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A STUDY OF  
TWO LONG POEMS  
BY C.K. STEAD

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English at Massey University.

Dell Boldt

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I.

C.K. STEAD'S POETRY AND ITS CRITICS.

Not I, some child, born in a marvellous year,  
Will learn the trick of standing upright here.

## Introduction

Poetry is at the very heart of C.K. Stead's literary work.

I would make the claim that I'm a fully paid  
up poet, but I wouldn't make the claim for  
myself in fiction.<sup>2</sup>

Stead has produced five volumes of poetry and a sixth is ready for  
publication. As well, he has written a number of highly acclaimed  
short stories and two novels.<sup>3</sup>

As he professes in "Birthday Poem", he has an awareness of his  
vocation.

October.  
No more grave poems.  
My birthday bloom  
Is royal purple.  
Royally gifted  
I become the subject.  
  
Thirty-five years and I'm out  
To butt my head again  
Against air, and bawl.  
Mother, you expelled me with  
A silver tongue  
A country in my cry  
A trenching tool  
To seed fresh furrows.  
Long, long I've crouched  
In the kitchens of art  
Over the hot stove of letters.  
Hear me now.  
Before the fingers are bone  
Hear me.<sup>4</sup>

At thirty-five it seemed urgent that he should dedicate himself to  
writing poetry; his own experiences, responses and feelings must

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1. Allen Curnow: "The Skeleton of the Great Moa in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch". Selected Poems (Penguin Books 1982), p77.
  2. Landfall 148. C.K. Stead replying to interviewer M. Harlow, p455.
  3. Stead's second novel will "it appears be published in London next year" (ibid). He has also published two books of literary criticism and a third is with a publisher.
  4. C.K. Stead: "Birthday Poem" in Crossing the Bar (Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press 1982), p35.

provide much of his "subject"<sup>5</sup> matter. Until that age, Stead's academic work had limited his output as a poet.<sup>6</sup> But what he did publish was of extraordinary merit. His poem "Pictures in a Gallery Undersea"<sup>7</sup> gained an award for the best Landfall poem in the first fifteen years of the publication of that periodical. "Birthday Poem" marks his awakening to the fact that "...writing was beginning to take second place or worse".

I had suddenly to scuttle and recover my sense of myself, which was myself as a writer; and I would say since that time the poetry has really been the centre of my intellectual life.<sup>8</sup>

In the last ten years Stead's most significant poems have been long poems. The successful technique of "Pictures in a Gallery Undersea" which "...owes everything to Pound's innovation in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley and the Cantos"<sup>9</sup> has been applied to other long poems. "Quesada" marked a development.

It was the longest poem I had written and I felt in many ways the best - that was reassuring for a poet just past 40.<sup>10</sup>

Other long poems were less satisfying to him. The imagist sequence "15 Letters from the Zebra Motel" left "...no space for sustained feelings" and lacked "density and texture".<sup>11</sup> As for his "Twenty-one Sonnets", though he claims he does not reject them, they are "...not central to what I see as my own line of development".<sup>12</sup> The long poem in "open form" is Stead's preferred genre. He is at present composing a sequence of four long poems of which only "Walking Westward" and "SCORIA" have been published.

But since these sonnets I have gone back to open form; and the title poem in Walking Westward is itself conceived of as section 1. of a longer poem.<sup>13</sup>

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5. Stead, referring to himself in 1951 wrote: "I didn't see what I see now: that I had no great subject; that the age was not 'demanding' poems of me as it had seemed for example to demand them from Ezra Pound; that consequently I had no obvious material to work on but myself..."

(C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case (Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press 1981), p264.)

6. At the age of 35, Stead received a Chair at Auckland University.

7. Landfall 50, p116.

8. Landfall 148. Stead to Harlow, p457.

9. C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p266.  
("Pictures in a Gallery Undersea" was published in 1959.)

10. *ibid*, p275.

11. *ibid*, p274.

12. Landfall 148, p45.

13. C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p277.

## I

Stead's poetry has the effect of polarizing opinions. It has received severe condemnation and high praise. One critic complained of an "...unintelligibility ... generated by the method of surprising juxtaposition".<sup>14</sup> In contrast another appreciated that "...it is left to the reader to infer from the minute particulars laid before him the pattern of meaning that the poem embodies".<sup>15</sup> Others have focused on the quality of the poetry:

I know of no other New Zealand poet (except Allen Curnow, though Stead is free of Curnow's cold edge) capable of commanding such an elegant justness of line and phrase.<sup>16</sup>

An "unfavourable review"<sup>17</sup> of "Walking Westward" was submitted by John Needham who did not perceive the ambiguity that characterises Stead's work. Stead shares with many modern writers a sense of the ambiguity in the events of his era. The problem has been with us throughout this century. Ortega y Gasset observed that:

...modern art is of an ambiguous nature which, as a matter of fact, does not surprise us; for ambiguous have been all important issues of these current years. A brief analysis of the political development in Europe would reveal the same intrinsic ambiguity.<sup>18</sup>

In "Walking Westward" almost every line conveys more than one meaning. Needham attributes to the poet "untenable beliefs and attitudes", but Stead does not often express "beliefs and attitudes". He imparts an impression of the ambiguity of this age. From the equivocal evidence that he places before us, we come to realise with Erich Heller that "Uncertainty alone is ineluctably real".<sup>19</sup>

Stead asks questions to which there is no clear answer:

- 
14. John Needham: "Sterile dichotomies" in Comment, May 1979, p34-35.
  15. Peter Simpson: Landfall 132, p369.
  16. Mike Doyle: Landfall 144, p478.
  17. Editor's description. Landfall 133, p81.
  18. Ortega y Gasset: The Dehumanization of Art (Doubleday Anchor 1948), p43.
  19. Erich Heller: The Disinherited Mind (Penguin 1961. First published 1952), p233 and 252. The statement occurs twice in the concluding chapter of a book dealing with Goethe, Nietzsche, Burckhardt, Rilke, Spengler, Kafka, Kraus.

made excuses for the Russians  
 (Suez was OUR crime)  
 or didn't know what to believe  
 but asked ourselves was totalitarianism  
 was repression  
 inherent in Socialism  
 the big question  
 ask it still and sometimes answer yes<sup>20</sup>

One of Stead's Australian friends "Izzy G German Jew", responds to history by hoisting the "black flag of irony". This response is seen by Needham to be Stead's "recommended attitude". Izzy G has known at first hand the inhumanity of the Nazis and the inefficiency of the Russians. He distances himself from the events that sent him "walking" from Germany into Siberia and is able to see their mix of comedy and pathos. A sense of irony allows him to see events in two ways at once. History is not simply a "joke"; it is also tragic. Like Izzy G, Stead distances himself from the confusing events of his lifetime.

Stead, unlike Baxter, does not define or comment upon the ambiguities he discerns. Baxter often makes it clear that the poet's opinion is crucial to the poem.

I thought of our strange lives, the grinding cycle  
 Of death and renewal come to full circle  
 And of man's heart, that blind Rosetta stone<sup>21</sup>  
 Mad as the polar moon, decipherable by none.

We are never in doubt as to Baxter's personal attitudes:- "It hurts me to watch the snaring of the unicorn".<sup>22</sup> Stead's personal opinion is difficult to identify because he may invest one and the same image with many contrary effects as in the following example:

Milhaud in a wheelchair  
 80, with dyed hair<sup>23</sup>

Milhaud displays dignity and vanity, resolution and deception. In addition, the reader compares Milhaud's flamboyant, distinctive career with his tragic image at the age of eighty.

To Needham, the "vision" of "Walking Westward" is "pernicious" and its "extreme position...unfounded". Since the poem's ambiguities have eluded him, he perceives only a "sense of emptiness", a "bleak

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20. C.K. Stead: "Walking Westward". (The Shed 1979), p34..

21. J.K. Baxter: "Rocket Show". Collected Poems (Oxford University Press 1980), p81.

22. *ibid.* "Autumn Testament 25", p553.

23. C.K. Stead: "Walking Westward", p35.

cosmic and historic framework" and a grotesquely exaggerated impression of the "discontinuity of human experience".<sup>24</sup> The lack of balance in his interpretation has led him to the conclusion that to Stead the land and the people of New Zealand are "meaningless". Needham has assumed Stead's position to be that of nihilism or a stoic despair.

Stead's response to Needham revealed only the most superficial facet of the meaning of some of the poem's early lines. Needham, since his interpretation differed from that put forward by Stead, retorted:

it may be that Professor Stead is cultivating some subtle paradox; but at present I can only regard his words as bearing out my contention that his poems exaggerate the bareness of 'Lackland'.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the poem does accrete many a "subtle paradox".

Needham does not declare a religious stance but hints that religious attitudes lie behind his response to "Walking Westward". He evades clarification by remarking that -

...this question is evidently complicated by religious issues which it would be folly to broach in a short review.<sup>26</sup>

From a traditional religious standpoint, despair is anathema. Needham's erroneous perception of an "extreme position" has led him to find that the poem offers -

too little of a general human bearing along which the reader can enter into the experience.<sup>27</sup>

Another criticism of "Walking Westward" concerned itself exclusively with the poem's form. Alan Loney considers that a modern poet should be working in a form that involves "risk...uncertainty...fascination and delight in...accidents". The use of

established forms does not seem (...) a viable way for a mature writer to take up his own speech as the 'cry of its occasion'.<sup>28</sup>

24. Comment May 1979, p35.

25. Comment September 1979, p10-11.

26. Comment May 1979, p35.

27. ibid.

28. Alan Loney: "Some Aspects of C.K. Stead's 'Walking Westwards'" (sic) in Islands 30, Oct 1980, p249.

Stead writes, according to Loney, with an "air of certainty". This "self-certainty" will -

as long as he hangs on to it, prevent him from achieving anything like truly open form.

Loney avoids offering his own definition of open form by saying:

It would be more useful to talk of "field composition" and so by-pass the 'open form/closed form' antagonism.<sup>29</sup>

Stead had no doubt that the mode in which he was working was open form.<sup>30</sup> He describes a poet using open form as one who

...wants literature to invade, to absorb life, almost to become indistinguishable from it, to collapse conceptual distinctions (...) That is one aspect of open form - an openness to experience as it occurs (...) an attempt to get nearer to the true feel of experience;<sup>31</sup>

Stead regards poetry as "not a form but a quality. Achieve the quality one might say and the form will look after itself".<sup>32</sup>

Stead's "air of certainty" may result from his belief that "the form will look after itself"; the urgent matter that has prompted the poet to write will find its own form. Each section takes the form demanded by its mood and focus.

Loney has judged the form of "Walking Westward" while ignoring its intention and the themes that find expression there. He has separated form from content. By contrast, Trevor Dobbin has observed that -

meaning and form are generated from within the poetry allowing these elements to fuse in a unique manifestation of imagination and energy.<sup>33</sup>

Michael Harlow's view is in line with Dobbin's when he suggests that "the language and shape (is) called forth by the material of the poem".<sup>34</sup>

Loney complains that Stead "values his considerable skills more

29. *ibid.* p248.

30. "... I have gone back to open form..." C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p277.

31. *ibid.* p248.

32. *ibid.*

33. Trevor Dobbin: Climate Winter 1980, p84.

34. Michael Harlow: Landfall 133, March 1980, p79.

highly than his language".<sup>35</sup> Such a remark constitutes a personal attack upon the poet, calling into question the value of Loney's criticism. Stead's language and his skill cannot be separated.

Among the reviewers who have appreciated "Walking Westward", Peter Simpson has observed the surface "lucidity and clarity of Stead's work".<sup>36</sup> Simpson and Trevor Dobbin have noted that the reader responds to "minute particulars" or "fragments of experience" by making what Dobbin describes as "imaginative leaps from specific to wider contexts". This "poetry as exploration" requires that the reader "must create his own understanding from a myriad of experiences".<sup>37</sup> The method is what Michael Harlow calls "escribing" rather than "describing"; Stead's "trusting strategy" allows texts to "declare themselves".<sup>38</sup>

Artistry lies beneath the artlessness of a seemingly random sequence of impressions. Simpson observes "a cunningly concealed art which binds the whole into an impressive and subtle unity". Dobbin considers that a tightly crafted amalgam of open form poems is linked by a series of images that "ripple through the sequence". To Harlow, Stead is a poet in the Greek sense of "a maker of texts". Images and motifs insistently reappear in his work "like a rondo motif in musical composition".

Dobbin appreciates Stead's conversational rhythms, his subtle use of spacing to indicate pauses and the unobtrusive end rhymes and internal rhymes. Stead, in Harlow's view is "listening to the character of his own speech and scoring it on the page spacially and semantically (...) The scoring on the page (...) is reflective of sense and the peculiar speech arc of the experience".

The notion that academic poetry implies a lack of 'raw' emotion is refuted by Harlow. History, literary allusions, place names may all have "an affective content". Stead's concern is with the "apprehension of the absolute condition of present things". Everything has its own resonant value.

35. Islands 30, p250.

36. Peter Simpson: "The Modernist Tradition". Landfall 132, p362-369.

37. Trevor Dobbin: Review of "Walking Westward". Climate 31,p79-85.

38. Michael Harlow: Review of "Walking Westward". Landfall 133, p73-80.

## II

By contrast "SCORIA" has been uncontroversial. It has in fact provoked very little comment. Twelve favourable lines appeared in a brief Listener review of Geographies.<sup>39</sup> Mike Doyle in his Landfall review<sup>40</sup> devoted two pages to it, and K.O. Arvidson, without explanation, omitted "SCORIA" from his commentary on Stead's recent poetry - though he offered his reaction to the other three sections of Geographies.<sup>41</sup>

Doyle discerns in "SCORIA" "overt traces of Pound's influence". Stead himself has affirmed that

Pound has influenced me strongly, and Eliot has been important too; but also the poets who have written since Pound and Eliot and who owe a lot to them have been influences as well.<sup>42</sup>

While acknowledging that Stead has been influenced by Pound, I would take issue with Doyle's assessment of what it is that Stead has gleaned from Pound.

Doyle finds that Stead's internal rhyme is "typical of Pound - via Anglo-Saxon". But internal rhyme abounds in poetry in English - "via Anglo-Saxon":

By the Isar, in the twilight  
(D.H. Lawrence) 43

Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey;  
(G.M. Hopkins) 44

I should hear him fly with the high fields  
(Dylan Thomas) 45

The barriers shining vertical and white  
(Roy Fuller) 46

- 
39. Listener, Vol 102 No. 2226, p94.
40. Mike Doyle: "The Poetics of C.K. Stead". Landfall 144, p472-474.
41. Journal of New Zealand Literature No. 1 1983, p38-42.
42. Landfall 149, p450-451.
43. D.H. Lawrence: "River Roses". The Complete Poems (Penguin 1977) p216.
44. G.M. Hopkins: "The Wreck of the Deutschland". Poems and Prose (Penguin 1953), p14.
45. Dylan Thomas: "Fern Hill". Collected Poems 1934-52 (Dent 1956) p160.
46. Roy Fuller: "The Image". The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse (Oxford 1973), p453.



order - "Empty are the ways of this land"<sup>49</sup> - and by using older forms - "Pull down thy vanity / Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail,"<sup>50</sup>

It could be that Doyle sees both Pound and Stead as encompassing verbal fields that range through culture, languages, history, memory and literature. But Pound ranges far more widely than Stead, so widely that he himself acknowledged that the Cantos lack coherence.

And I am not a demigod  
I cannot make it cohere<sup>51</sup>

I consider the allegation that "the influence of Pound is not always fully assimilated" to be unwarranted. Stead does owe a debt to Pound. But it is a different kind of debt from that alleged by Doyle. Stead claims to have learnt from Pound how to relegate the 'I' of the poet to the background, instead of placing it at the centre of the poem.<sup>52</sup> And he has also taken from Pound the method of accreting "radioactive fragments"<sup>53</sup> in order to achieve a work that has length without loss of energy and intensity. The technique of bringing unity to a long poem by means of recurring motifs is one that is not entirely successful in the Cantos, though Stead employs it effectively in "Walking Westward" and "SCORIA".

The reader of Stead's work "...does not get the sense of a single voice (...) One cannot yet say with certainty, 'This poem can only be a C.K. Stead'."<sup>54</sup> In this opinion Doyle is at variance with Harlow who finds "one of the unifying principles of "Walking Westward" to be "quality of voice - the emotional range and impact of the voice;"<sup>55</sup> Like Harlow I find that Stead does have a clearly discernible "voice". In my concluding chapter, after a study of "Walking Westward" theme by theme and "SCORIA" section by section, I shall try to define his distinctive "voice" as a poet.

49. Ezra Pound: "'Ione, Dead the Long Year'", p54. *ibid.*

50. Pound: "Canto LXXXI", p180. *ibid.*

51. Pound: "Canto CXVI", p191. *ibid.*

52. Landfall 148, p450.

53. C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p149. Stead's use of "radioactive" implies expression that causes maximum agitation or response in the reader.

54. Landfall 144, p480.

55. Landfall 133, p74.

## II.

## "WALKING WESTWARD"

## Introduction

"Walking Westward"<sup>1</sup> is a long poem composed of twenty-five separate sections. In a manner characteristic of poetry in "open form", the sections are juxtaposed. That which links one section to the next is not always obvious. Contrasts or echoes, expansion of, or variation upon a theme may relate the units not only to those adjacent but also to others widely spaced throughout the poem.

The poem gives the impression that it pursues its own course. At the same time there is containment in that each section has its own coherence. It may focus upon a philosophical problem, evoke a past experience or create an imaginary situation. It ranges among imagined places and places where Stead has lived. The first five sections for instance, involve five different settings - a western beach in New Zealand, a Mediterranean town, an imagined Paradise, Armidale (Australia), and Hobson Bay (Auckland). There is movement back and forth within the time-span of the poet's adult life. Drawn into his field of vision are world history, tradition and legend.

Memories are presented in no apparent order and without comment from the poet. The reader is left to determine what is of value or enduring and what is transitory or inimical. Though it is "composed of random memory",<sup>2</sup> the poem as a whole has coherence. It takes the form of an exploration and culminates in a discovery. It is my contention that, in the course of the poem, the poet's response to the world undergoes change from disaffection and alienation from his own land to accord and a sense of being at one with his environment.

The whole poem is unified by a structure of recurring motifs and themes. In the same way that a composer modulates a musical phrase or repeats a melody in a different key or context, the poet develops themes and repeats motifs. Contrasts and similarities emerge as the poem progresses.

Contrast is a compositional device in 'Walking Westward'. Hell on earth is opposed to heaven on earth. Man's will as a destructive

1. C.K. Stead "Walking Westward" Walking Westward (The Shed Auckland 1979) p32.
2. Stead's own words. The following statement appears on the dust-cover: "'Walking Westward', for example, is composed of random memory, but put together as music ..."

force is opposed to his spontaneity which has creative energy. Orient and occident, ancient and modern, 'here' (New Zealand) and 'there' (the rest of the world) are balanced one against the other.

## I

The concept of life as a 'westward' journey towards the setting sun is universal. Walking Westward derives its name from this concept. The book's cover bears the title in English and in characters which may be read as Chinese.<sup>3</sup> These call to mind a Chinese book of similar but not identical title. It is Hsi Yii Chi - Journey to the West or Travelling West. The significance of this book in China is comparable to the significance of the Odyssey in Europe.

Briefly, Hsi Yii Chi involves a legendary journey westward to Paradise by the pilgrim Tripitaka to secure scriptures that contain "wisdom". They may dispel the "blindness" of the people of the East whose lack of wisdom and sins are said to have plunged them "into the darkness of deepest Hell". Tripitaka's visit to Paradise is associated with his attainment of a "wisdom that knows no bounds".<sup>4</sup> In the legend, both paradise and hell are conditions not to be discovered after death, but are states of mind belonging to life.

C.K. Stead's long poem "Walking Westward" attempts to discover the nature of the "wisdom" that may be responsible for transforming a man's world into a place where life may seem rich and fulfilling. It also embraces a belief that whether life is a hell or paradise is determined by an individual state of mind. The title, written in Western and Eastern languages and alluding to Chinese legend, indicates the universal and age-old concern that the poet addresses.

Other literary works are called to mind by "Walking Westward". John Donne's poem, "Easter 1613. Riding Westward",<sup>5</sup> is also concerned with the enrichment or impoverishment of a man's life.

- 
3. The characters may also be read as Japanese. 'Walking Westward' is their accurate translation. I acknowledge the assistance of Mrs Mae Needham who translated them for their Chinese meaning and Mr Paul Knight who translated them for their Japanese meaning.
  4. Quoted words and phrases are from Dear Monkey. Abridged by Alison Waley from Arthur Waley's translation of Hsi Yii Chi (Bobbs-Merrill New York/Blackie & Sons U.K. 1973) p204-205.
  5. John Donne: "Easter 1613. Riding Westward" in The Complete English Poems (Allen Lane 1974) p329.

John Donne sees his own soul being "whirled" towards the west; distracted by "pleasures or business" man fails to hear the voice of his soul. For a man to be "whirled" towards his death suggests a grotesque distortion of his assumed dignity. In "Walking Westward", Stead's image

the smoky athletes <sup>6</sup>  
longing for rest (47)

suggests a similarly grotesque impression of humans being "whirled" through life, wearily hoping for respite. This key image<sup>7</sup> is integral to Stead's concept of hell.

The image is part of an incantation that appears in both "Walking Westward" and "SCORIA" forming a link between these first two poems in a cycle of four that C.K. Stead had planned to compose.<sup>8</sup> In "Walking Westward" the incantation is presented as the moon's urgent announcement. The moon, personified as a "cold warrior" of ancient times, is "wasted", presumably after a long hard journey. He mounts steps, crosses a "waxed floor", and "breathless" in anxiety or haste, makes his announcement "between boards". Between the boards of an ancient floor are cracks forming definite black lines that assume the appearance of a lined page. The moon's announcement is written thereon.

Moon  
    cold warrior  
wasted  
on the stone steps  
on the waxed floor  
    breathless  
between boards  
                    announcing

PARIS  
    SCORIA  
the WARS  
the smoky athletes  
longing for rest.

- 
6. Numbers refer to page number in the volume Walking Westward by C.K. Stead. (The Shed. 1979)
7. I will begin my detailed discussion of "Walking Westward" by considering the significance of his central image to which there is specific reference in three separate sections of the poem - the 19th, 20th and 21st <sup>lines</sup> ~~stanzas~~.
8. "I had a general plan to do a long poem when I wrote "Walking Westward"; and in order to indicate that it was going somewhere as well as being a poem in its own right, I wrote a section which refers forward to " SCORIA", "PARIS", "the WARS", "The Smoky Athletes." That was repeated when I came to write "SCORIA" which is the second part of that sequence". C.K. Stead replying to interviewer Michael Harlow - Landfall 148, p459.

The moon which endures from age to age delivers to the poet the promise or prophecy of four created works which may achieve a duration that is beyond the life-span of one man.

"Smoky athletes / longing for rest" is a potent motif of multiple significance. There is irony in the implication that those who strive to achieve standards of physical excellence should so often be found wreathed in destructive tobacco smoke after an event. These athletes may one day be wraith-like sufferers from lung disease or appear dried out, darkened or wizened like any "smoked" flesh. The image occurs in two separate contexts in "Walking Westward". Sportsmen in a smoke-filled Wellington pub are enclosed in a space from which their cries and shouts emanate -

their shouts echoed on the landing  
their cries reached the carpark (46)

Their separation from the natural world is emphasised by the fact that they are visible only in a mirror:

downstairs were the smoky athletes in the mirror (46)

They are reminiscent of 'shades' from the underworld.

As air is the earth's primary source of life, polluted air is associated in the poem with a hell: "the gas chambers", "smell of rotting bodies / fades into text-books",<sup>9</sup> and "the smoky athletes" who are hastening to their deaths in the air they have polluted.

In a second context, the lovers Francesca and Paola are seen to be "smoky athletes", whirling interminably in hell, "longing for rest". They are driven by an "unloving wind" -

an old wind that knows no need but its own  
unloving wind that drives the lovers in hell (47)

The lines recall the description of the wind of hell in Dante's Inferno:

The blast of hell that never rests from whirling  
Harries the spirits along the sweep of its swath  
And vexes them forever beating and hurling.<sup>10</sup>

The connection with Dante's hell is made even plainer by Stead's quotation from Book 5:

sulla marina dove il Po discende<sup>11</sup>

9. Quotations from p34 and 42.

10. Dante: The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, the Florentine. Cantica 1. Hell (l'inferno). Translated by Dorothy Sayers. (Penguin 1953) Book V, p98.

11. Ibid. The "tributary rivers / longing for rest" is Stead's translation from part of the same stanza.

Stead's juxtaposition of a storm-swept French landscape and Dante's hell is important in firmly establishing the idea that a hell can exist on earth:

woke to a strange light  
wind assaulting hillslope (46)

Stead creates a ghostly landscape which is at one and the same time the landscape of hell and that of a storm-wracked Menton in 1972. In Menton everything is driven towards death:

woke to a strange light  
wind assaulting hillslope  
running at rockface  
driving home rainspears  
paper torn from hoardings on the Moyenne Corniche  
branches down in the garden of Blasco Ibanez  
frigate anchored off  
                                  in orange turbulence  
listing.

Guessed what K.M. felt at Bandol  
death-drive  
                                  barrenness of that wind  
grains out of Africa (46-47)

Nothing is upright; all is out of alignment as it whirls away or is assaulted. Man is under attack, assailed by "rainspears". The wind tears down hoardings and branches and bears the grit of African sand.

The scene encompasses features that characterise Dante's hell. There is "no silence", and the relentless wind is "an old wind" from which there is no escape. The orange light is reminiscent of a scene lit by the interminable fires of hell.

The "smoky athletes" who are "longing for rest" epitomise a recurrent condition of man in this world - a condition to which modern man is especially susceptible. They recall the crowd flowing over London Bridge, in Eliot's "The Waste Land".

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,<sup>12</sup>  
I had not thought death had undone so many.

The crowd is described by Matthiessen as

...condemned forever to wander aimlessly, in  
feverish, useless motion.<sup>13</sup>

- 
12. T.S. Eliot: "The Waste Land". The Waste Land and other poems (Faber and Faber 1940) p29. These lines are reminiscent of Dante.
13. F.O. Matthiessen: The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (Oxford U.P. 1959) p22.

The word "athlete" comes from the Greek word "athlos" - contest. "Athletes" represent a multitude of contestants in a world that seems increasingly competitive, not only in sport, but in every field of human endeavour.

Francesca and Paola personify a concept of "smoky athletes" and represent all those who are harried by social disapproval or who are thrust into endless motion by the pressures and demands of civilisation. They represent those who are divorced from the earth and familiarity with its nature; they have exchanged clear air or "a breath from the sea" or "wind in (the) ears"<sup>14</sup> for a smoke-filled confined space. They are like those who are "riding westward" driven by "pleasures or business". And they are related to the people of the Chinese legend who have "no ray of wisdom to dispel their blindness".

## II

Stead's view of what constitutes hell and what might be conceived of as heaven belong to the thought of this century. It was Nietzsche in 1892 who wrote:

The greatest event of modern times - that "God is dead", that belief in a Christian God is no longer tenable - is beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe.<sup>15</sup>

J.P. Stern, commenting upon this pronouncement wrote:

...belief in heaven ("the Land of Back and Beyond") reduces the value of physical existence...

Having been distracted by a vague promise, we have tended to neglect this world. Stern continues:

...belief in personal immortality diminishes the seriousness of men's experience of irretrievable time by mythologising time into a spurious perpetuity called 'eternity'.<sup>16</sup>

Stead's rejection of a belief in life after death is made clear in the 11th section which tells of his mother close to death:

"Life is a gift," said my mother  
having nearly lost it  
but the old plangent note returned  
the looking away the regret (39)

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14. Quotations from p32 and p33.

15. Nietzsche: The Joyous Science, Part V p95, cited by J.P. Stern: Nietzsche (Fontana Collins 1978) p93.

16. J.P. Stern: Nietzsche, p93-4.

Stead contrasts his view of death with that of T.S. Eliot who believed in "shores" beyond death - in "Living to live in a world <sup>of time</sup> beyond me;".<sup>17</sup> For Stead, life is seen as "a gift", not as something "lent" temporarily until the real significance is attained after death. Stead borrows several phrases and images from Eliot's "Marina":

The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger -  
Given or lent?.....

I made this, I have forgotten  
And remember. ("Marina")<sup>18</sup>

Stead reverses the order of Eliot's 'forgotten / And remember'

pulse in throat sun in sky  
and every mortal thing  
remembered forgotten<sup>19</sup> ("Walking Westward" 39)

Stead perceives that age, danger, violence ends in a forgetting; death has finality:

shark inshore  
wings falling  
the 'possum's last violence  
on the floor of the cage.<sup>20</sup> (40)

These images evoke the deaths of trapped or hunted creatures.

### III

"Walking Westward" begins on a western beach in New Zealand. After years of travel, the poet has returned home to his own land, where he walks alone in clear air. The sea and sky are "pale blue with a clean white edge". The edge may refer to both the distant horizon and to the strip of sandy shore. The poet is walking on the edge of a space that could be interpreted as a void:

Out there is the world  
is nothing... (32)

The line "you have it all before you" is ironical because "out there" is "nothing"

...nothing but the sun bleeding  
cloud cerements  
ocean  
darkness enfolding. (32)

17. T.S. Eliot: 'Marina' in The Waste Land and other poems (Faber & Faber, 1940) p68.

18. Ibid. Underlining mine.

19. Underlining mine.

20. In "Walking Westward", in contrast to "SCORIA", "wings falling" refers primarily to birds killed on the wing such as ducks or pheasants.

There is a sense here of what Erich Heller describes as:

the utter exposure and defencelessness of the  
frontiers of human experience against the  
neighbouring void, that area which was once  
established as the divine home of souls and is  
now the unassailable fortress of the nihil...<sup>21</sup>

The person on the western beach is the embodiment of a feeling experienced by the poet. The view of a vast desolate ocean reflects an inner state. The immediate cause becomes clear later in the poem when it is found that he has returned to New Zealand after living in Australia, England and France. He has visited the cultural centres of Europe. And after air travel, he:

came ashore  
who had walked already above cloud floor  
had looked up from his book and down 7 miles  
to arctic ice  
had seen off San Remo  
sea floor's mosaic<sup>(44)</sup>

The traveller who has come "ashore" to New Zealand is suddenly conscious of his mortal condition; at the sea's edge, the sun's death is described through images of human death - "bleeding" and "cerements". What is at one level "merely descriptive"<sup>22</sup> of sunset and red clouds is on another level an intimation of the poet's own death. In the stillness, the hiatus following intense activity abroad, a man becomes aware of the precariousness and brevity of his life. Man's time on earth is limited. Stead's response is an urgent reappraisal and reconstruction of his vision of the world in which he lives.

New Zealand may be regarded as a "Paradise". The poet observes that "in Paradise there are no legends". The line is equivocal. Compared with the cultural centres of the world, compared with places that are rich in history, New Zealand ("Lackland") is lacking in tradition and its store of legends is small. On the other hand a paradise, since it is idyllic, has no need of legends. But the

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21. Erich Heller: The Disinherited Mind (Penguin 1961) p144.

22. These are Stead's words from a letter to Comment, in reply to John Needham's review of "Walking Westward", in which Stead is criticised for suggesting that "the phenomenon" of the sun's "bleeding" was "out there". Stead protested that - "'out there' was out to sea, at sundown. The sun 'bleeding' ...is merely descriptive. It is the death of the day, the sun is blood-coloured, the clouds are like cerements etc." Comment. Sep. 1979, p11.

western beach falls short of the idyllic. Angels who might create heavenly harmonies are absent:

the drowned angels are silent  
as the millennial stars. (32)

Angels belong to a mode of belief that Stead rejects. The stars, makers of music in Dante's Paradise are silent here; such music does not belong to the mythology of this land.

The poet at the poem's opening doubts his own ability to make "legends" in New Zealand. The void is within as well as without. On the one hand the words - "the surf is blind as Homer and forgetful" - reflect a state of mind in which inner vision and creativity seem to be absent. Although the sea often stimulates the imagination, it 'forgets' to nourish the poet; in its blindness it fails to recognise him. There is self-irony in these lines, suggesting that the poet is blind to truths beneath the surface or within himself.

On the other hand, the empty "outreach" may be regarded as an open vista, its clean air alive with possibilities. Neither blindness nor forgetfulness impeded Homer; he turned his eyes within. Implied is Stead's potential to respond to the sea's creative energy and his potential to re-discover his own creative resources.

Paradise is a condition of mind, dependent in part upon a man's relationship to, and attitude towards, the land that is his home.<sup>23</sup>

23. William Carlos Williams is a poet who found richness and meaning in his own land, through his ability to reconcile imaginatively the discordant elements of his life. Stead's opening -
- rabbits among lupins  
a dog in the distance  
no human shape. (32)

- may be compared to the 'Preface' to Paterson:

Sniffing the trees  
just another dog  
among a lot of dogs. What  
else is there? And to do?  
The rest have run out  
after the rabbits. W.C. Williams Paterson (The New  
Classics 1946) .p11.

The dogs in William Carlos Williams' poem are writers like Pound and Eliot who have 'run out' in search of a richer environment. We discover later in "Walking Westward" that Shadbolt, Ireland and Frame were in London in the 1950s - Kevin Ireland "sadly sketching", Maurice Shadbolt "worrying about his lungs" and Janet Frame in a mental hospital. These images confirm the difficulties that attend continuing separation from one's homeland. What is needed perhaps is that Stead's "dog in the distance" should turn his attention to the nearby "rabbits among lupins" to find succulent meat that others have journeyed elsewhere to find. For Stead, one facet of the rebuilding of his world will involve finding a way to relate to his own land.



Despite its ambiguity, the opening section evokes a mood of melancholy through the sombre tone of the sequence of words upon which emphasis falls: "downing" "nothing" "bleeding" "cerements" "darkness" "hook" "guts" "Lackland" "blind" "forgetful" "drowned" "silent". The poem opens with gloom and disaffection, but implies the possibility that this mood may be transformed into its own opposite.

## IV

The poet's immediate response to the discovery that he is walking on the edge of a void is to create, through memory and imagination, a place that is rich in culture and history. The poem's focus moves from "here" (New Zealand) to "there", a French town on the Mediterranean coast, across the sea from San Remo. The town has a "stone stairway / to the square of the churches"<sup>27</sup> which is lit by oil lamps. This antiquated form of lighting suggests past eras unaffected by technology. The place has the timeless quality of the omphalos where truths of life may be revealed.

"Sunt manes" (They are the ghosts.) is expressed in the language of antiquity. "Ghosts" "shadows" and the "shades" of the classical mythological past populate the town as echoes of ancient civilisations. Of the original meaning of events, only "shades of shades" remain in histories and legends. Also the town may be interpreted as the poet's own past which exists as shadows and shades in his memory, waiting to be brought into the light.

Everything is in readiness. The ritual of preparing tables has been performed:

on the waterfront tables are laid  
for supper at midnight  
white cloths red napkins (33)

It is as if the poet summoned shadows from the past to assemble there in a symposium.

There is a "light salt breath" from the sea breathing life into the scene.

the oil flares flap on the stone stairway  
the music answers the music of the stars (33)

The "answer" to the "silence of the stars" is the creation of the music of this poem. The stairway gives entry into the poet's memory

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27. "Walking Westward" p32.

and imagination. Memories and reflections will move through the inner gallery of the poet's mind. Such a gallery is referred to in Stead's "Quesada" where:

Pictures in a gallery of his brain  
Were turned facing the wall.<sup>28</sup>

In "Quesada" the past is shut out, but in "Walking Westward" the past is recreated for appraisal from different perspectives.

v

Three kinds of time permit contrasting perspectives in "Walking Westward" - cosmic or cyclic time, existential time, and historical or objective time.

Cosmic time is the concept of time as

a vast cosmic flood of cyclic movements and  
sudden precipitations, in which man has his  
part to play like other animals.<sup>29</sup>

This includes the cycle of day and night, the cycle of the seasons, the vast cyclic movements from one ice age to the next and the rhythmical movement of the stars. The images that conclude the first two sections allude to this time scheme; "the millennial stars" and "the silence of the stars", though perceived from 'here' and 'there', belong to the same cosmic time scheme.

The moon making a "universal statement" in the 5th section is the reminder that man is minute in a cosmic time scheme; months, centuries, aeons have come and gone beneath the moon's dispassionate gaze. From its vast time and space perspectives, it seems to mock much that we take seriously, from the spilling of blood to "our most inventive coupling". And yet, ironically, the words,

the moon  
this moon  
this very moon and no other  
moon of 15.2.76 making over Hobson Bay  
its universal statement (34-35)

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28. C.K. Stead: "Quesada". Quesada (The Shed : Auckland 1975) p24. The lines from "Quesada" echo and alter slightly the lines from "Pictures in a Gallery Undersea", published in 1959:

Pictures in a gallery undersea  
Were turned facing the wall, and the corridors were  
endless;

The quotation from this poem and from "Quesada" are similar in significance.

29. George Santayana as cited by John Henry Raleigh: Time, Place, and Idea (Southern Illinois Press 1968) p43.

remind us that every moment in which the moon may be seen in a particular relationship, to "garage and pongas" for instance, is unique. And the moon is at the same time making another "statement" within the context of the "universe". To discover the many significances of the "universal statement" requires changing perspectives.

Subjective, individual perception of time (existential time) allows the poet to reflect upon a present situation in section 1., and to conclude at a later stage of the present in section 25. Along the way he has gathered memories from the past. But he returns at will to the present moment of writing in the course of the poem as in the following example:

into this day that's full of sunshine and cicadas  
and sparrowtalk  
 an aching back and a halting typewriter  
 the breath of wind just now that drove a cloud across

A seemingly spontaneous flow of memory, interspersed by awareness of the present, is possible if time is perceived according to the poet's flow of consciousness.

Memory of the past brings with it the dimension of objective or historical time, allowing the past of countries, communities and individuals to be seen in a linear progression. Dates and times from Stead's own past are like landmarks.<sup>30</sup> They fix details from his personal history and resurrect events from oblivion. Events are not recalled chronologically. An impression is given of "random memory", but in fact sections are placed together so as to effect a contrast in perspective or in mood or in setting.

Stead, like Eliot, is able to convey a fusion of existential and historical time:<sup>31</sup>

this night began before Christ  
 the oil flares flap on the stone stairway

In the present moment of memory, Stead is aware of the generations that have used the same enduring stone stairway. Any one event may thus be seen from a personal viewpoint or in an historical, objective context.

30. Events are recalled in the following order: " '56 Armidale Australia; Takapuna 1970 the Mon Desiré Hotel; '72 saw him in a box at the Nice Opera House; at the Auckland Art Gallery; Balmoral Intermediate / 1945; Sydney.../'56; my 26th birthday the first dog in orbit; Rongotai / 7 pm; '58.../...Picadilly Circus; with Ainsley under the willows / 1949."

31. e.g. "History is now and England". "Little Gidding", section V, 1.237.

Events are often interpreted subjectively - according to our memory and the way things affect "us" personally.

with a sense of History bearing a million half-remembered precedents  
fine compositions plausible fictions horrible accidents  
flowing into us<sup>32</sup>  
(34)

But a "lived" sense of history is not entirely to be trusted. Any sequence of events would seem different if viewed as part of the history of a race or empire. The Suez Crisis might be seen as another blow to the British Empire. Its significance to Egypt or to France would offer a different perspective again. To switch from one perspective to another is to eliminate certainties.

Sections are juxtaposed in such a way as to offer perspectives against which the aspirations of men can be seen in different contexts. Baron Philippe de Rothschild is a "vintner financier intellectuel". In his arrogance, he deems the wine fit only for the cook and chooses to condemn the whole Arab race: "such uninteresting people". Two years later the poet sees him

...in a box at the Nice Opera House  
with Milhaud and the Begum Agha Khan  
Milhaud in a wheelchair  
80, with dyed hair. (35)

Though it is not stated, it is clear that despite the Baron's wealth, Milhaud's success, the Begum Agha Khan's status, death would see these three "in a box" of a different kind before long. The brevity of man's life span is given emphasis by the fact that section 5 ("the moon / this moon") is followed by the exploits of de Rothschild in section 6. "the moon / this moon" prepares the reader for the perspective required to reflect upon the irony of the Baron's arrogance, the irony of Milhaud's efforts to stay the ravages of time and the irony of the contrast between the two boxes. Against the perspective of cosmic time the pride and the vanity of men appear ridiculous.

Later sections extend our awareness of time in relation to effort and action. The 12th section begins with an image of "Penelope" who tries to delay the progress of time by unpicking her work like the legendary lady of the same name.

Penelope has a flat in Wollstonecraft  
sits unpicking her knitting (4)

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32. My underlining to make the connection between us of the quotation and the "us" of the previous sentence.

This is a compact and complex image of a person who is shut tightly into her own world while attempting to avoid involvement with the continuous rhythm of life. Three subsequent sets of impressions show alternative responses to the passage of time.

The possessions at Beecroft are quantified:

and at Beecroft there's the big house with 3 cars  
and 3 horses and 2 score of gum trees  
kookaburras before sunrise  
2 nice girls and a recordplayer and a barbecue and  
a cat and a dog  
(40)

The last line is a very long one to indicate that it represents many more similar items. At Beecroft, it seems that nothing is savoured for its intrinsic, individual quality.

The excitement of overseas travel and the enticement of a reduced fare are conveyed in the next sequence:

and that flat of Bruce-and-Brenda's  
somewhere near Gladesville  
or Kings Cross where I know nobody  
\$175 at the old rate  
Epic Fare  
marble fins cutting a velvet sky  
(40)

There is self-irony in the words "Epic Fare" suggesting a poet's high hopes that the "Fare" - the sum of experiences that he will "consume" - may provide material for an "Epic". "Marble" and "velvet" give a sense of the glamour attached to this first overseas travel. But the journey takes the poet to places that are merely names and people who are mere acquaintances.

The image of the Sydney Opera House is then brought into view. It was, in '56, "every good Ocker's mad laugh.../ and now it's the world's most beautiful building". Here again are two ways of seeing one object. The lines also carry the implication that the next stage may be disuse or ruin, for buildings are not satisfactory bulwarks against the rush of time. This notion is underscored later in the poem by images of post-war England:

Broken teeth of Europe slow to repair  
cats and broom flowers among the masonry (47-48)

and:

the Downs  
Centre rebuilt from the ruins of '45  
St Mary Redcliffe spire  
dockside survivor<sup>33</sup> (43)

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33. These images of destruction are also images of renewal of life, offering yet another example of Stead's ability to see things in two ways simultaneously.

The survival of a building cannot be taken for granted.

The four sets of impressions precede an observation calling into question the acquisition of goods in bulk (as at Beecroft), the drifting among overseas acquaintances (as in Sydney) and the building of huge structures (Sydney Opera House):

you know time's passing  
you feel  
 past and present in the passing  
 a hum as of that generator working through the night (40)

Life is a series of beginnings and conclusions, arrivals and departures, all of which mark the passing of time:

tall lights shining on grass and gumtrees  
 a car starting  
somebody calling goodbye. (41)

Opinions and interpretations are not offered by the poet. He simply places his contrasting images alongside one another. Just as we reflect upon our own free-flowing memories so do we connect and contemplate the impressions offered by the poet.

Otto, one of a group of friends from Armidale, is the central figure in the 15th section. Like "Penelope" he tries to delay time's progress, but in a different situation. He farewells the Steads at Armidale's railway station and then travels by car to Sydney to greet them. In this way he suspends their departure. But the "calling goodbye" which marks "time's passing" cannot be avoided. Otto's farewell must soon be repeated.

The "Penelope" section is followed by a piece containing two anecdotes. Chaliapin tries to ignore his age in his effort to win a younger woman. This situation is followed by another that parallels it. Forrest Scott, "after midnight", asks "Iris Murdoch to dance".<sup>34</sup> The two incidents suggest that vanity of this kind is commonplace. The overtures are laughable but at the same time express a poignant optimism.

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34. Chaliapin and Iris Murdoch are widely known. But the reader feels he should also know Forrest Scott - who is in fact a colleague of Stead's and not comparable with the other two. It is not immediately apparent that the precise identity of Forrest Scott does not matter in this context. One suspects, though, that in addition to the significance I have offered, there may be some joke that may be enjoyed by those who know him. As J.D. Needham observed (*Comment*, May '79, p35), 'there is... a feeling of coterie rather than community'.



land, drawn by the "hook of Maui". He is drawn there by the "slow reel" of time which is both the dance of life ("reel") and an inevitable progress towards life's conclusion.

1949

slow reel  
fishermen casting in gold (49)

Memories of New Zealand are "cast in gold". They are enduring and highly valued. The extended contemplation of man's effort and action in time helps the poet to accept his own progress "westward" through life and to accept rather than resist a movement back to his homeland.

## VI

The opening of the poem unfolds an ambiguous and complex mood of disaffection. Before it can be dispelled, anxieties must be confronted and given expression. To the symposium prepared for in the second section, Stead brings remembered events from the past including historic events in 1958, education in New Zealand since World War II, and the "corruption of thought" that allowed the death in war of "20 thousand / 6 million / 50 million".<sup>37</sup> For Stead is a social critic. He questions the values that dominate the decision-making of those under whose power we must live.

Stead begins his social criticism with the story of "Izzy G German Jew" who

had been at Hitler rallies  
had felt in his own throat the euphoria  
that would drive his race to the gas chambers  
walked into Russia sat out the war in Siberia  
remembered communist efficiency as shops in one village  
full of boots with no laces  
and in another laces but no boots (34)

A political decision compels Izzy to flee Germany. A political decision of another kind produces mismanagement of retailing in Russia. Political acts of will disregard the feelings and needs of the individuals affected by them.

Izzy, the poet and their friends make the ironic suggestion that Marx<sup>38</sup> - "along with the capitalist pig-shit theoreticians" -

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37. "Walking Westward", p42.

38. The words, "That other Marx brother" associate the political thinker with the comedian, implying that Karl Marx cannot be taken entirely seriously; his philosophical solutions have never been translated into practice. See NOTE 41, p33.

should be set adrift in a small boat presumably to be washed up on a remote shore. There they must translate their theory into practice.

to argue about the means  
and how to share the bread and water  
and who catches the fish and who drinks the seagull's blood  
(and "who navigates us towards what unknown" etc.)<sup>39</sup>  
(34)

Stead parodies the politician who characteristically regards himself and his task with seriousness. The 'shipmates' must determine how to share out limited supplies and unpalatable sustenance; they must decide who should be assigned to the various tasks essential for survival. The lines are rich in religious symbolism, the meaning of which is equivocal. The echo of Christ's miracle with loaves and fishes could be interpreted as an ironical comment upon the tendency of politicians to vainly hope that they will achieve miracles. On the other hand the tendency of all groups to establish their own hierarchies and religious rituals ("seagull's blood") is implied. Basic questions of leadership and direction need to be resolved along with the fundamental question of whether God or man is the navigator. It is necessary for the theoreticians and politicians to face the problems that are basic in any community in order to narrow the gap between theory and practice.

An "aching back a halting typewriter" are the result of the complexity of the remembered situations. By contrast the poet notes "a breath of wind" which in its tangible presence is refreshing.

Despite the humour in the image of the "small boat" and "that other Marx brother", it becomes clear that the decisions of politicians are for the poet a matter of extreme concern. The effect of their acts of will is explored further in the 10th section. An attempt is made to discover reasons for "corruption of action" which results, in Stead's view, from "corruption of thought".

Section 10 questions the merit of an education system designed to teach not individuals but "tens" "scores" "hundreds" of children. There is a crowd dressed all alike - "little boys in black". They are made uniform "in black" and constrained by a Language Study Prescription in diagram form which robs the words of

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39. This quotation is from Curnow's "Landfall in Unknown Seas" Collected Poems, p138. In that poem Curnow urges humility in our attempts to forge a future. The idea is derived from a European folk tale - The Ship of Fools. Thus the arrogance of politicians and theoreticians is subtly alluded to.



corruption of action because corruption of thought 41  
 corruption of thought because corruption of language  
 (39)

When language can no longer be trusted, the meaning and the truth of all we hear and read becomes uncertain. "One must doubt everything" was a "favourite maxim"<sup>42</sup> of Karl Marx.

There is an obvious connection between "corruption of thought" and "confusion of thought". The confusion begins at school: "confusion of thought enshrined in diagrams from the government printer". The associations that the passage sets in motion provoke the questions: Are we personally responsible for past and future wars? Are the people of this country responsible for what happens in the name of freedom, and education? Stead points to the relationship between such questions and the "20 thousand / 6 million / 50 million".

Three concluding images bring about a change of focus which places the impressions of the section in a wider context.

a white butterfly drifts across the tomatoes  
 a bell rings  
 50 million.

(39)

The tranquil and fragile image of the butterfly is destroyed by the two brief ensuing lines. At any second there may be a sound signalling the end of peace or of life. Life is fragile.

As with every other image in "Walking Westward", the white butterfly is equivocal. It lays thousands of eggs producing grubs that destroy vegetables. This offers the implication that ideally freedom cannot be unlimited. The butterfly that "drifts across the tomatoes" moves freely on the air responding to its currents and sustaining a contrast between the bright natural world and the little boys in black. The tangible butterfly is also in contrast to the abstraction - "50 million". Stead remarked in his essay entitled "A Poet's View":

Poetry is limited to what the human imagination  
 can assimilate. It can't deal with 50 million  
 deaths...<sup>43</sup>

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41. In observing that Stead shares some of Marx's attitudes I am not aligning either Stead or Marx with Russian Communism. Fromm observes: "...the Russian Communists appropriated Marx's theory and tried to convince the world that their practice and theory follow his ideals. Although the opposite is true, the West accepted their propagandistic claims..." *ibid* p6.
42. Erich Fromm: Marx's Concept of Man, p82.
43. C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case (Auckland/Oxford University Press 1981) p260.

This number and all the other statistical information in the poem provide examples of the failure of language.

The butterfly has a further significance in that it can be equated with the soul - which is susceptible to damage as is the butterfly.<sup>44</sup> The souls of the children in black seem to be constrained; it is as if "stones" weigh down their spontaneity and imagination.

The bell that rings recalls the death knell of the millions of war dead, it recalls the bell that announced the war's end, and it anticipates the dying mother of the next section. It also signals the steady movement of time - the Sunday of another week, or the beginning and end of another school day. By implication, it seems that the will of successive politicians has caused our system of education to remain essentially the same since World War II. By giving expression to the need to consider critically this country's education policies and use of language, Stead, the social critic, is acknowledging his commitment to the well-being of New Zealand.

The 14th section is a history lesson. Atrocities have resulted from corruption of the will. Two paradoxes create tension and a cutting edge at the opening of the section. The poet presents a "fresh-faced CIA man" who "ate well slept well" in spite of the fact that he "thought" -

Phoenix had been wrong  
because half the 20 thousand murdered  
were "innocent" - meaning not VC<sup>(41)</sup>

A second paradox is implicit in the suggestion that "innocent" people are dead while the guilty leaders - Dr Goebbels, Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, "holyoake"<sup>45</sup> - are "free to walk about" or to die in their own beds. All of the victims have been deemed guilty by those who mete out punishment by death. Innocence and guilt become meaningless. Marx envisaged an ideal wherein men are "simultaneously the authors and actors of their own history".<sup>46</sup> Instead many men are helpless pawns who are unjustly attributed with "innocence" or "guilt"

44. Stead likens the soul to the butterfly in an earlier poem - "Like".

Away, white against blue  
Like a freed soul  
The butterfly dances or spins  
Out of control. (Crossing the Bar, p36)

45. Holyoake's lesser importance by comparison with the others mentioned is signified by the small "h".

46. Erich Fromm: Marx's Concept of Man, pl3.

not because of their actions but because of their race. Stead  
scorns the injustice of such a system:

(imagine Dr Goebells<sup>47</sup> saying  
the programme for the Final Solution  
had been wrong  
because half the 6 million weren't Jews)  
(41)

The reaction to the paradoxes is contained in four bitter lines  
of discourse. In their lack of subtlety they form a contrast within  
the section and within the poem as a whole. They have a leaden  
quality that suggests anger and dejection.

the mean masters of destruction  
the mealy mouths that abet them  
they don't figure among the unemployed  
there's work for them always

(41-2)

The implication conveyed in the 4th section that politicians pay  
little heed to the plight of the individual recurs at the conclusion  
of the 14th section. "The mean masters of destruction" become  
detached manipulators of numbers. Catastrophes are minimised when  
deaths are reduced to statistics.<sup>48</sup>

smell of rotting bodies  
fades into text-books  
resolves into numbers  
20 thousand  
6 million  
50 million  
and half of them were "innocent"

(42)

## VII

In contrast to matters of politics, intense personal relationships  
are lifted from the past. The friends at Armidale offer an example of  
spontaneity, warmth and good fellowship. It seems that the group has  
shared many suppers and many discussions, voicing serious concerns or

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47. sic.

48. This is for Stead not an isolated protest. A sense of outrage  
against "The mean masters of destruction" appears in his novel  
Smith's Dream and in other poetry such as "A Small Registry of  
Births and Deaths":

Lyndon  
If ever a missile  
Blows one of your Birds to bits  
Don't hate it, Lyndon -  
It was only misguided.  
It wanted to make her free.

(Crossing the Bar, pl8)

entertaining one another. Tales of intimate triumphs and disappointments have been exchanged.

Andre the Pole who taught us about wines and donkey sausage  
 Otto from Vienna who made a magnificent cake...  
 Al from California who couldn't have an orgasm  
 and Aussie M who had so many  
     you could have made a fine paté of her liver -  
(33)

The "liver" pun has a Shakespearean overtone implying sexual excitement.<sup>49</sup> Like any joke of its kind, it is grotesque out of context, but witty and good-humoured as part of an evening's shared wine, food and laughter.

A dramatic sequence is achieved by characterising people through their actions. A delight in the variety of personalities gives the impression that individuals are valued:

and Izzy G    German Jew  
           frying chicken dumplings in deep oil  
           sawing dangerously at the wheel (one of the first Holdens)  
           because he insisted on turning to look at his passengers while  
   he talked  
(33)

"Otto from Vienna" reappears in the 15th section. Having farewelled the Steads at Armidale, he drives "350 miles"<sup>50</sup> to meet them at Central Station, Sydney. This spontaneous and whole-hearted expression of affection forms an effective contrast to cold acts of will that the poem enumerates.

An unsuccessful attempt to repress feeling is the subject of the 18th section. An effort is made to diminish the pain of a broken relationship by reducing it to a mathematical problem and objectifying it in a Venn diagram. With a sense of irony the poet attempts to follow the example of the politicians; by an act of will he turns a personal tragedy into a statistical exercise:

as for example that a survey of 19 love affairs showed  
           17 were over  
           7 were forgotten  
           and 13 irrelevant  
           but only 2 were all three  
           9 were over and irrelevant but not forgotten  
           5 were over and forgotten but not irrelevant  
  
           how many that were over were neither irrelevant nor  
   forgotten?  
(44-5)

- 
49. Eg. Henry IV Part II. Falstaff: 'The second property of your excellent sherris is the warming of the blood; which before, cold and settled, left the liver white and pale...; but the sherris warms it, and makes it course from the inwards to the parts extremes... So that skill in the weapon is nothing without sack for that sets it a-work'. (Act IV Scene 3.)
50. "Walking Westward," p42.

The answer to the problem is "one only" - one love affair which has left one isolated individual. Stead shows that one man's suffering cannot be diminished or eliminated through statistical manoeuvres.

Feeling is expressed at the conclusion of the section, showing the mathematical exercise to be a mere subterfuge:

he had explored with her  
the caves of generation and the terraces of the stars<sup>51</sup>  
(45)

These lines are written in the evocative "language of another dimension". It is the language of imagination and feeling. At the same time, "caves of generation" has a certain startling accuracy in that it refers to the womb. The line is not just an exaggeration implying exploration to metaphorical heights and depths.

In suggesting that the Venn diagram has "a cold beauty / like the beauty of a fiction", Stead is implying that a diagrammatic representation of emotion offers a denial of the truth. Such deception requires an effort of the will.

In the 8th section, the effects of love and imagination are contrasted with the fruits of "the will". The shapes of art and nature are appreciated while mathematical shapes are assigned to a different category.

Art has nothing to do with perfect circles  
                                  squares   parallelograms  
they belong to the will  
even the best of moons is hand-sketched  
                                  effulgence-blurred  
but a rough triangle  
                                  that's different  
the Nile Delta for example  
or what Antony saw first and last in Cleopatra  
a blunt arrow-head of crisp hair  
                                  pointing the way  
(37)

The image of a "circle" occurs in the opening and the concluding lines of the section.

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51. There is a printing error in Walking Westward, pointed out to me by the poet. The line beginning - "to caves of generation..." - should read - "the caves of generation..." (45)



exact quotation from Antony and Cleopatra suggests the death of the self in the timeless moment of fulfillment. A long line like a sigh follows: "and all the perfumes of Arabia couldn't rival what the lady made there".

Stead makes complex use of the phrase - "all the perfumes of Arabia". In Macbeth it suggests the magnitude of Lady Macbeth's crime. In "Walking Westward" the perfumes suggest not only wondrous aromas but carry an exotic, perhaps aphrodisiac quality. They have the effect of enhancing the attractiveness of Cleopatra. The Macbeth echo prepares the way for a switch from Cleopatra to Lady Macbeth; the "lady" refers to them both. Nothing could rival the murderous activities that follow the exercise of Lady Macbeth's will.

She demands murder from Macbeth as a confirmation of his manhood, almost as an act of love.<sup>55</sup>

"Infirm of purpose!" carries the implication of sexual impotence. So does Macbeth's reluctance to wield a dagger. The spontaneity and passion of Antony and Cleopatra's union is contrasted with the destructive union of Lady Macbeth and her husband, a relationship ruined by "the will" enkindled by ambition.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, familiar characters at two extremes, demonstrate the destructive potential of the rational will as opposed to the enrichment of life and intensity of experience offered by art and love. The rational will can produce ruthlessness and disregard for nature contributing to a perception of earth as hell. On the other hand, spontaneity and imagination, since they are associated with valued relationships, fine works of art and appreciation of nature, may contribute to a perception of heaven on earth.<sup>57</sup>

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55. Jan Kott: Shakespeare Our Contemporary (Methuen 1964), p93.

56. Macbeth Act II, Scene 2, line 52.

57. Stead himself has shown that this particular antithesis is a familiar one in literature. He has observed that a theme in Curnow's poetry is "a conflict between Imagination, which comprehends, encompasses, and reconciles, and the Rational Will which creates or destroys blindly... The attempt to realize something better, more inclusive, than a 'rational' order ... has been a central preoccupation of the finest English poetry since Blake, Coleridge, and Keats. And if modern criticism has been prone to postulate a Golden Age when no such separation of the human faculties existed, we may simply observe that precisely such a separation is expressed in Antony and Cleopatra, in the antithesis between rational Rome and instinctive Alexandria".  
C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p191-2.

## VIII

Stead's social criticism includes reflection upon city life. Bristol and London offer stimulating environments, nurturing individual imagination and fostering the arts. Wellington forms a direct contrast to the two English cities.

In the 16th section Stead presents a series of separate impressions of Bristol and London: failure to buy a "signed Yeats at George's", the city of Bristol after snow, Kay at the Bristol Steam Navigation Company, the acting expertise of O'Toole and McGooghan in London. The excitement and cultural richness of the two cities is high-lighted through being juxtaposed against a single act of will - that of sending a dog into orbit for experimental purposes.

my 26th birthday the first dog in orbit  
 Laika  
     she died there  
 could make nothing of that  
 but the silence followed us to London  
(43)

When the focus turns from Bristol to London the poet allows four lines to clarify the transition:

but the silence followed us to London  
 Clifton/Hammersmith  
     same bridgemaker  
 (only connect)<sup>58</sup>  
(43)

In Stead's work a single line strategically placed may qualify the preceding or following lines or impressions; "(only connect)" functions in this way. This flexibility increases the significance of few words.

News of the dog in orbit becomes significant if we "(only connect)"<sup>59</sup> it with other impressions in the section. The Laika project can be contrasted with the value of works of imagination exemplified by the dramas in which O'Toole and McGooghan perform so impressively.

58. The most obvious connection is that Clifton Bridge in Bristol and Hammersmith Bridge in London were designed by the same remarkable engineer - Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

59. "Only connect..." appears in Howards End by E.M. Forster as a caption opposite the title page. In this novel a major theme is the attempt to "connect" (in the sense of marrying or reconciling) two extremes - culture and commerce. Stead invites his reader to compare this theme with his own attempt to reconcile cultural experiences with an inhumane act of will.



seem lifeless: "green branches fainted across the tombstone houses". There is evidence everywhere of the modern convenience - electricity - but there is no sign of civilised human life.

the air is electric  
the whole town is charged with an absence  
it enters no plea

(46)

There is a sterility and a loneliness - "5 beds to choose from / all of them empty". Ironically, the only 'life' is found in the smoke-filled bar that has the appearance of one of the smoke-filled levels of Dante's purgatory. Stead defines the situation as he sees it. In this way he offers his social criticism.

London, three sections later has vitality and variety. Everywhere a sense of history is apparent - in the senile presence of Churchill in the House of Commons, in St Pauls, and in the stark war-damaged buildings still standing like "Broken teeth". The headquarters of "all the good causes" are located there, manned by people with "innocent faith" and "energy".

CND

"South Africa Defence and Aid"

Rhodesia

(48)

In contrast to Wellington's emptiness, London, though not overcrowded in "'58",<sup>61</sup> drew people from all parts of the earth; "the loo shared with Mr Spiteri from Malta". In London there is also a group of expatriot New Zealanders. But Shadbolt, Ireland and Frame seem not to be at one with their new environment. Janet Frame is "in the Maudsley", a mental hospital, hiding away behind blankets and dark glasses. Ireland seems "lost" and Shadbolt is concerned for his health.

Stead's positive response to London is surely related to the fact that he remembers walking "under the embassy windows" - "Hand in hand". The bedsit is shared with the person whose hairpin is used to pick the padlock of the gas metre. Unlike Wellington, London and Bristol<sup>62</sup> involve for Stead, shared experiences.

61. "'58 your Ford Popular costs you  
\$450  
and you could drive it around Picadilly Circus" (47)
62. "Kay at the Bristol Steam Navigation Company". (43)  
(Kay is Stead's wife.)

An allusion to Keats suggests that the "unheard melodies", the melodies within the mind played on "imaginary pipes", are "sweeter"<sup>63</sup> than those offered by the melée of London life.

and in Soho Cobra Kaye  
who became Kasmin and ran a famous gallery  
writhing out of a basket  
to unheard melodies  
imaginary pipes. (48)

Ultimately it is not a rich environment which determines a man's imaginative and creative capacity. Whether or not he can take delight in the world about him must depend upon his own inner life.

## IX

In "Walking Westward", images of a hell on earth are derived from Dante's Purgatorio and from John Donne's poem "Easter 1613. Riding Westward". The effect of these allusions is counterbalanced, if Wordsworth's "Stepping Westward" is called to mind. After a courteous greeting by a pleasantly-spoken woman, Wordsworth observes:

And stepping westward seemed to be  
A kind of heavenly destiny:<sup>64</sup>

Behind, all was "dark", "cold" and "gloomy". Ahead, the sky was bright - "a glowing Sky" so that thought of the poet's journey through life seemed lightened.

The echo of the voice enwrought  
A human sweetness with the thought  
Of travelling through the world that lay  
Before me in my endless way.<sup>65</sup>

In this instance the journey through life seems heavenly rather than hellish. Courtesy and good humour can enrich life. And travel on foot allows appreciation of natural beauty such as that offered by the sunset.

"Walking" forms a refrain in Paterson, Book II, as Williams discovers new perspectives from the rock of his own countryside.

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63. "sweeter" is a quotation from Keats, not Stead. Stead playfully uses elements from the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by Keats.

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;"

Keats: The Poems of John Keats (Collins 1955), p258.

64. Wordsworth: "Stepping Westward" Poetical Works Ed. Hutchison (Oxford University Press 1969), p229.

65. *ibid.*

In his emphasis upon "walking", Stead joins Williams in attributing significance to this activity. In contrast to "riding" westward, "walking" is associated with closeness to nature; Williams sees this as a prerequisite to an ability to discover and create. Another necessity, if there is to be renewal through "addition and subtraction / walking up and down",<sup>66</sup> is an acknowledgement of mortality. In Stead's poem "Westward" states this acknowledgement. Instead of "whirling" unawares towards death, the walker moves with a steady rhythm. He recognises and accepts milestones.

The third section of "Walking Westward" discovers the Emperor Henshu<sup>67</sup> who has attained Paradise - on foot. Traditional courtesy is extended, calling to mind the courtesy that Wordsworth values in "Stepping Westward". There are tall redwoods, the most ancient trees in the world, and a clear beautiful river running over bluestone. Henshu is calm, at one with his surroundings, and able to draw creative energy from his environment. Henshu's relationship to the natural world offers a glimpse of an ideal.

Henshu offers a poem that is humorous in its oriental turn of phrase and rhythm, and serious in its particular wisdom.

"Green hair of girls  
lives under blue water  
combed by currents.  
Rain that picks at water  
hides hair from eyes,  
sun restores it to view."

(33)

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66. The following lines from the 'Preface' to Paterson may be contrasted with Stead's opening:

It is the ignorant sun  
rising in the slot of  
hollow suns risen, so that never in this  
world will a man live well in his body  
save dying - and not know himself  
dying; yet that is the design. Renews himself  
thereby, in addition and subtraction  
walking up and down!

Stead's "downing sun" is antithetic to Williams' "ignorant sun" rising new and innocent each day to fill the empty space left by the sun that has died. "Walking Westward" opens with the empty space and the dying sun - a situation that must precede any rebirth.

William Carlos Williams: Paterson (New Classics 1946), p11.

67. Henshu is not an historical figure. In response to my query as to Henshu's origin, the poet wrote the following reply:  
"On the subject of Henshu - I'm almost 100% positive I invented him." (C.K. Stead to this writer, 26-8-82.)

If we are too near-sighted, "importantly / ... picking in the scratches",<sup>68</sup> like the hens in "SCORIA", then the surface will remain opaque forever.

Unlike the figuratively blind man on the western beach, the emperor, himself a poet, is able to see beneath surfaces into translucent depths. He is able, in the imagination, to descend into those depths to be at one with the currents that comb the green hair.

Light on water reveals beauty and releases creative energy. The beauty evoked in an instant of light may be captured in poetry and held, in spite of the passage of time. That time's progress is not to be denied is signified by the diary: "Henshu emperor among the poets /... noted in his diary..." In short, he provides an example of an "emperor among the poets" at work.

There is nothing within this vision of Paradise that is unattainable on earth. Two essentials are shown to be water and light, sources of natural creativity and traditional sources of literary creativity. The motifs of water and light recur through "Walking Westward". Clearly they are no less abundant in New Zealand than elsewhere. But in the opening section the poet is not receptive to the sea and is conscious only of the sun's departure. The lamps and flickering lights of the remembered old town, together with "a light salt breath from the sea" prepare the way for an impression of an emperor-poet in a situation that combines a natural paradise (such as may be found in New Zealand) with traditional decorum (such as might be found in the ancient town).

In the 7th section the work of the creative artist is again contemplated. A Picasso painting in the Auckland Art Gallery calls to mind rich memories of the Mediterranean:

Mougins, Notre Dame de Vie, Antibes  
statues on ramparts against the sea  
terraces, orange stone, deep windows, tiled parterre  
(36)

The painting of two lovers is recreated in the words of the poem. The lady "the lover looked on" stirred Picasso's creative impulse. The lady and Proserpine (who activates the renewal of life each spring) are perceived as one and the same. Just as Proserpine can be said to effect spring and summer, so does this lady facilitate the artist's perception of "the way the light struck light from water". A man who is unresponsive to the "energy" that she evokes would not

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68. C.K. Stead: "SCORIA" in Geographies, p12.



l'occasion<sup>70</sup>  
 the times that release it  
 so that the blessings of the heavens  
 holy influence  
                                   the rain and breath of stars  
 these are intelligible  
                                   (36)

A work that is truly 'art' will outlive the span of a man's life:  
 "When the lovers die their stars are not withdrawn." (37)

The artist who is in touch with the rhythms of his world can respond to water, light and natural beauty wherever he may be; Stead makes this clear by returning to his present situation and delighting in his own Auckland morning:

Or any morning like this one  
 that is a world of webs.  
                                   (37)

The web suggests the surprising relationships that the artist perceives. The web connects objects which were previously unrelated.

In the 9th section, Stead becomes a painter with words comparable to the landscape artist. He recreates in language a waterfall in the bush. Stead's viewpoint seems to be from the centre of the pool below the fall. He can look "up there" at trees "blacker / than black sky" silhouetted above the lip of the fall. The fact that it is night allows greater concentration on the senses of touch and hearing. The words "knee-deep in stone" could simply indicate the depth of the pool.

70. The "cry of his occasion" (Wallace Stevens) has become a literary catch-phrase. Stead therefore uses the French "l'occasion" to indicate the special and peculiar nature of the moment in which circumstances are ideal for creativity. Goethe, in his fourth "Roman Elegy" refers to the Goddess Occasion or Opportunity ("Gelegenheit") who appears in many forms. He takes the character from the later Roman writers. Superficially, the elegy refers to opportunity for romance. But it also refers to taking hold of an opportunity to create, to give something new form. Stead's poem "How it Came About" is a tribute to an 'occasion'. The first five lines are as follows:

Sitting alone in a high class Chinese restaurant  
 hearing three Indians talk of a Japanese tea-garden  
 thinking of K with love, with love remembering J  
 she was lucky enough to think out a poem about  
 herself in a high class Chinese restaurant

From: "Breaking the Neck : An Autumn Sketchbook". Walking Westward, pl2.

But a literal contact with the flow of the stream is implied as well. The coldness and rush of the water become part of the poet's 'being' to be transformed into the energy of the poem.

...stone  
cold  
audible - silent  
rush

(38)

The words of the poem are carefully placed one, two or three to a line in order to attain their full strength. The weight and intensity of the rush of water is conveyed not through many words but through few words, and through the predominance of stressed syllables:

fallwater  
                  down  
and up there  
trees  
                  blacker  
than black sky  
edge-fall to  
                  water-drop  
knee-deep in stone  
                  cold  
audible-silent  
                  rush  
and deaf  
and blind  
                  but for  
fernstars'  
                  white  
burning.

(37-38)

The whole piece forms an integrated aural pattern through assonance and alliteration.<sup>71</sup> Despite the poem's brevity, the aural echoes are numerous conveying a unified texture of sound. Visually the poem takes the shape of a small waterfall.

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71. The assonance is as follows: "sky", "silent", "blind", "white"; "audible", "edge-fall", "fallwater", "water-drop"; "up", "rush", "but"; "fernstars", "burning", "trees", "knee-deep". Alliteration: "down", "deaf", "drop", "deep"; "blacker", "black", "blind", "but", "burning"; "fallwater", "edge-fall", "deaf", "fernstars", "for".

Contrasting visual images begin and end the poem. Black trees frame the scene at the opening. In the final scene, a little light is caught by the wet fernstars so that their "white / burning" shines against the darkness, forming a vivid conclusion.

The poet partakes of the flow of the stream and senses the "burning" of the fernstars. In redirecting the energies of water and light he is following the example of Picasso and of "Henshu emperor among the poets".

The "fallwater" poem is an example of language at full strength. It precedes, and is in direct contrast to, the "8 modes of language" section. A diagram which deprives words of their full meaning attempts to specify what school children should do in their language programme. In its truth and simplicity, "fallwater" offers an example of what children might be doing with language; having observed and experienced the world about them, they might express their response with accuracy. In Stead's small poem each word attains the fullness of its meaning. Even the much worn "stone / cold" gains a sudden clarity in this literal context.

Fernstars are among the remembered "first things" that give special value to the place that is the source of the poet's personal history. The remembered moonlight on the water at Ngongotaha - not "cold" or "white" but "gold" - forms a background to another "first thing" - "with Ainsley under the willows". In the 24th section, memory of moonlight upon water helps to re-establish the poet's openness to the natural energies of his own land.

It is Stead's belief that:

...the Eden we are all cast out from is that  
of the world fresh to our awakening senses. <sup>72</sup>

The way to rediscover that Eden is to alert the senses and the mind to the natural world. In his essay on the composition of "Quesada", Stead suggested that for the poet to write freely, the ideal is -

the arrangement of one's life so that nothing  
is closed off - so that the mind is alive, free,  
flexible, open. <sup>73</sup>

That condition of sensory alertness rendering the world a paradise is the very condition that is conducive to creativity.

72. C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p217.

73. *ibid*, p273.

In the final section of "Walking Westward", the poet rejoices in his capacity to write in his own land. The coming of rain is a familiar sign of rebirth or renewal of resources.

After dry weeks  
   rain  
 and that's to say "rain"  
 as it hammers on iron  
 nothing to do with Spain  
   (49)

There is a light-hearted echo of the song, "The Rain in Spain"<sup>74</sup> which is sung jubilantly when the heroine finally makes progress with her lessons. Stead is affirming his own progress. He delights in the distinctive character of heavy rain on New Zealand roofs. No longer is the poet thinking nostalgically of the Mediterranean.

Stead is "rested". The attainment of openness and alertness requires relaxation. Such was the condition of Henshu, who quietly contemplated the river while being served tea. Stead observes the sparrows in the pear tree and his mind allows the free entry and exit of memories, like that of the previous evening's poetry reading by Robert Creeley offering -

denim itinerant  
 chain-smoking poems.  
   (49)

Smoke may be regarded positively if it is part of a relaxed yet stimulating occasion.

There is recognition that life is a series of "exits" and "entrances", departures and arrivals. A man may be "here today / ...gone tomorrow" - walking by a stream or by the sea, or gone to his death. There is nowhere he can "jet to" to escape this situation.

An impression of quietude and equilibrium is evoked:

still at hand and at heart  
 soothed as if by fingers  
 that know a need  
   (49)

There is a sensuous satisfaction implicit in these lines that forms a direct contrast to the restless agitation of the "old wind out of Africa"...that knows no need<sup>75</sup> "but its own". Curnow's words -

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74. Song from the musical "My Fair Lady". Based on G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion.

75. My emphasis.

"it knows a need"<sup>76</sup> - are echoed by Stead. In "Spectacular Blossom" these words combine two significances that Stead uses in two separate contexts. Stead's "old wind that knows no need but its own" signifies the wind of time that is a facet of the inevitable rhythm of life and death. His lines - "soothed as if by fingers / that know a need" - refer to an emotional need. In an oblique way, Stead is affirming a feeling of being 'at home' in his married life. This allusion is in keeping with his pleasure in being with Kay in Bristol and in London. To live with a sense of fulfillment not only of one's own needs but of shared needs is to transcend the 'wind of time' that "knows no need but its own".

Stead has found a place which parallels the place of rest where the Po descends to the sea.

Francesca recalling the tributary rivers  
longing for rest  
sulla marina dove il Po discende. (47)

Francesca longs for the region of her childhood home. Stead's place of rest is the region of his youth where "first things" were discovered and experienced.

Instead of an empty "outreach" of sea and sky the poet now perceives "green doors" as he is "walking westward".<sup>77</sup>

walking westward  
the green doors  
the runnels of water. (49)

"Green" has a range of figurative meanings dependent upon a heritage of literature that associates greenness with innocence, creativity and imagination. ("And as I was green and carefree"<sup>78</sup> in Dylan Thomas's poem suggests a time in which all of these qualities were at their height.)

76. It is an ageless wind  
That loves with knives, it knows a need, it flows  
Justly, simple as water greets the blood  
And woody tumours burst in scarlet spray.

Allen Curnow: "Spectacular Blossom". Selected Poems (Penguin Books, 1982), p122.

For Stead's explication of these lines, see C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p198.

77. Cf. the poem's opening:

Walking westward  
you have it all before you  
the great out-reach  
pale blue with a clean white edge

78. Dylan Thomas: "Fern Hill" in Collected Poems 1934-52. (Dent 1956), p159.

"Doors" too form a familiar motif in a range of literature from Through the Looking Glass to Kafka's The Trial. The "green doors" imply endless imaginative possibilities. From nature's many "green doors" - from sea or forest or streams or grassy areas - energies are released that may be received and re-expressed by the artist. The "green doors" may also open into an inner realm of imagination. The poet gains access to his own insight and creative energy.

The phrase "runnels of water" also carries a range of connotations. It has a clear literal significance suggesting a movement of water to river and to sea in response to the natural contours of the land. "Runnels" is a vigorous word implying energy and direction. It recalls an early poem by Stead, 'Whether the Will is Free'.

This loping landscape doesn't care  
What falls on it, what freezes there,  
(...)  
Whether streams have a will, but sends  
Them even under ice, to sea.<sup>79</sup>

Streams or runnels may seem to take their own course, but they are naturally drawn towards the sea. Their movement seawards is as inevitable as man's "westward" movement through life.

The poet has achieved what Fromm would call -

...a return to the lost unity between himself  
and the natural world ... it is the at-onement  
of man with himself, with nature and with his  
fellow man...<sup>80</sup>

The poet discovers his own "westward" course while responding to the rhythms and contours of his own land. A responsiveness to nature in an atmosphere of tranquility and contemplation has long been associated with Oriental wisdom. The poet of "Walking Westward" discovers wisdom of a kind enjoyed by Henshu. Both have a sense of stillness and reconciliation with the world about them. Stead's exploration has led him to the attainment of the ideal he established for himself early in the poem.

But his situation differs from Henshu's. He is not waited on with traditional decorum in an idyllic natural setting. He is at

79. C.K. Stead: 'Whether the Will is Free'. Crossing the Bar. (Auckland/Oxford University Press 1972), p59.

80. Erich Fromm: Marx's Concept of Man. (Frederick Ungar New York 1968), p64-5.

home in Hobson Bay. The rain is loud on his roof. There are sparrows in his pear tree. He finds culture in the city of Auckland in the form of Robert Creeley's visit. And he has the freedom and peace of mind to be responsive to the "green doors" of his own neighbourhood or countryside. The water which captures his interest is not an idealised river but a "runnel" such as any city gutter might offer.

An imaginary Henshu was at one with an imagined paradise. Stead finds himself at one with his own home in an Auckland suburb. To achieve such an outlook, a man must first discover an "...at-onement... with himself..."<sup>81</sup> This is the "wisdom" that the poet of "Walking Westward" shares with "Henshu emperor among the poets".

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<sup>81</sup>. *ibid.*

## III.

## "SCORIA"

## Introduction.

Scoria is the substance that has formed the "ridged and rifted" landscape of Auckland. The scoria rock is the central motif for the poem "SCORIA". The motif does not encompass rock alone; it has weathered into soil which is scoria in another form.

The setting for much of the poem is the garden of Stead's childhood home. From it, Auckland's volcanic cones can be seen. They form a continuing presence telling the region's geological history and recalling Maori myths and legends. Memories of Greek mythology also enter into the poet's response to this landscape. The influence of a European heritage is apparent in that the garden itself is carefully structured and well maintained. Furthermore the garden often resounds with piano music - "Beethoven / Rachmaninov / Chopin".

The garden is the place which has provided elements from which the poet has constructed his own mythology; it is the place which has coloured his particular way of seeing the world.

Encompassed by a wall of scoria, the garden offers an Edenic situation to which a child responds with spontaneity and clarity of perception. The recreation of a childhood garden is Stead's device to explore an ideal relationship between man and the natural world, the way it was before "the Fall". "SCORIA" takes us back to a state of innocence or "ignorance" in the sense in which Wallace Stevens used the word:

You must become an ignorant man again<sup>1</sup>  
And see the world with an ignorant eye<sup>1</sup>

The return to the childhood garden allows the poet to become "an ignorant man again". The experiences enacted there are not remote from our own experiences; the heritage of myth and legend that form a part of the garden's wealth are known or available to us all. The private garden becomes a universal garden.

The poem is not autobiographical. There is no distinct person or character visible in this poem; but there is a central focus upon one man's perception. The poet celebrates the rediscovery of a particular way of relating to a garden.

"SCORIA" is composed of twenty sections of variable length. The flexibility of "open form" allows each section to have its own distinctive shape and rhythm according to its emphasis and intention.

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1. Wallace Stevens: "Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction". Gray : Twentieth Century American Poetry (Cambridge University Press 1976), p39.

## I

"SCORIA" seems to offer itself from the silent earth. The poem opens with "language-as-music"<sup>2</sup> in the form of an incantation that brings the poem into existence:

MURMUR  
                   mormorio  
 sussuration  
                   audible silence

Out of the "audible silence" there will emerge sounds, smells, patterns of colour and living memories:

                  ...silence  
 picked at in the fowlyard below  
 earth smell  
                   as of wattle root  
 and through their tracery  
 azure  
                   puffed with white

The emphasis upon the earth motif is established immediately in this first section - "earth smell / as of wattle root" and "picked at in the fowlyard". The elliptical phrase "picked at in the fowlyard" introduces two recurrent images; one is the garden's hens and the other is that of earth that supplies sustenance. The eye lifts from the ground to the azure sky, a movement that will be reversed in the concluding lines of the poem.

## II

The second section begins with a conjecture. A deliberate piece of reconstruction is signalled:

That is 'for example'  
                   lying in the track through wattles

Nowhere does the poet mention "I" - and yet we become aware of his detailed perception. The words "lying in the track" have no subject. But the eye that observes from the track and moves from lemon tree to asparagus to pergola becomes equally that of poet and reader. The omission of a visible character allows the poet direct access to a past experience; objects are called upon to appear before him.

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2. Mike Doyle's expression. Landfall 144,p472.

Naming gives life to the things of the garden:

and there was beyond the lemon  
   asparagus  
 beyond asparagus  
   beans  
 and the brown boards of the fowlhouse  
 and the grey rocks that were  
   SCORIA  
 stone on stone  
   walls / terracing

Each line seems to culminate in a discovery. Key words are placed at the end of lines; some stand alone for emphasis. Eye and voice can linger on them. Image by image, the garden is brought into being.

Just as the wallstones, terraces and exterior rock walls have given the garden its outline, so language, ordered phrase by phrase, will pattern the total form of the poem. The hand of the poet is apparent from the outset in the way in which the selection of material is made obvious by the phrase "'for example'". The poet has chosen examples here and throughout "SCORIA" that have contributed to his mode of valuing and relating to his world.

### III

"SCORIA" does not unfold like a narrative wherein each section is the outcome of the preceding one. The setting for the third section is no longer the garden, but the volcanic cones visible from it. The benevolent energy of the sun lights and warms grass, stone and "the three green / visible cones".

"Energy cousin to benevolence" is an echo from "Walking Westward" in which the line is - "Holding that energy is near to benevolence". In "SCORIA" we may accept as a basic premise that energy is "near to" or "cousin to" benevolence. But as the section develops, this premise is shown to be ironical; light's energy derives from fire and fire's energy unleashed can be destructive. Many centuries earlier the benign cones -

                                  ...inflamed their skies  
 burst in cloud  
                                   sent rolling out  
 rivers of rock

The effect of the eruptions has been "benevolent" in that the outcrops and ridges have offered firm rock upon which to build homes and with which to build walls. Today the cones stand like "obsolete cannon"; but just as obsolete cannon retain their potential for destruction, so do the ancient volcanoes. For the time being though, their energy is contained.

The section begins with the present day European names "Mt Eden" "One Tree Hill" "Mount Albert". The action moves into a distant past in which the land was being formed. Then it returns to a present in which the awe and respect that should be accorded the volcanic cones is suggested through their older Maori names:

Maungawhau  
                   Maungakiekie  
 Owairaka.

## IV

Section 4 returns to the garden. The poet gives the impression that each object inside the garden defines its own individuality. The tactile and visual characteristics of the scoria rock are recreated there:

Dry  
 its pores edged  
 sharp to the touch  
 bearded often  
                   with a white lichen  
 hard on palms  
                   on bare knees  
 but a warm refuge  
                   my friend the rock  
 SCORIA

The word "Dry" ensures by its solitary position on a line that it is followed by a pause. Pauses are indicated with each indented line. This effects a slow rhythm and gives the piece a dignity. The whole section, which builds to a climax and culminates in the single word "SCORIA" is like an apostrophe to a divinity. It is a tribute to a friend; the rock embraces as a warm refuge. Implicit in these lines is a deeply felt respect for the earth. An understanding of the poet's response to the rock is crucial to our appreciation of his way of humanising the things of nature, and his perception of their response to him ("sharp" "hard" "warm").

Stead's manner of relating to the rock is not new. Mircea Eliade in considering the history of religions has written:

"Above all, stone is. It remains always itself and it subsists; and what is more important it strikes. Even before he picks it up in order to strike with it, man himself runs into it. Not necessarily with his body, but in his sight at the very least. Thus he notes its hardness, its ruggedness, its power. The rock reveals to him something which transcends the precariousness of the human condition : a mode of absolute being".<sup>3</sup>

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3. Mircea Eliade : "Traité d'histoire des religions". p191.  
 Cited by Angus Fletcher : Allegory (Cornell University Press 1964)p88

The strength and protective quality of the rock counter-balance the impression of the land's instability as conveyed by the third section and reiterated in the sixth.

## V

The poet is at one with the rock and with the ivy which form central images in the ensuing section, the fifth.

Ivy had swamped had smothered the front wall  
 the stable one so held so cluttered  
 you could walk on it lie down on it  
 vanish in its broad top die in it  
 breathing its scent like a dust that caught at the throat  
 unseen between in the dark shine of leaf  
 heaped there over the hairy arms that bound it

The ambiguous "you" takes the present poet and the distant child into one. The lines that follow envelop poet/child - and reader - in the richness of the ivy's foliage and scent. The present participle, "breathing", gives a sense of immediacy.

The luxuriance of the creeper's growth is indicated through the long trailing lines in which the rhythm sweeps from one line to the next with scarcely a pause : "... lie down on it / vanish in its broad top die in it / breathing its scent ..."

A note of dismay is introduced when the "level lawn" is seen as a place -

where was always trimming cutting to be done  
 mowers clippers the sword ...

It is as if the earlier episodes involved the response of a younger child. Here, for the first time, there is an awareness of the pressure of the outside world, as adult values intrude. The discordant and unexpected "sword" suggests the destructive potential of the implements and implies by association that none of them belongs in the garden.

The concluding lines introduce a theme that will be expanded later in the poem:

over the dwarf lemon beside the impossible gate<sup>4</sup>  
 larger than life in sight of the sun and shut

Despite the richness of the garden, there is a restlessness ("impossible gate") in those who are confined. Paradoxically the child is impatient

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4. My emphasis.

to venture through the impassable gate into the unknown world. The closed gate of Paradise must one day give way.

## VI

The focus again moves to neighbouring hills in the 6th section. The contrast, introduced in the 3rd section, between present peace and past eruption, is heightened. The delightful summer activity of berry picking -

...in  
billy-filling summer  
the black  
berry  
in the dry grass -

is juxtaposed against a dramatic evocation of volcanic activity in which the land's geological history becomes infused with Maori and Roman myth.<sup>5</sup>

... the dripping cave mouths  
saying  
we are your neighbourhood gods  
Vulcan  
Matuahou  
created your world in our image  
of scattered stones  
who sleep in your dreams  
who breathe on your pillow  
whose skies we painted red remember us  
and the pie broke open and bled on the hotplate

The myths emerge as the berry picking ("billy-filling") moves to "the bracken / about the dripping cave mouths". The "cave mouths", like so many natural things in this poem, have their own voice. They travesty in a subtle way the religious belief that God created man in His own image. This belief has previously been treated with heavy irony in Stead's "Letter to the Enemy".<sup>6</sup> As he anxiously awaits Lucifer's counter-attack, God indulges in a new hobby.

It was then I took to making  
These models of myself  
They seemed to know  
I loved them, and even why.

In "SCORIA", Vulcan, Roman god of volcanoes and the forge, and Matuahou, primeval creative force from Maori mythology, combine to create a "world" in their "own image / of scattered stones". In their realm beneath the earth, there is rock, and in the realm above the earth, there is rock. It is the earth that is the gift of these gods and that

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5. Stead has a sense of the relatedness of volcanic rock whether in the Mediterranean or New Zealand.

6. C.K. Stead "Letter to the Enemy". Crossing the Bar (Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press 1972), p23.



"matador's cape" or a "black shield". The gesture of the red comb that "goes down for" is one of aggression - and yet we know that in fact the head goes down to pick for grain. The staccato rhythm of the hen's movement, expressed through the rhythm of the words, is also the rhythm of drumming hooves as the knight charges, head down, lance lowered, crouching upon his steed.

under the red comb she goes down for  
                                   as under a cloud  
                                   as under a fiery banner  
                                   crouching  
 to the packed soil  
 beyond the bean rows  
 black on black glinting  
 green in the sunlight

The "packed soil" becomes the earth of the jousting arena; "the bean rows" become the spectators. The whole movement of the hen parodies the charging knight, light glinting on his armour ("black on black glinting"). Spectators and knight are comical, absurd. The encounter and return to position is suggested by:

                                  shuddering  
 a moment only  
                                   ruffling  
 and back to  
                                   picking and scratching

The "picking and scratching" further deflates the image of the knight while the whole parody inflates the hens of the fowlhouse. The section is deliberately ironical.

Irony involves a dual perspective. There is a child's admiration for the hens as heroes. As well, there is an awareness that these are not "fowls of the air". They are domestic fowls confined behind wire mesh. Their appearance of self-importance adds to the irony:

it being important to scratch the packed earth  
 to the left and the right  
                                   with thighs big like a peasant's  
                                   under heavy skirts  
 importantly

The "importance" is juxtaposed against the image of the hen "staring" with a "round blank shining eye"; she does not see beyond her enclosure. Most often she is "picking in the scratches"; she is chiefly concerned with the area immediately beneath her beak.

There is a comparison to be drawn between the display of importance on the part of the hens and man's inflated sense of the value of some of his activities. The parallel will be made more obvious as the poem develops.

## VIII

Several elements from the opening section are recreated in the eighth section - the sunlight, the wattle, the hens and the "audible silence". Once again the eye is taken earthward - "scratched at in the fowlyard below" and skyward - "under the blue canopy / laced with gold". The first section began with an incantation; the eighth section will end with one.

The imaginings of a boy are defined in terms of a Greek myth, a poem by Wordsworth and a Brueghel painting. The poet offers a highly contrived 'example' of a boy's myth. The wattle flowers form a gold net, seen to be the work of Hephaestus,<sup>7</sup> which imprisons hens and boy. It is subtly suggested that all the prisoners "dream of flight" - for the words "dream of flight" are poised between reference to the fowlyard and a complex sequence of images that relate to the boy.

audible silence  
scratched at in the fowlyard below  
dream of flight  
    waiting in the wax  
in the wings  
    Naxos Delos Paros  
the child's legs vanishing in ocean  
father to the man

The boy is attempting to make for himself a myth which reconciles his present condition with a dimly perceived future that must take him beyond the garden. Escape from the walled garden requires flight; the boy imagines himself to be "waiting in the wax / in the wings". He is identified with the young Icarus for whom wonderful wings were constructed. The myth is archetypal in that it is one of a number of similar tales and it represents an ageless human aspiration.

Icarus failed to heed warnings not to fly too high lest the sun melt the wax holding the wings and feathers in place. The Icarus image implies impatience and ambition. For those who fly and for those who combine impatience with ambition, a fall will follow. The "child's legs vanishing in ocean" recalls the Brueghel painting in which the tiny legs of Icarus are about to disappear into the sea.<sup>8</sup>

The words "waiting .../in the wings" have a second meaning. The boy is like an actor waiting to perform. He shares the restlessness of all those who are separated from an imagined centre of activity.

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7. The Hephaestus and Ares images relate to the tale in which Ares together with the wife of Hephaestus are discovered in bed. They are imprisoned there by a cunning net devised by "the crippled smith".
8. "The Fall of Icarus" by Peter Brueghel the Elder.

There is irony in the boy's inflated expectation and the inevitability of the fall. His pride has a comical counterpart in the image of "Ares astrut / under the blue canopy".

The "dream of flight" refers not only to an archetypal dream, but also to an imaginative capacity that flourishes within the garden. It is an ability to see hens as knights or matadors; the child-like imagination can transform one thing into another and believe in it. The wings of the hen ("green sheen over black feathers") become his own huge Icarus wings.

"Naxos", "Delos" and "Paros" are three small islands in the Aegean Sea. Their names hold something of the mystery of legendary and distant places. "Naxos" recurs in the twelfth section: "for ever walking westward out of Naxos". The journey towards death is envisaged, Naxos having been left behind. "Naxos" is a realm in which the imagination may still anticipate "flight" rather than resignation to the daily effort of life on foot.

The concluding lines of the section consider what might be salvaged from the child's world and from his failed attempt at flight:

the child's legs vanishing in ocean  
father to the man  
who might carry to his forged world  
word of

SCORIA

The child "might carry" with him into adulthood his creativity and imaginative prowess. For, as the allusion to Wordsworth suggests, the child is "father to the man".<sup>9</sup> Childhood experiences and imaginative resources will be employed in "forging" the values and aspirations that will define the man.

The word "might" is significant. A child's myths and his imaginative capacity "might" be lost entirely in the transition from boyhood to manhood.

The "dream of flight" emerges as the section's central motif. It can refer also to the poet's own aspiration to "fly"; flying, in this instance, is equated to the creation of poetry. The lines

SCORIA  
PARIS  
the WARS  
the smoky athletes  
longing for rest.

~ refer to a sequence of four long poems that may come to be seen as central to Stead's poetic output.

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9. W. Wordsworth : "The Rainbow" Wordsworth Poetical Works Ed. Hutchinson (Oxford University Press Paperback 1969), p62.

## IX

"SCORIA" conveys the impression that the music of "Czerny... Mozart... Liszt" and Beethoven flows into the garden. On the rare occasions when it does not, there is a silence that is noticeable, "audible". In the ninth section, the music combines with other impressions of the garden.

The opening lines suggest idyllic peace and beauty. All of the shrubs and flowers named have an intense fragrance. In addition, sun, water and stone seem to be at one, or to express it in different terms, the elements - air (the perfumes), earth (the "tamed foundation stones"), water ("water ran warm") and fire ("the sun")- are in harmony.

verbena rosemary  
lavendar lilac daphne  
and under the piano windows  
carnation  
where water ran warm from the tap  
and the tamed foundation stones absorbed the sun.

This harmony is expressed in a different mode through the music of the piano.

Czerny and verbena  
Mozart and rosemary  
lavendar and Liszt  
and for the Moonlight Sonata  
perhaps the primal challenge  
of cut grass  
to purify the nostrils of the tribe  
with scented gardens through the blind

The line, "perhaps the primal challenge" is mock heroic. The music enters from the dim world behind the blind into the lit world of colour and smell. But hearing is not overpowered. Instead, the mind of the poet orders, accommodates and reconciles; "notes of colour", "chromatic scales" and "arpeggios of light" apply equally to vibrant patterns of colour and light and to vital patterns of sound. Out of a multitude of impressions the mind can create its own harmonies by synaesthesia:

a dérèglement of nose and ear and eye  
as for example the simple  
'notes of colour'  
chromatic scales  
even  
arpeggios of light



The sound of the music, distinctive yet at one with the light, shade, colour and smell of the garden, seems to continue beyond the wall. All that has evolved from the "source of all" is intimately related - culture, plant-life, people, mythology and history.

With divine power Vulcan once hammered the earth into this "ridged and rifted landscape". The power of the pianist may today be revered. The hammers within the piano send sound in rising and falling patterns back to its ultimate source as part of a vast inevitable rhythm.

## X

The music that travels to "the green cone" takes the eye to the setting of a drama that took place there two hundred years before. The Maori legend of Reia, the dolphin god, involves Maungawhau and Maungakiekie; their slopes provided pa sites for the Tainui people. The tenth and twentieth sections tell of the feud between the Tainui and Ngatitamatera tribes over Tainui's theft of Reia.

The poet becomes a story teller. Like all good story tellers he uses direct speech where possible.

'Come to the Manukau  
to the fields of Tainui  
for scented grasses'

The tale is in the past tense ("brought him swimming ...") but a sense of the continuous present within the past is achieved through the use of the present participle - "dolphin god ... / playing in sunlight".

Reia's seduction is conveyed in smooth-toned language. There are long and repeated 's' sounds.<sup>13</sup>

'Come to the Manukau  
to the fields of Tainui  
for scented grasses'  
this to Reia  
sleek bodied taniwha  
dolphin god of the Ngatitamatera  
playing in sunlight  
in the shadows of Hauraki  
the enticement of scented herbs  
that brought him swimming northward

By contrast, the threat of violence is suggested by the harsher consonants - and the barbaric images of "club and cooking pot". The avengers emerge from darkness and silence "crying vengeance". Stead skilfully orchestrates pauses between words to allow tension to build:

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13. Long and repeated 's' sounds,  
scented grasses fields sleek sunlight enticement swimming  
There are also many nasal consonants - Come, Manukau,  
dolphin, Ngatitamatera.

Sunrise  
                   long shadow  
 and out of shadow  
 voices of Ngatitamatera  
 crying vengeance ...

There is a 'rest' as in music after "Sunrise", and before "long shadow" so that the lines read: "Sunrise [pause] / [pause] long shadow". If a piece of story telling is to be effective, and if suspense is to build, then pause is as important as the voiced word.

At the section's opening, there is harmony among the elements fire ("sunlight"), water ("the shallows of Hauraki"), earth ("the fields of Tainui") and air ("scented grasses"). This harmony is destroyed by an act of treachery. The result is a "long shadow"; darkness replaces the sunlight. The elements reflect the discord.

## XI

Darkness - "shadow over harbour" continues into the eleventh section. But here the discord is caused by volcanic activity. The pall of volcanic ash and smoke casts a shadow over land and sea. The poem travels back in time to the source of the land's distinctive contouring. There is a return to the era in which the cones, ridges and valleys of the Auckland isthmus were being formed.

"No man" walked "westward into the valley" at this time for two obvious reasons; there was then no human life in this part of the world, and had there been, the violence of the volcanic activity would have removed it. The danger to life is emphasised through the metaphors - "blitzkrieg in the blacked-out valley" and "one slow armoured column", and through the likening of a lava flow to the Phlegethon, the flaming river of hell. The section evokes the terror of volcanic activity.

The whole piece is onomatopoeic, the rumbling within the earth contrasting with the fiery explosions in the air and the devastating pressure of lava flows. The rumbling of the earth and the movement of rocks is conveyed through words with a single stress (gróund shóok), heavy consonants (ground groaning cauldron) and repeated long vowel sounds (stones groaning over slopes). The mid-air explosions are suggested by light short vowel sounds and light or sharp consonants - "lip spitting fire", "twittering in heaven". The insistent pressure of "pushing" "moving" "adjusting" gives the impression of the insistent pressure of the lava flow. Following these lines, the gradual cooling

and hardening of the lava is indicated by the slowing pace of the poetry.<sup>14</sup>  
The flow halts with the pause after "valley".

Phlegethon flowing under glass  
over its own hardness  
cooling westward down  
into the valley.

Cloudfire rockflight flow  
as of glacier

There is a last burst of activity followed by a reiteration that it is impossible for any man to live in such an environment:

Cloudfire rockflight flow  
as of glacier  
where walked no man  
westward into the valley.

## XII

The form of section 12 is quite unlike that of any other section. Long lines flow almost without pause from one into the next as a stream of images moves through the consciousness of an observing poet and a sleeping child. No capital letter begins the section and no full-stop ends it. It is a slice from a continuum of dreaming and sleeping.  
The Maori gods -

who sleep in your dreams  
who breathe on your pillow

- are part of the succession of dream images.

At first the poet stands back and watches the boy:

how you slept knowing it your own sleeping

In the child's world, sleeping happens independently - in contrast to the familiar adult awareness of the sleeping of someone else - wife, husband, restless child or baby. And in the adult world, the tasks of the day or the needs of others quickly dispel sleep and dream. At a more obvious level of meaning, the boy is so close to being awake that he is aware of himself asleep.

The line that follows adds a further meaning:

face the flies explored their walk your waking

The word "sleeping" is changed from a gerund to an adjective once it is followed by "face"; however this does not detract from the meanings suggested by the first line alone.

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14. The slowing occurs chiefly through the choice of words with long vowel sounds - "over ... own hardness", "cooling westward down". In addition, each line has fewer and shorter syllables than that which precedes it.

Each additional word or phrase allows the evolving statement to be constructed differently, and adds a fresh layer of meaning. The "flies explored" may take as its object "your own sleeping face" or "their walk" - meaning a specific route "over brow lip nose". An impression is given of a swiftly changing pattern of image and meaning.

The poet is seemingly drawn into the dream and comes to share the focus of the sleeping child. He too is drawn "back / to a dream of legs". They are the legs of the summer flies, and at the same time, with a touch of humour, they intimate a future interest in women. The flies' legs merge to become like the nib of a quill-pen writing its own characters and expressing its own mysterious purpose upon the boy's face:

... each fly a feather's point  
over brow lip nose with curious communication  
of purpose hurrying and halting departing arriving

The flies are not rejected. Here is a further example of intimacy between the child and the natural world - a world in which each object "finds tongue to fling out broad its name".<sup>15</sup> The child accepts the apparent purpose and direction of the flies' activities. His imaginative facility then transforms them into aircraft that depart and arrive.

The drawn blind represents the limitation of the boy's view of the world; the glare "pushing" at its "edges" corresponds to the boy's need to push away that blind. The poet again steps away from the boy to observe that he is suspended for the time being in "a hot room" - that he is still in a condition of "ignorance" which does not reject the legs of flies.

the hot room holding in its teasing dream  
your hand from waving away the white legs

The poet then returns to the awareness of the boy whose dream reiterates the intimation of a future flight and fall. The heat of the room becomes mingled with the Icarus legend in which the sun's heat melts the wax. Wing feathers float free - "out of thin air the fallen feathers floating".

In the final line the poet again detaches himself from the boy to observe him: "the boy still struggling under his sleeping face". The struggle must occur within the boy before he can leave the protection of "the hot room" or the sunlit garden.

### XIII

It is the wakening consciousness of the boy which hears the "lay

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15. G.M. Hopkins : "As Kingfishers Catch Fire". Selection of his Poems and Prose ed. W.H. Gardner. (Penguin 1953), p51.

language" of the hens in section 13. To the child, the hens have their own language - a language belonging to creatures uninitiated into the complexities of human communication - but valid nevertheless. And it is of course the language of the 'lay-ers' of eggs. This section is playful and child-like, emphasising the simplicity of the child's response to the world.

The "discontent" of the hens is a projection of the boy's discontent; he is "waking", preparing to leave the womb-like protection of the garden.

lay language  
subsiding (bk bk bk)  
to the languid / discontented  
kaaaaa  
    kaaaaaa  
        kaaaaaaa

#### XIV

The opening image of the fourteenth section still concerns the hens. At its simplest level, "Veronica / of the spread wing in sunlight" may simply name a hen and her dominant characteristic - an inclination to preen her wings in the sunshine. But a veronica is also a reflected image of Christ. The implication is firstly that one wing of a hen is a mirror image of the other, and secondly that there is something miraculous in this perfection and beauty.

And there is yet another veronica, a shrub that grows "among flax", and contributes to the colour, texture and perfume of hillsides. There is a connection, or rather a contrast, between the historical realism of Dieffenbach's observations and the wealth of imaginative associations that a hen's wing can evoke.

Veronica  
of the spread wing in sunlight  
and to Dieffenbach  
    that other veronica  
speciosa  
    the koromiko  
in lilac flower among flax  
its scent on the air  
'where this shrub grows  
    is richest soil'

The values brought to Auckland by its European settlers are conveyed in part through their writings. Dieffenbach's<sup>16</sup> response to the veronica

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16. Dieffenbach was a naturalist, geologist and writer who surveyed parts of New Zealand for the New Zealand Company between 1839 and 1841. "He frankly assessed the disadvantages as well as the possibilities for colonisation".

(Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Vol I)

indicates a limited perspective and a preoccupation with "richest" soil. Concern for the richness and enrichment of soil occurs in two further sections, betraying in every case man's impulse to exploit the soil for his own gain.

The "ignorant" man enjoys a variety of perspectives. He delights both in the close-up view of the "spread wing in sunlight" and in the wide view of flax-covered hillsides above Manakao Harbour. Connections are made between large and smaller shapes and patterns. The outspread feathered wings of the hen, each of which mirrors the other, are compared with the hillsides, presumably furrowed by a central stream or fold in which one flax covered hillside mirrors another. The flax catches the sunlight as do the feathers of the hen.

green-bronze mirrors of flax  
 turning in the breeze  
 catching sunlight  
 on the slopes of 'Manakao Harbour'

Just as there is something miraculous in the perfection and beauty of a hen's wing, so is there something miraculous in a flax-covered hillside that has been brought into being through the balance and harmony of the four elements. The understanding that moments of peace reflect balance or poise among the elements occurs in several different contexts in the course of "SCORIA". At the conclusion of section 14, fire ("catching sunlight"), earth ("richest soil"), air ("its scent on the air") and water "Manukao Harbour" combine in a moment of tranquility. Dieffenbach fails to appreciate the whole pattern. His limited close-range vision focuses upon that facet of the koromiko's existence which is of significance to the scientist and to the coloniser.

## XV

The garden setting with its scent of cut grass and its piano music is resumed in the 15th section. The poet adopts an ironical stance. His focus fluctuates between a close identification with the boy and the detached perspective of the poet who, with wryness and wit, observes the boy's single-minded concentration upon a bamboo pole.

It seems that the high jumper is an older child who no longer aspires to work the forge beneath Maungawhau like Vulcan, nor does he aspire to fly like Icarus. His goal is more realistic:

Aspire to no forge nor flight  
 but 5 short steps to the bar  
 driving  
 DOWN  
 left foot shaking the earth  
 and out of that crouch



and a bamboo pole your horizon  
 holding:  
     5ft 2"

The child-like joy in movement is indeed replaced by "gravity".  
     to have draped yourself over  
     the skyline's elegant couch  
                 informally  
     before the angel entered  
     bringing gravity to the garden

On the surface this section is light, witty and amusing with puns on gravity, grace, fall, and foam.<sup>18</sup> The tone of the extract is mock heroic; a thin bamboo pole silhouetted against the sky is referred to as "the skyline's elegant couch". Graceful motion to the sound of classical music is contrasted with "ungainly" movement. At first the "angel" and the "Fall" seem to be part of the mock heroic mode. But the poet's intention is serious; as in the Biblical story, the purpose of the angel's entry is to eject the guilty from the garden.

#### XVI

The setting for the 16th section is the "visible cone" that is most distant from the garden - Owairaka, Mount Albert. An impression is given of Mr Robinson's story-telling as he tells of Owairaka's tribe.

'Owairaka' (said Robinson)  
     'surf-rider  
 daughter of a chief' ....  
 fire and blade and spearpoint ascending the slope  
 only the caves for escape  
     running crouched  
     through crooked caverns  
     shouts and shadows pursuing

The story's contrasts in rhythm reflect the changing fortunes of the defending tribe. The long line with its strong beats (quoted above) gives the impression of enemy pressure as the attackers power uphill. The decision to take to the caves is made in a haste that is suggested by the shorter line. Three ensuing short lines give the impression of breathless running.

Individually, Stead's lines are idiomatic - "and her tribe moved north / built their pa on the hill". But, as a whole, the tale is told with remarkable economy. The swift transitions from pallasades to slopes to caverns contribute to the story's pace and intensity.

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18. "falling to foam" also recalls the legs of Icarus about to disappear beneath the foam of the sea.

Hearing a good tale, well told, is one of the pleasures of our way of life. In addition, legends reflect human achievement, human folly, and the precariousness of the human condition:

and at the narrowest pass the gross old chief  
wedged himself after them  
died there to be hacked out  
while his people escaped  
into the manuka valley

The idea central to this section is the power of the earth to preserve and nurture life. Owairaka's people were protected by the earth itself, together with their will to endure.

In an amusing episode, Mt Eden provides a quiet refuge for a couple in the back of their car - while children observe them; "we held our breath watching". The encapsulating steamed-up vehicle forms a humorous echo of the encapsulating "blue black / berry". Both are found on the slopes of a volcanic cone and both are potentially fruitful.

The foliage of Owairaka ("fringed with eucalypt") and that of One Tree Hill ("daisies in grass") testify to the earth's capacity to recover after the effect of "fire and blade".

## XVII

Section 17 by contrast expresses typical values of an 'adult' world. Builders and developers unendingly reshape the surface of the land. They fail to be concerned with the steady encroachment of the suburb "over stonecrop and bracken". Those who promote expansion "across the isthmus / towards the further harbour" invite comparison with others of limited vision - the botanist Dieffenbach, and also the hens. The builders see the nail beneath the hammer - "(7 true notes to the nail)" and the wood beneath the saw; the botanist is concerned with examining the soil for richness; the hens are preoccupied with "picking in the scratches" beneath their beaks. The hammers of the builders are in "conflict" with one another, and with the natural world.

The second half of the section offers a further example of an adult's concern for rich soil. A woman requires "manure - for the garden".

Stead returns to his technique of projecting himself into the heart of an experience. Again the present participles give the impression of a continuous present in the past. And again we discover a child's capacity to transform one thing into another; horse droppings become "beautiful big bran muffins".

And she said 'Please get me that horse manure'  
 meaning the beautiful big bran muffins  
 steaming in the roadway  
 handing me a bucket and shovel

The words "handing me a bucket and shovel" apply to the poet-as-child "experiencing the experience"<sup>19</sup> once again.

The child's situation is easily recognised. An adult imposes a task that she finds distasteful. The indignation of the child is occasioned by more than his self-consciousness; there is, in addition, a poet's objection to interference with the natural process.

and whose garden was it  
 and if it was no shame and no one would laugh  
 why didn't she get it herself  
 forced out protesting  
 to scoop it up

#### XVIII

In exploring the values that have come from his own German-Swedish forebears, Stead has selected from the history of Auckland writings by 19th Century Germans. There is a heaviness and pomposity in the observations of Dieffenbach, Julius von Haast and Hochstetter.<sup>20</sup>

Dieffenbach, with scientific precision, records the measurable: distances, population and dominant buildings. Julius von Haast adds to a recurrent preoccupation with richness of soil for the purpose of re-ordering landscape and plant-life - "the hills/...have made luxuriant gardens". Both he and Hochstetter reduce the cones to the typical - "models of volcanic action", "cones / with craters distinct". In addition, Hochstetter calls Rangitoto "the Vesuvius of Waitemata", emphasising Rangitoto's likeness to another volcano while ignoring its distinguishing features.

In evaluating a place called Auckland, Stead's predecessors have overlooked its individuality. The quotations reflect a lack of response to the land itself. Instead they imply a regard for statistical information, a penchant for generalising and an interest in rich soil for man-made gardens.

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19. This phrase was used by Stead in a radio discussion of "SCORIA" (with Elizabeth Alley, Concert Programme Oct 20th 1983). Stead expressed the hope that his readers would "experience the experiences" of the poem. This is made possible through the poet's intense involvement in an experience; the reader may subsequently share that involvement.

20. Hochstetter and von Haast were geologists and explorers. Von Haast came to New Zealand to report on immigration prospects for a shipping firm. Hochstetter came in order to examine the Drury coalfield in Auckland. Subsequently "he described the volcanic cones of the Auckland Isthmus". (New Zealand Encyclopaedia)

The efforts of Stead's own grandfather - "the German Swede"-may be understood in the light of these values. His energies were directed towards "adjusting" the land's surface according to his "will". His legacy to his offspring was not the product of his imagination in the form of songs of exile; instead he built "terraces walls" having laboured to pile "stone over stone". There is a heaviness, a "gloom" about these lines which contrasts with the enthusiasm of a child-like response to the land.

and at the century's turn  
 the German Swede  
     no 'sang aus dem Exil'  
 (unless the 'sang' should be blood)  
 but moving stone over stone  
     terraces walls  
 as of a century's habitation  
 a landscape adjusted  
 to the will of man

The word "adjusted" suggests a minor and superficial movement of earth and stone. The temporary nature of the adjustment is emphasised in the final lines of the section.

in the hot eye of Vulcan  
 under the hammer of Thor  
 between two seas.

Sun ("Vulcan") and storm ("Thor") constantly threaten and frequently undermine man's labour. This is stated plainly by Stead in a later poem:

stones your own hands dug in and  
 canted after rain-sodden clay  
  
 had pushed them all over the  
 lawn and if you'd done a good job  
 that only means they'll be standing  
 when it's your turn to go <sup>21</sup>

Two vast oceans lie on either side of the isthmus. From one perspective, Auckland can be seen as a sliver of land poised "between two seas", as well as being poised between fire "above" and forge "below". The poem does not emphasise the possibility that the equipoise may be upset; instead, the poet reveres the balance in which the rock, the plant life and human existence is held. Adjustments to the surface seem irreverent and irrelevant. Lines from a poem by Stead, published in Landfall come to mind:

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21. C.K. Stead : Geographies. "A poem called 'The Weather in Tohunga Crescent'", p75.

Suppose its true our planet and the sun are on course  
to vanish in a black hole, and still you're refusing  
because of something said on Friday ...<sup>22</sup>

In geological terms, the moment of balance between fire above, forge below and seas on either side is infinitely small. The poet's response is to capture the balance in the containing form of the poem and, by so doing, to experience a true appreciation of that balance. The poet is poised in a moment of time and space as if "Between two waves of the sea";<sup>23</sup> but in that instant of stillness, something unmeasurable is brought into being - the poem "SCORIA".

#### XIX

Section 19 contrasts "the green (outdoor) world" and the indoor realm in which "adult" values hold sway.

"Winter rain" has a confining effect upon the poet's remembered childhood self. Outside, the thrush is free and the grey warbler is singing, while the boy must split "firewood in mud". Clouds and rain-washed windows increase his separation from the Waitakeres and Mt Eden. Such conditions render Sundays "intolerable".

Redwood panels, favoured for coffin making, line the living room, making it seem tomb-like:

a dead man's gloom alive  
his 'sang aus dem Exil'  
in the redwood panels.

The boy imagines the grandfather's mood to have been one of gloom, since he laboured indoors to put the panels in place.

The values of the adults are plainly conveyed in the lines -

Clean hands on cold keys  
cold feet on clean linoleum

Cleanliness and preservation of property are highly valued; a child's comfort is secondary. The cold keys signify compulsory music practice rather than joy in music making.

The rain on the roof makes its characteristic din while the imaginative child exercises his facility at transforming one thing into another.

22. C.K. Stead "Poems from : The Poetry Room" Landfall 148, p470.

23. "SCORIA" offers recurrent echoes from Eliot's Four Quartets. Stead's "between two seas" is an echo of this line from 'Little Gidding' V, line 251.

'and crystal ski-lifts  
 running on telephone wires'<sup>24</sup>

The concluding stanza offers a contrasting mood. Free again to make discoveries in the "green world" the boy observes:

...on a rare clear morning  
 frost  
 sheet-ice on barrel water  
 crystals over bunched soil  
 black burns on broadleaf

The "ignorant man" does not need to make a garden; he can delight in discovering the elements in their own natural balance. The air is clear - "a rare clear morning" - the barrel water is ice covered, the soil is ornamented with crystals of ice and the leaves are burnt with frost.

XX

The twentieth section returns to the feud between the Ngatitamatera and Tainui tribes. Maungawhau is the setting for the final reckoning. The focus leaps back "200 years". The leader of the Tainui "called his people inside the pallisades" where they wait in terror -

stomachs tight  
 fear in the pits at sundown

They face a true "primal challenge" for survival.

Stead's story-telling prowess is apparent in the skilful creation of suspense. The intensity of "crouching behind the lashed stakes of manuka" is followed by stillness - "moon cold over the gulf", and by "silence". After a pause, five lines from the tenth section are repeated. The repetition adds emphasis, giving the impression of a bitter feud of long standing.

The final battle, explosive after another pause, is decisive:

mid-morning the pallisades breached  
 high noon  
 the last skull crushed  
 on the slopes of the crater

Two hundred years later the slopes of Maungawhau form a natural garden. Instead of a "long shadow", there is sunlight which colours the harbours blue and gold.

Unbroken silence of the tapu  
 harbours blue and gold  
 isthmus green  
 spring wind in the whau's white flowers  
 among the rotting stakes

---

24. This quoted line is from Stead's earlier poem 'Letter to the Enemy'. It is the second reference to that poem in "SCORIA" which indicates the relevance of the attitudes expressed there. See also p59 above.



in the imagination<sup>28</sup> is to know it (and its gate) for the first time. The significance of the subtitle "A Reconstruction" can now be understood. Stead has brought to the task of reconstruction the innocence of the child and the wide knowledge of the "fallen" man.

A community lived on Maungawhau and vanished from Maungawhau. But "the rock ... transcends the precariousness of the human condition".<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Eliot, Stead does not revere an infinite deity. He reveres the earth itself, open to the "spring wind" and held in balance between water ("two seas"), and fire ("forge above/below").

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28. Stead is also following the path advocated by Milton in creating 'A paradise within'

...thou has attained the sum  
Of wisdom...  
...only add  
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable...  
...then wilt thou not be loath  
To leave the Paradise, but shalt possess  
A paradise within thee, happier far.

"Paradise Lost" Book XII. The Poetical Works of John Milton.  
Ed. Rossetti, (Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd. London. N.D.), p208.

29. A repetition of the quotation by Mircea Eliade. See p57 above.

## IV.

STEAD'S IDIOM AND IMAGES.

## Introduction

Stead's "eclecticism", his ability to work in a wide range of poetic modes, is in Doyle's view<sup>1</sup> responsible for the poet's failure to attain a "single" voice. But the various formal modes can be discerned visually, without any awareness of a poet's voice. For a voice to be known, language must be heard and it must be understood. In contrast to Doyle, Harlow considers "quality of voice"<sup>2</sup> to be a unifying principle in "Walking Westward". It can be shown that Stead's voice is distinguishable through his particular idiom and through the patterning of images that embody his concepts.

## I

A padlocked trunk keeps  
My days accounted  
In draft and revision.

Iron grave  
It's a womb too.  
I sentence myself.

An oak-headed catechist  
A Swedish captain and  
His daughter whose exact blood  
This world affronted  
Meet there the black Celt  
Uttering  
History, music.<sup>3</sup>

These lines offer a clue to the way the poet gathers material. Experiences are recorded. Stead's "trunk" retains pieces of the past that are dead in one sense ("iron grave") but which are nevertheless incubating for possible use in the future ("It's a womb too"). For the poet has passed upon himself a life "sentence" of commitment to writing ("I sentence myself"). This demands a written record of his response to experience. The "emperor among the poets", we recall, noted his impressions of the river "in his diary".

In Stead's poetry a sequence is often observed and recorded as if in a diary:

- 
1. Landfall 144, p480.
  2. Landfall 133, p74.
  3. C.K. Stead: "April Notebook". Crossing the Bar (Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press), p30.



"Sanity" implies the capacity to let light into the mind and implies also the freedom to walk along the towpath. Janet Frame is depicted ten lines earlier. "Sanity" is in contrast to her condition; she is confined indoors behind "dark glasses". The gaps between lines allow an impression to be compared or contrasted with any other in the poem. The 24th section is in elliptical sequence which demonstrates further the effect of lacuna.

but first things  
     as fernstars for example  
 or moon's path off Ngongotaha  
 with Ainsley under the willows  
 1949  
     slow reel  
 fishermen casting in gold <sup>6</sup> ("W.W." 49)

The above passage demands of the reader direct involvement. Links can be discovered between three different "first things" - the fernstars, the moon's path and the activity with Ainsley; each is elemental and entirely natural. The "fishermen" refer not simply to people such as Ainsley's father, but to all those who penetrate unknown waters and are engaged upon a quest. Gold, in addition to other connotations, signifies any imagined guerdon bestowed after patience and endurance. By leaving "slow reel" alone on a line the poet allows the words to gather a range of interpretations; they form links with other parts of the poem - "the hook of Maui" for instance and "the swans turning with the turning tide". The section is "open" precisely because it challenges the reader to close the gaps and to complete the poem instead of limiting him to a fixed interpretation. Use of the lacuna is one very subtle way in which Stead's long poems attain unity. Stead's "voice" can be discerned between the lines as well as in the lines themselves.

The poetry is "open" in another sense. It raises questions that the reader formulates in his mind. Why is the moon's "cold" light now "gold"? The line "could make nothing of that" provokes the reader to make something of it. Stead was conscious of this process:

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6. An earlier poem refers to the same material, but since the poet's intention is to "Put...it Straight", his method of presentation is entirely different.

I drink to the Catholic girl - the first ever to undo me  
 Without an argument - with whom I tucked up in fern  
 While her father fished the lake at Ngongotaha  
 ("Putting it Straight in London". Crossing the Bar, p44-45)

Perhaps the most fundamental sense in which the Modernist poem is 'open' is in never quite completing the statement. It is 'open' in reaching out and engaging the reader's imagination in the poetic act.<sup>7</sup>

Debate surrounds the definition of "Modernist". But it is clear that Stead is describing a quality in poetry which he values. His long poems are characterised by their invitation to the reader to become involved in the "poetic act". Stead's "voice" invites response.

Subtlety and economy arise from skill in writing equivocally. A return can be made to earlier examples to show their ambiguity: "light on leaves falling over the towpath" implies that the leaves are falling and the light is falling on the leaves; or the words "I sentence myself", in addition to their obvious meaning, carry the implication that the poet must repeatedly transform his life into words or sentences to become "the bones of a poem".<sup>8</sup> Or take the lines:

and every mortal thing  
remembered forgotten ("W.W." 39)

The tendency of the elderly to forget "every mortal thing" is familiar and the phrase colloquial. But Stead is also affirming that death will have finality. His 17th sonnet makes this clear: "Man has a soul indeed. That soul is mortal".<sup>9</sup>

A most intriguing line is "Holding that energy is near to benevolence". The line appears in quotation marks but eludes positive identification. However, it offers an example of Stead's distinctive mode of working with language. The line may be read as a philosophical proposition; or "holding" may mean either 'containing' or 'tapping a source of energy'. A painting can contain an impression of the light's energy forever on canvass; and the painter can redirect the light's energy into a work of art.

This is not the only instance in which the word "holding" is ambiguous. There are two examples in "SCORIA". "Holding / 5ft 2" suggests that the bar holds firm and that the particular personal record is 'held'. And in the lines -

7. C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p153.

8. "How it Came About". Walking Westward, p12.

9. "Sonnet 17". Walking Westward, p26.



The black and white trees of Bristol appear first in "Winter Song", and the poet's early endeavour as a high jumper is reflected in "Crossing the Bar", "SCORIA", and in the 6th of the "Poems from 'The Poetry Room'".

Stead's awareness of his own genealogy recurs in his poetry. The "Swedish captain" from "April Notebook" is the "grandfather, young and bearded" from "Pictures in a Gallery Undersea". The same grandfather is recalled in Sonnet 6 as one of the parents "home after sailing two years" and he appears in "SCORIA" as the "German Swede".

Stead's images achieve full definition through contrast to, or comparison with, other images. There is a continuing rhythm of contrasts that runs through "Walking Westward". Repeatedly the poet takes the eye down and up - from the "drowned angels" to the "millennial stars", down to the sea and up to the "square of the churches". The moon's pallor is spilled on the floor and the sun's light plays on the ceiling. The poet discovers a position of balance from which he can know two extremes - "the caves of generation and the terraces of the stars", "fallwater / down / and up there". Throughout his work there is an acknowledgement of life's contraries.

Life on earth can be a "heavenly destiny" or a whirling in hell. For many images an antithesis may be found in the poem. Some are obvious. In other instances the contrast is implicit.

"longing for rest"	"rested"
"cloud ceremonies"	"scarves of light"
"5 beds to choose from all of them empty"	"with Ainsley under the willows" "Hand in hand under the embassy windows"
"...the euphoria that would drive his race to the gas chambers"	"with Izzie, Iain Lonie, a dozen stoking euphoria" others
"tortured into text-books"	"everything from Shaks to Shav"
"Francesca recalling the tributary rivers"	"beside a river running deep and strong" <sup>12</sup>

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12. Francesca is nostalgically remembering the rivers of her childhood home as she whirls in hell. Henshu has peace of mind beside a beautiful river.



While pursuing their inquisitive and strange exploration, the flies are known to the boy by "curious communication". The "dripping cave mouths" seem to be "saying" - "we are your neighbourhood gods". The rock wall is bound by "hairy arms", the lilac has "wrists" and the scoria is "bearded often". In "Walking Westward", "scarves of light" are "shaken over" the "seafloor's mosaic", and the storm in Menton attacks like a party of raiders. The grotesque image - "Broken teeth of Europe slow to repair" - gives a sense of the injury and pain suffered by bombed cities.

The four elements are motifs that recur throughout "SCORIA" and "Walking Westward" contributing to the unity of each. "Walking Westward" begins and ends with images of water. The poem begins with the formlessness of "ocean / darkness unfolding" and concludes with the implied structure and direction of "runnels of water". Flowing water suggests the running of life through veins signifying again a relatedness between man and nature. As important as the water motif are those of air and the light of the sun.<sup>16</sup> The image of "walking" emphasises the importance of contact with the earth. "SCORIA", while giving greatest attention to the earth itself reveres the balance in which the four elements are held. These motifs convey the respect and awe with which Stead regards all aspects of nature.

Though his concern for "the green world" and man's relationship to it forms a centre of seriousness in his work, Stead frequently expresses himself with wit and humour. Wit depends upon the unexpected. It often results from the bringing together of incongruous images. He compares the legs of a hen in "SCORIA" to those of a peasant woman:

with thighs big like a peasant's  
under heavy skirts ("SC." 12)

The very subtle link between the 16th and 17th sections of "Walking Westward" offers an example of wit. The images of the cake that Otto 'built' and Wills Castle are presented in such a way as to invite comparison between them:

Otto's cake  
no baking  
bought biscuits soaked in wine  
heaped over with cream (16th section)

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16. The significance of air as a recurrent motif is discussed on p16. Light, and the sun's energy are discussed on pp45-47.



Stead's "voice" speaks wittily and with irony. A single situation can seem both amusing and tragic through irony. The image of the lady Penelope who unpicks her knitting while her life is unravelling in spite of her efforts to forestall time is ironical. Most often irony is characterised by the appearance of detachment while a coolness of expression conceals intensity of feeling. There is irony in the attempt to objectify suffering by depicting it in the form of a Venn diagram. A mathematical image could never define the complexity of a state of mind.

Wellington is evoked through a series of clear images to convey irony of a different kind.

February Wellington  
 white wood blind windows  
 a kind sky a good sea  
 and from one high room  
 the 2 spires on Willis Street  
 the red and the green ("W.W." 46)

The significance of "a kind sky a good sea" is negated by subsequent images of emptiness, hell, and death ("tombstone houses"). And it is ironical that Wellington's white, red and green are colours that appear in Bristol, Paradise or the western beach. Stead is like the weaver of a tapestry who has only a few distinct colours with which to work: black, white, green, blue, red and orange. Paradise, Bristol and France are fascinating and stimulating. The western beach and Wellington seem dreary and lifeless. Nevertheless the same colours are available for each tapestry. The notion that Paradise depends upon attitude towards place rather than the place itself is confirmed.

Stead enlivens lines with paradoxical images:

under the unseen seeing  
 of saws and hammers. ("SC." 20)

no 'sang aus dem Exil'  
 (unless the 'sang' should be blood) ("SC." 21)

hill of death  
 hill of heaven. ("SC." 23)

I have a bass voice  
 but the heart of a tenor ("W.W." 41)

More significant are the paradoxes that emerge as the reader juxtaposes the images that Stead presents. Through paradox the poet awakens

critical faculties by revealing inconsistencies in attitudes and values. In "SCORIA", the "German Swede" lined his walls with redwood panels instead of making songs among living trees. These images suggest that the work of building and reshaping can keep a man from a full appreciation of the natural world. The boy, like a confined fish that is denied the freedom of his "green world", must practice the piano imprisoned behind "aquarium glass". Contrasting images convey the impression that the wet outdoor world beckons while the indoor world with its "cold keys" and "clean linoleum" is alien. Stead's image of the hen "picking and scratching" and its juxtaposition against images of knights in armour, matadors, a botanist named Dieffenbach and a peasant in heavy skirts, has the effect of showing man to be a short-sighted picker and scratcher of the earth's surface.

Stead writes with an awareness of human folly and, as his self-irony reveals, he includes himself among the fallible. His characters in "Walking Westward" are drawn with warmth or anger or compassionate interest, like the figures in a Brueghel painting. They tend to be caricatures caught in action.

and in Soho Cobra Kaye  
 who became Kasmin and ran a famous gallery  
 writhing out of a basket ("W.W." 48)

Churchill has the appearance of a toddler who "fell backward into his chair / and fell asleep". Skill in debate and stylish appearance characterise MacMillan. Chaliapin is defined by a pathetic optimism, Otto by his devotion to friends and de Rothschild by his extreme arrogance.

### III

Stead's "voice" gives the illusion of simplicity and impresses with its spontaneity. The surface of his work reveals precision, economy and avoidance of complex vocabulary and syntax. With ease and lightness the poet plays with paradox, pun and caricature. His wit and detachment give an urbane quality to his writing. He has the worldliness, the breadth of overview to recognise, without bitterness, man's ignorance of his own nature and his exploitation of the earth's resources. The poet protects himself against his sharp awareness of man's tragic alienation from himself and his world. His safeguard is to discover humour through an understanding that

the 'tragic' is but one side of a truth. From different perspectives, the situation can be seen as paradoxical or comical or ridiculous. Through his own creativity, the poet transcends his despair at the many absurdities that characterise modern man's system of values.

Beneath the level of playfulness and delight in language, Stead's particular range of impressions and images carry his serious intent. We feel for instance a sense of "time's passing". The tragic and unforgettable knowledge of a "hum as of that generator working through the night" resonates throughout "Walking Westward". This pivotal concept belongs within the central 13th section but it detaches itself to form connections with impressions from earlier and later sections: the imminent death of the poet's mother (p39), the aging Chaliapin (p41), Milhaud in his wheelchair (p35), "exits/entrances" (p49) and "Here today (...) gone tomorrow" (p49).

A feature of "Walking Westward" and "SCORIA" is the mobility of their patterns of images. Impressions are juxtaposed before the reader. Truths are gleaned as he links disparate images in a variety of relationships. Stead's distinctive "voice" does not resound in his words alone but resides in the attraction and tension developing between similar and contrasting images.

Geographically, "Walking Westward" ranges widely until the poet discovers a harmony within himself. "SCORIA", which is narrow geographically but ranges back in time, acknowledges the poet's cultural heritage. In this land, he celebrates a harmony among the four elements within his particular lifetime. And he celebrates the sense that he is part of that harmony.

There is a tension, now familiar in New Zealand writing, between a desire to live in a homeland that offers a natural paradise and a desire to be involved in the excitement of a culturally rich Europe "where people are willing to pay".<sup>17</sup> A.R.D. Fairburn's "I'm Older Than You, Please Listen" and his long poem "To a Friend in the Wilderness"<sup>18</sup> explore this very theme. Stead has noted that there is between "our New Zealand identity and our European background (...) a permanent dramatic tension in which much good writing has been generated".<sup>19</sup>

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17. A.R.D. Fairburn: "I'm Older Than You, Please Listen". Collected Poems (Pegasus 1966), p107.

18. *ibid*, p47.

19. C.K. Stead: In the Glass Case, p257 & 258. Among the authors of the "good writing" Stead names Charles Brasch, R.A.K. Mason, D'Arcy Cresswell, E.H. McCormick, Maurice Duggan and Allen Curnow.

In "Walking Westward" and "SCORIA" the recreation of the "dramatic tension" forms an analogue for a more profound tension between a man's need to relate to the natural world and his desire to compete for wealth and public acclaim. Civilised life and the goals valued in modern communities effect an alienation from the earth that is so extreme that man carelessly carves into the land's surface, plunders the ocean and pollutes the air. Furthermore, a New Zealander's desire to be on the move, travelling to more exciting places is symptomatic of man's inclination to escape from knowledge of himself. In a place of rest it is more difficult to avoid that knowledge. It may mean venturing through "green doors" into territory that has hitherto been unexplored. Stead uses the 'here/there' antithesis to explore and define inner conflicts in man that are universal.

In embarking upon a poem of epic proportions, and in using the New Zealand example to examine man's mortal condition, Stead is showing that he has learnt "the trick of standing upright here".<sup>20</sup>

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20. Allen Curnow: "The Skeleton of the Great Moa in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch", p77.

## V.

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## WALKING WESTWARD

1

Walking westward  
you have it all before you  
the great out-reach  
pale blue with a clean white edge  
the downing sun bright orange  
rabbits among lupins  
a dog in the distance  
no human shape.

Out there is the world  
is nothing but the sun bleeding  
cloud ceremonies  
ocean  
darkness enfolding.

The fish of Maui is under your feet  
the hook of Maui is in your guts  
here is all the beauty of Lackland  
the surf is blind as Homer and forgetful  
in Paradise are no legends  
the drowned angels are silent  
as the millennial stars.

2

On the stone stairway  
to the square of the churches  
oil lamps flare at a breath from the sea  
and across the water flicker  
lights of San Remo.

The windows look upon the square  
the square looks over the water  
the town is still listening to music from the square  
at a light salt breath  
black smoke flaps from the oil flares  
dark heads look down  
shadows  
shades of shades

32

Sunt manes

and the ghosts live for ever  
on the waterfront tables are laid  
for supper at midnight  
white cloths red napkins  
this night began before Christ  
the oil flares flap on the stone stairway  
the music answers the silence of the stars

3

And when the emperor Henshu walked into Paradise  
he was assigned this place  
served tea in a pagoda  
beside the river running deep and strong  
clear over bluestone  
out of a forest of redwoods.

Henshu emperor among the poets  
who noted in his diary  
"Green hair of girls  
lives under blue water  
combed by currents.  
Rain that picks at water  
hides hair from eyes,  
sun restores it to view."

4

André the Pole who taught us about wines and donkey sausage  
Otto from Vienna who made a magnificent cake  
and dreamed he was panting behind his girlfriend's car  
until he turned into a kangaroo  
and all at once he was bounding across dry grass under gum trees  
wind in his ears horizon opening before him --  
Al from California who couldn't have an orgasm  
and Aussie M who had so many  
you could have made a fine pâté of her liver --  
and Izzy G German Jew  
frying chicken dumplings in deep oil  
sawing dangerously at the wheel (one of the first Holdens)

33

because he insisted on turning to look at his passengers while he talked  
had been at Hitler rallies  
had felt in his own throat the euphoria  
that would drive his race to the gas chambers  
walked into Russia sat out the war in Siberia  
remembered communist efficiency as shops in one village  
full of boots with no laces  
and in another laces but no boots  
- liked an irony but political innocence  
and a big mouth  
he properly frowned on.

'56 Armidale Australia  
the year of Suez and of Hungary  
made excuses for the Russians  
(Suez was OUR crime)  
or didn't know what to believe  
but asked ourselves was totalitarianism  
was repression  
inherent in Socialism  
the big question  
ask it still and sometimes answer yes  
consigning that other Marx brother to a small boat  
along with the Capitalist pig-shit theoreticians  
to argue about the means  
and how to share the bread and the water  
and who catches the fish and who drinks the scagull's blood  
(and "who navigates us towards what unknown" etc.)  
and salute instead that black flag of irony  
Izzy admired  
with a sense of History bearing a million half-remembered precedents  
fine compositions plausible fictions horrible accidents  
flowing into us  
into this day that's full of sunshine and cicadas and sparrowtalk  
an aching back a halting typewriter  
the breath of wind just now that drove a cloud across.

5

the moon  
this moon

34

this very moon and no other  
moon of \$5.2.76 making over Hobson Bay  
its universal statement  
sailing over pohutukawa  
that shades our house in the mornings  
moon unmoored above garage and pongas  
white influence felt along arms and in scalp  
cold brilliance  
pallor spilled on the floor  
would not flinch at blood  
or our most inventive coupling  
has been worshipped  
walked on  
moon  
is said to draw up tides and drive men mad.

6

Takapuna 1970 the Mon Desir Hotel  
Baron Philippe de Rothschild  
vintner financier intellectual  
sending the wine back  
telling the waiter  
"give it to the cook".  
Sat under the big pohutukawas  
watching waves coming across the Gulf from Rangitoto  
translating Marvel

waiting  
for his wife's heart to be repaired  
a cutting and stitching no one in the world could do so well  
as Barratt-Boyes at Green Lane

said of the Arabs  
"such uninteresting people"  
and we felt uneasy  
remembering the 6 million.

'72 saw him in a box at the Nice Opera House  
with Milhaud and the Begum Agha Khan  
Milhaud in a wheelchair  
80, with dyed hair.

35



- shark inshore  
wings falling  
the 'possum's last violence  
on the floor of the cage.
- 12 Penelope has a flat in Wollstonecraft  
sits unpicking her knitting
- and at Beecroft there's the big house with 3 cars  
and 3 horses and 2 score of gum trees  
kookaburras before sunrise  
2 nice girls and a recordplayer and a barbecue and a 15  
cat and a dog
- and if you go in August  
a bank of freezias that bloom fruit trees that blossom
- and at Mosman  
and at Kingsford  
Lane Cove  
and that flat of Bruce-and-Brenda's  
somewhere near Gladesville  
or Kings Cross where I know nobody  
\$175 at the old rate  
Epic Fare  
marble fins cutting a velvet sky  
return refreshed from  
Sydney  
first foreign soil I ever stepped on  
'56 they were arguing about the design  
it was every good Ocker's mad laugh  
and then it was the cost  
and now it's the world's most beautiful building.
- Somewhere in the syntax  
in the joints of words put rightly together  
you know time's passing  
you feel  
past and present in the passing  
a hum as of that generator working through the night
- 40  
in the carpark at Macquarie  
tall lights shining on grass and gumtrees  
a car starting  
somebody calling goodbye.
- 13 Somewhere in the musi-mythology  
Chaliapin  
on the sea-front at Monte Carlo  
taking a gloved hand:  
"Madame  
I have a bass voice  
but the heart of a tenor"
- and add to that  
Forrest Scott  
after midnight  
at the White Heron Lodge  
Auckland  
asking Iris Murdoch to dance.
- 14 fresh-faced  
as if he ate well slept well  
the CIA man who thought  
Phoenix had been wrong  
because half the 20 thousand murdered  
were "innocent" - meaning not VC  
(imagine Dr Goebells saying  
the programme for the Final Solution  
had been wrong  
because half the 6 million weren't Jews)
- he was free to walk about  
so is Nixon (so is holyoake)  
Lyndon Johnson died in his bed
- the mean masters of destruction  
the mealy mouths that abet them
- 41
- they don't figure among the unemployed  
there's work for them always
- smell of rotting bodies  
fades into text-books  
resolves into numbers  
20 thousand  
6 million  
50 million  
and half of them were "innocent"
- 
- 15 Otto's cake  
no baking  
bought biscuits soaked in wine  
heaped over with cream
- and when we left Armidale  
he was at the station  
with Izzy, Iain Lonie, a dozen others  
stoking euphoria  
tapping tears  
350 miles to Piermont Wharf  
woke to sunrise on the Hawkesbury  
and at Central Station  
Otto  
the same  
had driven all night  
to greet us at the other end.
- 
- 16 Bristol University  
Wills Castle  
built on smoke  
with crests  
and mullioned windows  
but no moat
- Marley's bass on the stairs
- 42  
"Donna nobis pacem"  
O'Toole at the Bristol Old Vic  
before his films and fame  
everything from Shaks to Shaw  
the signed Yeats at George's inscribed  
"the years like great black oxen tread over the world"  
£3.00  
and I hesitated  
and next day it was gone
- first snow  
waking at Westbury  
puzzled by a strange brilliance on the ceiling  
the black trees edged with white  
Whitelady's Road  
Blackboy Hill  
the Red Maid's School  
the Downs  
Centre rebuilt from the ruins of '45  
St Mary Redcliffe spire  
docksider survivor  
sky-spear flying  
repeated in water
- Kay at the Bristol Steam Navigation Company  
the burred r of the West  
the oi oi and the curly cobbled l  
Brightstowe  
that became Britstowl  
Selkirk in his corner with Long John Silver  
as 'ad loike a missin' lag
- my 26th birthday the first dog in orbit  
Laika  
she died there  
could make nothing of that  
but the silence followed us to London
- Clifton/Hammersmith  
same bridgemaker  
(only connect)
- 43

Isambard Kingdom Brunel  
and Boozy O'Toole came too  
to Kensington  
the Royal Court  
but McGooghan at Hammersmith  
the best actor of his age

How are we visible to ourselves  
but by the fires  
these light in us?

17

came ashore  
who had walked already above cloud floor  
had looked up from his book and down 7 miles  
to arctic ice  
had seen off San Remo  
sea floor's mosaic  
the scarves of light  
are shaken over

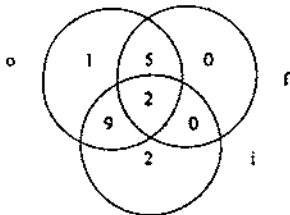
18

October she phoned to say  
for her at last it was over  
forgotten  
irrelevant  
3 nails meant for the heart  
might have made use of the new maths  
that has a cold beauty  
like the beauty of a fiction  
as for example that a survey of 19 love affairs showed  
17 were over  
7 were forgotten  
and 13 irrelevant  
but only 2 were all three

44

9 were over and irrelevant but not forgotten  
5 were over and forgotten but not irrelevant  
how many that were over were neither irrelevant nor forgotten?

to which a Venn diagram  
viz:



returns the answer 1  
(rendered poetically: one only)  
irrefutable  
as to say in the language of another dimension  
he had explored with her  
to caves of generation and the terraces of the stars

19

and Donne said  
(not to mention Ern Hem)  
don't ask for Dr Who the bloody bell told you  
wanting to make a blue movie  
Long Tongue  
sequel to Deep Throat  
with Kath Romancefield at the Villa Isola Bella  
it tolls for thee  
but how could it rival Fellini?  
and Milhaud in a wheelchair  
80, with dyed hair

20

February Wellington  
white wood blind windows  
a kind sky a good sea  
and from one high room  
the 3 spires on Willis Street  
the red and the green

5 beds to choose from  
all of them empty

downstairs were the smoky athletes in the mirror  
their shouts echoed on the landing  
their cries reached the carpark  
green branches fainted across the tombstone houses

that was no dream  
the air is electric  
the whole town is charged with an absence  
it enters no plea

a jet climbs out of Rongotai  
7 p.m.  
the hills are beginning to fade.

21

Menton soixante-douze  
storm in the olives  
shutters banging  
woke to a strange light  
wind assailing hillslope  
running at rockface  
driving home rainspears  
paper torn from boardings on the Moyenne Corniche  
branches down in the garden of Blasco Ibanez  
frigate anchored off  
in orange turbulence

listing.

Guessed what K.M. felt at Bandol  
death-drive

46

barrenness of that wind  
grains out of Africa  
breath of testaments  
for 3 days no silence among the tombs  
an old wind that knows no need but its own  
unloving wind that drives the lovers in hell  
Francesca recalling the tributary rivers  
longing for rest  
sulla marina dove il Po discende.

22

Moon  
cold warrior  
wasted  
on the stone steps  
on the waxed floor  
breathless  
between boards  
announcing

PARIS  
SCORIA  
the WARS  
the smoky athletes  
longing for rest.

23

'58 your Ford Popular cost you  
£450  
and you could drive it around Piccadilly Circus

Supernac elegant at parry and thrust  
with Gaitskell in the Commons  
while the old bulldog whose promise never to surrender  
had hurried out blood through static  
entered like a toddler  
felt backward into his chair  
and fell asleep.

Broken teeth of Europe slow to repair

cats and broom flowers among the masonry  
Amen Court in shadow of St Paul's  
CND

"South Africa Defence and Aid"  
Rhodesia  
all the good causes  
(most of them lost)  
innocent faith  
or where it faltered  
energy.

Hand in hand under the embassy windows  
(Cambodia  
where was that?)  
Phillimore Gardens bedsit stacked with paintings  
the loo shared with Mr Spiteri from Malta  
picked the meter padlock with your hairpin  
every shilling twice used  
once for gas once for woodbines.

Calamari in a Chelsea basement  
Shadbolt worrying about his lungs  
Kevin Ireland  
lost child with a long nose  
sadly sketching.  
Janet in the Maudsley blankets up to her chin  
wearing dark glasses  
and in Soho Cobra Kaye  
who became Kasmin and ran a famous gallery  
writhing out of a basket  
to unheard melodies  
imaginary pipes.

And the Thames flowed by beyond that wall at Hammersmith  
sweet Thames  
numbering our days at the Doves  
last hours of our indifference -  
London  
not style  
but sanity  
light on leaves falling over the towpath

48

a red bus crossing Brunel's bridge  
the swans turning with the turning tide.

24 but first things  
as fernstars for example  
or moon's path off Ngongotaha  
with Ainsley under the willows  
1949  
slow reel  
fishermen casting in gold

25 After dry weeks  
rain  
and that's to say "rain"  
as it hammers on iron  
nothing to do with Spain

Rested  
could focus on nothing  
but sparrows in the pear tree  
exits / entrances  
remembering last night's  
denim itinerant  
chain-smoking poems.

Here today  
still at hand and at heart  
soothed as if by fingers  
that know a need  
nowhere to jet to but  
gone tomorrow  
walking westward  
the green doors  
the runnels of water.

## APPENDIX 2.

## II SCORIA

### A Reconstruction

- 1  
murmur  
    mormorio  
surruration  
    audible silence  
picked at in the fowlyard below  
  
earth smell  
    as of wattle root  
and through their tracery  
azure  
    puffed with white
- 2  
That is 'for example'  
    lying in the track through wattles  
above the vegetable garden  
in sight of the lemon tree  
and there was beyond the lemon  
    asparagus  
beyond asparagus  
    beans  
and the brown boards of the fowlhouse  
and the grey rocks that were  
    SCORIA  
stone on stone  
    walls/terracing  
as of a century's habitation  
work of one man one decade  
upper lawns and flower beds  
lower garden and orchard  
paths  
    the pergola  
rotting under its roses  
stone on stone  
    soft earth sifting between
- 3  
Energy cousin to benevolence  
and both of light  
    on grass  
on grey absorbing stone  
on the three green  
    visible cones  
to the north east  
    Mt Eden  
eastward One Tree Hill  
west  
    Mt Albert  
that have inflamed their skies  
burst in cloud  
    sent felling out  
rivers of rock  
    congealing  
to a ridged and rifled landscape  
outcrop on which to stand a house  
wallstones  
or stones for a small hand  
    bent on birds  
the fields of bracken and wattle  
littered as of battle  
the dead cones their obsolete cannon  
Maungawhau  
    Maungakickie  
Owairaka
- 4  
Dry  
its pores edged  
sharp to the touch  
bearded often  
    with a white lichen  
hard on palms  
    on bare knees  
but a warm refuge  
    my friend the rock  
SCORIA
- 10
- 5  
Ivy had swamped had smothered the front wall  
the stable one so held so cluttered  
you could walk on it lie down on it  
vanish in its broad top die in it  
breathing its scent like a dust that caught at the throat  
unseen between in the dark shine of leaf  
heaped there over the hairy arms that bound it  
the tall rock wall above the level lawn  
where was always trunning cutting to be done  
mower clippers the sword and by the monkeyapple  
lilac that in this month in this spring sun  
will be blossoming still above its worm-eaten wrists  
over the dwarf lemon beside the impossible gate  
larger than life in sight of the sun and shut
- 6  
Three Kings  
    the nearest cone  
but hidden beyond two ridges  
of its own making  
    a suburb's frayed edge in  
billy-filling summer  
    the black  
berry  
    in the dry grass  
and bracken  
about the dripping cave mouths  
saying  
we are your neighbourhood gods  
Vulcan  
    Mataihou  
created your world in our image  
of scattered stones  
who sleep in your dreams  
who breathe on your pillow  
whose skies we painted red remember us  
and the pie broke open and bled on the borplate  
and the sun was a crippled smith

journeying  
 forge above  
     below  
 and between the blue black  
 berry

7 As the matador's cape concealed the steel  
 so the spread wing in sunlight  
     or a black shield  
 green in sunlight  
 the black knight strutting and shining  
 green in sunlight  
 under the red comb she goes down for  
     as under a cloud  
     as under a fiery banner  
     crouching  
 to the packed soil  
 beyond the bean rows  
 black on black glinting  
 green in the sunlight  
     shuddering  
 a moment only  
     ruffling  
 and back to  
     picking and scratching  
 picking and  
     scratching  
 it being important to scratch the packed earth  
 to the left and the right  
     with thighs big like a peasant's  
     under heavy skirts  
 importantly  
     to the left and the right  
 picking in the scratches  
 and the small head stops  
 and the bead eye stares

12  
 into the lacery  
 the round blank shining eye  
 staring  
     into the lacery

8 Wattle in sunlight  
 Hephaestus' golden net  
 scent of verbena  
 'he who shines by day' lays down  
 green sheen over black feathers  
 glint in her beads  
 and Ares astrut  
     under the blue canopy  
 laced with gold.

Somnolent under the forged net of gold  
 and in nostrils  
     verbena  
 and in the air  
     audible silence  
 scratched at in the fowlyard below  
 dream of flight  
     waiting in the wax  
 in the wings  
     Naxos Delos Paros  
 the child's legs vanishing in ocean  
 father to the man  
 who might carry to his forged world  
 word of  
     SCORIA  
 PARIS  
     the WARS  
 the smoky athletes  
 longing for rest.

13

9 verbena rosemary  
 lavender lilac daphne  
 and under the piano windows  
 carnation  
 where water ran warm from the tap  
 and the tamed foundation stones absorbed the sun.

Czerny and verbena  
 Mozart and rosemary  
 lavender and Liszt  
 and for the Moonlight Sonata  
 perhaps the primal challenge  
     of cut grass  
 to purify the nostrils of the tribe  
 with scented gardens through the blind  
 a dérèglement of nose and ear and eye  
 as for example the simple  
     "notes of colour"  
 chromatic scales  
     even  
 arpeggios of light  
     harmonies of shade  
 over blade leaf petal stalk stamen  
 receding rising  
 beyond the ivied wall across the school the suburb  
 to the green cone  
     cold forge of Hephaestus  
 hammer of Vulcan  
 source of all.

10 'Come to the Manukau  
 to the fields of Tainui  
 for scented grasses'  
 this to Reia  
     sleek bodied taniwha  
 dolphin god of the Ngatitamatera

14  
 playing in sunlight  
 in the shallows of Hauraki  
 the enticement of scented herbs  
 that brought him swimming northward  
 where club and cooking pot waited

Sunrise  
     long shadow  
 and out of shadow  
 voices of Ngatitamatera  
 crying vengeance on  
     Maungakiekie  
 Maungawhau  
     the pas of Tainui.

11. Ground shook  
 on which walked no man  
 hot stones rolled from the lip  
 fire flew heavenward  
     gods stirring the cauldron  
     Vulcan Matuahou  
 laying  
     shadow over harbour

Day dark and shrunken  
     night inflamed  
 groaning under earth  
 twittering in heaven  
 trees tossing on windless slopes  
 where walked no man  
 the lip spitting fire  
 bright rock bounding  
     down dark slopes  
 blitzkrieg in the blacked-out valley  
 and one slow armoured column  
 pushing into the valley  
 moving forest about

15

adjusting stream and tideflow  
Phlegethon flowing under glass  
over its own hardness  
cooling westward down  
into the valley.

Cloudfire rockflight flow  
as of glacier  
where walked no man  
westward into the valley.

- 12 how you slept knowing it your own sleeping  
face the flies explored their walk your waking  
those summer sundays late that drew you back  
to a dream of legs each fly a feather's point  
over brow lip nose with curious communication  
of purpose hurrying and halting departing arriving  
and there must be glare pushing at the blind edges  
the hot room holding in its teasing dream  
your hand from waving away the white legs  
melting like wax in true-blue open ocean  
for ever walking westward out of Naxos  
out of thin air the fallen feathers floating  
the boy still struggling under his sleeping face

- 13 bk bk bk bkaa bkaaa  
bkaa bkaaaa  
bk bk bk bk  
bkaa bkaaaa  
bk bk bk  
bk bk bk bk bk  
lay language  
your waking  
subsiding (bk bk bk)  
to the languid/discontented

16  
kaaaa  
kaaaaa  
kaaaaa

- 14 Veronica  
of the spread wing in sunlight  
and to Dieffenbach  
that other veronica  
speciosa  
the koromiko  
in lilac flower among flax  
its scent on the air  
'where this shrub grows  
is richest soil'  
green-bronze mirrors of flax  
turning in the breeze  
catching sunlight  
on the slopes of 'Manakao Harbour'

- 15 Aspire to no forget nor flight  
but 5 short steps to the bar  
driving  
DOWN  
left foot shaking the earth  
and out of that crouch  
arms shoulders right leg gathering  
the whole weight  
UP  
and over  
'falling to foam'  
or as it was in those days  
to sandpit  
or under the piano windows  
to cut grass

to make that bar your horizon  
horizon your bed  
and to lie along it  
defying the upright posture  
a moment weightless before  
the Fall  
to roll in cuttings  
in carshot of  
Beethoven  
Rachmaninov  
Chopin

as if to have swum in that moment  
without support of water  
to have draped yourself over  
the skyline's elegant couch  
informally  
before the angel entered  
bringing gravity to the garden  
scales falling like glass from the windows  
scent of grass invading  
legs tumbling ungainly  
and a bamboo pole your horizon  
holding:  
5ft 2"

- 16 'Owairaka' (said Robinson)  
'surf-rider'  
daughter of a chief  
from Kawhia (was it?)  
and her tribe moved north  
built their pa on the lull  
gave it her name  
but couldn't hold it  
against the tribes of the isthmus  
the assault closing  
palisades breached  
fire and blade and spearpoint ascending the slope

18  
only the cover for escape  
running crouched  
through crooked caverns  
shouts and shadows pursuing  
and at the narrowest pass the gross old chief  
wedged himself after them  
died there to be hacked out  
while his people escaped  
into the manuka valley

Owairaka/Mt Albert  
the westerly one  
fringed with eucalypt  
blue-grey in distance  
against the Waitakere Range

And Mt Eden/Maungawhau  
where we held our breath watching  
she on the back seat of a car  
he over her  
in mist  
the windows clouded  
moving as in a dream

and One Tree Hill  
arcadia  
white on green  
lamb's and daisies in grass  
among lichened outcrops  
beyond the olive grove  
in sight of the sea.

- 17 new timber new iron  
'panting of saw'  
conflict of hammers  
(7 true notes to the nail)  
sawdust on the wind

and under iron where showers best  
the unfloored joints  
over stonecrop and bracken  
the suburb moving  
inching over itself  
red roofs green gardens  
across the isthmus  
towards the further harbour

And she said 'Please get me that horse manure'  
meaning the beautiful big bran muffins  
steaming in the roadway  
handing me a bucket and shovel  
a day full of hammering  
that seem to stop and listen  
repeating 'manure—for the garden'  
pushing the bucket at me  
and whose garden was it  
and if it was no shame and no one would laugh  
why didn't she get it herself  
forced out protesting  
to scoop it up  
under the unseen seeing  
of saws and hammers.

18

Ernst Dieffenbach  
1843  
'the government town of Auckland  
7 miles from harbour to harbour  
2000 inhabitants  
a bank  
a fine barracks of SCORIAE'  
and 15 years later  
Julius von Haast  
'the hills  
models of volcanic action

20

have made luxuriant gardens"  
Hochstetter 1867  
'cones  
with craters distinct  
Rangitoto  
the Vesuvius of Waitemata'  
and at the century's turn  
the German Swede  
no 'sang aus dem Exil'  
(unless the 'sang' should be blood)  
but moving stone over stone  
terraces walls  
as of a century's habitation  
a landscape adjusted  
to the will of a man  
in the hot eye of Vulcan  
under the hammer of Thor  
between two seas.

19

winter rain  
splitting firwood in mud  
the blinding melancholy  
of the thrush on the wet lawn  
of the grey warbler singing  
intolerable sundays  
Waitakeres curtained in cloud  
Mt Eden swimming in windows  
the roast the early fire  
a dead man's gloom alive  
his 'sang aus dem Exil'  
in the redwood panels.  
Clean hands on cold keys  
cold feet on clean linoleum

21

and through aquarium glass  
the green world  
heavy with moisture  
the grey rocks  
black with rain  
the iron roofs  
loud with it  
'and crystal ski-lifts  
running on telephone wires'

But on a rare clear morning  
frost  
sheet-ice on barrel water  
crystals over bunched soil  
black burns on broadleaf

20

Maungawhau/hill of the whau tree  
from hilltop the two harbours  
and westward  
the Waitakere Range  
and he saw fires on Maungakiekie  
and called his people inside the palisades  
stomachs tight  
fear in the pits at sundown  
crouching behind the lashed stakes of manuka  
moon cold over the gulf  
and silence  
Sunrise  
long shadow  
and out of shadow  
voices of the Ngaitamatera  
crying vengeance on Tainui  
for the death of Reia  
mid-morning the palisades breached

22

high noon  
the last skull crushed  
on the slopes of the crater  
Unbroken silence of the tapu  
harbours blue and gold  
isthmus green  
spring wind in the whau's white flowers  
among the rotting stakes  
Maungawhau/Mt Eden  
200 years of silence  
hill of death  
hill of heaven.

23