

Chris Corne
1942–1999



TRIBUTES TO CHRIS CORNE

William Jennings

Jim Hollyman

P.J. Lincoln

1.

As many readers will know, Chris edited *Te Reo* for over a decade. A former President of the Linguistic Society of New Zealand, and a prolific researcher, he made a huge contribution to the growth and promotion of linguistics in New Zealand. His interests lay in non-standard language varieties, from New Zealand English to New Caledonian French, from Seychelles Creole to the intertwined Michif, whose verbs come from one language, and nouns from another. This did not prevent his imposing the most rigorous academic language where necessary, as demonstrated in his very high standard of editorship of this journal.

Chris enjoyed juxtaposing different registers throughout his life. He would ask a question in the coarsest vernacular to a room of precious postmodernists, or set his senior students translation exercises full of bewildering colloquialisms. His humour is perhaps best illustrated by the earnest tone of his paper on the phonology of *l'enculé* in New Caledonian French.¹

At Auckland University in the 1960s, Chris studied French and linguistics. Jim Hollyman, a pioneer in the study of French in the Pacific, encouraged him to follow his interests in non-standard language varieties, a field beyond the pale of mainstream linguistics at the time. For his doctorate, Chris worked on Tahitian French phonology, and found that bilingual speakers had transferred features from Polynesian languages into the local variety of French. After

obtaining a lectureship in the French Department at Auckland, Chris investigated other non-standard languages, basing his research throughout his career on fieldwork. This did not prevent his building up the holdings of the Auckland University Library, which has one of the world's best collections of works on overseas varieties of French and French creoles.

A tireless correspondent, Chris overcame his relative isolation in New Zealand through numerous letters and e-mails, in which he conveyed both ideas and personality. He was in touch with everyone in the field of creole studies, and would go out of his way to help graduate students all over the world, sending them bibliographies, articles and advice. Initially an ardent opponent of computers ('I won't use 'em till they put one on my desk and make me'), he quickly realised their potential and vigorously advocated electronic publishing as a way of accelerating the dissemination of scholarship. After Chris's untimely death, many overseas colleagues who had never met him told me that because he wrote so frequently and had such a strong and distinctive 'virtual' presence, they had lost a good friend. And it is to the memory of a good friend that this special issue of *Te Reo* is dedicated.

Reference

1. Corne, Chris, 1994. 'De l'enculé à l'onkilé: autour d'un euphémisme calédonien'. *Observatoire du français dans le Pacifique: Études et documents* 8: 173-176.

William Jennings

2.

Many tributes have been paid to Chris Corne, to the high level of his scholarship, to the breadth of his interests, but so far none of his collaborators has celebrated his excellence as a co-author; yet this is one of his most significant contributions and one of its most common manifestations. His approach to collaboration was like that of some one participating in a joint venture, in which two or several authors make their own contributions to a common cause. He would welcome useful additions, develop them further, integrating them into the general argument, providing more material they had suggested to him. Reading his last book, *From French to Creole* (University of Westminster Press, 1999), is in many ways a process of going over familiar ground, because discussing problems with his colleagues was one of his most

important ways of broadening his point of view and developing his strategies of argument. His breadth is one of his major characteristics, and one which served him well, particularly in his polemical pieces, but also in his general exposition of his point of view.

His last book is a major contribution to French and Creole studies, and no one reading it could not but regret his untimely departure from our midst and more specifically from the team producing *Te Reo*.

Jim Hollyman

3.

Chris maintained attitudes that at least puzzled even his friends, but over the years I have come to agree with his wisdom. Let me recall a few reasons for you now.

As I remember, Chris first spoke to me on the phone in Auckland in 1977. Chris came across as a very polite representative of Ling Soc NZ. He apologised that although I would be giving a presentation, he would not be there, in fact would not be in town for the remainder of my brief visit. At the time, it seemed like an unnecessary conversation; indeed he later said he did not recall the call. Today, I insist there was such a call if only to admit to the desire of so many of us who knew Chris to maximise our recollections of contact with him.

When we met face to face two years later as I began my post-doctoral year in Auckland, his almost gruff manner and blue-collar costume did little to remind me of that earlier polite conversation. Over time, I gradually discerned that his posture and attire were carefully constructed – more informed by Parisian café Apache than an actual criminal background. Chris was protecting his sensitive nature with an homage to experience as a lorry driver, experience further validated by his keeping an old Peugeot on the road by salvaging parts from even older models.

One of Chris's rituals involved beer at the University Club, which has since closed its doors presumably for reasons other than the loss of Chris's custom. At the bar, we would both order Lion Red. The barman would give me a well-chilled bottle of the Auckland favourite, but he would provide Chris with a bottle that had been kept at ambient (cool) temperature. Once, we encountered a barman who didn't know the ritual. Chris gently explained that

beer was traditionally served without excessive chilling and that at slightly higher temperature it provided an even better flavour experience; additionally it was gentler on the stomach. Then, he convinced the reluctant barman that he could warm the icy bottle under the hot water tap without harm. It took some years before I came to embrace this attitude, but now I like to repeat the slogan of the famous Denver brewer Russell Scherer ‘warm and flat is where it’s at!’

Chris was a vital force in Ling Soc NZ. His gentle urgings often improved both the audience and the presentations. A case in point is my paper on dual-lingualism (Lincoln 1979). One of the flaws of that paper is that Chris’s help particularly with the final revisions was not publicly acknowledged – now belatedly ‘thanks Chris’.

Chris and I shared a love of beer. We drank with pleasure the popular beers in Auckland, but almost unknowingly longed for less industrialised brew. Towards the end of my year in Auckland, I discovered that Coopers Sparkling Ale was available. Soon Chris too fell in love.

Just after leaving NZ, I sent Chris a copy of the landmark book, *The World Guide to Beer* by Michael Jackson, a book that changed the world for beer drinkers. It inspired the Merchant du Vin in Seattle to import many of the featured beers. These interesting beers inspired home brewers, some of whom became the successful professional brewers that started the craft beer or micro brewery revolution. Chris and I were similarly affected. In September 1980, I started brewing in Honolulu with help from a Ling Soc NZ stalwart Don Bayard, who was in Honolulu on study leave. Chris had heard me speak of Don’s stout, “parish priest (all in black with a dirty collar)” that I had sampled in Dunedin. The same month on his own in Ngatea, Chris started brewing too. As many of you reading this already know, Chris was a wonderful correspondent. We exchanged recipes and beer stories for years.

Indeed, as the NZ craft beer market evolved, Chris wrote thoughtful, even expert accounts of the developments. By 1986, I had met Michael Jackson, whose birth was just weeks ahead of mine, as mine was just weeks ahead of Chris’s — 1942 was a good year. So with Chris’s permission, for several years I kept transcribing his hand written notes to pass on to Michael. In 1992, I was acknowledged in *The Simon & Schuster Pocket Guide to BEER*. Again I am embarrassed that Chris did not get his due and take this chance to say again ‘thanks Chris’, this time on behalf of Michael Jackson. At the time, Chris had some surprisingly rude words to say about the slight, but he quickly moved on.

Even more fun than his letters were his visits. Chris managed to visit us in

Honolulu several times in the two decades. He brought beers for me to try, both his own and those of the NZ craft beer market that echoed similar developments in the USA. On one memorable visit, Chris proudly opened samples of his favourite NZ craft beers. His keen palate was able to discern subtle differences particularly among the hops used. He was shocked when I undervalued the contribution of the NZ hops. There were two reasons: first he had a better palate than I; second he had not experienced the hop varieties developed in Oregon and Washington state that contributed so much to American craft brews. Then, I opened for him my favourite, Sierra Nevada Pale Ale with its abundance of Cascade hops. Chris fell in love again. He took several bottles back to New Zealand. I don't know that he shared those bottles with any NZ brewers. I do know that as of January 2002, the Shakespeare Tavern in Auckland serves a brew hoppier than any of those samples from years ago. When I asked the current brewer and others at the Shakespeare what influence Chris had on them, I got the impression that they were all hired too recently to know Chris. I do know from repeated mention of the Shakespeare in his letters that Chris had made frequent volunteer quality control visits for them since they first opened their doors. I don't remember hearing from Chris about a newer brew pub in Auckland, but I do know from my own volunteer quality control visits to Galbraith's Ales in Mount Eden Road in January of 2002, that an appropriate memorial to Chris would be to enjoy a pint hand pumped from Galbraith's cellar at a temperature, hopping level and carbonation level that would have pleased Chris no end.

References

- Jackson, Michael. 1978. *The World Guide to Beer*. New York: Ballantine Books.
Jackson, Michael. 1992. *The Simon & Schuster Pocket Guide to BEER: revised and updated third edition*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Lincoln, P. C. 1979. 'Dual-Lingualism: Passive Bilingualism in Action.' *Te Reo* 22: 65-72.

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P.C. Lincoln

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