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### **Abstract**

This brief review of four New Zealand 'road' poets suggests something of a phenomenon of the seventies, a hangover from an earlier 'beat' period, which infused New Zealand poetry with a new sense of mobility and openness that owed a deal to the social and political movements of the time as much as to consciously-derived literary models.

MICHAEL SHARKEY

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## Gypsies, City Streets: Four New Zealand Poets on the Road

This brief review of four New Zealand 'road' poets suggests something of a phenomenon of the seventies, a hangover from an earlier 'beat' period, which infused New Zealand poetry with a new sense of mobility and openness that owed a deal to the social and political movements of the time as much as to consciously-derived literary models. The work of

Gary McCormick, Sam Hunt, Peter Olds and Jon Benson is not uniformly concerned with travelling, but all these writers deal with images of transience, travel, or a trip, to infer relationships with persons, society and art. Nor are they the only contemporary writers in New Zealand to concern themselves with 'travel' sequences (even travelogues). Alan Brunton ('Letter to Harry Leeds', *New Argot*, May 1975, pp. 5-6) and Russell Haley (*On the Fault Line*, Paraparaumu, Hawk Press, 1977) explore distance, separation, and perception in their work generally, and James K. Baxter's own observations on travelling up and down New Zealand — including hitch-hiking scenes — may be considered a formative (and even normative) instance of the mode. Associated with the general thematic area are the public stances of these poets — the images of street-dweller, 'gypsy', hobo or peripatetic boozier (Sam Hunt).

The deliberate adoption of a 'pose' goes beyond a fashion or passing trend, to mark the output of these four in particular ways as an experimental direction in New Zealand poetry. In effect, they represent a casting-off from more static modes, into an anti-academic contemplation of landscape, society, and self. And in the case of at least two of the writers, a conscious grandstanding element signifies their relationship with the public. Their work is 'public' by contrivance — their audiences being drawn from the street or pub, or revamped 'readings' that take on theatrical aspects with the arrival of Hunt or McCormick. Declamation, in their case, is the point.

McCormick's second collection *Street Poems and a Walking Story* (Porirua, Piano Publishing, n.d.), a collection of broadsheet-style pamphlets, commences with a neat encapsulation of the dichotomies relating to poetry. 'There are Two Kinds of Poem' differentiates the 'academic' poem and the 'street' poem:

the one

is a genius in technique, it whirls with precision  
across the stage and leaps before tiring  
in libraries; familiar with college campuses and  
assisted by the Arts Council, it goes on tour  
in the provinces

lives on in books few care to read.

This 'type' has a solid pedigree; a considerable number of contemporary practitioners are campus-located or patronized, including C. K. Stead,

Vincent O'Sullivan, Kendrick Smithyman, M. K. Joseph, Mike Doyle, and others from the Oxford/Auckland University Press stable. Nor is this 'generation' of academic poets wholly separate by age from the generation of Hunt and McCormick. Hunt and Olds, like Mike Morrissey (*Make Love in All the Rooms*, Dunedin, Caveman Press, 1978) and other more recent writers, have served terms as writer-in-residence (Burns Fellow, Otago University, 1977, 78). McCormick is right, however, to point up the pitfalls of achieving 'genius in technique', in terms of the poet's relationship to a wide public base. Transcending Smithyman's delineations of Auckland versus Wellington poetry at an earlier period (*A Way of Saying: A Study of New Zealand Poetry*, Auckland, Collins, 1965), the 'academic' poet — like Smithyman at Auckland, or Bill Manhire in the south — is drier, trickier, more hung up on its recognition that it plays with concepts. Smithyman observed that academic poetry (the poetry of academics, or fostered in the atmosphere of analytics, contemplation)

exploits tone and calls for nuance as our romantic writing was little urged to do, (and) makes for itself a recurring difficulty about getting 'the true voice of feeling' which waits on one's efforts to keep a tactful poise between the pleasures of intellect which may be offered, and those staple excitements of poetry which tend to be sentient. (*A Way of Saying*, p. 155)

The very language is guarded, to weigh 'those staple excitements ... which tend to be sentient'. McCormick considers the other side of the metronome:

Another is more stubborn. By nature, a more  
erratic lover, coming occasionally  
like a brilliant sun from behind clouds;  
recording no apology it speaks out of turn  
or like a dumb midshipman on holiday  
stares cheekily out from the expensive seats.

It knows no life other than the brawling street  
and refuses to come in.

More jocularly metaphysical than the 'technical' poem that McCormick infers in his description of the academic impulse, the more plebeian, 'romantic' poem mimics with its images the differences in sentiment and tone. The entire poem ironically takes off the academic tropes it describes — the poem as skilled actor or action, the 'tourist' in provinces — and contrasts the career-traveller, the vocational midshipman, inferring love

as motive and an uncontrollable impulse to speak out. The 'new' Romance, in short, is announced at the start of McCormick's collection.

The poems move through various styles and topics: in each case, the street is referential. In 'What of the Day's Possible Alternatives', courses of action are considered:

suspended like a bird  
Between two seasons, going this way

And now that; exhausted, I crouch on city pavements,  
Hoping the clatter of hurrying footsteps  
Will down the quiet of my own indecision.

McCormick is not imprecise about the resolution of indecision concerning direction however: poetry is the total commitment that ensures a kind of immortality, a confirmation that a 'right' decision has been made. A long poem, 'The Rope', from the third sheet in the collection cuts through a catalogue of turnings and twistings through social small-talk and occasions, to remark

My religion, if you like, consists of the worship  
of the purely temporal, which I choose to adore,  
in all its uncertainty.

This avowal is not a fatalistic embracing of Negative Capability, but a vehicle for continued travel. The second broadsheet includes a poem 'In Certain Seasons', where present emptiness ('Unrequited love' is equivalent in this poem with 'life in all its passages') resolves into inclusion in a perceived larger chaos:

one day oceans must  
swallow rivers, one day the bird  
plunges, freed from the storm.

Often in McCormick's tone there is an uneasy balance between acceptance of this chaotic principle and incipient alarm at personal extinction. On the whole, however, the balance is maintained by a continuing interest in 'possibilities', a curiosity concerning choices. 'The Rope' succinctly captures this mood: '»My life« is nothing more or less than one/ of a number of possible choices'.

This almost-acceptance of chance is accompanied by residual doubts, at the least. The undertow of personal uncertainty is suggested in 'Naked

and Nameless', with its wish or hope

I may become  
the very spirit of a tree.  
Tall, but  
no longer alone.

The elegiac possibility of much of McCormick's earlier collection (*Gypsies*, with Jon Benson, Piano Publishing, Gisborne, n.d.) is suggested again in *Naked and Nameless*, in poems like 'The Declining Passions of Autumn'

Sighing, sighing,  
the pain-tinged leaves of old passion  
and memories decaying

and 'Remember February', with its gentle musing upon self-annihilation:

such times as these  
men murder themselves  
and have much to gain.

The sadness or nostalgia is linked more with love in the later collection however. Where *Gypsies* struck some strident, even eldritch notes with poems treating with disappointment ('You Never Know' works uneasily through some bitter clichés dealing with bourgeois life and is fairly unresolved) the later works are more assured, and the irony is a product of a cooler hesitation, rather than the disillusion with realities that tinged the first collection. The 'public' works in *Gypsies* in particular sound echoes of the Baxter of *Ode to Auckland* (1972) or of the unrebruted satires in *The Holy Life and Death of Concrete Grady* (Ed. J.E. Weir, Wellington, Oxford U.P., 1976), works like 'Ballade of a Happy Bureaucrat' or 'Spring Song of a Civil Servant'. McCormick recounts, in 'The Mall Christmas', the domestic sleaze that designates, not what Baxter might have called accidie, or torpor, apathy, but the designs of capitalism:

The men who sell the Birth of Christ  
Are not aware of what they do.  
Just thankful for the poor and simple, who  
Will buy the plastics in the mart  
The clothes and toys that fall apart  
And keep the bloody wheels of commerce  
Turning.

This directness is gravitated against by the polemic unsubtlety — the poem might make tolerable propaganda were it not for the monotone dimension of the analysis, or the reliance on clichés relating to the sacred and the profane. More successful among the earlier works were the love-relative poems in the Thunderclouds section, where the slickness of the 'easy' political and social comment pieces is abated by some restraining of an impulse to be disappointed. Tolerance of transience denotes the love-lyrics:

Mean well, be well  
we have not long,  
touch me ...  
we thread the needle and are gone ('Thunderclouds 1')

An introductory note to McCormick's poems in *Gypsies* acknowledges Sam Hunt's 'older poet' status. Calling his works 'Roadsongs' after Hunt's usage (in his 1973 volume *South Into Winter*, Wellington, Alister Taylor) McCormick notes 'Road is of symbolic importance to this mobile generation. *Song* has no pretensions about it'. If the poems of *Gypsies* reflected more of the turmoil experienced by the poet in 1973-4 as he claimed in the introduction, then the works in *Naked and Nameless* mark a maturing into capability for handling the uncertainties of the following year or two in a more concise and effective manner. At the same time, they denote a 'found' direction to pursue, in experimenting after romantic models, including the love-lyrics of Sam Hunt, that argue for a sort of resignation to the limits of effectual behaviour.

Sam Hunt's considerable opus since *Bracken Country* (Wellington, Glenbervie Press, 1971) includes two collections that play with the notion of the road (*South Into Winter*, and *Time to Ride*, Waiura, Alister Taylor, 1975) and two volumes that ostensibly celebrate a preoccupation with alcohol, *Bottle Creek* (Waiura, Alister Taylor, 1972) and *Drunkard's Garden* (Wellington, Hampson Hunt, 1977). Hunt's lyrical capabilities have been remarked on in the early seventies, by Peter Crisp (Review of *South Into Winter*, *Landfall* 109, March 1974, pp. 74-9) and Trevor Reeves ('Recent New Zealand Writing', *Ariel*, Vol. 5, No. 3, July 1974, pp. 30-1), among others. Crisp points to Hunt's simplicity, or economy of style — his recounting of 'freshly familiar territory' (the localities, or landscapes of his verse) with a willingness 'to keep his sticky inner paws of afterthought and metaphor off it' (p. 77). Reeves observes in his brief mention that Hunt 'is reluctant to write more personally about himself, but this may eventually come' (p. 30).

Both views are illuminating. Crisp's picture of what is happening in Hunt's early poems suggests that it is predominantly imagistic, or that it works best where sensory triggers engage the reader in the trip (as Reeves observes, Hunt is 'probably New Zealand's first genuine »roving poet«', p. 30). And in fact, much of Hunt's verse is reportage from the seen (and scene). What he tells us of himself is in fact inferential much of the time, but the preoccupations are evident, from the very choice of material described. They are not only 'booze, women, wine, women, and song (in that order)' as Reeves suggests (with the occasional dog thrown in, or a word on pollution). Hunt's love-poems (concerning booze or women, or dogs) are not dismissive or cavalier. His 'props' or set-pieces involve Romantic escape as much as bemused toying and dissipation. The dissolution offered by the bottle — or love — is a proper concern of poetry and carries a kosher benediction. As Crisp remarks, Hunt's poetry evokes an 'affectionate' feeling — of recognition of situations, without excessive commentary. Reeves takes exception also to Hunt's general philosophical 'lightness', comparing him to James K. Baxter, and this appears inappropriate, given the ostensible mythopoetizing tendency of the 'legendary Jim' and the more elusive *trobar clar* of the contemporary Hunt. Whatever the faults of Hunt's work, it is not arcane or 'private' in the way that much of Baxter's self-created woeful enmeshings in theology suggest.

In a sense, Hunt's economy derives from the transience of 'roving'; the poems are mimetic to the extent that they record brief encounters, and become 'moving' pieces themselves. The metaphor of travel works throughout Hunt's work, to suggest an overall sense of nostalgia for places and persons visited: the depth is fathomless, but contained within the image of motion. The spider spinning in a 'seaward window' (in 'Four Cobweb Poems', *South Into Winter* 2) is destroyed by a visiting girl 'spinning faster than a cobwebbed fly', and the tenuous relationship of poet, spider and fly becomes paralleled and parabolic, to suggest a diversity of readings concerning not sexuality, but existence. The flippant tone of the poem ('So this, friends, this is the last bright cobweb poem!') rings down a veiled finality and offers a lever into Hunt's particular concern for the imagery of wine or beer, or further travel.

Hunt offers many such vignettes as the spider sequence — poems that suggest intensity of watching ('Smash (for Meg)' in Book Four of *Bottle Creek*, for instance) or reflection ('Herons, Ma, Bright Spinnakers' from *Time to Ride*, p. 34, a vision of death, 'My mother, crying as she dies'). Each experience is archetypal; without recourse to mythic names and

precursors, each of Hunt's occasions become a type of epic of its sort, domestically-curtailed in the case of moths attempting to enter a crack in a window, or conflated to embrace all occasions in 'Everytime it rains like this' (*Time to Ride*, p. 17):

Everytime it rains like this:  
I walk hangover beaches, make  
no more sense of it:  
in love with a winter woman,  
a woman when she steams, I kiss  
wet winter lips, return to you

Everytime it rains like this

The separateness of lovers, as well as their inclusion in the couple is an endless fascination for Hunt, moving through versions like this, of the 'whole/ wide world of our bay (...) given in' to clearer statement in 'Words on a First Waking':

And so, you drift from sleep

you dress. Deliberate; beautiful,  
as if you had a wardrobe full —  
the same tight jeans and shirt you threw on  
yesterday. To think us strangers then:

all lovers like to think they're not!  
It's your world, love. You wander out  
alone into the living room,  
alone into another dream. (*Drunkard's Garden*, p. 10)

Not the least of Hunt's appeal is in his gracefulness with rhymes and half-rhymes; throughout *Drunkard's Garden*, an effortless handling of common situations (apparently) veils a tendency to melancholy that is suppressed in order to appear controllable in poetry: 'Those Eyes, Such Mist' for example holds in check a situation that recalls 'Everytime it rains like this':

I dream of the several men who've  
sailed seven seas; their many mists;  
  
wake again to your love  
as thick dreams clear; a dream of masts,

a dream that no man ever  
saw your eyes like this.

I have lost all voice. I kiss  
those eyes, our voyaging; such mist. (*Drunkard's Garden*, p. 12)

The voyaging, the travelling, becomes another metaphor effectively for a state of controlled uncertainty. The illusion of control is served by motion, by continual mobility, experimental startings-out, and observations of the other things in motion also — humans, animals, birds, insects, to suggest a confirmation of the principle of journeying and flight. The title poem of *Drunkard's Garden* brings the elements together:

This overgrown acre,  
full of emptiness, Darkie!  
a headland, refuge for  
the heron, swan and wild  
duck and drunkard; lover, child. (p. 22)

This brief, tight lyric that is ostensibly autobiographical expands through a series of suggestions in the manner of a Baxter 'metaphysical' work, to embrace notions of a Waste Land, and the poem's (headland) promontory into the dark, a place that reconciles the poet and his familiar emblems, loved ones — in a word, the poet's world, reconstituted against all possible ruin. The poem as a tenement is perhaps a logical conclusion to a series of pitstops and roadhouses, and is a neat resolution of Hunt's peripatetic considerations: a place to pause a while in (or forever) to take account of the trip so far.

Jon Benson's contributions to the *Gypsies* volume are marked by an adolescent urgency that is similar to McCormick's. A sort of pop lyricism is derived to account for some observations (for example 'Sarah' recalls Dylan's poem of the same name) and Benson warns in his Foreword against looking for 'continuity'. The poem 'The Road' offers some way into his perceptions however:

This morning  
a chance renewed.  
The road, washed  
By a night's heavy dew,  
Clean,  
Winding in the trees  
and hills,  
Following the river.  
...

I'm following the river  
Although I cannot see it,  
Glimpses in the mist,  
And I hear it singing,  
It beckons all to follow  
With melodies from the source.

The gaucheries derive chiefly from the experimenting with other people's clichés, not merely of speech, but of situations. Thus 'Late Afternoon Epilogue' constructs a contemporary Last Supper of sandwich, fruit and bread and water, and dissipates its clarity. 'Harbours' compares a lady to a harbour, and ultimately treads an almost embarrassingly hackneyed line:

Sun-crazed and mightily drunk,  
I've run before the moods of night.  
To beach finally on rocky coast  
for want of, just one guiding light.

In direct contrast to McCormick and Hunt, particularly McCormick's later work, Benson's lyrics are banal and contrived. A sense of personal disaster pervades 'Execution' and 'Another Loser Leaves Town', where the travel image is epitomized in the decision to quit and move on. The dramatic attempt to impose some direction upon things in poetry patently fails, and the option to quit becomes another piece of the grand-standing that marks the entire opus.

Arthur Baysting commenced a review of Peter Olds's first volume, *Lady Moss Revived* (Dunedin, Caveman, 1972) with the disparaging comments 'First off, he's a better poet than he is an illustrator. But he *is* a poet' (*Landfall*, 108, December 1973, p. 357). Baysting allowed that Olds's 'tone is authentic, the style and rhythm assured, and the better poems are bursting with vitality' (*op. cit.*). The image Olds presented was 'late-fifties punk', and his images recalled 'the bodgie/auto-erotic/fifties' together with 'pill bottles, probation officers and paranoia'. Literary style recalled Ginsberg for Baysting, notably in a poem called 'In Auckland', where Ginsberg's 'habit of verbal over-kill' rather than 'paring-down and sharpening of the vision' impaired the work.

For all that, Olds's talent is a persistent one. Almost as prolific as Sam Hunt, his contemporary, Olds has produced subsequently *4 V8 Poems* (1972), *The Snow & the Glass Window* (1973), *Freeway* (1974) and *Doctor's Rock* (1976), all from Caveman Press, Dunedin. And the themes are consistent throughout this period — poems concerning the hidden structures

of free-form existence, with the accoutrements of urban dwelling in crammed tenements, suicide and drugs and cars, the open road: escape routes that become a viable metaphor for the poetic art, and offer alternatives to dwelling in the psychosis-inducing city.

The first volume served notice of the parameters of the situation: commencing with 'On Probation', the experiences moved through psychosis and jail to 'habits' and, finally, the 'Schizophrenic Highway' and 'In Auckland'. The round trip was, as Baysting suggests, essentially rewarding. 'On Probation' sets the patterns up, as the poet,

Like a Ponsonby native  
that can't escape  
from his neglected monument

goes through the 'shiftless' ritual of progress to the courthouse and out into the boarding house world of barbiturates, late bars, and decay — a 'smelly dungeon'. Protest, and escape (in wine, or drugs, or the 'dreams' that are poems) are the options to acceptance, and Olds reveals them to be essentially mutually-supportive. Halfway through the work, Olds comments 'I put another piece in the allnight jukebox/ and I cry why?' — a question that remains throughout the entire volume, as the poem concludes 'while another piece drops in the allnight/ jukebox'. With this overview of the city's attractions, it is ironic to follow the option offered by going on the road. 'Herne Bay Revisited' catalogues the 'unchangeable Ponsonby', Auckland's inner suburban area, to suggest there is 'Not a ghost of a V8/ Not a ghost of you' (p. 15) left in the city, as Olds sets off from the scene with

Dunedin  
I'm on my way —  
on my way  
hitching.

There is genuine nostalgia in the recurrent imagery of the V8 car in these early poems, and later; in *Freeway*, Olds wheels out a 'V8 Poem for Christ Howard':

Take off, brother, but please return —  
best that the parts be not than bent.  
Come back, broken nose, plucked eye & all,  
better that, brother, than a black-&-red wreck —

*Not a gearstick, as we would want it.*  
*Not a blazing death, as we would dream it.* (p. 47)

In the same poem, the metaphors come clearer:

‘Tonight I sit in a coal-fired room  
captain of my own foaming 4-wheeled brain  
trying to write a line for you  
while ghosts of Fords rumble across the gloom.

The unrespectable hot cars in the city’s quiet areas and or in the crash-pad zones of the early seventies, late sixties, and beyond in time epitomize a tenuous relationship with the realities of the present. Olds’s poems dealing with the counter- or alternative societies and cultures that he moves through, in experimental searching, image a longing for escape.

The Mandrax poems, like the ‘nineteen fifties revisited’ works (‘A Teenage Problem’, ‘A 50s Schoolboy Remembers’ or ‘Lady Lust Revisiting the Great Psychiatric Rock & Roll Nostalgia’ — *Doctor’s Rock*) represent a retreat into a more controllable world of the imagination than the present seems to offer, with — or despite — the attractions of its ‘replacements’ for that which has been lost. The second work in *Doctor’s Rock*, ‘To the End of the White Lady Piccart & Hamburger Joint’ sums up Olds’s essentially nostalgic and elegiac characteristics: the glory of James Dean era has departed, and Olds feels regret more than savagery at its departure. His work is a record of its features, and his satires are less stagey and rhetorical than McCormick’s structured efforts, in their comparing of the old and the new:

Now, walking through

Broadway midafternoon busrush &  
Samoan women big bags & bellies, I

notice the absence of the ‘46 soda  
joint fountain. I walk into a pub.

The barman tells me they ripped out  
the joint’s tap burgers & bits for a new

carpark yard — he added the con-  
tractors need some concrete mixers — I

walk back out to the street & home.  
A bit sad, I turned onto Hauraki late

night service to hear some music  
but picked up the White Lady instead

singing a commercial — (p. 12)

There is no retreat from the present, except in Olds's own attempts to reconstruct the past, familiar ikons, and to soften shocks by recourse to the 'drug', poetry, pre-empting the psychosis resulting from destruction of a world that is gone in every sense.

In *Doctor's Rock* Olds follows up another road — the growth of self-reliance as the props run out. The 'Hemi' Baxter New Jerusalem — the extended crashpad family scene of Hiruharama — is acknowledged to have passed in '4 Notes. Jim Baxter One Year Gone', with its restrained conclusion 'They buried the old man a year ago —/ the eels don't bite so much now'. In this poem also, the control of form is most notable in the paired-lines (after Baxter's *Jerusalem Sonnets* maybe). The volume ends with a similarly pared-down summation of the city life, where the picture comes 'clear & true,/ well framed, well hunZ, & all of you' (p. 49) and a wry dialogue interlaced with narrative, describing the 'wandering wind's sinister return' (p. 50). The 'wind' — of romantic imagination, of dreams, images Olds's fundamental Romanticism. The 'heroes' in his mythology are James Dean, Little Richard, and the V8 engines out of a transposed American Dream.

In an interview with Stephen Higginson (*Pilgrims*, 4, October 1977), Olds suggests some of his directions in discussing the American presence in his work. Replying to Higginson's question 'Is there any single poet/-writer/movement which has provided you with anything in particular? Interests you now?' Olds speculated

I could mention a few American 'beat' poets that have been important to me (not the *Black Mountain* thing) ... guys like Kerouac, William Wantling, D.J. Burger ... Little Richard (movement), John Lennon (poet), Bob Dylan (circus), Bernard Malamud (short stories), Alan Ginsberg (confusion). (p. 135)

Olds also mentions Steinbeck, James Baldwin, Jack London, rounding his remarks off ironically in confirmation with his theme of 'confusion', 'I hope I can learn something from what I've just said. I'm not in Ward 10 for the money, you know'. It is significant that the predominant number of writers he mentions have been or are metropolitan writers and resi-

dents, and that the Road has served to represent a hope for escape or involvement, in the interpretations of London or Kerouac.

The 'transcendental' or religious possibilities of the Road are also present in Olds's readings of experience. Olds recalls Baxter's influence upon him 'I think he paid more attention to me than I did to him. He affected me terribly. I thought I should give up writing and become a monk' (p. 133 — in his interview with Higginson, and he observes that he had Christianity in mind when he wrote some of the reminiscential poems for his father in *Doctor's Rock* — muted lyrics like 'Memories of a Town Drunk', where the death of the worrying ('kicking stones with Mister Kent/ was evil') town drunk provokes an 'At last he's gone — thank God' from the townspeople and a continuation of routine. Such a subtle inference exists in the departure of the 'Town Drunk' that the effective shift from straight narrative to delivery of the 'point' of the poem is contained in the act of telling itself. The form is that of the pruned-down short story — a style of writing that Olds observed he hoped to concentrate upon during the tenure of his mini-Burns Fellowship at Otago in 1978. In a disingenuous dismissal, he remarked 'I've already had a lash at it and I reckon I can handle her with a bit of luck or with the love of Mike'. The themes again, he summarizes, are 'love, hate, baked-beans, pistons, courtrooms, hospitals, sneakers, cops and cars' (p. 135).

It is this openness in Olds's poetry relating to intent — a common trait with several of his progenitors and contemporaries on the American scene, that gives Olds's poetry its particular appeal. In the poem 'The Snow and the Glass Window', from the volume of the same name, Olds offers us in effect a catalogue of banal circumstance, within which 'the boy', his protagonist, considers 'I must break out', — and on gaining access to the world 'outside' discovers 'The glass window remained'. The breaking of the glass (almost predictably) by physical as well as mental efforts, coincides with the end of the poem. The limits of the Romantic search, as in Keats's *Hyperion* poems take the poet to the edge of his art, where realities collide, and dualism is resolved.<sup>1</sup> Olds plainly knows what he is about, in terminating the volume with this poem, and the neatness of his infusion of 'elemental' questions into the record of a mundane existence ('»What have you lost?« boomed/ the sky') suggests his art can be easily overrated. It is every bit worth investigating for its critical exploration of the unresolved dilemmas in contemporary post-Romantic poetry. Confronting a problem that is essentially linguistic — the language of 'poetry' and its relationship to other realities, Olds effectually overthrows the distinctions to establish the 'new' limits of art — its

relationship to its society, the poet's culture. At the same time he indicates his concerns are more purely 'conceptual' than Hunt and McCormick, and that his primary interest is to overhaul the art itself, by solidly rooting it in his own instinctual perceptions.

#### NOTE

1. The American critic Ben L. Hiatt, reviewing Olds's *V8 Poems* (*Second Coming*, Vol. 3, No. 1 & 2, 1974, *Special New Zealand Anthology*) commented on Olds's 'power' in poems where 'something more than simple nostalgia makes him take these backward looks at what may have been better times' (p. 98). And despite misgivings by reviewers Paul Foreman (pp. 94-5) and William Wantling (pp. 89-91) discussing *Lady Moss Revived*, there is general agreement with Tom Montag's view (relating to *The Snow and the Glass Window*) that 'When Olds is successful, he is powerful' (p. 115).

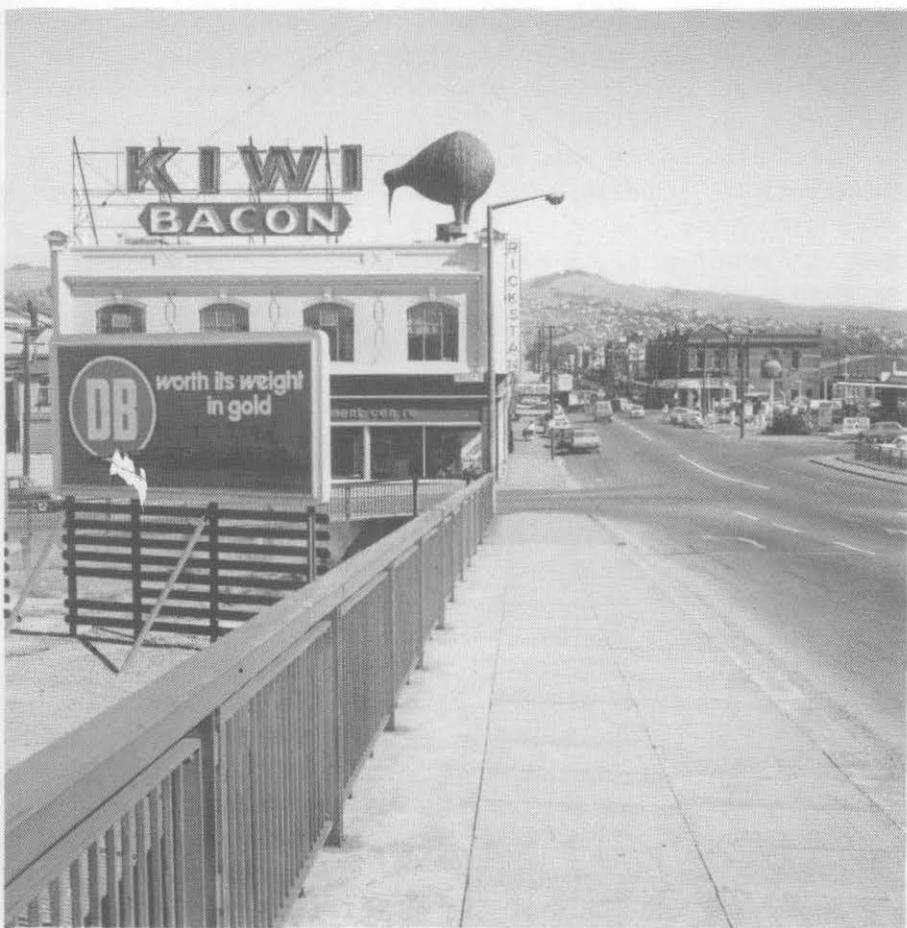
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*Interviews:* Buchi Emecheta, David Ireland.



Christchurch — town centre. Photo: Armand Petré



New Zealand scene. Photo: Armand Petré.