*Sestina: Men of Earth*

Man first walked out upon compacted earth,

Eyes still streaming from the planets’ dust and smoke.

The next he knew was forests green and waters.

Only body’s sleep and sun’s heat

Weighed about his temples like a challenge

And kindred faces bore his only hopes.

Desires soon played neighbour to man’s hopes

That grew like ivy round his heart of earth.

The trees beside him loomed as if in challenge

Till man would learn the flame to make them smoke.

When winter cracked man turned to flint for heat

And welded rivers west to bring his family waters.

The race of man spread far across the waters

Spurred on their way by keen and jealous hopes

Until, whilst snow had dulled the flowers’ heat,

Man stole his noose around the earth.

From broad encampments scents of food and smoke,

Encase the forests with the bite of challenge.

Kings and rulers rose to lead man’s challenge

Placed boats for trade and war upon the waters

Cooking fires grew to factory smoke.

Against the trees grown taller raged men’s hopes

To stand the greatest height upon green earth

To man’s red heart ambition brought new heat.

Chains of miners emptied valleys to heat

The belly of the machine that could challenge

All the forces stored in layers of the earth.

Hot steam for engines eats up all the waters.

They pressed flowers between pages in the hopes

That such things could outlast the cloud of smoke.

Blue nights are now muddied brown with smoke

I shiver in my city-bed, my pit of heat

My sheets of plastic cling to me with choking hopes

I lack the strength of will to raise a challenge

My sleep brings songs of glassy waters

To wash silver the steel factories on the earth.

Despite these hopes I still can feel the challenge

From molten heat that shall displace our waters

My heart is mankind’s smoke, that comes to curse the men of earth.