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CONTINUUM: THE MIXTURE'S MOMENT

**Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English
at Massey University**

by

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1993

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CONTINUUM: THE MIXTURE'S MOMENT

INTRODUCTION.

This thesis grew out of a simple observation. This was that in terms of sheer numbers, allusions to the bodily, the sexual and scatological in Continuum outweighed all other references.

What is the significance of so much 'body language'? Is a simple 'listing' enough to show anything of interest?

Certainly the specific body allusions have several characteristics in common. They often use strong, short and sometimes 'shocking' words; they use the idea of taboo to seek out new meanings; they are often alliterative or punning (and hence literary and conscious); they may often involve pain or release and spillage. This is their emotional or immediate function. We might infer that Curnow wishes to be 'all things to all men,' to have the sort of 'inclusiveness' approved of by a critic like Eric Partridge when he discusses the imagery of Shakespeare's plays. Time after time, critics have insisted on Curnow's willingness to face the 'reality of experience' or have commented that he seizes 'the reality prior to the poem.'

What that 'reality' might be needs to be addressed, if only to lift it out of the realm of the purely subjective. For example, 'reality' *per se* cannot be a direct transcription, or an 'average' agreed reality, seen by some imaginary, communal eye. As Curnow himself makes plain in the poem itself entitled "Continuum", we live in a world where we cannot even rely on the evidence of our own eyes:

The moon rolls over the roof and falls behind
my house, and the moon does neither of these things,
I am talking about myself.

He characterizes the author himself as a "cringing demiurge". That is, as a second, lesser creator, he is trapped in the limits of his all-too-human apprehension:

It's not possible to get off to sleep or
the subject or the planet, nor to think thoughts.

This is not just insomnia; it is the dilemma of experience itself.

Is there somewhere we can begin to extract some form of 'reality' somewhere within "the mixture"? In a letter to this writer, Curnow has this to say on the lines in '16 March 1978' about Aldo Moro's feelings just prior to his capture by the Red Brigade:

Normality was the moment's
mixture, moment by moment
improvising myself,
ideas, sensations.

He comments: "At the time of writing this I had to imagine what it was like for Aldo

Moro (on his way to a meeting where he hoped to resolve - or avert? - a crisis in the nation's affairs.) 'Normality'? the expected, the usual, till it crashes into the unexpected; the guns worn by the bodyguard change to the guns of the Brigade Rosse (the guards are 'gunned down dead...' as in fact they were that day.) For the 'moment' in his official car, I try to show Moro 'improvising' himself, out of the presence of the guards, the smells of the upholstery, mentally running over the speech he has prepared, 'the mixture's moment', beyond which nothing can be known ('trusted further')... as his awareness forms and re-forms 'moment by moment'... until another 'normality' (of the violent kidnap and imprisonment) supervenes." 1

This goes beyond any "average" perception, the "normal" in that sense. What is stressed here is the briefest of certainties, "the moment's/ mixture", the limits of time not just for a busy politician but perhaps by implication for all experience. If process is part of experience then perhaps that process itself is a 'continuum' out of which individual moments may be extracted.

The extract from Solzhenitsyn's The First Circle which precedes the collection is suggestive of a "focal point" for a poet with Curnow's predilection for meditating about time:

"There is a law that governs all artistic creation, of which Kondrashov had been long aware, which he tried to resist but to which time after time he feebly submitted. This law said that no previous work of his carried any weight, that it could not be counted to the artist's credit. The focal point of all his past experience was always the canvas on which he was working at the time; for him the work in hand was the ultimate expression of his intellect and skill, the first real test of his gifts... only *now* was he really finding out how to paint!..."

-Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, tr. Michael Guybon.

This implies that 'now', for the artist at least, comprises moments seized upon to recompose or use. In addition, Curnow states in a prefatory note that the whole collection is ordered in reverse-chronological order for the sake of an internal "logic" about which he does not actually elaborate. It may be useful now to briefly trace some possible connections in time across the collections to show how the 'here and now' is embedded in the past...

In Continuum, the relations between the "now" and the "never now" are basic to time because the present is continuously becoming history. When the past emerges from the "safe side of history's mirror" ("The Vespiary") we may be able to reflect that we are never in charge of our lives; it is "sooner or later than you think" ("Narita"). One may try to bridge the generations temporarily ("The Pug-mill") but the question time will ask is: "*Where-/ ever have you been?*" We belong where we are.

In an interview with Peter Simpson recorded in Landfall 175, Vol. 44, No.3,1990, Curnow makes the statement that *poetic* order may be at least as 'reliable' as our perceptions gained through the uncertainties of ordinary *time* order: "I like to think poetry

can-perhaps even does- substitute a kind of simultaneous order for the linear, chronological if you like, order that we assume for most practical purposes."

In "The Loop in Lone Kauri Road" Curnow emphasizes that philosophically it is the same road to the same sea. In "You Will Know When You Get There", since life and travel share the same end one can only salvage remnants out of memory. "An Incurable Music" and "An Abominable Temper" as collections seem to show that on the way to that "deep last unison" we are faced with the incurability of both Nature and human nature or 'temper'. Finally (or is it firstly, if one follows the general logic of Curnow's arrangement in the collection?), in "Trees, Effigies, Moving Objects" things have a tendency to frantically "back away" as we go forward in time. The question arises as to whether life consists of only chance resemblances, whether tides or cycles of time are random or purposeful. If the Apocalypse can occur at any time, then any human purpose may be lost or not even matter. 'Now' is as valid a time as any. This, in effect, brings us back full circle.

To sum up, if time is continuous, there may be little we can do but to accept the 'now'. We have to start somewhere, walk a road, start/ stop breathing, reach back through memory or history. There may be no Grand Entry into (or out of) time, no great trumpet call and yet either might just occur during the next breath. Within such uncertainties, the 'real' may be said to exist.

The consequence of these kinds of ideas was an early decision not to explore the intellectual background to Curnow's scepticism so much as to focus on patterns of experience as they reoccur. If experience is a closed circle, a 'round' of reality, then one needs to start at individual moments in order to break through.

Much of what we experience is the mundane or ordinary. That the extraordinary may co-exist with the mundane is the subject of other remarks made in the same letter. I had asked about the poem "Any Time Now" (the last in the collection), and about the curious sharp focus on an eggshell and a capsicum stalk introduced, I felt, as a kind of over-distinct detail, almost surrealistic as set against the apocalyptic general tone of the rest. I remarked that: "you refer to (possibly) seeing an eggshell, a capsicum stalk:

Such details are always so terribly

(if that is the word) distinct...

Curnow's reply is characteristic: his starting point is the ordinary:

"I have lived for nearly 30 years at this address, about a kilometre from the nearest shops on Parnell Road. From this latter, Brighton Road is the way I go home, down the slope, all the way overlooking (where not broken by trees or roof tops) a Hobson Bay foreground and a Remuera background. That is 'my walk' in the poem...

"The eggshell and the capsicum stalk were lying on the pavement; it was rubbish collection day in Parnell, and somebody's scraps had fallen. That is how they got into the poem. It interests me that you insert a '(possibly)' before the mention that I 'saw' them. Of

course the poem does introduce them in the form of a question ('Was it then, etc?'), while on the contrary, the 'extraordinary things' - a sort of surreal or apocalyptic projection of one's fears - are plainly stated as fact, categorically." 2

If one chose certain points at which one might lift out some samples of the local and the particular, then this might be a way forward. Assume the position of the artist in The First Circle and one might find some kind of recipe (if that is what is required) for the way in which Curnow approaches the broad themes in history such as sacrifice and blood.

From the very 'local' or immediate concerns such as one's feelings about the rape of the land involved in the felling of the giant kauri, to the feeling of human inadequacy when faced by other natural 'giants' (such as rocks at low tide), one might then conceivably move to the felling, or attempted felling, of human figures (those political figures who loom large in popular history). In questions about such wastage, perhaps all these could be seen as examples, writ somewhat large, of time's "mixture's moment", that process out of which significant, if wide-ranging, symbols could be extracted. Necessarily then, it was a starting point to look at a few examples lifted out of that struggling mass of history of which the natural tide of the bodily and sexual processes forms but one part.

What might then start as the perceived 'ordinary' becomes teased into invention by Curnow, into ways of exploring other possibilities.

The "honest meeting of language and experience" (3) is not a simple affair of transcription of something 'out there'. It comprises a flexible interaction, in part a decomposition and a different re-creation to suit the very ambiguities of experience that give rise to it.

This thesis has tried to remain faithful to the single idea that what comes first is the world, pressing in, ^{upon,} forcing itself in front of, though not replacing, intellect. This seems to be what lies behind the large number of physical allusions and the complex resonances that such reference sets up. The underlying intellectual scepticism has already been the focus of other work such as one finds in Trevor James' article in the Journal of Commonwealth.

Literature: "*Errors and Omissions Excepted*." 4

One runs the risk of exaggerating a single dimension to Curnow's approach. The poems themselves are so tightly worked that broad generalizations must do them a disservice. But the plan of approach in each chapter has been to seize some large and, as it proved, haunting form.

Chapters 1 to 5 begin, then, being firmly anchored in this world. Chapter 2 stresses place, in particular the west coast of the Auckland area and the trees and rocks found there. The effects upon the Waitakere area by the entrepreneur Dr Rayner in "A Fellow Being" remind the poet of personal guilt, a guilt brought about by the unnecessary sacrifice of kauri. This ancient forest growth is desecrated and as photographs of the time show, the trees themselves seem stranded like whales before being dragged away. The 'otherness' of

nature in those trees is stressed. In the same chapter, huge rocks seen on the west coast at low tide, revealed up and out of their normal watery element, seem to challenge one's own existence by their separateness of 'being', too.

Chapter 3 concentrates on fish, and the potent symbolism of Leviathan. The body of Spenser's "dame Nature's wonder" rises up in a variety of contexts as "a big one". Less specific than trees or rocks, it coasts many waters in a variety of shapes linking the real or the immediate to the symbolic, from kahawai found on the west coast of the North Island to sacrificial figures such as Christ. It may even be the devil. The spirit of Job predominates: "Against these eyes where is a man to hide?"

In Chapter 4 the effect of place, whether Karekare or Florence, gives rise to thoughts about the actual fabric of the church, with its echoes, artefacts and ceremonies of music and voice .

Chapter 5 focusses on two big political fish: Medici and Moro as examples of sacrifice.

In Chapters 6 and 7, drawing on Curnow's spirit of scepticism and involving perhaps a more integrated discussion involving thought and language acting together, an attempt is made to show how far beyond the reality of self one can go ("Things To Do With Moonlight"). A discussion of "Organo ad Libitum" stresses the hyper-real, the almost surrealistic effects of the exuberance of the language in evoking both the imagined point of death of the reader and the subsequent funeral.

Finally, the question that may be asked is, how well integrated are the complex shifts in subject within the fabric of the verse? And some brief discussion of this is taken up in the final chapter.

Supplementary subject-matter not readily assimilated in the above chapters is discussed in the appendices.

To restrict a poet's world to that of literary consciousness is to ignore the very environment in which the poetry itself grows. To quote C. K. Stead again:

"Against [an] invitation to abstract oneself, this wishful dissolution of pressing realities, Mr Curnow has stood firm, knowing that to be 'freed' from one's environment is to be freed from the necessity to live." 5

There seem to be several stages through which the 'realities' emerge. There is a stage at which the poet looks hard at what is around him. Yet Nature, or the environment, has a way of shrugging off attentions. What has been experienced (because it is stored in the memory) is not perfect, and so under the hand of the artist becomes a fiction. The fiction itself becomes its own way back into experience. Its form and its construction not only make an artefact, a poem, but forge links made through the process of an imagination that encompasses it all and helps complete a circle of artistic creation.

In giving shape to the verse, the words themselves show verbal virtuosity, and although this has dangers in 'cleverness,' it is a method of resisting closed lines of meaning.

Typically, this involves puns and word play, larger ideas repeated or extended across stanzas or poems, single word emphases and images, and a strong verbal movement.

1. Letter from Curnow to writer: 7 June 1993.

2. *Ibid.*

3. C.K. Stead, In The Glass Case : Essays on New Zealand Literature (Auckland: AUP, 1981), p.190.

4. Trevor James, 'Errors and Omissions Excepted' : Allen Curnow's Philosophical Scepticism, Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No 22 (1987), pp.55-72.

5. *Ibid.* p.191

CHAPTER 1: WHY START WITH THE PHYSICAL?

"Where do we look to find ourselves?..."

"It is possible to think that we live by fictions which tell ourselves about ourselves, by a kind of magic. For most people, or enough people at a time, they are true; and that would be sufficient, if the question of truth were not always open, or on the point of being reopened. It is more than a matter of knowledge, getting facts right, mere truthfulness. Since we are always short of knowledge, and have to speak or act without enough of it, we have to make do with our fictions. This is human existence such as it is..."

"Any daily paper or cheap weekly recites for us the lesser fictions, the sporting successes, the moral and social postures, the current scientific, economic and political oracles. It may be a little frightening to think how much depends, of such common or personal sanity as we possess, on a faith in this kind of magic. If today's fiction wears thin, there will be a replacement tomorrow.

"On the greater scale, nations find the fiction of their very existence shaken, if not defeated, by revolution or defeat in war. The experts in a more potent magic have prevailed; the fictions have to be rewritten, in blood, and in another language..."

These are extracts from Allen Curnow's introduction to his Four Plays, published in 1972 (pp. 8, 10, 11). This thesis will try to pick up this essentially questioning spirit to show how he moves to chart, or mark out territories very much in the way the first cartographers would have worked. The emphasis is to move, despite doubts, from the known to the unknown, to place the close at hand (the self's perceptions, the place one finds oneself in, the time one finds oneself caught in) within larger patterns of place and time.

An example of where we stand now in our rudimentary knowledge may be seen in this introduction to a layman's guide entitled Timescale: An Atlas of the Fourth Dimension by Nigel Calder, where Calder discusses present time concepts:

"Chronographers, if I may use that term for those who put dates in sequence in a more comprehensive frame than earlier chronologists, are at roughly the stage of geographers after the first circumnavigators had returned to base. When Mercator laid out his chart of the world in 1569, he knew the size of the planet and the whereabouts of most of the principal land masses; important elements were nevertheless missing, and ignorance jogged his hand as he drew the coastlines. Exploration proceeded at only a few knots, and more than a century later, Jonathan Swift could justly remark:

So geographers, in Afric-maps,
With savage pictures fill their gaps;
And o'er uninhabitable downs

Place elephants for want of towns.

...And even though the time-explorers turn up every day with new findings and breathtaking assertions, an Afric-map of past events may be better than nothing." 1

And again, later, Calder says;

"A sailor checks the foot of his chart for the date of the last correction: if it is more than a few weeks old he keeps a sharper lookout.... A little integrated knowledge subject to continuous amendment is more reliable than a library's worth of complacent suppositions. Experts were recently teaching their students that the continents were fixed, that there were four ice ages, that Europeans invented cast iron, and so on. Exposure of errors gives hope of offering something better, but it also proclaims fallibility..."

That there are strong parallels between the problems of explorers relying too heavily on their maps as absolute truths and the task of a poet in interpreting his world is not surprising. Curnow has absorbed much of the twentieth century not only in really specific detail but in the larger crises of representation of the human condition.

The very title, Continuum, is provocative. If, for a moment, we take Einstein's view of the universe of space and time, we are told that space and time are laid out as a four-dimensional continuum. Any event is specified by its location within three dimensions of space and the instant of its occurrence along a single dimension of time. A relation between time and space is implied in the term 'light year'.

For the purposes of this thesis, the starting point will have to be a little local knowledge: certain events at certain times.

"Where do we look to discover ourselves?"

Though Curnow is not a scientist, his gaze must be just as steady. In the poem "Continuum" the answer is clear: as a man engaged in writing about the world, the author must use himself and, as his "tools", the power of language. There will be no attempt directly in this thesis to engage in debate over "texts" and the nature of language. That lies outside its scope. Some remarks here by C.K. Stead may be helpful about general tendencies that will have to take for granted:

"For Doctor Johnson, as for most literary theorists of the eighteenth century, the purpose of poetry was to offer, in verse as near to impeccable as could be, general truths. As the faith in general truths has diminished, so the insistence upon the mysteriousness and at the same time the particularity of poetry has increased. Poetry deals in the concrete, not in abstract ideas, which belong to philosophy and other forms of discourse." 2

The starting point will be, of course as so many have remarked, by looking hard. It will be what Curnow himself signals as a beginning, "the local and special."

In "The Duke's Miracle", one of the Four Plays, the Duke says:

I had the fancy to stand, as the painter stands,
Looking steadily at my wife - as you must do -

Past the edge of this canvas - If the world were flat
As some say it is, your painting eyes go sailing
Over the flat ocean of this canvas, you're at home there -
Then over the edge you go - God knows where!
Chaos, probably. Blinding rain, blood,
Thunder-clouds cracked with fire. Somehow or other
You scramble back to your flat plain, you're at home,
And you fill it all up with such a smiling image.
See, my lady has stopped smiling now.
Her picture goes on smiling for her...
Even a miracle like this Duchess of mine
Has got something natural at the bottom of it."

Not only does this passage have relevance to the representation of the Duke's wife, but it helps to focus on the problems of any artist in going beyond the "natural representation". If we pick up the problems of an artist in the twentieth century in the visual field, for instance, we may see a common sharing of development across the arts.

Even in a layman's guide to modern art we may find the following kind of discussion. Painters all use codes and conventions, and photographic realism is simply one of those codes that perhaps allows for easier decoding and may tend to persuade the viewer suspicious of the 'non-realistic' that it is 'closer to the truth.' But as the guide remarks, "modern artists, Matisse among them, have discovered and exploited the fact that detailed description is not necessary in order to evoke references to reality in art. Abbreviated signs are sufficient; cues alone can do the job. We bring memory to bear on what the painting gives us, filling in the gaps and interpreting details in the context of the whole." 3

Visual rhyming within a picture creates links and draws analogies between different objects and hence will bring in richer associations. There will be a search for unity and an integration between, say, background and foreground forms. Whilst the subject matter creates distinctions between things yet the treatment and the paint (for poetry, read 'the language') will themselves counteract the distinctions made, creating larger rhythms across the canvas.

Here in the same guide is a brief description of some of the effects found in Cubism:

"The continuities created over the surface of the image help bring foreground and depth together, to re-establish the integrity of the flat surface of the painting....The shading of the planes in ... Cubist works does give a sense of (shallow) depth but the shading is contradictory. The result is that the hints of depth cancel each other out, and the eye is 'returned' to the flatness of the canvas surface, to the sense of a two-dimensional design."4

The reason for this extended comparison between painting and open form in poetry is that this more elaborate code, this way of seeing, may not be quite so accessible as 'realism'.

Yet once learnt, it is capable of providing subtle distinctions and precise comments. Because 'realistic' art doesn't invite us to question its language, it tends not to want to disclose the assumptions buried within it. By contrast, the new language (paint or whatever) permits parody and irony, for instance.

In discussing the "real" then, in terms of map making, we must be careful never to mistake the "map" for the "territory". Curnow himself is anyway always aware of the incorrigibility of nature and the seeming inability of words to represent it.

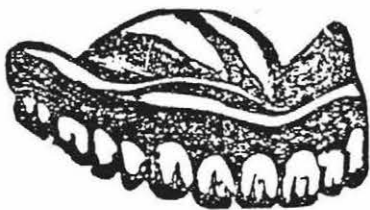
In examining the exact facts that make our fictions, this thesis will tend to stress the following: a distinct awareness in the poet about the exact meanings of words, almost to the extent of following the deep cultural, almost genetic code that lies within dictionary language meaning, and an acute consciousness of literary tradition with grafts of literary allusion within the text.

The starting point for many poems is the consciousness of the past, and places where inside the poem there is a feeling of 'reconstitution', making anew through the "mixture's moment" of language.

Outside, in nature, there will be a resistance to assimilation. And within the human condition it seems, too, that "compassion sings to itself".

There are moments of specific impact where one meets the world almost head on at moments of personal questioning. Language may not follow logical or narrative structures and will tend to be fragmented. Speech patterns are imposed over external form and there is carefully-judged incompleteness.

1. Nigel Calder, Timescale: An Atlas of the Fourth Dimension (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984) p.11
2. C.K. Stead , Answering to the Language (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989.) p.25
3. D. Clarke: Modern Art: A Graphic Guide (London: Camden Press, 1987.) p.34
4. Ibid.p.34



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A typical Rayner advertisement.

Figures 1 and 2: Dr. Rayner's advertising campaign. Source: Scott, D. Fire on the Clay. Auckland: Southern Cross books, 1979. pp 91-2.

Dr. Rayner's
Methods



positively eliminate every element of chance.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT'S HOLY ABOUT KAREKARE?

We will literally start in Curnow's own backyard at Karekare in the Waitakeres to show the influence that particular place seems to have had. This is particularly apt since in the poem "A Fellow Being" Curnow ironically identifies himself with the entrepreneur Dr. Rayner, who made a fortune out of the kauri trade, as his former alter ego. The place Karekare has been a second home for Curnow for many years, and its shameful past of exploitation by the timber trade accords with his images of Karekare perhaps once being a 'holy' place.

The Waitakere Ranges form a crescent-shaped rampart to the west of Auckland. They have deep valleys and fast flowing streams. The ranges themselves are the eroded remnants of debris from ancient volcanic eruptions. Now accessible in an hour's drive to any tourist or camper journeying from Auckland, prior to 1840 they were covered by a magnificent mature forest with a vast wealth of natural species, from miniature mosses, lichens and ferns to a supreme example and symbol of all giant trees, the massive kauri.

The account by Andreas Hochstetter in his book Neu-Seeland, quoted in Dick Scott's Fire On The Clay, gives some idea of the awe that this particular tree could generate then:

"I have seen beautiful Kauri woods in the coast range West of Auckland, in the Titirangi chain, on the Waitakeri, in Henderson Bush and in the Huia on the Manukau Harbour.... The crowns of the Kauri pines rise far above the rest of the forest trees, and produce dark shades upon the slopes of the mountains and in the valleys, here and there intersected by the light green stripes of fern trees.... They often occupy several square miles; sometimes there are only 30 or 40 trees clustered together which thus, mutually protecting each other, thrive splendidly... tree by tree rises of equal thickness and of equal height, like pillars in the hall of a cathedral. In these clumps the Kauri pine suffers no larger forest trees by its side..." 1

The kauri, *Agathis australis*, features widely in "A Fellow Being", and at various times and levels in "A Raised Voice", "An Abominable Temper", "Lone Kauri Road" (and title reference in "The Loop In Lone Kauri Road") and "There Is A Pleasure In The Pathless Woods". The kauri is a national symbol of the past and a rich source for analogy. It has a straight columnar-shaped trunk like the pillars of an ancient temple; it is actually beheaded when felled so that its canopy can be burnt leaving the body or trunk behind for haulage; when felled it lies, as Curnow expresses it, as "elephant limbed" or as precious as any ivory hoard, perhaps apt for the activity of Dr Rayner whose dental practice at its height employed five men who extracted the teeth of thousands (see *figures 1 and 2*.)

An equivocal tone and personal involvement with kauri seem to be set early in the volume, in "A Raised Voice". In his father's church:

Panels of a pale-coloured wood
liturgically pointed assemble

to enclose and to elevate the voice:
is it soft *kahikatea*, so readily

riddled by the worm of the borer
beetle but ideal for butter-boxes

or heart *kauri* ? the rape of the northern
bush left plenty for pulpits and pews.

The sense of being personally involved through family occurs in "An Abominable Temper", section VI, where the grandfather H. A. H. Munro ("*sometime Judge of the Native Land Court*") mentions his father's failures in relation to the local tree:

Disobedient to my father,
the timber trade failed again, the Maoris felled
no more *kauri* to make him spars for Chile.

It wouldn't have mattered if they had been English trees : [they]"don't care/ what hemisphere this is..." (section II)

It is the "columnar" ghosts of the *kauri* that seem to haunt "A Fellow Being." Since Dr Rayner is the fellow being that Curnow speculates might almost have been a previous alter ego, it is Karekare timber that unites them.

Curnow directly quotes from Eliot R. Davis (*A Link With The Past*, 1948) that Rayner was:

A dentist by profession and an extremely clever businessman with an immense number of commercial interests. He had a huge forest of *kauri* timber on the West Coast near the Manukau Harbour, out of which he made a small fortune.

In the "dawn's early light," Curnow, living within an hour's drive of Auckland at Karekare, has "a use for/ this valley". The "sun that comforts my/ westward windows" lights up (to quote the Auckland Regional Council's booklet on the Waitakere Ranges) "ranges noted for their cover of mature and regenerating native forest."

There is something holy (or unholy) that meets the gaze of Dr Rayner in that earlier dawn. It is:

a rare and a dreadful
vegetation
vast bole by
swollen bole
a sickness
peculiar to the soil
of the island stuffed up
into the sky jamming the
exits to the world

valley and belly
tumoured
a case of
gigantism
(pathological)
bole by bole sheer as
Karnak

In an area whose name Karekare has faint echoes of the word "Karnak" there is an ancient feeling of sheer size, a rarity, a holiness in the growth of those trees. But the "*old priest of Ammon*" 2, presumably now the high priest of Mammon, wants to know:

what's holy about Karekare
sheer's sheer in Egypt

The right angle that made that civilisation famous will be made by the same geometry: trees sheered off at right angles. And if a ridge is too steep for a 'tramway', the sight of all that timber will prove to be too powerful, too "pathological" to resist. So the doctor will apply his surgery to the "sickness" of the soil and estimates "the cost/ of extraction". It is the sheer natural majesty of the tree that reduces the doctor's actions to the level of parody or the nursery story of the Big Bad Wolf :

by God I'll
Timber!
We've come and we'll stay till
there's not a stick standing.

A whole section (III) in "A Fellow Being" praises the kauri. It is announced grandly by its Latin name and the repetition of the words "massive" and "columnar" give weight to its presence. The language, as elsewhere, uses the style of an entry in a reference book, yet the lines are broken into awed and echoed sounds:

Agathis australis a lofty
massive
massive! tree
100ft. (30m.) high
sometimes far
higher with columnar
columnar!
trunk 3-10ft. diam.
or even more
more!

The size goes beyond the mere specifications. The text book information becomes animated into a compressed flurry of imagery where the canopy head of the kauri can represent so much of the unique quality of New Zealand with its geysers, its clouds, its

essential nature, or "sap" more than in one sense being so distinctly antipodean:

spreading head of great
branches geysers pumping
cloudy jets clouds forming
dissipating

The literal flow of life in the tree itself is itself upside down, against the pull of gravity:

sap is rivers
pouring the wrong way
up
up!

The kauri seems to be from the time of gods, the time when myths were not "dry on the beach" and fish not simply there to be appropriated. The verse here is 'always on the boil' and the description of the fruit and methods of dispersal of the kauri uses almost an exact quotation from the Mobil Book of New Zealand Trees (3)

fruit a hard ovoid or
globose cone which falls to
pieces
when ripe scattering
compressed winged
winged!
seeds

The new appropriated kingdom of Rayner, stretching from Whatipu to Anawhata, lasts for a biblical seven years. Saw blades, his new set of "teeth", or, to use another analogy a plague of locusts in ancient Egypt, slice through the crop, which comprises "a few million board-feet". From the profits of this bounty is constructed a new temple of Karnak: his mansion at Almorah Road, Epsom, complete with Turkish bath and

doors between the bedrooms
hidden in the wardrobes...(section VII)

Kauri becomes household wainscoting. Cumow reflects on his own "collusion course" with Dr Rayner. It is his own inability in being born at the wrong time to stop the destruction that provides a most poignant moment. The kauri, like elephants, are made almost extinct by the doctor who had had such power:

the
'columnar' the elephant-limbed
conifers of this western
ocean toppled and rolled *you*
had only to lift your hand [my italics]

And now, returned to the present tense, surrounded only by the names of the walking

ANAWHATA

Keyhole Rock

Fishermans Rock

Whites Beach

Te Waha Pt.

Monkey Rock

NORTH PIHA

Lion Rock

PIHA

Taitomo Is.

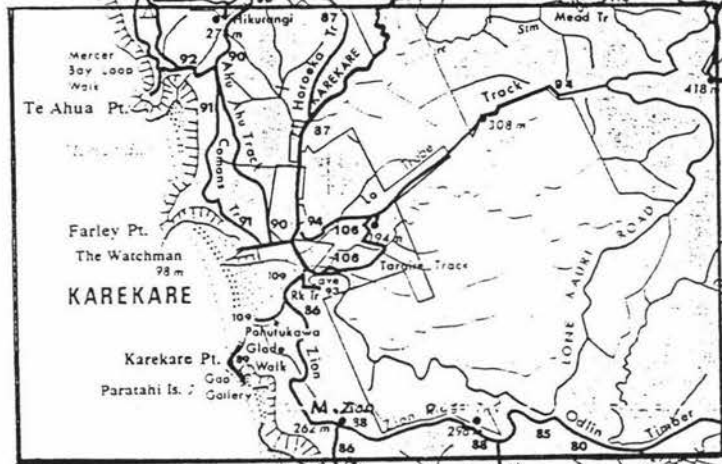
Nun Rock

The Gap

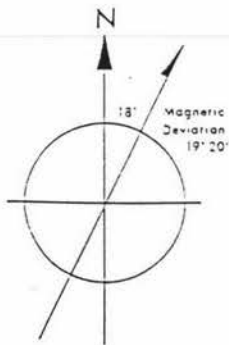
Blowhole

Takatu Head

Note: Mount Zion
 and Zion Ridge
 : Cave : Wharengarahi
 : The Watchman
 : Paratahi Island
 : Lone Kauri Road



TASMAN SEA



WHATIPU

Cutter Rock

Paratutae Is.

Map 1: Detail from the Auckland Regional Council Parks Dept. map of Waitakere Ranges Centennial Memorial Park showing Karekare and some of the walking tracks of the area

tracks of the Waitakeres, and the few protected trees for the visitors, guilt is reawakened:

the seeds are flying
down into the teeth of the wind
the bulldozers the week-end visitors
in March on my roof the bursting

cone wakes me like hail the soul
flies this way and that in the thinning
dawn dark where the paths cross and the
young trees know only how to grow. (section X)

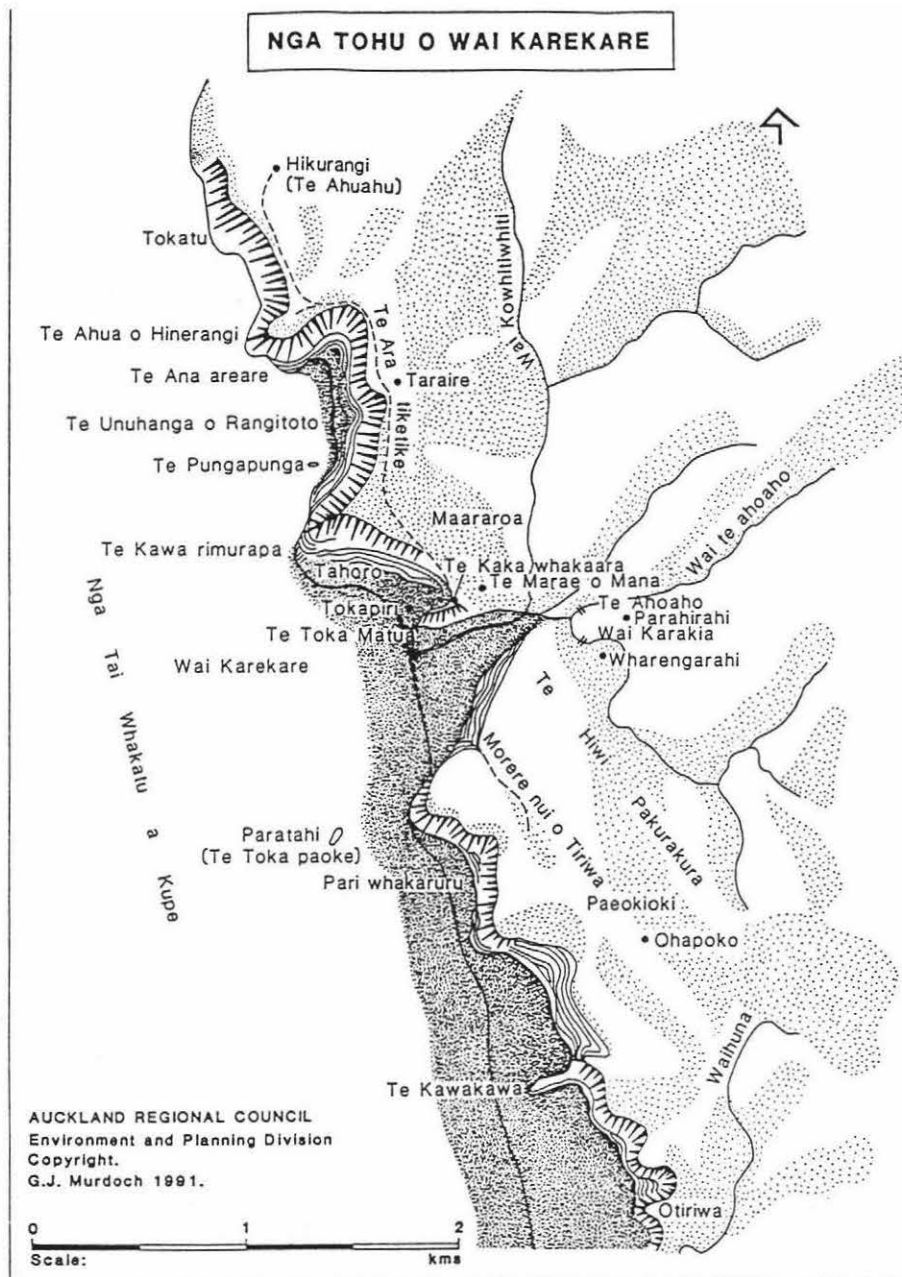
The disposition of the features around Karekare itself has its own hinted significance.[see *map 1*] The paths or tracks that now cross the Waitakeres number 132 listed ones. Many of the tracks point out, now only by the extent of their names, the Upper Kauri track, the Lower Kauri track, the Walker Kauri track, the Large Kauri track, the Kauri Grove track, the original abundance that gave rise to them which has gone for ever.

Of particular interest are the number of loop tracks in the area. Besides the ordinarily-named tracks such as the Mercer Bay Loop Walk, there appear the Upper and Lower Loop Tracks and, suggestive by its name alone, the Identification Loop. The idea of walks so named naturally centering round and returning seems curiously to parallel Curnow's own disposition in his verse to return to his subject in cycles such as "Lone Kauri Road" (an actual feature in the Waitakeres) and "The Loop In Lone Kauri Road". There is more here than just the identity of named places.

An examination of Maori history throws up some interesting sidelights on the area.⁴ [see also *map 2*.] On the seaward side, of the three most prominent rocks [*figure 3*], there is a legend from the age of stone when inanimate objects possessed animate qualities. The Watchman (Te Matua) had two children who took the form of smaller rocks. The rock that clung close to its parent (Te Tokapiri) is still to be seen near its parent, whereas the disobedient child, who had a tendency to wander away to play, became frozen in later ages much further off and became known as Paratahi, Curnow's "Paratohi", (' the sibling that stands apart'). It is interesting that it is this particular rock that Curnow chooses to illustrate its resemblance to the bell-tower of San Giorgio in "Moro Assassinato" : "All the seas are one sea...", because for Moro's widow,

the obliterations
are one obliteration...

here and not here, to sit
by the sea which is all one,
where Paratohi is neither



Map 2 : Karekare, place of Maori legend, showing The Watchman (**Te Matua**) and the disposition of his two children. **Te Tokapiri** stands close to the parent while the disobedient **Paratahi** is 'the sibling that stands apart'. **Wharengarahi** may be seen slightly inland. Source: Northcote- Bade, J (ed.) West Auckland Remembers. Vol.2. Auckland: W. Auckland Hist. Soc.(Inc.), 1992. p.20.



'Nga toka e toru' — 'The three rocks'. Tokapiri is the tall rock standing on the beach near its parent the rocky headland 'Te Matua'. Paratahi stands alone a kilometre to the south midst the boisterous seas of 'Waikarekare'. (G. Murdoch.)

Figure 3 : 'The three rocks'. Source: Northcote-Bade, J

steel stalk nor bell-tower
and either is Paratohi...

in an act that recomposes the mixture's moment.

Of local candidates as a possible 'Duomo', the nearest to Karekare itself is Wharengarahi or 'large overhanging rock shelf', a prominent shell-like shelter. [see *figure 4*] However, a more likely choice seems to be an immense sea cave Te ane areare ('the cave with the cavernous and vaulted interior') just north of the Reef of the Bull Kelp [*figure 5*] The cave has an interesting history. Early in 1825, following a very bloody skirmish between the Ngapuhi and the iwi of the Kaipara and Mahurangi areas, one young rangatira escaped with others and hid in the sea cave for several days before eventually leaving to go into exile, perhaps an interesting echo of the bloody events connected with the Pazzi conspiracy, with Lorenzo de' Medici himself the object of the earlier parallel finding safety inside a chapel in the duomo at Florence.

It is not affirmed that here at Karekare there is some kind of exact replication but it is perhaps so, that in searching time, one finds alignment or correspondence:

Time and again, the Tasman's
wrestler's shoulders

throw me on Karekare
beach...

There is a casting up or, in another sense, a re-casting of the "one tale/dead men tell."

Any westward-facing coastline in New Zealand especially in winter time will force on one some kind of recognition of nature's power to change. Two such poems that recognize this, on home ground so to speak, are "Dialogue With Four Rocks" (addressed to jointly and not necessarily to the individual rocks previously discussed) and "Moules à la Marinière". Here the sheer presence of actual objects forces one to meet them at the margins.

In "Dialogue With Four Rocks" we meet the solid resistance of Nature head on, literally and metaphorically. The rock formation has size - "a visiting beast" like a Leviathan - "more rocks than anybody imagined." It is the "whole mile"... Nature has "dropped the floor of the beach", i.e. it has gone the whole hog. "The thing 'demands an/answer'." Just as one couldn't personally 'conceive' "A wall of human bone the size/ of a small church", so presumably God conceived this in natural religion and so we have to conceive it, too!

It overhangs in several senses: if rocks are difficult enough to "approach" then the hot star that hangs over all must be beyond all conception except by God. In this example of a 'think big' project, the creator has certainly proved himself; ([he] knows he's "made



Figure 4 : Wharengarahi: 'The large overhanging rock shelf', reminiscent of a duomo with its shell shape. Possibly not the basis of the Karekare duomo concept.

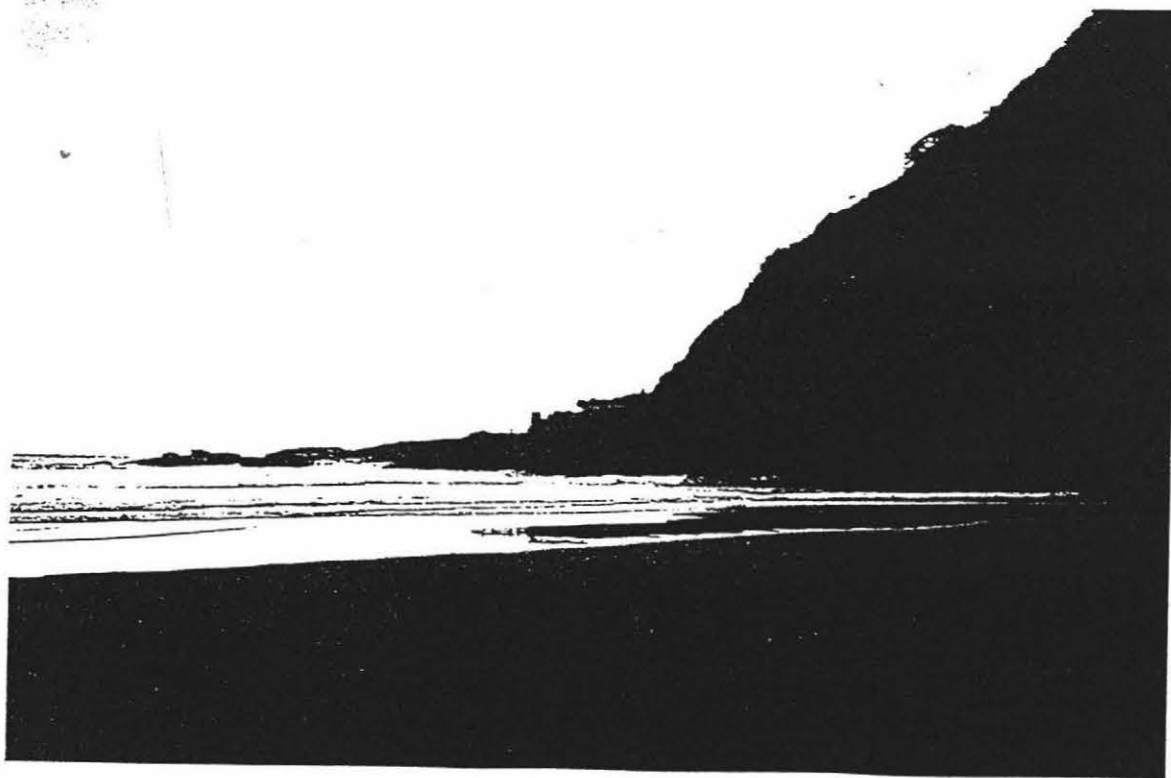


Figure 5 : Te Kawa rimurapa: 'Reef of the Bull Kelp', north of which lies the seacave Te ane areare ('the cave with the cavernous and vaulted exterior') which is most likely to be the basis for the Karekare duomo setting.

it," colloquially) and we can only stand and stare.

Curnow now puns on the words "mate" and "matter" in the word "material" and on "stony ghost" (holy ghost). Yet to us it is simply a tied tongue, an ancient silence existing long before our Babel of languages. We can only be certain that:

I think the rock
thinks and my thought is what it thinks.

The rock face reflects, resists, we may try to get closer, but only succeed in magnifying and distorting. We see the rock face in a Swifteen way with all its imperfections as a human face, our patches and "spots/ the size of an iris of/ a mouse's eye to a smashed/ egg...[and] wetted/ by a weeping lesion". One is thrown back on one's own reflection. The Creator made stone but he made it tongueless.

Memory is stonier-hearted too. It pulls him back to a primeval state of crawling, both in the remembered hunt for a wounded hare and in the broader, more generalized view of the human condition.

The question is: if it is dialogue, is it simply one way? The rocks are said to be
a formation

[born] out of the gut of gales the noise
the haze the vocabulary of
water and wind.

Rock offers like life "no/choice of exit", except the flux of

little
as you like to think nothing's either
covered or uncovered for ever.

Perhaps this is the natural tempo of the swallowing gut of the sea, or slamming of seadoors in "*chlomp*" in "Organo...", or the "surge-black fissure" of "You Will Know..." in having an "arrangement" with the tide. (These latter two poems are backed, one on one in the collection to add weight to this kind of interpretation.)

In treatment, lineation is free-moving, allowing the weight of words to fall:

High and heavy seas all the winter
dropped the floor of the beach"...[my emphasis]

Typical here are run-on lines and an added emphasis so that even on the page the eye has to literally "walk round / a formation", picking its way through sound too, especially the alliterative such as "the gut of the gales" or closely related sound words, "the noise/ the haze", sibilance, too, being "the vocabulary of/ water and wind".

In the very placement on the line, the words "the thing" are exposed like two rocks at low tide. Two small words, too, "little" and "think" run as main threads of emphasis through the poem. There is a characteristic blending of relationships: "I know you do you know me?" Where does dual or separate recognition begin at all?

In comparison, the rock in its appearance like the wall "of a small church" has a

"big wig" of trees on top. The trees are knotted into a judicial chaplet (wise or simply dictatorial?) The reference to 'thinking big' (alluding to the Muldoon/ Birch industrial projects of the late 70s and 80s) is further pointed up by the wry reference that there may even be possibilities of a "cerebrum behind the bone"!

Ideas now seem to tumble or swing down through the lines, using variants of the words such as "overhangs/overhung" or "cupping" to "up-ended seas". The effects are commonly alliterative and strongly assonantal, for example:

if it

stoops to speak so to speak the word
of a stony secret dislodged

almost waiting poised for a word or idea to be dislodged and tumble down. By contrast, the rock-like words on the page remain fixed and intransigent: "a tied tongue loosed the stony ghost". Then Curnow wryly satirizes human speech by referring to the parakeet which makes "brilliant remarks" or the "fluent silences of the/ eel in the pool". Gifted with speech, we can only impose ideas on Nature which always resists us.

After a stricter tempo here with stanzas of three lines, we finally reach a 'stonier' section. Caught in the bare imagery like the hare he pursues between sun and stone, he is "[Clawed]... back where I'm crawling ." There is "no//choice of exit".

Another "mixture's moment" caught at the lowest point of another tide is to be found in the poem entitled "Moules à la Marinière". Again this is a direct response to the literal shape of "the bottom of the tide", to the "stony text" that is coated or bedaubed with the internals of the gut of the sea, akin to one's own "interior/ furnishings". To recognize the similarity is to "[know] more than's good for you" because through it you smell your own nature. However, this weight of possibly inherited guilt is, in the event, actually unsurprising and you are "unaccountably " lifted clean by "the// tonnages of water lightly climbing/ your back."

The human subject is picked up by forces beyond resistance, now in his turn like the mussel shell being prised off. Then he can only exercise the "succinctest [of] body language", in moving "arms and legs" in the basic act of self-preservation. Perhaps this is, in the event, the only "language" with which one communicates with nature (see also "The Parakeets At Karekare" which emphasizes, too, the inability of communication outside oneself). The paradox of "it's up to you down/ in the gut" draws on two possible meanings, the actual gut feelings of threat and self-preservation and fear, and the knowledge of "how natural it all is, in the end/ no problem", because the event is so close in emotional response to release and hence closest in 'fluency' to the language of the sea.

Curnow seems interested *in extremis*, the verges of danger, the "mixture's moment", equally specifically in "This Beach Can Be Dangerous", which has as an epigraph a quotation from Nietzsche:

"The fatalities of his nature cannot be disentangled from the fatality of all that which has

been and will be." Here the beach can give rise to visions of the dead transfigured: "DO NOT BATHE ALONE." [See also *figure 6.*] Death or dissolution is pictured not in terms of the ferryman of Acheron but of the Bay Belle en route from Paihia to Russell, frozen in mid-lift of the bow: "That/ will be all I suppose" ("A Reliable Service")

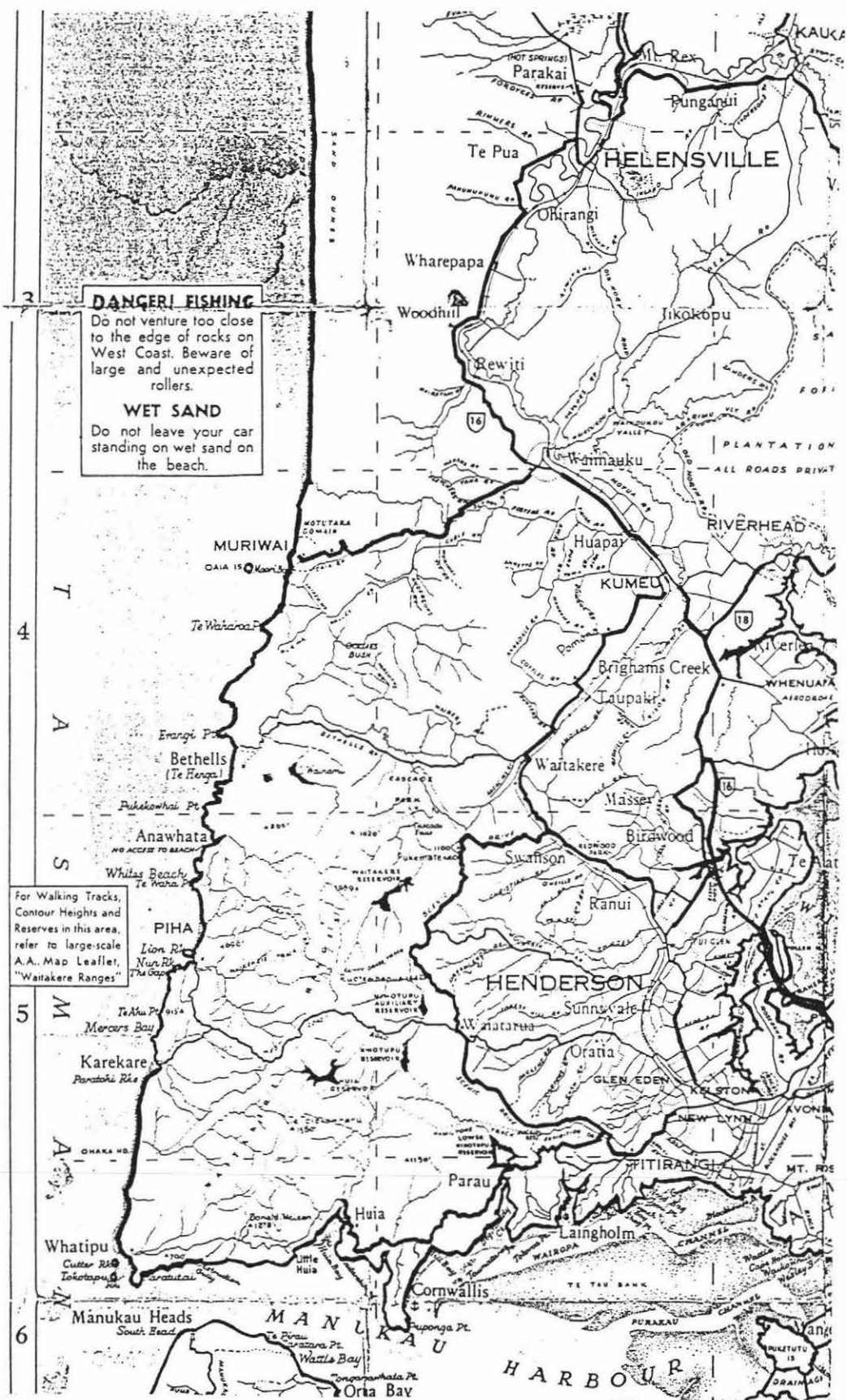
Whilst the slack of the swell "drooms, fills, empties/ refills" yet an incoming tide can clean, taking one beyond the mere euphoria of uplift, and beyond "the dull thought of drowning".

That the "moment's mixture" can be a solitary and individual time, event or meeting is emphasized in "You will Know When You Get There". It is a matter of one knowing and recognizing - "Down you go alone, so late". Located on the edge of night/ the grave (the "surge-black fissure") at the meeting of water and land again, at a moment when the light itself seems shredded during the late "season," this is a moment when the vacuum is "a hesitancy of the earth rolling back and away" (the larger rhythm of the earth turning diurnally) or a tomb entrance rolling back.

It is a scene primarily with its own physical 'whump', the light itself almost tangible like "bits of crushed rock". In going down to the sea, the figure of a man seems to have "an arrangement with the tide", but instead "A door/ slams."

1. Dick Scott, Fire on the Clay (Auckland: Southern Cross Books, 1979), p.65.
2. Sometimes spelt Amon. Of Thebes, he progressed from being a local god represented as a goose, becoming eventually the supreme Egyptian God, about whom, however, little is known.
3. The actual extract says: "The mature cones are globular, dark green and resinous, and when ripe fall to pieces and scatter the winged seeds," in Nancy M. Adams, New Zealand Native Trees. (Auckland: Mobil New Zealand Nature Series, 1987), p.15.
4. See as a useful guide to the area around the beach at Karekare: Graeme Murdoch, "Wai Karekare-'the Bay of the Boisterous Seas'" (in West Auckland Remembers, Vol.2, ed. James Northcote-Bade, West Auckland Historical Society, 1992), pp. 7-28.

Figure 6 : Detail from an Auckland A.A. map of 1958 of the West Coast. The wording of the warnings might have been almost ready-made for Curmow.



CHAPTER 3: COLLISIONS AND COLLUSIONS (The big one!)

Can you pull in the Leviathan with a fishhook
or tie down his tongue with a rope?
Can you put a cord through his nose
or pierce his jaw with a hook?
Will he keep begging you for mercy?
Will he speak to you with gentle words?
Will he make an agreement with you
for you to take him as your slave for life?...
I will not fail to speak of his limbs,
his strength and his graceful form.
Who can strip off his outer coat?
Who dares open the doors of his mouth,
ringed about with his fearsome teeth?
His back has rows of shields
tightly sealed together;
each is so close to the next
that no air can pass between.
They are joined fast to one another;
they cling together and cannot be parted.
His snorting throws out flashes of light;
his eyes are like the rays of dawn. (Job 41, 1-18) 1

The Oxford English Dictionary entry for 'Leviathan' is a useful beginning for a 'thinking big' approach to this beast. The definitions there prove to be relevant to this poem.

Some scholars refer to a root "liviathan" from the Arabic "lawa" meaning "to twist", conjecturally rendered "wreath", whilst others think it is adopted from some other foreign language. Three meanings have relevance in some degree.

First, it is the name of some aquatic animal (real or imaginary) of enormous size, frequently mentioned in Hebrew poetry. A creature that is both real and imaginary is precisely the useful kind of blend of the real and the mythic that can link several worlds but can never be quite "caught."

Second, it is also something bound up with the very act of creation. Just as cruelty and mercy are bound up together in the human heart, so evil is part of the world it inhabits. This is the feeling engendered in a passage such as we find above from Job, both awe and horror. In Isaiah xxvii.1: "In that dai visiten shal the Lord in his harde swerde...vp on leuyathan...a crooked wounde serpent..." By its nature, Leviathan cannot be "drawn out" by human action, only by "the Lord" in the sense of being separated from the nature of the world, or "untwisted".

The third meaning is that introduced by Thomas Hobbes as a metaphoric

conception of the organism of political society; and it features only peripherally in our consideration of Medici and Moro, political leviathans in chapter 5.

The fascination of fighting something more powerful, of beauty mixed with evil, is at the heart of Job's dilemma. The greater one's good, the greater the test of that good. Whether one has the strength to survive a struggle with "a big one" is a problem common to fishermen and to those who resist evil.

Curnow's titles for his poems are always suggestive of rich connections, and no more so than "Canst Thou Draw out Leviathan with an Hook?" It is interesting to note that the Oxford English Dictionary mentions, for instance, that the word "draw" has a strong Teutonic verb base. It has eighty-nine separate meanings, and my impression is that Curnow makes extensive use of dictionary meanings to build up many levels. Amongst the meanings of "draw" are those of "pulling/ hauling", "bringing forward", "attracting", "extracting" (as with entrails), and most potently, "representing."

That Leviathan as a monster was originally many-headed seems entirely appropriate. It appears in many places in the Bible including those in Psalms and Job (as above in a modern, the International Version, translation.) The monster is variously referred to as the sea or water equivalent of the behemoth, king of the animals of dry land. In the time of Baal it was thought that "He who mounts the Clouds" (Baal himself) was engaged in epic combat with the enemies of divine order so he slew Lotan (Leviathan) seven-headed serpent of the deeps. In Job it assumes a particularly interesting significance in chapters 25-27 (the fragments) that after Yahweh's cosmic victory over rebellious forces, he confined those forces under the sea. Later, the concept was used as a means of showing God's triumph over the monster of primeval chaos that He had helped to create in the formation of the world, so that projected into eschatology, it becomes a symbol for Yahweh's final triumph over all rebel powers and establishment of his kingly rule. 2

The starting point for Leviathan in this poem as usual is the "local and the particular" and we may let the suggestibility of the title hang for a while. This poem begins with "An old Green River knife" and the whispering of its sharpening. There will be blood.

The business of catching kahawai, luring them close to the "cathedral" (rock), bleeding them quickly once caught so that they taste good, seems to be the immediate concern but in fact the mixing of senses in 'being caught' modulates to a comment on the condition of the whole of human kind 'caught' between one breath and another, the pain of living colloquially expressed in the remark:

...you're caught, mate, you're caught
the harder you pull it
the worse it hurts, and it makes
no sense whatever...
how you kick or cry...

As it is the opening poem in prime position in "An Incurable Music", we are

now forced to consider the various weights of meanings we should place on the title. The question of "draw[ing] out" now becomes acute: the thoughtful death
whispering to the thoughtless,

Will you be caught?

The unravelling (in this sense "drawing out") an 'answer' from the twists of the human condition only results in death, when the true salt of one's being joins the salt of the sea. Understanding is ultimately denied human knowledge. There may be sacrifice in the world but it does not guarantee success.

People who cast lines into the depths of the sea draw up a variety of life sometimes. Around them the seaworld moves yet does not change:

The rocks kicked angrily, the rocks
hurt only themselves, the seas without a scratch
made out to be storming and shattering,
but it was all an act...

The next reference to Leviathan occurs in "Recitative" section I of "In The Duomo" where Christ's face is "enormous", "conceive[d]...smiling" on the place where the monster may be found. Sacrifice to a "Messer Domeneddio god and lord" involves "blood" in a "cup", and the "agony" normally associated with the "cup" is given another perspective not wholly Christian. Will blood sacrifice cause a monster to move? Are we calling up the devil, instead of just casting our "barbed" and puny, ridiculous wishes in the teeth of who knows what? Again there are no answers. The sacrifice simply "floats/ in a red cloud of himself..." The physical leakage is perhaps all we are capable of seeing. Its efficacy or otherwise is beyond us.

The world of spiritual mystery in section III "A Turning Point in History" uses standard 'fishing' imagery of the church, ostensibly continuing the task of the disciples as 'fishers of men'.

But in fact High Mass has been chosen as the opportunity to lure the Medici to their deaths. So "The flood of a king tide", the "deepest sounding/ where the big ones are", "the tackle secure" takes on an ominous secondary meaning. There are "big ones" to be drawn into the net along with "the other poor fish...threadbare in Tuscan shoddy." We have been drawn rapidly away from the idea of sacrifice for greater spiritual understanding to a political stabbing unofficially sanctioned by the Pope himself.

The poem ~~concludes~~ returns in part V to the present solid world of the cathedral rock and success at fishing. Mrs Dragicevic is the 'Old Hand' of the title, perhaps reminding us of the "experienced hands which do not shake / serving up to Messer Domeneddio god and lord / the recycled eternity of his butchered son." Yet the miracle of the leaping fishes does take place. They offer themselves to "the necessary knife" as if this is part of the order of things. All you can personally do is to simply keep "your head for heights", try not to get

swept off rocks and just accept the contradictions.

In "An Incurable Music" cruelty and mercy are found in the same human heart. This seems central to the human dilemma and to the problem of death and sacrifice in the world : "A big one! a big one!" Could this in fact be The Leviathan? The question, then, "Can't thou draw...?" must remain rhetorical so that the opening poem in this series remains propositional.

Bible,

1. New International Version, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978.
2. See the discussion in Veronica Ions, The World's Mythology, London: Hamlyn, 1974, p.15

CHAPTER 4: FROM KAREKARE TO DUOMO

An essential way in which the poet examines what proves to be an ungodly world of blood-letting and sacrifice is through religious reference. This occurs in his uses of the physical fabric of churches, the signs used by the Christian church, the articles of faith, the details of church ceremony, and especially of church music and the names of God, drawn from both Old and New Testament, as well as a whole segment of other religious veiled references. Curnow has also generously brought in personal reference to his own family background.

And Curnow's religious references and allusions are never very obscure. They are always within a reader's reach.

First, the references involve a large number of allusions to the actual fabric of churches or cathedrals and their counterparts in Nature in cliffs, headlands, shells, rocks or the seafloor.

is Jesus Christ our Lord
"The church's ~~one~~ foundation", so says the hymn. But there are no human assurances that what goes on inside is based on true faith. What we do have is the booming empty dome of *Santa Maria del Fiore* ("In The Duomo") and the sunless dome of the Lincoln Memorial in "Bourdon." Idealism and violence rub shoulders.

Santa Maria del Fiore
In *Santa Maria del Fiore* or at the "cathedral" on the west coast of New Zealand (kept in lower case to distinguish it from a real Cathedral), "It is all in the walls of one great shell incised", where time has created in Nature an eminence and perhaps humans have in the "cathedral" added only their

poor untidy

littles or nothings,

bits and pieces, yet 'of such' is the highly esteemed 'kingdom of heaven', what else?

To imagine the cliff as a church or "makebelieve masonry" marks out the limits of human perception:

interior sunlight extinguished at eye level

which is rock bottom.

There is the possibility that the walls of a cathedral are just a shell; at best it must remain ambiguous. This, it is made clear by the poet, is because the artist, the cathedral architect, those who gaze on their creations, only "comprehend[s] the introversions of arches."

The place is first conceived as a cliff (concave?) in New Zealand, on the west coast at Cathedral Rock, but then blurs into a domelike vault where human aspirations and prayers drift upwards like birds or motes of dust. It is a kind of shell, hollow, a natural cathedral dome on the interior concavity of which it may be possible to conceive the face of God. As the

distance reduce even prayers to that of "the murmuring surge" like the sea at Dover.

The sheer size of the place has an "eminence" in Cumow that is called "magnetic." It is a natural majesty that easily attracts awe or praise. Yet the morning sun itself can blot out detail,
the columns, the ogives, the hollowed throne,
smoking the kite-high concavity of the cliff.

The repeated idea of "smoking" as in "the smoky/ambiguous morning sunlight" emphasizes the chiaroscuro of conceiving anything here whilst in context, the word "magnetic" stresses the ability of the place to attract bits and pieces of human clutter (one remembers the many statues in some churches) or the natural clutter found at a beach or at the bottom of a rock face.

To try to establish oneself as having identity here, one may take up a customary chant, or a recitative to declaim meaning. Recitative, for example, is a state midway between song (with its implied release and freedom) and speech:

This is the rock....

That is the clifftop....

Here is where Leviathan lives,

which may help establish a place where belief may take effect, a little like a bird singing to mark out its territory. "The instructions look simple, the trouble is...." as if this were someone following a guide-book or a construction kit. But though presumably the words one should follow are written up large on the walls of the cathedral (even "incised" in their authority) yet their sense seems blocked, particularly, it seems, by dust, swirling across vast spaces ("smoky...sunlight", "motes", "blurred [clifftops]").

[Dust not only impedes vision; it can deaden, sometimes literally. In vast national monuments, like the dome on Washington's Capitol Hill or the Pentagon in "A Framed Photograph" ("the megagothic national cathedral"), they too have to be dusted free of violence, coldwar diplomacy or the "fallout" from the atomic bomb. In "Blind Man's Holiday": "What does God smell of but the dust of hassocks...?"]

Having lost any clear perception in the heights, we return to the setting of "cathedral rock", the place where Mrs Dragicevic fishes, which is angled, brutal, clubfooted like the base or abutment to a wall [*figure 7*], just as dangerous even though away from the dizzying heights of the roof or dome "dooming" with its distant promises of death and damnation. Murderous patronage in Italy itself is firmly placed on the bedrock of the church floor just as much as pagan ceremony is in 'Recitative'. The concept of actual hollowness is continued in the possibly rock-formed throne which is "hollowed" with an echo of irony on the near word sound of "hallowed". At high mass later when the murders are about to be committed, the floor of the cathedral becomes a sea floor under the "king tide". The church pavement is "cold underfoot/ and over it full flow, high blood" with the flushed pomp of the purple and scarlet. The rest of the population are simply "poor fish" or "drab/ discolorations of plankton".



Figure 7 : "Slaty grey strata/ angled..." ("In the Duomo": part v: "An Old Hand .")

From the main building of the church we move to the sacristy where, besides storing the valuables of vessels and vestments, the knifing of the brother, Giuliano de' Medici takes place. It seems in contrast with, but just as much a result of 'an arrangement' as "the linens, the sacred/ silverware", though this time "the blood is poured" by other kinds of "arranged" hands than those priestly ones which "do not shake."

Generally objects of significance found inside the church are trappings such as the baldachin canopy in "Lone Kauri Road" which is described as a "black umbrella" or the Ghiberti doors called once the "doors of paradise" but which have been "regilded."

Outside, there is mention made of stone edifices and statues, such as the one of Mary at Paraparaumu in "Magnificat", again something hollow, locally constructed using two-by-fours and "lapped with scrim and plastered/ three inches thick ", or some memorial like a presidential obelisk in "Do It Yourself" that the handyman might possibly erect as "his thought upon Waiheke.../ for the time being."

These objects seem incapable of yielding up anything, just as the rocks in "Moules à la Marinière" that are "wetted perpetually" are simply "quotations lifted from/ life into a stony text," or perhaps the inscription on a churchyard gravestone becomes just a name in the course of time.

[The intransigence of boxes or any container to do other than to contain is fairly constant in Curnow, though one may call on a receptacle to "*receive me*" (the end of 'A Framed Photograph') or any box that has an ostensible purpose attached to it, like the US mailbox in "Friendship Heights". Once 'posted', who knows the fate of anything?(US postal service notwithstanding.) And the grave must be literally the Last Post box.]

Curnow employs standard signs basic to Christianity in very literal ways. A dead lamb is washed up on Karekare Beach; the ichthyic symbol of the early Christians becomes New Zealand kahawai to be hooked and killed; nets, hooks, lines are employed at many levels of meaning. People can themselves be "hooked" by meanings imposed or accepted meaning imposed as apparent order.

Of particular relevance here is the whole business of names and statement. From "An Abominable Temper" (part X) we read :

In the beginning was the four letter Word
Tetragrammaton, an angry father.

Other parents bear a mention. In "Bring Your Own Victim" the father, either Abraham with Isaac, or Agamemnon with Iphigeneia, prepares to sacrifice his child to the god (Yahweh or Artemis) but a substitute is found at the last moment. And the holy mother in "Magnificat" states simply: "I AM THE IMMACULATE/ CONCEPTION." In the face of these, one may only ask questions as a child might.

Titles, by their specific allusions, give focus to many of the works such as "Lo, These Are Parts Of His Ways", "Canto Of Signs Without Wonders", "A Passion [For Travel]", "Dialogue With Four Rocks", "Canst Thou Draw Out Leviathan With An Hook?", "In The

Duomo (Recitative)", "The Poor" [you always have*], "An Upper Room", "A Dead Lamb", "Magnificat." 1

If "unisons happen/ how does anybody know?" If by "unisons", we think that it is an agreement of voices, heavenly and earthly, though we may try to raise music on high, yet it may not sound a universal chorus at all. We may be simply listening to ourselves.

What we hear in terms of music at first in the Duomo is "Recitative" as The Oxford English Dictionary defines it: "A style of musical declamation, intermediate between singing and ordinary speech, commonly employed in the dialogue and narrative parts of operas and oratorios." According to Addison, cited in The Spectator of 1711, the "transition from an Air to Recitative [was] more natural, than the passing from a Song to plain and ordinary speaking."

Here there are voiced responses in the pagan/ Christian ritual, a priest-like voice with the immediacy of a Mass:

This the rock
That is the clifftop
Here is where Leviathan lives

and, in an older more pagan chant, the blood-letting:

This is homoousianus
this the cup
this is where he floats..
this is morning sun...

with a sub-voice of priest and celebrant, who unnamed, calls up doubt. So much for high art (or high church).

From direct instruction in antiphon: "say, no/ *I am teaching Leviathan to swim* " there is a transition to several kinds of voice, first that of Dante in Italian, and then an anachronistic comment about how "We all boil together when we boil" in "*A Professional Soldier*." The form of the triplets here mimics the layout of the stanzas in The Divine Comedy.

By naming, one may hope to connect with reality or one may try to 'connect' by offering up sacrifice or prayer often to the accompaniment of music. So there is "Magnificat", a "Recitative", a chant, "A Hot Time" with the Daniel- type jazz of Shadrach and Company, or a "jig time" with a nodding organist. In the fiery furnace it is "deadly still and silent", the music of the dead or of angels, who like Milton's angels, atomically tiny, dance on the tip of a needle. Updated to the gramophone era: "dead still and silent at the centre of the disc" and "The needle was a diamond paddling in the bloodstream," the stylus

[1* My brackets. My additions, which do not alter the intentions here, I feel.]

both draws out pain and an unearthly music. Contrast this to the raucous frenzy of "Organo ad Libitum" (section II), "flung on the bloodstream" with the raunchy nun, a kind of religious Tina Turner, who is accompanied by the male organist who "fondled the keyboard", drawing out of the erect but dusty pipes "a husky/*vox humana* ." Whatever the type of musical accompaniment, in Continuum, it seems always to be "an incorrigible music."

CHAPTER 5: MEDICI AND MORO.

From one big mythic fish, we move to two large political 'fish' separated by five hundred years almost exactly, the human foci of "An Incurable Music."

Though the men themselves are presented in parallel as examples of sacrifice in blood Cumow probably does not intend detailed parallels in the lives of his two subjects. Yet in some ways there are similarities between Lorenzo de' Medici and Aldo Moro other than the remarkable coincidence of dates of the killings 26 April, 1478 and 9 May, 1978.

In the fifteenth century, Lorenzo 'the Magnificent', friend of poets and politicians, reflected the contradictions of his age in having to mix Florentine politics and the interests of his family. His position in Florence and his ability to control Florentine foreign policy were inseparable. In setting up mutual alliances between Florence, Milan and Venice, he thereby threw together the Pope and the King of Naples who distrusted him. Yet though he was the leading figure in politics by the time of the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478, he held no regular position in government. His influence was only indirect. Much of his time was spent in having by necessity to be agreeable and to consult widely with others since he had to combine the demands of a business empire, the management of the Medici party and the needs of Florence itself.

The Pazzi conspiracy against the Medici family arose partly out of the inability of the Medici bank to support a papal loan. The Pazzi bank offered the money and thus the family ingratiated themselves with Sixtus IV, pressing with their own fierce competitiveness to support the Pope's cause at the expense of the Medici.

In our present century, Aldo Moro, the other subject, took office as the Secretary of the Christian Democrat party. He had held a succession of posts, including secretary of foreign affairs and minister of justice. Moro was a centrist but was forward-facing, since he formed a coalition with the Socialists. When, for instance, he formed his own government in December of 1963, the cabinet included some Socialists who were then participating in government for the first time in sixteen years. This 'organic' government was, however, faced with Italy's high inflation rate and failing industrial growth, and Moro was prevented from initiating many of the reforms he had envisaged. This angered the Socialists and helped bring about his defeat in 1966.

By October 1976, he was the president of the Christian Democrats and exercised a powerful influence in Italian politics even though in a striking resemblance with Lorenzo's early political life he had held little public office.

Just as money and privilege were behind the Pazzi conspiracy, so too the Brigade Rosse's avowed aims were to undermine monied privilege in the Italian state and pave the way for a Marxist upheaval. In their early days of terrorism they struck out at obvious symbols of Italian industrial wealth at first, bombing Fiat, Pirelli and SIT-Siemens in Milan.

It is reported that at the time of the assassination attempt on Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici, the members of the Pazzi family rode up and down outside the cathedral declaring: "Liberta! Liberta! Popolo e. Liberta! Abasso i Medici!" in order to cover up their true, more mercenary, motives. This has its grim parallel in the demands of the Brigade Rosse for freedom for thirteen members of their organization.

The bloody tide following Lorenzo's escape was terrible. Several days of rioting followed, with eighty people killed in revenge. For example, the old man Jacopo de' Pazzi escaped, but was later recognized, tortured, and hanged. His body was later dug up and propped against the Pazzi palace and his decomposing head used as a knocker. The Pazzi family names and coat of arms were expunged in total disgrace.

Curnow seems most at home with the parallels of such a violent age in the chirpy, modernised clichés of a fifteenth century mercenary; "no job too small, go anywhere," and the spiralling self-absorption of the Moro terrorists in the later act.

In 'A Turning Point in History,' the Church and State concerns are here successfully amalgamated and paralleled by being incorporated once more into the imagery of fishing. The text is compressed and this seems the sort of area that Curnow is happiest with, rather than say a looser narrative.

Stanza one is worded and therefore 'placed' like an invitation card to history, to let "place" and "time" be accepted into larger patterns of cause and effect.

Puns and allusions freckle the whole text: "king tide"/ "king fish", "high tide and time", drawing the threads of political plot and religious irony together. In the "holiest" of lures, "the steel and the stone [are] scraped crosswise" (sharpened like the "Green River knife" earlier in the volume) in a holy invitation to butchery and blessing.

This prefaces a fully-realized scene in the Cathedral, involving the 'high' blood (a full tide of passions and a Passion), the purple and scarlet (church and state), with the word play highlighted by the sound of the poor "scuffing" the floor, and "graining the green" (see also the use of the term "graining" in "A Window Frame"). The pun on "poor fish", both colloquially 'mugs' in much larger games being played here, and the trawled-in "miraculous draught" of men brought into the body of the church, mixes both meanings uneasily. The background detail is superbly captured, such as the damned souls pictured on the church mural: "the size of a skinned eel / in Beelzebub's teeth and the fire from Christ's left foot." The main actors in this drama are certainly caught between Satan and Christ or between money and salvation.

The ironic contrasts with today, slid in under the ribs of the text like a knife, are sharpened in the details of the church a "half chiliad later". Though "Jesus [is] dooming in the dome" still, it is only a background fresco now and the Ghiberti doors that represent "the doors of paradise" have merely been "regilded". (It was apparently the southern doors through which Lorenzo de' Medici escaped from death and which were closed to shut in the assassins.) However a "turning point of history" is ignored because of the inordinate

inconvenience of "mopping up the bloody mess": both a political mess to clear up and an eternal 'mopping up' by stewing ^{sinners} in their own later promised damnation.

In '26 April 1478 ' (that date so remarkably chiming with '16 March 1978 ' the date of the capture and even more ominously close with the date of the murder on 6 May), Curnow seems to enjoy the Rabelaisian unchurchmanlike "lascivious leakages" of the miscreant assassins. They may go forth fulfilled ("*Ite missa est*"). The big fish to be landed is the Magnificent One, Lorenzo, poet, friend of artists and scholars. The sacrifice like the ritual enacted "In the Duomo" will be made on the church floor, "flat as bedrock", offering up a victim for Messer Domeneddio. And after the partly-botched murder, there is a stink left, a "strong bestial smell/ of dissolving clay."

With "*An Old Hand*" we are back to the "cathedral"(rock), the here and now, the turn of a king tide when the kahawai offer themselves in the bounty of nature: "having to, having to come..." as "an acceptable offering/ to... the necessary knife". So at the end, the poetry is religiously, politically and artistically loaded.

Placed between these ancient and modern acts there is a parodic interlude, "Dichtung Und Wahrheit", an interlude in the sense that the narrative thread is left temporarily before the modern events and parallels are brought into play in "Moro Assassinato".

In this segment within the sequence, violent language, left to itself, reduces itself in its inward turning to a *reductio ad absurdum*. Again "mopping up the mess" is a cruel yet absurdly necessary act. In it, we may compare M.K. Joseph's final narrative comment through the storyteller (not Joseph himself as Curnow seemed to feel at the time) that "Sometimes I think it's the finest love-story I know," ¹ with what Curnow chooses to do with it. Joseph's narrative inserts include a now perhaps dated psychological treatment of male sexuality. The narrator says for instance at one point that handling a knife by the central figure Saul Scourby was "a kind of primitive tapu thing... this feeling of power in his weapons, part magical, part practical, part phallic, was an unthinking part of his special abilities." ² This becomes the subject for lampoon by Curnow:

What can you do, with nothing but a cock
and a knife and a cuntful of cognac
if you haven't got the talent?

You certainly don't need "the literature on the subject".

Perhaps one needs the verbal and poetic invention, the ability to make the imaginative act mean.

In the parallel act of "Moro Assassinato", "the mixture's moment" is history recomposing itself. The poet becomes the imaginative wanderer in the first section: "*The Traveller*."

Philosophically and in terms of the connections across the two examples in history he

is using, he attempts to demonstrate that:

All the seas are one sea
the blood one blood
and the hands one hand

This is a very important transition in the collection. Yet it has the air of being only this. One senses through the somewhat artificial focussed / unfocussed effects of image, that in film terms this is meant to be a 'dissolve' but that it does not quite work, simply because in carrying through the 'message' the poetry does not quite measure up as language. "*The Traveller*" as a piece has simply too much to 'do' for the structural strength of the verse.

Through the dolorous tears of "Eleonora, la Signora Moro" that "splash black, dry on the page" which become almost objectified into artefacts, we see that she is intended to be someone deprived of full existence, both as a person in life and as the woman in the poem who is "here and not here". Through the spillage of her tears we are meant to see that "the obliterations/ are one obliteration". In terms of music it is certainly a difficult transition passage tending to rely on statement and assertion. Can Life be so transformed to Art?

In "*An Urban Guerilla*", parallel in placement to the earlier "*A Professional Soldier*" in the earlier poem, the fear of damnation in the Italian soldier of 500 years before is replaced by a manic concentration on things seen in magnified, obsessive, yet dead detail: in flaking paint, the thread of a curtain left dangling, in the arrangement of switches on a transistor radio. There is a terrible fixity. The terrorist himself feels caught up in his own "dead design", with its horrible inevitability (and fierce boredom), something akin to Macbeth's "tomorrow and tomorrow...", and in his seven comrades "repeating/ themselves, repeating".

Terrorism comprises "getting the sums right", a kind of mechanical combination. It is almost as if the terrorists themselves become the agents of time, in a terrible machinery of revenge upon history. Certainly this particular terrorist is concerned with the specific mechanisms of handguns, "the things that think faster than fingers". This period of Moro's capture reflects the dangers of endless enclosure, solipsism in a "dusty time", breathing the smell of dusty mortality. It is a terrible limbo where the compulsion to act becomes insupportable, a sign of the age they occupy: "we had to be/ terrible news, or die". In waiting for the right historical combination, they meanwhile both aimlessly fondle their loveless guns and as people become "encoded" as "abcdefg" in having sex in various combinations with one another, a modern hell echoed in "*A Professional Soldier*" with the reference to Dante's "stewing [of] damned humanity". Time itself seems to telescope out.

The "*Lampoon*" is simply made, a statement of self-contradiction that Moro is "the biggest" yet will die "the death of an old crook".

As noticed earlier, in the segment called "*16 March 1978*" written from the point of view of Moro himself, we have a definition, a working definition from the point of view of a

busy politician, of "normality", "the moment's/ mixture, moment by moment improvising myself..." There are three stanzas of definition, including: one's physical discernment of being alive (exact "knowledge...point by point"), being surrounded by guards ("good friends"), a prearrangement of life like the carburettor of a car, then the ambush and the guards/ friends dead: "normality" in the explosive nature of the state or simply of having "one's number up"?

Then there is a split consciousness, a reversal to simplicity, to the understanding of a child. To what extent does the victim become part of the pattern? "the irreversible justice/ of the wrong once done, the victim's// yes to the crime".

So included in the definition of being a 'big one' are statements about what the biggest political fish has to do: [knowing] "exactly where/ I was going, and why, and how". Ultimately this may entail a child-like acceptance as victim (faint echoes of Christ's own humiliation and his ability to teach how to see as a child). "My case was not so special" he says although the terrorists have a feeling of special occasion, that it is time now for a special death. Moro alone gains stature through his own humility. Perhaps, it is argued, the captors are necessary philosophically and in the interests of history because: "They carried me / carrying the child who could teach me..."

In "*The Prison of the People*", one prison, the State, is exchanged for another. What now lives here is the printed word, though only through the relative truth of the newspaper. The correspondence that follows allows Moro's essential humanity to escape. He understands the conspirators. The w.c. becomes a bodily confessional of humanity shared. 'The Prison of the People' shrinks like Balzac's ass's skin. This shrinkage reduces everything to the

silence outside

and the nothing more inside

in a metaphorical evacuation. Time is the only real 'movement' now.

The question "How can we know/ who it is that speaks?" in "*The Letters*" (VI) show another persona emerging even through such brief communiqués, one who has grown increasingly clear-minded, sweeping away all the unnecessary, realizing he has been wrong all his life by simply "meaning well". There is only one *cri de coeur* in five short words:

Get me out of this.

Otherwise he seems to have the serenity of the truly alone, reflected in the formality of his final statement:

at my funeral...

I ask to be followed by the few

who have ^{truly} wished me well and are therefore worthy

to go with me in their prayers, and in their love.

The simplicity of lineation matches the simple last rites in "*The Executioners*" yet conveyed in terms of a material world- the external details such as the type of car used in transporting Moro, a shirt label, the specifications of the number of shots taken and the

range to which "the socks wrong-side out" add an odd touch of indignity (or dignity?) to an otherwise "packaged" victim. The man becomes an 'it', shrinking beyond childhood to a "giant foetus":

It squirmed, shrank, squirted red.

This is similar in effect to the dialectic in "Things to do with Moonlight", where the numen becomes a worm or sperm-like creature. Blood, a mark of the real spiritual duality in the world, becomes a terrible living thing in its own magnified world. Moro recognizes and acknowledges his fate, indeed the bullets themselves:

Gesù! he saw them// coming.

He recognizes it fully in that split second and appears to nod a terrible affirmation. If this is an age "incurable", well beyond reach of poetry, what has or what can replace it?

In "9 May 1978" and in "The Poor", a new poetry of product names, "Alfas, Fiats, Lancias", replaces belief in the stone statues of former heroic liberators. Now the poor pasted scraps of newsprint "20 by 10 centimetres" in their humble, measured tribute. The sacrifice made by Moro "strikes off one more" in the sordid history of sacrifice and assassination; tribute is run off in the cheap "*tipografia* / round the corner."

Curnow enjoys the play of the idea that death also signals the innate inability of language to cope. Since "*Il Mattino*, page one, X-nine columns" is the nearest thing to a modern tribute, it is an age in which the poet finds himself "a guest, in a stricken house/ eavesdropper, easy tourist".

And yet the verse is never that of an "easy tourist". It is characteristically wide-ranging and probing.

We have been examining the "mixture's moment" at the moments of most physical impact on the extremes, or margins when most seems to be tested. They are times of recomposition and turning points when the unity is recomposed in some way. Yet there can be no reassuring signs because the physical mixture, the incurability of human nature will remain the same.

1. M. K. Joseph, *A Soldier's Tale* (Auckland: Fontana/Collins, 1986), p.152.

2. *Ibid* (p.136).

CHAPTER 6: SCEPTICISM: "THINGS TO DO WITH MOONLIGHT."

Perhaps in one sense seen as a separate piece, this remains very close to Curnow's other expressions of scepticism and immediately precedes "Moro Assassinato" in the arrangement in this volume.

The Cartesian philosophy uses as its starting point '*Cogito, ergo sum*' which becomes in its turn a point of scepticism. Descartes, featuring in this poem as a person rather than philosopher who discusses the duality of body and soul, is characterised as a:

most thoughtful and doubtful pissier
who between that humid light [i.e.the light of the moon]
and the dark of his mind discerned
nothing but his thoughts...

Typical of the overall tone is the word "doubtful". Here the word amalgamates several meanings: someone who has stringent philosophical doubts through the rigour of their own mind; but in another sense one whose philosophy may indeed in some larger perspective may be called "doubtful". The leakage of urine and an expression of mind are paralleled then in "thoughtful and doubtful" and this irony continues in the body/soul debate in

his body
had a soul, his soul had a body,
an altogether different matter
and that made two of him
very singularly plural

The word "matter," used both in terms of the delineation between body and soul and in terms of being the literal "material" part of his argument, is revived (in somewhat the same way as it is in "Dialogue with Four Rocks"), as is the pun on the word "solution." This may involve a philosophical "answer" or be something in solution, a chemical spirit, a "holy adhesive", presented here in manner almost as if it were an advertisement for glue: "best bond for body and soul"!

The moon's regular passage allows the sepulchre to be opened once again and Holy Week to be celebrated. At the opening of the poem the moon is "gibbous", i.e. not only protuberant and humped, but growing. It is more than half in size but yet less than the completed whole in illumination. The moon marks off its own passage of time, but will be "cutting it fine" to coincide in fullness with the celebration of full religious rites. Anyway, one could hardly expect the lunar phenomenon to recognize the event. It is a beautiful sight:

imaginably gold
and swollen in the humid heaven

yet it is a pagan moon pulling a face. The word "gibbous" is teamed closely with the word "loose" as if it has almost a quivering, tumescent shape. The markings on the face of the moon place it before "paschal configurations". "Prefigurations" could not "nail " the moon

down. The implied process of CONfiguration, PREfiguration is never completed to TRANSfiguration. Nails and crosses may mark out the "bloody triangle on the hill", yet there is a sense of geometric and religious constriction. The triangle of sacrifice is stiff and demanding. Though the moon may almost refuse to be 'nailed down' to any celebration yet, in its own way, Nature, too, remains incorrigibly intransigent. It has its own language:

By the spillage of light [moonlight] the sea told
the cliff precisely where to mark
the smallest hour.

This poem is hallmarked by its ability to undercut philosophy by the physically bathetic.

I woke
and went out to piss
thankfully, and thought of Descartes...

Between stanzas 4 and 7 to the end of part one, thoughts are made to appear breathless, almost as if tumbling out (like a 'midnight leakage'). Perhaps it is a literal 'pouring water' over even the best of human philosophy, because it is human thought which inevitably must indulge in self-reflection as self-gratification.

Curnow (or the narrator) is, and must be, part of that process, too. In the midst of a night that imposes itself on the consciousness:

And the height of the night being humid,
thickened with autumn starlight
to the needed density and the sea
grumbling in the west,

then

something visceral took the shape of an idea.

The idea appears, emerges, as if a sperm or a wriggling foetus:

a numen, a psyche, a soul,
a self, a cogitation squirmed
squirmed.

The piled-up words imitate the search for the entity that emerges, from the general term "numen" to a kind of self grown into a "cogitation", a product. The duality of thinker and thought transforms to two figures, both urinating on the beach. One is the *doppelganger* of Descartes himself who is now on Karekare beach. He has now become a separate entity in proof of his own thesis, or to be accurate the thought of such an entity at least! Descartes' most vivid memory is not actually any philosophical truth but of being a willing student of the "snow queen Christine" and "his zeroed extension / wait[ing] there for the awful joyful thaw" reducing philosophical niceties to the ludicrous.

By the end of the second section, Descartes' ghost has cast enough uncertainty on his own existence. First, through the memory of Christine whose physical activities outweighed any philosophical speculation! ("her midnights outglittered/ my sharpest certainties.")

Second, through his own reproof of *Cogito, ergo sum*:

the truth being I exist here thinking,
this mild March night.

As for the thought, you're welcome.

This modern pan-American 'signing off' forms the transition to the final short section of the poem and the narrator casting doubt on his own thought and existence:

No less true it was I, meaning me,
not he that was physically present...

The final coda is a black comedy of three stanzas where the only comfort is to "borrow his knife" and cut one's throat. In one swift movement the paschal blood that had begun the poem changes to that of an ordinary suicide, a method of relieving oneself of all problems. Like a midnight pee on the beach, the "small matter on my mind " (the problem of existence) is brought to a close. The mind /matter debate may in the larger perspective : indeed be a small matter. The world has a way of reasserting itself in its normality:

a gibbous moon, a philosopher's
finger on his cock,
and a comfortable grumble of the sea.

CHAPTER 7: REALISM AND BEYOND: "ORGANO AD LIBITUM"

"The highest endeavour to which poetry can aspire is to compare two objects as remote as possible from one another, or, by any method whatsoever, to bring them into confrontation in an abrupt and striking way."

André Breton: Les Vases Communicantes

If for Curnow Life comes before Art, then the art that recomposes what happens at the moment of dissolution must indeed be an "honest meeting of language and experience." 1
In "Organo..." Curnow more than "Explode[s] a dozen diverse dullnesses" ("A Small Room with Large Windows"). There may be

one way to save space and a world of trouble.

A word on arrival, a word on departure.

Yet if the end of the road is the 'message', Curnow gives us "Time's up!" in an exhibition of exhilarating surprises. It is very much in the spirit of the Surrealists.

Here, for instance, is a description of the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme held in Paris in July, 1947 :

"The exhibition brought out into the open a need which until then had remained unvoiced: the need to create a collective myth.

"The layout of the exhibition was conceived as a series of ritual tests, reduced to a minimum, through which the visitor had to pass before he could look at the works on show. Progress from one room to another was intended to help in the gradual transformation of the neophyte into an initiate....the visitor passed into the Hall of Superstitions...a synthesis of major superstitions, which the spectator was forced to overcome before continuing his visit....The walls were hung with dark drapes, through openings in which the visitor could catch mysterious glimpses of the paintings....Then came the initiatory labyrinth, where visitors were guided by a transparent Ariadne's thread. Here, twelve octagonal recesses, like the cells of a honeycomb, were set out as altars, dedicated, after the pattern of pagan cults.... An electric bell rang continuously. Surprise followed surprise - the visitor passed from canvasses to sculpture, from masks to 'objects' of every kind, and the whole was surrounded by a luxuriance of feathers, glass, mirrors, light and shadow." 2

There is something for everyone in "Organo..." True, there are the direct, bold literary grafts. But it is mainly the sheer strength, the frenzy of comment, the asides, and the humour that carry us along. We are swept round as at an exhibition, or perhaps as in a car on a ghost train: "(shriek!)" Or to change the metaphor to that of organ music, as the title partly suggests, we are given a stream of *arpeggios*. As in *arpeggio*, the notes are not sounded simultaneously but in succession and nearly always starting at the bottom.

Death is the most theatrical of events and Cumow gives it the brightness of such an occasion, first with the snippet from Thomas, Lord Vaux: "*For beauty with her bande*"... We are about to be "*shipped ... iⁿst^o the land.*" We are "got up to kill", lying out in our best array and dead. We are surrounded by all the fancy funeral trim breathlessly related with a kind of working-class pride:

the lilies and the ferns on wires
the brightwork the sorrowful silk
ribbons the cards the cars...

It is written in the present tense to lock us into immediacy (even if we are actually 'in the past.') We are surrounded, then, simply by packaging; in an advertising sense we have become an end-product. The music plays (Handel's '*Largo*', genius misused into cliché)

'in a blaze
'of brilliant light' that sort
of stuff is packaging
printed matter only if only
there were more to it than that

This is a world (from which you are the dearly departed) where the real genius of Handel is only "packaging"; at a deeper level the musical notes are only "printed matter" as opposed to real, REAL spirit: it can never be more in this world anyway.

The *largo*, the spacious and deliberate style, becomes "*e grave*" and "grave" as the officially recommended pace of the "black twelve-legged beast" of pall bearers can't keep in step with the "fingers walk" (faint echoes, too, of the telephone directory's yellow pages admonition: "let your fingers do the walking") to the real grave. And as Moro nodded his affirmations, so the organist nods "yes to your proceeding". The word "proceeding" is marvellous in its neutrality, for these are merely official rituals. Yet in another sense you have to proceed. There is no going back, anyway.

The next seven stanzas use Samuel Butler's chapter IV of *Erewhon*. Cumow rearranges the letters in the word 'Erewhon' twice to represent this as indeed a "main divide". The woolshed sleeper may just as well be in "a bandaging whiteout" up in the mountains or simply mummified

this isn't a dream
west of the main divide

"everyone present is// wide awake nobody's dreaming..." The seven stanzas actually rely ~~for~~ their effect on the swaying internal rhythms, the internal rhyme, as in, say,

big wig nodding mountainously
swaying playing the instrument

and where the quotations are presented too as if pieces of packaging. You may climb "uselessly towards the source" (just as music rolls emptily among mountains) so it is "you (you)" that needs to be steady before breaking out into a sweating run towards the grave.

Your own twitching frame of mind, not just the heaving, out-of-step pallbearers, lurches at the end of Part One through the repeated "i" sounds, to a *vox humana* of St Cecilia, the patron saint of music. The finger trot of the organist becomes jig-time, a "fingering/ diddledy-dancing."

And it is almost here as if Curnow has delightedly explored the full run of meanings and delight in the play of words that we find for instance in Partridge's Dictionary of Historical Slang . Here for example is an entry for meanings for the word "jig" :

on the jig--fidgety (colloquial.)

jig-a-jig - sexual intercourse

the jig is up (the game is up)

jiggered (possibly fusing and perverting 'Jesus' and 'buggered')

jig-jog -- jolting. 3

The high brilliant notes of the "i"s in the first two stanzas become insistent and colloquial:

a husky

vox humana out of dusty

pipes fat candles for Sister

Cecilia's jig-time fingering

diddledy-dancing you down

hold tight there brother in the box.

Repeating *Walerian's*

'It was no

no dreme: I lay brode waking'

is a literary beginning to letting it 'all hang out' in a fit of nympholepsy. Those who pursue Truth as a divine compulsion are also frenzied because it is something unobtainable, hence the Vaux quotation at the head of the poem:

For beauty with her bande

These croked cares hath wrought...

Beauty is not a matter that the Society of Jesus can actually handle; it is "dangerous; does set danc-/ ing blood."

The 'fun time' in Walerian Borowczyk's blue nunnery is reminiscent of the underlying 'anti-everything' of a surrealist like Clovis Trouille in his Dialogue at the Carmel (1944) [figure 8] during the period of the Surrealism mentioned at this chapter's opening.

The liberated sisters in Borowczyk's film poison their Mother Superior and perhaps Curnow uses cinematic technique in his frenzy round the deliberately modern word "*raunchy*". It is at least one form of release for a body ready for the grave...Yet a frenzy answers no questions:

the movie's

over

will you get up and go?



Figure 8 : Liberated Sisters? Clovis Trouille: Dialogue at the Carmel (1944). Source: Alexandrian, S. Surrealist Art. London: Thames and Hudson, 1970. p.210.



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Dr Rayner with the telephone at his elbow that was said to have a direct line to Wellington.

Figure 9 : Soulful photograph of Dr Rayner at his desk. Source: Scott, D. Fire on the Clay. p.89.

In part III, dull officialdom steps in and shuts any further proceedings down; it will
postpone the politics of eternity
till time permits.

In the meantime, the local council fires up the furnace conscious of expense, or like another
piece of road maintenance, may just dig another hole in the continuous round: "one after after
/another".

Real questions of the "thereafter" do not trouble the local authority, and
before you
know where you are you were.

This is a flip, smartly deliberate closure to the "proceedings."

One may, in the meantime, lie in wait in one's coffin, rather as if it were a room with
a window let into it, a facility some large caskets have, yet with the general sense of
impermanence that a motel room has (for those on the move), as a

prone figure folded in scarlet perfectly
composed exposed in a
window for anyone who cares to know
what it's like in these rooms for sleeping
off life.

Again there are surrealist touches; in more than one exhibition by the surrealists there
would be a feature made of a body/dummy laid out for inspection or as a basis for a 'feast'.
There is a particular reference, too, to that arch-surrealist Magritte who often used the
principle of enlarging a detail, such as an immense apple or rose filling up all the space in a
room. Here it is the stone of Sisyphus, the King of Corinth, perhaps the final stone on one's
tomb, and hence immovable. On the coffinside shelf are the motel paperbacks, colourful only
by their covers and contrasted with "the small print" of the black book "lying in wait" with
its fish-hooks. Faustus' temptations become the latest fads in reading: "one celebrated
psychiatric/ teacher..."

For New Zealanders a national symbol for wholesale death is the Erebus disaster. We
are given much local reference for that event such as "the crash is/ programmed " referring
to the way the aircraft was flight-programmed to actually take it into the side of the
mountain. One does need to fasten one's "bible-belt" (though this may be one of the more
obvious phrases in the piece). The bulletins issued for passengers as routine notices in "the
unlikely event/ of an emergency" become the only likely event in the real world. The

music is magnified the
size of the side of an antarctic
volcano

so that any final music on board is a crashing chord of rending metal. It is not certainly in
any usual sense 'magnifying the Lord'. It has the finality of simple statement: "you
disintegrate there". And "buzz buzz", the electronic white(out) music of nothingness is also

a Hamletian raspberry to existence. This section ends finally and terrifyingly in its hyper-realism with:

"A face the mirror has
forgotten"

and one may be reminded of the use of mirrors by Magritte. Yet another exit has been 'marked'.

The section marked number VI is extreme in its compression both syntactically and in thought:

After is a car door
closing
chlomp

and the sound of the waiting hearse door closing like a jaw takes us inside. Fed through the "wide gate"(the tailgate and a kind of tollgate to our final journey) we are about to take the main, and only, road. The request: "can I take you anywhere?" begs the question: anywhere? everywhere? Erewhon? So to eternity, chauffeured...

VII. From this extreme tightness of statement the poem again seems to 'loosen up,' "retrieved into the time of day" with its hints of normality, in the standard "belief in a hereafter" which turns out to be as mundane and tired as a female trundling her groceries around, or the sight of a local bus. It is difficult to believe anything under the stress of death, so Curnow quotes from Cymbeline. Even the beauties of language seem little help, so, as in "Dichtung und Wahrheit", Curnow descends into gross *arpeggio* to the language of 'the basics': "the little dog said you can't eat it..."

After all, even authors are not so special, commonly conceived as they are, riding on the back of existence. So Imagination is cut down to size by Rationality or Will (as Edmund in King Lear might argue).

With the word "*palingenesis*" in section VIII, the typography of the poem opens up on the page into a looser texture as befits

pure vacation
round trip
returning.

Now double columns give way, as here, to triplets especially dwelling on the hedonism of a speculative "hereafter stocked with/ genuine spare parts", the emptiness of cliché, "good as new".

However, in the face of storms and the sea, "an instrument/ big enough to drown," the organ music of Handel becomes changed to a real instrument, and a method of recycling. The biodegradable dissolves with no need for messy resurrection, the wave simply "spirits you away" with no hint of the soul of the lately-departed. Like curtains, or teasers in the theatre that hide stagelights, the

gauzes uncloses
closes teases you

don't see anything

clearly.

IX. The finale of this music over, we see how little Art can touch Death. Handel or Tiziano cannot venture into sun, wind and rain, so the "organist/ locks up the console." Art merely coats sugar over the bitter pill of life or makes empty bell sounds in response to that final "*chlomp*". The poem ends, as it must, by changing to the past tense: "they made the bell-mouth swing." It is now an empty, and lesser sound.

1. C K Stead, " Allen Curnow's Poetry", from Essays on NZ Lit. (London : Heinemann 1973), p.55
2. Sarane Alexandrian, Surrealist Art. (London: Thames and Hudson 1970), p.192.
3. Eric Partridge, A Dictionary of Historical Slang. (London: Penguin, 1972), pp.491-2

CHAPTER 8: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS WORK:

If time is a continuum from which the poet extracts special moments of connection, then it is an interesting but inevitable conclusion that most structural strain will be found (either inside a poem or between poems) at those transition points where time changes. If it is true as the poet contends, that "the tales are all one tale" ("The Traveller": "Moro Assassinato"), then with this kind of philosophy at its back, a single poem will tend to be more concentrated.

And this appears to be the case. In a single poem such as "Lo These are Parts of His Ways", which deliberately uses a complex of time-juggling, the poet's intercutting is sure-footed and deft. The verse works in its studied performance: the lack of punctuation, for example, allows slippage backwards and forwards over thought:

the heart
grows obsolete bottled protons

of an irrefutable *might*
majesty dominion and power poke
infernal noses into heavenly
business mutually assured
destruction keeps both of us guessing...

But there are areas in Continuum where the handling (particularly between parts in a poem) is less certain. An example is "A Fellow Being", part I. Here the idea that calls the poem into existence is that a fellow doctor (Dr Rayner) was mortal (which Curnow calls a 'major' premise). His second connection to Dr Curnow is through simply holding a doctorate (called a 'minor' premise). We can grant these are simply playful syllogisms and partly an excuse to call up all the foolish doctors of the past. But the "poetry of fact" as Curnow calls it ("he's dead enough and I'm/ alive (enough)"), the idea that because the thought itself has occurred, it validates itself by simply existing, are not enough to show other than that an awkward transition moment has just been clambered over. Curnow wishes to show later that Rayner's actions over felling kauri bring out Curnow's own feelings as a "fellow being." But the connection does not seem to be a particularly strong one at this particular point. Where the poem does succeed is in the emotional connection made at the end of the poem where the losses of the trees themselves are felt.

There are awkwardnesses in "Bring Your Own Victim." There is an implicit death link through the Oresteian Trilogy of Aeschylus from Iphigenia to Clytemnestra to Agamemnon to Orestes. But the transition from part I to part II: "History began to be true/ at a later time" signals a general looser approach perhaps because the examples provided seem self-evident of blood letting to Curnow, a tempting tendency because there may be fewer challenges in an already well-established message.

There are difficulties, too, at the beginning of "Moro Assassinato" in amalgamating the limbo state of the half-widowed Eleonora Moro with the general tenor of a philosophy that living characters are minor figures in the tale of blood that forms the world's history. This makes her, in effect, a minor character in the sense that the poet has not chosen her for detailed examination. There is nothing wrong in that. But having granted that Aldo Moro himself is the focus, Eleonora then becomes a rhetorical device, a transitional means to frame what Curnow's version of history will itself prove. This seems to be part of the uncomfortable shift at the beginning of "Moro Assassinato" mentioned before in Chapter 5. In direct contrast is the force of, say, Moro's letters which combine both public and private functions in communicating his place in the scheme of things (both as a "sacrificial lamb" and a husband), and generating sufficient complex emotions to bridge both the public and the private worlds. 13 ?

Yet these remain minor cavils in the face of Curnow's achievement in amalgamating the immediate physical world with the symbolic and making the imaginative connection. The inclusiveness and focus are made 'true' through a grasp of language that is flexible and forceful. One does come to expect the remarkable. I leave the final comment with C. K. Stead:

"To refuse to meet the 'landscape' of experience because we fear the cost; to put in its place an ideal, a 'dream', a 'plan'- this is to deny life. That is what Mr Curnow's latest poems imply again and again. Supremely those poems, for all the anguish which lies somewhere behind their achieved irony, are engaged in affirming life and a world which is real. The anguish is in the imaginative struggle to meet and encompass the contraries of which our 'landscape' is composed. What emerges from the struggle is a kind of affirmation Yeats called 'tragic joy'- a quality achieved only by those few poets who have on the one hand the talent, and on the other the will or the need, to discover the full extension of human consciousness in the recognition of human limit." 1

1. C. K. Stead, In The Glass Case, p.205

APPENDIX 1: Plants and trees.

The poet's attention, as previously discussed, moves, indeed must move, rapidly to and fro across many subjects wrapping them together into a new rhythm and a new form so as to recreate anew. New analogies are established and a larger sense of movement spreads across the poems involving the reoccurring reference or consistent image.

The starting point is the world as experienced first-hand through nature... The passion of the cone like Dylan Thomas' "green fuse" might be a sexual pleasure ("There Is a Pleasure in the Pathless Woods"):

When the green grenade explodes, does the kauri
experience an orgasm of the spent cone?

Nature returns our stare and we can only classify (as Botany) or speculate. And the tree, with its sheer force of being, can with its own "sexual jets" ("Names Are News") fly as high as a jet, "forty thousand feet high", its own planing "seed vessels." In other poems the post box is compared to a "black hollow iron tree" (in "Friendship Heights"), or implicitly to an obelisk on Waiheke Island (in "Do It Yourself") where the handyman can only erect his own thought. Even Tane himself can be an "old arboreal bore" ("A Four Letter Word").

The Northern Rata, *Metrosideros robusta*, the "iron-hearted", features in "Names Are News", and as before, the tree is introduced with the pomp and formality of a classification entry in an encyclopedia:

Metrosideros robusta,
the northern rata. Usually
commencing life as an epiphyte
becomes a tall, massive tree
60 to 100 feet high.

The "full/ rigour of a description" may or may not bring us "close" to the tree. But Curnow knows full well the echoes, the metaphoric weight of a tree whilst denying the weight of mere facts. Consider the implications of this particular entry about the growth and development of the rata:

"The northern rata usually begins life as a perching seedling high in the branches of other forest trees. Roots descend from the young rata down the trunk of the host (often a rimu), to reach the ground. In time these roots become thick and woody eventually uniting to form a massive trunk inside which is the decaying trunk of the host - ancient rata trees are often hollow." 1

When the poet says: Lord,
I cannot compel you,
I implore you, by the dust
of a rigorous description

cracked by its own rigour,
lean easier, for the sake
of a chance resemblance

we are immediately put on our guard against both the hollowness of simply describing because of the nature of language (as in "He Cracked A Word" from "Poems 1949-1957"), and the inability to get inside oneself because of the "hollow[ness]" or being "punky at the heart" ("A Four Letter Word").

And yet, and this is the peculiar quality of the suggestibility of the verse, the metaphoric quality of the tree remains as a residue. For example, when we are told in a notational reference book tone that:

Flowers are broad, dense,
terminal, many-flowered cymes,
dark scarlet

we pick up the repeated reference to "dark scarlet"; and the voice, presumably of the "wood god botherer" or perhaps of the young tree itself, says:

Lord, I am small.
I break easily. I call
red cumulus green bubbled
cloud with a bloody curd,
not flowers, not cymes.

This is clearly much more than the reference book which might tell us, say, that the flowers of the rata are a mass of bright red stamens borne in sprays on the tips of the branches. The blood reference and the "red cumulus" take us beyond a mere swollen sprouting. In a cyme, the inflorescence is a primary axis which bears a single terminal flower which develops first and the system is continued by axes which develop successively in a similar manner. This centrifugal inflorescence seems to echo the manner of reference in the verse as successively different voices speak: an impersonal narrator, the trees who say "*Speak up we can't hear you*" and possibly the young growing rata plant to whom flowers emerging are "bubbled/cloud with a bloody curd." Later the narrative voice refers once again to actual jet planes:

Funny how the sexual jets
grumbling aloft resemble
cymes, dark scarlet.
Can a machine do more?

That Curnow may have taken the explosive manner of development in the rata too far (perhaps too deliberately with "the dust/ of a rigorous description") shows in the awkwardness of the explanation: if jets resemble cymes then

Tall, massive clouds,
thunderheaded trees,

don't commence life that way.
Green pod, sky boring jet
nevertheless resemble.

It cannot be both "chance resemblance" and a seriously worked metaphor, even if granted, ambiguity is the point.

That the word rather than the thing may be the beginning may be seen in "A Four Letter Word." Here the "wood god botherer" has become a "cantor", or singer/precentor. He may not name the canticles but instead

tanekaha, kaiwaka, taraire.
Mispronounced, any of these

can strike dead and dumb. Well spoken,
they are a noise neither of the writhing root

nor glabrous leaf nor staring flower,
all that can unspeakably supervene.

They are pure sound, pure word.

Tane mahuta in section II, the giant kauri in the Waipoua forest, is "too venerable/ for words", or "Logos begotten of log". "*Tane mahuta* is a very big tree, because of the signboards at the roadside", a kind of victim of his own advertising. One can stop as a tourist and go and stare at him. He deserves to be cut up for his own signboards.

By contrast, Tane the god of the forest can become embodied in the trees themselves so that the children of Tane are now merely "litter" as cut down lordly "stumps". Tane was the most creative of the sons of Rangi and Papa who themselves "littered" the generations of gods and ultimately humans.

In section III, this differentiation between the tree as mere object and father of subsequent generations is mixed in with Greek mythology with Zeus as the "Thunderer" and the Olympian gods' defeat of the Titans with Zeus's castration of his own father Cronos (hence, presumably the adjective "defoliant Thunderer.")

Yet Curnow can also mention the smaller less significant species such as the tanekaha or celery pine which is smaller and the *Beilschmiedia* taraire, a slender tree up to 5 metres in height, simply as part of his broad knowledge.

Hall's totara, *podocarpus hallii*, the thin-barked totara found at higher altitudes, resembling the English yew, is part of Adam's "Ten acre block"/ "private kingdom" in "A Family Matter". Near it, Adam nearly falls over "an old survey peg, half-rotted". Having made up his mind to retire back to his own chosen Eden (the backblocks high up perhaps), Adam turns his thoughts to: "Regeneration, conservation", rather than the Old Testament

"angels,vandals, vermin," but will leave the property to Cain when he passes on! The young totara makes Eden particularly 'kiwi'.

Other references in Continuum to plants range over dianthus, delphinium, phlox, clematis, blackberry, peach, ladder fern, fingernail, dracophyllums, rhubarb and artichokes. Each of these have their place. For example in "A Sight For Sore Eyes" there are garden plants ("dianthus, delphiniums, phlox") grown from seed by his mother; or rhubarb in the poem "Unfortunate Young Lady" becomes both the purgative explosive, a humorous raspberry to her and what the "heavenly host" may be singing in one of "several languages,/ some dead?" Anyway, "One man's rhubarb is another man's / artichoke."

Sometimes, as in "A Passion For Travel", plants are far from home, misplaced, like "*pakeha* thistles in the wrong forest". The "palm lily, *ti australis*" is found in the "Botanical Gardens" at Palermo.

Perhaps the last word on plants here should be left to these lines from "A Balanced Bait In Handy Pellet Form":

Because light is manifest by what it lights,
ladder-fern, fingernail, the dracophyllums
have these differing opacities, translucencies...

APPENDIX 2: Exact Measurements: "the way numbers/ won't go by numbers" ("A Window Frame")

As may be seen from the specificity noticed in the above section on the height of the rata, Curnow uses exact measures to emphasise "the hallucination of fact."

In "A Window Frame", the dimensions of the paper written on, or the measurements of the room only serve to emphasize a number's inability to do other than measure. The window frame only frames the relative view through it. Moving one's head an inch or two to the right or left alters the view.

Marking out time and space by possibly erecting one's own obelisk, say on Waiheke Island ("lat. 37S long.175E") is only a thought "for the time being." A dead president's tomb does no more ("Do It Yourself"). In "Magnificat", the religious image of Mary when constructed here becomes humorously local, framed by two-by-fours, "lapped with scrim and plastered/ three inches thick." Representation must always be limited: the Mother of the Light of the World is haloed not by holy light but by "Twelve electric bulbs...a glory made visible/ six feet in diameter". So the Magnificat for Mary at Paraparaumu has to be measured in terms that mean something, just as much as a memory of a "six-foot galvanised iron" fence or "Number 8 fencing wire" forms a garden of childhood in "A Sight For Sore Eyes."

One particularly moving set of items in "An Abominable Temper" involves the changing fortunes of H.A.H. Munro's household who arrive at Horeke dragging their "worldly goods" ashore:

<i>item</i>	tables and chairs
<i>item</i>	window sashes and doors (2)
<i>item</i>	bricks for the chimneys
<i>item</i>	one ton of flour etc.

Then all the possessions are lost in a fire, the Maoris provide them with a hut and they begin to live as others have done:

<i>item</i>	one frying-pan
<i>item</i>	four halves of coconut shell for cups
<i>item</i>	mussel shells stuck on reeds for spoons.

The legacy of that life past is also summed in three objects:

<i>item</i>	one pair...duelling pistols
<i>item</i>	one <i>Poems</i> of Robert Burns, Edinburgh, 1812
<i>item</i>	one Holy Bible

What is finally left is the memory of "an angry father"; the pistols disappear into the Canterbury Museum and most poignantly: "Allen will get the Bible and the *Poems*."

As neat and as open a summary of a life as one has come to expect from Curnow.

That exact specifications are in another sense the 'measure' of our times is seen perhaps most dramatically in Part vii of "Moro Assassinato": 'The Executioners'. In a world left ticking over and apparently unattended, it is attention to the details made by terrorists that fills the horrible gaps:

Christ set it going and ascended,
leaving the engine running.

There is a fixity, an unwavering attention to detail at the expense of humanity in the Renault car used for the execution (an R4), the shirt initialled and made by Ninarelli of Bologna, the specifications of say the Beretta 7.65 bullets, the range of firing, the number of shots, the subsequent parking of the car exactly between two party headquarters in the centre of Rome. And the final memorial, that of the poor, is measured by the size of the newspaper pasted at the spot in the Via Caetani, "20 by 10 centimetres".

Death itself seems measurable in its administration in a poison "30 g/kg (3%) Metaldehyde", an "active ingredient" in "a world as good as its word", perhaps no more and no less ("A Balanced Bait...")

APPENDIX 3: Bodily matters.

Consciously literary and comprehensively bawdy, the verse abounds in bodily interest as an expression of human weakness: all kinds of secretions, smells, bodily parts of every type, and the sexually expressive from the joyful to the murderously self-centred. Of all the types of image, this bawdy element exceeds all others in terms of frequency of reference. In an age that both eschews the "dirty word" yet embraces the sexual as a means of expression it is not surprising to read of the reaction to "Dichtung und Wahrheit", which is simply a rather unfair pastiche of M.K. Joseph. If cruelty and mercy remain close to the human condition then we find both joy and sorrow in this subject too.

1. **Orifices.** Typical of the underlying attitude towards human nature is ^{that} expressed in "Moules à la Marinière": in looking down into a gap left by the tide in the rocks, we are reminded not of the Lord's dry shelter, the "Rock of Ages" (as composed by the Rev. Toplady, "cleft for me"), ^{of} but the interior view of something disconcertingly human and possibly female:

muddy cysts, mucus, your own interior
furnishings, glands, genitalia
of the slit reef spilling seawards:

walls all scabby pink...
...it smells of your nature, sickishly.

This "tide" of self-recognition "scrapes the bottom/ blinded and a bit fouled..." Apparently we can always read in the spoors of human expression something of the "baffled

epigraphy/ and excreta of such slow short lives" (left by the dead snails in "A Balanced Bait"). It is part of the nature of the place we inhabit: "among the spitting and the shitting stars" ("Bring Your Own Victim"), and now increasingly populated with the litter of human presence even in the original purity of space:

what cometing bitchcraft, rocketed shitbags,
charred cherubim pocked and pitted....

(I. "Lone Kauri Road")

Of course the most significant spillage is blood (bird, fish, flesh) because of the nature of man: "slaughterman, overman, everyman." ("Bring Your Own Victim")

2. **Smells.** And it of course "smells of mortality" in the best Shakespearean tradition...From the "helmeted barnstormers" who smell of "harnesses, horsepiss, fleeces, phosphates and milk". ("A Time of Day") our "dissolving clay" invades the pages. It may be fondly remembered as the balaclava used in a childhood flight warming with "old sweat and foul oil", or sheer sulphur (a syllogism "bubbles like/ a fart in a bottle" in "A Fellow Being." I) or a churchman's "involuntary/ or surreptitious fart" or it may be the ghost of Descartes farting or belching on Karekare beach, his mind on higher things such as the duality of mind and body! Yet the shared humanity can give temporary insight into others: in "*The Prison Of The People*":

Can the same w.c.
receive the faeces of judge, executioner
and condemned man for 54 days,...

and nobody be changed?

3. **Body parts.** That we are separate and mortal is, in part, the subject of "A Fellow Being": Our relationship with someone dead is here stated as:

he's dead enough and I'm
alive (enough)

a "sillyolgism" which playfully teases with *la condition humaine*:

he being
dead for one thing and in
the light of such darkness
a fellow being?

From the head to toe we are examined as literal bodies of experience. We are squirming, pulsing, tissueed, gaping or mouthing entities more body than brain or intellect, like the rock in "Dialogue With Four Rocks", a "thing" or "a cerebrum behind the bone". When we try to find the centre of what we are, even as centres of our own worlds, it may be that it is "in the bone" or as in these instructions:

"To The Reader"

Look for my fingerprints.

Good luck to you.

In trying to reach the exterior world we can only: "Knuckle the cool pane." ("A Window Frame") Though perhaps it is part of the human condition to fight this dumbness through self-expression or self-assertion or just resistance, that struggle may only cause pain: by extension in "Can'st Thou Draw Out Leviathan With An Hook?"(V):

Fingers and gobstick fail,
the hook's fast in the gullet,
the barb's behind the root
of the tongue and the tight
fibre is tearing the mouth
and you're caught, mate, you're caught,
the harder you pull it
the worse it hurts, and it makes
no sense whatever in the air
or the seas or the rocks
how you kick or cry, or sleeplessly
dream as you drown.

Fluency only comes when we speak "the languages of the sea", when it is "too late for vomiting salt." (Perhaps then, and only then, are we worth our salt?)

And yet there is so much expression in the nervous activity we find. The head may be the place we feel to be our home. In these poems, the rock face has a "wig" of trees, Handel's "big wig" may be "nodding mountainously" ("Organo ad Libitum"), and on the road to Erewhon the peaks like statues have "mouths" blasting "inhuman syllables." The human mouth chews its own history ("A Cool Head In An Emergency"): Killing Rules, OK?

Bring your own victim
ruled from then on,
conscience cut its milk teeth
on the live bone. ("Bring Your Own Victim")

The inhuman (or human) mouth, the inhospitable can utter "empty wind into wind". Yet we may also find the remembered face cast up to memory ("This Beach Can Be Dangerous") "familiarily transfigured":

Each with the same expression, his own,
mirrored in the sand or the mind

or at the moment of disintegration ("Organo Ad Libitum"): "...a face the mirror has/ forgotten."

Indeed the mirror is an important motif, associated in "An Incurable Music" with the problems of Art or indeed any representation:

The mudbacked mirrors in your head

multiply the possibilities of human
error, but what's the alternative?

Or most memorably the victim's throes in death seem to affirm the necessity of being a victim: Moro's "grey head/ whiplashed, nodding to the shots."

Other areas of expression include the visceral, the blind 'gut' of feeling. In "Moules..", the "black underwater/dries out grey underfoot" (the rock that forms "the gut" which is black and ominous when wet or underwater, is grey when it dries out); from "the gut of the gales" ("Dialogue...") comes: "the noise/ the haze the vocabulary of/ wind and water".

Naturally, blood figures potently in the poems: it pulses in time to a pacemaker (a "soft drum ") through the aorta taking instructions from "control" like a piece of rocketry from "celestial/ software" ("Lo These Are Parts...") in time of personal crisis where in a chessgame the next move is over to God. It is of course liberally spilled for church and state, the "nicked neck" ("26 April 1478") or "under the knife" to even "the spoonful in the womb" as part of the cycle of human affairs ("Bring Your Own Victim.")

Human hands are busy in these poems , whether "fluttering" at prayer ("In The Duomo") or the organist's fingers" trotting" or "fingering/ diddledy-dancing you down"("Organo") or twitching for blood money, "hot hand" contrasted with "cold feet" (Montesecco before the attempt on the Medici).

Those who have sat for posterity on their posteriors come in for a bad time: Dr Rayner in "A Fellow Being" telephoning long-distance to Wellington about the price of kauri is

Talking the soul's language

which sits as if spiked
upright on crossed buttocks

(though in another sense he has been as actively destructive on a large scale) and the photograph (reproduced in Fire On The Clay: see **figure 9**) is used wickedly:

...the soul of the doctor
sits at his study desk....
...its trousers are confident of
'covering the loins and legs'

a well-tailored imagination
is the mufti of the soul

The organist, too, "polishes the stool he rocks on/ the bones of his arse."

There are two interesting left feet that appear in these poems. Arnold Wall (in "After Dinner") alive but near to death ("pressed hard") with the gangrene that will kill him is presumably dressed for dinner and so is the left foot (wrapped "in a white fold freshly/ dressed".) The grimace of the pain from the foot is "...no sooner/read than cancelled, very civilly" with a tremendous sense of contrast between the pressing need not to express pain

and the symbolic presence of death in the foot's white shroud. Threatening damnation sprouts from another left foot, this time Christ's, in a painting on the ceiling of San Giovanni at Florence, pricking the eyes of a plotting Montesecco. The larger the man, the larger the representation, the larger the effect: "the godsized Jesus dooming in the dome" ("In the Duomo").

4. Specifically sexual. There appear to be two major elements in the sexual in Continuum.

One is a terrible, inward-facing, destructive element associated with violence or boredom. There is a particular cluster of such images in 'An Urban Guerilla'. From the fixity of gaze on the small details of the actual rooms, as imagined by Cumow, that constitute "the Prison Of the People" ("a feather of paint", "a thread hanging from the hem/ of the curtain", "the switches/ on the transistor, the way they were placed/ in a dead design"), it is only a small step to the faceless to-ing and fro-ing of the regular guard over Moro, to the aimless exercise of routine, whether cleaning one's gun or cock or using whichever sexual partner one might choose, as a matter of the presumably previously-discussed 'principle of freedom.' Similarly we find the press equally culpable, "camera in at the fuck"; or poetry itself can be regarded as "a fumble/ in the back seat of the mind" ("To The Unfortunate Young Lady"). How much of this age comprises "trigger friggers"?

On the other hand, there is a joyful, though animal, enjoyment of sex as in "Blind Man's Holiday" something close to the pleasures of eating and drinking; the question that opens this poem asks, perhaps, whether 'dirty pictures', as so conceived, are really 'adult':

Is the word 'adult'? Utamaro's engulfing
vulvas, deep thought! Füssli's girls muscling in, a
moist-handled glans...

Metaphysics must give way to the flesh. One may orbit the earth through pictures in the mind but

I re-enter, entering
you...

and

Angel surrogates
shinny up and down the fire-escape, flapping

at bedroom and bathroom windows, all fingers
and feathers. She's too full and he's too busy to
notice much...

Schopenhauer's dream of Paradise is not that of the mind but "a/ hereafter stocked with/ genuine spare parts" ("Organo..."), Descartes' "zeroed extension" awaits the "awful joyful thaw" though it is suggested that the natural place for the philosopher's finger is "on his cock" ("Things To Do With Moonlight".)

Most memorable in this ability to 'place' all experience is the skill and fun of sexual

innuendo. In "A Passion For Travel" when the word "erotic" is corrected to "exotic" then

Discrepant

signs, absurd similitudes

touch one another, couple promiscuously...

and then fun by association even of sound becomes active:

After dark,

that's when the fun starts, there's a room

thick with globes, testers, bell-pulls

rare fruits...

And the imagination takes hold:

Vincento

in white shorts trimming the red canoe

pulled the octopus inside out

like a sock, *Calamari!* The tall German

blonde wading beside, pudenda awash,

exquisitely shocked by a man's hands

doing so much so quickly,

Calamari! Those 'crystalline'

aeolian shallows lap the anemone

which puckers the bikini, her delicacy.

We remember the sheer guffaw of the virgin sisters in "Organo..." who

danced

their hot pants down on the stony

gallery for joy of their nubility

crying 'La Mère est morte!' they

swung on the bellrope naked making the

bell-mouth boom at the sun...

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