

Bernard Cadogan  
**Sixty Something**

Volumes 1 & 2



Poetry



Bernard Cadogan has been writing poetry for more than forty years. Inspired initially by the visit of Māori poet Hone Tūwhare to Bishop Viard College, Porirua, he later met with Tūwhare many times at his Kaka Point crib.

This book is but a small sample from a body of work which comprises more than 2,000 poems. Imbued with the personality of the poet as well as the times we live in, his themes are both specific and universal, with a creative mix of philosophy, history and personal storytelling. Traversing joy and loss, hope and anxiety, love and despair, they reveal a poet at the top of their game.

Bernard Cadogan is a philosopher, historian and poet. He holds a Doctorate of Philosophy from Oxford University and has acted as an advisor to different governments, including to the prime minister. He was appointed an honorary advisor to the Māori king in 2015.

Bernard lives in the Cherwell Valley, near Oxford, with his wife Jacqueline and their three children.

*Austere intelligence at the service of deep feeling and moments of piercing intimacy.*

Ian Fraser, broadcaster and TV personality

*These two volumes are a small peninsula on a continent of ideas, and each poem is a pebble washed up on the beach at the edge of a vigorous sea.*

Rt Hon Sir Bill English KNZM, Prime Minister 2016–17

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## Foreword

Bernard Cadogan and I first met as callow, curious undergraduates at Otago University in 1981, the turbulent year of the Springbok tour. Bernard arrived from multicultural Porirua and I arrived from agricultural Southland, an eager listener to Bernard's flow of ideas. Over 40 years I have read millions of his words. These two volumes are a small peninsula on a continent of ideas, and each poem is a pebble washed up on the beach at the edge of a vigorous sea.

Cadogan's work runs against the tides of the time. Contemporary creative arts seem to bow to increasingly constrained parameters of identity and the implicit rules about what we can say about who. If identity is socially constructed, then poetry will have the predictability of a large apartment block of sameness. The bountiful opposite is to be found here, a mansion of many rooms where Cadogan overwhelms the mainstream boundaries of cultural reference and identity.

Instead, he shows us his sparkling *Sixty Something* world – the energy of flashing new synapses exposing a network of rich, deep layers of unexpected connections across time and culture and philosophy. *Sixty Something* is a remarkably fresh and challenging work from a man in his sixties who shows how to renew memory and imagination.

*Rt Hon Sir Bill English KNZM, Prime Minister 2016–17*

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## Kaikōura Earthquake 14 November 2016

we all felt  
somebody dying  
through the shock  
of the quake  
transmitted  
the length  
of the country  
lighting up  
the epicentre  
at midnight  
here in the Waikato  
it felt like  
a massive eel  
had slid  
and floundered  
under our  
bedroom floors  
a few minutes  
before slipping away  
the highways  
and railways  
have ended  
mountainsides  
have fallen  
towns are cut off  
indefinitely



the capital  
is deserted  
and compromised  
  
earthquakes  
are a compulsory lottery  
we all submit to  
  
a national event  
of prizes  
and penalty  
  
whoever died  
took the chance  
for us all

*Grey St Kitchen, Hamilton, New Zealand  
25 November 2016*

## On a Coin in the Ashmolean

true sovereignty  
is control  
of the money supply

Domitian II  
was emperor  
long enough  
to get a mint  
into action

before his issue  
was stopped

we never knew  
he even existed

a successor  
of Victorinus  
at Trier perhaps

speedily  
assassinated

yet here is  
his minute sovereignty  
struck  
in debased silver

a beard  
and radiate crown  
in profile

his life's penny  
spent

*Grey St Kitchen, Hamilton, New Zealand*  
*25 August 2016*

During the mid-3rd century crisis of the Roman Empire, a line of emperors was based in Gaul. Domitianus may have made a bid for power in the winter of 270/71 CE. Just two coins have been found from his brief reign: one in France in 1900 and the other in England in 2003.

## A Complete History of Tokelau

in Waitangirua

I met a man

aged 80

in 1980

who told me

in Tokelauan

how he fished

for bonito

under the stars

out of sight

of the shoal

he lived on

and showed me

shrivelled

the anchor

which sailors

from the Great White Fleet

in 1908

had tattooed

onto his arm

he was a catechist

an authority

for University of Hawaii

anthropologists

he knew

the art of making

his atoll vanish

far out to sea

and making it  
appear again

soon  
it will disappear  
for ever

excavated  
by the New Zealand Government  
out of the coral

he and his family  
were deposited  
in the bare suburb

beneath another  
shadeless sun

that time  
there was no  
getting back  
to shore

*Oxford, UK*  
*30 January 2016*

## Zeno at the Dardanelles

Sapper Moore-Jones  
was the one  
who painted Simpson  
and his donkey

ferrying  
the wounded  
at the Dardanelles

how do you draw  
a bullet flying  
across the stinking  
Gulf of Styx

how would we depict  
the hot strafed bed  
of Acheron

where the tortoise  
of a man  
could sometimes  
outrun  
the instantaneous bullet

at a Hamilton  
hotel fire  
after the War

Moore-Jones  
went back  
to rescue a woman  
he thought was still  
in there  
  
time was different  
inside  
  
the fire peeled him  
until he became  
Achilles  
at every step  
and he never caught up  
  
the cul-de-sac  
named after him  
  
is built  
of the world  
that was coming about  
when he died  
  
Jugendstil  
a touch of  
Berghof  
on the river bank  
  
the Italianate  
pink villa  
and red fasces  
on Madame Wong's

War –  
still in the race  
and blundering on  
with men in pursuit

*Blackwell's, Oxford, UK*  
*28 December 2017*

*Oxford, UK*  
*19 December 2016*

Sapper Horace Moore-Jones (1868–1922) was New Zealand's pre-eminent war artist of the first world war. He painted the famous picture of Australian stretcher-bearer John Simpson (Kirkpatrick) (1892–1915) and his donkey at Gallipoli. Moore-Jones died after trying to rescue a woman left unaccounted for from a hotel fire in Hamilton, New Zealand.

This poem was extensively edited and rewritten on 28 December 2017. Material from the original version has survived, but I admit this version is a rebuild.

A small side street in Hamilton, New Zealand, down from Victoria St to the bluff over the Waikato River, has been named after him. Madame Wong's is a Chinese restaurant in an Art Deco building.

I am of course referring to Zeno's famous paradox of Achilles racing the tortoise.



## For Jamie

the 4-year-old cried all night at losing  
 his mother. now the 17-year-old  
 is dead under a train. diffusing  
 such pain did not work. its stranglehold

was so complete on his life. I recall  
 my eldest at 4 when his mother went  
 to give birth to his sister. he bawled  
 so badly without any relenting –

he did not cry – he haemorrhaged sorrow.  
 I have no idea how we got to sleep.  
 imagine a life only borrowed  
 from murder that evening. the heart weeps

and not just the eyes. boys who lost mothers –  
 how do they sleep – sons under the covers.

*Woodford Halse, UK*

*18 July 2021*

Jamie McKitten of Great Lumley, Co Durham died on 31 March 2021 from injuries sustained at Chester-le-Street station. His mother had been murdered by his father in 2008.

## Rangiriri II

Rangiriri is the gate

its two hills salute  
as you pass north

they crouch  
and take aim  
as you drive south  
into their line of fire

the motorway  
is building up  
around them

when will the two hills  
be one again

*Oxford, UK*  
*27 September 2015*

A reference to the siege of Rangiriri in November 1863.

## Old Taupiri Road

bypassed road  
bypassed burial  
obelisk  
inside a garden fence  
a steel latch  
lets you in  
their dead are here  
there's nowhere to stand

*Oxford, UK*  
*6 October 2015*

Yes, there is a mass grave of those who defended Ngāruawāhia, the Māori king's capital in 1863.

**Erewhon**

don't cling  
to the harbour  
and its shallow shores

this is a narrow country  
which runs  
north and south

what point is there  
going across it

you must find  
the interior  
where another life's  
possible

lost to the world  
yet recovering the world  
for others

go where the land  
is gathered

get where the rivers  
come down

trek through  
weeks of cloud

see where you  
end up

maybe then  
you will find  
our country

after that  
you might find  
the way

*Blackwell's, Oxford, UK*  
*13 December 2017*

The title refers to the book *Erewhon* (1872) by Samuel Butler (1835–1902) who lived in New Zealand 1860–64, but I was thinking as much of the Tūhoe iwi or nation, in the Urewera mountains, as well as of a basic New Zealand experience which New Zealanders should all recognise.

# Ōhaupō

driving along  
the early Spring  
darkness  
at rush hour

we found the highway  
suddenly glistened  
with gore

as if  
a bloody egg  
had been smashed down  
on the road  
smeared with red yolk  
and white

until the fear  
fast grew  
that a body or more  
lay ahead

the headlights soon  
made out in the dip  
what had lately been  
a Friesian calf  
reduced to  
a hindquarter

which we went over  
at speed  
swearing at the impact

and the traffic  
went on after us  
each vehicle doing its bit  
to rub out  
the story of  
that stray carcass

*Oxford, UK*  
*10 November 2015*

**Kākāriki**

12,000

miles away

and after

two months apart

my four year-old

daughter

won't talk to me

either by phone

or on Skype

so I have resorted

to sending her birds

as little psychopomps

to show her

I'm still around

I sent

a message

to be read aloud

telling her

how I visited

a forest

along the cliffs

above the river

yesterday

and discovered

a pair of kākāriki

rastafarian parrots

red gold and green



that adhered  
one after the other  
to a tree  
yet fully to leaf

sidling along  
the branches

letting  
themselves down  
by the beak

before flying on  
blue  
into the river  
below

I emailed her  
a picture of one  
to which she responded  
through her mother

‘I will see you soon  
at Christmas later’

the future aspect  
of one  
still innocent  
of death

though not of loss

*Lake Oranga, Waikato University, New Zealand  
17 October 2016*

## Byfield Tavern

the gods turned out to be guys playing pool  
 in the back bar – old guys fearsome and hale  
 as pirates and voices that were a school  
 of speech for the lads – uncertain and pale  
 as they waited their turn at the table.  
 Odin and Thor had made up with Loki –  
 were showing off what they were capable  
 of – while keeping their appearance low-key.

the bulb lit a room with something at stake.  
 the young guys would not go beyond the doors  
 and kept quiet – nursing their drinks as they slaked  
 their dulled impatience to take the floor.

could they match that game? could what they do  
 have a result? wait till the gods are through.

*Woodford Halse, UK*  
*2 October 2021*

Something I observed passing by on the bus that evening.

## Villanelle to my Daughter

The most beautiful sound in the world  
 for me has been the sound of my daughter  
 singing. It started when she was a girl  
 of 7, soon at 10 and three-quarters  
 she will grow out of it. I will too  
 having heard heaven make brick and mortar  
 vanish, to leave behind no residue  
 of shadow. Whether the years will be hard  
 for her or not, whether she continues  
 her course among the angels or leopards  
 I cannot tell, but she has brought blessing  
 to mine, now I am more on my guard  
 against death. For I am confessing  
 she and not these poems are fulfilment  
 of my life, in futures beyond guessing.  
 How thrilled by her song, weak filament  
 I am, as she pronounces her joy  
 in private. My life is no element  
 in that peace – hearing which I stand destroyed.

*Woodford Halse, UK*

*13 December 2022*

## About Bernard Cadogan

Growing up in working class Porirua in the nineteen-sixties and -seventies, there were few luxuries in most homes. There was, though, an abundance of great poetry to stimulate young and hungry minds from resident poets Gary McCormick, Sam Hunt and Alastair Te Ariki Campbell.

With the publication of *Sixty Something volumes 1 and 2*, a new poet is added to the pantheon of Porirua poets. Bernard Cadogan grew up in Cannons Creek and went to Bishop Viard College. His poems reflect his context and environment. They are real and visceral, observational and insightful, personal and raw.

The product of more than sixty years' life experience, it is time for Bernard Cadogan to be recognised as one of our great living poets.

## Also by Bernard Cadogan

*Crete 1941: an epic poem* (Wellington: Tuwhiri, 2021)

*The loss of madness: a tribute to Hölderlin* (Wellington: Tuwhiri, 2022)

## Advance praise for *Sixty Something*

A landmark collection from one of our most distinctive voices. Austere intelligence at the service of deep feeling and moments of piercing intimacy. These are remarkable poems.

*Ian Fraser, broadcaster and TV personality*

Bernard's breadth of knowledge amazes and delights in equal measure. You can see his *magnus opus*, *Crete 1941*, in this collection, with poems that traverse the ancient and the modern, the south and the north and all points in-between, while offering insights into Bernard's spirit, his vulnerability and, needless to say, the consistency and strength of his writing.

*Gabriel Makblouf, Governor, Central Bank of Ireland*

A powerful collection of poems capturing moods, places, people and connections to Aotearoa, emotive and heartfelt, immersing the reader into a moment in time that connects you immediately. Stop, close your eyes, breathe and read.

*Fay Amaral, Youthtown CEO*

They are, from the first word on, very engaging. The reader doesn't feel that there is a 'task at hand'. The evocative motion forward is a reward in the reading.

*Mike Chunn, founding member of Split Enz*

Bernard Cadogan has an eye for detail when looking at the world, but more than that, he has an experienced historian's skill to analyse what he sees, search for the facts, transmit the results of his research to his readers, and connect the past to the present. A coin in the Ashmolean becomes the starting point of thoughts on sovereignty, while the ghost town of Eboracum opens a discussion on the relationship between empire and colony. These are but two instances of how a historian's training and a poet's sensitivity merge in his work, creating a rare combination of the scholarly and the ineffable.

*Dr Olympia Bobou, author of Children in the Hellenistic World*

The way these poems unfold shows me what must be inside Bernard's head all the time. While each poem is beautiful in itself, it also connects to a thousand ideas from history, philosophy and literature. Reading them is like being invited to walk into a tiny sliver of light that opens up into an expanse of ideas. I'll never see all the threads that Bernard does, but when I read these poems, I think I can understand what it might be like to do that.

*Becky Prebble, public policy adviser*

This is modern verse at its most receptive, thoughtful, and alert. Cadogan offers startling reflections on a life lived between different worlds, and if we listen carefully to what he is saying we will find ourselves changed in ours. Rarely do modern poets show such bravery when it comes to knowing themselves.

*Dr Dan Sperrin, TA Fellow (JRF), Trinity College, Cambridge*

Reading Bernard Cadogan's poetry is often challenging, albeit worthwhile. This selection of poems, written over decades with a wide variety of subjects and themes, is more accessible and a taster which will lead to a wider appreciation of Cadogan.

*Rt Hon Trevor Mallard, Ambassador of New Zealand to Ireland*

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