



A Window Upon Mountains by Peter Hooper



Looking east from Mt Faraday towards the author's home covered by a sea of mist. Photo: Andy Dennis

In stillness, in quiet breathing, the dominance of the ego diminished, one can participate in the rhythms of natural being. A dewdrop flashing in the sunlight becomes a passion of jewelled energies, its extinction the death of a star. Yet as the wave of morning flows ever westward around the world, the tide of darkness daily strands fresh brilliants about our feet.

Every morning is an invitation to new pastures of the imagination.

I am fortunate that I live in a noble landscape, my windows opening upon valley farms to the blue-steeped wilderness of the eastern Paparoa ranges. Like the ocean a mountain range is never static; it flows to different rhythms, that's all.

Angles of sunlight, the passage of wind-driven cloud shadows, the veiling of peaks by coming rain, are all phases which daily reveal the moods of a mountain range. The northward retreating sun of autumn shapes ridge and valley differently from their summer contours. In the sharp clarity of dissolving mists on a winter's morning the mountains advance almost to the end of the garden. And tomorrow a nor' wester may see the same ridges turn their backs upon me as they shrug grumpily into an overcoat of cloud.

Fortunate indeed are those who can re-

lease the imagination to participate in the holistic nature of wilderness. A communion is established and the mind liberated to its wanderings in lonelier and more remote valleys than the eye had reported. To keep the mind open to this sense of wonder is to come home to a wholeness of self that matches the wholeness of unspoiled nature.

For me, this faculty of delighting in the natural world operates most powerfully during autumn, in late March and April. The conditions required are quite specific, and could be measured in terms of atmospheric pressure, temperature, humidity, the angle of the noon-day sun, wind direction and speed. There is a quality of ambience in the light that gives mystery to the landscape even under the cloudless sky. Earth pauses in its breathing, caught in memory of past summer before the onset of winter.

Wax-eyes fossick among the garden shrubs, sparrows rifle the seeding toe-toe, dusk sometimes floats the kotuku lordly above the marshes. A mountain wind on such days brings to the quiet roads and towns of the seashore the electric vitality of forested solitudes, the breath of the wilderness just beyond our backyards, the challenge of Emerson's 'alienated majesty' within ourselves.

The only equipment needed for a journey through current space and time into a natural state beyond the personal ego is a healthy pair of feet, preferably well shod. Hazlitt has some shrewd remarks *On Going A Journey*, by which he means walking:

"I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone . . . I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I want to vegetate like the country."

Even in England's tamed countryside, Hazlitt reached out to enter into the spirit of nature.

In *Water and Dreams*, the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard, sees the world delighting in experiencing itself. "The cosmos, them, is in some way clearly touched by narcissism. The world wants to see itself. The lake is a large tranquil eye."

Philosophically, one can accept that ecological holism makes possible a sharing of nature's self-enjoyment. In the growth of imaginative sympathy there is an outward spiralling that promotes participation in a natural wholeness. If Bachelard is correct and "The world wants to see itself", then, since we are part of cosmic reality, to delight in our experience of nature, is to enter into our heritage.