned.
But, I read of Senna when he died;
A brief star, shot down, still bright in flames.

Racing cars, I never crashed or burned.
My racetracks were a different game;
As a kid, my drivers lived, held fame.

Racing cars, I never crashed or burned.
But, I read of Senna when he died.

*After watching the documentary film *Senna*,
dir. Asif Kapadia.

OLD BAT

(For my nephews Lewie and Jonty)

There was a boy with an old bat,
Well-kept, from his grandfather's day.
Sometimes he'd take it out to play.

There was a boy with an old bat,
He'd hit high; hard; a six or four.
In his room, he built up a score.

There was a boy with an old bat,
Well-kept, from his grandfather's day.

PART THREE

THE REVISIONIST

(For Stacy Schiff, author of Cleopatra: A Life)

Cleopatra's beauty is the myth of ages:

The reality is her coined-head, her 'hooked nose';
Her mind not face lit up Antony and Caesar.

Cleopatra's beauty is the myth of ages.

In Alexandria a goddess of Isis
Learned of culture, of art, orators and sages.

Cleopatra's beauty is the myth of ages;

Her mind not face lit up Antony and Caesar.

DOROTHY PARKER

Dorothy Parker at the round table,
In despair you found poetry,
Drinking the darkness of love.

Dorothy Parker at the round table,
You loved, lost, with wit, strove
To write, and from heady heights you dove.

Dorothy Parker at the round table,
In despair you found poetry.

BONJOUR TRISTESSE*

So, she had to die, did she not?
The one who stood before freedom:
The woman of normality.

So, she had to die, did she not?
While you outran reality,
Those cages of normality.

So, she had to die, did she not?
The one who stood before freedom.

*Based on the novel by Françoise Sagan

LEARNING MATHS IN AFGHANISTAN

*(Acknowledgement to Åsne Seierstad, author of
The Bookseller of Kabul)*

Little Mohammad has a Kalashnikov.
It holds in total three magazines.
And each magazine has twenty bullets.

Little Mohammad has a Kalashnikov.
He kills thirty infidels with its bullets.
He uses up all its three magazines.

Little Mohammad has a Kalashnikov.
How many died with each magazine?

SUMMER OF SAM, 1977

(a Spike Lee film)

A mad dog stalks NY streets,
America's son of Sam.
He bullets all the young brunettes.

A mad dog stalks NY streets,
Says he is but a 'son of Sam',
Sends a note just like Uncle Sam.

A mad dog stalks NY streets,
America's son of Sam.

DAVE GROHL: ROCK LEGEND

Dave Grohl ain't just a punk.
He can rock it with phunk
– Led Zep, Beatles he'll name.

Dave Grohl ain't just a punk.
From hardcore he came;
Now plays all just the same.

Dave Grohl ain't just a punk,
He can rock it with phunk.

MARGARET MAHY (1936-2012)

Margaret Mahy lived merry;
Her words were magical, fairy:
A lion roamed in a meadow...

Margaret Mahy lived merry;
With hat, wig, almost Bad Jelly.
Children loved her; she was fairy.

Margaret Mahy lived merry;
Her words were magical, fairy.

THE NAKED VIEW

I sit and read a *Penthouse*:
Boobs and lips, bras and pantyhose;
The fine points of sex in-house.

I sit and read a *Penthouse*.
Women dolled up to impress;
Is this what it takes to arouse?

I sit and read a *Penthouse*:
The fine points of sex in-house.

THE WHITE STRIPES

(After watching the film, *Under Great White Northern Lights*, dir. Emmett Malloy, 2010)

The White Stripes, man, they just come to play.
No set list. Anything can happen.
They create, don't need to fabricate.

Red, black and white; they come to play.
Meg and Jack. Anything can happen
With Jack's old guitars; hard to tune in.

The White Stripes, man, they just come to play.
They create, don't need to fabricate.

A SHOUT OUT

*(i.m. Adam Yauch, aka MCA, of the Beastie Boys
(1964-2012))*

Yo! This shout out's for MCA
Who died, left his mic today;
A true-blue legend of hip-hop.

Y'all pass the mic for MCA:
A man who brought cool soundz to all;
A pioneer, like Run DMC, raising hell.

Yeah, this shout out's for MCA;
A true-blue legend of hip-hop.

EPILOGUE

VOICES AMONG THE RUINS

I'm a poet unlike you,
But I fell through the cracks;
I wrote verse, the sort that sings.

I'm a poet unlike you,
I wrote of beauty that's true,
Outside the modernist zoo.

I'm a poet unlike you,
But I fell through the cracks...

AUTHOR'S NOTES

p. 22. 'Blanket Man' - Well-known Wellington street character Ben Hana (aka Blanket Man) died earlier this year. RIP.

p. 23. 'Privates, WWI' - A workplace talk given by Births, Deaths and Marriages was accompanied by a display of photocopied records from official death books relating to World War I Kiwi soldiers. A number of them died from flu and other diseases without seeing action.

p. 24. 'Dot Com' - Sometimes computer scammers call from overseas. This triolet is a programmed call from a computer voice for extra annoyance.

p. 25. 'Port Ross' - Port Ross and Enderby Island are in the sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands where Andrew Fagan sailed, while circumnavigating New Zealand, 26 December 2006-21 February 2007. 'Beating' is sailing against the wind, used here ironically in reference to the rough seas of the Southern Ocean.

p. 29. 'The Cup' - Hats off to Richie McCaw and his team for lifting the IRB Rugby World Cup 2011 after 24 years.

p. 30. 'The Wandering Bard' - Ernest L Eyre (1886?-1968) was a wandering minstrel, who travelled around New Zealand selling his poetry. He was widely published in newspapers and published around 20 books from 1906-1938. Eyre played rugby for the North Shore Rugby Club and was a player and official there, 1904-1967. He wrote the history of the North Shore Rugby Club, *C'Mon Shore!* (1973).

p. 32. 'Norwood Room' - A poem inspired by the wall hangings in the Norwood Room at the R A Vance Stand, Basin Reserve. The room is named after Wellington Cricket Association patron, former Mayor of Wellington Sir Charles Norwood (1871-1966). The players mentioned are Lance Cairns, Mohammed Azharuddin, Gary Sobers, Brian Lara and Richard Hadlee. The quote: 'silky elegance' is by Don Neely from his text on the wall hanging relating to Azharuddin's play during a Basin Test.

p. 33. 'The Champion' - Conflicting reports place the incident at two matches: Australia v Lord Sheffield's XI, at Sheffield Park, or Australia v England, First Test, at Lord's, on the 1896 Australian tour. All-rounder George Giffen, 'the Australian W G Grace', referred to Jones as 'the fastest of bowlers' at that time. However the uncertainty of the reports, it certainly occurred, as Grace, then aged 48, in future referred to Jones as the man 'who bowled through my beard'. Source: *W G Grace: A Life* by Simon Rae, Faber & Faber, 1998.

p. 34. 'Martin Guptill' - A salute written after Guptill scored an unbeaten 78 for the Black Caps against South Africa in the first Twenty20 International at Wellington, 17 February 2012. Guptill hit two towering sixes, one clattering on to the stadium roof.

p. 35. 'The Babe' - Babe Ruth hit 714 home runs, an extraordinary and long-held record, finally surpassed by Hank Aaron in 1974, who took over 2500 innings to reach The Babe's mark. Babe Ruth is now third on the list of Lifetime Home Runs and Aaron second.

p. 36. 'Gary Sobers' - Most Barbados boys grew up playing Lilliput cricket on streets or fields using soft balls knitted and rolled in tar. Sobers later described the experience, in his autobiography *Cricketer Crusader* (1966), as the reason for creating flamboyant West Indian batsmen unafraid of the hard leather ball.

p. 37. 'The Piri Weepu Blues' - Piri Weepu, TV One's *Marae Investigates* Nga Toa Whakaihuwaka Maori of the Year 2011, Maori Rugby Player of the Year and Maori Sports Person of the Year for 2011; and the overall Hutt News Hutt City Sports Person of the Year for 2011; at his best a favourite player of mine despite a tough 2012 Super Rugby season with the Auckland Blues.

p. 37. 'Kieran Read: Tape Man' - Kieran Read's taped up head brings back memories of former All Black forward Wayne 'Buck' Shelford, famous for the 'Bring back Buck' signs often displayed at New Zealand sporting grounds over the past 20 or more years.

p. 38. 'No. 1' - Jamaican Usain Bolt successfully defended his 100m and 200m sprint titles at the 2012 London Olympics to become the greatest Olympic sprinter. The triolet is in commentary mode.

p. 44. 'Dorothy Parker' - Parker (1893-1967) was an American poet, journalist and fiction writer, who wrote for *Vanity Fair*, *New Yorker* and other magazines. She co-founded the Algonquin Round Table

group who met regularly to discuss art, writing and other ideas. Her love life was often unsuccessful and she made several attempts to take her own life.

p. 46. 'Learning Maths in Afghanistan' - Based on the broadcast journalist Åsne Seierstad's account of Afghanistan under Taliban rule (see *The Bookseller of Kabul*). My triolet is a fictional account of a boy's maths exercise.

p. 47. 'Summer of Sam, 1977' - Spike Lee's film *S.O.S.*, a fictional story based on the 'Son of Sam' serial killer, who stalked New York streets in the disco/punk summer of '77 randomly killing young brunettes. He was eventually caught and told authorities that a demon inside a dog told him to do it. Viet Nam vets were 'Sons of Sam'.

p. 48. 'Dave Grohl: Rock Legend' - Source: *This is a Call: The Life and Times of Dave Grohl* by Paul Brannigan, HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

p. 49. 'Margaret Mahy' - Mahy died in July this year. I never met her as a child but read her words in *The School Journal* and her books like *A Lion in the Meadow* in Wadestown School's library. I saw her once as an adult at the 2005 Prime Minister's Awards for Literary Achievement evening ceremony, Premier House.

p. 51. 'The White Stripes' - The White Stripes (1997-2011) are an American rock duo consisting of Jack White (guitars) and Meg White (drums). They made exclusive use of a red, black and white colour scheme, from album art to clothing worn for live performance and interviews.

p. 52. 'A Shout Out' - Adam Yauch died earlier this year from cancer. Like Run DMC, the Beastie Boys were an innovative hip-hop group at their peak in the 1980s and 1990s and were often heard on stereos and in cars during my teen years up until university days. It's always sad to see a pop hero of your generation die young. The Beastie Boys' maxim: 'Stay true to yourself, and you will never fall' is something I live by.

p. 54. 'Voices Among the Ruins' - My work with the Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa has brought me into contact with a number of classic New Zealand poets who have fallen 'through the cracks'. May their voices be heard again in the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Pirie (1974-) is an internationally known author or editor of over 20 books, including the cricket poetry anthology, *A Tingling Catch*, the anthology of Generation X New Zealand writing, *The NeXt Wave*, an anthology of rail poems, *Rail Poems of New Zealand Aotearoa*, and (with Tim Jones) an award-winning anthology of New Zealand Science Fiction poetry, *Voyagers*.

He is the publisher for HeadworX (<http://headworx.eyesis.co.nz>), a small press publisher of poetry and fiction in Wellington, and has edited two literary journals *JAAM (Just Another Art Movement)* and *broadsheet: new new zealand poetry*.

His poems and critical articles have been published in Singapore, England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Germany, Croatia, India and Iraq. He has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines, including the Che Guevara anthology *Che in Verse* (UK), the international online poetry journal *Jacket*, the *Journal of Refugee Studies* (Oxford University Press, UK) and the *Journal Of Commonwealth Literature* (UK). A selection of his poetry, *Gallery*, appeared in 2003 from Salt Publishing, England.

Since 2010 he has co-organised the Poetry Archive of New Zealand Aotearoa, with Niel Wright and Michael O'Leary.

More information: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Pirie

HEADWORX

Series Editor: Mark Pirie

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*'A Tingling Catch': A Century of New Zealand
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In Vitro Laura Solomon
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Old Hat: A Book of Triolets Mark Pirie*

New Fiction

baby is this wonderland? Jeanne Bernhardt
The Diary as a Postive in Female
Adult Behaviour Vivienne Plumb
Extreme Weather Events Tim Jones
Out of It: A Novel Cricket Novel Michael O'Leary