

Kendrick Smithyman: Poems Written in War Time, 1942-45

From the Graham Perkins Archive¹

Edited and with notes by Peter Simpson²

¹ Graham Perkins [GP], born 1921, attended Point Chevalier Primary School (1931-34) and Seddon Memorial Technical College (1935-37) with Kendrick Smithyman [KS], born 1922; KS stayed on at high school until the end of 1939 and attended Auckland Teachers' Training College, 1940-41. The poems or drafts were included in letters sent by KS to GP in New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and Italy between 1942 and 1945. The poems are printed with the kind permission of Graham Perkins and Margaret Edgcumbe.

² Margaret Edgcumbe kindly assisted with transcription of the poems.

1. [Handwritten]

To Graham – on his 21st Birthday

eleven years ago you stood by me
stranger in depressions arbitrary school
we played the same games and made
the same jokes
all that our years asked in satisfaction
in this respect

and so through schools
taking together the ignoble landmarks
of that paper kingdom
but finding
a world outside keen to be trodden
plentiful and liberal in colour and note

in this real world we went
pushing bikes up summers gradient
or walking in rain on winter evenings
to satisfy
an unwarmed but always present yearning
not given words
but still anonymously powered

now you first come to your heritage
look about you
the acres are barren, the sea dangerous
only the birds that impinge on us
are known in the distance
till nearer they resolve themselves to the
brute statement of training bombers.

[Sept 1942]³

³ GP notes: "Written on Air Force stores form."

2. [Handwritten]

[Walk past those houses on a Sunday morning]⁴

Walk past those houses on a Sunday morning
with the piano stumbling in the front room
where the mechanic freed from tools takes shears
to clip his hedges, talk of politics.

Or move along the lake, or down the track
sit under butts of logs and watch the mangroves
the chips, the pottery shards, while distant farms
grow out of fog to sun; for it was here
that pedant summer rose to teach us fate.

Think how the threads were coming close together:
remember the month, the day, the hour, and the
ungainly kitbag dragged off home in the train
and two days after
set in the hot Waikato close to the river
bell tents, new straw and uniforms everywhere.

Leave was a chance to take the bike
and go crawling into the ranges. Here were places
not to be seen as before: and places to visit,
a house with oaks where there was one
was quick with sympathy but did not understand.

Remember all these things: the League ball punted
across the park
processional the sails of eighteen footers
and a cold salad at five.

Somewhere there is value to them. Like
the piano stumbling
something is cast into being that will
take shape in the end.⁵

[1943]

⁴ Titles in square brackets are supplied by the editor.

⁵ Note in KS's hand: "You'll appreciate the spirit of this – and some of the scenes / Hi for Rosebank Rd!" Rosebank Rd was in Avondale, close to where GP and KS lived. GP notes: "Nostalgia, referring to our mid-1930's bike rides. We would assemble at my home on Sunday morning. My father, a professional armature-winder, may be cutting the hedge – 'mechanic takes his shears' – and he enjoyed teasing Ken about his politics. Ken always insisted that the 'piano stumbling in the front room' referred to the girl across the street, and not to me, but I don't think he expected me to believe that. If the weather was too inclement we might all gather round the piano, and Ken who was developing a very passable bass voice would render 'Simon the Cellarer' in the popular mode of Oscar Natzke." One of the first poems of KS to be published – apart from Training College publications in *Manuka* – in *New Zealand New Writing* (June 1944), p. 19, it became well known from its inclusion in *An Anthology of New Zealand Verse*, ed. Robert Chapman and Jonathan Bennett (Oxford University Press, 1956), but was not included in a book by KS until *Selected Poems*, ed. Peter Simpson (Auckland University Press,

3. [Typewritten]

[How shall a man have order]

How shall a man have order
about him if his strait wish
sways between peace and murder
from Nero to lonely Christ?
His eye not wanton, not chaste
ranges simple horizons;
he cries that water flow from stones.
Longing for death and the lost
season he leans to a girl
bends back to the slim child's past
and watches bright leaves fall.

Buoyed by those long and secret tides
conviction, ecstasies and loving
he watches the bright leaves fade.
The sea's fingers that purse and stretch
tentative round the dark far reach
of promontory, bay, islands
bare to the cold and probing winds
are embassies that may fetch
tomorrow the one soft word
end to violence, net to catch
the wings of the frantic bird.

[1943]⁶

1989). Each time the poem was printed KS made further small changes.

⁶ Unpublished.

4. [Typewritten]

Troop Train

It is not the drowned bell they hear that wakes them
only the crossing signal clear along the track.

The brakes scratch. And many people get out,
go on the overhead bridge, walk
through the darkness
many civilians in uniform to whom
the past is not familiar.

They have been lost in the legends of islands of seas
or swift in power followed
clouds that they may appease
today which makes them criminal
if they stand apart.

The bell wakes them. Donne heard these metrics
such urgency.

And they get out and walk into the darkness seeming more tired
than their fatigue and you look out from the carriage and all
you can see against the paddocks or the bridge rail is that
movement, that sway of shoulders going away from the lights of the
train
and back to camp.

(This is the army, mr jones)

[1943]⁷

⁷ Unpublished. GP notes: "When returning to Papakura Camp at night from leave, the train pulled up at Tironui Station where everyone disembarked, to the clanging of the crossing bell." *Donne heard these metrics*: presumably in the famous words from a sermon, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*: "Do not ask to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee."

5. [Handwritten]

Forward Area

This day dying
men will not gather
wild fruit or feather
will feel the staying
hands upon them.

Where burst of laughter
goes like a fever
night will discover
good bed and softer
way for the lover.

Who broke with their skies
and left their idols
for lips to rattle
with idiots daze;
there shall be sum

Which totals wonder
and cancels vision
to winds derision
and slap of thunder
and end of dreams

One left behind
sees startling crowd
broken from pride
and foreign to land
where cold will maim.

[1943]⁸

⁸ Unpublished. On the back of this MS in KS's hand is written: "I heard part of Lilburn's Fantasie Quartet the other night. It was from Christchurch and the static made full listening impossible. What I heard was good. The themes not especially brilliant, not rendered notably well. It looks as if New Zealand has at last produced a real composer. Also Colleen Challis, a local contralto, who gave on Thursday [?] possibly the finest recital of leide[r] [sic] I have heard from a native artist. She needs polish, but the voice and sensitivity are there; powerful, a full even tone – and rich – flexible, remarkable clarity in her words, and amazingly responsive to the balance of words and music. A natural leide[r] singer, with that innate 'slide' in the voice. She'll be worth two of Natzke given the chances.

And then in the hangar one afternoon the incongruous: a section of Brahms's 'St Antony Chorale' – the middle, deliberate passage, solemn beat of the brass and basses that put a patina on the place.

Come back and play me Corelli."

For another reference to Corelli see "Two Sonnets in Return," Number 38. Douglas Lilburn, 1915-2001, was the leading New Zealand composer of his generation.

6. [Handwritten]

[I pack things all away]

I pack things all away
that night shall tell my fortune
from immediate stars:
venture in lucky regions
with women, wine and play
find difficult futilities
significant realities.

They say the moon is dead
blind and dumb, goes forlorn
through calculated space
but still with earth will join
that every tide must tread.
Out of considerable power
comes the blind moons round and hour.

Death has put hand to plough
darkness blotting the moon
with wild entangled cloud.
Rain drums the wheat fields down
makes mock of wombs that throw
to the []⁹ of distress
completed bitterness.

Tear off the root and branch
of all a dream has foretold;
due emptiness may claim
now folly has grown cold.
Dead moons should have no stench
nor visibly show their decay:
what more shall chattering stars say?
[1943]¹⁰

⁹ The word is illegible in the MS.

¹⁰ Unpublished.

7. [Handwritten]

Lazarus

What was it Lazarus saw,
and laughed, strait from his shroud:
the shadow of his desires,
desuetude king, stripped pride?
The thorn bush on the hill
clattered its hands to the moon,
and the night was still.

What said the world he read:
lean death's at every throat;
virgins grown soothe, are had¹¹;
thin men blow out with fat?
The thorn bush on the hill
clatters its hands to the moon
and the night is still.

What were his eyes to claim,
fresh from the neutral dark:
passion and wasted time,
bloat, folly, too much talk?
The thorn bush on the hill
clattered its hands to the moon
and the night goes still.

Clay is a richer estate
than many men could dream.
Cradled by love and hate
green grass can neither name.
The thorn bush on the hill
clatters its hands to the moon
and the night falls still.

[1943]¹²

¹¹ "had" is a guess; the MS is illegible.

¹² Unpublished. KS to GP 8 November 1943 (Letter 11): "The Lazarus outfit is a belated memory of O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughed*, a bloody powerful play, one of his best. I was going to borrow a Bible & study the legend which rather attracted me for a day or so. I turned the theme over and then wrote this. The changes in the refrain indicate something more felt than seen, to me, at least." Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), American playwright, wrote *Lazarus Laughed* in 1928.

8. [Handwritten]

September Frost

Here was no stir of leaf
or fragrance out of bud
trouble walking abroad to the moon
water tinkling over mud
seemed cousins that were lately born
to be not more than brief.

Here was the flower to drop
earthwards before its bloom
frost scrawled across the curved blade
beauty tempered with harm
fever came swiftly up and rode,
called death in freezing sleep.

Here is the sleep of death
not moved by any dream
where willows hang over grey pond
and grass whispers the name
of one who goes across the land
'Persephone, your wreath'.

[1943]¹³

¹³ Unpublished. Persephone: Greek goddess of seasonal cycle.

9. [Handwritten]

Record

Some planed the rimu, some packed
sheet iron from the coast.
Evidence of the lost
on shingle flats was stacked,
left for winds to turn over
that weekend tramps discover.
This was the blind dreams only structure
slow grown dismay and final fracture.

The bush went back and the grass
spread round between grey stumps.
The Public Works built camps,
roads, railway through the pass.
Some loved and came to stay there
were born to hills and to fear
of a dream, admitting fracture
flaw built into their words, and stricture.

Swift shadow, love of death
matured among those hills
where the kea's wing falls
on coarse paddocks beneath.
Flood water made its spring and slashed.
Back of the flat a mail plane crashed
brought flame into the fog and feature
of older hills in light of fracture.

[1943]¹⁴

¹⁴ Unpublished. See Letter 11 which probably refers to this poem: "a mixture of Westland, and Kaipara. Phil [Mays] understood it to be the districts round Ruapehu, and felt a Jane Mander note in it. (She wrote of the Otamatea-Kaiwaka area, beating me to the Wairoa as a theme.) So it seems to have a genuine touch somewhere, though it refers to no actual, identifiable place."

10. [Handwritten]

(1)

[Put down your christ somewhere]

Put down your christ somewhere
within the darkest soil
cease to remember there
lie love and dread and toil

late was this part of you
born of yourself alone:
woman who lived and knew
rain, sweat, and broken stone

you took to breast this child
grew man and felt his fall
in season turned and smiled
such pain to burial.¹⁵

(3)¹⁶

[bring laurel here or bay]

bring laurel here or bay
cloths that should wrap the dead
send him well swathed to bed
with treasonable clay
laud him with flute and drum
that all may know who come

bring me no bay or rich
garland of state. I sought
to make some toy of thought
turn to danube this ditch
played fool with grace and pride
but night came and I cried.

[1943]¹⁷

¹⁵ Published in revised version as “After” in *Inheritance* (1962), *Selected Poems* (1989), and *Collected Poems 1943-1995* (2004-06). KS to GP September 1943 (Letter 10): “The ‘put down...’ piece is the development of the short lyrical form at which I’ve worked on and since last year. It has, I hope something of the tone of Yeats’ “Woman young and old” series, but with it my own tricks that make it mine and not just imitation.” The revised version removes the allusion to Christ and Mary, making the poem secular in focus.

¹⁶ Section 2 is missing.

¹⁷ Published in revised version as “Song with an Attitude,” *Inheritance* (1962) and *Collected Poems 1943-1995* (2004-06). The influence of R.A.K. Mason can be felt in this and the previous poem.

11. [Handwritten]

Prothlamion

Tonight take on perfection and a woman's name
- Jn. Donne.¹⁸

By the grave of the living my young love came
parting the long grass with her passing.

She who is the page where birth and death may read
came slowly from the dark sea, in her hands
bearing strange fruits that burgeon on the night:
poppy and mandragora sprang from her fingers.

Her skull lay flowering aeons below the hill
and bones like silver bedded in the shale:
then the sea bell rang an orison : she turned
from her own travail and has bloomed
to harvest foods from desolation

look, for
she goes like ghost of glass
by water

luminous body borne from one tide to this beach,
where shall she lie
who cannot now have rest
driven by discipline into new ways of bondage?

the sea has always given birth

love is the shield of birth, is shield of death: who
wears it goes mailed bright challenge to the archers

she carries love with her: is the hostage of her death
offers the asp as child born to her loving

she brings me delicate the seeds of death and birth
throws back the blanket soil: she shows the stone skull
spill where the ravening salt calls, rings on its shore
the anthems of desire and legend of simple peace

¹⁸ From John Donne, "Epithalamion made at Lincoln's Inn," c. 1595.

2.

I
have carried back to her this body
with its cold scar of poverty

these lips are stained with the dull petals blood
harsh with the dryness of persimmons

are linked with her
while the young freshet breaks
its buds expand into the wave
of which the stars are froth that summons to her hand

she is both bell and wave
one reckoning me out
threatens the harsh curb whipped before the wind
the seas, love, which is death

and die in her?
and find death friendlier come, and stay?

[1943]¹⁹

¹⁹ Unpublished. GP notes: "Written while at Levin, and given to Phil Mays, (see Letter No. 10, Sep. 1943). This poem meant much to Ken at the time." KS to GP, September 1943 (Letter 10): "The 'Prothlamion' means much to me. I think that as a sample of my poetry, it's good. I like the images, and the rhythms in it. But its chief value is an association which I can tell you and hesitate to tell others. Apart from Phil Mays for whom it was written as so much of this year's work has been, you'll be the only one to have seen it so far." The title alludes to the Edmund Spenser poem of the same name which is spelt "Prothalamion."

12. [Handwritten]

Garrison

They hear the miserere
of love in unaccustomed tones,
rivers' accounting monotones
or gull cry sunward, where the
Pacifics ambling swell
like a familiar ghost
breaks on foreign coasts
and will not speak or tell
justice which works for few:
not for me, not for you.

[1943]²⁰

²⁰ Unpublished.

13. [Handwritten]

[Sensitive the music]

Sensitive the music
where the bluegum moves:
under a swirl of leaves
bad luck is brooding.
Wind goes not warm, not cold
but neutral, seeming
over the lovers dreaming
drab, stale, and too soon old.
[1943]²¹

²¹ Unpublished.

14. [Handwritten]

[Now there is no surrender. This is the moment]

Now there is no surrender. This is the moment
seeded with all occasions where chance may sprout
quota of danger, or the arresting finger
tap on a shoulder notify end to crimes
unseasonably written on court records.
This is full end to dreaming within a dream
where all compatibles are suddenly opposed
and ludicrous the reasonable themes
will poise incongruous as tidal litter.
The landscape gravely swelling west
out of March goes without umbrage.

Indifference bearing

late harvest yields between its nights and mornings
specious []²²: the febrile and the nubile
are heirs to this, not circumspect, direct
and bound to go through vaster similarities
into the dark negation, flushed from appeal
or passion.

News tells northward violence and distress,
a continental violence, a parturition stab
predicative of still-birth, lameness or gross
affliction not to be countenanced but here
accessory's imperatives. North by west
the sun moves into new zones and reason's
climacteric is due with turbulence or dismay:
from autumn south eyes follow. The monastery
still stands, graveyard charnel, split relic
spat into sudden importance in temporal concerns.
And there will be a new word out of a foreign
tongue used to serial tragedy

which on these lips

stings before tears, salt with the tang of folly.

[1943]²³

²² Illegible; "romantics"?

²³ Unpublished. Note in KS's handwriting: "This was intended to be part of a long poem."

16. [Handwritten]

[Comrades we cannot speak]

Comrades we cannot speak
of comfortable rewards:
can tell of certain words
useful when bastions break.
Some will remain to dance
and test the edge of chance.

Now there is date for tolling.
Memory calls its beads
and must forego some needs
by agencies recalling
you, the deliberate friends
gone down to futile ends.

When land is left fallow
the tools gather up rust.
One finds the note, the trust
autumn harvest follows,
clarity in those nights
stripped of too soft delights.

Yet hardness does not come
furious from the sea,
blowing across the free
hillsides and city slum:
equal over islands
hour glasses tip their sand.

The lovers in their beds
recall the sum of this
transition, no release
from what ill bones have bred.
Centuries won't decay
or tumbling harvests stay.

But you more separate
have grown – out of this youth
discarded pedants truth
where in the passionate
heights reason is less than lead:
you are wise being dead.
[1943]²⁴

²⁴ Unpublished.

17. [Handwritten]

Earl of Warwick to Count Otto de Burgh

Sir, having found several great states
contend in essentials and verbosities
for argument no remittance lack of exemptions
from being involved in other peoples affairs,
I offer you again these gifts of memories
[]²⁵ on single peninsula where death
and breath compel lavish exchange of tokens.
Recall regrets and seals, periods and pledges,
tacit acceptance of a boy, and falling tide
harbour retreats, excursions on rich streets
that then were not quite humbled to the curse
of patient mediocrities or compromise.

Recall the hillsides, promontories where we stood
lords over pastoral archipelagoes [sic], seeking
fence lines trace of civil limits, soil showing
the promissory notes of personalities
lost under names assumed to suit an instance,
lost in cohesion and misplaced in time.
Think too I'd say of sluggish foam of mist
concealing valleys wherein roads had purpose;
not this same arbitrary purpose which withholds you
but was consumed with being way for right
fertility. Then we were wise, were young, not much dismayed.

Europe was limited by hawthorne hedges
stippled with white and sharp with leaves of holly:
transacted history argued, [],²⁶ dissembled
came finally resolved in afternoons.
Dual the swans that turned across the paddock
and dual were the liberal tones of evening
schooling outside discipline so time was malleable.
In private scenes morning was not compulsory
and summer sessions froze with open hands.

Now being temporarily home, discovering
tangible goodness in the streets we played on
being still more aware of outside cogencies
I send you this trust holding one²⁷ shall tell
new fashions and new cities as before
under some simple stars, discursive nights.

[1943]²⁸

²⁵ This word is illegible in the MS; "tracked"? "tranced"?

²⁶ This word is illegible in the MS; "annealed" is a possibility.

²⁷ "one" is a guess; the MS is illegible.

18. [Handwritten]

[Now the crisp earth redresses]

Now the crisp earth redresses
each significant wrong
spirit may turn where winter presses
finding no night too long.

The loving moment leave
a husk within the bed
slides into dawn that it receive
a blessing from the dead.

Those laid within hillside
wont stir to tell their truth
foreswearing valley and high road
and cancelling their ruth.

Here let the lovers learn
season will bring its peace
darkness go down so day shall burn
caustic across your face.

Who looks on bird and flower
seeing an answer there
promises luck within the hour
dismisses sexual fear.

Who looks in orchards finds
fruits hidden in wet grass:
wanderers on alps against the winds
strike passage through a pass.

The sleeping earth reviews
the concord with the sun
that spirit in part be free to choose
what action shall be done.

May 14th '44
Point Chevalier²⁹

²⁸ Unpublished. GP notes: "This refers to a game we had while at secondary school, and one would take a known personality, the other something fictional, and have a debate or discussion."

²⁹ Unpublished. Note accompanying this and the next two poems in KS's handwriting: "My dear Gray, I send you these without a letter as that would be so much verbiage. These three were written this weekend; the two [No's 19 and 20] concern Gab Hyde directly, and the one above is a general thing. I've volunteered to be a farmer this week. God help us. He won't probably." Galbraith Hyde was born in 1922 in Kaikoura, trained as a schoolteacher, joined the RNZAF and served with a bomber squadron in England. On 6 November 1942 his Stirling bomber was shot down over France; he spent about 6 months on the run and was eventually captured and shut up in Stalag Luft 8b at Lamsdorf and other prison camps until the end of the war. KS presumably met him in the Air Force.

19. [Handwritten]

[Not for him the medallion, only brief]

Not for him the medallion, only brief
surprise that it should be brought by this
one gesture out of known regions, in this place
dismally smashed from height, the leaf
spun unregarded from a warring tree.

This autumn prematurely laid, the stone
upheaval shuddering, a passage made,
a memory of voices on a valley road:
summon him these who quietly went down
cancelled his vision in a lonely sea

North from the waters where he put his hand
testing a current while the noisy stock
swam to the shore.³⁰ Remember him; the land
where he was raised breeds silence and the rock
forgets his cunning and rejects his look.

May 13th '44 ³¹

³⁰ KS wrote "store" but "shore" seems required by the sense.

³¹ Unpublished.

20. [Handwritten]

[Calling armistice here beside the gulf]

Calling armistice here beside the gulf
I think of him as one who counted tides
who would not read the riddle to a self
more suitable for driving stock on roads
than playing anagrams with love and death
 where all the course was charted by a twisted star.

Under the cold dominions nightly walking
tacitly told by bridges why his season fell
or named his passage by the harbour, baulking
at dates or plans. Richer than these he fell
out of his bearing sapped from his acts or faith
 where end of course was charted by a simple star.

May 13th '44
Point Chevalier³²

³² Unpublished.

21. [Typewritten]

092822³³

He in his hemisphere cracks now careful handed
each nut of memory whose sweet kernel savours
all contingencies under the screen and shadow of Italy;
neither particular blessing or despair is his.

The black cock falls backward from the tower
four fingered iron pouts all directions round
wound by a bomb burst spin above such walls
where beams strike curt on the morning angles.

Here deft the sections coach explosion on
remote and incidental ridges, heavy headed
walking among slopes among gravel sweating to serve
those guns the correspondents camera poses
as the intruder snout in peasant orchards,
the blind geometry and technics of destroying.

O say he is surgeon and tired of the need to break
and by the breaking protest some measure of urgent
building amongst the alien people, the unidentified
whose enemies are said to be his, whose feelings
are words in a language he will not understand
while he records what any data bears on, notes
figures ranges and files in the intrinsic battle.
Say this is the boy competent and skilled in
twentieth century warfare and I say you lie!

For I have known his better, the heart under
battledress and distress under the shock of shells
who was quick with rancor and tired, whose hands
still from the action are feeling
to the cool keys in the quiet front room
who cannot be transposed by accident of time
or temper or military artifice or history
from one who quietly walking through summer and winter
was foreign at home and never
more than a stranger in barracks.

For him the cannonade mutters, for him the tanks
mount in a green obscurity with ranging bursts.
Also for him is Venice squat in lagoons and time
is a Farnese village, is no matter of place and when.

³³ Graham Perkins' ID number. There is some ambiguity as to whether the fragments collected here were intended as a single poem (as presented here) or as separate but related poems.

Anonymous the stand to cockerel salutes
a military boy with certain tall fears lacks favours
one of those who have tipped a casual glass
on a bitter cafés terrace with the glaciis of a glance
sheer down streets and vistas to the unlimited future
to the blind barren mountains and the guns anger
where coiled like snake consequence
waits from the bush of the year striking
on the indifferent and unimportant, the abstract
political economic man.

.....

He stands midway between brutality
whom occupation seals but not offers
more than the winds occasions for anger
or for escape; lacking neutrality
from armoured fears he suffers
is always borne to historys danger.

O she where he asks still valleys, quiet
pastoral surcease from the run of sun
he cannot linger with too late since strong
there floods in her the great diseased riot
inherent in her blood for she is one
who moves as well to dangers smoother song.

All the bright music holds him as he moves
and she is deep sonata to his hand
the subtle killer easing, the coarse will
bending away from high power into love
a pole between two poles, on some green land
set on the peak of the observers hill.

.....

He stands on the observers hill.
Round him is unmapped country, fogs[.]
The sun is somewhere shining still
brisk on hedgerows and steel-smooth bogs
where winter water seals earth and seals
with smooth cold touch what critical heart feels.

Whose once exploring members
stiffen into acceptance, fear
fire burn in stirring old embers
who lonely at the last must hear
high the improbable echoing lark
is he whose day lies hostile now and dark.

Neither for fogs nor sun he cares
for one like history will not hide
and arrogant the other stares
on detritus of skills and pride
stares on the maimed and twisted land
the legion damage of his cunning hand.

.....

Exiles are those to whom
equators are not drawn
as fulcrum of mapped division
of latitude and dream.
In uncharted country
where only the private move
those lines across time will cleave
the personal reality
which can dispose its claim
beyond worlds cartography.

Nor the horizons there
predicate wind nor weather;
if one blows soft then another
may harden into despair
abrasive bond or love or wealth
whatever that one heart deems
or lost in immediate names
the names of familiar faith
may be posts along some clear
or sunstrong county path.

So when exile charts
you, tourist or static,
under whose hands most frantic
fantasia can start
from total blank to fury
when to be wise is be dumb
know that you too have come
into personal glory
are set in the midmost heart
rich with our single story.

[1945]³⁴

³⁴ Unpublished, though some phrases and images re-appear in the poem "From a War to a War," *Collected Poems 1943-1995* (2004). GP notes: "Written at Norfolk island in April 1945. Reference to 'the black cock falls' etc. comes after I had written a letter describing an Italian village damaged by shell-fire."

22. [Typewritten]

Vision at Kingston

It seemed that from the stone
came an essential thing
that could so laugh and sing
as blood bedazzled eye and ear
since Christ could not have dreamed or known;
such ecstasy of pain, such fear
could crying rise and cloud these skies
with its great longing and its blind desire.

With its great longing and
its blind desire! Yet tall
it stood above the broken wall
with that ecstatic voice could bless
with eye and curious rent hand
could bless the pain, the snarling press
the ruin of its life, the jail
the compassed fury and Pacific shore.

And yet what fury could
raise whether hot or slow
that proud pitiful shadow
to tower against the sun and turn
that afternoon to music, would
transmute the stones till they must burn
with history's restless blood
and calm all battle from the raging sea?

[April 1945]³⁵

³⁵ Unpublished. Kingston is the main settlement on Norfolk Island where the poem was written.

23. [Typewritten]

Factory Hand

This man is built and bent by labour
not for chess or for dancing
not for romancing –
that drug to his body's lost savour
as in a seasonal sickness once outgrown.

For now his hour is working skilled in that foundry
whose barred lights lean down a barren street
towards the markets to the sticky wharves
where winches patter and the small neat
launches enter the basin as strict doves
move processional to their trees, trysting
buoyant curving and then arresting
their cursive wake by a wall, by the stone
wall of the shore of the harbour boundary.

Whose day is limited by furnaces by thrust
of steel and flame, sweaty his eyes and sore
is his [sic] to whom I speak since on his skill
that mercantile city stands stayed on hill
in gully where concrete lifts up hoar
winter ridden fences of buildings over the lost
whose meridian is consequent act and pain
as his median power is to test strengthen
the hammered bar bright in the sparks rain.

Walking an awkward lane he smells strong earth
about the Chinese gardeners trucks and bags
a memory of outer lands, the breath
alive though stinking warm of leaf rot and slag
that from such flames as his to soil returned

but not corrosive.

Ten fingers touched by fire can hold, batter
by known skills can make that metal live;
useful and cunning he though bent and near broken
still more of man than many, face wrinkled, brown
dirty and slightly lame, token
I name him of the city and not of the town alone
of the grey lonely streets and the crowds where stone
stands cold as cliff face open to every weather
not to his fires vulnerable but like them banked
to weather and winds he also will be turning
but only after his faith is blind that was burning

and burnished on strips and rods, on the air
could rise so others could see there
how one a worker in metal nor primitive now
could work for the union, work for the city nor seen
by all of the world be powerful and unknown
whom even the facile press forgot in their reckoning.

Labour is more than a term for political talk
more than an attitude or a way to get by;
it is the set of fire and the bar strong, the work
that mars but makes not for this time alone
nor for these people; it works for every day.

[April 1945]³⁶

³⁶ Unpublished.

24. [Typewritten]

Words for Tristan

'I dream your body bent,
the angle of your arms.
What are the world's alarms
if the cold sea should prove
tomorrows great complaint
empty of all reprieve?'

'Tomorrow has not come;
but here is talisman
to any man within,
to any who would prove
how rich, his swirling dream
though empty of reprieve.'

'Iseult, your hair, your voice.'
'These lips, Tristan, these hands.'
'The wanderer has found
what wind nor sea shall prove,
the cleansing wave of peace.'
'And something of reprieve.'
[1945]³⁷

³⁷ First published in *Landfall* 54 (June 1960), 119 as "Air for Two Voices"; also in *Inheritance* (1962) and *Collected Poems 1943-1995* (2004-06), where the date, based on KS's placement of the poem, is given as 1944. *Tristan and Iseult*: Celtic legend, part of the Arthurian cycle, made famous by Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

25. [Typewritten]

Radio Mast at Evening

The red mast stands more tall
and aircraft nearing home
along the winds smooth edge
look down where far and still
an island or a ridge
stands stiff, stripped of that charm
slim words gave or the late
quicksilver run of light.

And air has meaning there
which the mast claims, which speaks
message to quicken both
island and hill with fear
where people hear of death
common, just north, that sneaks
luck from the airmans winds
that breaks on cunning hands.

Look to that light for some
see there the symbol flash
will tell how time will bend
history, and can come
with peace and power. The land
where we have stood is rich
but more than this can breed
great harvest from our seed.

[1945]³⁸

³⁸ Published, much revised, as “Masts at Te Atatu” in *Collected Poems 1943-1995* (2004).

26. [Typewritten]

Anthem

And the sky asks when will the engines
stop and rain fall notable on orchards?
You hear the heart blessing each hour, the stones
thrust to the summer moves or dirty shards
dug up in gardens speak of something gone
already drowned where history is brief
but the soil cries out, the sea cries and each leaf
mutters against engines consequent pain.

For certain districts think of certain men
were damned while dumb to tell how land extracts
peculiar blessing from its artifacts.³⁹

Because of these the sky must bear complaint
bearing the youth and spilling with his blood
telling of autumn close, failure and flood.

[1945]⁴⁰

³⁹ KS typed “artifracts” but clearly intended “artefacts.”

⁴⁰ Unpublished.

27. [Typewritten]

Poem

She has been kin with winter
for here the guelder rose
against her pane lay tender
massed like remembered snows
that hung across the light
curious, cold and neat.

But the wind heavy with damage
batters such trees and shakes
and under the rain's harsh barrage
petal and branch must break
where now the moon's strict glaze
is a memory of the rose.

[1945]⁴¹

⁴¹ Unpublished.

28. [Typewritten]

[Now is the time to appraise]

Now is the time to appraise
all that you valued most –
light in the streets and rain
or that great lonely coast
where single the gulls parade
and music falls on the land.

Today Pacific claims
and no one there can thrive
under that charter, damned
by waste of many lives
stranded on beaches, stirred
by dangerous foreign winds.

North to equators lean
across desires and time
and dream that day relieve
us from such bitter crime
of fighting without passion
nor hope, nor skill, nor reason.
[1945]⁴²

⁴² Unpublished.

29. [Typewritten]

[News tells how north how soon]

News tells how north how soon
summer reveals its plan
to make something special
from the wholly natural man.
But where winter shall fall
where awkward handed time
shall twist – the seabirds name
that place and the lonely cry
hits at our hearts by day
by night when we would claim
a gap in consequence
being to logic born
and having no defence
from the military dawn.

The triple threat of chance
logic and consequence
repudiate a while.
Where under loves strict trance
a man and woman feel
their way to sympathy
they shall find history
burned hard across the dead
but when all is summed and said
only gave ecstasy
rarely and then to those
whom danger would follow
and they will know their days
are vulnerable now.

[New Year's Day 1945]⁴³

⁴³ Unpublished. The date is given in KS's handwriting.

30. [Typewritten]

[Such stillness was not in]

Such stillness was not in
the text books on the table

But in the century
when we are born
blood is seen on the skies
something is torn
with terrible sad cries
and then it is morn-
ing full of the low birds

and full of a babble rage
and the calculated words
when meaning was never able
to hold upon our stage

the wisest are the poor
who hear the bombers come
tangible in the clouds
above their slum
and cherish the bruised walls
landlords and poverty
perhaps because they are sure
of their own posterity
which does not ever begin
nor end nor have allure

there is
no language for the mother
crying by the broken child
only the loud impotent
wailing for the wild
sweep of the century
in which we are born
or strictly silent innocence
because we have been torn
out of a twisted flesh
given faces and degrees ...

but if what they have planned
without recognised clause
that birth and love and death
are flowing without pause
that one is another phase
without beginning or end
and that no working days

skill will ever mend
the flaw that is history
where events go on like tunes
the juke boxes parade
and there is no healing
no skill that will aid
the sad disease of feeling
when the community wants
somehow to live to die ...

I cannot bring back the trance
when in the last bitter stroke
of lust I had been broken
and yet felt that there woke
more insight than had woken
in any other breath
sir in that clip of love
I was most near death
myself and not at all
what I had thought had been
something remembered potent
something behind the screen
of personality not
alive and surely not dead
in a still winter
when time had all fled
and all was barren and all
richer and still and close ...

but always the sun
out of dark winter rises
in autumn leans through the trees
picks up the harbour ripples
and slender on the tin
roofs of the country houses
spots nail heads like nipples
and the earth bruises
the seasons dropping apples
you may read by these
your own compassion
you may read the charity
unconscious with your breath
that you name in memory
symbols that could be faith
sir I am quickened by an old air –
that is death ...

[1945]⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Unpublished. KS notes: “These scraps are from a long dialogue between my abstract man and his death.”

31. [Typewritten]

[below a plane of silence]

below a plane of silence
richer than I have told
out of time and still
more than time more old
for out of the midnight violence
we have been timeless and all
was strait with the great innocence
where no birds could call
nor world could waken move
that absolute of love
and yet in that quiet
when we have spoken words
her voice was a riot
twisting and I have heard
your tones through that dark ..
 she
will say what I have said
being woman her hand
is intimate with the dead ...

my dear we should not meet
ever on such hillsides
after the ambush the snarl
when actions arbitrary
phrase is published and time
puts period to me ...

they have been your terrors
where the elusive face
might wait for you surprising
in some ordinary place
between the aspidistra
and the bubbling coffee urn
sudden accosting, the extra
power to make time turn
I have known your horror
of that frustrate public shop
with its synthetic ambush
placid at the top
of the plush vulgar stairs
where you were frightened to pass
yourself meeting yourself
in the redundant glass.....

my dearest death in me

has moved along my blood
dangerous smooth and easy
when living was a flood
that could not be overborne
except within your arms
there were such charms
against the malice
of the unpropitious minute
against that critical poise
of legend when within it
was all of damage and good
the dark glasses clarity
of pure acceptance
which is utmost charity
any can ask of an age

but in the century
when we are born
we have outgrown deities
out of them have torn
new myth new expression
made great legend and myth
but never in compassion
have measured to our technics
and have foregone our ethics
for formalism our dance
shuffled into commerce

but was there any
over ourselves when the leaves
began to fall and the altars
were tripped about with sheaves
in country parishes
and autumn wrapped us round
and the keen clear air
frosted the fallow ground

[1945]⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Unpublished. KS notes: "These are from the dialogue of the man, death and the woman."

32. [Typewritten]

[The ultimate armistice rings them down]

The ultimate armistice rings them down
in a set village mounted on the hills.
He sees processional lanterns thread through
the streets that fall like legends of a man.
(But do not stretch the figure though the guns
have written action on the walls at night.)
And he thought of betrayal while the priests
told a familiar story of rituals.
The lanterns bobbed, the choristers removed.
A toilet flushed the house where he consumed
two bottles of red wine tasting of tar.
He went to camp and dreamed he was at home.
Sometimes he wondered meaning to his name.

[1945]⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Unpublished.

33. [Typewritten]

[Castles and ultimata in the air]

Castles and ultimata in the air
the ferries on the harbour the bright
reel of our Queen Street rolling to the fair
and the Town Hall squat on the night;
for those the signal victory of being
what is and has been where we try to stand
still in the middle of motion whose hand
puts out the stores redundant light.

Castles and peace pacts meaning
for you and me someday the dark
prayer and midnight and that leaning
face bent above and the twin spark
living leaping from one to each other then
and swift commingling with the drums the strings
telling our music when the moment brings
a long dream from our dreaming.

What was in silence was in distance
not sure enchantment though by memory
bred and is past and is all presence
O now by that tell how the arbitrary
flux may confound and be confounded when
re-entering is music for all who
sing dance ecstatic lie – for you
who have no word no armistice of me.

[1945]⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Unpublished.

34. [Typewritten]

[Time explodes into history]

Time explodes into history
sweating with persons places and despair
and now slim personal fury
is broken by someones distant stare
by one quick finger nimble against a trigger
or a word whispered, so no longer
the private dream can stall nor can love sweat
a firm band round each arm and be complete.

Mechanic men have threatened us
and consequences cancel miles on maps.
We are a day from front lines, force
is an arrow pressing closer through our sleep.
The adolescent leans to love or death
under a brilliant sky, but not the harsh
kiss of his vision can wipe out his pain
nor summer rapture bring him back again.

[1945]⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Unpublished.

35. [Typewritten]

[And the singular gull climbed]

And the singular gull climbed
across channels drifting to lost islands
drowned in that night and the sand turned
cold underfoot so when hands claimed
your secret natural warmth
fingers were busy walking
over a fertile unpredicted earth
good beyond any speaking.

Through babble of words lapsing, through
the dark deceptive as a showmans tricks
by weeping grass promise could make
tomorrow rich with tides and show
fortunate that beach where tongues
are tanged by salt and kissing.
Though history scald with its wrongs
eastward the moon was rising.

Here where the world turns east we turn
because we must, being alive with time
dazzled by words uncertain charm.
All that's to be known we hold, stone
fact crisp between palms not chilled
by scientific search:
but chance is a rock must be scaled
for something out of reach.

The stone is that fact is that break
from chance which shows how unsuspected lie
possible veins of silver ore
hidden below the casual sleek
surfaces of plain circumstance
that once washed bare by rain
can gleam and wave like a dance
but may not come again.

Where we move is that unexplored
lacks guides and we compelled by some slim sense
from curious deft hands may trace
limits of swift luck ranged abroad,
to meet with luck where dim seas pressed
their mouths on winds and stones
and taller the blown gull be lost
and we must meet again.

[1945]⁴⁹

⁴⁹ First published as “Poem” (“And the singular gull...”) *Angry Penguins* (Aust.) (1945), p. 103; first two stanzas reprinted, much revised, as “Moonrise” in *Inheritance* (1962) and *Collected Poems 1943-1995* (2004-06).

36. [Typewritten]

[Pardon me this and every supple haunting]

Pardon me this and every supple haunting
that asks its sustenance from what may move
our charity or sooner move our love,
surprising as a pain and simple
found now in winter as you come returning
critically from Europes sad example.

I hear the cries of memories now rising,
the monstrous ghosts of our intelligence
inform our days; we fall without defence
and certain only of what's long time gone.
But you come south from suffering winter
to a whip of wind, down to a meagre sun.

And the birds fall from the cliffs and crying
go west in the evening and the sea is dark,
the streets quiet, smoky, and from the park
the picnics have left for home and playing
dogs look lonely and the cold enormous world
shadows our islands where need is lying

Closer against our bone to be loved, to love
while the radios play and the footballs slip
in the Saturday mud, wind hits at the lip
of the lover; the strangers who daily crucify
their ideal selves since the world is not enough
are round the corners where all dreams die.

Watching the Queen Street crowd I see a motion
familiar in us, the common move of man
who tries to find himself where no one can,
walking with pain and question, goes under
nameless to danger and unanswered still
who hears no thrushes calling through the thunder.

They are all strangers and we know them all
and are these singly and are these we number,
and we are these and from their human summer
follow their twitching of leaves and fall
as they afraid through every night of winter.
But here you enter, and the thrushes call.

[1945]⁵⁰

⁵⁰ First published, much revised, as "Apologia" in *Inheritance* (1962) and *Collected Poems 1943-1995* (2004); the first stanza and last two stanzas form the first three stanzas of the revised six-stanza version.

37. [Typewritten]

[The mind no more delights in simple heroics]

The mind no more delights in simple heroics,
preferring evening and a slender glaze fastened
on macrocarpas, fast on the flying field
the hangars curled uncouth, the asphalt strip cooled
solemn and alone.

Remembering two people single in tastes whom frenzy
drew into her hands and shredded without
any patent reasoning,
my mind no longer pleased with eloquent manouvers [sic]
with decorations, flights or words for military actions
returns to browse on paddocks, on the stipple
of hawthorne and holly, on a melancholy company.
Hedges and macrocarpas are what we understand
and find familiar: even uprooted trees
have more compassion than the broken geometry
the frayed mainplanes, stripped fuselage
of aircraft in salvage sections.

Remembering two people young in the babbling city
both keen from a country town and by their time
betrayed, I see across the westering light
metrical the parade of pylons moving north,
see power stretched over the paddocks not
to destroy but produce;
from inland rivers to known harbours
the murmuring lines flowing.

Violence has been a necessary shadow
lain across beds where this pair could not couple
(and he went down near Norway and the girl
was killed by accident here.)

But these not ritual deaths may still assure
how, under the stretch of power, the soil remains
while here flanked road unreels those steady symbols
that, as permanent values, move through stress and action
where beyond, clean, hard and durable,
the pylons lean against clouds like harvest stooks.

[1945]⁵¹

⁵¹ Unpublished. Note in KS's handwriting: "For Gray who seemed to like it. Kendrick Smithyman."

38. [Typewritten]

Two Sonnets in Return

The moon caught in the elbow of a cloud
looks over the horizons arm and sees
gusty July, big engines and pruned trees,
is not amused by poverty or the proud
who count devices against time and reckon
the deepening expenses of their lives.
Tides leave these coasts and sometime you arrive
who now know what all travellers are seeking.

Not with the moons stare cherishing winter
indifference, to place and person coming
across my quiet and local stage you enter
with a grin and Corelli, who could saunter
through memory when absent and be known:
south from the moon you travel and are homing.

2)

'Thou talkest of harvest, when the corn is green
The end is crown of every work well done;
The Sickle comes not, till the corn be ripe.
Be still..

Kyds Spanish Tragedie

Now you come back, and look: the ships turn round
the order of their ports but people stay
suffering, dishonest, good, wanting a Christ
whose part is to be loved and then to die
under the peoples hands so that the lost
may know that they are lost and every day
be dead and rise again. O history
is this, and that cold term has bound
our furious records with felicity.

Four years of war have taught us there are few
essentials to our living and I plead
for charity, acceptance, and some action
that we may live peacefully with our need
and take the harvest of our long affection:
the green corn of our youth you bear with you.

[1945]⁵²

⁵² First published as "Two poems in the return for Graham," *Book 9* (July 1947), where the order of the poems is reversed and the epigraph from Kyd is dropped, Note in KS's handwriting: "For you, Gray, on the return." GP notes: "In the event it was July 1946 when I returned to Pt. Chevalier."