*Words from Table One...: A compendium of creative writing irreverence edited by Charles Gent and Alex Hope (Table One, 2009)*

Said table refers to the moveable feast of hand-picked wine and lively conversation enjoyed by the largely academic-based club. The group began meeting in a Flinders University Club building but now meet at a ‘certain caffe’ at Flinders. The book itself is a compilation of poems and essays from key members of the club that has come to be associated with the term Table One. Of course, it is a daunting task to pronounce judgment on writings from such venerable academics and eminent drinkers. A misplaced sentiment on my behalf could jeopardise the liberal (small ‘l’) offers of wine extended to me whenever I sit at Table One.

Compiled and edited by Table One stalwarts, journalist Charles Gent and scientist Alex Hope, *Words from Table One...: A compendium of creative irreverence* is presented as a moving tribute to Alex Hope, who died last year. Writers can impose the qualities onto paper that they lack in the non-paper world, prompting Raymond Chandler’s note to self never to meet in person a writer that he admired. However, Hope’s writing is witty, astute, warm and humble, qualities that reflected the real man accurately. So it is pleasing to see that the personality of the man is brought to life through his Introduction and essays. In Hope’s ‘True History of the Harrex Gang’, describing the evolution of the Table One crew, Hope wonders about the contribution scientists and a mathematician could possibly make to the ‘conversation of fluent humanitarians,’ comprising ‘poets, creative writers and linguists’. Yet surely this is Hope eating humble π. For the fact is that each of the contributors to this book is a highly proficient linguist in his own way. Hope himself provides the best examples of science writing that is engaging, accessible and literary (in the best sense of the word).

Syd Harrex’s poems in this selection are wisely placed early in the book and show how formidable is Harrex’s use of words (one of Australia’s greatest living poets is not too lofty a title). A sensuousness and physicality emerge strongly from this particular assemblage of Harrex’s poetry. In a poem such as ‘O for the Parental Past’, the combination of unsentimental sentimentality and vivid physical imagery created a response in me that was more physical than emotional. In spite of (or because of) Harrex’s incredible poetry, it is an apt contrast to have towards the end of this book Rick Hosking’s humourous and cleverly-crafted retelling of Poe’s ‘The Raven’. Hosking’s version depicts a domestic dispute Syd had with his partner Jane in India. This reveals Syd as comically and endearingly human. In between these conceptual bookends are contributions from other regulars at Table One: Trevor Fennell, Graham Rowlands, Robin Storer, Humphrey Tranter, Raj Huilgol, Graham Tulloch, Brian Matthews, Michael Morley and Charles Gent. And there are unexpected finds. Charles Gent’s ‘Dispatches from Wine’s Dark Ages’ has whetted my appetite for reading a mid 20th century book on wine called *Barrel and Book*. Raj Huilgol’s article ‘Numbers and How We Love Them’ taught me about substitution codes and even provides an example of ‘The Hospet Code’. (If only Shane Warne and Mike Rann had learnt and used The Hospet Code instead of text messages.)

The shape of this compilation tells an invisible story about the connections between Science and Art, the two alleged polarities, which are often divided.
conceptually (and even physically at Flinders University by way of a lake).\textsuperscript{1} It would have been an interesting exercise to emphasise these connections even more, by having all of the contributors to this book write about one theme, such as friendship. This would have created artistic unity, but could also have highlighted the individuality of the minds and perspectives of the contributors. For example, a mathematical take on friendship could have produced an interesting essay. Dammit, my challenge for the next edition (which I hope is on the cards) is for each contributor to write about the theme of friendship.

Words from Table One... is a moving expression of friendship and loyalty. Beyond that, it is well worth the read as an enjoyable and stimulating work in its own right.

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\textsuperscript{1} The connection between humanities and science was reiterated in a recent lecture by Baroness Professor Susan Greenfield (‘A Brain For Life: the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Mind’, delivered at the Science Exchange Building, Adelaide, on 10 October 2009), in which Greenfield recognised that Euripides’ play The Bacchae had posited what neuroscientists had ‘discovered’: humans need both mindful thinking and the mindlessness involved in giving oneself up to sensations.