

Canterbury Visit, Winter 1982

You clasp a shabby quilt
of dun and brown.

Memories from years before
at first stay locked away
like the snow water
in your mountains
marching north and south.

No storms call to your Port Hills,
which are as bare as the trees
that trellis your sky.

But then, they always did.

Even as I enter the city
of my first true love
you get coy
clutch up a skirt of fog.

Once again
I have to fumble my way.

Poems to the West Coast

Fragments from 1967

I remember rain
when the train
came through the portal

beech trees, trunks black
as though licked by flames
that never stood a chance

Moana's empty platform
soft drops on Lake Brunner
dark amoeba pools

at Stillwater
(or was it Dobson?)
wagons awash with coal

Burn time

They say it always rains on the Coast
but Coasters who have been away
know they'll not get as good a tan
in Palmerston North¹
as they will in Hokitika.

¹ Palmerston North, although about 500 km north of Hokitika and much drier, has fewer sunshine hours.

Town statue talk

On mid-winter nights
in Hokitika
Robbie Burns, Richard Seddon²
and the Unknown Digger
get down from their pedestals
and meet behind St. Mary's
for a Monteiths –
except for Robbie
who has a single malt.

At first they talk about
the eighteen-sixties
when the town had
one hundred and two hotels
ten thousand souls
and nuggets in the creek.

They next discuss
the West Coast rugby team's
last match.

Aye, the best laid schemes...

moans Robbie.

What we need

thumps King Dick

is more resources

and a distribution plan.

But the Digger
just takes a swig
looks to the hills and says
*There's gold inside 'em –
we just need
to work it out.*

² Richard Seddon (King Dick) – NZ Prime Minister 1893 – 1906.

Rivers that feud with the sea

The Haast rages at the sea
when in flood
rips boulders big as trucks
from the knees and feet of giants
hurls them in the ditch.³

The Waiho runs to the sea
from the nose of a river of ice
which very slowly pokes its tongue in – and
out, as it bench-presses
mountains of snow.

The Grey races for the sea
but, barred from its prize
wins instead
the bones of boats and ships
and the tears of fishermen's widows.

³ The *ditch* – the Tasman Sea.

The last word

Don't you throw rocks at me
retorts the sea
cuts up rough
slings trees
at the giants

The goose egg rock

A small rock, still smooth
once white, now grey

sits on my desktop today
picked from a beach thirty-four years ago

south of Kaikoura, north of Goose Bay.
Jum said be impressed by the goose eggs

laid down on the beach by the sea
laid down in the sea by the Clarence.

I may not have been so
but you were away.

In Central Otago we laughed
when Jum said *Look out for schist tor!*

But rock-spotting ardour
is suppressed by the goose bumps of love.

Our kids found more rocks for my desk.
You are still my tor today.