

Three Poems from A Kind of Kingdom

the visit of the Dalai Lama

*for Bob*

I've no idea whether  
my uncle is a spiritual man

I only know that life  
has battered him  
as a fish is battered

and fried him  
as a fish is fried

and rubbed salt  
into all his wounds

but that when I say  
how's the world

not bad he'll say not bad  
and could be worse

just said with his mouth  
looking elsewhere

papering himself  
around with a warmth

that could steam windows

First published in *Printout* (1995). Later anthologised in *With Our Eyes Open* Ed Ruth Unger, Peb Simmons & Kathleen Gallagher, (Chrysalis ,2002) and *Contemporary Poets In Performance* ed Jack Ross & Jan Kemp (Auckland University Press 2007)

last confession of a bivalve

for Zoë

mother

I have never known such speed

the upper ether

mother

is no place for a mollusc

if I could dream

it could be that I would dream

of flashing my soon-to-be-smashed

shells

of flapping my whole life before me

of flying

but the beach

mother

the rocks

where I have breathed in

and breathed out

sucked and silently squirted

the rocks are rushing towards me  
I am about to be dashed on my home

I have never known such speed  
mother

nor such solicitous wings  
following my fall

First published in *Takahe* (1990).

### **poem of the mechanical parrot**

it is a screeching calliope  
stuffed with coloured whistles  
and staticky blasts hanging

caged in the marble mall  
among the tricky rubber plants  
and twining philodendron

alarming & then silencing  
in an instant the clattering chatter  
of Diners Club and American Express

I can just about tolerate  
this opinionated poll  
and its spurious squawking

but its cage bothers me  
the steel bars even anodised  
are a worry I mean

I mean

it's not as if  
the thing were about to flap  
its brilliant nylon wings

and swoop down the corridors  
of boutiques leaving echoes of  
iridescence in the terrazzo terraces

it's not as if  
it were about to soil the steps  
with oil stains or coloured moult  
pebbles of plastic parrot dung

it's that unrelenting reality  
of the bars & their chunks of cuttlefish  
the thoughtful provision  
of the water and millet dispensers

to this sleight of parrot this  
mockery of macaw whose  
only reality is the noise

these real bars let escape  
these things add  
their crazy verisimilitude

they're the water  
in an actor's tears

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