

Hero

Flanked by salt beef so hard
it could be carved and polished,

he sailed home from Trafalgar
like a gourmet delicacy, floating

head down in a cask of cognac,
tapping a minuet on the barrel's bottom.



McINDOE PUBLISHERS

Crik'ey
New and Selected Poems
1978-1994

CILLA McQUEEN

At last — McQueen's new and selected celebrates the best of her work from *Herring In to Berlin Diary*. Three times NZ Book Award winner, McQueen's poetry has been described as eloquent and intense, 'graced by wit and sharply observed detail' (Fiona Kidman & Albert Wendt). Together with her latest work and an introduction by Hone Tuwhare, *Crik'ey* cements Cilla McQueen's reputation as one of New Zealand's foremost and popular poets.

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A Whale Sunday

It was the day in that year when the dead American President's brother got shot with his friend singing his way down Moon River, nearby. The picture in the paper had Bobby staring out of a wet pool of concrete, eyes caught wide. Surprised in a vein of light. It was the red year. There was a hot war in the jungle where young men leaped out of green dragonflies into fields of water. Dianne went off one night to protest about them in her nightie. It was all okay, she said. It wasn't going to be an orgy but a celebration of love. A love-in. Is that the same as free love? asked our mother. The very concept of free love is so banal, said the old man, downing his gin and tonic. Meanwhile Dr Zhivago and Lara made love in the vast and hollow cold of a Russian winter house; filling the air with a sound like chimes. Smooth words floated about like up, up and away in my beautiful balloon . . . far out. Shit hot. Some women wore completely red outfits with big wide bangles and, worst of all, big red secrets hung about in the summer sun.

It was coming around to Christmas that day on the beach. There we all were, the whole fandango except Dianne watching the old man build his sphinx out of sand. He had only got as far as its outstretched paws and already it was shaping up to be huge.

'Your father's bloody mad,' said Mum as she squeezed the bathing cap with the rubber bird motif over her head and patted off down to the water's edge.

'I'll join you in a jiffy,' cooed Nora who was sitting by us but not with us. She bent over and steadied her flask of tea in the sand. Her arms were plump and covered from the elbow down with fine black hair; hands large like her milky white breasts.

'Size forty-two. Poor woman. Actually Mum can't stand Nora,' I said to my little friend Sandra.

Sandra's big eyes blushed like innocence confronted with an invitation to malice.

'Why?'