

Mr. Nelson

In flight from Hirohito's Samurai,
We settled in Hilton Road, Natal,

A nest for flustered wives and children,
whose fathers were left to dig trenches

For mosquitos in Bengal.
I was three and thought it fun.

Mr. Nelson, bachelor and violinist,
Gave women guns to shoot at shadows—

Zulus strolled past white bungalows,
Strumming love-songs to the moon

Slung low over the teeming veldt.
On Sundays women in printed cottons

Sipped tea from fragile cups, gossiped
About the war they neither saw nor heard.

And fired their Brownings at winking
Bulls-eyes painted on the sackcloth screens

That flipped around the Zulu longdrops.
To reassure and cushion recoils, Mr. Nelson

Held many trembling wrists, and won
As many hearts.

I watched them all between the gaps
In the verandah balustrade, hoping

They would leave to do what adults do,
While I raced about the grass

Gleaning cartridge-cases fired in a
Phony war, with armourer as enemy.

ALEX SCOBIE