

**Notes to Charles Spear *Collected Poems*, edited and with an  
afterword by Peter Simpson with images by Tony Lane  
(Holloway Press, 2007)**

Note: An abridged version of these notes by Matthew Wood and Peter Simpson was published in the above book. The notes are given here in full, unabridged form. The Notes to the poems included in *Twopence Coloured* are by Matthew Wood; those to Uncollected Poems and Unpublished Poems are by Peter Simpson.

Poems published before *Twopence Coloured* and not re-printed

**The Hippopotamus**

A Moral Tale.

(According to cable reports Herr Hugo Eckener intends, when he returns from Africa in the "Graf Zeppelin," to take a hippopotamus with him.)

Now see a land where forests walk,  
Where foxes grow upon a stalk,  
Where eagles delve deep underground  
And high in air the Hippo's found.  
See him rise on potent wing  
To where the choiring angels sing,  
And every night take pastures by  
The water-meadows of the sky.

But Afric's no such phoenix land:  
The Hippo, though his smile is bland,  
Ignores the callings of mad blood  
And dwells contented in the mud.  
So we each beast contented find  
In his own place, as Fate designed,  
Till man, upsetting Nature's law,  
Sows longs where none longed before.  
And this was what Herr Hugo did,  
When passing, where Ma Hippo hid,  
He determined, then and there,  
To take her riding in the air.  
And so, within his Zepp, the "Graff,"  
She soared, above the high giraffe,  
Above the sunset's blinding rim,  
And all her qualms were nought to him.  
No more the droning swamps at eve,  
Where hippo tracks a pattern weave,

No more grave gambols in the grass,  
No loves, no fears when hunters pass.  
Uplifted then in aerial cage  
She added wonder to the age,  
But found no pleasure in the change:  
She bellowed loud, and sad, and strange  
E'en when through porthole dim she saw—  
What Hip had never seen before—  
High peaks to anthills dwindled down,  
And trees as small as thistledown.  
So, what with one thing and another,  
This 'Potamus became a mother.

See Nature's scheme to madness whirled:  
A Hippo born in air! The world  
Had known no marvel greater if  
The babe had proved a hippogriffe!  
While all his tribe were things of earth,  
He then, by accident of birth  
Denied the mud of his descent—  
The sky his native element!  
And though the child was not allowed  
To paddle in the thunder-cloud,  
Nor yet to eat the moon for cheese  
Or pluck for flowers the Pleiades,  
He suckled mid the Milky Way,  
A planet was his toy at play,  
And when he would in slumber lie  
The spheres all sang his lullaby.  
No earth he knew, but from the skies  
Supped wonders with his infant eyes,  
And childlike, thought them his by right:  
Saw comets sport for his delight,  
The sun come up to please his whim,  
The moon a lantern lit for him.

But bliss was short. It came through men:  
By them was stolen back again.  
Herr Hugo was not over-joyful  
At Hip's increase. Said he, "Der Teufel!  
"I can't continue keeping two,  
"this craft of mine is not a Zoo!"  
The thought soon grew. Their doom, though harsh,  
Was said. He found a likely marsh,  
Came down to ground, and with a shout,  
His men cast both the Hippos out.

Oh 'Potamus! Oh 'Potami!  
 No more to ride the swinging sky,  
 No more to pass with god-like grace,  
 Where lonely eagles have their place,  
 But like the Hippos of all time  
 To think, to live, embower'd in slime.  
 No need to tell the mother's joy:  
 Our story now concerns the boy.  
 She welcomed back the brushing reed,  
 The richly smelling swamp, the need  
 That drove her snuffling there, and he,  
 Young Hippopot', soon seemed to be  
 No different from his Hippo kind.  
 But still an ache drove through his mind  
 And when at last he waxed full-grown  
 This ache through maddest acts was shown.  
 He tried one day to climb a tree,  
 Spent hours in following a bee,  
 And squatted on a bank all night  
 Considering the toucan's flight.  
 But stranger yet: his comrades found  
 He really sought t spurn the ground.  
 So often he, until his doom  
 Swung down on him. Then one full moon  
 They saw him perched upon a steep  
 Above the swamp, and saw him leap  
 Upon the air, and heard him call  
 The stars to lift him. Then saw him fall.  
 Bend close, and mourn, ye distant skies,  
 This Hippo's death, that sought to rise:  
 And now he's dead, transport him where  
 A child he wandered in the air.

*B. and S.*

*Canterbury College Review* October 1932, 35-37. B is probably Lawrence Baigent; S is probably Charles Spear.

### **Twopence Coloured**

Spear published three extended selections of his poetry before and in the year *Twopence Coloured* was printed. These can be found in *Landfall* 2:1 March 1948, under the overarching title of 'In Times Like Glass'; *Arachne* 1 January 1950; and the *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1, 1951. While all three selections are mediated through another's editorship they can each be regarded as mini sequences, presenting not only poems and a

few variations on poems that would appear in *Twopence Coloured* but also indicating something of his major collection's form. Of the three, 'In Times Like Glass' perhaps most clearly demonstrates this presentational method, inasmuch as Spear sets them apart as an 'office' or a 'canon' replete with its own title (cf. note on 'From a Book of Hours').

The *Arachne 1* poems are:

Karl [poem 1]  
Portrait  
Homecoming  
Karl [poem 2]  
Promised Land  
Tancredi  
Christoph  
Vineta

The individual pieces of 'In Times Like Glass' are:

From a Book of Hours  
Animae Superstiti  
The Watchers [poem 1]  
A Life  
The Prisoner  
Memoriter

The poems printed in the *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol. 1 were singled out by the *Yearbook's* editorial team and placed alongside work by three other poets in a 'special section'. The editors decided that the four poets—Hubert Witheford, W. H. Oliver, Pat Wilson and Charles Spear—should each have more room in the *Yearbook* to present a wider selection of their work than is usually allotted to poets in a general survey of a year's poetic activity. An introductory essay and commentary to the section was provided by Erick Schwimmer. The effect of this 'setting apart' may, I think, be thought of as an attempt to officiate and offer to meditation something canonical of the year's poetry. This editorial work intends both precedent and prescience to the poetical year through the office made of the special section. Schwimmer said this of Spear's poems:

These are all developments which are now new to New Zealand poetry. There is no doubt that the Curnow generation has done much to make such developments possible, but it should now be recognised that the period of preoccupation with the specific New Zealand experience is past. An interesting instance of disagreement between the Curnow school of thought and the one here put forward appears in the choice of Mr. Spear's poems. Mr Curnow gives a generous selection [i.e. those poems of Spear's that appeared in Curnow's revised and updated anthology *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1950* Christchurch : Caxton 1951], and yet it was felt that another selection for this *Yearbook* was justified.

Mr. Spear has written a group of very remarkable poems quite like anything else produced in New Zealand before him. For once they are not poems of adolescence or philosophical poems, but poems of full adult sensuous experience.

Charles Spear belongs to the same generation as Mr. Curnow, but did not publish poetry until a few years ago. The attempt to come to grips with a New Zealand background is as pronounced in his work as in that of other poets of the same generation.

One can distinguish the places where the New Zealand background is remembered from many other places where an attempt is made to come to terms with the adult experiences of life abroad. There is no doubt home reminiscences must have entered a good number of the successful poems, and some of these have been included in Mr. Curnow's anthology. However, if poems inspired wholly by way of experiences abroad are ignored – as they are in that anthology – violence is done to the poet's personality. [69]

Several of Schwimmer's comments are patently ill-founded (that Spear only started publishing his poetry 'recently', for example), nevertheless the introduction has interest for us because it claims for Spear a difference that has stuck with his poetry ever since, characterising Spear's work as an exceptional occurrence in New Zealand verse. True, Curnow also said as much when he wrote the introduction to his anthology. The interest, therefore, is in how Spear's poems are put to work in a particular critical or political perspective and, perhaps, how variously amenable to supposedly opposed contexts they seem to be.

Spear's *Yearbook* no.1 poems appear in the following order:

The Watchers [poem 1]  
Homecoming  
Anima Superstiti  
The Disinherited  
Ricimiero  
Edward Vining  
As It Was  
Nec Reditura Dies [variant title for 'Remark']  
The Watchers [poem 2]

## **Twopence Coloured**

Charles Spear

Christchurch : Caxton Press 1951

No. 7 in The Caxton Poets Series

*Twopence Coloured*: Collection title. The phrase, "one penny plain and twopence coloured", was popularised by Robert Louis Stevenson. In *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879) Stevenson describes the landscape he passed through in order to reach "the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of the Snows", situated in the hills of Vivarais (in the Rhône-Alpes region, South East France):

There was not a sign of man's hand in all the prospect; and indeed not a trace of his passage, save where generation after generation had walked in twisted footpaths, in and out among the beeches, and up and down upon the channelled slopes. The mists, which had hitherto beset me, were now broken into clouds, and fled swiftly and shone brightly in the sun. I drew a long breath. It was grateful to come, after so long, upon a scene of some attraction for the human heart. I own I like the definite form in what my eyes are to rest upon; and if landscapes were sold, like the sheets of characters of my boyhood, one penny plain and twopence coloured, I should go the length of twopence every day of my life. [166]

The two grades of printed paper sheet that Stevenson is alluding to here, in order to make his point about preferring a contrasted and definitely contoured scene to an amorphous and wan one, are those from which 'toy theatres' were constructed, a popular children's entertainment in 19<sup>th</sup> century Great Britain. The completed diorama of a toy theatre would display a representative scene from a pantomime, an opera, stage play, tale or even an historical incident. Stationers sold sheets printed with the outline of characters, much akin to paper dolls, and other pieces to be used in the making of a stage, resplendent with stage furnishing and representations of landscapes appropriate to the scene under construction. A penny plain indicated the price for uncoloured paper-sheet sets, while twopence was the price for ready coloured sheets. Stevenson discusses his memories of the toy theatre directly in the chapter entitled 'Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured', *Memories and Portraits* (1887).

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'This the way to the museyroom. Mind your hats goan in': Epigraph to collection. Quotation from *Finnegans Wake* James Joyce London : Faber and Faber 1939, Book 1 sec. 1, 8.

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### **Edward Vining**

Appears in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 94.

*Edward Vining*: Edward Payson Vining (1847-1920) American crypto-scholar (honorary M.A. from Yale, 1886), who, in his *The Mystery of Hamlet: An attempt to solve an old problem* Philadelphia : J. B. Lippincott & Co. (1881), averred that Hamlet was a woman.

The 'old problem' Vining addresses is that of Hamlet's personality, his 'melancholy' and his 'procrastination', the oblique path he traces through the play (in particular, Hamlet's vacillation before the task set by his father's ghost). According to Vining these personality traits indicate not only that Hamlet had a feminine sensibility but was, in actual fact, a woman—"...not only a womanly man but in very deed a woman desperately trying to find a place by which she was by nature unfitted." [59] Evidence also contributing to Vining's 'solution' includes Hamlet's high regard for Horatio, an old

chum from Hamlet's days at university in Wittenberg, and Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia's affection.

Notable among works that have made a considered use of Vining's suppositions is the 1921 German silent film production of *Hamlet*, produced by and starring Asta Nielsen in the lead role.

James Joyce alludes to Vining twice in *Ulysses*, but seems to abrogate Vining's discourse to an observation on the long tradition of female actors playing the lead in major productions of *Hamlet*, which is an altogether different 'problem' than that which may be posed of Vining's book. Sarah Bernhardt and Sarah Siddons are among women who have played Hamlet on stage to great effect.

*To Turn again: not even finger tips / Could find a wall in darkness or a garden gate:* possible allusion to T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* (1930): "Because I do not hope to turn again". As such, this brings us within the compass of Eliot's well-known pronouncement on *Hamlet*, that as an integration of its source material the play is a dramatic failure ('Hamlet and his Problems', *The Sacred Wood* (1922)). Eliot's assessment is not made before he makes a plea for a criticism that would focus less on characterisation and pay more attention to the play as a whole.

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### **As it was...**

First published as 'vera incessu patuit dea' by "S", *Canta* vol.3 no.1, 23 April 1932, 5:

Be rare; and, in venetian red,  
calm, turning towards long wine-dashed skies,  
recall dear Ceres corn-gold head,  
her smiling, perfect, pagan eyes.

An elegy within a dream,  
you half despise our mundane tears  
and move, as to a Chopin theme,  
a trifle lost among your peers.

Also published in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 94. It appeared there as it does in *Twopence Coloured*.

*vera incessu patuit dea*: partial quotation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, book 1 line 405: "et vera incessu patuit dea. Ille ubi matrem". The phrase stands on its own as an occasionally used Latin saying signalling the manifestation of something or someone considered to be of divine status. It is probable that Spear alighted on these words and employed them here in this very manner, in the same way Henry James had one of his characters use the phrase in *The Figure in the Carpet*:

Early in March I had a telegram from her, in consequence of which I repaired immediately to Chelsea, where the first thing she said to me was: "He has got it, he has got it!" She was moved, as I could see, to such depths that she must mean the great thing. "Vereker's idea?"

"His general intention. George has cabled from Bombay."

She had the missive open there; it was emphatic though concise. "Eureka. Immense." That was all - he had saved the cost of the signature. I shared her emotion, but I was disappointed. "He doesn't say what it is."

"How could he - in a telegram? He'll write it."

"But how does he know?"

"Know it's the real thing? Oh I'm sure that when you see it you do know. Vera incessu patuit dea!"

"It's you, Miss Erme, who are a 'dear' for bringing me such news!" - I went all lengths in my high spirits. "But fancy finding our goddess in the temple of Vishnu! How strange of George to have been able to go into the thing again in the midst of such different and such powerful solicitations!"

Spear once suggestively commented on James's story about obsessive hermeneutists while 'reviewing' *The Portrait of a Lady*:

What was the truth about James? I confess I do not know. I do not know what he meant when he murmured those extraordinary words about the figure in the carpet; but I shall give my private opinion for what it may be worth with all the allusiveness the subject demands. [Landfall 2.3 237]

The Virgilian phrase may be roughly translated as: 'the way she moved manifested a truth and set this goddess apart' or, slightly more literally: 'truly, walking openly as a goddess'. Originally, the line is from the episode in the *Aeneid* that has Aeneas investigating the Carthaginian territory, where he landed after being blown off-course on his way to Italy. In this land not counted on Aeneas does, however, encounter a woman, quite poorly dressed in hunting garb. After a colloquy, the woman, who has been concealing her true nature, reveals herself as the goddess Venus, Aeneas's mother. John Dryden rendered the revelation thus:

Thus having said, she turn'd, and made appear  
Her neck refulgent, and dishevel'd hair,  
Which, flowing from her shoulders, reach'd the ground.  
And widely spread ambrosial scents around:  
In length of train descends her sweeping gown;  
And, by her graceful walk, the Queen of Love is known.  
The prince pursued the parting deity  
With words like these: "Ah! whither do you fly?  
Unkind and cruel! to deceive your son  
In borrow'd shapes, and his embrace to shun;  
Never to bless my sight, but thus unknown;  
And still to speak in accents not your own."

Given that Ceres is also mentioned in Spear's poem it may also be worth noting Shakespeare's rendering of Virgil's words in *The Tempest*. During the phantasmagoria of the wedding masque held for Ferdinand and Miranda Shakespeare has Ceres say the phrase not of Venus but of Juno: "Highest Queen of state / Great Juno, comes; I know her by her gait." [Act 4 sc.1, lines 102-103]



*venetian red*: A pigment used in painting traditionally derived from ferric oxide. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries venetian red was also commonly used to colour stucco in the manufacture of imitation marble. The dry material containing the ferric oxide (rust) used to make the pigment was once known as ‘caput mortuum’, Latin for ‘death’s head’. There was, it seems, something useful to art in what alchemy preferred to leave behind. In the alchemic lexicon, from which the phrase is derived, ‘caput mortuum’ signified a useless residue left after a chemical reaction. The alchemist’s nomenclature often recorded the presence of this material with a stylised skull (cf. ‘At a Danse Macabre’, and the “rusted corpse” in ‘Environs of Vanholt I’, a poem which carries an allusion to Faustus, an alchemist). If ‘venetian red’ does indeed refer to the pigment one can be excused for assuming the presence of a particular painting behind Spear’s clearly allegorical poem. The exact identity of this painting, however, remains obscure. However, we can, again, assume the painting to be classically themed, given the reference to Ceres later in the poem.

*wine-dashed skies*: probably a metaphor for a spectacular sunset, but we can imagine the scene of the poem during or after a bacchanal of some sort, perhaps one conducted in the epicurean tones of *Ecclesiastes* (one ‘should eat and drink, and enjoy the fruit of one’s labour’ even while ‘all go to one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again’), an assurance related to the homily of a danse macabre (cf. ‘At a Danse Macabre’). There is also a slight echo of Homer’s famous ‘wine-dark sea’ in Spear’s phrase.

*Ceres*: The name under which the Romans adopted Demeter, the Greek deity associated with the cultivation of plants. She was the mother of Proserpine (Greek: Persephone). When a rapacious Pluto, god of the underworld, abducted Proserpine Ceres had the land lay fallow. This was an untenable situation for mortals. The petitioned gods convinced Pluto to return Proserpine, but with a sleight of hand that involved a pomegranate Pluto still holds Proserpine captive in the underworld for one season of the year, winter, when Ceres’s protestation again takes hold of the world and its weather.

*Chopin*: Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849), Polish composer noted for his remarkable, highly nuanced piano works.

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## **Rearguard**

*Rearguard*: tactical or martial position employed by Spear as a by-word or an emblem that figures a poet’s or, more generally, an artist’s experience and occasion in history, society and the ‘tradition’. Spear’s use of martial terminology is closely related to reflections that he most likely applied to himself and his own poetry. This is certainly how Daphne Lawless has read Spear’s and his collaborator Lawrence Baigent’s ‘tactics’ in the co-authorship of the novel *Rearguard Actions* (London: Methuen 1936) under the composite nom-de-guerre ‘C. L. Spear-Baigent’.

Spear's by-word might be further thought of as an 'about-face' with respect to a related discourse given in R. A. K. Mason's 'Song of Allegiance' (1925). Mason's poem is a litany (made up of the names of reputable and great writers in English who have 'fought' and died in their particular poetic occasions) to which his own poetic being is added as a somewhat pathetic coda:

Though my voice is cracked and harsh  
stoutly in the rear I march

Though my song have none to hear  
boldly I bring up the rear.

Where Mason's view of his own socio-historic moment follows weakly but in the same general direction of the imagined incessant forward march of poetry's glorious past Spear's emblematic poet is in danger of being isolated and separated from this column completely. The rearguard has turned 180 degrees. The compass of Spear's by-word orientates his poetic being in a socio-historic moment such that it now faces in the direction of a culture's unquiet ghosts. These work mischief against the poet's present, which is, in turn, defined by the struggle to ward off these assaults emanating from a past where these emanations threaten a complete confusion of past and present.

Also cf. 'Karl' [poem 2], 'The Disinherited' and 'Animae Superstiti'.

*The host*: an army or armed cohort.

*Priest, king, and fighting man, and saint, and sot*: the ciphers constituting the host.

*Bavarian bells*: cow-bells are part of the rustic iconography of Bavaria.

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### **The Watchers**

First published as part of the sequence entitled 'In Times Like Glass' in *Landfall* 2:1 March 1948, 20.

Also published in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 91.

This is the first of the three two-part or double-sided poems in *Twopence Coloured*. The other two are 'Environs of Vanholt [I and II]' and 'Karl'.

Supposing that *Twopence Coloured* can be conceived of as a 'yearbook' or an 'annual', presenting one poem for each of the fifty-two weeks in a single year then these two-part poems are singularly important for making such a formal arrangement work.

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## **O Matre Pulchra...**

First published as 'Broken Sequence' by 'B', *Canterbury College Review* 1932, 16:

When you, whom the de Goncourts' prose  
had placed on shallow, leaf-strewn steps,  
against a tower, slate-roofed, and rose,  
when you gaze in your mirror's depths

(dear worldling), do you understand  
my seeing, in those fine brave eyes,  
instead of ladies of the land,  
the unkissed Galatea rise?

*O Matre Pulchra...*: Horace, Odes, Book 1, ode 16, line 1: "O matre pulchra filia pulchrior", indicating that the ode is addressed to 'A beautiful mother's yet more beautiful daughter'.

Just what or whom does Spear has in mind with his revised title? This is as obscure as what is implied by the original title. What is the sequence that has been broken? Can we conflate the two titles and say that the line of descent is broken hence rendering redundant the comparison that was achieved by Horace in the terms of the address?

*de Goncourts' prose*: Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, (1822-1896 and 1830-1870 respectively), brothers and literary collaborators. The Goncourt brothers co-authored art criticism, novels and an extensive diary plotting the goings-on of Parisian society. The revised poem, in which Spear specifies "Jules de Goncourt's prose", makes little sense—since Jules only wrote in collaboration with his brother such that his prose cannot be individually ascribed, whereas Edmond continued to write on his on behalf after his younger brother's death due to syphilis—except, perhaps, in terms of a code referring to the dynamics of Spear's own collaborative relationship with Lawrence Baigent (cf. 'Rearguard').

*Galatea*: the name later attributed to Pygmalion's ivory statue. Pygmalion's tale is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid the statue becomes animated after an intervention by Venus and under Pygmalion's kiss but remains nameless throughout.

*fancy lady*: a promiscuous woman or a prostitute, woman regarded as such and spurned by Pygmalion before he committed himself to his 'great work'.

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## **The Disinherited**

Also published in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 93. There the poem is printed with the first and second stanzas conflated.

*Ignored the worldly watchers and the powers*: cf. 'The Watchers'.

*staples*: the things principally dealt in [?].

*Remote as any gipsy rover, / They stared along the cliffs...*: Possible allusion to George Borrow's *Lavengro* (1851). In the first preface to his book Borrow wrote:

The principal actors in this dream, or drama, are, as you will have gathered from the title-page, a Scholar, a Gypsy, and a Priest. Should you imagine that these three form one, permit me to assure you that you are very much mistaken. Should there be something of the Gypsy manifest in the Scholar, there is certainly nothing of the Priest. With respect to the Gypsy - decidedly the most entertaining character of the three - there is certainly nothing of the Scholar or the Priest in him; and as for the Priest, though there may be something in him both of scholarship and gypsyism, neither the Scholar nor the Gypsy would feel at all flattered by being confounded with him.

In this connection Spear's habit characterising the members of a band or cohort with ciphers should also be considered, for example cf. 'Rearguard' and 'Animae Superstiti'.

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### **Homecoming**

First published in *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* no.5 H. H. Tombs (ed.) Wellington: The Wingfield Press (1949), 142.

Also appears in: *Arachne 1* January 1950, 2; and *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 91. Both of these publications print the poem with an accent missing in "abbe", line 7.

*Homecoming*: The homeland returned to is most likely French. Cf. 'France'.

*That was the prelude*: The first battle of the Marne? Or is there a black humour or portentousness at work here with the implication that 'The Great War' as a whole was a merely prelude? On the other hand, though it is less workable in terms of the actuality of the military history, it could be that the Franco-Prussian war is implied as the prelude in question.

*sugared violet*: a confectionary made from violet petals, particularly associated with Toulouse, France.

**Memoriter**

First published as part of the sequence entitled 'In Times Like Glass' in *Landfall* 2:1 March 1948, 21.

In the earlier version of the poem colons appears where a semi-colons are printed in *Twopence Coloured*.

*Memoriter*: mode of an expression or recitation that comes via memory, the iteration of something learnt by heart.

*paladins*: originally referred to the twelve peers of Charlemagne's royal court, but often more generally applied to indicate knights errant, warriors esteemed for their morality and chivalry as much as their fighting prowess.

*crocus*: flowering perennial, the appearance of crocus blooms is traditionally associated with the end of winter though there are croci that flower in autumn. Notable among the croci is the saffron plant. The native range of croci extends across Central Asia to as far west as the Aegean Sea region. Croci were not cultivated further west until the mid 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Oulremer*: or 'outremer', French noun for the 'crusader states', the regions in the Levant invaded and occupied by the crusaders from the time of the first crusade, including 'The Kingdom of Jerusalem' (est.1099 with the capture of the city by the Christians). Mediaeval and Renaissance French allows the variant spelling. The word translates as something like 'over-seas' or 'across-the-sea'. Interestingly, in modern French, it is the word now used to refer to the pigment ultramarine.

*That other arrow*: invoking the love dart of Eros or Cupid.

**Portrait**

First published in *Arachne* 1 January 1950, 2.

*steinkirk*: a kind of loosely tied cravat or neck-scarf worn by both men and women, fashionable in Europe from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century through to the 1720s. The accessory's name derives from or was a design specifically fashioned to commemorate Louis XIV's French successfully repulsion of William of Orange's joint British, German and Dutch

force at the 'Battle of Steenkerque' in Flanders on August 3, 1692, an infraction that was part of the 'Nine Years War'.

In English literature the steinkirk is associated with a once scandalous scene from Colley Cibber's play *The Careless Husband* (1704), Act 5 sc. 5. This play, and others by Cibber, were produced at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane (cf. 'London Musical Box').

Today, Cibber is better remembered for being the principal dunce of Alexander Pope's final version of his poem-essay on stupidity, *The Dunciad* (1743). Cibber became a target for Pope in the same way Robert Southey did for Byron: both Cibber and Southey were the poet laureate and both were elevated to that position of eminence, in the opinion of the two satirists, more by politic than for their talent.

*popish candle*: where this probably does not indicate that the "Prisoner or madman" is actually Catholic but that he is one whom is exercised in the ceremony or airs of an aesthete, a des Esseintes type of figure.

*old Zealand*: geographically speaking there are always two possibilities when one speaks of old Zealand. These are the largest Danish Island (Sjælland) or the Dutch province Zeeland.

*under sails of lawn / And roughened rose*: lawn is a type of fine-woven fabric. Spear's syntax suggests 'rose' is also a type of textile, though we may also think of the old colloquialism 'sub rosa', to say something in confidence or in secret.

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### **London Musical Box**

First published in *Canta* September 20, 1950 Vol.2 No.5.

*Jenny Lind?*: Jenny Maria Goldschmidt née Lind (1820-1887), Swedish Soprano known as the 'Swedish Nightingale'. Regarded as the finest soprano of her time.

Hans Christian Andersen was enamoured of Lind. Andersen wrote 'The Nightingale' for her, though Lind did not return his affection.

In 1844 Lind performed at festivals in Dresden to honour the visiting Queen Victoria. These performances assured her of success across Germany and most of Europe and would pave the way for an enthusiastic reception when she sang for the first time in London during 1847. Lind toured extensively, achieving fame not only in Europe but also cult status in the United States.

In America Lind was represented by the promoter and raconteur P. T. Barnum ('A sucker is born every minute') from 1850-1852 in what can be kindly described as benefit performances. From this time on Lind rarely performed in full-scale operas but did dedicate her time and money to philanthropic ventures.

Interestingly, recent research by Cecilia and Jens Jorgensen proposes an ironic twist to the attempted wooing of Lind by Andersen. It is said that shortly after her last performance in London Lind secretly travelled to Paris in an unsuccessful attempt to

marry Fryderyk Chopin (cf. 'As it was...'), and that this doomed clandestine assignation was sanctioned by Queen Victoria. Lind had supposedly fallen in love with Chopin while ministering at his bedside, relieving him of consumptive pain through her sweet song just as the Chinese emperor is ultimately relieved of the shadow of death by bird song in Andersen's story. Lind subsequently married Otto Goldschmidt, a well-known pianist, in Boston during her celebrity romp.

Lind lived in London for the later part of her life.

*Sarah with the throat of gold?*: This reference remains obscure. Spear possibly refers to Sarah Bernhardt. While also known for her singing voice Bernhardt was principally, and famously, an actress. Among her acclaimed roles Bernhardt caused much comment through her portrayal of Hamlet when the play was performed in London's Adelphi Theatre during 1899 (cf. 'Edward Vining').

Another possibility is that Spear is alluding to Sarah Fischer (1896-1975), Paris born mezzo-soprano who grew up in Montreal, Canada. As a singer Fischer is notable for her involvement in the first live opera radio broadcast, which took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1923. In this performance of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* held at Convent Garden Fischer sang in the role of Pamina. Fischer then went on to be seen in the lead role of Bizet's *Carmen* when, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1934, the BBC telecast opera for the first time. She would also play the lead role in another notable occasion in the history of opera, when, in Paris during 1927, Ambroise Thomas's *Mignon* (cf. 'Mignonne') was performed for the 1600<sup>th</sup> time.

*Miss Nellie Melba?*: born Helen Porter Mitchell in Melbourne, Nellie Melba (1861-1931) was the acclaimed Australian Soprano. She was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1918 for her war time charity work and fund raising. Her image now appears on the Australian 100 dollar note.

*Fan*: apparently the wife of the 'muffin man'. By identifying the voice heard at the start of the poem in this manner Spear twists out an irony. Rather than tones issued of a famous soprano what is now heard is the shrill voice of a cockney working-man's wife, the 'truer' music of London's city streets. Fan is hunting down her husband, angry that he has neglected to place a bet on a horse that has paid out on odds of "ninety five to three".

*the muffin man*: itinerant purveyor of English muffins, a common sight and sound in London from the Victorian period through to World War II, when the muffin man was banned, ostensibly due to the sound of his bell but more likely because these traders avoided rating payments. The muffin man is memorialised in a children's song. The lyrics are variations on the following:

Do you know the muffin man,  
The muffin man, the muffin man?  
Do you know the muffin man  
Who lives down Drury Lane?  
Yes I know the muffin man,  
The muffin man, the muffin man?  
Yes I know the muffin man  
Who lives down Drury Lane?

We all know the muffin man,  
The muffin man, the muffin man?  
We all know the muffin man  
Who lives down Drury Lane?

*bobs*: colloquialism for shillings.

*perisher*: in British parlance the colloquialism refers to an irritating person.

*Drury Lane*: Street in Westminster, London, near Covent Gardens. The Theatre Royal is located there.

19

### **Christoph**

First published in *Arachne* 1 January 1950, 4.

*Christoph*: possibly a reference to an historical personage or fictional character that, nonetheless, remains obscure. One may guess at the identity of ‘Christoph’ (who is, patently, an “exile”) but ultimately the poem does not supply us with the sense or context that would make one figure probable. However, possibilities might include Johann Christoph von Schiller and the cornet Christoph Rilke (the still romantic character of Rainer Maria Rilke’s early poem and best-seller).

*yawl*: a small ship or boat.

*Zuider Zee*: Dutch for ‘southern sea’, the name that designated an inlet of the North Sea in the north-west of the Netherlands. The Zuider Zee no longer exists. The greater part of the inlet was walled off from the ocean with an enormous dyke completed in 1932.

*The Hook of Holland drenched in diamonds*: the Hoek van Holland is cape and an associated port in the southwest Netherlands near Rotterdam. The Hook is a long serving and important harbour for Dutch trade. Rough diamonds have passed into the Netherlands through the port since 1586.

*hours like golden tissues stacked away*: a double entendre, one thinks of an illuminated Book of Hours (cf. ‘From a Book of Hours’). *The Book of Hours* is also the title of a well-known collection by Rilke.

20

### **The Hand**



*Lepanto*: The Italianate name for the Greek port town of Ναυπάκτου (Nafpaktos, Naupactos, Naupactus). Nafpaktos has a long and tumultuous history, but as Lepanto the town is best known for the great naval ‘Battle of Lepanto’. Lepanto was the base for an Ottoman fleet under the command of Ali Pasha. The Ottomans were engaged and defeated in the Gulf of Patras by a Christian coalition, commanded by Don Juan of Austria, bastard child of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1571.

Miguel de Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*, was a combatant on the Christian side. He was wounded and captured during the battle, suffering major damage to his left hand and would spend the next five years in a Turkish prison.

*Prime*: the second lowest frequency in the campanological scale of partial tones used to tune bells. Or, and perhaps more likely, the Prime is the first devotional Hour (or early morning prayer) in the liturgy of Hours, cf. ‘From Book of Hours’.

21

### **Audrey**

First published as ‘Arcadians Both’ by ‘B’, *Canterbury College Review* 1932 16:

You fly a kite against a silver sky,  
Your starry loveliness, [*sic*] pale by the wane  
Of sighing tides, gleams like a butterfly  
White-crystal-winged in slanting straws of rain.

*Audrey*: In consideration of the poem’s original title this is most likely to be an allusion to the minor character of Audrey in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Shakespeare’s Audrey is an uneducated, slightly moronic, rustic. She is first encountered in Shakespeare’s play accompanying Touchstone through the woods. Audrey and Touchstone marry at the play’s conclusion.

22

### **Glimpse**

*Dean and Chapter*: a dean is the head of a chapter of canons, the administrative body of a cathedral.

*King of Kings*: Yahweh, Jehovah, God etc.

*Cathedral stands in Golden Square*: Golden Square is a quadrangle in Soho, Westminster, London. It is adjacent to the south end of Regent Street. There is no cathedral situated on the square, it is also unlikely that one could see a cathedral spire from there.

23

### **Winter Dusk**

First published in *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* no.4 Howard Wadman (ed.)  
Wellington: The Wingfield Press 1948, 168.

*rick*: haystack.

24

### **Petriburg**

*Petriburg*: possibly Saint Petersburg, the former capital of Russia established by Peter the Great in 1703. While the city of Saint Petersburg has gone by various names—including its inaugural appellation, which was given by Peter in Dutch (Sankt Piterburh), as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> century re-namings of Petrograd and Leningrad—it has never been officially referred to as ‘Petriburg’. Therefore another possible reference must be considered.

‘Petriburg’ is an abbreviation for Petriburgensis, Peterborough rendered into Latin. The name has been in use since the consecration of the second Peterborough abbey in 972 AD. The abbey was run by the Benedictine order until Henry VIII decreed England’s monasteries be dissolved in 1539. The former abbey would become a cathedral when Henry established the see of Peterborough in 1541.

*Parma violets*: heavily scented violet with a double flower. Parma violets are not known to occur naturally but a history of their deliberate breeding has been lost. Due to this mystique, their scent and sensitivity to cold weather the Parma varieties (also known as Neapolitan violets) were considered royal flowers. A cultivation program for Emperor Alexander I of Russia was supervised by Isaac Oldaker. Oldaker was the first to grow the violet in England in 1816 at Sir Joseph Banks’s Spring Grove nursery.

25

### **A Life**

First published as part of the sequence entitled ‘In Times Like Glass’ in *Landfall* 2:1  
March 1948, 20.

*Tashkand*: or ‘Tashkent’, ancient city in Central Asia, once an important post on the Silk Road, currently the capital of Uzbekistan. Spear’s poem deals in Imperial Russian military activity to the south and west, so the appropriate historical moment to note is that of the fall of Taskent to the army of Alexander II in 1865.

*Kars*: City in north-eastern Turkey. The scene of the siege of Kars, which had Russian forces taking the Ottoman controlled city fortress as one of the closing acts of the Crimean war in late 1855. The Ottomans would later completely relinquish the city to the Russians with the battle of Kars, a part of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878.

*Shipka Pass*: in the Balkan mountains, Bulgaria. The location of the battle of Shipka Pass, a series of important battles in the Russo-Turkish war.

26

### **France**

Spear describes the French landscape in terms approximating heraldic devices. Cf. 'The Prisoner'.

*And the reservists fired and fired across the Marne*: the first battle of the Marne saw a French and British force prevail over the advancing German army in early September 1914 during World War One. Hundreds of French reservists were transported to the battle-ground in taxis. Cf. 'Homecoming'

27

### **At a Danse Macabre**

*Danse Macabre*: 'dance of death', the mediaeval French term referring to images of skeletons playing musical instruments for the other, fleshier figures included in the image. The song played by the skeletons leads the still mortal figures in a dance that is or will be, allegorically, their death. A danse macabre was, not long after its first appearance, typically serial, containing more than one panel, comparable in this respect to the Stations of the Cross. Different panels showed different mortal figures from various social strata, from kings to peasants. The allegory generally applied through these images was one with a 'memento mori' at its heart, the instruction to 'remember death': for whatever one's social standing death is constant presence, we are in its shadow the whole length of our short lives.

Danses macabre first appeared as informal murals in mediaeval European centres wracked by plague. They were quickly adopted officially and frescoes of the form were often commissioned for public buildings, particularly churches and charnel houses. Essentially it was Hans Holbein the Younger who standardised the danse macabre motif with a series of woodcuts made in 1538 entitled 'Todtentanz'. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a renewed interest in the danse macabre and, in turn, mutating its allegorical content.

28

## **Environs of Vanholt I**

[Title misspelled on the contents page: ‘Environs of Vanhold I’.]

*Vanholt*: or Anhalt, historical Principality and sometime Duchy in Central Germany. The region is the setting for a scene in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (in the ‘A’ text, Act 4 sc. 2; in the ‘B’ text, Act 4 sc. 6). This poem is the only two-part or double-sided poem of Spear’s that is explicitly titled as such (i.e. ‘Environs of Vanholt I’ and ‘Environs of Vanholt II’). Could this particular doubling up be related to the two distinct versions of Marlowe’s play? As ‘Vanholt’ (in other words, as it was misapprehended by Marlowe) the Duchy bordered Faustus’s home of Wittenberg (cf. ‘Edward Vining’). In addition, it may be noted that while Spear’s description of these environs are very much littoral the region once known as Anhalt is, in reality, landlocked.

*the Holmcliff*: in keeping with the patently fantastical description of an imagined world Spear’s poem also supplies completely synthetic designations or names to what a reader of the poem is encouraged to imagine as prominent landmarks in the ‘environ’ described. The poetic technique which gives this litany of named navigational points functions to inculcate a reality to the place described, for it as if the environ is or has been known, however fleetingly, by a people who had use for these names and vociferated them accordingly. In this way the names are re-iterated or reported by the poem as if they were designations extant prior to the poem. While this supposition applies to the “Broken Span”, “Razor Drop” and “Winesael Yawn” “Holmcliff” can be further differentiated from these latter designations, for it can be said to carry a specialised language function. Holmcliff is close to an Old English word, ‘holmclifu’, that can be found in *Beowulf*, meaning ‘sea-cliff’. It, as such, ramifies the series of names with an artificial etymology. Cf. ‘Scott-Moncrieff’s *Beowulf*’.

*Beanpod*: the name of one who knew the environ of Vanholt (see previous note). Beanpod is either sleeping out on the beach or has died there.

29

## **The Prisoner**

First published as part of the sequence entitled ‘In Times Like Glass’ in *Landfall* 2:1 March 1948, 20-21.

In the earlier version of the poem a colon appears where a semi-colon is printed in *Twopence Coloured*.

Cf. the “prisoner or madman” of ‘Portrait’

*Three mitres and the shield with rope and wedge*: Allen Curnow deftly characterised this as “sinister heraldry” in his introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960). In theory it may be possible to discover the fidelity kept by this combination of heraldic device. The arms of Simon de Apulia, Bishop of Exeter from 1213 to 1243, closely match Spear’s description.

30

## 1914

*1914*: The year in which the World War One was initiated

*Guards*: short for ‘Foot Guards’, refers to those army units stationed at the Chelsea Barracks (see next note), the Household Division, troops that have direct dealings with the sovereign.

*Chelsea Barracks*: British army barracks in central London.

*Coldstream*: one regiment among the six Foot Guard units the Household Division during World War One. The other five were: the Grenadier Guards, the Scots Guards, the Irish Guards, the Welsh Guards and the Machine Gun Guards.

31

## The Watchers

First published in *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* no.5 H. H. Tombs (ed.) Wellington: The Wingfield Press (1949), 142:

The bulg’ng rampart streaked with pink and jade  
Shelters the quay where heedless drinkers sit,  
Discoursing love with gin and orangeade,  
or Marcel Proust to a banana split.

The waiters on their monorail recur  
Like an old and boring complex; all aglow  
The ironclads out at sea fire through the blur  
And sink to tango rhythms suave and slow.

It is this earlier version that appears in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 95. The Yearbook version contains

one subtle difference in punctuation setting it apart from the first time it published. This being a reversion to the standard, non-contracted, spelling of “bulging” in line 1.

Second poem with this title in *Twopence Coloured*.

*Marcel Proust*: (1871-1922), author of the monumental modernist novel, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

*ironclad*: armoured warship, the dominant naval vessel from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*El Choclo*: or, rather, ‘*El Choclo*’, a tango written by Angel Villoldo (1861-1919), ‘the father of tango’. It was premiered in Buenos Aires in 1903. ‘El Choclo’ translates as ‘ear of corn’, the sobriquet given to the sort of man invoked by the song. He is named so for his bright blond hair. A number of English versions were recorded in 1952, all re-titled as ‘The Kiss of Fire’. Notable among them was one by Louis Armstrong.

32

### **Endimione**

*Endimione*: Italianate spelling of ‘Endymion’, the mythological Greek shepherd-prince who was so handsome the moon goddess, Selene, fell in love with him. Selene realised that the mortal Endymion would age and eventually die and so asked Zeus to grant him a wish. Endymion, as it happens, chose an eternal sleep in which he would never age. Despite this unending slumber Selene and Endymion had fifty children together. John Keats’s poem is the best known variation in English on this narrative.

*Great Elector’s wars*: Friedrich Wilhelm (1620–88), the Elector of Brandenburg, known as the Great Elector. He is credited with the resuscitation of Prussia after it became a pan-European joke during the Thirty Years War. The Great Elector’s strategy in this respect was to negotiate an armistice with Sweden, disenfranchise the Prussian Junkers, centralise state power and build up military strength. Friedrich Wilhelm’s wars were means to an end, efficient affairs and never long or major conflicts. He deftly negotiated pacts alliances and treaties in order gain as much territory under direct state control as he could and, for the most, part he succeeded.

33

### **Karl**

First published in *Arachne 1* January 1950, 2.

*Karl*: As for ‘Christoph’ Karl could be an historical personage or fictional character. Again, his identity is obscure. Our only clue is that he might be an “exiled king” of some

sort. 'Karl', however, differs from 'Christoph' in that it lends itself much more readily to a reading that would resolve it as a purely hypnogogic vision or dream image.

*Saxon blue*: a dye produced by treating indigo with sulfuric acid, also referred to as 'indigo carmine'. Not to be confused with saxe-blue, cf. 'Animae Superstiti'.

34

### **Vineta**

First published in *Arachne 1* January 1950, 4.

Spear's poem gives a phantasmal description as a vision had by a soldier at the point of death. This dramatic scenario comparable to the given by Heinrich Heine's poem 'Seegespenst', which also alludes to Vineta.

*Vineta*: a 'lost city', 'the Atlantis of the North', also known as 'Jumne' (following the supposition that when Nordic sagas referred to Jumne or Jomburg they were speaking of the same city as the one that became known as Vineta). Vineta's possible location and its historical reality have been the cause of much speculation. Possible sites include Wollin and Usedom islands. Both islands are located on the south Baltic sea-coast, the former is just off the Polish Coast and is, today, a Polish territory, the latter is a German territory located just off Germany's northern coast. Together the islands enclose the Szczecin Lagoon, into which the Oder river flows (topographically this landscape is comparable to the former Zuider Zee cf. 'Christoph'). Another possible location for Vineta is Barth, a small German city located on the mainland near the aforementioned islands.

Vineta is mentioned very occasionally in historical documents from before 500 AD through to the last years of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. These references reported it as the most important trading centre in Europe with links to Russia, Greece and Phoenicia. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century Vineta was purportedly the largest and richest European city. From 1170 through to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Vineta existence is no longer registered. 16<sup>th</sup> century cartographers plotted Vineta on maps of the Baltic region. Stories were told of a city at the height of its glory struck by an earthquake and slipping to the bottom of the Baltic Sea. For this reason Vineta was thought a product of this later era's imagination. The Vineta myth was again popularly revisited during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when its real historical existence was assumed and integrated into an account putting its sack and destruction at the feet of the Danes as part of their eastward expansion into the Baltic Christianising the peoples they encountered as they went.

35

## News from Paris

*Sambre et Meuse*: ‘Le Regiment de Sambre et Meuse’, French military song, a march, the lyrics by Paul Cezano were set to music by Robert Planquette. Cezano wrote this song in 1870 after the debacle of the Franco-Prussian War. It glorifies the French revolutionary wars regiment which became known as ‘L’Armée de Sambre et Meuse’ when it came under the command of Jean-Baptiste Jourdan on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1794. The song extols the glory to be had in a patriotic death. It was taught in schools during the Third Republic, played at the Dreyfus trial and was the music a traitor died to when they were executed during World War One.

*West-Easterly Divan*: *West-östlicher Divan* (1819), collection of poetry by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe’s Divan was inspired by an intensive reading of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet Háfiz

*the vase from old Japan*: reflecting the early 20<sup>th</sup> century French taste for oriental and especially Japanese design and objects de art. The fashion was a development of ‘Japonism’, or the influence of Japanese art, particularly Utamaro and Hokusai., on French art in the fin-de-siècle period.

36

## Animae Superstiti:

First published as part of the sequence entitled ‘In Times Like Glass’ in *Landfall* 2:1 March 1948, 19:

Some leagues into that land I too have fared:  
The diligence along the causeway sped,  
While from the left a giant planet stared  
Across the restless marsh with face of lead.

In number we were four: you, child, and I;  
The swordsman next, who wore his mocking air  
Of Papal Zouave, fencing master, spy,  
And last the golliwog with vacant, saxe-blue stare.

Onward we whirled: you slept disturbed in mind,  
And from your hand the English roses fell:  
Europe by lamplight far behind,  
We clove the white fog’s shifting swell.

So for an hour, and then I must return,  
And you, with your creatures, ply insensate flight.  
Broken I stood beneath the frontier light,  
Till through the endless marsh I could discern  
No wheels, no sound, only the airs of night.



Also published in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 92. Identical to the *Twopence Coloured* printing of the poem.

*Animae Superstiti*: I'm unsure of Spear's Latin here. Approximately and variously: 'the soul that survives', 'the soul that is left over, saved or preserved', 'the surviving spirit', 'the survivor's spirit' or (as a cross-lingual pun) 'soul survivor' etc. Spear has probably gleaned this phrase from the ninth ode in the third book of Horace but I do not know if the abrogation of a subject or agent in Spear's usage changes the phrase's sense or even if it is grammatically legitimate.

*Papal Zouave*: or '*Zouaves Pontificaux*', an army corps raised in 1860 by Louis Napoleon for the defence of the Papal States, which were becoming threatened by the rising tide of Italian nationalism. Modelled on the French Zouave, a corps raised in Algeria consisting of 'native' recruits, the Papal Zouave were made up of Catholic volunteers from 22 countries. Though precision drilled and highly disciplined the Zouave were characterised by a flamboyant uniform and style and had a reputation for being arrogant. The Papal States fell in 1870, at which many of the Papal Zouave offered their services to the defence of France during the Franco-Prussian War.

*saxe-blue*: or 'Williamsburg blue', a light grey blue. Not to be confused with Saxon blue, cf. 'Karl' [poem 1].

37

### **Scott-Moncrieff's Beowulf**

*Scott-Moncrieff*: Charles Kenneth Scott-Moncrieff (1889-1930), journalist, poet and translator. Scott-Moncrieff is best known for his translation of Marcel Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (cf. 'The Watchers' [poem 2]), which he rendered as *Remembrance of Things Past* after the line in Shakespeare's 30<sup>th</sup> sonnet. His *Beowulf* was published in 1921.

*Swan's Way*: allusion to the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*, entitled *Swann's Way*.

38

### **Mignonne**

*Mignonne*: French endearment or pet-name, meaning something akin to '[my] sweet'. *Mignon* (1866) is the name of an opera by Ambroise Thomas, the libretto of which is based on an episode from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*.

### From a Book of Hours

First published as part of the sequence entitled 'In Times Like Glass' in *Landfall* 2:1 March 1948, 19.

In the earlier version of the poem a colon appears where a semi-colon is printed in *Twopence Coloured*.

*Book of Hours*: private devotional book of prayers. Books of Hours became the most popular style of prayer book with the European laity, outstripping the Psalter, in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Essentially a monastic book for home use a Book of Hours would contain psalms, prayers for the dead, a calendar, gospel commentary and, almost always, a prayer cycle known as 'The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary'. The text would be recited according to and at the canonical hours of the day, which are: 'Matins' (night prayers), 'Lauds' (dawn), 'Prime' (first hour, 6 AM), 'Terce' (third hour, 9 AM), 'Sext' (sixth hour, 12 PM), 'None' (ninth hour, 3 PM), 'Vespers' (evening prayer) and the 'Compline' (prayers said at retiring). Books of Hours were only sometimes heavily decorated with illuminated plates, but it is these exceptional manuscripts that are most often thought of when now one talks of a Book of Hours. These spectacular works were made for rich or noble families and handed down from generation to generation.

*Solomon's Temple*: the first Jewish temple. Established in Jerusalem c. 10<sup>th</sup> century BC.

### Ricimiero

Also published, with a slight variation, in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 93:

It was the other world of sleep  
When we met upon the high stone stair,  
I stood and waited, heard the seconds creep;  
He passed serene and unaware,  
But not alone descended there,

For down the shaft of sapphire light  
Wavered a butterfly through widening rings;  
She seemed not so disposed to flight  
As to display her gold and carmine wings.

From centuries apart, through seas of time,  
We met as strangers, not in joy or grief,  
And on he paced to what sharp lunar clime,  
With Psyche fluttering like a tarnished leaf?

*Ricimiero*: Probably the Roman ‘kingmaker’, ‘de facto leader of the Western Empire’, Flavius Ricimer (?-472). Three or four 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian opera were based on his life and his (somewhat unfairly ascribed) notorious reputation, including Niccolò Jommelli’s *Ricimero rè dei Goti* (1740) and Giacinto Calderara’s *Ricimero* (1755).

Ricimer’s father was a Sueve and his mother was a Visigoth. He rose through the ranks of the Roman army to become its commander (magister militum) some time before he played a leading role in the revolt of 456 against emperor Avitus. As a German Ricimer would never be allowed to sit as emperor so, with the consent of the eastern Emperor Leo I, Ricimer installed Julius Valerius Majorian in Avitus’s place. In the aftermath of the revolt Leo granted Ricimer the status of Roman patrician. Majorian would soon also run foul of Ricimer.

Majorian was disposed as emperor in 461 and soon afterwards was assassinated at the behest of Ricimer. Libius Severus was the next to be boosted to the throne. Libius, much more so than Majorian, was a puppet-ruler. It was unfortunate for Ricimer that Libius was an ill man and died in office in 465. For the next eighteen months Rome was officially acephalic, this was the only time during his life that Ricimer had true unmediated command of the empire. In this period Ricimer and Leo’s relationship became strained. Yet, after long debate, Ricimer accepted Leo’s candidate for Western Emperor, Anthemius. As part of the deal Ricimer married Anthemius’s daughter, Alypia.

From 470 the strained relations between Ricimer and his father-in-law were openly displayed. Ricimer moved his operational base to Milan and in 471 declared war on Anthemius’s Rome. Diplomatic talks between this new North-South split ensued but eventually broke down. In early 472 Ricimer laid siege on Rome, sacking the city in July. Anthemius was executed and Olybrius installed as the next emperor. Ricimer died soon after. Ricimer’s record as military leader and warlord is impressive to say the least, he was never known to have been defeated in battle.

Like ‘Petriberg’, the spelling of Spear’s title may or may not be well advised. If we grant Spear ingeniousness in this case it could be suggested that the iota of difference introduced into Ricimer’s standard Italianate name, ‘Ricimero’, is there as an indication of the Sueve’s faith. Ricimer was more than likely an Arian Christian. Arians (after the Alexandrian presbyter Arius, who originated the controversy) averred that Christ was homoiousios (ἡμοιοῦσιος), ‘of similar substance’ to God, as opposed to the argument articulated by Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, that He was homoousios (ἡμοοῦσιος), ‘of the same substance’. It was Edward Gibbon who epigrammatically summarised this very serious controversy in the early Church, which threatened a schism, with the comment about an iota being the only difference separating the two positions. The Nicene Creed was the jurisprudential advice forwarded to Christians everywhere through the Council of Nicaea of 325, which resolved the controversy by branding Arian professions of faith as heretical. In any case, the Latin of Ricimer’s name had always admitted variations in its spelling (Recimer, Ricemer or Rechimer, for example) and Ricimer did happen to consecrate a vow at the only Arian church still standing in Rome, Sant’Agata dei Goti.

*Psyche*: the beautiful mortal who suffered at the jealousy of Venus but is eventually married to the goddess's son, Cupid, there upon apotheosised and giving birth to Pleasure. Psyche's story was first related by Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*. Psyche is often symbolised by a butterfly. In Greek her name (ψυχή) means both 'butterfly' and 'soul'.

41

### **Sakiamuni**

*Sakiamuni*: or 'Sakyamuni', 'the solitary one of the Sakya people [of Northern India]', sobriquet commonly indicating Siddhartha Guatama, Guatama Buddha.

42

### **1894 in London**

First published in *Canta* September 20, 1950 Vol.2 No.5.

*Red Lion Square*: is situated in Camden, London.

*gardees*': impudent form of address to Guards, cf. '1914'.

*tanners*: sixpences.

*the Old Kent Road*: famous road that runs through the south of London.

*Dorian Gray*: eponymous protagonist of Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).

*Lambeth*: borough to the south bank of the Thames, predominantly slum-land in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

43

### **The Haven**

First published in *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* no.4 Howard Wadman (ed.) Wellington: The Wingfield Press 1948, 168.

44

### **The Day before Yesterday**

*sciolists*: dilettantes. The word derives from a diminutive form of the Latin verb *scire*, to know. An obscure word favoured by Spear, he also used it in his review of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* [*Landfall* 2:3 Sept.1948 237].

*You see no more the blank white disappear / Beneath the velvet passage of your brush:* the intimate tone and familiarity of address suggests that Spear has someone personally known to him in mind as the addressee of this poem. Perhaps it is Leo Bensemann. Cf. the description of a painter's activity in 'Endimione'.

45

### **Esther**

First published as 'Without the Mask' by 'B', *Canterbury University College Review* 1932, 16:

Smiling, but awed and close to tears,  
you turned from that street-storming wind,  
and haunted by most ancient fears  
your rain-wet, flowerlike eyes were blind;

yet you best love, with conscious art,  
impetuous, to be most rare  
and sit, with orchids on your heart,  
bolt upright in a rose-silk chair.

*Esther*: While it is tempting to make the connection with the biblical book of *Esther* the allusion is probably not in evidence. Esther, as a name, is perhaps better thought of in company with the feminine characters Spear scatters throughout his poetry. Cf. Felicity of 'News from Paris', the eponymous Mignonne, Barbe in 'Old World New World' and, especially regarding Esther's orchids, Hyacinth who "carried windflowers in the rain".

*rare*: cf. "Be rare", 'As it was...'

46

### **Karl**

First published in *Arachne* 1 January 1950, 3.

Cf. 'Karl'

*Weeping Cross*: from the proverbial ‘to come home by weeping cross’, meaning to be penitent having suffered ruin, failure or disappointment. The proverbial may resolve itself literally, where the weeping cross is figured as a wayside shrine at which prayers like the one Spear comments on in his last stanza are offered.

*rearguard*: cf. ‘Rearguard’.

47

### **Theme for Hyacinth**

*Hyacinth*: the flower named for Hyacinthus, the beloved of Apollo who was accidentally killed with a discus thrown by the Greek god. Hyacinths, as Apollo mournfully named them, were said to have sprung from the boy’s spilt blood. The Greek story is sometimes told with an iris also appearing as a blood-flower, the same genus the crocus belongs to (cf. ‘Memoriter’) Yet Spear’s theme, as is suggested by the almost excessive use of the feminine pronoun in this poem, plays for a women, which befits the gender commonly indicated by the modern use of the name.

*ground-note*: the key note of a chord, its fundamental tone.

48

### **At Dawn**

First published in *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* no.4 Howard Wadman (ed.) Wellington: The Wingfield Press 1948, 168.

*drunken god*: one thinks of Dionysus or Bacchus as the gods of intoxication.

*the sleeping man*: cf. “Beanpod” in ‘Envrions of Vanholt I’ and the one who doesn’t respond when “We call your name” in ‘Envrions of Vanholt II’. May we think of the sleeping man as akin to Mephistopheles? This being the case the response is a Tom Waits’s style gnosticism, apparent in ‘Heartattack and Vine’(1980): “Don’t you know there ain’t no devil, there’s just god when he’s drunk.”

49

### **Anniversary**

*Sleepwalkers*: possibly an allusion to Hermann Broch's novel, *Die Schlafwandler* (1931, translated into English in 1932 by Edwin and Willa Muir). *The Sleepwalkers* spans the years from the fin-de-siècle period to the brink of the First World War and carries the thesis that this epoch is critical to an understanding of an emergent and dangerous sort of European consciousness.

*Spitfires*: The famed Single wing propeller driven fighter plane most readily associated with the first military action entirely fought in the air, The Battle of Britain 10/7 –31/10 1940.

*Jugurtha*: or 'Jugurtha', Numidian king from 116 BC to 105 BC. Numidia was geographically defined by the North African coast from Morocco to the border of the territory formerly controlled by Carthage (from 146 BC known as the 'Roman province of Africa'). Numidians were a formerly nomadic people who had, at the time of Jugurtha, only recently established a network of settled towns and agricultural communities. If this more sedentary way of life was a new development for Numidian culture its political organisation was nonetheless impressive. The vast area extending south from the coastal region into the interior (though how far their territory went inland was never known) was pock-marked by large cities of complex infrastructure. Details of the Roman-Numidian conflict known as The Jugurthine War are given in a 'literary style' by Gaius Sallustius Crispus ('Sallust') in his *Bellum Jugurthinum*.

Spear's "Jugurtha's fortress" probably refers Jugurtha's mountain stronghold located near the Moroccan border, captured by the consul and commander of the Roman army in Africa, Gaius Marius, in 106 BC. And yet, even after this stroke with which he lost most of his war-chest, Jugurtha still defied Marius—until he was betrayed to Rome and delivered as a prisoner by his son-in-law Bocchus, the Moorish king. Jugurtha was destined to die in prison soon after he was displayed at Marius's victory parade through the streets of Rome.

*thoughtless snails*: for another variation on a perspective shift attained through a gastropod's eye view in New Zealand poetry see Allen Curnow's 'A Balanced Bait in Handy Pellet Form', *An Incurable Music* (1979).

50

### **God Save the Stock**

First stanza published earlier as 'Reading Ezra Pound' by "S", *Canta* April 23, 1932 Vol. 3 no.1, 5:

Dusk falters over shelf and chair,  
carnation webs of shadow hold  
a crystal in the breath-soft air,  
a candle's hoop of lucid gold;

and o'er his books in random row,  
his darlings rich in ravishment,  
with eyes, like Attic owls, aglow,  
he bends in charmed astonishment.

The relationship between the earlier and later poems is difficult to figure, though the revised title offers a clue. 'God save the Stock' is possibly a sardonic expression made in distaste of Pound's eugenic ideas as they became explicit through a revealed fascist politics, where 'the stock' is to be read as meaning the purity of a race or ethnicity. This interpretation fits with the later poem's commentary on "the Jews" and "Korea".

*Ezra Pound*: Ezra Weston Loomis Pound (1885-1972), major figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism.

*Attic owls*: the owl was either an incarnation of or symbol closely associated with the Greek goddess of Wisdom, Athena.

*Commander of the Bath*: the second class in the Order of the Bath, the fourth highest British order of Chivalry. The order was formed at the behest of George I in 1725.

*playboy of the western world*: *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), play by John Millington Synge (1871-1909).

51

### **Balthasar**

*hauberk*: coat of mail, chain-mail armor.

52

### **Tancredi**

First published in *Arachne 1* January 1950, 3.

*Tancredi*: *Tancredi* (1813), opera by Gioacchino Rossini the libretto of which based on a play by Voltaire, *Tancredi* (1759).

*fansticks*: presumably the spokes of a hand-held fan. Spear's simile is worth noting, as the shape of a fan is a recurring image in his poems. For other examples cf. 'Portrait', 'London Musical Box', 'Environs of Vanholt I', 'Mignonette' and 'The Haven'.



*cuirassiers*: cavalry soldiers, a military unit that first appeared in Europe during the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. The cuirassier was characterised by a lighter armouring than the mediaeval knight that, for the most part, the cuirassier came to replace in most European armies.

*Guelph and Staufer*: European dynasties. The Guelph, or the 'Welf', are the oldest authenticated royal line in Europe.

53

### **Promised Land**

First published in *Arachne 1* January 1950, 3.

54

### **Joachim of Flora**

*Joachim of Flora*: or 'Joachim of Fiore' (c.1132-1202), Cistercian abbot and mystic, the author of *Expositio in Apocalipsim* and other works in which he expressed a doctrine that became known as the 'Eternal Gospel'. Joachim's writings attracted controversy but Dante, who placed him in *Paradiso*, canto 12, celebrated him.

*Dunkerque Lane*: not a street address, probably a way of characterising a seaway across the English Channel to Dunkirk, i.e. a shipping lane.

*Four-in-hand harmonies*: in campanology a technique for playing bells.

55

### **Air Operations**

*apple-blossom*: cf. the "blossomed apple-boughs" of 'Edward Vining'.

56

### **Escape**

*Irish harps*: a foil for the Bavarian bells of 'Rearguard'?

57

### **Environs of Vanholt II**

Cf. 'Environs of Vanholt I'.

58

### **Old World New World**

*Barbe*: cf. 'Esther'.

*Phaethon*: reference to a classically themed though non-specifiable musical piece.

59

### **Air**

*Orpheus now from Hell returning, / Without Eurydice...*: alluding to the well known episode in Greek legend in which Orpheus, the famed poet and musician, failed to lead his dead wife, Eurydice, out of the underworld having broken the condition, imposed by Persephone, not to turn around and look on her until they had again completely attained the mortal coil.

*He drove a gallery in on death*: cf. the last line of 'Escape': "And the tides of death in the galleries beneath."

60

### **Remark**

First published as 'The Inconsolable One' by 'C. E. S.' in *Art in New Zealand* vol.4 no.13 Wellington : Harry H. Tombs Ltd. September 1931, 28:

High-coiffed, the muse in red brocade  
Hears waltzes that are not for her,  
And haunts by Time yet unbetrayed,  
A breath-dimmed pane's curved lavender.

But soon the shadow's rosy gloom  
Shall wrap in petal's her my muse,  
Since red-silk-shod she walks the room  
And breaks her heart for crystal shoes.

Also published as 'Nec Reditura Dies' in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.1 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1951, 95:

High-coiffed, the muse in green brocade  
Hears waltzes that are not for her,  
And haunts, by time yet unbetrayed,  
A breath-dimmed pane's curved lavender.

But soon old age's mordant gloom  
Shall brim with malice her my muse;  
With aching feet she'll walk my room,  
And out the window throw those crystal shoes.

*Nec Reditura Dies*: probably sourced from the second book of elegies by Sextus Propertius, elegy number 15, line 24: "nox tibi longa venit, nec reditura dies", meaning 'the long night is imminent, no day will return'. Spear's title thus may be translated as 'daylight returns not'.

*She may grow spiteful in a little room*: possibly a recondite reference to the lines spoken by Touchstone to his 'arcadian muse' Audrey in *As You Like It*, Act 3 sc.3 (lines 12-16):

When a man's verses cannot be understood,  
nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child,  
understanding, it strikes a man more dead  
than a great reckoning in a little room. Truly  
I would the gods had made thee poetical.

Here, the sense of 'reckoning' employed by Shakespeare indicates the (excessive) weight of a bill, the account due for lodgings. As exorbitant as twopence would be for a plain sheet?

Cf. 'Audrey'

## Uncollected Poems

### Pastel

First published in *Canta* April 23, 1932 Vol. 3 no.1, 5. by "S".

*Verlaine's brief Clair de Lune*: poem by Paul Verlaine (1844-96), French symbolist poet, later set to music by Claude Debussy.

### Die Pelzenaffen

First published in *Gaudeamus* 1 April 1951, 3; also in *Arachne* 3 December 1951, 7 and *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.2 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1952, 78.

### Letter to Guadeloupe

First published in *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* vol.3 Louis Johnson (ed.) Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed 1953, 99.

**Guadeloupe**: an island group in the Lesser Antilles, West Indies, an overseas department of France.

## Unpublished Poems

### G.E.T. obit. 1913

The subject of the poem is Spear's maternal grandfather, a man by the name of George (?) Taylor, a commercial traveller

### C.E.S. obit. 1959

The subject of the poem is Spear's father, also Charles Edgar Spear; he lived in Dunedin with his wife, Jen, moving to Christchurch later in life; **Otago Hussars**: the 5<sup>th</sup> mounted Rifles, formed in 1886. **Good King Edward's closing years**: Edward VII died in 1910

### Poem

**'No rose in all the world'**: words from a song entitled 'Until', words by Edward Teschemacher, music by Wilfred Sanderson: "No rose in all the world until you came,/ No star until you smiled upon life's sea,/ No song in all the world until you spoke,/ No hope until you gave your heart to me."

### At the Invalides

**Invalides**: a complex of buildings in Paris relating to France's military history. *Damietta*, *Verdun*, *Dien Bien Phu*: names associated with French defeats in history from the Crusades to the war in South East Asia

### J.A.L.

The subject of the poem is John Arthur Lush (1881-1964), Vicar of St John's, Invercargill, 1921-50, Archdeacon of Southland 1933-62; born in Dorset, he came to New Zealand in 1911; Spear studied theology when he was living in Invercargill in the 1940s, gaining a Diploma Licentiate, but was never ordained; Archdeacon Lush was his mentor and friend.