

## Two poems

### *Andrew Slattery*

#### **Lithographone**

Pop invented this thing and he called it  
the *Lithographone*— a strange contraption  
with metal rods clenching pencils  
and bolted to a metre-long pianola scroll,

he said it “turns yer music into pictures.”  
Here’s how it worked: you sharpen the pencils,  
crank the scroll, feed in a sheet of butcher’s paper  
and put on a record of cello music

(he only played strings music,  
said it gives you “a clear drawline”).  
Then he stands back, against the shed door  
and rolls a smoke. I watch the manic pencils

scrawl lines and the scroll almost tumbling  
off its hinge. I go to steady it and he says,  
“Just let it be.” And the scroll holds.  
Like a child sees a cup or a lizard in a cloud,

he watches the pencils scratch in abstract swipes,  
watching through slanted eyes and the rise  
of smoke, waiting for the glimpses of music  
that phrase up, fire a notion in his mind, then fade out,

obsolete. The patent office said it wasn't enough  
of an improvement on the gramophone to warrant  
a new patent. (Or of any use to anyone).  
But I've seen no better loyalty to presence—

he scurries in, mid-song, to reload with a new  
sheet of paper, then stands back against the shed door.  
A violin solo jolts the pencil rods, I look up and he  
stands there, eyes closed. The subtle quake

of his crimped eyelids only hint that an image  
has formed somewhere in the tiring mania  
of his enterprise; white ears pricked like receivers  
and the stringnotes etched in skitters across his face.

## The Westerly

*Black Creek, Rothbury, January 2007*

With the creek on its right, the grassfire takes left  
on the stifewind, uphill toward the vineyard and leaps

the last form of scrub before the grapelines. The june beetles  
and emperor flies pop out of the vinebrush as the first

leaves start to sing and curl. The scarecrow, with large  
toggle buttons for eyes, has endured a look of distress

that's now warranted. With flame at its' back, the wind  
neatly combs into the vines' upper canopy of guard leaves.

Rodents dart away from the lower clumps of the ripe  
grapes rich with sugar, the orange nitrogen fertiliser ignites

and shoots spats of dirt to their backs. The concord grapes,  
beta grapes and those already brown with the jacket rot,

they drop to the ground like the beaten might first discard  
a weapon (any grapes that do survive will test the critics'

adjective pool— "an admirable ribaldry; the oddest finish  
of cinder & filth; rank with green and the fusty seneca;

deliciously toasty! A wonderful accompaniment  
to smoked salmon"). The westerly holds its' duct of smother

as the last trellis line is torn bare with flame. Ruin  
is a detailed whim and the burnt climber worms drop

like leaking oil from the stemknots. And having issued its' limits  
to the ranging hearth, the land begins to cool into the afternoon.

Tonight, the quails will come out, shake their feathers about  
and look for something edible, anything.