THE POETRY AND DRAMA

OF

DOUGLAS STEWART

Gordon C. Winch, B.A. M.Ed.

A thesis submitted to
The University of Sydney
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the (pass) degree of
Master of Arts

Lent Term 1968

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the following people who, among others, assisted me greatly in the preparation of this work; Professor G. A. Wilkes, Douglas Stewart, Nancy Keesing, the staffs of The Public Library of New South Wales, The Fisher Library and the library of The Balmain Teachers' College, the students who took part in my productions of the plays and my professional friends and associates.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Douglas Alexander Stewart was born 6 May 1913 in Eltham, Taranaki Province, New Zealand, where his father, an Australian, was a lawyer. He was educated at New Plymouth Boys' High School and Victoria University College, Wellington where he studied law. He left university without taking a degree and took up journalism.

Between 1934 and 1938, when he came to Sydney to take up a position on the staff of The Bulletin, he extended his experience by travel to Australia and England and worked in various positions in journalism, including the editorship of a small New Zealand country newspaper.

From 1940 to 1961 he was editor of the Red Page of The Bulletin, and then joined the editorial staff of Angus and Robertson Limited. In 1946 he married the artist Margaret Coen, and apart from a holiday to New Zealand and a trip to Europe on a UNESCO scholarship, he has not left Australia. His published works, extending over thirty years, have been in poetry, drama, short

stories and criticism and he has edited numerous literary works.

Although Stewart has published a volume of short stories,[1] has written many critical articles and has edited numerous works, he is essentially a poet and his five dramatic efforts themselves were written in verse.

His writing reveals that he is a multi-faceted poet, both in the types of poetry he attempts and the features within it which are too conveniently easy to catalogue. He writes effectively in the lyric form, ranging from the short personal lyric through the nature lyric to the long meditative piece; he writes in a variety of narrative types including the ballad and develops in his later poetry a penchant for long and short poems in the discursive mode; he uses myth with particular effect when applied to the explorer; he is a close observer of human nature and delights in the incongruous, showing a real

---

1. For a list of Stewart's published works see Bibliography.

gift for comedy and a mastery of the ironic.

I have argued, however, that Stewart's whole work reveals much more than isolated features of excellence. It shows fundamentally a delicately-wrought and deeply considered evolving view of life based on a humanistic, almost romantic, concept of man, counterbalanced by a degree of irony and explored through a wide range of subject matter and technique. More specifically, the essential theme or motif in Stewart's writing is the exploration of human endeavour, and since man is not alone on the planet his relation to nature and the poetic analysis of the natural world itself all become part of the exploration which the poetry traces. The vast continuum is explored in infinite detail, for the discovery of its essence may provide interconnecting links throughout the whole and the perplexing duality of the natural world finds its parallel in human action.

The humanistic view of man implies a concept of human excellence and Stewart explores this through the "heroic dimension" in his work.

The hero as such appears in numerous guises throughout Stewart's poetry; he is the soldier in the sonnets, the explorer hero in The Fire on the Snow, "Worsley Enchanted", "Terra Australis" and "Mungo Park"; the mythical hero in Ned Kelly and the scientist hero in "Professor Piccard" or "Rutherford". He can be found even as the fantasy hero in "The Dosser in Springtime" and "The Bunyip", or the unassuming hero in "B Flat". In the plays he is considered, weighed, and modified to appear again in the later poems.

I have argued that Stewart as a playwright has not been a success. He has attempted a most difficult task in the field of verse drama and had to contend with an adverse theatrical climate. The plays are, however, extremely rich in the texture of their ideas, the quality of the poetry and the development of Stewart's concept of the heroic.

I contend that Stewart's later verse - much of it in the discursive mode - is the natural outcome of the developmental pattern of his writing and forms a fitting culmination to the work of one of our most significant poets.

PART I

THE EARLY POETRY

CHAPTER 1

GREEN LIONS AND THE WHITE CRY

Green Lions[1] was Stewart's first published book of verse and the only collection of poems to be printed in his native land, New Zealand. Like its successor, The White Cry,[2] Green Lions shows Stewart's response to the natural world about him and his struggle to make some sense of his own life and of human beings generally. Although the book contains some extremely immature efforts at verse - he was only twenty-three at the time of publication - in it can be seen the beginnings of a perceptive and sensitive observer of nature and of life, of someone who can use words with considerable skill.

---

1. D.A.Stewart, Green Lions (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1936). All references to poems will be from the original editions, except for those written after the publication of Rutherford for which the reference will be Collected Poems (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967).

2. D.A.Stewart, The White Cry (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1939).

The emotional, generalised response of the apprentice poet is seen in such poems as "Auburn" which opens the edition. It is difficult to see the mature Stewart in such lines as:

> As with a music rare
> As moon on crags of lime
> The bow of ice-blue water
> Sang keen sang keen across
> The silver strings of time.

or in "The Growing Strangeness":

> Impersonal, impersonal, I am as strange and lone
> As a dead tree, a pillar of black stone.

and in "Traffic":

> there the ploughshare
> Gashing earth's guts behind the sweat-smeared
> horses
> ---
> To stand on some sheer pinnacle, white and drawn,
> Aghast with triumph in a weird green dawn.

Apart from the unfortunate straining after alliterative effect in "silver Strings of time" and "gashing earth's guts" these poems rely for effect largely on the vague associations the words draw up. They commit faults in poetic expression which Stewart was to deplore later and weed out very carefully from

his mature work.[1]

There are, in Green Lions, some very sensitive and beautiful nature lyrics which are as fine as anything of the type he wrote. "Poplar in the Mimi Valley" shows Stewart's ability to colour imaginatively a natural scene and bring it to life with a striking image, cleverly maintained:

> She holds a golden coin between her teeth
> This winter singer who is not afraid,
> And wind or the dark audience of trees,
> Watching and envying, on the ground beneath,
> Have showered tribute even as I do now,
> Guinea on guinea, a golden cannonade;

Sometimes striking images are isolated as at the end of "Tablet for the Lonely Water":

> And those cool eddies that caressed her feet
> Be utterly lost in winding and unwinding
> Of the lost listless tides hauled creaking on
> Cordage of silver, the windless of the moon,

while at other times the image becomes the very fabric of the poem itself as in the title poem of the book:

---

1. Stewart has omitted many of the more creaking attempts at poetry from his first collected edition, Collected Poems (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967).

The bay is gouged by the wind
In the jagged hollows green lions crouch,
And stretch,
And slouch,
And sudden with spurting manes and a glitter
of haunches
Charge at the shore
And rend the sand and roar.

Stewart does not write about nature in this collection as a symbol of a wider world - a typical feature of his later poetry. As if not confident of his power to evoke the general from the particular, he uses nature in this early verse more as a stepping-off point for direct comment on himself and life generally. In the second section of the poem "Green Lions", for instance, the windy bay becomes the background to a scene of human tension and "the black cup of a winter's dusk in "Moment" provides the framework for a personal mood of melancholy.

I am not suggesting that Stewart's meditative lyrics are either limited to his earlier work or are in any way inferior. Indeed, Vivian Smith maintains that poems such as these are among Stewart's finest,[1] but this coupling of natural description with

---

1. Vivian Smith, "Douglas Stewart: Lyric Poet", Meanjin, XXVI (1967), 46.

reflection in this early writing is often too shallow or too personal. It is only when he reaches well beyond the particular image that he seems able to make a relevant poetic comment on the world about him.

An example of this is seen in the poem, "Watching the Milking". The scene is first described and the patient cows who "await the sucking cup" are brought pictorially into focus. Then Stewart provides us with the explanation; the cows are part of a wider, almost primeval pattern of life with which man has become an integral part. So clearly is the pattern revealed that the poet's imagination carries him to a state of deep insight.

> I might have been watching the cold craters
> of the moon,
> Or Pithecanthrope gesturing to his mate.

There is a direct allusion to a wider and more significant world here rather than the implied one which is found in much of the later poetry. I would argue that the poetic imagination is trying to grasp the concept of an interrelated universe but the hold is still unsure. It will become firm and steady in

the nature poems from Sun Orchids onwards.

Although Stewart may not have reached the mature statement which his later poetry makes he is able to demonstrate in the early writing his ability to look closely at particular things and describe them in detail. The New Zealand landscape which he paints in Green Lions is fully assimilated through accurate observation and portrayed with pictorial skill:

> The colours of dawn persist into day.
> The sky gleams to the east, to two blue mountains
> In streaming copper, in steels cold grey.
> Stone cattle are carved on the green.
> "Winter Morning"

Another characteristic which appears in Green Lions is that the landscape to which the poet alludes is looked on as essentially hostile and forbidding. In "Hostile Mountain", wind is "assassin", water calls "with a cold voice", stone "is angry" and "The dead volcano has something of stillborn hatred even yet". Possibly this type of response is best seen in "Morning in Wellington":

Thin stone is in this chill wind from the south,
Thin stone, an essence of those bleak hard hills
That bulk between the town and the wild surf.
Yes, though it gets its coldness from the sea
That snowed with moonlight, icicled with foam
Antarctically glistened all night long,
This current in its planes like panes of glass
That vertically shear between black walls
Is hardened and made sour with those huge hills
As though the sharp spurs gritting through the grass
Exhale their own dark breath into the wind.

Stewart has commented on the early influences on his writing,[1] listing among them the dark, passionate prose of John Cowper Powys and the flamboyant imagery of Roy Campbell. It is possible that the black mood of much of this early writing can be attributed to the poet's impressionable youth responding to neo-romantic impulses. However, the idea of nature being alien has impressed Stewart strongly in his early poetry and its tone is very similar to that which produced the harsh white world of The Fire on the Snow. Later he is to see the essential paradox in nature which impressed him so greatly in his poems on Australia and will write with

---

1. See Poetry Magazine, No.5 (1966), 3-6 and telecast interview 7 January 1965 with John Thompson, reprinted in Southerly, XXVII (1967), 188-198.

restraint and sensitivity of a land which can produce tiny, delicate wild orchids and yet can be violent and cruel; the type of world which will provide a suitable backdrop to the play of heroic human life which is to become one of Stewart's dominating interests.

There are no poems in this collection which show Stewart's later developing interest in man's heroic dimension - these emerge in the wartime writings - but he is, in these early works, showing his concern with human problems. In poems such as "The Girl in the Bus" he responds directly to the human scene which appears before either his physical or inward eye, and writes sensitively on it. There is in this poem an effective evocation of loneliness in a crowd, of the extreme difficulty of communication, of the isolation of the individual and his dream of fulfilment. The essential features of the scene are clearly etched:

> From left to right huge matrons on huge haunches
> Surge and converge with the swaying of the bus;
> A thin man shrinks into the evening news
> As if it were his shell;

then Stewart's youthful physical and romantic longing becomes the poem's point of focus:

> With wild desire I note
> Her lithe live limbs, her honey-golden throat.
> It may be she, it may be she who holds
> The clue to my lost lake, the green, the
> blinding sky
> The shaking cool lost leaves. And we will age!

This is refreshing in spite of its immaturity, but the cry of "And we will age!" is out of keeping with the previous responses. It is not until much later that Stewart can talk with control about the whole human situation. His poem, "Elegy",[1] in which he looks upon death as "the rest of the bargain right from the start", is the type of emotionally controlled comment which maturity will bring.

Stewart's poems in Green Lions which fall into the comment-on-life category include "Shinbone and Moss", "Died in Harness" and "Prelude and Gold in Taranaki"; the last mentioned and "The Girl in the Bus", in particular, seeming to anticipate Stewart's

---

1. Poetry Magazine, No.3 (1967), p.8.

interest in the positive, life-affirming aspects of the world. The appeal of Roy Campbell's work and later that of Norman Lindsay was understandable in a young man eager to taste life. The poems are essentially masculine and outgoing.

Stewart's work usually shows considerable variation within one collection, and Green Lions is no exception. Side by side with robust masculine poems are verses of extreme tenderness and delicacy. "The Imperishable Image" puts forward with sensitivity the romantic fancy that one, very beautiful, might leave a permanent image on the reflecting surface of a pond or mirror. It is a fitting poem to conclude the discussion of Stewart's first volume, which left little doubt that he was a young man with a future in Australian writing:

> We dream of one imperishable
> Who roves the land when trees are still
> And has such perfect loveliness
> Her cool reflection never passes
> But leaves undying soft impress
> On any water, any mirror,
> Whiter than naked boughs and clearer
> Than candlelight on softening snow.
> Where water can withhold its flow
> In reedy lake or leafy pool
> I see her image always now
> Whiter than willow, beautiful.

The White Cry (1939) published in England three years after Green Lions, is a very disappointing work and the worst collection of poems that Stewart has produced.[1] Self-conscious and mawkish in sentiment, the poems at their worst are so different from either the Stewart of early promise or the Stewart who will emerge, that the book could well be looked on as a deviation from the main stream of his poetic development - he has admitted, himself, that the work is largely Roy Campbell pastiche.[2] The poems are also so extremely repetitious that detailed consideration of more than a few is not worthwhile.

In "On the Crest of the Ridge", the first poem in the collection, Stewart is comparing his life to the moonlit and shadowed parts of a ridge. With hackneyed poetic diction he makes an apostrophe to

---

1. It is surprising that the collection has not escaped a more pungent attack. Vivian Smith in his article on Stewart's verse, Meanjin, XXVI (1967), 41, has seen The White Cry as the best of Stewart's early books. James McAuley considers "Look Now for Country Atlas" a near perfect lyric. Cf. The Literature of Australia, ed. Dutton (Adelaide: Penguin, 1964), p.365.

2. Interview with John Thompson, Southerly, XXVII (1967), 197.

his love:

> ----------O my love,
> Take break for brutes or flutes as passion wills.
> In silver anguish chained too fierce to move
> I say take break or spurn, but do not turn
> Where down behind you, scarred with years and
> fern,
> Lit with a blacker magic than the moon's
> Lies half the ridge and half my life in shade.

The poem continues with such phrases as "ere they fade" and "O forbear" strikingly unlike the writer who will later use to great effect, the conversational poetic style.

The word "silver" is used four times in the poem, the word "light" twice, "blacker" twice and "shade" four times. Through the collection these words, together with "saffron", "blue", "rose", "gold" and "creamy", develop into an annoying colour cliché which becomes extremely tedious and has little imaginative impact. Consider the following examples:

> Like silver foam on yellow wine,
> The valley's whole wild goblet won
> Pours down my throat with saffron fire
> A taste of earth and gnarled desire.
> "Gorse"

Hissing with silver like a sea of snakes,
And willow boughs now belled with gold again
Shivered and struggled in the rain's bleak lakes,
Were naked in the glitter of the rain.
"Green Pond"

And as on yellow pools at eve
The silver rains of insects bubble,
Bright showers of starlings pelt and grieve
The still and saffron lake of stubble.
"Haystack"

From saffron and silver, bells and leaves and light,
And the blue thunder of the drums of noon,
"A Summer Dusk"

"Summer Dusk" shows clearly how Stewart has stepped away from the sharp, particular description of landscape which was a feature of his earlier volume. The poem is hardly about dusk at all, reminding the reader forcibly of many of the nature poems of Kendall which are little more than generalised and vague responses, not to a particular natural scene, but to a mood.

In "The White Cry" sentiment is laid on with a heavy hand and the effect is not the one of tenderness and pity which the author wished to provoke, but a general discomfort experienced as a

result of an exhibition of poor taste. A lamb is, after all, a strong symbol of innocence and purity in English poetry and to have it lost in a forest should be more than enough, without the crude associations of "red blood" on "white snow".

"A Walk in the Wind" opens with a poor image and fails to recover. The author's emotion weaves through the poem, self-conscious and immature; "Village" is the ranting of a homesick youth; "Hooves Through the Village" lacks clarity, although its impact is forceful; "Green Pond" endorses the poet's own description of his mind as "but a waving of green weeds". Stewart wisely saw fit to omit ten of the poems in The White Cry from his first collected edition, among them being "Triumph", "Silver in Black", "Hand and Eye" and "Against the Tide".

There are isolated images and sections from various poems which show imagination and developing poetic skill. The last two verses of "Look Now for Country Atlas" give an otherwise mediocre poem a grace and charm which anticipate the lyric excellence of Stewart's later work:

Look now for country Atlas:
Lightly enough he bears
Who moves among dark trees
His world of simple cares,
The wood to warm him by,
The paddock thick with grass,
The stack not built, but I,

True load not shouldered yet
And nowhere here to find,
Feel the red-brown light a burden
Lowering on my mind,
And walk with heavy tread
Homeward from farm and Atlas
To glass and book and bed.

In "Haystack" Stewart considers the romantic idea of the haystack being "a whole green field, a whole gold summer". He gently develops the feeling of winter:

The field is bare that once concealed
So much of little fur and feather,
Too shorn of cover now to shield
A fieldmouse from the hawk or weather;

And as on yellow pools at eve
The silver rains of insects bubble,
Bright showers of starlings pelt and grieve
The still and saffron lake of stubble.

then he emphasizes the haystack's golden treasure:

Yet what was there is gathered up
And will not perish for the cold:
Though all the suns of buttercup
Went down in one wild dusk of gold,

And daisy-moons like snow were shed
On soft green oceans toppling over,
And lark and hare in terror fled
The crumpling purple flames of clover,

It is only then that he relates the poem directly to himself, keeping the meaning of the analogy only one of implication:

And I beside the cold, shrill marsh
Rejoice I heard that bitter rumour,
And stacked me here for time grown harsh
A whole green field, a whole gold summer.

Colour is used in this poem with effect. The golds and purples of Stewart's repertoire find full and ready application to the autumn scene.

Even so, the best of these poems are extremely "Georgian" in diction and in idea. Stewart's debt to W. H. Davies, Blunden and even de la Mare is seen clearly enough and the poems are very stereotyped. The individuality which was to mark some of his later poetry was little evident at this stage.

Both Green Lions and The White Cry, I would argue, are the poetry of Stewart's youth, giving an indication of what the poet would do in the future. His perceptive observations of the natural world

recreated through an imaginative use of words, his lyrical quality, his interest in humanity - as yet very personalised - his obvious questing for insight into the pattern of the universe are all significant features in his writing and will appear in developed form in his later work.

PART II

THE WAR POETRY AND THE VERSE PLAYS

CHAPTER 2

ELEGY FOR AN AIRMAN AND SONNETS TO THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Elegy for an Airman[1] and Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier[2] can be considered together. The former was published in 1940, the latter in 1941, and each represents a new phase in Stewart's thinking. Gone is the early vague romanticism which coloured much of his early poetry and in its place is a more mature and sober approach to life. War has had its effect on the poet; his childhood friends have been killed in action, his new-found home, Sydney, has become a place which resounds to the tramp of marching feet, the news of Dunkirk has brought to him the tragedy of war in all its force.

---

1. Elegy for an Airman (Sydney: Frank C. Johnson, 1940).

2. Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1941).

> Burning Dunkirk was the mouth of hell at midnight
> And a man who was lover, husband, father of children,
> Workman or farmer or bank clerk, not of importance,
> Walked cursing into the flames and died on the beach,
> Or clambered aboard a boat and saw white dawn
> Break on the cliffs of England. And this was the man
> Who died at Thermopylae, and died at Waterloo,
> Died at Gallipoli, died in the mud at Passchendaele.
>
> Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier (p.7)

It is at this stage that Stewart's interest in the heroic begins to appear, and war seems the catalyst which has hastened its development. The exploration of heroic motive becomes a significant theme in Stewart's writing. It provides an essential link between these poems and the verse plays; it follows through and permeates his later writing; it appears in varying circumstances in different environments; here it emerges against the general background of a world war.

Stewart sees war's brutality, its wastefulness and its essential tragedy. He would agree forcibly with Siegfried Sassoon's ironic comment:

In sermon-time while Squire is in his pew,
He gives my gilded name a thoughtful stare;
For though low down upon the list, I'm there:
"In proud and glorious memory" - that's my due.
Two bleeding years I fought in France for Squire;
I suffered anguish that he'd never guessed;
Once I came home on leave; and then went west.
What greater glory could a man desire?
"Memorial Tablet"

Indeed there is an echo of this in:

Never fear, soldier, that we shall not reward you,
Though you did not fight for money and ask but little-
A speech, a cheer and a job and a girl who remembers.
You shall have the soldier's reward as from time immemorial:
A column of stone in the park ----------
Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier (p.9)

Nor has Stewart any illusion about what war will solve. "The fools will tell you we stand on the threshold of light", he says cynically of the future, and the general tone of the sonnets maintains this attitude. What is different is that Stewart sees great value in the soldier's courage as a thing in itself. The unknown soldier is remembered for "the lonely flame" within him, for courage and endurance; for "a life against the darkness". His deed in itself catches that nobility in human action which

Stewart is beginning to isolate, and which he will voice more explicitly in The Fire on the Snow:

> Triumph is nothing; defeat is nothing; life is
> Endurance; and afterwards, death. And whatever
> death is,
> The endurance remains like a fire, a sculpture,
> a mountain
> To hearten our children.
> Four Plays (p.30)

A number of poems in Elegy for an Airman were published in overseas journals before Stewart came to Australia and took up his position with The Bulletin in 1938. Some are similar to those published in The White Cry, which went to print a year before. In fact, poems such as "The Grasses Bend with Frost" and "The Mirror" would be quite in place in the former collection. In poems like "Heritage" and "The Fisherman" the poet is seen squaring his shoulders to life:

> I would endure for you,
> Whom I love as my own brother
> All the soul's thunderous weather;
> I would turn my flesh to stone
> To see the long winter through
> For you, for man, for my son.
> "Heritage"

The title-poem is, however, the finest in

this collection. "Elegy for an Airman" was written in memory of Stewart's friend, Desmond Carter, killed in action in 1939. The poem has an elegiac tenderness, a poignancy and a detachment, which are as yet new to Stewart. The invocation of the vision of childhood in:

> Only the trees were dark behind trees in the bush
> And only the blackberries stained our mouths like blood,
> The thrush like a fountain sang in the heat of the willows
> And our shadows moved with the trout in the sunny water,
> And we were the hares and the deer, ----------

is almost as effective in its way as Dylan Thomas's exquisite:

> Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
> About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
> The night above the dingle starry,
> Time let me hail and climb
> Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
> And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
> And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
> Trail with daisies and barley
> Down the rivers of the windfall light.
> "Fern Hill"

The restraint in feeling makes Stewart's

poem very moving without permitting it to approach the sentimental:

> Always beyond the roof that fingers could reach
> Was life like a blue day, not to be held in the hand;
> And caught in its day your silver statement of laughter
> Is a fountain they cannot bury under the clay.
> O my friend, your life goes echoing on through time
> As the thrush still rings in the mind when the willows darken.

There is sufficient acceptance of the stark realism of death to balance the romantic memory of youth and the poem is essentially satisfying.

> For death is no blackbird buried to feed the sunflowers
> But the empty room and the clothes to give to the neighbours
> And the fairy tale proved to be folly, the mirror broken,
> And the fire not lit because nothing can warm the heart.

The sonnet sequence of eleven poems which begins the collection Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier and which bears its name is not particularly imaginative or impressive in terms of poetic skill. It is true that Stewart has begun to use the long lines of blank verse which form the basic pattern of

his plays and that he has consciously done away with the lush and often vague language of his early poetry, but the sonnets are not memorable in expression. Their real appeal lies in the sincerity of the emotion and the ideas which underlie them, indicative of Stewart's thinking at the time.

The sonnets, read as a unit, give the impression of a deep and considered statement. The unknown soldier, for all his heroic dimension, is just a man with

> ----------one eye on the girls,
> The other on the pub, his uniform shabby already
> "Sonnet I"

There is an air of disenchantment about him, often amounting to bitterness, because "all the speeches were lies" and war generally points to the failure of human aspiration. There is no foolish optimism here, no shallow patriotism. Stewart has looked more deeply into the sources of human motive and has set his highest value on heroic fortitude as all that matters and, indeed, all there is. This feature of human activity he describes in his next poem, "Men Who Know the Mountains", as "the naked

valour of mankind!"

This is the first of Stewart's "explorer" poems. He has taken the heroic quality which he has found in the war poems and transferred it to the man who faces the challenge not of war but of the elements:

> The men who know the mountains, men who have
> hurled
> The stone of their being down vast abysses of
> air
> And clung to the rock and laughed while the white
> hell swirled,
>
> Men who have known what terror it is to stare
> On crag upon rearing crag to the end of the world,
> What pride it is to march with them, to dare
>
> Their giant pilgrimage among the clouds
> To shrines and destinies beyond our dreams,
> Bring strange reports to trouble our huddling
> crowds.

The hero of this type appears again and again in Stewart's writing, embodying directly or obliquely what he terms, the basic myths of the nation.[1] He is Scott at the pole, Piccard under the sea or above the clouds, William Lane in mid-ocean or the Australian explorers from "Birdsville":

---

1. Cf. introduction to Voyager Poems, ed. Douglas Stewart (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1960), p.12.

You can see yet
In the great wide street
The heroes, the giants
Still striding the land:
Glaring and huge
From the Simpson mirage
Leichhardt come out
Dripping red sand,
Or with groan of bullock
And screech of hub
Blind Charles Sturt
From his stony desert.

In modified type this heroic figure is represented later in any one who contends with nature, explorer or not, appearing in a wide range of writing from the plays to the meditative lyrics: in comedy and tragedy, realism and fantasy; Ned Kelly in his fiery outback, Tawhai in her misty mountains, Cornelius on his desolate island, and, I would argue, Rutherford the scientist who attempts the most difficult task of all, the solving of the riddle of the Universe.

The sonnet sequence, "The Dreaming World", is strikingly different from the previous poems in Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier. The poems all share a romantic, wistful quality which associates them with some of Stewart's earlier work in Green Lions. The world is personified; it is a sleeping, dreaming world with a life of its own:

> The dark world stirs in her sleep with a wave
> of branches
> (p.19)

and a voice:

> Talking in water as churches talk in bells.
> (p.21)

As the sequence progresses the poet seems to be searching for some mystical communion between the dreaming world and himself, but the matter is never clear and remains a type of romantic vision which is rather disappointing in its vagueness:

> But who in the crash and blaze of starry night
> Can fill his throat with the towering cry of its
> dreamer?
> (p.27)

The sonnets are generally unsatisfying in their lack of real point and fall well below later poems in which Stewart looks into the essence of the natural world.

"New Zealanders", which closes the collection, is an exaggerated piece of patriotic waffle but "The Presences" - the only poem from this volume which Stewart included in his Collected Poems (1967) - is another of the delicate personal lyrics which are only too rare at this stage. The sensitive play of

feelings coupled with the light rhythmic movement make the poem a development from "The Imperishable Image" (Green Lions) and "Look Now for Country Atlas" (The White Cry), all precursors of "The Dryad" (Rutherford) which is the nearest approach to the perfect personal lyric one would wish to find.

The two volumes of verse have marked a development in Stewart's writing. Although the romanticised landscape is still present in some of the poems, making a link with the early volumes, the poet appears to have grown up emotionally and begun to come to terms with the more serious and universal motives which determine human action. The sonnets, for all their isolation of heroism, however, are by no means romanticised and the duality in the soldier's aspiration gives the sonnet sequence balance. The two volumes represent a step forward in the poet's thinking and a development in technique; both features to be discovered as fundamental to an understanding of the verse plays.

CHAPTER 3

THE VERSE PLAYS

> It is more than this that sets me ranging
> the mountains and among the tall trees;
> it is the twisting and turning in the heart of
> a man
> that has been there, biting on the gag of the
> dream of security,
> ever since he saw the trap of his own civilisation
> closing in upon him, shutting out the sunlight
> of the freedom of the far ranging hunter
> who fed when he was hungry, and then
> sang or danced or carved his spears before he
> slept.
> ----------
> ----------It is this ancient resentment
> running wild in my veins;
> it is the deep cool smell of the gullies,
> hard sunlight on illimitable plains.
>
> "Ned Kelly Speaks"
> Ian Mudie

The times of writing and publication of Stewart's verse plays differ in sequence but it seems clear that Stewart wrote the four major works between 1938 and the middle 1940's, and sometimes had two plays in hand at the same time. He began working on The Fire on the Snow during 1938-39 and on Ned Kelly

during 1940; The Golden Lover he wrote completely in 1941 and Shipwreck during the early 1940's. Ned Kelly was first published in 1943, The Fire on the Snow and The Golden Lover in 1944 and Shipwreck in 1947. The plays fit into Stewart's literary development between the wartime poems and his later writing and show some interesting inter-connecting links.[1]

Stewart's verse plays were written for performance on stage and radio,[2] unlike the literary dramas of the Romantic Revival such as Shelley's The Cenci. This was a most ambitious project for a writer who was just beginning to emerge as a poet and had very little real knowledge of the demanding discipline of the theatre, a fact which is not surprising when one considers the literary climate

---

1. Fisher's Ghost, a comic fantasy of light texture, was written much later and published in 1960. Stewart's other verse play, The Earthquake Shakes the Land, has been performed by the A.B.C. but never published. It is a play based on Maori legend. For a further discussion of times of writing and publication see Nancy Keesing, Douglas Stewart, Australian Writers and Their Work, ed. G.Dutton (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1965),pp.20-21.

2. The Fire on the Snow and The Golden Lover were written as radio plays; Ned Kelly and Shipwreck for the stage.

of Stewart's time. There was no well established dramatic tradition in Australia nor was there any working theatre of note in which a playwright could develop his craft, much less a critical and sensitive audience to respond to it.[1] I would argue that the plays fall short of success in spite of their intrinsic interest in terms of ideas and poetic expression and have been overvalued by critics in the past.[2]

Stewart has attempted in his plays to revive the form of the great poetic dramas of the Elizabethans considering poetry as the correct expression to carry the weight of a lofty theme. Unfortunately poetic drama in its traditional form is an extremely difficult medium for modern theatre, which is becoming more and more devoted to using techniques verging on the impressionistic to realism verging on the prosaic. That Stewart looked back to the

---

1. Stewart's main verse plays were all written before the formation of The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in 1954. For statements on the state of Australian drama see Leslie Rees, Introduction to Australian Radio Plays (Sydney,1946) and H.M.Green, A History of Australian Literature, Vol. II (Sydney,1961), pp.1178-1179.

2. A notable exception is David Bradley's "Second Thoughts About Douglas Stewart",Westerly, No.3 (1960),23ff.

Elizabethans there is no doubt, but it is very probable that he was influenced, too, by his immediate forbears or contemporaries in poetic drama such as James Elroy Flecker, Maxwell Anderson, Christopher Fry and Louis MacNeice; or, stepping back a little farther to John Millington Synge or William Butler Yeats.[1] This company notwithstanding, it is not surprising that Stewart's plays did not receive the acclaim expected from an audience[2] which was ready to applaud Ray Lawler's The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, Richard Beynon's The Shifting Heart and Alan Seymour's The One Day of the Year.

The verse drama, particularly with romantic emphasis, was simply out of fashion. It is, of course, not a reasonable critical position to react against a genre which is not topical, but it must be admitted

---

1. Stewart acknowledges his debt to Yeats in poetry; see television interview with John Thompson reported in Southerly, XXVII (1967), 194. Points of similarity both in theme and verbal expression between Stewart's The Golden Lover and Yeats' Land of Heart's Desire have been noted by L.Rees, Towards an Australian Drama (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1953), p.141.

2. In spite of Stewart's own attempt at justification his plays have never been successful box office. They have been performed, apart from the A.B.C. productions of the radio plays, mainly in little theatres. See D.A. Stewart, "On Being a Verse Playwright", Meanjin, XXIII (1964), 272-277.

that the realistic drama introduced by Ibsen and Chekhov has an economy and exactness which Stewart's dramas lack.

Poetry has always been a difficult form to harness to the demands of the theatre; a reason no doubt for the fact that there have been so few really good poetic dramas written. Fry's plays which were popular in the 1940's when they appeared and still play to good houses in revival[1] often err here and Fry, unlike Stewart, was a man very well versed in the discipline of the theatrical craft. A Sleep of Prisoners seems to lose tension as it progresses. The words take over and the theme, admittedly difficult, becomes lost beneath the surface glitter of the language. The Lady's Not for Burning shares this fault, some speeches being little more than virtuoso pieces on the sonic and associative effects of words. For example:

> Coming in from the light, I am all out at the eyes.
> Such white doves were paddling in the sunshine
> And the trees were as bright as a shower of broken glass.

---

1. Harold Lang's production of A Sleep of Prisoners in 1966 is a case in point.

> Out there in the sparkling air, the sun and
> the rain
> Clash together like the cymbals clashing,
> When David did his dance, I've an April blindness.
> You're hidden in a cloud of crimson catherine-
> wheels.

One can turn to Stewart and find the same type of weakness again and again in the plays. Take for example Gribble's speech in Act I Sc. ii of Ned Kelly which begins:

> The clarkes taken. Ned Kelly still at large.
> Piesley hanged; Davis sentenced to death;
> Gardiner sentenced to thirty years hard labour;
> ---------- (p.145) 2

and continues listing the bushrangers who have met their end for fifteen lines of blank verse, not to mention the concluding four lines ending "---the first harsh gods of Australia, the lash and the gallows". Kelly answers immediately with:

> Say what you like! I don't care who was hanged.
> You only prove that we're right to fight the
> traps. (p.145)

---

1. Christopher Fry, The Lady's Not for Burning (London: O.U.P. 2nd ed. 1950), p.4.

2. All references to the plays will be made from D.A. Stewart, Four Plays (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1958), except Fisher's Ghost.

and so the argument goes on. Dramatically it is an argument and it loses its main effect in Gribble's long-winded if rhythmical and poetical rundown on bushranging history. The speech is just not right and does not work on the stage. Some poetic speeches on the other hand are very effective, both dramatically and poetically. Gribble's next comment which begins, "You're not right! ----(p.145) is very effective and parts of Byrne's speech in Act II Sc. i (p.156) are both imaginative and forceful, particularly the section which includes,

> My God, it's empty,
> Empty and barren and stony, all our life;
> We're four dead trees in a sunset. (p.156)

This is the colloquial, succinct expression which marks some of Stewart's better conversational writing but he fails to maintain such a standard and the works succeed only in part, producing the overall effect of looseness in the dramatic structure.

Stewart's tendency to prolixity in his dramatic writing is given full rein in the radio play. The Announcer's speeches in The Fire on the Snow tend to be repetitive in their emphasis on the icy world

of the south, and the overstatement in the speech following Oates' heroic sacrifice is an unfortunate flaw. If ever understatement was necessary it was here, but Stewart cannot resist the temptation to re-state and comment, robbing the scene of most of its inherent pathos. Similarly, in the dramatic Scene vii of The Golden Lover, Stewart gives the shattered Tawhai a lengthy dissertation on her motives when two short lines of grief would have been more in keeping with her feelings at the time.

The radio play has, by virtue of its reliance on the ear alone, special requirements in terms of description which the stage play lacks. The Announcer's verbal painting of the scenery and the action in The Fire on the Snow:

> Rollers of blizzard
> Roar and break
> In foam on the tent.
> The tide of the South
> White, tremendous,
> Roars on the tent,
> Roars in the ears
> Of drowning men (p.25)

> The five men in harness,
> The groups drawing apart,
> The heavy sledge moving:
> The step light, and the heart. (p.6)

or the old women's descriptive commentary on the scene and the action in the final scene in The Golden Lover:

> The seven great fires, flaring against the stars,
> And the steam rising from the pots; and behind
> the steam
> Wera and Koura kneeling; and the other old women;
> And behind the women, Nukuroa and Ruarangi
> And Tiki too, standing there straight and silent;
> And behind those three, the warriors, row on row,
> With their spears and clubs and axes-eh, the
> fine men!-
> Row after row from the firelight back to the
> shadows (p.94)

are all the necessary accoutrements of radio drama and the poetic form helps considerably as it did on the austere Elizabethan stage.[1]

Unfortunately Stewart's descriptive passages are often far too long and impede the action, or are redundant. When Tawhai addresses the assembled Maoris in Scene vii in The Golden Lover it seems incredible that the playwright would have written-in the line, "Tawhai is speaking" (p.95) when the heroine proceeds with:

---

1. H.J.Oliver, "Douglas Stewart and the Art of the Radio Play", Texas Quarterly, V (1962), 194.

(loudly and clearly)
Am I to stand before you
Shamed, with my head bowed----------(p.95)

The fact that she is the central figure in the drama being enacted is fundamental to any understanding of the scene. Again, even more glaringly, when Whana rushes in during the same scene with:

Tawhai! My love! My love! (p.96)

and the second woman commentator says:

Whana has come! (p.96)

It is an interesting experiment, in fact, to notice how much of Stewart's plays, whether written for stage or radio, can be pruned back without affecting the action in any way other than improving its impact.

Apart from being wordy and repetitious the plays do not sustain tension throughout. A good example is Act II Sc. i of Ned Kelly. As Bradley points out, the scene is full of dramatic potential: betrayal, a police trap, illicit love are all there, but the scene wanders on allowing two pages for an elaborate commentary on the arrival of the Roo, two more for the suggestion of derailing the train and

two more for musing on the future.[1]

Of course, one can spring to Stewart's defence, nominating many sections of the plays which do hold tension, such as the Aaron Sherritt murder scene in Ned Kelly or the scene containing Sebastian's death in Shipwreck; but unfortunately there are too many flaccid scenes for the plays to be successful in full. Possibly Stewart has asked too much of himself in the scope of his dramas. The long chronicle plots of Ned Kelly and Shipwreck provide "quarries for plays"[2] rather than compact actions within single pieces. The playwright neither knows or uses the element of selectivity in his theatrical writing so vital in dramatic form. The classic example of this is the fearful repetition in atmosphere, action and idea within the Ned Kelly hotel scenes, Act I Sc. ii at Jerilderie and Act IV Sc. i at Glenrowan. The second scene eddies like the backwater of a river until its belated surge forward at the end. The same ideas are worked over and over

---

1. Bradley, "Second Thoughts About Douglas Stewart", Westerly, 3 (1960), 26.

2. Ibid., p.25.

ad nauseam with different characters voicing them.

The characters, too, are in many cases not developed. They come to us as set figures from history or are given only a pale existence of their own which does not vary. To bring them to life on the stage requires imaginative, if not inspired direction with the exception, maybe, of a few such as the magnificent Ruarangi from The Golden Lover or Joe Byrne, for some of the time, in Ned Kelly. Also, it is extremely frustrating to find a character who has some promise, such as Mackin or Living in Ned Kelly or Godwin Van Mylen in Shipwreck, suddenly disappear or become reduced to a shadow of his former self.

Even if the chronicle play requires, by the nature of its form, that the minor characters are understated, one is reminded of the successful minor characters in Shakespeare's histories and also of the relative greatness of his protagonists. Unfortunately Stewart's plays do not always provide this compensating factor. Cornelius from Shipwreck falls dramatically short of the role Stewart has given him. He is psychologically complex[1] but his motives only receive

---

1. Cf. J.F.Burrows, "An Approach to the Plays of Douglas Stewart", Southerly, XXIII (1963), 107-108.

surface consideration so that he appears to change for no apparent reason and an audience must remain confused.

Further problems of characterisation are found in The Fire on the Snow. In terms of the criticism of lack of differentiation of the minor characters one could argue that all characters in the play represent "hero" in almost pure form; that they are, in effect, essentially symbols of the noble side of man's nature; that they do not develop, but they do not need to. The problem with this approach is that in a play, and a radio play at that, the lack of clear character differentiation gives the work little interest in terms of human personality and at times becomes downright confusing. By the time of reaching the pole there is little to distinguish between Bowers, Oates and Evans, and their response to the Norwegians' success is similar if not identical. They are all disappointed and annoyed; Oates says: "O, blast the luck. And blast the Norwegians. Damn them" (p.11); Evans says: "I'd like to bash their heads in" (p.11) and Bowers, having already made a petulant outburst about the sighting of the cairn, is content to be somewhat

more philosophical - which is rather surprising considering his reputation for impatience and hastiness.

Scott himself can be seen as more complex, developing from the egotistical, almost solipsist, "Voss-like" dreamer into a man who emerges "confused but sensitive, defeated but glorious".[1] This concept of the hero, locked in his Nietzschean dream is logical enough, from evidence presented in the play, but apart from clashing with the historic Scott,[2] it tends to lessen the main effect of The Fire on the Snow which is one of heroic sacrifice, thus denying the work its essential force. Even if one accepts the argument in terms of Scott, the other characters, as Burrows points out, are lifelessly doctrinaire and little more than caricature.[3] The play, in fact, is less of a play than a poem and

---

1. Burrows, p.105.

2. H.G.Ponting's study of the Scott expedition, The Great White South (London: Duckworth & Co., 1921), presents the historic Scott as a man, devoted, gentle and self-sacrificing.

3. Burrows, p.106.

would have achieved its greatest impact if it had been written as such.

In spite of these weaknesses in the dramatic fabric of the plays, which I have argued lower their status as plays to be performed, Stewart's verse dramas have had a considerable influence on the development of Australian dramatic writing,[1] and in the case of The Fire on the Snow in particular have received world recognition. I consider that the plays are essentially interesting in terms of the complex of ideas within them, the attempt at resurrecting the romantic heroic theme and the effectiveness of much of the poetry which points so clearly to where Stewart's strength as a writer lies. To look at these features more closely it is necessary to consider each play separately.

The Fire on the Snow, the best known of Stewart's verse dramas, deals with two features of Stewart's thinking which were beginning to emerge at the time he wrote and published the play, during the

---

1. L.Rees, Towards an Australian Drama (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1953), p.133 ff.

late 1930's and early 1940's. These are his interest in the heroic dimension in human endeavour, and the use of the explorer as the type of person who will best embody such a theme. The play, then, forms a link with the wartime poems treated above and in many respects with the other plays and later poems of the heroic type. Stewart had been fascinated by Scott's journal as a child and was, as he says, interested in snow itself,[1] having lived in New Zealand in the shadow of Mount Egmont as a boy.

The play has a very simple framework. It deals with the epic journey of Robert Falcon Scott and his four companions from 4 January 1912, when the last supporting party returned, to 29 March 1912 when Scott's journey ceased and the three remaining men perished in their tent. A large proportion of the play is written in dialogue which ranges from the vernacular, when the men are talking to one another, to the rhapsodical lyric when Scott or Wilson discuss their motives. As the play was written for radio, there is also an Announcer who acts in a multiple

---

1. See television interview with John Thompson, 7 January 1965 as reported in Southerly, XXVII (1967), 188-189.

role ranging from straight description of scenery and establishment of atmosphere through symbolism, to a commentator on the action and the motivation of the men. The verse forms used for the Announcer are as varied as his role.

The play makes its chief impact through the unquestioned romantic acceptance of the need to endure which remains the static theme throughout, enacted, as the Announcer says, "On the pure plane of action" (p.17). The journey is the symbol of "the common fate made clearer" (p.29) so that life becomes

> Endurance; and afterwards, death. And whatever death is,
> The endurance remains life a fire, a sculpture, a mountain (p.30)

When read this way The Fire on the Snow becomes a dramatic poem with variations on a theme, rather than a play relying on conflict for its lifeblood. In fact the play has received justifiable criticism, as a play, for its lack of internal dramatic conflict[1]

---

1. E.Hanger, "Australian Drama", The Literature of Australia, ed. G.Dutton (Adelaide, 1964), p.452.

and insufficient intellectual depth. The answering argument that external nature becomes an actor in the play appears flimsy. It is true that nature does appear alien; the sunlight is cruel (p.21); the snow is sinister, even more than the rain (p.25); and the whole Antarctic, in relentless mood, has clumsily lashed itself to a fury of destruction (p.26). This is how the situation appears to Scott and Wilson. It is they who anthropomorphise nature in this one instance, not the playwright. For the most part the white south is inanimate in The Fire on the Snow; an inert force against which man can test his endurance.

The play can also be criticised dramatically for its repetitious nature;[1] there is no development in the theme once the play is set in motion and there appears to be no specific aim in terms of the men's determination to endure.[2] Each of these criticisms can be met if The Fire on the Snow is considered as a dramatic poem. The use of

---

1. vide supra, p.35.

2. Consider Hudson's point that Stewart did not mention the heavy bag of geological specimens that he carried to the bitter end. Cf.W.F.Hudson, Poetry, No.15 (1945). From L.Rees, Towards an Australian Drama (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1953), p.136.

repetition could be seen as emphasizing the underlying mood which the work evokes, while the lack of development and specific direction keep the theme held down on the point that Stewart is making. Possibly it is the very simplicity of the theme, man's heroic struggle against insurmountable odds, that produces in the end the type of awe and catharsis that the writer intends. Whatever may be said of Stewart's Scott, his struggle is glorious, "a thing burning and perfect" (p.30), and the appeal to the heroic quality in man is beautifully stated in the play. There is something essentially moving in the romantic vision of man's life seen as a struggle in which his endurance alone is what is worthwhile:

> -----life when it's lived like this, hard and heroic,
> Is something so joyful no one could understand it
> Unless he was willing to dare it. No bird and no beast
> That lives on unthinking life can know such delight. (p.28)

or as Wilson says:

> We dreamed, we so nearly triumphed, we were defeated
> As every man in some great or humble way
> Dreams, and nearly triumphs, and is always defeated,

> And then, as we did, triumphs again in endurance.
> Triumph is nothing; defeat is nothing; life is
> Endurance; and afterwards, death. (p.30)

This is the lyrical form, linked with heroic character in which, as Bradley rather grudgingly admits, Stewart produces his best writing.

Stewart, in an article called "Tricks of the Trade" which appeared first in the Red Page of The Bulletin and was later printed in his collection of critical articles, The Flesh and the Spirit,[1] outlined his credo regarding poetic rhythm. He believes that neither the natural speech rhythm, "the rhythm of the awakened emotions, like the beat of the heart"[2] nor the controlled academic metre is the rhythm of real poetry. The true poet "must strike a balance between the two systems",[3] he argues, using a mixture of the natural rhythm of stresses and the regular metres of academic forms. In practice this means a reasonable regularity of the number of

---

1. "Tricks of the Trade", The Flesh and the Spirit (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948), pp.152-156.

2. Ibid., p.155.

3. Ibid., pp.155-156.

stresses to a line with little heed to the number of the unstressed syllables between them. This is the rhythm of most great poetry from Piers Plowman and Chaucer to Hopkins and Eliot, Stewart argues, and it is the basic rhythmical form which is used so effectively in Stewart's dramatic blank verse. For example:

> It's fine to be marching; strange that human courage
> Should droop at night like the flowers and the green things,
> As if we were quite at the mercy of natural forces.
> I remember the blackbirds when it was dusk in the country,
> The last songs, and then the twittering, then silence;
> Dusk and sleep were a law they never quiried.
> It would be less unnerving if night meant darkness here,
> One could be sad; but last night was desperate;
> There is no relief if you can't go down in the dark. (p.9)

or:

> I've seen this coming and been afraid of it;
> Each day since he took that fall I've watched him failing,
> His poor hands rotting with frostbite, his face all eaten,
> As if there were rats in the ice. The worst thing
> Was to see his reason going, see him losing heart,
> His movements slowing and his speech becoming wooden.
> Each day we've seen him nearer this collapse,
> And it's made my heart bleed, watching him.
> (p.15)

The number of stresses to the line is usually five, and the metrical pattern leans sometimes to iambic, sometimes to anapaestic. As a poetic verse form its great value is that it can be varied to suit the emphasis an actor or reader wishes to place on a syllable or line, permitting a flexibility of interpretation which more structured verse would not. For example, the line "And it's made my heart bleed, watching him", could be read:

or:

depending on the speaker's feeling in terms of the scene.[1]

Varied verse forms are used with the Announcer's speeches, depending on the changes in mood as the journey progresses, such as the stark lines:

---

1. James McAuley has been critical of this form saying that it tends to loosen the structure of the verse pattern. See J.McAuley, "Douglas Stewart", The Literature of Australia, ed. Dutton (Adelaide, 1964), pp.363-364.

They let him go.
In grief and shame
They let him go
Out to the flame
Of wind and snow
Where he burns for them. (p.22)

and the colloquial speech of the men makes an effective contrast with the poetic form.

In The Fire on the Snow there is a sustained image of fire which is cleverly woven into the play. From the outset when the Announcer describes the men as being "like dark tough flames on the snow" to where Wilson describes the men's struggle as living after death "Purely, like flame, a thing burning and perfect" (p.30), the flame image moves through the play as a symbol of man's courage and endurance. In fact the play is distinguished by the forceful imagery throughout, particularly in the sections which describe the southern desolation such as:

The snow slowing the sledge
Like waves of white iron (p.7)

Stewart is moving forward as a poet in The Fire on the Snow, and whatever one may feel of the work as a whole no one would deny the essential beauty of some of the sections in it. No better example

could be given than the sensitive and tragic reminiscence of Scott just before his death. The control of the diction and the grace of the movement make the speech a most touching and effective piece of writing:

> I remember before that, vaguely, England. It seems
> A blue mist, and hollows where leaves were green
> And everyone was kind, you could touch their hands.
> That was years ago. I remember more clearly
> New Zealand, that garden at Christchurch, how
> sharply blue
> The peaks of the Kaikouras stabbed the horizon,
> And the Avon looked so tranquil among its willows,
> And the city was quiet. But that was years ago.
> I remember the ship, yes; shouting and the gulls,
> And in such a little while no gulls or shouting,
> But the sea darkening and looking lonely. Wilson,
> Remember those days in the pack, the sun on the
> ice
> And the men's voices clear as bells as they sang,
> Clear as bells. (p.29)

Stewart's Scott in <u>The Fire on the Snow</u> is a far more controversial figure when looked at more closely.[1] I shall argue that he shares many of the qualities of Stewart's other protagonists and fits in closely to the heroic pattern which was interesting Stewart particularly at the time and was far removed from the "noble heroic" Robert Falcon Scott of history.

---

1. <u>vide supra</u>, p.42.

In the play Scott is the leader of the party and the central figure in the drama. He assumes responsibility from the beginning when the party of five moves off on the final march to the pole:

> -----it had to be done. I had to make a choice. (p.4)

he says as the party leaves, and later he speaks to Wilson regarding the opium:

> You've made your protest. The responsibility's mine.
> I make it an order. Give us the tablets, now. (p.20)

The Announcer emphasizes the point in his commentary:

> This journey is one man's dream
> As it is one man's burden
> And the man is Scott, the leader. (p.16)

Historically, as Oliver points out,[1] such a statement is almost a libel on Wilson but it is surprisingly true of Stewart's Scott. He has accepted the

---

1. H.J.Oliver, "Douglas Stewart and the Art of the Radio Play", Texas Quarterly, V (1962), 200.

challenge which the struggle has offered, removing all excrescences which may interfere with his plan, even life itself. To persist, to endure in spite of everything is to Scott the personal challenge which he accepts:

> I am glad we have lived so bitterly and die so hard;
> And if only they find what I've written, perhaps our story
> Will say what I wanted to say; that a man must learn
> To endure agony, to endure and endure again
> Until agony itself is beaten into joy. (p.28)

This dedication to a single purpose in Scott is almost an act of sheer will dissociated from any other consideration[1] and amounting at times to obsessional level. As McAuley puts it, the journey to the pole "becomes virtually autonomous and self-justifying --- a pure exercise in daring".[2] The lack of any specific scientific goal has already been mentioned, and the pointlessness of the whole journey is underlined by the fact that Amundsen got there

---

1. See Vincent Buckley, "Utopia and Vitalism", Australian Literary Criticism, ed. Johnston (Melbourne University Press, 1962), p.16.

2. J.McAuley, "Douglas Stewart", The Literature of Australia, ed. G.Dutton (Adelaide: Penguin, 1964), p.371.

first. Scott pursues his vision with energy and grim determination, exalting in his dream and his will to triumph. When the party learn that the Norwegians have beaten them he says:

> We've reached the Pole; it's something; I won't be robbed of it,
> I won't be robbed of achievement. (p.13)

He is essentially locked away with his own vision of success, enclosed in a dream which will cause his death and that of his men.

Of course it would be an over-simplification to look on Stewart's Scott as a man so possessed that he excludes all sympathy. Indeed it is his warmth and sensitivity to the others in his party that makes the tragedy so much more poignant and compelling. He says of Evans:

> Everyday we've seen him nearer this collapse
> And it's made my heart bleed, watching him. (p.15)

The question of the opium, too, can be seen in the light of Scott's consideration for the suffering of his men but, in spite of this, his own doubts as to his responsibility seem well founded at the end of the play:

How am I justified for Oates and Evans
And Bowers ---------- and you? (p.29)

Wilson's answer is a beautiful and moving attempt to exonerate Scott and raise the struggle of the five men to a symbolic level. As he says:

All of us chose to do it,
Our own will brought us, out death on the ice
Was foreseen by each of us; accepted.
Let your mind be at peace
I have seen this death as the common fate made clearer,
----------this simple struggle on the ice. (p.29)

Yet, just to what extent was Stewart's Scott justified in pursuing his vision to the detriment of others? Just to what extent was each man equally involved? Would the poor stumbling Evans have been prepared to accept the romantic interpretation of his motives that Wilson presented or was he "---lost, In the fog of another man's dream" (p.16), one of the men at the mercy of a dreamer:

Who ruled men's minds or bodies
Who had no will of their own. (p.17)

I would say that it is only Scott and to some degree Wilson who share the bitter satisfaction:

reserved for the saint, the martyr;
-----and the soldier on the point of death. (p.28)

Dedicated to a goal, absorbed in himself and his problems, possessed of vital energy which enables him to carry on, little concerned with the broader considerations associated with his mission, Stewart's Scott presents a special type of hero, a type more developed in a different landscape, in different circumstances in Stewart's next verse play, Ned Kelly.

In Ned Kelly Stewart made his greatest attempt at writing a drama of excellence in the fashion of the great poetic dramas of the past.[1] He chose his hero from Australian history, a man who shared many of the qualities of the great dramatic heroes and whose actions gave that degree of elevation which Aristotle and Arnold saw necessary for poetic drama. It was an ambitious attempt and the play - in spite of its failure as theatre - is surprisingly rich in the texture of its ideas and in its imaginative range.

---

1. See Stewart's comment on his reasons for writing the play in his foreword to the school edition (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961).

Stewart's interest in the great issues of classical literature is clear in his critical work, and during his days as editor of the Red Page of The Bulletin he espoused the cause of Australian writing and Australian themes.[1] Later his interest in the "basic myths of the nation" was to become a fundamental feature of his poetry.[2]

Kelly is, in many ways, fashioned in the mould of the great heroes of Marlowe and Shakespeare, an heroic cast which Waith sees dating back to Hercules.[3] These Herculean heroes, as Waith points out, are men greater, if not morally greater than ordinary mortals, have a core of vital primitive strength, an ability to endure, a savage anger, little sense of social responsibility, and are isolated from their fellows and dedicated to an heroic ideal which is of their own making. One sees

---

1. Consider, for instance his article "A Letter to Shakespeare", The Flesh and the Spirit (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948), p.30 ff.

2. Introduction to Voyager Poems, ed. Douglas Stewart (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1960), p.12.

3. E.M.Waith, The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).

the mighty Tamburlaine standing out clearly in this heroic pattern alongside Shakespeare's Coriolanus. In fact there are many features of the heroes of Romantic fiction such as Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights or Captain Ahab in Moby Dick which are of the Herculean type.[1]

Kelly, an expert marksman, horseman and fist-fighter by reputation shows in the play qualities of leadership which inspire dedicated allegiance from his men;[2] a warrior with all the essential Herculean strength and vitality. His ability to endure is seen particularly at the end of the play where he marches forth in armour to fight a hopeless battle against his attackers, and the savage anger of the Tamburlaine who tortured princes and slew his own son is seen in Kelly's treatment of Rankin, Bracken and the "little" men of the play. Kelly is violent, cruel, impetuous and unpredictable, never stopping short of murder when he feels it necessary, and his

---

1. Waith, p.201.

2. Byrne's loyalty to Kelly is the strongest evidence of this. As he says, when asked his reasons for taking up the outlawing life: "I did it for Ned". (p.157).

feeling of isolation, even from his own men, is shown in his "I should have travelled alone,-------
--You'll die alone in the end (p.173). He has his own moral code and a vision or dream of his own making, which is like an obsession with him, and he takes every opportunity to put his case.[1] Because he is isolated from society he has no accepted moral and social responsibility, and opposes society's instruments, such as the police, becoming a Nietzschean isolate who shares all the fears Bertrand Russell has for the Byronic hero.[2.]

These heroic features are enhanced by Stewart's evocation of a romanticised Australian landscape which is a place of loneliness, violence and cruelty, "----- a country Where only eagles are fit to travel the skies", yet offering in return "burning miles of freedom" (p.214). The essential

---

1. Consider his typical outburst on p.148 and his plan to have his case printed in the newspaper. Historically, the famous 8,300 word Jerilderie letter is further evidence of Kelly's vision. See M.Brown, Australian Son, The Story of Ned Kelly (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1948), p.271.

2. See B.Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), p.707. See also whole Chapter XVIII, "The Romantic Movement", 701 ff.

paradox of the Australian natural world emerges again in Stewart's later nature poetry,[1] and he builds Kelly up as part of the national mystique.

The romantic bush-derived ethos comes to life in the play appearing as the devil-may-care backwoodsman who dislikes and distrusts authority - particularly the police - who hates the Englishman and elevates the bushranger to the level of a national institution, a symbol of what every bushman furtively dreamed of being.[2] Historically a majority of the people in the Kelly country supported Ned and his gang,[3] and the play affirms this.

Byrne. -----Did you think, Bracken,
These people would really help the police
against us?

Bracken. I see that they won't.

Byrne. If, in that hollow head
Where the wind bellows, the light of
intelligence gleamed,

---

1. vide infra, p.125.

2. R.Ward, The Australian Legend (Melbourne: O.U.P., 1958), p.6.

3. J.V.Kenneally, The Inner History of the Kelly Gang (Melbourne: Hearne & Co., 1934), p.29. This book presents a strong case for the Kellys as "---merely a revolt against persecution", and justifies the support they received in this way.

You would see, when you saw the Kellys,
ghosts behind them,
Ghosts in chains, ghosts being whipped,
hanged,
Ghosts in the mirror of every man's mind in
Australia. (p.212)

or in Act II Sc. i:

Ned. You seem to think we're alone. There's more
than the Kellys
Round Greta and Beechworth who don't want
the snooping traps
Poking their noses in; not just the duffers,
There's plenty who're on the square but
still remember
It was traps who sent their fathers out to
Australia
For poaching a rabbit, stealing a loaf of
bread -
They're all for us; ---------- (p.169)

Kelly's Irish background also receives consideration:

I know about my blood, better than you do.
I like my blood. It's good blood sent from
Ireland
For nothing worth twelve thousand miles of sea
In a convict hulk, and years of chains and the
lash,
Kicks and curses and the dirty spite of the traps

Maybe there's salt in my blood from the voyage
from Ireland,
Maybe there's iron from their chains, stone from
their prisons;
(p.146)

yet the play is not a simple espousal of "Australianism",

as H. G. Kippax has noted.[1] First, the two sides of the argument are too effectively balanced for the play to fit neatly into an "Australian Romantic" propaganda piece. In this regard the play is more akin to Seymour's The One Day of the Year in which he exposes the Anzac Day question to critical observation. The case of the "little man" in Ned Kelly as opposed to the bush hero in such speeches as Living's:

> For thirty years I've given my life to this bank,
> Worked like an honest man, obeyed our officers,
> Received my reward in position as well as in money,
> And most of all in respect. Here in Jerilderie -
> You may not know it, coming from over the border -
> The people look up to the bank; it's their own institution,
> Standing for honesty, standing for neighbourly service,
> Standing for upright dealing between man and man,
> A temple, a monument,
> To the patient, decent industry of decent men
> Who wring an honest living from these hot plains
> And will not be beaten down by such as you.
> Insulted and bullied and robbed by strangers and outlaws
> Who ride their horses at night while the towns-people sleep. (p.111)

has too much truth in it to be pushed aside.

Secondly there is, as Phillips puts it, the

---

1. H.G.Kippax, Introduction to Three Australian Plays (Melbourne: Penguin, 1963), p.16.

"puncturing ironic realism"[1] of the Australian appearing in the most deflating of situations. The Lounger in Act I Sc. ii who has the temerity to answer Ned's question, most seriously intended, "Where can I find Gill?" with "Search me." (p.135) and interrupts Gribble and Tarleton in full romantic flight with, "I want a beer" (p.141) is an example of this. The disenchantment of the whole legend happens again with Byrne, who has no "legend to sleep with", and can offer his sardonic side comments on the action when he pleases. Possibly the most effective deflation of all is the one which Phillips has pointed out.[2] Mrs. Barry, Aaron Sherritt's hard-bitten mother-in-law, is doing more than pacifying the terrified victim when she says:

> The Kelly's aren't a flood -
> Four silly boys who gallop about on horses. (p.193)

Stewart sees heroic vitalism as the distinguishing mark of Joe Byrne. He has cast off all links with civilised society and lives in terms of

---

1. A.A.Phillips, "Douglas Stewart's Ned Kelly and Australian Romanticism", Meanjin, XV (1956), 267.

2. Ibid.

a simple motive "to flower like a man into action" (p.208). Living and Curnow are his very antitheses and it is in terms of these men we find what Byrne loves and hates.

Living is permitted to make his case. He stands for law and order, for the "patient, decent industry of decent men" (p.111), he has given his life to the bank, receiving his reward in position and money and "most of all in respect"(p.111).

Out of context this seems noble enough in itself, but within the play Living is anything but an heroic character. The lines which follow the speech in which Living makes the case, mentioned above, show the tone of the scene. Byrne replies: "Good God, Ned, the thing can talk! Wonder if we could teach it to whistle?" Living is, in fact, being held up to ridicule by Byrne; his stand is almost pathetic. Consider, too, how undignified and cheap is his anxiety over his insurance papers when Kelly threatens to burn them; he almost cringes in his attempt to save the documents. Byrne's comment reduces him further:

Byrne. You do it, Ned.
Burn his property and you burn the man himself,
He'll twist in the flame with the paper. Why
shouldn't he burn?
He's only a legal document, not a man. (p.119)

Stewart has brought man of this type to a very low order in this first scene of the play and vital man is raised proportionately. Living's protestations are never taken seriously and those of his counterpart, Elliott, are very similar in this respect.

In Act IV Sc. i, Curnow, although not comic, is treated with the same critical effect. He is a sitter-on-the-fence. He admires Ned in a way, realises that cattle-duffing is a matter which must be condoned, but lives within the bounds of law and order - because he is meek:

Byrne. Why don't you try your hand at duffing, Curnow,
Since you think it's so fine?

Curnow. I wouldn't have the nerve.

Byrne. Of course you wouldn't. And yet you've the
nerve to exist.
You know, Curnow, I think of men like you,
Meek little men who'd never lift a horse,
Never lift a hand to a gun, never one moment
Stand up in the sun and flower like a man
into action,
And I could shoot you, just for what you are
And all you are not. (p.208)

Not only is Byrne sardonic and cynical regarding the bushranging ethos which is a large part of Kelly's dream, but he dissociates himself from any vision beyond the supreme importance of the moment, beyond energetic self-expression and immediate sensation. Where Ned has "a legend to sleep with" (p.214), Byrne is but "a feather in the wind" (p.214), relying on his own untamed vitality for his motivation. He stands for the very essence of the man who flowers into action because action is what matters, whatever the consequences. This is the type of vitalism attributed for its genesis to Norman Lindsay which Vincent Buckley sees as such a significant influence in Australian literature,[1] and which Hugh McCrae describes in his poem, "Stirrup Cup":

> Men should live their lives with zest,
> Pledged to girls and golden song,
> Wine and horses --- all the rest ---
> Let me die while I am strong
>
> Young and strong I have no fears;
> Where's the lad would feel forlorn,
> Being dead a million years
> Who was dead ere he was born. 2

---

1. V.Buckley, "Utopia and Vitalism", Australian Literary Criticism, ed. G.Johnston (Melbourne University Press, 1962), p.16.

2. Hugh McCrae, Poems (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1939), p.162.

In fact there is little doubt that Stewart at this time was being considerably influenced by Norman Lindsay and the Lindsay "aesthetic". The main features of Lindsay's ideas are found in his work Creative Effort and comprise a direct espousal of Dionysian lack of restraint, physicality and gaiety, a Nietzschean belief in the power of the individual and a vigorous messianism.[1] His ideas in the 1920's onward had a distinct appeal, according to Buckley, to young writers in a country "virtually without literature",[2] and his influence can be found in the works of many poets of the period including R. D. FitzGerald, Kenneth Slessor, Hugh McCrae and Ray Mathew as well as Douglas Stewart.[3] I would argue that Lindsay's influence can be seen directly in Stewart's critical writing and in his poetry and drama, but that the Lindsay "aesthetic" is by no means all-pervading and, if

---

1. Norman Lindsay, Creative Effort (London: Cecil Palmer, 1924), and "The Delicate Art of Bawdy" in Southerly, XX (1959), 30-37.

2. Buckley, Australian Literary Criticism, p.27.

3. See Kenneth Slessor's article, "Australian Poetry and Norman Lindsay", Southerly, XVI (1955), 62-72.

considered to be the sole influence, tends to over-simplify Stewart's work. Stewart's concept of the heroic is multi-faceted (consider Byrne and Kelly within one play) and develops over the whole scope of his writing. His interest in the Elizabethan heroic concept already discussed in relation to Scott and Ned Kelly shows that Stewart's thinking went much farther back than any "anti-intellectual piece of nervous excitement"[1] which the Lindsayian "aesthetic" has been called, and the concept of messianic revolt, for another thing, has a much broader literary connotation than the Norman Lindsay statements in Creative Effort.

Stewart makes direct reference to Lindsay's influence on him as a young man in his critical article on the writer's novels.[2] The novels, with their spirit of revolt and vitality, appealed, as he said, to the mutinous spirit of youth, throwing Christianity and most of the established moralities

---

1. Buckley, Australian Literary Criticism, p.25.

2. D.A.Stewart, "Norman Lindsay's Novels", Southerly, XX (1959), 2-9.

of the world superbly out of the window. Later Stewart was to meet Lindsay and to form with him a long association and friendship.[1] Lindsay illustrated many of Stewart's publications[2] and wrote critical articles on his work. Notable among these is the article from the Bulletin Red Page on Ned Kelly in which he sees the play essentially as a moral conflict between tamed man and lawless man.[3] Lindsay selects only one theme of the play and sees it virtually from the point of view of Byrne. He fails to consider the importance of the more complicated issues associated with the Kelly myth and the national mystique. By explaining the play in this way Lindsay has pinpointed the narrowness of the vitalist interpretation as an explanation of the play or of Stewart's work as a whole, irrespective of the fact that the vitalist factor is explored by Stewart again and again and Stewart refers to it

---

1. See Nancy Keesing, Douglas Stewart. (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1965), p.24.

2. Note particularly the 1946 and 1948 editions of Ned Kelly and Shipwreck respectively, and Sun Orchids.

3. Norman Lindsay, "Tamed Man and Lawless", The Bulletin, 31 March 1943, Red Page.

directly in his critical writing. In his Red Page article "Six Australian Poets", for instance, he uses "life affirmation" as a measuring stick for literary judgment. As he says:

> But, measuring strength against strength, the denial of life always pales before the affirmation - Lionel Johnson before Yeats, Brennan before McCrae, [1]

and in the piece entitled "The Flesh and the Spirit"[2] he pays a direct tribute to Lindsay as an artist and a stimulation to young writers.

Nevertheless, as Buckley has admitted, Stewart, like FitzGerald, if influenced strongly by Lindsay in his early days, produced later work which showed that he had outgrown the Lindsayan effect.[3]

Robert Brustein, in The Theatre of Revolt[4]

---

1. "Six Australian Poets", The Flesh and the Spirit (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948), p.70.

2. The Flesh and the Spirit, p.274.

3. V.Buckley, "Utopia and Vitalism", Australian Literary Criticism, ed. G.Johnston (Melbourne University Press, 1962), p.27.

4. Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (london: Methuen, 1965).

makes an analysis of modern drama as a three-sided type of revolt which he terms, messianic, social and existential,[1] and uses this classification to explain the work of the great modern dramatists from Ibsen and Strindberg, through Shaw and Brecht to O'Neill and Genet. He sees the "theatre of revolt" as an international movement and Stewart's plays could well be explained in terms of the three types of revolt. Brustein described his messianic heroes such as Kelly or Cornelius as setting themselves up in true rebel tradition "in a restless search for coherence in a world of abandoned gods",[2] true disciples not only of the Herculean heroes of the past but of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky or Lawrence. Social revolt is there too in the reaction against the existing social order, even if it is without the contemporary economy of Miller or Osborne, and finally there is an element of existential revolt in which the playwright looks into the metaphysical life of man and protests against it with "a cry of Anguish over the insufferable state of

---

1. Brustein, p.16.

2. Ibid., p.20.

being human".[1]

Although there is no suggestion that Stewart is attempting to reach towards the existentialism of Satre, Albee, Pinter or Beckett, there are elements of existential revolt in Byrne in Ned Kelly and Cornelius in Shipwreck. Their cry is essentially the cry of a man revolting against the inadequacy of his existence. Byrne is, as he says, "the lost bird in the gully" (p.214), and his distaste for the world of Living and Curnow is, as is their distaste for his world, a revolt against something which is part of himself. Sensitive and despairing he pinpoints the weakness of the "safe" element in man when he comments:

> And what they hate is what they fear in
> themselves
> And what they fear is what deep down they love:
> The man that stands up straight as a man in
> the sun
> And dares to be himself. (p.214)

This despair and defeat that Byrne is able to voice clearly is what Pringle has seen in the Ned Kelly paintings of Nolan; it is the sense of loneliness

---

1. Brustein, p.26.

and disappointment at the heart of every Australian who sees the paradox of Australia as a land of the free, while the first Australians came here in chains, or the Rousseau-like freedom of the wild outback which is now being tamed.[1]

Heseltine has noted this lonely alien quality in the Australian writer generally as one who is forced into himself by both an alien landscape and an alien society; made to rely on, as he puts it, "the primal non-ethical energies, in which there is hell as well as delight".[2]

The play then is considerably complex and penetrating in terms of the ideas within it. The separation of one theme is always an over-simplification, as Stewart's ability to see both sides of a question and to use the ironic always tends to refute any seemingly tight argument. Even with the issue of heroic vitalism or the "Ulyssean" quality in man, as

---

1. J.D.Pringle, Australian Accent (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), pp.123-124.

2. H.P.Heseltine, "Australian Image: (1) The Literary Heritage", Meanjin, XXI (1962), 35-50.

Phillips has termed it,[1] there is no simple, direct statement. Kelly, Byrne, Brett and Gribble, among others, show differing reactions to the "give-it-a-go" quality. Stewart is most certainly exploring the romantic-heroic image in the play, and Kelly or Byrne are two types emerging with overlapping characteristics. The richness of the idea pattern within the work makes it a very interesting addition to Australian literature although the very complexity of the ideas and the scope of the action detract from its value as a stage piece.

The verse which supports the play is the blank verse which Stewart has developed as his medium for dramatic writing. It is varied and imaginative as usual ranging again from the tight almost aphoristic statement such as Byrne's "We're four dead trees in a sunset" (p.156) to the long, loping speeches of Kelly. There is no question that Stewart has become exceptionally skilled in welding the poetic to the vernacular, and the verse at no

---

1. A.A.Phillips, The Australian Tradition (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1958), p.104.

time grates or seems out of keeping.[1] Its only major fault is its uniformity which does not permit adequate character differentiation. Stewart is to remedy this weakness in Shipwreck.

The Golden Lover appears to be a step away from heightened heroic themes which Stewart had been working on in The Fire on the Snow and Ned Kelly. It is based on a Maori legend taken from James Cowan's Faery Folk Tales of the Maori, and has a whimsical quality which it shares with no play other than his gay little fantasy, Fisher's Ghost. Closer observation, however, reveals once again the Stewartian ironic quality, the complexity of ideas and the heroic issues with vitalist overtones, which appear in all of his plays.

The Golden Lover can be read at various levels. It can be seen, as H. J. Oliver has pointed out,[2] to be a symbolic development of the theme that

---

1. Notice how Kelly's Jerilderie Letter is very similar in rhythm and imagery to some of the long "justification" speeches in the play.

2. H.V.Oliver, "Douglas Stewart and the Art of the Radio Play" Texas Quarterly, V (1962), p.194.

the romantic lover is merely a creation of the mind, an allegorical representation of woman's desire to have at the same time romance and reality, or, as a fairy tale. Also, in its early scenes, the play is extremely amusing and contains some most discerning philosophical comments about human nature, particularly with respect to women. Consider the following example from Scene i :

Ruarangi: I, too, shall work.
A warrior's work. I shall sit out here in the sun
At the side of the whare, and look at my fishing-lines.

Tawhai: You must not exhaust yourself. And this afternoon
The sun will have moved, you will toil in the cold shadow.
What then will you do, Ruarangi?

Ruarangi: This afternoon
I shall walk with my lines to the other side of the hut
And sit down there and work.

Tawhai: Ah, you are lazy.

Ruarangi: How dare you say such a thing! I am a warrior.

Tawhai: You have never been to battle in all your life.
The men are all women now. My mother says
When she was a girl the men were men indeed.
She says one time -

Ruarangi: From all we know of what happened
When she was a girl, Tawhai, it is best to forget it.

You must not fill your head with loose
imaginings.
You are far too ready to do so.

Tawhai: You are jealous still.
Although I have been your wife for two long
years,
You think I would cast my eyes on younger men
And not so fat, perhaps. Why, Ruarangi,
I should never dream of doing such a thing!
It is true that several youths, especially Tiki
(Who, I think, is insane), watch me with eyes
like dogs'
And even invite me to go for a short walk,
But I do not see them or hear them.

Ruarangi: I believe you, Tawhai.
After all, you are married to me; which is an
honour.
Yet it is true, before you became my wife,
You were somewhat gay with the impudent youths
of the pa.

Tawhai: There were only three or four.

Ruarangi: You told me two! (p.37)

Stewart himself favours this multiple interpretation, seeing the play as a comedy of love, a dramatisation of a Maori legend and a view or vision of life.[1] It is over the consideration of the particular view of life which Stewart is exploring that most of the deeper interest in the play lies and the link between the other works is provided.

---

1. See introduction to the edition (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962).

The whole question centres on the heroine, Tawhai. She possesses many of the heroic elements which are found in Scott, Kelly and Byrne in that she has a romantic dream or vision with which she is possessed and a vitalist quality which she pursues. The difference with Tawhai is essentially that she turns her back on her dream after momentary acceptance. Like most women, Stewart may be saying, she has her head in the clouds of romance and her feet firmly placed on the ground of reality. She has her moment with her "tall and golden man" (p.81) with his hair like flame, and experiences "the wild hours in the night, the midnight torrent of stars" (p.99), and then finally accepts the inevitable lot of the unheroic, in the village where the woman are born for childbirth, the back is bent at the cooking and the slender feminine hands "Lovelier than the toi-toi plumes waving in the moonlight" (p.98) are stained and broken.

Because of her renunciation of the romantic vision, I would argue, Stewart is saying that Tawhai descends to the mundane. She becomes a Curnow, an Elliot or a Living, destroying the element within

her which makes her greater than the ordinary and reverts to the unheroic and ignoble. Tawhai does not have the stature of real love for she accepts, not only the "whare where love is stale" (p.97) and the fat snail of a husband who inhabits it, but also the prospect of clandestine love affairs with the young men of the pa; poor substitutes for her golden man of the mists. Her true character is exposed at the end of the play when she calculates her advantages in choosing as she does. "There is always Tiki" (p.102) she says in her impish way, suggesting very strongly what her future course of behaviour will be.

One cannot argue that Tawhai is returning to reality and "life" as Te Kawau suggests (p.100). She has returned to something which is essentially second-rate. No matter of preaching by old Te Kawau can convince us otherwise, for all his high-flown speeches in the scene of reconciliation. The tohunga is, after all, a classic example of a "bush lawyer" Maori style; a village psychoanalyst exploiting the shallow superstitions of a primitive people. Tawhai sums him up well when she says:

He is old and yellow and evil and feeds on
horror
Like fungus on a rotten log. (p.36)

The philosophy of life that he preaches to Tawhai, obscured though it is by persuasive rolling phrases, is that love is not worth pursuing because it does not last for ever.

Te Kawau: Yes, Tawhai, a man.
Golden in the firelight, but no fire burns for
ever.

The golden lover - what is that but the god of
a dream?-
--- the dream of a night
To fade with the dawn, turn ugly or nothing in
a year, (p.99)

Such an argument would require the acceptance of permanence as a basic criterion for human endeavour; an assumption which would rob life of most of its aspiration. At any rate, the banal world to which Tawhai returns is also transient, so that on this level of argument Te Kawau is denying his own case.

Existence of the type that Te Kawau preaches and Tawhai accepts is realistic, maybe, but basically inferior to the romantic life that she forsakes. Te Kawau is another unheroic symbol, the message being as clearly presented as in the other plays.

Consider Tawhai's horror at her own action when Te Kawau finally persuades her to renounce her lover for ever. "Alas, what have you done?" she says. "You have made me betray my love, And I am sick and ashamed" (p.100). There is never any question of what she has forsaken or any doubt of what the future holds:

> Never again the love sweeter than the summer
> And the fire that leaped from the darkness.
> All darkness now.
> O lost, lost for ever, my golden lover. (p.101)

A feature of Stewart's plays which reappears in The Golden Lover is that the pursuing of the heroic-vitalist aspects of life is always fraught with difficulty. Wera tells Tawhai that when a woman is stolen away by the people of the mist:

> ----------she goes for ever.
> And the yearning for her own people is colder
> than the snow
> And a heavier thought than mist to lie on her
> heart. (p.46)

Life for the person who pursues his dream is hard and uncertain but Stewart is saying here, as in The Fire on the Snow and Ned Kelly, that it is worthwhile.

The minor characters in The Golden Lover

are more fully etched than in Stewart's previous plays. The old women of the pa, Wera and Koura, Tiki and Ruarangi are most convincing and interesting. Small family scenes such as the squabble in Scene i and the flirtation scene before the first appearance of Whana are very well written and dramatic, but the erotic scenes with Whana in the mountains are repetitive and dull, despite the imagery which colours much of the poetry:

Whana: Lovely beyond all that is lovely in the earth
of the sky
And coming so to my feet! Beautiful, Tawhai,
Is the silver Waipa, but the water runs from our
fingers;
Beautiful is the rimu-tree, the green-haired
dreamer,
But her eyes are blind and her feet are fastened
in the earth;
Beautiful is the blue sky and the sky of stars,
Beautiful the white clematis and the wild white
heron,
But sky and flowers and water and tree and bird,
They will not come to the hand. And you, you are
here!

Tawhai: I saw you standing here at the edge of the
forest
Like a tower of sunlight. Oh, Whana, take me
away.
Quick, far in the bush, wherever you like. (p.77)

Stewart has used the fire image again in this play with singular effect. Where the flame is courage and endurance in The Fire on the Snow, here

it is the symbol of love. As Whana says:

> Always the fire!
> Love is a fire in the fern, a fire in the bush,
> A fire on the mountain, Tawhai. Will you burn
> with me? (p.77)

Whana, himself, the symbol of romantic love, is described in terms of the fire image:

> ----------he is tall and golden
> ----------and his hair is auburn
> Like embers glowing in the dusk. And his hands
> are fire. (p.81)

The frequency of passages like this, coupled with the ethereal dream-like quality of the legend, helps to make The Golden Lover the most consistently poetic of the plays, but even within the poetic symbolism of fire a closer look reveals the evasive ironic comment that is a feature of Stewart's work. Just as the pointed comments of Living on the shortcomings of the Kelly ideal tend to cast a shadow on the glowing romantic view, so Te Kawau, cunning commentator that he is, tends to deflate the romantic vision that Stewart himself has set up. His speech, couched in the very symbolism which carries the whole romantic structure, is a classic example:

Te Kawau: Yes, Tawhai, a man.
Golden in the firelight, but no fire burns for ever.
Now dream no more, you who are woman awake.
Know you are woman. Not a flower of the forest nor a fire,
But a woman of the Maori here among your people
(p.99)

Stewart's insight is too penetrating to allow him to paint a picture of life that must rely solely on "the god of a dream" (p.99). It is possibly this ironic quality which appears again and again in his later poetry which gives his work such an interest. He is the realist and the romantic in subtle combination.

Shipwreck, Stewart's last stage play of the 1940's, I consider the least effective of his dramatic writings and the least interesting with respect to the ideas within it. In terms of noble motive the play is a direct contrast with The Fire on the Snow. It is a play full of unrelieved brutality and as much of a blood-bath as Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus. Every character seems to possess an unwarranted degree of cruelty and one cannot find in the play anyone who behaves with real human dignity. It is absurd that R. D. FitzGerald saw in the work "the heroism inherent

in adaptation and survival",[1] and not surprising that he was forced to rely on the ineffectual Heynorick and the old tom-cat to carry the main body of his argument.

Cornelius is an arch villain; Pelsart is a deserter in spite of his protestations to the contrary; Lucretia has only "whiteness of flesh",[2] the simpering Heynorick is only strong for a brief moment and this out of character; Sebastian chooses death to assuage a conscience which rightly reminds him that he is a coward and Van Mylen, possibly an exception to the rule, is dead at the end of Act II Sc. i.

The work is based historically on the wreck of Pelsart's vessel off the west coast of Australia in 1629 and the mutiny and massacre which followed while Pelsart was making his way to Java for assistance. Possibly Stewart, with his interest in heightened action in the Elizabethan sense, is

---

1. R.D.FitzGerald, "Shipwreck: A Poetic Drama", Meanjin Quarterly, VI (1947), 274-7.

2. L.Rees, Towards an Australian Drama (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1953), p.44.

using the incident for a dramatic study of the effect of such a circumstance on human nature, suggesting that there is a strong element of brutality in all people which is exposed under the correct circumstances; that Shipwreck is a dramatic representation of a grown-up's Lord of the Flies.

The play, however, lacks the dramatic depth to show the link between motive and action in this sense. It would have been necessary to analyse in more detail the reaction of characters to thirst, loneliness and sexual deprivation. One is expected to take for granted such matters and watch the response of the characters en masse. There is insufficient psychological probing of human nature to give the work any real interest. It is more of a manifesto of violence; a revelling in a world of lust and horror, presented, as Bradley says, with a distinguishing lavishness of language and all the swashbuckle of the 17th century.[1]

I would argue that the key to the play lies

---

1. D.Bradley, "Second Thoughts About Douglas Stewart", Westerly, 3 (1960), 24.

in the character of the complex and contradictory Cornelius who shares many of the features of Stewart's heroes. He has a vision or dream of power which he sets as his goal; he possesses strange qualities of leadership differing in their type from those of Kelly, but equally effective; he revels in vital living and he is unscrupulous in the pursuit of his goal. At the end of the play he sees his brief strut upon the stage as sufficient justification for his actions and accepts his fate with resignation:

> I am for death.
> I deserve it. Did well in my way. Led them;
> was king;
> Master of them; stormy men; took life like wine,
> Rich in the throat; hot. Did better than you;
> So weak, so pale. (p.306)

The taking of life like wine, rich in the throat, is the essential core of vitalism attributed to Lindsay's "aesthetic" and simple enough in itself. Unfortunately the play is not a direct exposition of the rewards of primitive excess. To begin with, Cornelius is not entirely convinced that his actions have always given him the type of satisfaction that he sought. He liked, as he said,

> Excitement, the battle; but not what happens-
> not after,
> The poor man lying dead. (p.307)

and he seems to accept the fact, unlike Kelly, that what he is doing is wrong, although im his usual slippery way he tries to place the blame elsewhere. There is more of Macbeth in Cornelius than Tamburlaine. He is being torn by conflicting desires and is, in spite of his statements of justification, inherently weak, crying out at the end for release from the fiend in his heart (p.308).

It can be argued also that the vitalist group which includes the mutineers Huyssen and Seevanck as well as Cornelius are rewarded for their activities with violent death. There is no endorsement of their unlawful pursuits by the playwright and the audience feels little sympathy for them. Once again Stewart is evasive and the case remains unresolved.

Recurring minor features in Shipwreck can be seen in relation to The Fire on the Snow and Ned Kelly. There is again the sharp contrast between law and order and the alien, hostile landscape which

forms a setting for the action. That the play lacks the density of interest of the previous works is disappointing considering that it was to be Stewart's last three-act verse play.

There is some significant difference in the language of Shipwreck. The play is much more closely geared to the speech of the characters and contains fewer sections that are poetic in the fuller sense of the word. Stewart has commented on the fact that he had attempted to tie the poetry more closely to the character in question and had tried to obtain a finer distinction of characterisation as a result.[1] He achieves this most successfully with Cornelius whose short nervous utterings are so much in keeping with the man concerned. In spite of this refinement, however, the play remains a very minor work.

Stewart's historical comedy in one act, Fisher's Ghost,[2] was published in an edition limited to two hundred copies thirteen years after the

---

1. "Poetry as a Playwright's Craft", Theatregoer, 5 (1962), 14.

2. Fisher's Ghost (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1960).

appearance of Shipwreck. The play is whimsical and gay with wry comic effect that makes it more akin to some of the poems in The Dosser in Springtime or such later poems as "Two Englishmen" than to the four more serious plays. Even The Golden Lover, which is also a fantasy, has deeper underlying themes that Fisher's Ghost does not possess.

The play moves at the level of farce reminding one of the highly amusing comic scene in Ned Kelly in which Byrne and Kelly hold up the Jerilderie bank and produce the manager without his trousers. Fisher's ghost, the spectral protagonist walks around on stilts, lights exploding tobacco and hoots at everyone. The minor characters make the most exaggerated reactions, ranging from Constable Neeland's unmanly fear to George Worrall's attempt at talking Fisher out of his revenge. This is the situation which brings the play to its amusing anti-climax after the imaginary annual hanging in which Fisher and Worrall decide that they are not sure whether they are there or not.

Fisher and Worrall (together):

The problems of this mortal life
Are more than man can bear;
If I'm not here and you're not here
Then which of us is where?

It seems to me you're haunting me
Or I am haunting you
Or someone's haunting someone else
But who is haunting who? (p.41)

The play is an essentially quaint and playful treatment of an Australian myth, producing its desired comic effect through the maintained level of farce, the simplified action and the light ironic treatment of the theme. R. D. FitzGerald has noted Stewart's use of myth in the play and his attempt at re-stating "the basic myths of the nation"[1] in his work generally. As FitzGerald puts it:

> We have no local mythology, for aboriginal mythology will never really mean anything to us; but we have a few legends, such as the Campbelltown legend of Fisher's Ghost, and we have a few legendary figures such as Ned Kelly. They may not be much to pit against a Greek mythology or a folk-hero such as that other outlaw, Robin Hood; but they are what we have, and they are the beginnings of the missing background against which we must build.[2]

---

1. Introduction to Voyager Poems, ed. Douglas Stewart (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1960), p.12.

2. R.D.FitzGerald, The Elements of Poetry (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1963), pp.26,32.

I feel that Stewart's treatment of the Fisher myth through comedy is a very important clue to a large part of his work. He can see that Fisher's Ghost must be exposed to the comic spirit if he is to be fitted effectively into our Australian background. An oblique light must shine on him as it shone on Kinglake and the English military man who, "erect, superb, absurd" (Collected Poems, p.15) passed each other in the desert. Stewart, the master of the multiple effect, the wry jest and the incongruous situation makes us feel in Fisher's Ghost that there is a balancing, even cleansing effect to be obtained from laughter - especially if it is at ourselves.

In Fisher's Ghost Stewart has given rein to his almost intuitive feeling for the vernacular which makes the characterisation extremely life-like and enhances the genuine broad "Aussie" humour. "Twenty miserable quid!", says Fisher, after Neeland has read the proclamation, "Is that all Fred Fisher was worth?" (p.13).

The ballads interspersed throughout the play are in perfect keeping with the mood of the piece

and help to maintain the lightness of touch which is essential to the treatment of the myth. George's explanation of the murder is an excellent example:

> Forgive me, Fred, forgive me, Fred,
> I only meant to stun you;
> The batten must have slipped in my hand
> And fell too heavy on you. (p.25)

Fisher's Ghost has a genuine theatrical quality[1] and is a gem of its kind. It indicates that Stewart possessed the ability to write plays and, had he progressed from the simple to the more difficult, had he been able to work within a player's theatre and test the "feel" of his dramatic writing, he may have continued in working successfully for the stage and added much more to a dramatic output which has been all too limited.

Stewart's dramatic writing has had a considerable effect on his later poetry. The use of dramatic dialogue refined his technique of writing and opened the way for his effective dramatic and narrative poems, particularly in the ballad form.

---

1. FitzGerald has noted that the play has performance potential, Ibid.,p.32.

Conversational speech, consciously being written for the stage, refined his use of the colloquial and the idiomatic, and the seemingly effortless blank verse of the plays became the basic form of much of the later poetry. By giving him the opportunity to explore human behaviour the verse plays did a great deal in developing Stewart's philosophy of life and, in particular, helped to refine his concept of the heroic.

PART III

THE ASSIMILATION PERIOD

CHAPTER 4

THE DOSSER IN SPRINGTIME AND GLENCOE

The Dosser in Springtime appeared in 1946, five years after *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*. In the intervening period Stewart had written all of his verse drama except *Fisher's Ghost*. The poems in *The Dosser in Springtime* appeared originally in the pages of *The Bulletin*, *Southerly* and *Meanjin Papers*. No doubt many of the poems were written concurrently with the plays and features of the dramatic writing appear in the verse. As Stewart has said of the poems in the collection:

> I was also experimenting with ballad forms, partly because I liked the dance of the rhythm, partly because - having started to write some verse plays by then - I was thinking of poetry in terms of narration-----[1]

The Dosser in Springtime presents Stewart

---

1. Introduction to Douglas Stewart, Australian Poets series (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963), p.vii.

dealing with an Australian landscape in poetry, for the first time[1] although I would argue that the treatment is a very slight one, a mere beginning to what will be a significant contribution to Australian nature poetry, a period of acquaintance and assimilation:

> I was chiefly making myself acquainted with the Australian countryside and its creatures: the coast, the inlets and the bush around Sydney, the mountains at Duckmaloi a hundred miles or so west of Sydney, where I used to go trout-fishing. 2

It is true that Stewart does deal with Australian bush creatures, legendary and real, in these verses. Crickets, crows, lizards, magpies, bats and bunyips become the subject of his poems, but except for "The Bat" - and this is a marginal case - Stewart is not dealing with the bush creatures as they are, but as they appear to him through off-hand whimsical comment. In "The Lizards"

---

1. He had, of course, dealt with the Australian scene in drama in Ned Kelly which, in a sense, represents another aspect of the assimilation period.

2. Introduction to Douglas Stewart, Australian Poets series (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963), p.vii.

he deals with old man lizard as a type of feudal gentleman protecting his rights from an aspiring intruder. The main feature of the poem is the playful quality maintained by the use of bantering vernacular:

> If I were as young and green as you, I'd take
> no risks, my boy -
> Why not go off and drown yourself in the
> glimmering Duckmaloi?

Certainly there are some spirited and interesting descriptions of the lady lizard herself. She has "a beautiful purple tongue", eyes as "red as bulldog ants" and her skin is "a lovely leathery green", but this is there for the effect of quaintness and humorous side comment rather than for its accuracy of description. I feel that poems like "The Lizards" and "The Cricket" make their main impact at this level. There is no hidden symbolic depth for which a reader should search. The poems are too light-hearted, too flimsy to be any more than jeux d'esprit; to read more into them would produce a distortion.

"The Cricket" consists of a series of personal comments by the small creature on his song.

He is not so sure what his piping is all about - "I leave it to you, said the cricket" - but none of it goes to waste if his love has heard. The cricket like the lizard is invested with human qualities and makes human comments on life which are, if daintily odd, not particularly profound or searching. The poem is saved from shallowness by the cricket's revelation of his understanding of his link with the natural world about him. "I like to announce I am I" he says, and goes on in the last verse to suggest that he is part of a universal pattern:

> Here while the grassblades glisten
> Thrusting each frosty spike
> From the earth where we serve our term
> With the poor old grub and the worm,
> I shrill and the tall stars listen.

Poems such as "The Bunyip" and "Child and Lion" are similar to those discussed above except in that they deal directly with a fantasy world. The Bunyip is a legendary Australian creature which has been built up through aboriginal and early folk lore. Stewart's own penchant for things that are "odd,

humorous, out of the way"[1] is given full rein in these poems as it is in the title poem of this collection, "The Dosser in Springtime".

When read on the level of fantasy a poem such as "The Bunyip" or "Child and Lion" has a real life of its own. In the former poem the legendary creature's nature is cleverly manifested. He looks up the waterfall from his lonely pool to the sky and dreams of another world; he thinks on his fearful appearance, his voice, his wicked habits and his genuinely Bunyip-like nature - a fearful creature indeed.

> What did I do before I was born, the bunyip
> asks the night;
> I looked at myself in the water's glass and I
> nearly died of fright;
> Condemned to haunt a pool in the bush while a
> thousand years go by -
> Yet I walk on the stars like stepping-stones
> and I'll climb them into the sky.

If one should read more into the poem its genuine freshness is destroyed. Stewart's comment that the poem is about Original Sin[2] I feel should be

---

1. Introduction to Modern Australian Verse, Vol.II (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1964), p.xxiii.

2. Douglas Stewart, Australian Poets series (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963), Notes, p.59.

disregarded. If the poem is about Original Sin then to begin with one must equate bunyips with humans which is, apart from distorting the original doctrine, a very doubtful hypothesis. Secondly the bunyip's moral thinking on the matter is very muddled. He obviously has committed, and intends to continue committing, crimes of considerable magnitude and yet he thinks that he will achieve salvation. "I'll walk upon the sky" he says complacently, but he is being very optimistic considering the circumstances. I would suggest that he will never reach a heavenly domain if he continues to behave in this way. There is no thought of repentence in his mind. He is obviously deluding himself as Becket would have, had he accepted the Fourth Tempter's advice in Murder in the Cathedral which amounted to doing the right thing for the wrong reason. The bunyip's idea of heaven is also distorted. He intends to make it the location of a joyous romp; a "Bunyipian" paradise. The only other explanation which would be logical is that Stewart is holding the doctrine of Original Sin up for question. This is of course possible because

Stewart develops as his work matures what Vivian Smith has called an "evasive scepticism".[1] The poem may be giving each side of the question without coming to any final irrevocable answer. The poem "Bill Posters" in this collection is also of this type. The reader is left wondering:

> You shall be washed as white as snow
> In a hundred million years or so
> Bill Posters, O Bill Posters.
> As white as a gull you shall rise from the slime,
> But now you are living and life is crime,
> You were born a man and you'll serve your time,
> Bill Posters will be prosecuted.

"Child and Lion" is another fantasy although not attached to the legendary natural world. The poet's imagination is captured by a child sitting on a stone lion and he develops a ballad around the idea of the lion moving off with the child on its back. The poem has a quality as ethereal as J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan and is as delicate and successful in its way.

"The Dosser in Springtime" is an interesting

---

1. Vivian Smith, "Douglas Stewart: Lyric Poet", Meanjin, XXVI (1967), 43.

poem and has a reasonable claim to varying levels of meaning. On the surface it is the reflections of an old cave-dwelling tramp or dosser, as Stewart calls him, who is watching a naked girl bathing in a creek. His responses illustrate his loneliness, his past youth, his burnt-out desire and more particularly his almost complete identification with his environment. The dosser has almost merged into the scene from which he makes his secret observations:

> I've been cooling here for years with the gum-
> trees wet and weird,
> Says the white old dosser in the cave.
> My head grew lichens and moss was my beard,
> The creek was in my brain and a bullfrog in my
> belly,
> The she-oaks washed their hair in me all down
> the gloomy gully,
> Says the white old dosser in the cave.

So well is the dosser made part of the landscape that the symbolic step to looking at the old man as winter and the girl as spring becomes a logical explanation of the poem. The beautiful maiden, her golden dress on the wattle, sports in rapture in the pool; old winter waits and watches but when he arrives she will be gone, for the blending of winter with spring is as unsatisfactory as that of youth

with crabbed age. The scene goes beyond the little Hawkesbury sandstone gully in Cheltenham where the original old tramp lived who inspired Stewart to write the poem. Just as the old man has roamed the outback and brings his dream of the chase to "Bourke" and "Alice", so too will spring be pushed farther and farther inland as winter takes its hold. There is real evocation of the Australian landscape here; there is nothing forced. Stewart is beginning to come to terms with this new Australian environment that has become his home. The playful ballad form of the poem with its brisk rhythm and its refrain help to give it the special whimsical charm for which it has become known:

> Many a time I laughed aloud to stop my heart
> from thumping,
> Says the white old dosser in the cave.
> I saw my laugh I saw my laugh I saw my laugh
> go jumping
> Like a jaunty old goanna with his tail up stiff
> Till he dived like a stone in the pool below
> the cliff,
> Says the white old dosser in the cave.

Stewart is filled with mirth at the suggestion of the poem having heavy erotic overtones and tells with relish the story of its appearance

in an anthology of erotic verse. Nevertheless, the poem's meaning pivots on the old man's desire for the girl and there is a jaunty, irreverent air of sexual naughtiness throughout the whole poem. It is the same type of amoral energy which seems to motivate the bunyip and hints strongly of Norman Lindsay vitalism. This air of irreverence towards conventional standards appears frequently - in "Heaven is a Busy Place" and "The Bishop" are other instances - and gives the whole collection a type of impish, Puckish quality which appears later in modified form in the mature ironic poems of later editions.

"The Magpie" is another poem with obvious symbolic intention. It differs from "The Dosser in Springtime" in that it must be read symbolically or has little meaning at all; there is no realistic level at which the poem makes sense. I see the poem as a comment on an attitude to life which Stewart is evolving at this time and which fits into the whole pattern of his thinking. The magpie, idle chatterer that he is, preaches passivity and capitulation. The wild woman is Australia; wild, fierce, untamed

and almost unattainable. She is beautiful, harsh and promises no reward for the traveller who reaches her shack - "For the snake is her flute and the eagle's wings her lyre". The magpie suggests that she is not worth the pursuit - it may be coincidental that the magpie is a bird of European origin for - "the magpie says sit down".

The answer to the magpie is the answer made by men who take up the fiery challenge of Australia, the men who are courageous and heroic. Stewart adopts a persona who is the symbol of all explorers and men or courage who have refused to listen to the prating knave of a magpie. He is Leichhardt, Burke and Wills, Cook, Smithy and, what is interesting, Thunderbolt the bushranger and the poets Paterson and McCrae. There is a forcible reminder of the poem written some twenty years later, "Mungo Park", in which Stewart equates the explorer with the poet in heroic stature; he has already equated the bushranger in his play Ned Kelly. The magpie achieves the fate he deserves: "Let him shriek it to himself when I throw him in the fire". But even then the reader is left wondering whether the bird has had the last say,

for what the heroic persona is reaching is "the end of time and space" which might be a Pyrrhic victory. Even so the thought remains that it is the struggle itself that matters; a recurring idea in the poet's writing.

In "The River", which follows "The Magpie" in the collection, Stewart looks upon a river as the symbol of his life's course and anticipates later poems in which nature has a deeper meaning for him than it first appears to have. FitzGerald rates the poem high. He sees it as supplying a type of spiritual biography of the poet in which the river that ran down from Egmont's snows in his boyhood came to have symbolic significance to the developing poet.[1] "The River" is a poem more part of Stewart's early life, technically and emotionally and has much less interest than his later writing on nature.

The vein of humour which runs through much of the verse in this selection is a new feature in

---

1. R.D.FitzGerald, The Elements of Poetry (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1963), pp.36-37.

Stewart's poetry. The sombre moods of the early New Zealand collections and the war books have been replaced by a light-hearted approach which runs through most of the poems in The Dosser in Springtime and becomes the main feature of the poem, "Heaven is a Busy Place". This poem shows Stewart's ability to fill a situation with genuine comedy. The poem begins with a satirical treatment of many accepted views of Heaven and is delightfully humorous:

> Heaven is a busy place.
> Those in a state of grace
> Continually twanging the harp
> And Court at eight-thirty sharp.
> Did he do ill or well,
> Shall he be sent to hell
> That scoundrel in the dock?
> The great black Judgment Book
> Says nothing good of him;
> Weeping of seraphim.
>
> Twanging the harp and mourning.
> Three more, a score for burning,
> And always, if not the best,
> Those of most interest.
> And then the deputations -
> Bishops for their congregations,
> Relations and friends of cherubs,
> Mahomet and all those Arabs...
> Arrival with knocking knees
> Of sixty thousand Chinese.

The poet's own view of Heaven is an earthly one; he would, he feels, accept Heaven as "finding it

good". A quiet place, "a gap in time" is the nearest thing to ultimate peace:

> And all is so silent here
> Lying by the gum-tree's root
> I listen to a beetle's foot
> Loud as a midnight thief
> Crash on a fallen leaf.

"The Bishop" is another poem which is rich in humour. The poet reflects in ballad form on the bronze figure of the bishop who is doing - at last - what he should have done in life:

> The rich and the poor, the strong and the weak,
> the priest and sinner and sot,
> Whether they like it or whether they don't the
> bishop blesses the lot.

The delightful little pictures of people; Sarah staggering to William Street before the wine-bars shut, the wharfies up from the 'Loo, the plump old girl in the chauffeur-driven car, the trim little bits from the Cross, all come together to make the poem an excellent comic reverie and a shrewd statement about life.

The reflective comment inspired by a natural scene or an incident is to become an

important feature of Stewart's poetic work. His growing experience of life helps to make the comments more incisive and telling. "Lady Feeding the Cats" is a contemplative poem of this type. The poet is moved to poetic statement by an old lady feeding cats in the Domain. The image of royalty is carefully woven into the poem; she is the benevolent monarch, "trembling with love and power", claiming the return of loyalty from her subjects who, "beggars and rogues" as they are, give of their best in obedience and respect.

> Some recollection of old punctilio
> Dawns in their eyes, and as she moves to go
> They turn their battered heads in condescension.
>
> She smiles and walks back lightly to the slums.
> If she has fed their bodies, they have fed
> More than the body in her; they purr like drums,
> Their tails are banners and fountains inside
> her head.
> The times are hard for exiled aristocrats,
> But gracious and sweet it is to be queen of
> the cats.

"Rock Carving" is possibly the best poem of the reflective type in the collection. The poem reaches back into the imagined past through the stimulus given by some aboriginal rock carvings on the rocks beside the water. There is a delicately

gauged statement of the sense of wonder achieved when looking at anything from the distant past which has been the creation of another human being, now long gone. Stewart achieves it most effectively and establishes a link with the ancient craftsman:

> Fisherman both, and carvers both, old man.
> I know as you how the work goes naked to the weather,
> How we cut our thought into stone as best we can,
> Laugh at our pain, and leave it to take its chance.
> Maybe it's all for nothing, for the sky to look at,
> Or maybe for us the distant candles dance.

The Dosser in Springtime represents a significant change in Stewart's writing for a number of reasons. The poetry, with respect to the natural scene, is essentially that of a man finding his way in a new landscape which he has not as yet fully accepted or understood. The immediate contact he avoids, looking obliquely at the bizarre, the quaint and the fantastic; almost self-conscious in his desire to avoid the direct and the real. The Australian scene is revealed only in fantasy or whimsy but even then one can detect this new land taking its grip. It is in no way surprising to find

the dramatic change in his writing that his next volume set in Australia, Sun Orchids, will bring.

There is change, too, in the poetic form. Having become involved in the dramatic Stewart has applied this to poetry in the ballad owing much, as he says, to the influence of Yeats.[1] The tone of his poetry has also varied. There is a new robust cheerfulness emerging which owes something to the life-affirmation idea of much of his later writing. There is the development of the ironic statement and the impish irreverence running side by side with the elements of the heroic which remains a constant theme.

If The Dosser in Springtime shows Stewart moving closer to his new Australian environment, his next collection of verse, Glencoe,[2] takes him far away again. The poem, or series of poems as it could be called, deals with the massacre at Glencoe

---

1. Interview with John Thompson printed in Southerly, XXVII (1967), p.191.

2. D.A.Stewart, Glencoe (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1947).

on 13 February 1691.[1] The work in the border ballad tradition reminiscent of Scott is written in the Scottish vernacular for the most part and something new for Stewart. His own Scottish background and the fact that his family lived in the Appin hills, where the remainder of the sept of the MacDonalds took refuge after the massacre, probably gave him the necessary interest in the incident and he had researched the period thoroughly in historical records.

I contend that the poem fits into the period of his assimilation with the Australian landscape in that he turned to his ancestral homeland and a Scottish myth while the process of his adjustment to Australia was taking place. Glencoe links with the other writing of the period in that it is really a drama set in ballad form, it deals with an historic event of striking interest and it permits the flexible verse forms, which Stewart had developed, to be used effectively.

The poem reads in parts very much like

---

1. See introductory note to the edition.

dramatic dialogue and it is no surprise that Stewart had intended the work originally as a play, changing his mind because of the scattered nature of the incidents surrounding the massacre. He wrote the ballad finally in one five-day period.[1]

Glencoe consists of sixteen separate poems, each depicting a stage in the story of the massacre, except for the first and last, which are separate poems providing a framework for the Glencoe incidents. The poem opens, as the introductory note states, "at an ale-house in Edinburgh some months after the event". This introductory ballad, and the concluding one for that matter, give the sequence a striking immediacy. The drunken Jock, the shadowy stranger, and even the landlord, are all tied in with the massacre, although the full significance of this is not discovered until the end. Stewart shows throughout the work a clever mastery of the Scottish idiom and pronunciation which adds to the atmosphere of realism; the clannish loyalties, the prejudices

---

1. See interview with John Thompson printed in Southerly, XXVII (1967), 188-198, for comments on the writing of the poem.

are all there in the first ballad.

Ballad II deals with the meeting of the chiefs with the black Earl of Breadalbane who explains the necessity of signing allegiance to William of Orange. The rhythm of the poem has changed and the ringing sounds of the clan names, "Lochiel, Appin, Keppoch, Glengarry" make one nearly able to hear the pipes. The antagonism between MacIan and Breadalbane is well handled in dialogue and the tension which develops is well recreated. Ballad III takes the reader to MacIan's home; doubts, fears and hopes are shared; the tension is mounting. Ballad IV tells of MacIan's ride through the snow to sign the note of allegiance, his delay and his failure to arrive on time. The refrain "Lord, man, you're dead" gives the poem a note of inevitability which makes the impending disaster more poignant. Ballads V to IX relate the planning of the massacre by Breadalbane and Dalrymple, imply the ineffectuality of the king and the sense of contrivance and conspiracy that was behind the massacre. Ballad X describes in rhythmical, loping lines the march of the Campbells of Argyle, under

the treacherous Robert Campbell of Glenlyon, to Glencoe. Ballads XI to XIV describe dramatically the meeting between the men, the deceit and treachery and finally the bloody murder. Ballad XV is a delicate inset lyric like a lament which comments on the horror of the massacre, and Ballad XVI is the concluding section of ballad I.

Glencoe is a well handled piece of work which illustrates Stewart's mastery of the border ballad form and his flexibility within its range, a very different form from the Yeats-like ballads from The Dosser in Springtime. The poem develops a frightening degree of verisimilitude and the fearful massacre strikes horror into the reader's heart.[1] The delicate variation of rhythms from ballad to ballad give the work internal variation and interest. The miniature sequence of two poems which provides the framework to the Glencoe incidents is very clever indeed. Bottle-nosed Jock is so life-like that one can nearly see him and the well known interplay of loyalties among Scottish people is well illustrated,

---

1. I cannot agree with E.A.M.Colman's view that Glencoe has an air of contrivance. Cf. E.A.M.Colman, Poetry Magazine, No.1 (1968), p.28.

the poem revealing with typical Stewart irony at the end the fact that bottle-nosed Jock, who refused to drink with a Campbell, admits himself a Campbell on his father's side; a point which H. M. Green has noted.[1]

Glencoe, apart from its intrinsic interest, illustrates Stewart's versatility as a writer of verse. He is always experimenting and coming forward with a new form at which he shows himself adept. It is also worthwhile noting that Stewart has given the poem a meaning beyond the historical recreation which, although very true to facts, is but one of countless examples of human brutality. The pathetic picture of a child's hand on the snow is sufficiently universal to make Glencoe a far more penetrating statement that it would at first appear to be.

> Sigh, wind in the pine;
> River, weep as you flow;
> Terrible things were done
> Long, long ago.
>
> Glencoe, "XV"

---

1. H.M.Green, A History of Australian Literature, Vol. II (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961), p.960.

PART IV

THE AUSTRALIAN PERIOD: THE POETRY OF MATURITY

CHAPTER 5

SUN ORCHIDS, THE BIRDSVILLE TRACK, RUTHERFORD, THE FLOWERING PLACE

Sun Orchids[1] shows Stewart dealing with the Australian natural world at close range. In this aspect the poems are similar to many of the nature poems in Green Lions although there is a change in the object of observation and the penetration of the viewer's gaze.

In The White Cry Stewart's response to nature had become generalised, in Elegy to an Airman and Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier he had directed his attention to the question of world war, in Glencoe he had written about Scottish history and in The Dosser in Springtime he had dabbled in fantasy and symbol; any objective description of the natural world being incidental, as his poem "The Bunyip" illustrates.

---

1. D.A.Stewart, Sun Orchids (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1952).

In Sun Orchids, however, Stewart becomes fascinated by the Australian natural world, particularly the things in it which are small and in some way striking; tiny wild orchids, fungus, a spider against the moon, a centipede under a stone, moss on a wall, bees on wet sand. He seems to look closely at the objects, hoping to find their essence; to distil their absolute reality. Stewart is not using the things he describes as symbols, as he had attempted to do in a number of the poems in The Dosser in Springtime, but more as an example of analysis of a sector of the universe in order to reveal the secret of the whole. He is like the scientist undertaking an empirical study to establish a universal truth.

Such an approach to description requires the most acute observation and the clearest of diction. The tiny nature poems of this collection are beautifully sculptured pieces, pictured as if the poet had brought his poetic microscope down closer and closer to these tiny things and had seen into their very being. For example:

Only in the deep secrecy
Of bracken-fern and maidenhair
One shaft of pink is glowing here
And poised in tiny ecstasy
With all life's hunger in its look
And arm outflung for the sweet shock
The trigger-flower strikes the bee.
"The Gully"

or

The slim green stem, the head
Bent in its green reverie;
So like the first discovery
Of what the hands could make
Or spirit dream out of rock
In the deep gully's shade -----

All that has come to pass
Where gum-trees tower in millions
Lies in the globe of silence
The little wild orchids hold,
Lifting each hollow hood
Nine in a row from the moss.
"Nodding Greenhood"

Others of this type such as "Helmet Orchid", "The Bees", "Sun Orchids", "The Fungus" and "Native Inhabitant" are all examples of Stewart's work in this field. The bandicoot's appearance and personality in "Native Inhabitant" are revealed in the first verse of the poem:

Red the dust and brown the rock,
Red and brown lie the leaves and bark,
And red and brown came stealing forth
An incarnation of native earth:

The sun orchids, the flying ants and the fungus are almost visual:

> Those clear blue flowers will stand on the blue
> sky's brink
> And close in rain and open in sun and look
> Except for the cup at the centre, some flecks
> like sand,
> More like a distillation of sapphire air
> Than anything out of the earth;----------
> "Sun Orchids"

> Pouring straight up in their excited millions
> Like smoke from the hot earth in narrow rings
> The flying termites, blind in their own bright
> shower
> Whirl in a crystal tower----------
> "Flying Ants"

> ----------speckled and crimson
> With gaping throat and tentacles wavering out
> Under a log in the sun;----------
> "The Fungus"

It is interesting to notice how carefully Stewart observes his adopted landscape. Possibly one of the most striking things about many Australian wild flowers is their perfection in miniature. They are often "one shaft of pink" (p.2) in an otherwise uniform green or grey world; more often than not they are rare, small and beautiful. Consider the first verse of "Helmet Orchid" which illustrates this point:

Oh such a tiny colony
Set amongst all eternity
Where the great bloodwoods stand!
It is the helmet orchid
That will not lift itself
Higher than a fallen leaf
But waits intent and secret
Leaning its ear to the ground.

Sometimes the natural scene is captured with a lyrical beauty which is as musical and as delicate as some of McCrae. For example, "Tongue Orchid" is as beautiful as "Pierrot's Song", and its rhythm just as fetching:

Day's clear blue and sunlight dappling
Apple-gum and she-oak sapling,
Like long fine wings the petals flash.

However, it is when the poet sees the link with the universal within the thing itself that these nature lyrics develop great depth and significance. The trigger flower is no isolated phenomenon but has "all life's hunger in its look"; deep within the fungus "Secret and black still gurgles the oldest ocean", a patch of grass is "where the little kingdom's creep". The important thing to Stewart is not that these things symbolise a wider world but that they are its very essence.

They are, as he says of the frogs in his poem "In the Rain", "the very heart of the bush". It is only when he distils this essence that he can link nature with a broader concept. In Stewart the things he paints are the things themselves; beautiful, arresting paradoxical, which form links in the vast pattern of a universe which he is struggling to explain. It is the almost mystical quality within each creature, which, when discovered, will provide the key to the whole. As R. D. FitzGerald says:

> Each poem tries to capture some small creature - it might be a flower or an insect or a bird - and to embody it imaginatively in the smallest possible space: to compress it, as it were, into an instant of its being, so as to show its momentary reality. The poet's expressed aim was to make each poem no bigger than the thing itself; for a treat a small thing at any length would not be true to its objectivity. The motif in each poem is thus not simply descriptive, but lies in this mystical conception of a poem as representing within itself the reality within and behind some external of the objective universe. There is a further implication which cannot be grasped from any single one of these short poems, but which is realised after a complete study of them - namely, that every object in the universe both embodies, and is embodied in, an underlying reality. 1

---

1. R.D.FitzGerald, The Elements of Poetry, (St.Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1963), p.38.

FitzGerald denies, correctly I think, that this mystical concept of natural essence is the same concept as Wordsworth's pantheism, although he does see some link between the two.[1] To Wordsworth there was a Christian God looking through all nature, to Stewart the power beyond is vague, unpredictable and unknowable; nature being as FitzGerald pointed out, a plurality of parts each representing the whole rather than being absorbed in it.

I would agree with FitzGerald's interpretation of Stewart's concept of a "power-beyond" for there is certainly not the universal immanence of Wordsworth in his writing. There are few references to God and those which exist are usually oblique. More often than not the "power-beyond" stands off and watches - as Stewart does himself - sometimes with satisfaction, sometimes with remorse, the universe at which the poet marvels. I see this power not so much as an omnipotent, all pervading God, but as something more of a mystical mother-earth figure standing behind and observing "indifferent and amused".

---

1. R.D.FitzGerald, p.40.

There are direct references to such a figure in Stewart's writing such as in "Mahony's Mountain" in which he describes the double-tailed orchid, using the image of the fox, as "whistled from earth by a wilder call than ours". In "Wombat", the first poem in The Birdsville Track, he says:

> We have one mother, good brother; it is Her laughter
> That sends you now snorting and plunging like red flood-water
> To earth again.
>
> "Wombat"

I believe, however, that Stewart does make some poetic statement about the universe itself and its interrelating pattern. It is, to begin with, one of paradox. In the goldfish pool there is "the devil in the shape of a water-scorpion" and also the beautiful fantail which "trailed his flame like a comet". There is beauty and "naked evil" side by side. The poet sees on a day when "the cassia bushes unfurled their pale soft yellow stars", "a big green centipede ----------rippling down the hill". The mopokes with "murderous beak and talons" also "blaze in love". There is always this duality; beauty and terror, goodness and evil

within Stewart's natural world and man takes his place in it. When the yellow butterfly dances itself out of the sky and is snapped up by the trout, the fisherman - Stewart himself - looks for a similar fly:

> The yellow butterfly,
> O yellow butterfly,
> Has danced itself out of the sky
> And danced itself down on top
> Of the eddy so bright in the rocks.
> O never again to be seen
> Where the river-grass grows green,
> Like a flying buttercup:
> Dark, dark the trout rose up.
> I stare at the ripple and sigh
> And look in my little box
> In eddies of feathers and hooks
> For a yellow butterfly.
>
> "The Yellow Butterfly"

This inter-connecting feature in nature which the poetry reveals coupled with the almost empirical quality of the particular nature poems tends to reveal Stewart as writing with a type of neo-Darwinian, evolutionary view of the universe; not God everywhere but nature everywhere, perplexing yet ultimately comprehensible.

Such an interpretation of Stewart's later writing throws considerable light on his attitude to man which is, I would argue, basically

humanistic.[1] His standards for man are high but he sees him as capable of solving his own problems through the adoption of a suitable code of behaviour which is tied in with Stewart's view of the heroic. Although there is no need to carry the parallel farther it is easy to imagine Stewart, taking the side of Dr. Rieux in Camus' novel, The Plague, both in Rieux's adoption of an heroic line and his rejection of Paneloux's passive Christian view. Evidence for Stewart's support of evolutionary humanism in his later writing can also be found in his movement to the scientist as an heroic figure, as poems such as "Rutherford" or "One Yard of Earth" indicate. I am not suggesting however that Stewart becomes rigid and didactic in his writing because he is never at a loss to produce the ironic and the comic:

> Darwin, that diffident wise patient man
> Who proved that men were monkeys as they are
> "One Yard of Earth"

---

1. E.A.M.Colman in a recent review of Stewart's Collected Poems has made a similar comment. Cf. Poetry Magazine No. I (1968) p.31.

The two poems, "Terra Australis" and "Worsley Enchanted" are similar in that they both illustrate Stewart's growing interest in the narrative form of poetry.[1] "Terra Australis" is particularly interesting in that it presents the explorer hero in an oblique light. Both Captain Quiros and William Lane are deluded; each led a fruitless expedition and even when brought to life in a fantasy meeting in mid-Pacific still were confused.

The poem is delightfully ironic; Lane travelled east to find paradise, Quiros travelled west for the same reason. Neither believes that he could be dead or that his search could be idealistically unreal. At the end they sail off - in opposite directions:

> At that the sea of light began to dance
> And plunged in sparkling brine each giddy brain;
> The wind from Heaven blew both ways at once
> And west went Captain Quiros, east went Lane.

The poem would seem on the surface to be extremely cynical and in opposition to the stand Stewart has

---

1. See his comments on narrative poetry in his introduction to Voyager Poems, ed. Douglas Stewart (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1960), p.12.

taken to the simple heroic pursuit of a "star" in previous writing. This is not necessarily correct. The paradox Stewart sees in nature he sees also in human endeavour; it is ironic that man's greatest efforts aften seem to lead to nothing. As he says in The Fire on the Snow:

> We dreamed, we so nearly triumphed, we were defeated
> As every man in some great or humble way
> Dreams, and nearly triumphs, and is always defeated,
> Four Plays (p.30)

If he is being critical of anything in "Terra Australis" it is not of the heroic element in either man. That they were confused in their mission may well be the case for there is every suggestion that both men had "giddy" brains. What I feel Stewart is doing is laughing and applauding at the same time. The wry smile at life is something which is to become more and more part of Stewart's writing but it never takes away his belief in the dignity of the human struggle.

"Worsley Enchanted" is a long narrative poem in seventeen parts. It deals with the Shackleton Trans-Antarctic expedition and takes the

reader through the various stages of the journey right up to the arrival of the men at Stromness Bay after the nine-hundred mile journey of the little James Caird. The poem tells the story with clarity and growing excitement. The variations in verse form and the building up of an Antarctic atmosphere are similar in a way to The Fire on the Snow but there is an interesting attempt in "Worsley Enchanted" to establish a sense of mystical enchantment around the men, especially when they are crossing the mountains of South Georgia to the whaling station. The sense of isolation, of fear but never despair comes through effectively in the poem; the dogged persistence of the men and their courage in the face of seemingly impossible odds makes "Worsley Enchanted" a fine statement of human fortitude equal to, if not better than, The Fire on the Snow. The understatement of the Shackleton narrative both in characterisation and in theme adds to the final force of the work as a whole.

The poems in the collection The Birdsville Track[1] can be divided into two sections; the first,

---

1. D.A.Stewart, The Birdsville Track and Other Poems (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1955).

consisting almost entirely of nature poems, about the coast, the hills and streams of the Monaro, down to the Murrumbidgee at Gundagai, and the second about the Birdsville Track; that area which runs three hundred miles northward from Marree in South Australia to Birdsville in Queensland:

> through semi-desert country of red and purple stones packed hard and flat like a Roman tessellated pavement and touching the fringes of Sturt's Stony Desert and the red sand-ridges of the Simpson Desert. 1

The nature poems of the first section are very similar to the poems in Sun Orchids. There is the same closely observed and sharply-etched descriptions of the natural world which were typical of the previous edition. "Mosquito Orchid", "Mignonette Orchid" and "Firetail Finches" are excellent examples of Stewart's ability in this type of writing. The little poems are essentially Australian and perfect of their type.

In "Christmas Bells", "The Last of Snow" and "Flowering Bloodwoods" there appears to be a change in the descriptive method Stewart has used.

---

1. Author's note to the collection.

In the first poem he has sought for a striking visual image to carry the weight of the description. The Christmas bells are immediately created as

> ----------wild children
> Running in their straight frocks
> Of boldest orange and vermilion
> All day in the sandstone rocks;
> "Christmas Bells"

the flowering bloodwoods are

> ----------a wave you cannot see
> And it goes foaming over the ridge
> From bloodwood-tree to bloodwood-tree
> Splashing the mountains tall and huge.
> "Flowering Bloodwoods"

and the last patch of snow in the Snowy mountains is

> Like a little white calf forgotten
> While sunlight bares its teeth;
> "The Last of Snow"

Stewart's main effect in previous nature poems in Sun Orchids and the poems already mentioned is usually gained through close observance of tiny detail using an image later in the poem to emphasize an already created effect. For instance, in "Mignonette Orchid", the tiny beetles crawling up the orchid's stem are brought into close focus

and it is not until the end of the poem that the poet allows his imagination play and he introduces an apt simile to describe them; "Like little green bats on a steeple". The Christmas bells in contrast are "wild children" all through the poem. The "have the sun's hot flesh" and "they dance all day in the heat". It is a challenging image and an effective poem if different in technique.

Stewart's interest in the essence of nature and the evolutionary pattern of the universe appears once again in this sequence of poems. There could be no better example of the poet's attempt to capture nature's beauty and sculptured perfection than in the celebrated poem, "The Snow-Gum". The gum is in itself a beautiful piece of nature's handiwork and the "silver light" recreates it with almost magical precision on the snow.

> Leaf upon leaf's fidelity,
> The creamy trunk's solidity,
> The full-grown curve of the crown,
> It is the tree's perfection
> Now shown in clear reflection
> Like flakes of soft grey stone.

The poem is very austere and is stripped of all imagery. It reads more like a statement of

perfection and requires the reader to make his own imaginative leap. Stewart has commented on an idea from Goethe which prompted him in writing "The Snow Gum", but whether the poem reveals that the tree

> begins as a seed and somehow that seed knows that it must grow into that perfect shape [1]

is not important in itself for the appreciation of the poem. It is a poetic statement which demands a direct insight from the reader. He, too, needs to look "into" the scene as the poet has done.

Two poems which illustrate Stewart's linking of the natural world with a primeval, evolutionary pattern are "Frogs" and "Crab and Cicada". In "Frogs" the comment is explicit. The sound of the frogs could have been, the poet says, that sound which

> Crept out of time's enormous waste
> When bright as dew some bubble broke
> And life awoke, and stared, and spoke.
> "Frogs"

---

1. From a discussion of the poetry of Douglas Stewart reported in Poetry Magazine, No.5 (1966), p.4.

In "Crab and Cicada" there is the recreation of the experience the poet has when he sees a cicada in the claws of a crab. His mind brings to light the fact that the cicada is a part of "the green earth" which ages ago "climbed the cliff where no wave reaches and towered with the powers that strike from the air". It is an uncanny, eerie sensation, one with that he experienced so many years ago in New Zealand as he watched the milking or he felt later when observing silkworms in a box. It is the meditative lyric of Stewart's maturity, searching in its insight and restrained in feeling. The universe is never without surprise to Stewart, although it is not often that he tries to recreate this in terms of a mystical experience. Sometimes in this collection, however, he ventures into a fantasy world.

In "Foxes" he talks of the "fox" in his heart which leapt forth to meet the fox of nature at Duckmaloi and in "Brindabella" he brings the mountain to life to talk "to itself in snow". He carries this idea a farther step in his poem, "The Rivers", in which he imagines that rivers still

maintain their individuality in the cycle from mountain to ocean and back again. I feel that these are far from Stewart's best nature poems. His writing moves too much within a developmental pattern which relies for its impetus on the poet's ability to recreate a real world, and these semi-mystical excursions are but minor deviations from the main course of his work. Stewart's nature poetry is not poetry of pretty fancy but poetry of keen observation and deep meaningful reflection.

There are two playful poems in this section of the sequence which bear mention. "Cicada Song" is a light-hearted parody of the thirteenth-century English poem, "Cuckoo Song", in which he substitutes the Australian cicada for the English cuckoo. There is none of the joy lost in the transportation from one country to another and the poem is a delight:

> Sumer is icumen in,
> Loud sing cicada!
> Bull jo nippeth, black snake slippeth
> Sun biteth harder.
>
> Treetops ring with peals of light
> (Merry sing Greengrocer!)
> Red bark cracketh, blue smoke tracketh,
> Bushfire stealeth closer.
> Sing cicada!

Black Prince with his ruby eyes
Stareth at the season;
Doubledrummer drunk with summer
Shrilleth past all reason.

Sing Floury Baker, Yellow Monday,
Bright as sun on bough;
Sing cicada, sing cicada,
Sing cicada now.

"Blackberry Pie" is equally light and gay:

Blackberries glistening under the moon,
Plucked and cooked to eat with a spoon -
Oh, my!
Blackberry pie,
Blackberry pie and cream...
Who'd have thought, my lovely lady,
(Midnight hair and milkwhite body)
To sup in bed on such a dish
All that hungry love could wish,
Any time this side of dream?

The second section of poems in the collection which deals with the Birdsville Track area is something new to Stewart in terms of detailed description of landscape, but the same touch is recognisable. The arid outback comes to life in one poem after another:

Here the world ends in a shelf of purple stone
Naked in its long war against the sun;
The white stones flash, the red stones leap
with fire:
"The Fierce Country"

Critics, however, differ with regard to <u>The Birdsville</u>

Track. Vivian Smith considers the lyrics inferior to the "Snow" poems, missing what he calls the "precarious tender delicacy" and finds instead "a poster, extroverted quality", for all the effectiveness of the imagery.[1] It would seem that Smith could be reacting against the differing landscape which requires a varied poetic treatment to Stewart's mind. He has written about the harsh Australian environment with telling effect in Ned Kelly. In the play the outback is a reported landscape which "burns the mind" (p.141) like a gun barrel; in The Birdsville Track the effect is so immediate it seems to burn the body too - it is not surprising that the quality of the poetry differs:

> But each in his glinting mound
> Of pebbles raked in a heap,
> Without one mark to show
> There is a man below
> Except that long low shape,
> Lie the nameless ones;
> And cook like bread in an oven.
> "The Nameless"

The sharp etching of this "lean land",

---

1. Vivian Smith, "Douglas Stewart: Lyric Poet", Meanjin, XXVI (1967), 48. E.A.M.Colman, on the other hand, sees the poems as most successful. E.A.M. Colman, Poetry Magazine, No.I (1968), 28.

as in so many of Stewart's poems, forms the backdrop for human action. The people are a special leathery breed which measure up to the challenge that such a life makes. There is the dogger who treats his lonely, unrewarding existence lightly:

> Who'd live the dingo's life
> For love and such small profit?
> Why, old Jack Clark he'd do just that
> And he thinks nothing of it.
> "The Dogger"

There is the Afghan, Alec Scobie the whipmaker, the black drover and old Father Vogelsang. But even here Stewart's evasive comment and searching irony strip the poems of any soft romanticism for

> Those who tread the Birdsville Track
> Make a whip for their own back.
> "The Whipmaker"

Old Father Vogelsang's task seems a fruitless one, the rainmaker has no success and the bones of the nameless lie beneath glinting red pebbles which bear no distinguishing mark. It seems that the men who toil in this red land may be as giddy in their brains as Quiros and William Lane, and Stewart introduces a sardonic comment for those who take the place lightly:

But what they wrote on a bullock's skull
A bullock could write on theirs.
"The Humorists"

In spite of this the poet is able to see beauty within the terrible scene; the golden butterflies mate over the ruins of an old house, the papery daisies are yellow and white like suns and the dwarf wild-hops lift up their "tufts of crimson flame" (p.29). He sees back through time realising that the saltbush and waterbush had an ocean ancestry and even the place names themselves have an intrinsic beauty:

Dulkaninna, Koperamanna,
Ooroowilanie, Kilalpaninna -
Only the names
In the land remain
Like a dark well
Like the chime of a bell.
"Place Names"

The final picture of the area, however, is one of decay; Birdsville itself has shrunk:

To a town so small
That blink but once
And the plain is bare.
"Birdsville"

and the drovers with their herds have all gone in

a dust-storm. Probably there is no better statement in all of Stewart's writing of the indomitable human spirit and his use of myth to embody it. This not red land which has shrivelled everything else could not shrivel that.

> You can see yet
> In the great wide street
> The heroes, the giants
> Still striding that land:
> Glaring and huge
> From the Simpson mirage
> Leichhardt come out
> Dripping red sand,
> Or with groan of bullock
> And screech of hub
> Blind Charles Sturt
> From his Stony Desert.
>
> "Birdsville"

Stewart's next and last separate edition of verse to date, Rutherford,[1] appeared seven years after The Birdsville Track and Other Poems, in 1962. There is still the rich variety in types of poetry which range from personal lyrics, nature poems, whimsical life comments to the long narrative title poem of the volume.

The nature lyrics of the "Sun Orchid" type,

---

1. D.A.Stewart, Rutherford (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962).

such as "Firetail Finches", "Goldfish" or "Yarrangobilly" are becoming rare; the poems seem now to contain more and more comment on life. This comment is often an implied statement about the pattern of the universe as in "The Silkworms" or a direct reference to Stewart's own life as in "Firewheel Tree". The personal comment, however, is now restrained and mature, unlike that of his work of twenty or thirty years before. There is a serenity about these poems. They are not grave, for the sparkle is still there, but they represent the considered statement of a man who has come to terms with life.

"The Silkworms" makes its greatest impact in the implied comment about the rightness of the universe. The silkworms, now bred to captivity over generations, recreate the whole history of their species through the various stages of metamorphosis they undergo in their life cycle. It would seem that as moths with "their pale curved wings------ marked in the pattern of trees" they would fly from their inhibiting box to freedom. This is not so, for the evolutionary wheel has turned and their

part in nature's pattern is to remain where they are. Deep instinctual urges seem to move them but they stay within the box where they are safe and experience vicariously the sensation of freedom only in the moment of mating; the moment when the cycle of their life begins again. "Their soft wings whirr, they dream that they are flying". Any direct human implications in this poem must be applied very lightly. To call the poem a meditation on "the limitations of the human world"[1] appears to be reading too much into it. The poem is at first level essentially about silkworms and is treated with Stewart's customary empirical skill - I am reminded of the nature poems in Sun Orchids in which the intrinsic qualities of the creatures are isolated - and the implications or generalisations remain in the background. There is the question of the evolutionary link between all creatures of the universe, the universal problems associated with freedom and action,[2] the compensation

---

1. Vivian Smith, "Douglas Stewart: Lyric Poet", Meanjin, XXVI (1967), 49.

2. E.A.M.Colman, Poetry Magazine, No.1 (1968), 29.

of love; features which, in varying degrees are common to all living things. It seems to me that the poet could have added the two lines - in thought content anyway - from his poem in Sun Orchids:

> And thought with satisfaction - or dim remorse?-
> That all was well with this strange universe.
> "The Goldfish Pool"

Stewart in his later poems is to develop his idea of the heroic dimension in man by extending heroic endeavour to encompass a much broader field of action. In fact those who stand and wait are to become heroic in Stewart's eyes as his poem "Sarcochilus FitzGeraldi" implies, and "Mungo Park" in The Flowering Place makes explicit.

Stewart's hero in fact comes to be more and more a man who thinks than a man who rushes forth with physical vitality. He is a far more sophisticated hero than the vitalist hero of McCrae who, "pledged to girls and golden song", seems to think of nothing beyond himself. It is as though Stewart has discovered the flaw in the Byronic hero,[1]

---

1. Cf. J.F.Burrows, "An Approach to the Plays of Douglas Stewart", Southerly XXIII (1963), 94 ff. for his comments on the "Byronic" quality of the protagonists in Stewart's verse plays.

and has realised that human survival depends on the subjugation of those individualist impulses which motivated Kelly and Cornelius.[1]

Piccard and Rutherford, the heroic figures of the Rutherford collection, are both scientists who make their exploration in terms of knowledge. Piccard is an explorer-scientist and therefore has a dual role. Nevertheless his main function, as Stewart comments, is to study "the cosmic rays and the weather", thus making his contribution to mankind. Stewart sees something comic in his rising into the air in a balloon and diving to the bottom of the ocean floor in his bathyscaphe:

> Yet when I think how from that deep
> Where life first moved and flickered
> His craft rose up like some great egg
> And hatched Professor Piccard,

but hastens to add that his singularity of purpose

---

1. Cf. Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), p.701 ff. for his comments on the individualist impulse. Russell concludes his analysis of the Romantic hero with: "man is not a solitary animal and as long as social life survives, self-realisation cannot be the supreme principle of ethics".

as symbolised in his vertical movements represents the quality which distinguishes man:

> When I reflect how his brave stance
> Of perpendicularity
> In posture and in motion both
> Is man's whole singularity,

Piccard remains "our emblem and our hero".

The long narrative poem, "Rutherford", which deals with the great pioneer of atomic physics, Earl Rutherford of Nelson, is a poem which reveals the deep responsibility of the scientist-hero to the service of mankind. Stewart pictures the scientist as pondering the possible outcomes of his discovery and deciding finally that man will eventually be able to cast aside his long history of "killing and ravaging" and

> ----------put his trust,
> Despite the whole long course of human
> barbarity,
> In what must supplant it, the rule of the
> strong and the just.

There is a faith and optimism here which is basically humanistic. Stewart sees in the dedication of men like Rutherford the hope for the future of humanity.

Now must begin, a clear new turn in history,
And there in his atoms, cramped in so small a span,
It glittered before him and rayed away out to infinity.
How perilous and dark, how enigmatic a course
It seemed to set whirling there for the race of man
Now bound to the inmost force of the universe-

"Rutherford" has a poetic depth which is gained largely from the wheel image used in the poem; the universe, the whirling electrons in the atom, the water-wheel his father made, all form part of a unity which is sustained throughout the long narrative. The effect is one of satisfying coherence. As McAuley has put it:

> His main device in this imaginative realization is impressive and powerful: the recurring image of the wheel, which has a truly structural function in the poem, binding together the waterwheel and other things made by Rutherford's father, who was a wheelwright, and the galactic wheel of the universe, and the planetary system, and the solar course, and the tiny system of the atom. It is this that lifts the poem above flat discursiveness and gives it imaginative strength and coherence. 1

Within the Rutherford collection there is also a number of whimsical poems which make a comment

---

1. J.McAuley, The Literature of Australia, p.370

on life. "Fence", "Terrigal" and "Nesting Time" are among these and provide a delightful interlude between poems of more serious intent. Stewart's series of tributes to his friends could be included in this group, with particular mention of "Sarcochilus FitzGeraldi" and the similar poem, "Cunningham's Skink", in which the poet muses on the perpetuation of a man's memory in a wild orchid in the first place and a tiny lizard in the second. Stewart's ability to make capital of the humorous, the quaint and incongruous comes to the fore in all these poems which are very entertaining in their way.

Stewart's ability to write a delicately balanced lyric has already been mentioned, and the two poems "Windy Night" and "The Dryad" are good examples. The delicate play of the image in the latter poem, the simplicity of the words, coupled with the music in the rhythm and rhyme patterns make the lyric essentially satisfying:

> There is a dryad in the lemon
> But which, but which is she
> In all those shapes so like a woman
> That nestle in the tree?

If I could tell what tender pair
Of pointed breasts are hers
Among so many clustering there
Where soft the green leaf stirs,

If I could see what deep recess
Of shadow hides her hair
And all that dappled nakedness,
I'd stretch my hand to her;

But love and light and thorny branch
And nymph and lemon-tree
They mingle so I can but watch,
But watch and let her be.

Stewart makes his first return to Maori legend after The Golden Lover in this collection with "Easter Island" and "Tanemahuta". The poems are recreations of the old stories and have an atmosphere of legend about them. In "The Garden of Ships", which also appeared in 1962 in a limited edition with pendrawings by Norman Lindsay,[1] Stewart takes up the story of the romantic haven discovered by Marco Polo in which ships had been swept into the jungle by the force of flood tides. The fantasy creation which Stewart paints is an idyllic garden frequented by dusky maidens and no doubt symbolises the world of peace which all men

---

1. D.A.Stewart, The Garden of Ships (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1962)

long for. Even in this ideal world Stewart's irony finds its way. Such a world cannot hold and soothe the human spirit forever and the men must leave for a place:

> Somewhere over the mountains, across the ocean
> With its broad golden fields, its urgent cities,
> Its ports where ships still sailed on whatever venture,
> Their homeland lay; and though like waterlilies
> The fair girls swam and the birds sang in rapture
> And the old ships dreamed in the jungle; even so,
> Now they were strong they could reach it, and they must go.

The Rutherford collection shows Stewart's poetic technique at its most mature. The long, relaxed rhythmic lines of discursive poetry in "Rutherford", the simple, direct image of "The Dryad", the perfectly attuned ghost-rhymes and half-rhymes of "The Silkworms", the ballad form of "Professor Piccard", are all examples of Stewart's technique at its best.

The nineteen poems in the section entitled The Flowering Place in the Collected Poems[1] represent

---

1. D.A.Stewart, Collected Poems 1936-1967 (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967).

Stewart's latest poetic intention. There is no dramatic difference in the types of poems in the selection. There is the same variety once again; the beautiful direct nature lyrics such as "Early", or the lyric with the striking image, "Moreton Bays". There are contemplative poems on life, such as "Two Englishmen" or Reflections at a Parking Meter" , light humorous pieces such as "Flying Crooked" or the witty "Four-Letter Words" and there are poems dealing with the heroic in man such as "Mungo Park", the last poem in the sequence.

What is significant is that Stewart makes an explicit statement about the heroic in this selection showing a tendency to couch more of his poetry in the discursive mode. The implications about the heroic dimension have now become direct statements. Any man who directs his attention to a worthwhile task is heroic in Stewart's eyes. He had moved a long way from the days of his verse drama.

> Each to his trade, and mine's to walk, Sir Walter;
> Yet in the countries never seen by men
> Who's paid the greater price, who's gone the further,
> I with my travels, you with your midnight pen?

My road lies far; yet it could be, my friend,
In mile and mile we go or book and book
We take the same strange journey in the end.
What can we do but wish each other luck?
"Mungo Park"

In fact Stewart's attitude to human endeavour has become mellowed and broadened to include those many who seem to achieve "virtually nil". His inherent and deep affection for humanity[1] is shown in poems like "B Flat" in which he considers the Reverend Henry White, who discovered nothing more than that owls hooted in the measure of B flat.

And found that each one sang, or rather hooted,
Precisely in the measure of B flat
And that is all that history has noted;
We know no more of Henry White than that.

and the boys who sleep their lives away on the beach or "Ride the bright waves in the sun". They, too, have their merit and join the extended hierarchy.

Wake then you curious heroes,
Shaggy and blond and alone,
And leaping from night and its hollows
Ride the bright waves in the sun.
"Boys Asleep on the Beach"

---

1. Colman has noted this point. E.A.M.Colman, Poetry Magazine, No.1 (1968) p.30

Stewart is never cruel; the oblique, the wry, the impish, the whimsical appear but never the heavily satiric or the sardonic. Even D'Albertis, who, like humans the world over, attempts to convince himself that he is right, is given the benefit of the doubt because his deed furthered the cause of science; the two Englishmen who "erect, superb, absurd" passed one another in the desert were only exemplifying the quaint and curious customs of their race. It is one of Stewart's gifts that he can "see the joke" and he can "take it" too, often holding up what he believes, to scrutiny and humour. "One Yard of Earth" and "The Peahen" are comments on the evolutionary pattern. They are, again, the poems of Stewart's maturity in which he shows that he is able to be deep and witty at the same time, revealing that he both loves and understands the world and the people in it. The lasting impression his writing gives is not that his work could be criticised for narrowness on intellectual withdrawal - he needs no defence on this score[1] - but rather that

---

1. Cf. G.Lehmann, "Posterity will value Stewart's poetry", Sydney Morning Herald, 11 November 1967, p.20.

he has written wisely and well or many things, revealing a deep degree of involvement.

The poetry from Sun Orchids onwards is without doubt Stewart's best. He has come to understand his new homeland and writes with keen observation and insight of the coast and inland of Australia. His nature poetry at this stage is particularly interesting in its effect. The poems, although close studies of tiny things show Stewart's awareness of the vast evolutionary pattern of the universe. He writes with a poet's sensitivity of the duality in nature, of the essential and sobering paradoxes which make up the long continuum from the minute creatures of a pool to the most developed and complicated of all - man.

Stewart's deep interest in human action is shown in his matured concept of the heroic and his movement from the isolated Nietzschean heroes of the plays to the calm, socially responsible heroes of the later meditative poems.

Stewart can be found in sober mood and, when he is, his writing becomes deeply reflective

and restrained. Possibly the best example of this is his recent poem, "Elegy". It shows the poet's deep sense of life's value, his feeling for the poignancy of death, for loss and regret. It is fitting that a quotation from this poem, written in the most simple language, should conclude a study of Stewart's poetry. Its restraint, dignity, balance and rich human quality are typical of the writer himself:

> I weep for what is no more, the strong personality,
> The person walking the world in all its vitality;
> I mourn for those who mean nothing to anybody
> But once were the pillars of the earth and held
> me so steady.

> So once again but not with so much hurt
> I may admit what I know for the truth in my heart,
> Life was the half we had and the fine lovely part
> But death was the rest of the bargain right from
> the start.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

Publications by Douglas Stewart (First editions only)

(i) Poetry

Green Lions (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1936).

The White Cry (London: Dent, 1939).

Elegy for an Airman (Sydney: Frank C. Johnson, 1940).

Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1941).

The Dosser in Springtime (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1946).

Glencoe (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1947).

Sun Orchids (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1952).

The Birdsville Track and Other Poems (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1955).

The Garden of Ships (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1962).

Rutherford (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962).

Douglas Stewart, Selection and Introduction by the Author, Australian Poets Series (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963).

Collected Poems, 1936-1967 (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967).

(ii) Plays

Ned Kelly (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1943).

The Fire on the Snow (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1944)

The Golden Lover (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1944)

Shipwreck (Sydney: Shepherd Press, 1947).

Four Plays (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1958)

Fisher's Ghost: An Historical Comedy (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1960).

(iii) Prose

A Girl with Red Hair and Other Stories (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1944).

The Flesh and the Spirit: An Outlook on Literature (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948).

The Seven Rivers (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1966).

(iv) Edited Books

and Keesing, N. Australian Bush Ballads (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1955).

Modern Australian Verse, Poetry in Australia, Vol. II (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1964).

Voyager Poems (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1960).

Tishler, J. The Book of Bellerive (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1961).

(v) Articles

"Norman Lindsay's Novels", Southerly, XX (1959), 2-9.

"Poetry as a Playwright's Craft", Theatregoer, II (1962), 14-15.

"On Being a Verse Playwright", Meanjin, XXIII (1964), 272-277.

"From a Discussion with Arthur Ashworth", Poetry Magazine, No.5 (1966), 3-6.

"An Interview with John Thompson", Southerly, XXVII (1967), 188-198.

Secondary Material

(i) Books

Brown, M. Australian Son, The Story of Ned Kelly, Including The Jerilderie Letter (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1948).

Brustein, R. The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama (London: Methuen, 1965).

Buckley, V. Essays on Poetry Mainly Australian (Melbourne University Press, 1957).

Elliott, B. The Landscape of Australian Poetry (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1967).

Ewers, John K. Creative Writing in Australia, 5th ed. (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1966).

FitzGerald, R. D. The Elements of Poetry (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1963).

Green, H. M. A History of Australian Literature, Vol. II (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961).

Green, H. M. Australian Literature, 1900-1950 (Melbourne University Press, 1951).

Hadgraft, C. Australian Literature, A Critical Account to 1955 (London: Heinemann, 1960).

Heddle, E. M. Australian Literature Now (Melbourne: Longmans, Green & Co., 1949).

Huxley, J. Essays of a Humanist (Penguin, 1964).

Johnston, G., ed. Australian Literary Criticism (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962).

Keesing, N. Douglas Stewart, Australian Writers and Their Work, ed. G. Dutton (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1965).

Kenneally, J. The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang (Melbourne: Hearne & Co., 1934).

Kippax, H. G. Introduction to Three Australian Plays (Penguin, 1963).

Kresner, H. A. Notes on the Fire on the Snow (Sydney: Grahame, 1963).

Lawson, M. A Companion to Douglas Stewart's Ned Kelly, Companion Series (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965).

McCormick, E. H. New Zealand Literature: A Survey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

Miller, M. and Macartney F. T. Australian Literature (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956).

Nolan, Sidney Ned Kelly: Twenty Seven Paintings by Sidney Nolan (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964).

Phillips, A. A. The Australian Tradition, Studies in a Colonial Culture (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1958).

Ponting, H. G. The Great White South: Or with Scott in the Antarctic (London: Duckworth, 1921).

Pringle, J. D. Australian Accent (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963).

Rees, L. Towards an Australian Drama (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1953).

Semmler, C., ed. Twentieth Century Australian Literary Criticism (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1967).

Wright, J. Preoccupations in Australian Literature (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965).

(ii) Articles and Reviews

Armstrong, M. Review, Three Australian Plays, The Bulletin, 6 April 1963, p.36.

Bradley, D. "Second Thoughts About Douglas Stewart", Westerly, No.3 (1960), 23-27.

Buckley, V. "Utopianism and Vitalism", Australian Literary Criticism, ed. G. Johnston (Melbourne University Press, 1962) pp.16-28.

Burrows, J. F. "An Approach to the Plays of Douglas Stewart", Southerly XXIII (1963), 95-108.

Chisholm, A. R. Review, The Fire on the Snow, Australian Quarterly, XVII (1945), 115-116.

Colman, E. A. M. "Review, Collected Poems of Douglas Stewart", Poetry Magazine, No.1 (1968) 27-31.

Farwell, G. "The Kelly Gang", Australasian Book News, I (1946), 123-124.

FitzGerald, R. D. "Shipwreck: A Poetic Drama", Meanjin Quarterly, VI (1947), 274-277.

Grano, P. L. Review The Flesh and the Spirit, Southerly, X (1949), 86-89.

Green, D. "Fire and Snow", Review Collected Poems, Nation, 3 February 1968, 20-21.

Haley, M. Review The Birdsville Track and Other Poems, Southerly, XVII (1956), 102-103.

Hanger, E. "Australian Drama", The Literature of Australia, ed. G. Dutton (Penguin, 1964).

Heseltine, H. P. "Australian Image: (1) The Literary Heritage", Meanjin Quarterly XXI (1962).

Howarth, R. G. "Two Radio Plays", Southerly, VII (1946).

Johnston, G. Review Four Plays, Quadrant, X (1959), 109-110.

Kelly, J. C. Review of Fisher's Ghost, Australian Quarterly, XXXIII (1961), 128.

Lehmann, G. "Posterity Will Value Stewart's Poetry", Sydney Morning Herald, 11 November 1967, 20.

Levis, K. Review Glencoe, Southerly, X (1949), 112-114.

Lindsay, N. "The Delicate Art of Bawdy", Southerly, XX (1959), 30-37.

Lindsay, N. "Tamed Man and Lawless", The Bulletin, 31 March 1943, Red Page.

Lindsay, P. "The Voice of Australia", Southerly, IX (1948), 125-127.

Macartney, K. Review The Fire on the Snow and The Golden Lover, Meanjin, IV (1945), 65-66.

McAuley, J. "Douglas Stewart", The Literature of Australia, ed. G. Dutton (Penguin, 1964).

McCuaig, R. Review Rutherford, The Bulletin, 19 January 1963, 36-37.

Mann, C. "Poet and Dramatist" - a biographical note - Australasian Book News, I (1947), 339-341.

Moore, T. Inglis Review Sun Orchids, XV (1954), 116-118.

Oliver, H. J. "Douglas Stewart and the Art of the Radio Play", Texas Quarterly V (1962) 193-203. Review The Flesh and the Spirit, Meanjin, VII (1948), 272-273.

Phillips, A. A. "Douglas Stewart's Ned Kelly and Australian Romanticism", Meanjin, XV (1956) 260-272.

----- Review, Fisher's Ghost, The Bulletin, 26 October 1960, 74.

Rees, L. "Ned Kelly and Australian Verse Drama", The Bulletin, 3 March 1943, Red Page.

Reid, O. "Douglas Stewart - Poet, Playwright & Critic", Tasmanian Education, XV (1963), 243-8.

Rhodes, F. W. W. Review The Dosser in Springtime, Southerly, VIII (1947), 170-175.

Ryan, J. "Ned Kelly: Flight of the Legend", Australian Literary Criticism, III (1967), 98-115.

Semmler, C. "The Best of Stewart", Review Collected Poems, VII (1967/1968) 41.

Simpson, R. A. Review, Rutherford, Quadrant, VII (1963), 90-92.

Slessor, K. "Australian Poetry and Norman Lindsay", Southerly, XVI (1955), 62-63.

Smith, B. "Island Revels", Review Shipwreck, Southerly, X (1949), 53-55.

Smith, V. "Douglas Stewart: Lyric Poet", Meanjin Quarterly, XXVI (1967), 41-50.

Tory, A. "The Shade of Ned Kelly", Harbour in Heaven (Sydney: G. M. Dash, 1949), pp.21-25.

Wall, A. Review, "Elegy for an Airman", The Bulletin, 27 November 1940, Red Page.

----- Review, Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier, 8 October 1941, Red Page.