

**SAY**

**C.K. STEAD**

**I**

**DO**

**THIS**

**POEMS 2018–2022**

A beautiful new collection from this country's leading poet.

'It's hard to renounce life once one is fond of it.' — Ludwig Wittgenstein

In this poignant new poetry collection, one of this country's most significant voices reflects on home, on away, and on friends living and dead. 'I lead a life of quiet medication', the poet claims, 'longing for foreign shores, adventure and death.' But whether swimming to the yellow buoy or remembering an encounter in Belsize Park, in the thick of it or asking, 'what next?', Stead's voice is intimate, amusing and always compelling.

Swimming in the dark I call on memory –  
Rangitoto ahead, and those lights  
of Kohi behind making

a cosy half-circle. Overhead the moon's  
a waka sailing west to escape  
first light that will put it out.

I'm reaching blind fingers for the yellow buoy  
and touch it only as the sun does  
dimly through a bank of cloud

---

**C. K. Stead** is an award-winning novelist, literary critic, poet, essayist and emeritus professor of English at the University of Auckland. He was the New Zealand Poet Laureate from 2015–2017, has won the Prime Minister's Award for Fiction and is a Member of the Order of New Zealand.



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*For Kay*



'Just when the gods had ceased to be and the Christ had not yet come, there was a unique moment in history, between Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, when man stood alone. Nowhere else do we find that grandeur.'

– **Gustave Flaubert**

'I know that half the audience might not understand this but I'm writing for the other half.'

– **Tom Stoppard**

'so long / as there's a next, there's no last.'

– **Allen Curnow**

'It is hard to renounce life once one is fond of it.'

– **Ludwig Wittgenstein**

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# 1. Home





## To be continued, perhaps

Horace, *Odes* 1, 11

It's said that to know too much  
displeases the gods, so for their sake, my love  
stop asking for the end of our story:

no horoscopes, no animal entrails,  
forget weather gurus in this time  
of storms and climate disasters;

don't think of the waves at their worst  
smashing on the rocks at Karekare  
but share with me a bottle of Te Mata red.

We'll leave our grapevine and plum tree  
to blackbird and thrush and other  
untidy feeders, and to the wasps.

Let's talk together not about flashy Love  
but the brilliant books and poems it has inspired  
and the ones who wrote them –

brainy gossip, and jokes about the times  
when there were still flowers to be picked.  
Forget tomorrow my love. Just live with me today.

## Tohunga Crescent

Across the street the Allen Curnow house  
sold and garden-tidied and refurbished,  
respectably letting as Airbnb

is home to wild parties, and just once  
a riot bringing cop cars, a paddy wagon,  
pepper spray and more than one arrest.

Always there's rubbish at the roadside when  
the random tenants leave. Tonight by morepork  
and moonlight while the neighbour cats patrol

I'm watching Jeny walk in her ghostly gown  
smiling and weeping, and here comes Allen alert  
with a new poem needing to know at once

what I will make of it – but as I read  
he seems to slide away among the trees  
all darkness and displeasure. There's a light

down at the Bay – that's Graham with his spear,  
full tide at midnight, and the water still  
holding itself for something new to reflect.

Morning will disclose the pōhutukawa  
know it's December, time for spectacular blossom –  
but Jeny's ambiguous tears have left me anxious

about those flashing lines of Allen light  
seen and forgotten like the spell of weather  
just gone you hadn't known might be a blessing.



In this poignant new poetry collection, one of this country's most significant voices reflects on home, on away, and on friends living and dead. 'I lead a life of quiet medication', the poet claims, 'longing for foreign shores, adventure and death.' But whether swimming to the yellow buoy or remembering an encounter in Belsize Park, in the thick of it or asking, 'what next?', Stead's voice is intimate, amusing and always compelling.

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'*Say I Do This* resounds with intimations of mortality, compounded with reactions to a contemporary world of pandemic, climate change and war, but this collection is not in the least morose. Rather, the poetry is enlivening – concrete, particular, detailed and often playful. There is a wealth of sensory content, and each poem has its own satisfying shape, with easy idiomatic speech forming its special kind of rhythm. In this book a major modern poet continues to "live and sing".'

— MacDonald P. Jackson

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