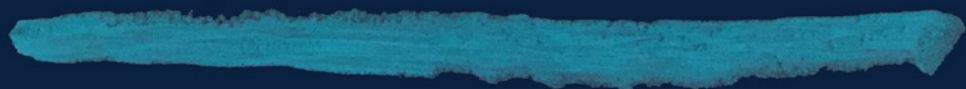


TIAN

WEDDE



With selections from 1971's Homage to Matisse all the way through to 2013's The Lifeguard, Ian Wedde's Selected Poems will introduce readers new and old to one of New Zealand's most distinguished contemporary poets.

Ian Wedde has been a major presence in New Zealand poetry since his work began appearing in journals in the late 1960s. His first book of poetry appeared in 1971; his sixth book won the New Zealand Book Award for Poetry in 1978; his sixteenth and most recent was a finalist in 2014. By the mid-1980s, as well as shaping his own verse, he had become an influential critic and shaper of larger trends in poetry as one of the co-editors of *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985) and *The Penguin Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry – Ngā Kupu Titohu o Aotearoa* (1989).

While Wedde has constantly experimented with and pushed boundaries of form and influence in his poetry, his work returns often to key themes and ideas, preoccupations and effects that this book throws into brilliant relief: a politics of language, social and ecological relationships, how memory works, the perceptual world. The son Carlos of *Earthly: Sonnets for Carlos* (1975) is now a father himself; Ian Wedde's poems are now more likely to feature grandchildren. But the ranging, tenacious, conceptual-romantic poet, with his linguistically rich but intellectually rigorous voice, is the same, and tracing that voice through nearly five decades will be one of the many pleasures readers take from this book.

—

Ian Wedde is the author of sixteen collections of poetry, seven novels, two collections of essays, a collection of short stories, a monograph on the artist Bill Culbert, several art catalogues, a memoir, and has been co-editor of two poetry anthologies. In 2010 Wedde was awarded an ONZM in the Queen's Birthday Honours, and in 2011 was made New Zealand Poet Laureate. He was awarded the Creative New Zealand Writer's Residency in Berlin in 2013–14, and in 2014 received the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement (poetry).

I PARADISO TERRESTRE

5 to start with & in memoriam Ezra Pound

1 *Madonna*

The world stretches out

time yawns

your head, lost

hours, on the pillow burns in its halo
of boredom. So what are we waiting for?
A birth, naturally.

O forgive me, this

is no light matter . . . you no she stretches
till your joints crack. You, I do not know you.

She watches little fists & knees in your
belly, I watch her watching your famous
blue tits. She yawns with your mouth,

with your voice

she tells me 'it's not long now', her halo,
lost hours, burns east of me in bed, I think
this lovely strange madonna has no choice

I think that in the end she will whelp you,
biche, it will be so good to have you back.

* * *

2 *It's time*

A beautiful evening, early summer.

I'm walking from the hospital. His head
was a bright nebula

a firmament

swimming in the vulva's lens . . . *the colour
of stars* / 'Terraces the colour of stars . . .'

I gazed through my tears.

 The gifts of the dead
crown the heads of the newborn She said
'It's time' & now I have a son time for

naming the given
 the camellia
which is casting this hoar of petals (stars?)
on the grass . . . all winter the wind kept from
the south, driving eyes & heart to shelter.
Then came morning when she said 'It's time, it's
time!' time's
 careless nebula of blossom /

* * *

3 *Paradiso terrestre*

The room fills up with smoke. Their faces are
imprecise with the imprecision of
their perfect intentions, all that loving
menagerie which the old man's left for
good & which the newborn entered in a
rage & through which he now sleeps: a profound
indifference he will lose the knack of
in spite of love or because of it more
likely . . . oh, I'd be glad if he became
a carpenter & built a house for my
old age: a *paradiso*, well . . . but earth-
ly anyway, straight planks above a plain
or seacoast, the trees & mountains known, high
familiar stars still bright in heaven's hearth.

* * *

GOOD BUSINESS

for my father 'Chick' Wedde

Toyota

In mid-March the city fills up with monarch butterflies.
The red flags of the Toyota sale yards all flap south.

In some way I find hard to describe
I know it's always been like this.

Tony's Tyre Service

Tony's Tyre Service is customer-focused. When they change my tyres
they also freshen up my car's interior. I like these guys

and their amiable TV commercial is a song-and-dance hoot.
Tony – listen to me: I can sing along. I hope you read this,

Tony, and give me a break. I'm bald
and stale and need a cheerful tune.

Metalworx Engineering

It's as though Metalworx Engineering in Vivian Street
has always been there. Always, that ancient smell

of the mineral earth smelted, beaten and twisted
into mild-steel elbows, the gothic interior

flickering with acetylene and loud with iron bashing,
its ventilators paddling sunlight in

and metal dust out. The display-window samples
of metalcraft with lumpy welds have been there

forever and especially the rusting toy crane that's always
been for sale but will never

be sold. Can't ever be sold unless there's a buyer somewhere
who understands that the forever crane's lifting

the entire weight of the future, which will end
along with Metalworx Engineering

if the crane's ever taken from its alchemical window
and expected to be half as real in another place.

Mighty Mats

'Expert advice freely given' is what's promised
by the helpful proprietors of Mighty Mats

next to Metalworx Engineering on Vivian Street, Wellington.
I've seen these guys

roll out a sample along the footpath
right across the road from the Cotton Shop

whose clientele pays big money
for unbleached fabrics direct from the sweats

of Bangladesh. 'Go on!' says the friendly salesman
at Mighty Mats. 'Pluck that tuft!' What say

we unroll a sample in the road
and I drive my car's new tyres down it? I'd like to do that,

if only to see what the competition makes of it,
over there – let's see the expert quality of *their* advice.

Wellington Scrap Metals

Okay, so they're sitting outside on the footpath
in the sun, but who can blame them after

two weeks of filthy wind, first puckering
the last of summer's tomatoes on their storm-scorched vines,

next sucking up the whole of the north's galvanic dust
and spitting it out all over town. They're sick of it,

the two guys and the woman at Wellington Scrap Metals,
so who can blame them for not keeping their promise that

'We recycle scrap metal'? There's always going to be time
for more junk, and it's the inevitability of junk

that makes time into space, the kind of space
you know will wait for you to fill it, even if

you don't want to wait, even if you
can feel your own time going utterly to waste already.

Shadow stands up

1

Shadow stands up under the
trees in Victoria Park
whose own filigree shadows lie
across matted russet leaves
on the sodden green turf that
the morning's tai chi moves
barely mar – I see this from
the Link bus window as we
cross the intersection at
the bottom of the hill where
Kathmandu's winter sale fails
to persuade me there's much to
gain from any promise of
warmth other than what I get
when, while rain rattles against
the bedroom window at dawn,
I press my ear to the smooth
skin between Donna's shoulder-
blades and hear, in the hollow
chamber where she's making dream
words, a voice that's not the
same as hers say eerily,
'Shadow stands up.' It's morning.

2

Please don't squeeze me until I'm yours
reads the greengrocer's sign
on his ripe avocados
whose enticing location
in a tilted tray on the
footpath outside his shop says,
we live in a country of
ripe words, which is why the im-

print of memory may be
all that mars the surfaces
where the outlines of trees can
seem to rise up at any
time and become the shadows
of runners circling the park
a green Link bus goes past with
me in it, thinking, 'How can
I know what memory is
going to offer me unless
I can feel it's ready to?'

3

Augmented reality

was what Donna talked about
on the way to lunch in the
food court on Ponsonby Road
but I forgot all about it
when she next told me that
the mummified body of
an Egyptian princess had
been diagnosed with a heart
condition at forty years
of age despite a presumed
diet of vegetables,
fruit, and fish, pretty much what
we eat most of the time and
believe we're doing enough
thereby to earn a decent
stretch. Memory, though, what a
shadowy mystery that is,
how it mars the surface
of the present it then stands
up in, *augmented*, a dead
presence that should have lasted.

4

*My first home, which I shared with
my twin brother David, was
our mother's womb.* This is the
first sentence of the book that's
got me thinking about what
exactly memory does
and what time it does that in,
for example, when was I
'I' when I wrote that sentence,
was I in the time of the
tardy twin hanging back in
the warm, shady womb, or was
I out here in the cold light
of day, too late now to say
wait as Dave's shadow stands up
and moves into the neither
here nor there we live in while
everything remarkable
in the world packs the foreground's
augmented reality
that never lasts long enough.

5

A green Link bus goes past with
Sorry in lights on its forehead,
windscreen wipers dashing
tears from its face, the shadows
of empty seats on fogged-up
glass, and I am, too – sorry –
I'm sorry that life's too short
and the memory of it
much shorter. *Magnificent
obsession sale now on* reads
the shop-front signage the next
unapologetic bus
passes not long afterwards

with my confused face looking
out through the wet, blurry glass,
messed up somehow, unable
to settle for sorrow or
jubilation – but then it's
over, it's gone, that moment
when I thought I'd remembered
something that reminded me
you just can't hope to do that –
remember, I mean, too late,
when it's too late to do that.

6

I get up early hoping
I'll encounter the line drawn
under *night time*, the red streak
that bisects the shadow of
dawn standing up, horizon
of dark buildings in the east
whose windows begin to flash,
the gassy aquamarine
sky pouring itself into
the gaps between high-rise glass,
laser-streaks of gulls lit by
the afterburn of early
sunrise over there where hope
appears inevitable
and unwise, but worth getting
up early enough for, to
remember why you do this.

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