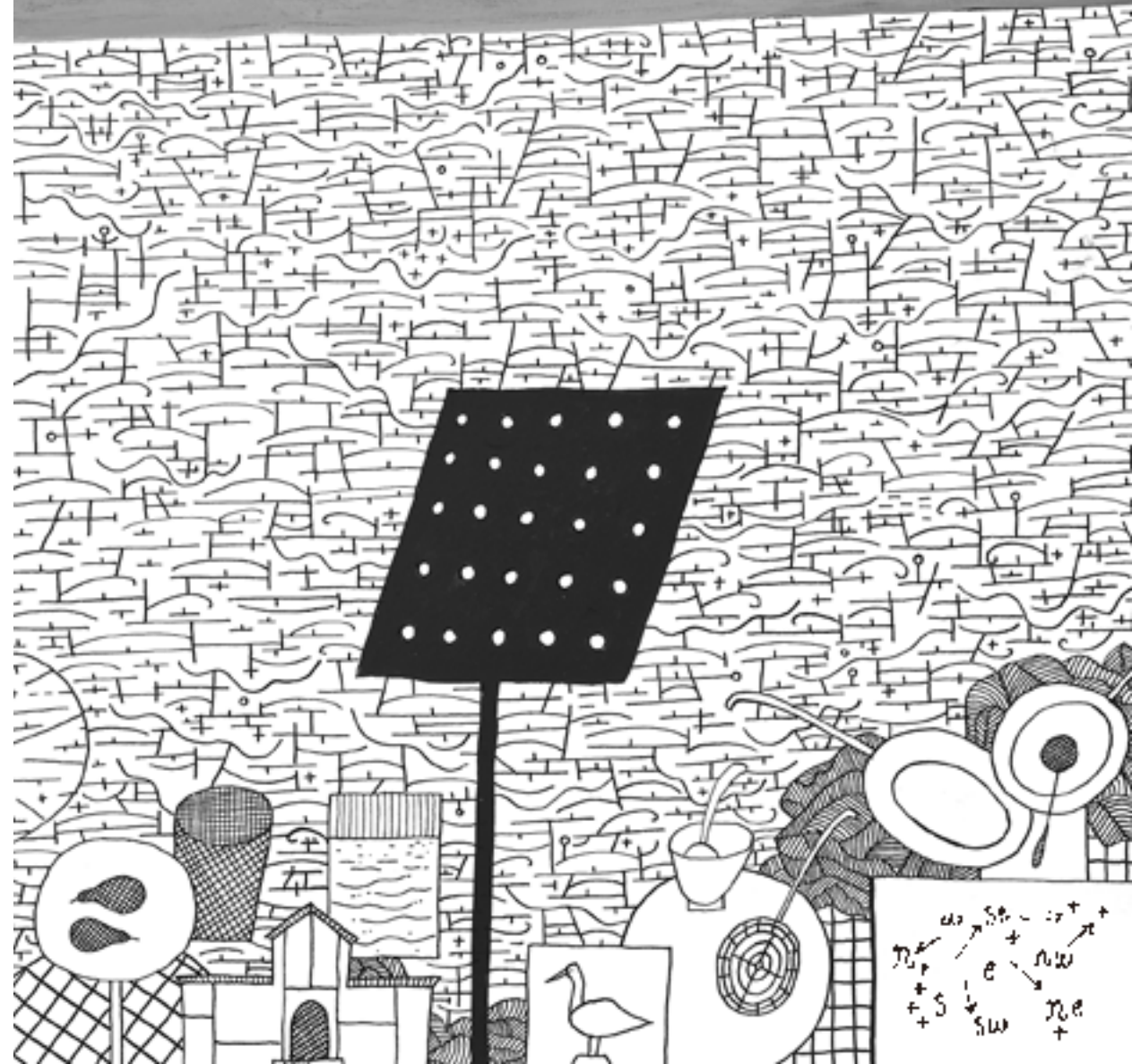


5. *Little Oneroa*



Little Oneroa

In the seaward room, all windows,
they had accomplished something
with peas

a light green paste on which
a fine percussive seasoning
had fallen.

Islands of summery bread were
summoned and an explanation
offered concerning

the use of lemon peel as a
navigational aid.
So began

my apprenticeship
in such matters.
Of the rain

only footnotes remained: a
ceramic fountain, a drink
knocked over

by a pukeko. And to close formalities
the chef's final offering—
a running rabbit.

Sprig

*Nelson, site of the first game of
rugby played in New Zealand, 1870*

Here, according to this plaque
the egg was laid

 only a grubber
or chip kick from the exact centre
of the country—

 one wet, running
afternoon played, without
exaggeration, in swimmers and
polished shoes—a town, smallish

by degrees, the winner on
the day the light between trees
a green cushion

 on which a tight head

might rest, a whistle blowing
down the years

 the oval egg
dreaming its bright bird
the scrum pressing onwards
 to its Byzantium.

A fall of ice on Mt Maunganui, 11 May 2009

Having seen everything
we look for something
less—lightning farms

of Bethlehem, snow-stopped
sea off Papamoa, the baffled minds
of avocado and men.

On shelter belt and More FM
a snow-like falling—
on television news and

migrant labour; on Gloria's
orchard, truckloads of white
unseasonal fruit.

And the tractor that
has never before shined
just so.

A small ode to faith

for Bill Manbire

Seated, as we were, eleven rows
inside the hungry belly

of the faithful, our religion was
fishing. And it was our religion

made us fishermen. We were ushered
down the long aisle of

a pier, at the end of which murmured a vast
green harbour. Between

a bucket of slop and the entangled talk
of a dozen water-logged men

we professed all that we now clove to:
the fish with piano accordion gills

stirring in an orange bucket
the detachable heads of trumpeter

and damselfish, blenny, spotty
and leatherjacket. It was not

their small minds we were drawn to
but their shining fuselage

held like a pen in one hand—a model
proposed for us: well-schooled, and rendered

in great detail, expelled from their
natural element

their aloneness. You must be fishers
of men, we were told, with our alphabet of

hooks, lexicon of sinkers, lures
and spinners. While down the non-fishing end

of things
under-sized boys kept

throwing themselves back, we
made of this

our pier-bound profession:
the backward somersaults of faith

beyond tide table and filleting board
where a factory ship lingered

like the Church of Scotland, emptying its icebox into
the midsummer sea. Deep in this

thicket of rods, these faithfully
rendered waters

with our next-to-nothing fish
and meagre vocabulary

our fishing only a dream

of swimming,
a chimney of birds
to smoke the fish king

and being rescued.

The Surfers' Mass

One believes in the other—
the awakening body

the soul's repose—that you have to
stand up so as to

fall down. Five p.m. at Saint Michael's
a trap best laid

after a weekend's swell, saltwater lakes
on the pews beneath our

boardshorts, a trail of sand as far as
communion—

we were carried in and washed
back out.

God above all: Fiona's birthmark,
Mary-Louise's Sunday

shoes, and Bernadette come lately from tennis
seen through

a veil of incense. Moira of the Roman
sandals. It confirmed us

in our doubt. Afterwards, the cup of tea
in the crypt, then walking home

on footpaths that extended
beyond description

the wandering mind catapulted out
into the early evening

certain that God's love would never give out
on us, as brittle

and enduring as an afternoon's tennis
played with Bernadette or

Mary Shanahan until
the bitter end.