

## CHAPTER 1

### DOUGLAS STEWART: THE EARLY YEARS 1925-1938

Throughout the many scholarly works that focus on Stewart's place in Australian literature, the word that recurs in respect of Douglas Stewart's creative work is 'versatile'. One of its first appearances is in Nancy Keesing's *Douglas Stewart*, which begins with the precise statement: 'Douglas Stewart is the most versatile writer in Australia today — perhaps the most versatile who ever lived in this country. He is a poet whose poetry and nature as a poet are central to everything in which he excels'.<sup>93</sup>

Stewart was not only a poet whose early philosophy that the closer one moves towards nature the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth, developed as a line of continuity which contributed to his total philosophy; this chapter focuses on Stewart's life and poetic ambition in New Zealand until his move to Australia as an expatriate in 1938. As a mature poet he was then concerned to apply this pantheism to modern responses regarding humans and their experiences. The purpose of the introductory part of this chapter is to clarify the theme of the dissertation — Douglas Stewart's creative impulse; the second part involves a discussion of the poet's visit to England where he met poets Powys and Blunden. At this time he also journeyed to his ancestral home in Scotland. Upon his return to Australia in 1938 he was offered a position with Cecil Mann at the *Bulletin*.

Stewart was also a distinguished verse dramatist, a successful editor, particularly of the Red Page of the *Bulletin* from 1940 to 1960,<sup>94</sup> and a participant of some repute in journalism and publishing. Some of his literary criticism was published in two volumes: *The Flesh and*

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<sup>93</sup> Keesing, N., op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Ballyn, S., and Doyle, J., *Douglas Stewart: A Bibliography*, Goanna Print, Canberra, 1996, p. 1.

*the Spirit: An Outlook on Literature*<sup>95</sup> and *The Broad Stream*<sup>96</sup>, following which he has written and published three autobiographical works: *Springtime in Taranaki*,<sup>97</sup> *The Seven Rivers*,<sup>98</sup> and *Fishing around the Monaro*<sup>99</sup>. His diary, *Douglas Stewart's Garden of Friends*,<sup>100</sup> was published posthumously by his daughter, Meg Stewart. The autobiographies enlighten the reader about the impulse behind much of the poetry. At the same time, it is from the poetry itself, and *Letters Lifted into Poetry* (1946-1979),<sup>101</sup> that Stewart's personal philosophy is evinced.

Stewart's preference for 'impulse' over 'stimulus' is influenced by R.D. FitzGerald, who admits in his essay that he admires Stewart's sizeable literary output as well as its 'unremitting quality' in a life-long effort to show his readers 'our own world — to which we are largely blind — and also, indeed, ourselves'.<sup>102</sup> FitzGerald recognises the many sides to Stewart's work and views this work 'within the outer framework of its versatility'. His definition has been extremely helpful:

This versatility is of the utmost importance when considering the matter of motif — by which is meant the impulse behind theme, the directive force that develops the thought in a poem. Motif, although not necessarily or entirely the reason why a particular theme may have been chosen by the writer, is yet the reason why the chosen theme takes the shape it does; it brings the poem from an arbitrary beginning to an end determined by the temperament or cast of mind of the author himself'.<sup>103</sup>

So, 'impulse' is the force that develops creative thought, and this is the reason for choosing this term instead of 'stimulus', which is more generally understood as an incentive, an enticement, that provokes the poet into action but does not necessarily develop his creative

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<sup>95</sup> Stewart, D., *The Flesh and the Spirit: An Outlook on Literature*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1948.

<sup>96</sup> Stewart, D., *The Broad Stream: Aspects of Australian Literature*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1975.

<sup>97</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Springtime in Taranaki: An Autobiography of Youth*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1983.

Note. All References to *Springtime in Taranaki: An Autobiography of Youth* appear as (S.T.).

<sup>98</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Seven Rivers*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1966.

<sup>99</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Fishing around the Monaro*, 1966, reprinted from *The Seven Rivers*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978.

<sup>100</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Douglas Stewart's Garden of Friends*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1987.

<sup>101</sup> Persse, J., editor, *Letters Lifted into Poetry* (1946-1979), National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2006.

<sup>102</sup> FitzGerald, R.D., op. cit., 1963, p. 26. Reprinted in *Considerations*, ed. B. Kiernan, Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1977, pp. 143-168.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid*, p. 144.

thought.

With the idea of this meaning of ‘impulse’ in mind and the way it affects creative thought, ‘Douglas Stewart: The Early Years’, follows this line of thinking and the poet’s observation of images of the New Zealand landscape. Stewart develops its colours and moods, symbolism, mysticism and spirituality — as well as metaphysical, sometimes surreal descriptions that are often Romantically inclined in his early poems, in keeping with the poetry of past masters such as Yeats and Wordsworth. As with his later poems, when considered together they constitute the framework of a philosophy of mysticism,<sup>104</sup> even though, as Brian Kiernan says in his introduction to *Considerations*, ‘Instead of asserting a philosophy they ironically and teasingly raise issues of the significance of life.’<sup>105</sup> Stewart’s philosophy is a personal philosophy that promotes the idea that mankind and nature are one, comprising the spirit of the earth.

Notable biographical accounts of Douglas Stewart’s literary achievement as well as important and interesting parts of his life have been included in books and essays of literary criticism by Nancy Keesing, Clement Semmler and David McCooley. In *Douglas Stewart: Australian Writers and their Work*,<sup>106</sup> Keesing includes a short biography, but as a friend and colleague of Stewart, she was mainly interested in discussing his creative work, so her biography is short and factual. This is understandable, especially as it was written as an appreciation before she had the advantage of Stewart’s autobiographical works. Clement Semmler begins *Douglas Stewart* with a biographical sketch before launching into an appreciation of Stewart’s literary works.<sup>107</sup> Although Stewart and Semmler were friends, the introductory biographical account follows the pattern set by Keesing, whereas David

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<sup>104</sup> Semmler, C., *Douglas Stewart*, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1974.

<sup>105</sup> Kiernan, B., ed., *Considerations*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1977, p. xx.

<sup>106</sup> Keesing, N., op. cit., 1969.

<sup>107</sup> Semmler, C., op. cit., 1974.

McCooley's essay written in 2002, 'Douglas Stewart 1913-1985',<sup>108</sup> had the advantage of Stewart's autobiographical works as a guide, so he is able to enlarge and develop the works of Keesing and Semmler. However, it is through Stewart's own tales of his life and creative works that a considerable wealth of information emerges and contributes to a greater understanding of his work as a whole. In *The Uncertain Self*, Harry Heseltine argues 'That the accomplishments of Australian literary prose have broadened as well as deepened during the past two decades is attested by the new excellence discovered in autobiography'.<sup>109</sup> Earlier autobiographies in Australia, 'either exist in isolation or retain interest chiefly as a social observation'. Since the 1950s, there has been 'an abundant and continuing harvest'.<sup>110</sup> As well as referring to Alan Marshall's *I Can Jump Puddles*, (1955), and *This is the Grass*, (1962), as important works of the period under discussion, Heseltine cites other recent autobiographies such as those of Douglas Stewart<sup>111</sup>. He also mentions Katherine Susannah Prichard,<sup>112</sup> Martin Boyd,<sup>113</sup> and Colin MacInnes,<sup>114</sup> all of whom 'write with the assurance that Australian life has become dense enough to make an account of growing up worth telling for its own sake, as well as for its representative quality'.<sup>115</sup> Donald Horne,<sup>116</sup> and Hal Porter<sup>117</sup> are also mentioned as two autobiographers whose work is worthy of praise.

Stewart's love of fishing in both New Zealand and Australia is the subject of the 'Foreword' to *The Seven Rivers*:

Though there is a chapter about swordfish in this book, another about snapper, and

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<sup>108</sup> McCooley, D., 'Douglas Stewart 1913-1985', *Australian Writers, 1915-1985*, S. Samuels, editor, Gale Group, Detroit, 2002, pp. 355-366.

<sup>109</sup> Heseltine, H., *The Uncertain Self*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>111</sup> Stewart, D., *op. cit.*, 1983. An Imprint Lives edition was published by Collins Angus & Robertson Sydney, 1991. References throughout this thesis are to this publication.

<sup>112</sup> Prichard, *Child of the Hurricane*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1963.

<sup>113</sup> Boyd, M., *Day of My Delight*, Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1965.

<sup>114</sup> MacInnes, C., *To the Victors the Spoils*, MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1950.

<sup>115</sup> Heseltine, *op cit.*, 1986, p. 19.

<sup>116</sup> Horne, D., *The Education of Young Donald*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1967.

<sup>117</sup> Porter, H., *The Watcher on the Cast Iron Balcony*, Faber, London, 1963,.

even a piece about pig-hunting, it is mostly a book about trout-fishing in Australia and New Zealand, and mostly meant for fishermen. It contains very little expert advice, for I don't claim to be an expert. I wrote it simply for the pleasure of going fishing again in retrospect along my favourite rivers.

It is also perhaps a kind of nature book, since you do meet a lot of interesting birds, beasts, bugs, and human beings when you are walking up the trout streams; and it is also a kind of autobiography ... but only of those parts of my life which I consider really important and significant, such as catching a lot of kahawai at Kawhia, or losing that ten-pounder in the Badja.<sup>118</sup>

In his memoir of fishing, Stewart suggests that subjects of his observation of the natural world contribute to his creative impulse; that is, the natural world he describes here in 1966 is a clear statement of his total philosophy that there is a spiritual relationship with nature if one seeks it, as he does throughout this thesis. It is not Stewart's love of fishing that appears in his poetry; as he says, in this 'Foreword', his subjects are the insects, birds, animals and wildflowers he was able to observe while walking up the trout streams; for example, the Australian 'Mosquito Orchid' and 'Brindabella' magpie and the New Zealand 'The White Cry' and 'Tui' occur in his collections. Remembering the magpie, Stewart says, 'The magpie looked at us and faintly carolled, as if to say he *might* come again some time, and then flew off. He landed, eventually, in a poem'.<sup>119</sup> The natural landscapes of both New Zealand and Australia were life-long interests, and this fills not only much of his poetry, but also his verse dramas, autobiographical collections and his later biographies and memoirs, all of which will be discussed in later chapters.

Moreover, it is from Stewart's poems and verse plays that the most interesting and important aspects of his life and his life's work arise. Poems such as 'Elegy' and 'Memories of a Veteran'<sup>120</sup> show the close family ties and values he inherited from home, values Stewart insists are the basis for living. Experiences and memories stemming from childhood and youth in New Zealand provide a background to his philosophical thought that matured as he himself

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<sup>118</sup> Stewart, 'Foreword', op cit., 1966.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>120</sup> Stewart, D., 'Elegy', and 'Memories of a Veteran', op. cit., 1973, pp. 232-236.

matured. Stewart went into battle for New Zealand expatriates, contributing to the Red Page, attacking the modernists and publishing and praising the work of those whom they devalued. While to some extent Stewart inherited the cause from Cecil Mann, one-time editor of the Red Page, he made it very much his own fight because of his association with New Zealand publishers.

Throughout this thesis it will be obvious that Stewart was not a man to be either stereotyped or silenced, even though the modernists in New Zealand tried to do that. A discussion outlining the role of Allen Curnow and Denis Glover suggesting new styles and new subjects different from *Kowhai Gold* poems, for example, resulted in a modernist literary form new to New Zealand while Stewart's poetry was excluded from publication (See Chapter 2). Stewart always insisted on his right to an independent opinion, and he expressed this opinion as editor of the Red Page of the *Bulletin*, in his creative work and through other media such as literary journals, for example, *Southerly* and *Meanjin*, as well as through interviews,<sup>121</sup> personal correspondence and criticism.<sup>122</sup>

Stewart begins the autobiography of his boyhood and adolescence, *Springtime in Taranaki: An Autobiography of Youth*, with a quotation from 'Wakeful in the Township',<sup>123</sup> by poet Elizabeth Riddell who, like Stewart, left New Zealand in her youth: 'Who would live in a country town / If they had their wish?', to which he states that he, for one, would (S.T., p. 11).

Stewart writes about growing up in Eltham, New Zealand. While this early autobiography can be appreciated for the light it shines on his boyhood and young adulthood,

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<sup>121</sup> Thompson, J., op. cit., 1977, 115-126. Originally published in *Southerly*, Vol. xxvii, No. 3, 1967.

<sup>122</sup> Elliott, B., ed., *Portable Australian Authors: The Jindjorobaks*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1979, pp. 239-244.

<sup>123</sup> Riddell, E., *Poetry in Australia Volume II, Modern Australian Verse*, chosen by Douglas Stewart, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1964, pp. 75-76.

the clarity of language and expression is also striking. His enjoyment of poetry is obvious in this short autobiography as it is in *The Seven Rivers*, his second autobiographical work, focuses on his love of fishing in New Zealand and Australia, and provides material for many of his poems such as ‘The River’, discussed later in this chapter. FitzGerald suggests that Stewart did not have a biography, but ‘probably the only really relevant biography is found in the poems themselves — by implication mostly’.<sup>124</sup>

Stewart was born in Eltham, Taranaki, near Mount Egmont, on 6 May 1913, to Mary and Alexander (Alec) Armstrong Stewart. His mother, Mary FitzGerald, was of Irish and Welsh descent, while his father, a practising lawyer, was of Scottish descent. Stewart’s grandfather, Alexander Stewart, lived in Dunedin briefly before returning to Scotland where he was advised to try Australia in the hope of healing a lung condition. In Leigh, Victoria, and in Essendon, a suburb of Melbourne, he was Presbyterian Minister and rose to the exalted position of Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Australia. Stewart says of his father that he ‘really was outstanding in character and scholarship, in which he inherited the minister’s brilliance. Stewart’s father was dux of Scotch College in Melbourne and matriculated at the unheard-of-age of thirteen’ (S.T., p. 18). Alec Stewart was eventually admitted to the Supreme Court as a barrister, but rarely took advantage of the position. He returned to New Zealand and settled in Eltham, Taranaki, where he preferred to live a quiet family life as a solicitor.

Stewart says the family home was ‘full of books’ of all sorts: cowboy and detective novels and golf books; in the drawing-room were sets of Kipling and Stevenson, and a set of the works of Anatole France. Stewart senior also subscribed to the Sydney *Bulletin* and as Semmler points out, ‘from his regular reading of it young Douglas became interested in

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<sup>124</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., 1963, p. 36.

Australian lore and legends and the mysterious attraction which this much larger country offered'.<sup>125</sup>

On his several trips to Australia, Alec Stewart took his son with him to see the family at 'Ardshiel,' the family home in Melbourne, so it is not surprising that Douglas formed his own ideas about this land with its interesting and exciting tales of bushrangers and other masculine stereotypes such as drovers, shearers and other heroes of the *Bulletin* in its nationalist phase. By the 1920s, the *Bulletin* did not publish ballads, but these nineteenth century stereotypes drawn from ballads and stories, had become part of what Russel Ward would later call the Australian Legend. Stewart read the ballads and the *Bulletin's* Red Page as well as novels such as Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms*. Such stories made interesting popular reading, even though contemporary literature was focused more on the urban landscape than the rural; the themes of Australian stories appealed to his imagination, and with reinforcement of visits to Australia with his father, the young Douglas Stewart found the Sydney *Bulletin* more exciting than current New Zealand weeklies.<sup>126</sup> Stewart's first poem published in the *Bulletin*, titled 'Ballad' (1933), was written in a semi-ballad style which, Stewart claims, 'some *Bulletin* writers were practising at that time' (S.T., p. 200). Its acceptance was to bring him 'a joy such as I had never known before; and I cherish it' (S.T., p. 201). The stories and poems developed the lad's appreciation of Australian literature so that, when he was later employed by the *Bulletin* he looked back nostalgically at the legend and its

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<sup>125</sup> Semmler, op. cit., 1974., p. 16.

<sup>126</sup> New Zealand also had a 'nationalist' phase in the 1890s. This was reflected in *Zealandia, A Monthly Magazine of New Zealand Literature by New Zealand Authors*, edited in Dunedin by William Freeman (1889 - 1890). A second magazine, *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine*, published in Auckland 1899-1945, featured New Zealand poetry, stories, articles and illustrations. This magazine also included work by several nineteenth century New Zealand landscape painters; this was a commitment by the founding editor, F.E. Baume, to produce a 'distinctly New Zealand colouring', *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, R. Robinson and N. Wattie, editors, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1998, p. 398. (References to *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* are shown throughout the thesis as OCNZL)



stereotypes.

At the age of twelve, Stewart began his high school education at New Plymouth Boys' High School. While he was a student at the high school he wrote his first poem, and he later wrote that he had a recollection of 'how awful the poem was' (S.T., p. 124). It was about a river: 'If a trout in thee doth quiver / By this placid pool so deep / where the mournful willows weep' (S.T., p. 126) and was published in the school magazine, the *Taranakian*. This achievement gave the young poet the impetus to read more poetry by Shakespeare, Herrick, Milton, Wordsworth, Burns, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Browning and Tennyson, from a school anthology, *Smith's Book of Verse*: 'magic, sheer magic, all of them. La Belle Dame sans Merci hath thee in thrall ...'. These early influences contributed to Stewart's early admiration for traditional forms; that is, Romantic notions conveyed by language which was popular with Georgian poets. This preference remained with him when he wrote *Green Lions* and *The White Cry*, even though he began to experiment with modern forms and language which continued throughout his poetic career.<sup>127</sup> Stewart's experiments with modernist themes and forms contributed to his total poetic oeuvre throughout his career,<sup>128</sup> yet some literary critics remained unaware of this development in his poetic preoccupations.

When Stewart had read all the poetry in the school library, a teacher, Jas Leggart, arranged for the young poet to read books from the New Plymouth Public Library. Although Leggart wanted him to read Swinburne, Stewart says he couldn't, because 'I discovered the poetry of my own times, and that, so I found, was the diet I most deeply needed (S.T., p. 128). He was excited by the newness, the freshness and the immediacy of poets such as Yeats, Walter de la Mare, W.H. Davies, Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, Richard Church, Humbert Wolfe, Rupert Brooke and John Freeman, and when Leggart introduced him to John

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<sup>127</sup> Sharkey, M., op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Sharkey, *ibid.*, p. 5.

Masefield's poetry, it was 'something altogether wild and bold and modern, and so, with infinite pleasure, I found him' (S.T., p. 128):

What things have the farm ducks seen  
That they cry so — huddle and cry?

Only the soul that goes,  
Eager. Eager. Flying.  
Over the globe of the moon,  
Over the wood that glows.  
Wing linked, necks a-strain  
(J. Masefield, S.T., p. 129)

'What was this?' Stewart asks, 'What extraordinary punctuation. What strange vanishing of verbs. What haunting, mysterious imagery! What did it all mean? I could not quite make it out, but it was magic' (S.T., p. 129). A reading of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets followed the discovery of Masefield and others, and so, armed with ideas from Masters, the young Douglas Stewart experimented with language and punctuation as he continued to write poetry. This, then, is an indication of his developing interest in modern poetic ideas which were popular in Europe and America at that time. He is vague about the poems he wrote for the *Taranakian* while he kept his 'masterpieces' in an exercise book. He says 'the few that I do remember are mostly associated, one way or another, with disaster' (S.T., p. 129); then he continues: 'There must have been other pieces about fishing or shooting, for I recall Jas Leggart widely suggesting that I should "try to get off the hunting theme",' so the young poet investigated other ways to express his creativity; significantly, this investigation was the commencement of his experiments with more profound issues related to human experiences and the development of his personal philosophy in accord with Sharkey's suggestion that Stewart was accommodating himself to modernism in poetry and language throughout his career.<sup>129</sup> Stewart was interested in adventure and heroism even at that young

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<sup>129</sup> Sharkey, M., op. cit., p. 5.

age ‘even though he did not keep copies of his juvenilia’. His parents became worried when they saw a poem in which the phrase ‘and death I dread’ appeared, but they were happier when he explained that ‘a poem is not to be regarded as a personal revelation but detachedly, as a work of art’ (S.T., p. 130). An older and wiser Stewart wrote that he was ‘surprised that at so early an age I was aware of it,’ and as he later perceives, a poem is not to be regarded as a personal revelation but, as a work of art, not a prediction of the future (S.T., p. 130). Even then, he showed an early recognition of philosophical concepts in literature which would later become what I have chosen to call ‘lines of continuity’, throughout his poetic career.

Unlike many adolescent boys, Stewart found pleasure in the study of English, French and Latin as well as the literary activities associated with them. He continued to write, and at age 14, he ‘began to bombard the *Bulletin* with poems I thought fully up to that paper’s august standard’, but the *Bulletin* did not agree. At the same time, he wrote a translation of Ovid’s ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ in which ‘I took a just pride’. There was also a translation of Horace’s ‘Fons Bandusiae’ in which a mountain, not in the original, appeared, ‘but after all, what are you to do when you have to find a rhyme for *fountain*?’ (S.T., 140), so he rhymed ‘mountain’ and ‘lantern’. His justification is an excuse for his life-long poetic use of the symbolic mountain / fountain imagery as well as the pragmatic rhyming device.

Stewart’s attempt to experiment with Walt Whitman’s style of writing was poor enough for Leggart to call it ‘a lot of rubbish’, a statement with which Stewart agreed. He was about fifteen at that time, and so he began to write sonnets, and later considered them ‘not too bad for his age’ (S.T., p. 131). Some of this work was sent, not to the *Taranakian*, but to the *Taranaki Daily News*, the leading newspaper of New Plymouth. To Stewart’s great consternation, the poems were printed on the children’s page, not because they were childish, but because this was the only page on which verse was printed. However, there were misprints and the poet was indignant: ‘The fragrant chips of new-cut pines were fragrant

chip' which, he understandably complains, 'wasn't at all the proper rhyme' (S.T., p. 131).

Stewart's career in journalism began at New Plymouth Boys' High School where he became editor of the *Taranakian*, for which he wrote the House Notes and cryptic items of school gossip considered to be 'the most exquisite shafts of wit' (S.T., p. 135) by the boys and Stewart himself. He went on to write the school song, the words of which he refrains from quoting, except to say they were based on the school's motto, 'Et comitate et virtute et sapientia', which translates as 'comradeship, valour and wisdom':<sup>130</sup>

Learning at school  
In strife to keep cool,  
Playing the game,  
We take for our name  
Comradeship, Valour and Wisdom,  
Comradeship, Valour and Wisdom.

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We will fight for the right,  
We will honour the brave,  
We will keep till we sleep  
To the rule that Rome gave —  
Comradeship, Valour and Wisdom,  
Comradeship, Valour and Wisdom.

Repetition of 'Comradeship, Valour and Wisdom' appears in the fifth and sixth lines of each of the six verses, while anaphoric 'We will' that begins the first, second and third lines of Verse six, give strength to the poem and a promise from the students to their school. This is a masculine poem as seen in the rhyming pattern throughout, as well as in expressions such as 'Playing the game', 'Laughing we bear / The harsh with the fair'. For these activities he received 'a certain amount of wary and reluctant acknowledgement' (S.T., 132-3). He says he was 'tolerated' — a modest way of saying he gained a certain amount of kudos from the staff and students of the school and undoubtedly also from his family and the people of Eltham.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Stewart, D.A., The School song, 'Et comitate et virtute et sapientia', was published in the *Taranakian*, Vol. 21, No. 1, May, 1932, pp. 63-64. A copy of the song was given to me by Meg Stewart.

<sup>131</sup> Stewart, D., *Douglas Stewart's Garden of Friends*, op. cit., 1987. Stewart wanted to change the wording of

In his final year of high school, Stewart sent a narrative poem to J.C. Squire of the London *Mercury*, and ‘implored him, in desperation, to tell me “whether I was a poet or not”’. Squire replied with a question, ‘ ... have you ever tried prose?’ (S.T., p. 154). Eventually Stewart realised his one hundred-plus lines of narrative were essentially a short story, ‘so in the end I was encouraged rather than daunted’. Although he would write some short stories, such as ‘A Girl with Red Hair’, his life-long interest was in poetry.

Stewart’s toast to ‘The Staff’ at the annual Sports Dinner closed the door on his life and literary achievement at New Plymouth Boys’ High School and opened the door to study at Victoria University College, Wellington. Although the aim of his university education was a degree in Law, this took second place to literature. He mentions his room-mate, George Palmer, who recommended books that Stewart found ‘beyond [his] comprehension’ (S.T., p. 169), such as Wyndham Lewis’s *The Childermas*, and he says he never really felt at ease with *Ulysses*, though ‘I respected it for introducing a new dimension in the novel’.

Despite his lack of interest and eventual failure in the study of Law, Stewart found stimulation in English literature. In particular, he recalls Norman Lindsay’s *Creative Effort* (1920) and *Redheap*, a story of adolescent love in an Australian small town that reminded Stewart of Eltham. Banned in Australia in 1930 (but not in New Zealand, so the students were able to read and appreciate it without restriction), *Redheap* was removed from the Australian censor’s list in 1958, together with *The Cautious Amorist*, published in New York in 1932, and in London in 1934, which was similarly banned in Australia. Stewart could have had no idea at that time of the enormous effect Lindsay would have on his literary career; yet he

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the school song, and in later years received a visit from a master from the New Plymouth Boys’ High School who disapproved of any change (p. 74).

insisted that Lindsay was a ‘stimulus’ rather than an ‘influence’ (see chapter 4). D.H. Lawrence was another author, of a more serious frame of mind, who was studied, together with Bertrand Russell, whose statements about atheism were appreciated and led to student debate. Russell’s statement: ‘I believe that when I die my body will rot and nothing of my personality will survive’ (S.T., p. 170), was a popular discussion topic among students. Stewart writes that with these philosophical statements ‘we sharpened our minds and so, hardly aware of what was happening, allowed Victoria University College to fulfil the proper purposes of a university’ (S.T., p. 170). There is little doubt that this introduction aroused Stewart’s early interest in philosophy, an interest which continued as a major dimension of his perception of poetic subjects; it is one of several lines of continuity which lead to an understanding of his total output in poetry and verse plays.

Employment at the Eltham *Argus* (1931) occupied Stewart as he reported on football and cricket, bowling, croquet, tennis and golf and the Magistrate’s court. Then there were the stock and station agents and prices for cows, heifers and vealers, and pigs. It seems surprising that more poems were not forthcoming in view of the everyday happenings in Eltham, especially the country dances, the Horticultural Society prize winners and various church group activities.

Although reporting mundane local news for the *Argus* may not have been stimulating, Stewart found the stimulation he sought with literary-minded friends, Jim and Marjorie Walsh. Jim, who was familiar with the works of Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and the Fabians, commented on Stewart’s poetry. Stewart writes of Jim that he found T.S. Eliot’s poetry ‘more approachable than he had expected and in whose poetry his clear, quick mind instantly detected the meaning in lines that had been obscure to me’ (S.T., p. 186). To have such a literary mentor was a distinct advantage to a maturing young poet. Marjorie, who was perhaps better read than Jim, also contributed to Stewart’s education, with her knowledge of novels and

their authors, providing food for thought and discussion.

Others who contributed to Stewart's developing literary maturity were members of the Symes family: Ronald, Terence and Geraldine. Ronald was at Oxford and his brother, Terence, read French and Italian novels in the original for pleasure. With her father, Geraldine read the *London Mercury*, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, *I Claudius*, Sigrid Undset's 'mountain masses of Norwegian gloom', the novels of the three Powys brothers, of which Stewart was impressed most of all by John Cowper Powys's *Wolf Solent* and *A Glastonbury Romance* (S.T., p. 187).

One of Stewart's memorable experiences at this time was the arrival of Kingsford Smith at Taranaki in 1933. Stewart was there to write a report about the flight across the Tasman from Sydney, and says that Kingsford Smith was 'a hero to us all in those days when flying was truly high adventure, and he was the great pioneer of the wild, empty skies and waters that separated us from Australia' (S.T., p. 201). The theme of this report — pioneering heroes — was to be followed in future years by that of verse and verse drama such as *Rutherford*, *The Fire on the Snow* and 'Worsley Enchanted'. Themes of heroism, exploration of the unknown and adventure were major lines of continuity in these works, some (such as *The Fire on the Snow*) would bring him world-wide audiences and world-wide acclaim.

Stewart himself was an adventurous young man, as illustrated in *Springtime in Taranaki* and *The Seven Rivers*, and it is not entirely unexpected when he leaves his home and his position at the *Argus* to join a travelling circus that soon dispensed with his services. Alone and without food or shelter, he tramped through the countryside until he met some Maori. He describes the meeting in an extract from his own short story of the incident:

I drifted into the Maori settlement with the greatest simplicity ... I was trudging along the road in the sunny midday, heading north, when a tall native, riding bareback on an old grey mare, came cantering up the road behind me. He stopped short beside me, the mare grunting with relief and indignation, and said, "You've

got a heavy swag, Jack. Carry it for you?"<sup>132</sup>

It was the season of the kumara harvest, and Stewart's description of the women at work is probably of the same place that appears in *The Golden Lover*<sup>133</sup>:

RUARANGI. Tired of growing food! Why, I, myself  
Have many a time walked almost as far as the field  
And sat on the hill and watched you women toiling..  
(Scene I, p. 38)

...

KOURA Here we are, on our village kumara field  
(Scene II, p. 42)

...

KOURA And now they are gone. And all the women are gone.  
And who knows who will meet in to-morrow's sun  
See where they climb the rise to the pa on the hill  
Where the fires burn and the men wait for their food  
And the children go to the whares like birds to their nests,  
Darting and rustling and fretting before they sleep.  
(Scene II, p. 43)

Back in Taranaki and remembering the nights with the Maori, he brought them into a poem called 'Day and Night with Snow' in which the colloquial idiom appears in the form of a pronunciation different to traditional English:

Talk lewder now, and turn the radio  
Louder, and shout the whirling darkness down,  
And someone lock the door against the snow.

So in a bleak time once I reached the end  
Of troubling and pianoing desire,  
And dead as stone in age-old leathery silence  
Crouched with two savages beside a fire  
And as a dog knows, knew them both for friend.  
Corncobs and drying shark were hung on wall  
And sooty kettle swung from a black chain;  
And rain outside, and shadows in. The woman  
Jabbed at the embers. And then was still again. (S.T., p. 218)

The phrase, 'Crouched with two savages' belongs to an earlier literary 'period', and it seems as though Stewart's interest in modernism and important changes in language which began to appear in New Zealand literature at that time, was not fully developed. Stewart's

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<sup>132</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1983, p. 215.

<sup>133</sup> Stewart, D., *The Golden Lover*, 1943. The edition used in this chapter of the thesis is 'The Golden Lover', *Four Plays*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1958, pp. 31-102.



expression eventually moved away from the Romanticism of Georgian poetry to more up to date expressions, as Sharkey later recognised.<sup>134</sup> Other variations of vocabulary such as ‘lewder’ in this poem are particularly noticeable; this word is ambiguous if the connotative ‘lewd’ is considered: it does not appear to refer to sexual excitement, nor does it appear to be an obscenity, rather, it is the Old English form for *ignorant* certainly is applicable. On the other hand, the poet may have been experimenting with a Maori form of pronunciation of the English word ‘louder’, but I believe that ‘*ignorant*’ is the preferable explanation. This is but one example of the way Stewart experimented with language, although it is not radical, and it is also a reason that many readers cannot relate to his poetry and therefore do not give his work the credit it deserves. After his adventure with the circus and living with the Maori, he began working as a reporter for the *Taranaki Daily News* at Hawera as a replacement for George Palmer who was on a round-the-world trip. However, following a broken love affair, Stewart wrote:

Night and day I was filled with longing and yearning and gloom and doom and misery and despondency and despair and desperation till really I did not know what to do with myself. I drank; so conspicuously that Sergeant Henry, who ruled the town like Olympian Jove with a face like red thunder, punished me by refusing to give me any more information for the *Daily News*; and the word was put about the town, so I was afterwards told, that I would be dead of my dissipations before I was thirty ... At last I felt that I could bear my misery no longer. (S.T., p. 221)

When Sergeant Henry refused to supply more information for the *Daily News*, Stewart threatened to kill himself with his Winchester .44 pig-hunting rifle, but finally he went home and joined the family for dinner, and after a talk with his father, he smuggled the gun into a wardrobe, went to bed and slept with ‘enormous relief at home’ (S.T., pp. 223-225). Eventually the *Daily News* sacked Stewart because of the wild life he was leading (S.T., p. 226), so he began to write a novel. He gives due regard to John Cowper Powys, ‘whose

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<sup>134</sup> Sharkey, op. cit, p. 5.

colloquies with the earth in Britain had done so much to set me communing with my own earth in Taranaki' (S.T., p. 226). In the novel there was a black bull 'who was no doubt a fertility symbol', and there was a Powys-like hero named Thorne 'who strode about the countryside communing with Nature and committing a good deal of adultery and fornication'. The reader cannot resist the temptation to envisage the imaginary Thorne as Stewart's alter-ego sowing his 'wild oats'. Stewart says he sent Powys some of his poems, 'but I am very glad I never sent him that novel' (S.T., p. 227), especially as he was to meet Powys in the near future. Characterisation in the novel reveals Stewart's early interest in nature, and as mentioned earlier, this theme developed consistently until the idea cohered as a continuing personal philosophical concern in his poetry and verse plays.

In 1933, Stewart went to Sydney after receiving a letter in which Cecil Mann, editor of the Red Page, offered him the prospect of a job on the *Bulletin* to replace Andre Hayward, known as 'T. the R.' (Thomas the Rhymer), 'Midford' and 'Pipards', who was about to retire (S.T., p. 227). The job on the *Bulletin* did not eventuate as 'T. the R.' decided against retiring at that point.<sup>#</sup> Aged 20, Stewart's response to the experience was that it was 'the world of magic I had dreamed of' (S.T., p. 228). He also records that while in Sydney, he applied for a job at *Smith's Weekly* where he briefly met Kenneth Slessor, who asked for his qualifications; Stewart replied that he was a poet and Slessor bought some 'very weak light verses' from him.<sup>135</sup> Then, before returning to New Zealand, Stewart asked Eric Baume for a job on the *Sun*, without success. He returned to New Zealand to wait for T. the R.'s retirement.

The visit to Sydney and the *Bulletin* was not without its pleasures and benefits, for here he met people connected with the literary world, including FitzGerald, who 'drove me out

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<sup>135</sup> Stewart, D., *A Man of Sydney*, Thomas Nelson, West Melbourne, 1977, p. 4.

through gum-trees shrill with cicadas across the Lane Cove River to his home at Hunters Hill' (S.T., p. 231), and, although Stewart did not realise it at the time, this was the start to a life-long friendship and literary association.<sup>136</sup> Returning to Taranaki, Stewart saw it with a new, clear vision, writing poems that pleased Cecil Mann.<sup>137</sup> Many of these poems appeared in his first book, *Green Lions* (1936). With a little help from his mother, who gave him fifty pounds, the book was published by Whitcombe & Tombs. Robinson and Wattie note that the landscapes of *Green Lions* are often 'bleak and cold, with images of frost, ice and snow'; in fact, they anticipate the Antarctic landscapes in Stewart's radio play *The Fire on the Snow*.<sup>138</sup> Stewart sent a copy to Cecil Mann 'who reviewed it nobly', and another copy to John Cowper Powys 'who wrote me, all in italics and exclamation marks, words of tremendous encouragement' (S.T., p. 231).

Apart from his short stay in Australia in 1933, Stewart was employed until 1938, firstly as a journalist for the *Taranaki Daily News*, and then, at 22 years of age, as editor of the *Stratford Evening Post*, from which he was sacked in a takeover. During this time he boarded with Mrs McQuade whose son may have provided the inspiration for *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* (see Chapter 5). Stewart writes:

Wounded and suffering from loss of memory, he had been picked up from Gallipoli during World War I and carried by mistake to Australia. Years later Mrs. McQuade saw his photograph in a Sydney newspaper which featured him as an Unknown Soldier; and she recognized him (with what turmoil of strange feelings?) and crossed the Tasman and rescued him. He was a tall, robust, wrinkled, grinning, silent sort of fellow who spent most of his time playing billiards ... (S.T., pp. 233-234)

Following his time at the *Stratford Evening Post*, Stewart managed to get a job at the *Truth*.

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<sup>136</sup> FitzGerald, R., 'Douglas Stewart', *Overland*, April, 1985, p. 30.

<sup>137</sup> Rolfe, P., *The Journalistic Journal*, Wildcat Press, Sydney, 1979, p. 282. Cecil Mann was editor of the 'Red Page' of the *Bulletin* at that time, and it was he who arranged for Douglas Stewart to join the *Bulletin* as his editor in 1938. Stewart acknowledges Cecil Mann 'who was at all times my mentor on the paper' in *Writers of The Bulletin*, p. 31. In 1940 Stewart became editor of the 'Red Page' and Mann continued as Associate Editor.

<sup>138</sup> Robinson R., and Wattie, N, eds., *OCNZL*, 1998, p. 515.

Spiritualism was a popular interest at that time, so while he and George Pownall were reporting on a court case in which a fraudulent spiritualistic ‘medium’ was being tried, they attended a séance; consequently the medium was exposed. While ‘spirit’ is a recurring word in Stewart’s poetry and verse dramas, he uses it, not to invoke memories of departed loved ones, but to show how the human spirit is part of the earth in order to demonstrate that they cannot be separated from one another. The concept of ‘spirit’ has a wide range of meanings and it is used throughout this thesis in various forms as lines of continuity which contribute to Stewart’s personal philosophy, often illustrating his animistic and religious points of view.

Stewart makes his opinion clear in *The Flesh and the Spirit*<sup>139</sup> when he deliberates about poetry, music and Norman Lindsay’s paintings: ‘All the arts as far as I can see, have one great purpose: to reveal the existence of spirit’.<sup>140</sup> He is clear in his opinion that the language of pantheism (the doctrine that identifies God with the universe) reveals ‘the beauty of nature and shows that ‘the earth itself is spirit or is visited by spirit’ (TFS, p. 279). In addition, he refers to William Blake and T.S. Eliot, whose work was a ‘direct assertion of the existence of spirit’ (TFS, p. 280). Moreover, W.B. Yeats whose poetry Stewart admired, was involved in spiritualism,<sup>141</sup> but Yeats’ interest in spiritualism was different to Stewart’s philosophy of spirit.

Seances, like the one Stewart and Pownall attended in Wellington, were (and still are) popular forms of entertainment, provoke suggestions which can result in different forms of human behaviour. As well as Yeats, the New Zealander Robin Hyde wrote of spirit in her poem ‘Ghosts’, ‘We are two ghosts [...] who are finally separated’ (K.G., pp. 80-81); this poem illustrates modern themes of separation and loneliness. The complex concept of spirit is

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<sup>139</sup> Stewart, D., ‘The Flesh and the Spirit’, *The Flesh and the Spirit: An Outlook on Literature*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1948, pp. 274-281.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>141</sup> Stewart, D., ‘The Heroic Dream’, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

a major part of Stewart's personal philosophy, and it is shown as a line of continuity throughout Stewart's total work.

Both the *Stratford Evening Post* and the *Truth* offices were situated in the port of Wellington where the ships sailed to England, and Stewart's next adventure was a trip on the *Doric Star* as third pantry man at a shilling a month (1937). While the ship was in Auckland, Stewart met 'those three Graces of New Zealand poetry and prose, Eve Langley, Robin Hyde and Gloria Rawlinson'. Langley's novel *The Pea Pickers* was admired by Stewart and her 'rich, sensuous, romantic poems were published in the *New Zealand Mercury* and in C.R. Marris's *New Zealand Best Poems*'.<sup>142</sup>

Iris Wilkinson (1906-1939) chose to use the *nom de plume* Robin Hyde. She was born in Cape Town, South Africa, and was taken by her parents to Wellington, New Zealand at the age of one (1907).<sup>143</sup> Stewart describes her as 'lame, witty and nervous'. Her autobiographical novel, *The Godwits Fly* (1938), is the story of her early life in New Zealand; two other novels, *Passport to Hell* (1936) and *Nor the Years Condemn* (1938), 'reflected the attitude of her generation in its hatred of war and in its debunking of militarism'.<sup>144</sup> According to Stewart, her prose 'was moving, or about to move away from the romanticism of the period and into a realism of stronger, more immediate impact. I think of the fine poems she was to write after a visit to China' (S.T., p. 238). Stewart's comment about Hyde's poetic development could also be applied to his own development as his themes and subjects expanded to include continuing interest in literary modernism, particularly when his subjects included abstract themes such as loneliness and alienation, both of which are found not only in

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<sup>142</sup> C.A. Marris edited *New Zealand Best Poems*, Harry Tombs, Wellington, an annual anthology combining new and previously published poetry, from 1932-1943 *OCNZL*, 1998, p. 357.

<sup>143</sup> Matthews, J., 'Hyde, Robin 1906-1939', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, 7.4.2006, p. 1. (This reference will be referred to as *DNZB* throughout the thesis)

<sup>144</sup> Reid, J.C., *Creative Writing in New Zealand*, Holcombe & Tombs Limited, Auckland, 1946, p. 55.

Stewart's nature poetry, but in later verse plays such as *The Fire on the Snow*, *Glencoe*, *The Golden Lover*, *Worsley Enchanted* and 'Terra Australis'. Stewart and Hyde spoke of Roy Campbell, the South African poet 'whom we all admired so much at that time, because he seemed to have won the battle for colonial poets in England, and who was a great swashbuckler and bullfighter' (S,T., p. 238). Hyde praised Stewart's poetry which she read in a magazine called the *New Zealand Mercury*.

The third poet in the group, Gloria Rawlinson (1918-1955), was a polio victim confined to a wheelchair. She had been a child prodigy at fourteen, having published her first book of poetry, *Gloria's Book*, at that time. Her second book of poetry, *The Perfumed Vendor* (1935), sold in excess of 7,000 copies and the book was translated into Dutch and Japanese.<sup>145</sup> Her only novel, *Music in the Listening-place* (1938), received 'glowing reviews'.<sup>146</sup> Rawlinson also contributed to the *Bulletin*, and 'from 1947 to 1954 her stories appeared regularly in the Australian anthology of short stories, *Coast to Coast*'.<sup>147</sup> Stewart writes of his obvious joy and the respect he had for these literary women as he describes the journey to England and his anticipation of meetings with many more literary icons in the near future. Rawlinson continued to publish poetry in *New Zealand Best Poems* and the *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook*. A close friend of Robin Hyde, Rawlinson edited a posthumous collection of Hyde's later poems, *Houses by the Sea* (1952), which established Hyde as a leading poet. As a tribute, a selection of poems, *Gloria in excelsis* was published in 1995 by Pear Tree Press, Auckland.

Once in England, Stewart was, like many other tourists, overwhelmed by the history of London itself: Westminster Abbey, for example, where he saw the effigy of Adam Lindsay Gordon, as well as the many plaques in memory of England's heroes. It seems that a visit to

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<sup>145</sup> Riemke Ensing, 'Gloria Rawlinson', in *DNZB1921-1940*, p. 424.

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, p. 424.

Culloden, during which he saw a stone slab inscribed ‘Clan Stewart of Appin’ marking the mass grave was a highlight of the visit to Scotland. To see Glencoe, from which ‘the survivors of the famous massacre had fled to my people for refuge’ (S.T., p. 245), to feel the spirit of the place, was to provide incentive enough for him to later write his verse drama *Glencoe* about ‘terrible things were done / Long, long ago’<sup>148</sup>. Of Scotland, he later wrote, the ‘gritty soil warmed by the autumn sun which my forefathers had touched before me and from which both they and I in my turn had sprung — all of this satisfied some most profound need of my being’ (S.T., p. 245), and it was from Scotland that the heroism and stoicism of his forefathers developed into a later major theme that runs through works such as those he chose to include in his anthology *Voyager Poems*.

At Chaldon in Dorsetshire, Stewart met John Cowper Powys and his brother, Theodore. Powys was, he said, ‘one of the three people I have met in my life who have conveyed to me the impression of genius: of talent and personality quite beyond the ordinary. The other two were Norman Lindsay and Eve Langley’ (S.T., p. 246). Stewart was fascinated as Powys pointed out relevant literary sites around the village: Theodore wrote a story about the church; David Garnett had written a story about the inn; but most impressive, there was Hardy’s moor. During his stay with Powys,<sup>149</sup> Stewart met Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland, who introduced him to John Clare’s poetry, although Stewart’s favourites were still Wordsworth, W.H. Davies and Edmund Blunden.

Stewart openly admits Blunden’s influence on his own early poetry, and sent him a copy of *Green Lions*, to which Blunden replied, ‘I am enjoying your book ... cumbered with

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<sup>148</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1973, p. 85.

<sup>149</sup> Taaffe, op. cit. In 1937 (no precise date), Powys wrote to Stewart, ‘You are, my dear Mr. Stewart, a real and true poet and an authentic genius; [and] it is a shock of astonishment to me to see the words “Printed for the author” in place of “Published by” ... so many of the genius’s (sic) of the world have had to pay for the printing of their own works’, ML MSS 5147/19.

Epithets, but it's got observation, imagination and often phrase ... you have admitted to my mind an unfamiliar and impressive world'.<sup>150</sup> In a second letter, Blunden writes that 'Haystack' (C.P., P. 285) and 'A Song to Cross the Sea' (C.P., p. 298) suggest that Stewart was 'gaining in the directness which brief poems must have. The excellent thing too is that you are not likely to lose the colour and figurative richness of your work while you acquire striking-power'.<sup>151</sup> Stewart visited him at Merton College, Oxford, where they discussed the work of Roy Campbell who had satirically attacked English litterateurs of the Bloomsbury Group in *The Georgiad* (S.T., p. 249). Stewart had a high opinion of Blunden's work, and agreed with Richard Church, who stated in *Eight for Immortality* (S.T., p. 249), that he believed Blunden would survive as a poet. Stewart quotes Blunden in his own autobiography because 'his poetry ... is as much about humanity as it is about nature, [it] remains deep and rugged and powerful' (S.T., p. 249). He is also prepared to accept Cecil Mann's opinion (S.T., p. 250) that Blunden's *Undertone of War* was the best of the Great War reminiscences of the 1930s. Blunden saw action in Europe during World War I, and his poem '1916 seen from 1921' justifies Mann's opinion, on account of its humanity and the place nature holds during hostilities. This poem could have been the impulse behind Stewart's *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*. Blunden wrote:

Tired with dull grief, grown old before my day,  
I sit in solitude and only hear  
Long silent laughters, murmurings of dismay,  
... wait while life drags

Its wounded length from those sad streets of war  
Into green places here, that were my own;  
But now what once was mine is mine no more,  
I seek such neighbours here and I find none.

...

There we would go, my friend of friends and I,

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<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, Letter to D. Stewart from E. Blunden, 4 October, 1937, NLA MSS 4829.

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, Letter to D. Stewart from E. Blunden, 24 October, 1937, NLA MSS 5417/19.



And snatch long moments from the grudging wars,  
Whose dark made light intense to see them by.

Blunden gave Stewart an introduction to 'some Empire magazine' that published his poem 'The Godwits' (a poem influenced by Roy Campbell (S.T., p. 250)). A meeting with Richard Church at 'Dent's' (Publishers) office resulted in Church's publishing Stewart's second book of poems, *The White Cry* (1939). Stewart says that this was a great honour; however, it brought him 'the most annihilating review I think my poetry has ever had' (S.T., p. 251). He says he learnt from the experience 'never to waste time trying to get published in England, unless you are prepared to live there' (S.T., p. 251). This was an invaluable experience which undoubtedly contributed to Stewart's own helpful attitude to aspiring writers when he was editor of the Red Page (1940-1961), which Stewart referred to in his Boyer Lectures: 'I for one didn't want to hurt the contributors too much. You have to be reasonably careful whose heart you break, and how hard you break it.'<sup>152</sup> He did send a copy of *The Fire on the Snow* to Richard Church, but 'Dent's' (S.T., p. 251) declined to publish it.

Life in London was difficult, made worse by a lack of a permanent income. His aim to write one poem every day was not carried out because, as he says, all his ideas had been expressed before by W.H. Davies, or Shelley, Wordsworth or Shakespeare. Finally, Stewart suggested to Cecil Mann at the *Bulletin* that he should write 'The Long White Cloud' section from Wellington where he could get fresh material and keep in touch with New Zealand life (S.T., p. 254). The *Bulletin* was interested, so in 1938 Stewart returned to Australia as third purser on the *Largs Bay*, writing the *Ship's News*.<sup>153</sup> Ken Prior, managing director of the

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<sup>152</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1971, p. 24.

<sup>153</sup> In *Springtime in Taranaki*, op. cit., 1983, p. 255, Stewart writes that he left London in October, 1937, but according to the *Largs Bay* timetable, the ship left London on 1 December, 1937; it was due to arrive in Sydney on 11 January, 1938, but the shipping list shows the *Largs Bay* in Sydney on 8 January, even though it departed Melbourne on 8 January. This must be assumed to be a printer's error as indicated here and the *Largs Bay* did, in fact, arrive in Sydney on 11 January, 1938. Meg Stewart provided me with a

*Bulletin*, met the traveller in Sydney where ‘the harbour flowered with light and the headlands rang with cicadas’ (S.T., p. 256). At the *Bulletin* office, Cecil Mann and Ken Prior said they were not sure what would happen about the New Zealand page, but he had ‘better stick around Sydney for a while ... and see how [he] liked it’ (S.T., p. 254)<sup>154</sup>. Stewart eventually became assistant to Cecil Mann, editor of the Red Page, but not on a New Zealand page. In 1940 he was appointed as editor of the Red Page, and remained its editor until 1961.

Before further analysis of Stewart’s Sydney experiences and career, an account of the literary milieu from which he emerged in New Zealand, an exploration of the poetry he wrote that was founded on his New Zealand experience is necessary in order to establish the distinctive themes that would continue to inform much of his poetry in Australia.

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<sup>154</sup> copy of the *Daily Commercial News & Shipping List*, for Tuesday, January 11, 1938, p. 2. Stewart’s family expected that, after talking to the *Bulletin* in Sydney, he would catch another ship to New Zealand. However, having been offered work at the *Bulletin* he stayed on in Sydney. The only evidence that Stewart went to New Zealand early in 1938 appears in Meg Stewart’s *Autobiography of My Mother*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 2007, p. 239. In her mother’s voice, Meg writes: ‘The young poet was going home to New Zealand for Christmas (1938) ... Six weeks passed and suddenly he was back on my [i.e., Margaret Coen, Meg’s mother] doorstep at 38A Pitt Street almost the moment after he stepped off the boat from New Zealand. Stewart had been engaged to a girl in New Zealand, but the engagement had been broken off on his recent visit home (op. cit., p. 240).

## CHAPTER 2: STEWART AS NEW ZEALANDER AND EXPATRIATE

### 1. An Overview of New Zealand Poetry in the 1920s

In ‘Making the Crossing: Douglas Stewart Expatriate Patriot’, Lawrence Bourke writes that there were few established outlets for a writer like Douglas Stewart in New Zealand in the 1930s.<sup>155</sup> Alan Mulgan was then editor of the *Auckland Star* and C.A. Marris editor of the literary pages of *Art in New Zealand* and *Rata (1931-1933)*, a Christmas ‘yearly’ with literary content. From 1932 to 1943, Marris edited the annual anthology *New Zealand Best Poems*. However conservative, Georgian English verse was considered to embody the highest poetical standard, and Mulgan and Marris ‘brought their profoundly limited views to their self-appointed roles as the guardians of literature in New Zealand’;<sup>156</sup> on the other hand, the point of view that Georgian literature<sup>157</sup> and nature lyrics were ideal forms of verse was ‘held in contempt by a number of New Zealand writers’ (L.B., p. 41).

The New Zealand modernist reviewers associated Stewart with Marris and made sure that this reputation followed him to Australia. A new New Zealand literary periodical, *Landfall*, 1947, gave notice that ‘the modernists were in control and would decide who was in and who was out. Stewart was out’.<sup>158</sup> Curnow and other writers of *Phoenix* were not only

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<sup>155</sup> Bourke, L., ‘Making the Crossing: Douglas Stewart the Expatriate Patriot’, *Southerly*, Vol. 53, No. 2, June, 1993, pp. 40-53. (Future reference to this text will be shown as (L.B., p. ).

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>157</sup> The word ‘Georgian’, as applied to a body of poetry written in English during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, came into use purely as a descriptive term. By the end of that period it had become a term of critical abuse, and by the beginning of the Second World War it was merely an archaism. G. Reeves, *Georgian Poetry*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, England, 1962, p. xi.

<sup>158</sup> Bourke, *op. cit.*, p. 43. Writing to Allen Curnow, A.R.D. Fairburn asks, ‘You indicated to me previously that you were going to be headstrong and cut out D. Stewart altogether. Have you relented? I feel that both he and Colleen [sic] Duggan are highly competent, but lacking in any of the essential qualities that make good

dogmatic in their efforts to introduce a new modernist tradition into New Zealand literature, they also discouraged writers such as Duggan, Hyde and Stewart from publishing their work in New Zealand. Stewart's decision to leave New Zealand and become an expatriate in Australia was influenced by this attitude as well as other distinct major factors; most importantly, the *Bulletin* offer of a position as assistant to Cecil Mann, editor of the *Bulletin*'s Red Page. This gave him the opportunity to write the poetry and verse drama he wanted to write, rather than the modernist poetry favoured by the future New Zealand establishment, although Stewart experimented with modernism early in his poetic career, and as Michael Sharkey suggests, Stewart was 'accommodating himself to modernity throughout his career'.<sup>159</sup> Another reason for Stewart's move to Australia and his sense of being a New Zealander in Australia, is contained in a letter to W.F. Alexander (16 February, 1938) in which he wrote:

Some day I'll come back ... but even poets have to make a living, and the *Bulletin* is a fine office to do it at. I wish desperately that New Zealand had more population ... so that it would have more jobs as congenial as this.<sup>160</sup>

In the Introduction to *Book of New Zealand Verse, 1923-1945*,<sup>161</sup> Curnow wrote that Stewart was 'often betrayed by rhetorical fancy, fond of lazy verbal flourishes, tossing words about to cause a sensation'; furthermore, he considered Stewart's 'strumming brass-band rhythms have not the ballad naturalness that might liven them', and suggested that Stewart's aim was to evade 'the suffering a poem must entail'.<sup>162</sup> Stewart made it known that he would not allow his work to be published in any future anthology that Curnow might edit.

Stewart and Curnow had different perceptions about the concept of what a poem should be. Stewart makes his philosophy clear in the Introduction to *Modern Australian Verse 2* when

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reason. But this is your pigeon or ring-dove'. 'Letter to Allen Curnow, 19 November, 1943', *The Letters of A.R.D. Fairburn*, ed. Lauris Edmond, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1985, pp. 130-131.

<sup>159</sup> Sharkey, M., op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>160</sup> *Letters Lifted into Poetry*, edited and introduced by Jonathan Persse, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2006, p. 107.

<sup>161</sup> Curnow, A., *Book of New Zealand Verse, 1923-1945*, Caxton, Christchurch, 1945, p. 48.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48.

he states that ‘Poetry can be “enjoyed”, of course, in many moods and many styles’. He is emphatic that his concept of poetry is about enjoyment — ‘It means giving joy’, and ‘that is what poetry is all about’.<sup>163</sup> In his explication of the ‘pleasure principle’, Jeremy Hawthorn presents comments on two philosophical texts which changed critical opinion at the time of publication. The first is Freud’s notion that pleasure was both infantile and temporary, ‘not to be confused with the adult experiences offered by literary works to the extent that READING of literature was seen to be regressive and comparable to dream experiences’.<sup>164</sup> Hawthorn then states that ‘terms such as “pleasure” and “enjoyment” with reference to their reading of literary works, within modern movements in literary criticism, during the twentieth century, have generally had a rather thin time’.<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, after Roland Barthes’s *Le Plaisir du Texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*) was published in 1976, ‘pleasure suddenly became much more respectable among literary critics and theorists’.<sup>166</sup> This reasoning contributes to an understanding of Stewart’s philosophical perceptions about joy, enjoyment and the pleasure principle. Stewart’s preoccupations in this respect as ‘lines of continuity’ contribute to modern readers’ understanding and wider appreciation of the totality of his work and include many aspects of ‘suffering’ as suggested by Curnow, by the natural environment and by humanity as a whole. This aspect of Stewart’s philosophy is mentioned in the thesis as it occurs, particularly in later works such as ‘The Dossier in Springtime’ (Chapter 4), ‘Sun Orchids’ and ‘The Birdsville Track’ (Chapter 7); however, the theme of human suffering is strongest in *The Fire on the Snow* and ‘Worsley Enchanted’ in which, as A.A. Phillips suggests, ‘Stewart was working in the modernism of his time’.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Stewart, D., ‘Modern Australian Poetry’, *The Broad Stream*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1975, p. 264.

<sup>164</sup> Hawthorn, J., op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>167</sup> Phillips, A.A., ‘The Poetry of Douglas Stewart’, *Meanjin Quarterly*, March, 1969, p. 98.

A group of young modernist poets of the 1930s including Denis Glover and Allan Curnow, strongly criticised Marris for his conception of and control over New Zealand poetry, while Stewart was among a number of other poets who agreed with Marris (L.B., p. 41). Feeling alienated, Stewart began corresponding with R.D. FitzGerald whom he had met in Sydney.

Both Stewart and FitzGerald disliked local (that is, Australian) and some international versions of modernism, notably the work favoured by American periodicals *Poetry*, edited by Harriet Monro (and Ezra Pound) and *The Dial*, the English anthology *Des Imagistes* (pre World War I), and some Australian journals such as *Poetry Magazine* (a journal of the Poetry Society of Australia), 1961-1970, discussed in Chapter 9 of this thesis. Stewart was familiar with international versions, including credos of the varieties promulgated by these English, American and Australian journals, as well as the New Zealand versions by Allen Curnow and Denis Glover who used the literary periodicals, *Phoenix* (1923-1933), and its successor, *Tomorrow* (1934-1940), as their forum through which they 'set the directions for New Zealand Poetry'.<sup>168</sup>

During the 1930s the change in focus and creative impulses in New Zealand was directly influenced by social changes caused by the Great Depression, and in a landmark essay, *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, E.H. McCormick contends that 'it effected a reorientation in outlook of major importance to New Zealand's literature'.<sup>169</sup> One of the first hints of a new impulse in New Zealand writing, he argues, was *Phoenix*, which gave

... evidence of intellectual and spiritual unrest among New Zealand youth; ... the writers of *Phoenix* were more confident, better informed, and far more critical than the predecessors of the former generation ... *Phoenix* was a challenge to New

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<sup>168</sup> Bourke, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>169</sup> McCormick, E.H., *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, Department of Internal Affairs New Zealand, Wellington, 1940, p. 169. While no wholly modernist literary journal came into being until the 1940s, with the appearance of *Angry Penguins*, earlier Australian journals such as *Birth* (1916-1922), *The Spinner* (1924-1927) and *Verse* (1929-1933) published a deal of non-mainstream poetry.

Not only was *Phoenix* a challenge to New Zealand complacency, it was also important because, for the first time, it became possible to speak of a “school” of New Zealand writing’.<sup>171</sup> Even so, the writers of the 1930s were strangely unaware that they had any precursors.<sup>172</sup> Robin Hyde’s essay, ‘Flaming Youth and Free Speech’, gives a general background to those closely connected to *Phoenix*, and in this often satirical discussion she comments on an article by Eric Cook, ‘Groundswell’, which was not about politics but about sex; this article, she claims, was ‘the cause of the first open breach with authority’ and was the cause of Reverend Mr. Martin Sullivan’s objection.<sup>173</sup> Hyde describes the ‘Groundswell’ affair as ‘really funny’ but the article was not printed; instead, a near-blank page explained where ‘Groundswell’ would have been ‘but for the tyranny of law and order’.<sup>174</sup> The new writers of the 1930s often ridiculed writers such as Jessie Mackay, Eileen Duggan and Douglas Stewart, ‘but more than that, they seemed to suppose that they had invented New Zealand nationalism’.<sup>175</sup> It is this aspect that the modernist writers of *Phoenix* were determined to introduce into New Zealand literature; this attitude placed constraints on writers such as Stewart, who became expatriates so that they were free to write in the manner which suited them, rather than writing to suit the new modernist group in New Zealand.

The challenge to traditional New Zealand poetry of the sort exemplified in the anthology *Kowhai Gold* was justifiable in light of the way that New Zealand writers largely conformed with ongoing sentimental ties to Britain and British poetry, because, as J.C. Reid

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<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>171</sup> Sinclair, K., *A Destiny Apart*, Unwin Paperbacks in association with The Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, New Zealand, 1986, p. 246.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>173</sup> Hyde, R., ‘Flaming Youth and Free Speech’, *Disputed Ground*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1934, Boddy G. and Matthews, J., 1991, p. 275. Reverend Martin G. Sullivan was the President of the Students’ Association.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*, p. 246.

put it:

New Zealand had developed an imperial consciousness stronger perhaps than that of any other colony ... New Zealanders in those years [early twentieth century] prided themselves on being 'more English than the English', although the promise of wider cultural horizons in England attracted many young writers to migrate. The concept of 'Home' loomed large in our literature, a nostalgic creation bred from memories of youth spent in 'the Old Country', from the recollections of parents, from books or from a sense of restriction and frustration in New Zealand.<sup>176</sup>

Ivy Gibbs' 'The Thrush' exemplifies Reid's explanation of New Zealanders' need to write English-oriented verse:

I heard a thrush in a bright tree,  
It sang with poignant ecstasy;  
It sang of English fields I've seen  
Oft in my dreams, dew-pearled and green;

...

So sweet and strange to me it seemed,  
Though long and often I have dreamed  
Of England — through a song-bird's power  
Really to roam one lovely hour  
Through English lanes, o'er English hills  
Lit up with golden daffodils.<sup>177</sup>

There is a marked difference between this piece of nostalgic romanticism and Stewart's later 'Oh No, Mr. Thrush', which captures the ambience of the Australian bush, its 'Mountains and ribbony-gums, / Tee-tree, blackberry, sand, / Tussocks and cattle in the sun' (C.P., p. 154). Stewart speaks through the tiny bird, saying that he belongs here in this place Stewart's song is analogous to 'a spear of light', and as the sun rises and the thrush's song heralds the day, the clear mirror of the river which reflects the world of the bird will shatter, and the peace and stillness of the dawn will shatter, just as the dog's bark heralding the new day breaks the peace in 'Winter Morning' (C.P., p. 315).

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<sup>176</sup> Reid, J.C., *Creative Writing in New Zealand*, op. cit., Auckland, 1946, p. 21. See also A.A. Phillips, whose essay about the Australian 'cultural cringe' is an indication that Reid's ideas about English superiority also existed in Australian literature and this affected social responses, particularly among the native born: *The Australian Tradition*, A.A. Phillips, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1980 [1958] pp. 12-117.

<sup>177</sup> Gibbs, I., 'The Thrush', *Kowhai Gold*, edited Q. Pope, J.M. Dent and Sons, London, 1930, pp. 150-151. All references in this chapter to *Kowhai Gold* are shown as (K.G.).



Another poem anthologised in *Kowhai Gold*, 'Garden Piece' by Alexa Stevens, also illustrates the effect of longing for England. This is a 'mystical' poem wherein the speaker steps through the gate from one world to another and satisfies the yearning for a remembered Paradise. The mood of this poem is also one of death and the after-life:

The gate. And then I step on dewy grass,  
All greenly glad and waking as I pass,  
There at my side slim, spreading English trees  
Quiver with tender newness to the breeze;  
*Kowhai Gold*, p.167

Stevens's formal English in this and other poems was not, however, a feature of Jessie Mackay's poetry. Mackay (1864-1938) was one of New Zealand's native-born writers and was, according to J.R. Jones, the first to articulate the hope for a new national awareness in the country's literature.<sup>178</sup> She was born at Rakaia Gorge of Scottish parents. Her closeness to Scottish origins encouraged her interest in Scottish dialect verse in *Poems* (1911):

The hand is to the plough and the e'e is to the trail;  
The river-boatie dances wi' her heid to the gale:  
But she'll never ride to Appin;  
We'll see nae mair o' Appin,  
For ye ken we crooned 'Lochaber' at the saut sea's gate.<sup>179</sup>

Allen Curnow does not have a high opinion of this adopted Scots dialect:

The affectation, the graceless botching of Scots and English locutions, and the fearful insensitivity of ear are all typical of Jessie Mackay ... Though McCormick sees in Jessie Mackay's work of the eighties "the first clear signs of self-awareness", I find only the familiar pseudo-nationalism of the colony, more of the nerves and more highly strung. It is schizoid writing.<sup>180</sup>

Stewart adopted a similar approach to Mackay's in 'Glencoe', 1947.<sup>181</sup> An example of Stewart's 'Scottish' diction may be heard in Verse 9, Ballad 1:

'Then awa' I'll gang,' says bottle-nosed Jock,

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<sup>178</sup> Jones, J.R., 'Independent Scholar', 'Jessie Mackay', retrieved from *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 20 December, 2004, 2 October 2006, <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=2855>, p. 1.

<sup>179</sup> Curnow, A., Introduction, *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1960, p. 31.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>181</sup> Stewart, D., 'Glencoe', 1947, *Collected Poems*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1967, pp. 197-221.

‘And yet afore I leave  
Is there naebody here will buy me a drink  
For a wame that’s dry as a seive?’  
(C.P., p. 198)

Unlike Curnow, who referred to Mackay’s pseudo-Scottish dialect as an ‘affectation ... and insensitivity of ear’, Breac Dearg<sup>182</sup> writes favourably of Stewart’s language in ‘Glencoe’, and he points out that Stewart:

has all the qualities and feelings which go to make a sound balladist, including a completely partisan outlook, and one feels that if he had written in Gaelic his result, excellent as it is in English, would have been superlative ... The ballad (‘Glencoe’), if not Celtic, should have been. Some of the best ballads are in the purest Erse (Scots or Gaelic), or in German. Any writer who is forced to produce his ballads in the namby-pamby tongue of the Sassenach,<sup>183</sup> which is too precise and gentlemanly for the barbarous emanations of an unjust indignation, is at a grave disadvantage beside bards of rougher northern lands.<sup>184</sup>

Furthermore, Dearg argues that Stewart is a ‘thorough hater and, what is more to the point in a balladist, a convincing one’.<sup>185</sup> Here his argument fails to separate the narrator from the author; Stewart is not, in my opinion, ‘a thorough hater’ — the voice of the narrator is telling a story in a literary manner, and in doing so, conveys the mood of hatred through diction appropriate to his topic which Stewart states, is a protest against all forms of violence.<sup>186</sup> Protests of violence against humanity is considered to be a modernist concept accepted by Stewart rather than ‘modern’ which suggests poetry preferred by both poets and readers at the time of their writing.

Curnow calls Mackay’s poetry ‘ghost-poetry, ghost-towns of long abandoned goldfields, husks without a past or posterity’.<sup>187</sup> McCormick, however, though not an ardent admirer of Mackay’s work, demonstrates a different understanding of this poet who was

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<sup>182</sup> Dearg, B., ‘Conducting a Massacre’, *Bulletin*, Vol. 69, No. 3552, 10 March, 1948, p. 2. ‘Breac Dearg’ is partly a Scottish form of War Cry: that is, it is a pseudonym. ‘An t’ Arm breac dearg’ (the red tartanned army) is the slogan of the McQuarries of Ulster.

<sup>183</sup> ‘Sassenach’ is a derogatory term for English in Scotland and Ireland. ‘Sennachie’ (also spelt ‘shanachie’) is a skilled teller of tales.

<sup>184</sup> Dearg, *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>186</sup> Stewart, Introduction, *Selected Poems*, *op. cit.*, p. vi.

<sup>187</sup> Curnow, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

interested in so many aspects of the literature of both New Zealand's new national spirit and the Gaelic romanticism of her parents' generation. McCormick claims that when Mackay's vision is focused on prohibition and women's rights, 'the effect is decidedly incongruous, and the verse becomes rough and jangly. She cared for these causes intensely and even passionately, but as poetic material they proved to be intractable'.<sup>188</sup> It is an indication of her esteem as a polemicist, as much as regard for her poetry, that in 1938 the New Zealand centre of the writers' organisation PEN<sup>189</sup> established the Jessie Mackay Memorial Prize for verse. Mackay finally used her writing as an avenue to inform others of the many aspects of political activity in which she immersed herself.

Similar ideas were reiterated by Edward Said in *Orientalism* in 2001 when he wrote about the 'high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth century and early twentieth century European colonialism'.<sup>190</sup> Said's argument refers to differences between the Orient and the Occident; it is but a short step to associate countries and islands — New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific islands — with this 'superior' attitude of white colonisers as assuming 'authority' over Maori and early white settlers. Mackay was at one with the many writers, novelists, philosophers and political theorists (referred to by Said), who used the East and West as 'the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people; customs, "mind", destiny, and so on"...'.<sup>191</sup>

Mackay's interest in Maori themes in poems such as 'The Charge of Parihaka', 'Departure of the Timaru volunteers for Parihaka' and 'Henare Taratoa' illustrate Mackay's

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<sup>188</sup> McCormick, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>189</sup> PEN NZ is the name given to The New Zealand Society of Authors (PEN NZ) Inc, which lobbies for the interests of professional writers in dealing with publishers, broadcasting organisations and professional theatres, and negotiating copyright and royalty issues. The New Zealand Writers' Guild represents writers in the fields of film, television, radio, theatre, video and multimedia. 'Writing and Publishing', *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*.

Retrieved from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/NewZealandInBrief/CreativeLife/6/en>, 3 October, 2006.

<sup>190</sup> Said, E., Introduction to *Orientalism*, Pantheon, New York, 2001, p. 2-3.

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

belief that the New Zealand wars were caused by Pakeha greed and violence; this theme differs from that of Stewart whose verse drama *The Golden Lover* (1944) is considered by Bill Pearson to be:

The only fully symbolic treatment of Maoris ... where Maoris symbolise the earth or mundane life as it is lived. A woman is abducted by a fairy lover, who represents romantic, unearthly passion: but is persuaded by a tohunga, who represents her intuitive knowledge of truth, to stay with her foolish, lazy, boastful husband, who represents mankind.<sup>192</sup>

Of the few occasions when Stewart refers to the Maori, his expression is unemotional and he concentrates on the clarity of the image. In 'Day and Night in Snow', written much later than Mackay's poem, the language is colloquially idiomatic and the expression is tight. Enjambment adds to the dramatic effect of the remembered experience:

Crouched with two savages beside a fire  
And as a dog knows, knew them both for friend.  
Corncobs and drying shark were hung on wall  
And sooty kettle swung from a black chain;  
And rain outside, and shadows in. The woman  
Jabbed at the embers. And then was still again. (C.P., p.335)

In his *Springtime in Taranaki* version of the same recollection, he uses images which are not romanticised, but are focused on reality:

And the fleas! When we sat by the fire I would scrape them off my leg by the handful. The old chief and his wife seemed more or less immune from them and only very occasionally, when some particularly penetrating bite really got through to him, the old man would say that he would pour boiling water over them 'tomorrow'. But that tomorrow never came, and the fleas flourished and bit. They were a torment. They were in the wharepuni, too, by the million; in the mats of my bed. I could not sleep for them.<sup>193</sup>

Like other (and younger) women writers of her time, including Robin Hyde, Mackay earned her living by working as a journalist because 'Earning a living was in itself hard enough in a society where this was not an accepted pattern for women'.<sup>194</sup> In a letter to A.G. Stephens of the Sydney *Bulletin* in 1903 she wrote,

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<sup>192</sup> Pearson, Bill, 'The Maori and Literature', *Essays on New Zealand Literature*, edited by Wystan Curnow, Heinemann Educational Books, Auckland, 1973, p.114.

<sup>193</sup> Stewart, op. cit., 1983, p. 218.

<sup>194</sup> McCormick, *ibid.*, p. 2.

When ruin overtook us four years ago, I had to take on a double sort of life — half woman's, half man's work. It is hard for even the most sympathetic man to understand how hard it is for a woman to obtain the conditions a man writer commands as a matter of course.<sup>195</sup>

To see Mackay as a poet only, as Curnow does, is to fail to recognise the interaction between the different aspects of her life. Her poetry is a record of her dearly held causes, and for this reason, if for no others, she is now remembered by later generations of New Zealanders. In support of this, the poet and journalist Robin Hyde writes, under the heading 'Women journalists':

But among, and apart from, the social columns, fine heads, bright and thoughtful eyes, do manage to appear. To think of the New Zealand woman journalist brings a score of names at once into the mind — the versatility and vitality of Mona Tracey, the true steel (unbared against injustice or untruth) of Jessie Mackay, whose touch of the Celt, taking the form of enthusiasm, not of shadowy twilight, has introduced into New Zealand newspapers some of their most telling contributions.<sup>196</sup>

Robin Hyde's comments are perhaps more relevant than those of Curnow and McCormick, particularly her wish that 'Jessie Mackay's best newspaper articles, which had the force and drive of clear-sighted feminism, could be printed in book form, for they are important in our record of progress, and in those older-styled lyrical lamps, which were shapely and good, [...] she kept a very clear flame burning.'<sup>197</sup> Although Mackay was of an earlier era, it is possible that her ballad poems may have exercised some appeal for Stewart. Her poems written in the late 1800s and early 1900s were conscious celebrations of ancestry, as was Stewart's 'Glencoe' written much later in 1947.

Like Mackay, New Zealand poet Ursula Bethell (1874-1945), was also concerned with a context of time and place, but for her, unlike Mackay, England was always 'Home'. Like J.R. Hervey, J.C. Beaglehole, Eileen Duggan, D'Arcy Cresswell, A.R.D. Fairburn and Hyde,

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<sup>195</sup> Roberts, H., 'Mackay Jessie, 1864-1938', *DNZB.*, Vol. 2, 1993, p. 2.

<sup>196</sup> Hyde, R., 'A Crick in the Neck: Women journalists', *Disputed Ground*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1991, p. 190.

<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*, p. 207.

Bethell refined her Georgian heritage and proceeded to write poems marked by authentic experience, professional competence and intellectual stature. By the 1930s the full impact of the Eliot-Pound revolution (see introduction to this thesis) had been felt and Bethell was among those who embraced modernism; she took the lead and ‘assimilated these invigorating influences, and applied the lessons they thus learned to a more determined search for significance — individual, social, historical — than had before been the case’.<sup>198</sup>

As for Bethell, so with Stewart: landscape images provide the stimulus which promotes the creative impulse, so it often becomes clear that while the subject of one of his later poems may at first appear to be a description of a particular image, such as ‘The Green Centipede’, a theme emerges; for example, ‘Whatever lies under a stone / Lies under the stone of the world’. The centipede is ‘fringed with silvery light, / So beautiful not to be touched, / In its green grace had power’, and that power ‘would / Burn, burn in the hand’ (C.P., 159). In a later interview, Stewart tells John Thompson, ‘So that poem is not just about a green centipede. It’s an exploration of the duality of God, of good and evil in the universe’.<sup>199</sup> This reference to Stewart’s personal philosophy becomes a line of continuity which continues throughout his total works.

Unlike Stewart’s philosophy by which he propounded that human beings and the spirit of nature are the same, in Ursula Bethell’s poetry ‘occurs the kindred thought that man’s estate here is a transient concern, and the land does not much love or want us’:

... stark antinomy  
Of wild and won annulled; and, new-companioned foes,  
Beneath the hostile heights homestead and farm repose.’  
(Curnow, p. 51)

Bethell writes:

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<sup>198</sup> ‘Search for Significance’ *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand 1966*, retrieved from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/1966/L/LiteraturePoetry/SearchForSignificance/en>, 15 August, 2006.

<sup>199</sup> Thompson, Interview with Douglas Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

The *consciousness* of God came to me, as to many, chiefly in the solitudes of Nature. Face to Face with horrors in East London, in the war, that wasn't enough ... And now that everything is broken up and I am starting out again alone, I begin to wonder, am I to learn what that 'and' really implies.<sup>200</sup>

In 'By Burke's Pass' (A.C., p. 119) Bethell says, 'Nature, earth's angel, man's antagonist, / The stern antagonist from whom he wrests his bread', and the reader gets a glimpse of Bethell's notion of humanity and its relationship with the earth. Allen Curnow concludes 'What Ursula Bethell calls (in 'By Burke's Pass') "this planetary decoration" supplies her, chiefly, with a language to express the transcendent truths of her religion' (A.C., p. 55).

In 'Weathered Rocks' Bethell makes a clear statement that poetry is music and that the music relies on images for its poetic impulse. Both music and the images of the New Zealand landscape<sup>201</sup> are affected by Time, but whereas the relationship between music and imagery come together to form poetry and are, therefore, reliant on each other, 'there shall be no equivalent' for the landscape images themselves:

Poetry is a music made of images  
Worded one in the similitude of another,  
Changing the whole universe to the ecstasies  
Of humanity, its anguish and its fervour.

In his introduction to *Ursula Bethell: Collected Poems, VUP*, 1997, O'Sullivan declares:

Yet it was the constant vividness of nature in her second country, and the play of her religious convictions between the near detail and the distant sweep of her life above the Canterbury Plains, that took her most deeply, and at her best even originally, into the great tradition of Anglican devotional writing. It was drawing on what she most valued in her Englishness, that prepared her so effectively to look straight in front of her.<sup>202</sup>

O'Sullivan also quotes from 'October Morning' to illustrate this view; it is in this poem that Bethell contemplates the need for a 'taught interpreter, / To translate the quality, the excellence, for initiate seer / To tell the essence of this hallowed clarity, / Reveal the secret meaning of the symbol: "clear".' Here the reader is given the clue that Bethell's words and

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<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>201</sup> The description of landscape images in 'Weathered Rocks' appear to depict South Island landscape, notably Lyttleton Harbour, the breached caldera of an extinct volcano.

<sup>202</sup> O'Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

images are symbolic. She makes an abstruse statement in verse three of the same poem:

Rock, thorn, cryptogram, each has significance,  
Each makes contribution to eternal parable;  
And we are kin, compounded of the same elements,  
Alike proceeding to an unknown goal.<sup>203</sup>

Though there are similarities in Bethell and Stewart's poetry, there are also differences; Stewart hears and conveys the music in the poem's rhythm<sup>204</sup>:

I feel like some mariner who lies  
Too tired for sleep upon his narrow bed,  
While overhead  
The stars are crackling in the glimmering skies,  
And sea beneath is ebony fired with green.  
While so he lies, so utterly serene,  
He hears the engines beat,  
Thud and repeat,  
In perfect rhythm, in lovely shuddering time.  
Their steady rhyme  
Seems far below him, far away  
In some vast chasm ... a great machine  
Throbbing and throbbing, far away.  
(C.P., pp. 322-323)

The change of thought in Bethell's 'Weathered Rocks' is most relevant to Stewart's poetry; both poets are alert to the nuances of sounds of words as well as rhythm, but Bethell's poems are, on the face of it, more 'regular' in respect to line length and stanzas. Stewart and Bethell hear music in words, but their poetry they choose to emphasise 'music' in different ways. As Stewart's poem continues in this style, the throbbing of the ship's engine is compared to his lover's heartbeat, and because of the irregular line lengths, effective use of comparative consonants like 'ts and ds' or 'bs and ds' and long vowel sounds, one can hear the music in this modern poem in the same manner as music continues to be a major theme in Stewart's later poems and verse plays.

Like Mackay and Hyde, Eileen Duggan (1894-1972) was a poet who made a name in

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<sup>203</sup> O'Sullivan, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

<sup>204</sup> Stewart, D., 'Heart of the World', *Green Lions*, op. cit., pp. 322-323. This poem reflects the music and rhythm of the engines, possibly of the *Doric Star* on which he journeyed to England in 1937 where his fiance waited for him. (From a conversation with Meg Stewart) There appears to be an anomaly here, the poem is included in *Green Lions* (1936), but the poet's journey began in 1937, so it is presumed that Stewart wrote the poem imaginatively while anticipating life aboard ship.



the literary world in New Zealand and overseas. She wrote for the media including the *Sydney Bulletin*, the *New English Weekly* (London) and *Commonweal* (New York). Duggan rejected modernism as a newfangled literary direction, unlike Stewart who later began experimenting with modernist trends in his poetry and verse plays; Sharkey suggests that Stewart was ‘accommodating himself to modernity throughout his career’,<sup>205</sup> and in later poetry it became a line of continuity which contributed towards his total philosophy. Her sensitivity towards women and Maori cultures reflects modern trends in literature which is also evident in Stewart’s poetry and verse plays such as *The Golden Lover*. Her alienation from the masses such as is seen in the poetry of modernist writers such as Yeats, Lawrence and Eliot, who found twentieth century technology and profit-oriented businesses distasteful. They knew they couldn’t ‘escape’, except into art, so they criticised it while depending on it to different degrees.

Like Stewart, Duggan uses Maori names here to ‘locate’ the poem. Images of motherhood are presented in the tiny bittern in ‘A Maori Lullaby’:

Hark! the bittern calls her children  
From the willow-weed and marsh-logs,  
And the lonely little swamp-bird  
Wades no more about the black bogs.  
See the Kelpies of the starshine,  
Peeping each one through a blue bough,  
Hearken to the voice of *Rangi*  
Singing as I sing to thee now.  
Sleep, my bright-eyed little *weka*  
Sleep, my *huiia*-bird of twilight,  
Sleep, my brown moth of the branches;  
*Ate! Ate! Ate! Ate!*

(K.G., p. 12)

The language in ‘A Maori Lullaby’ is often archaic and there is a mix of biblical expressions and Maori tags of phrases. Duggan employs the language of archaic English nineteenth

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<sup>205</sup> Sharkey, op. cit., p. 5.

century translations of Maori songs; the repetitions and paralleling are also features of old Maori songs. This is one of the poems about which Hyde says, the poet 'has touched, perhaps, the deepest and sweetest spiritual note, and [ ... ] *New Zealand Bird Songs* contains some little masterpieces of descriptive phrase and sincere feeling.'<sup>206</sup>

J.C. Reid believes Duggan's poetry conveys a sense of alienation and loneliness which is also evident in Stewart's poetry, for example in 'The Scarlet Dancer', but when one considers the rural aspect of her personal life, this is understandable, particularly when read as a reflection of the landscape itself, a landscape where a sensitive person could escape from the noise and trouble of a bush town to meditate on her own sense of values and emotional experiences. Reid is sympathetic to Duggan's literary impulse, and feels that she was not well served by her admirers and critics:

It is difficult to understand the patronizing and minimizing tone which Allen Curnow adopts concerning her poetry, in his preface to *A Book of New Zealand Verse, 1923-1945* unless he is unconsciously on the defensive and his criticism proceeds from a sense of the lack of concrete values in the greater part of the verse he has selected for the book.<sup>207</sup>

One must agree with Reid's criticism, but Duggan's poem does appear to sentimentalise Maori life in a way Curnow probably found patronising:

The early work of Miss Duggan and of Robin Hyde shows how talents above the commonplace could be drawn into the habit of sentimental posturing ... It is not the true romantic's power to transfigure appearances, procuring the 'willing suspension of disbelief'; it is an appeal for some childhood privilege, exempting from reality. Poet and ingenue are incompatibles.<sup>208</sup>

The result of this tirade had the same effect as Curnow's comments about Stewart's poetry; Duggan refused publication of any of her work in Curnow's 1960 *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse 1945-1960*. She remained in New Zealand, and wrote no further poetry after 1951; although Peter Whiteford says she felt herself 'to be remote from what was then

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<sup>206</sup> Hyde, op. cit., pp. 192-193.

<sup>207</sup> Reid, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>208</sup> Curnow, *Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1945*, op. cit., 1945, p. 24.

happening in New Zealand literature',<sup>209</sup> it is not beyond the realm of possibility that she took these comments to heart and, to the loss of her New Zealand audience, decided to write only on historical and religious topics.

It is clear that twentieth century New Zealand writers found nineteenth century writers to be moralistic, wordy and sentimental, and many of the poems in *Kowhai Gold* illustrate the truth of this attitude even while these poets retained some features of the older style. The modernists responded with new subjects and new styles and their poetry is concise and experimental. Even so, at this time Stewart was open-minded about it and began his own investigations regarding modernism in poetry, and as mentioned above, Michael Sharkey points out: 'Stewart was accommodating himself to modernity throughout his career'.<sup>210</sup>

The challenge made by those involved with policy-making in *Phoenix*, Glover and Curnow, was taken up by poets who had 'a sensitiveness to local nuances', resulting in literary forms new to New Zealand. Modernism was reflected in both prose and poetry; the novel *Man Alone* (1939) by John Mulgan (1911-45), expresses the changes pervading the literature in the 1930s in an attempt to 'mould the language and rhythm of everyday New Zealand speech — the speech of the street, the government office, the hotel bar, the middle-class household'.<sup>211</sup> Frank Sargeson's short stories influenced countless other modernist writers of the period and later. In verse, responses to changing social conditions were made by poets like Bethell, Duggan and Hyde, as they 'modified their conception of the poetic through the stress of the contemporary world'.<sup>212</sup>

McCormick's 1940 essay, a revision of his M.Litt. Thesis, 'Literature in New Zealand: an essay in cultural criticism', 'explores New Zealand literature through the idea that literature

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<sup>209</sup> Whiteford, P., 'Duggan, Eileen', *OCNZL*, 1998, p. 151.

<sup>210</sup> Sharkey, M., *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>211</sup> Whiteford, P., 'Duggan, Eileen', *OCNZL*, 1998, p. 151.

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 180-182.

is a function of cultural identity and integrity, themselves the products of complex historical, intellectual and social pressures'.<sup>213</sup> In 1940, McCormick published a revision of his earlier thesis under the title: *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, in which he aimed 'to bring out their relation to social changes in the years since European discovery'.<sup>214</sup> Stewart was an ephebe<sup>215</sup> in the poetic world of the 1930s; nevertheless, New Zealand nationalism was also a concern facing him as well as the New Zealand modernists who 'were asserting a new image of nationhood and an aesthetic grounded in local reality'.<sup>216</sup> Stewart had 'collaborated with the local Georgians, that is Marris, who had taken him up as a protégé and published his work in a number of anthologies and newspapers and spoke highly of him in a paper delivered to a Wellington literary conference in 1936'.<sup>217</sup>

Marris's annual anthology *New Zealand Best Poems*, first published by Harry Tombs in 1932, combined new verse and as previously published verse written in the manner of previous decades, upheld poetic conventions, and discouraged literary modernism. In his biographical essay on Marris, Stephen Hamilton writes: 'In common with several other literary journalists, including Alan Mulgan and J.H.E. Schroder, Marris used his position as editor and anthologist to guide New Zealand's literature in a direction he thought suitable',<sup>218</sup> preferring the works of poets such as J.C. Andersen, J.R. Hervey, Duggan, Hyde and Dora Hagemeyer and others including Stewart, to writers associated with Glover and the Caxton Press in Christchurch. Marris's beliefs in regard to his preferences in poetry were repeatedly denigrated in publications such as *Tomorrow* and culminated in a satirical poem by Glover, 'The Arraignment of Paris' (1937) in which Marris as Paris is characterised as 'the arbiter of all our

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<sup>213</sup> McCormick, E.H., *OCNZL*, p. 318.

<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>215</sup> Bloom, H., *The Anxiety of Influence*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 10. An ephebe is an apprentice or junior poet without much experience.

<sup>216</sup> Bourke, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 43.

<sup>217</sup> *ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>218</sup> Hamilton, S.D., 'Marris, Charles Allan, 1876-1947', *DNZB*, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 336.

art and letters / presenting rotten apples to his betters',<sup>219</sup> which Allen Curnow says was 'not too scornful'; Marris's response 'was muted, although privately he threatened to sue Glover'.<sup>220</sup>

Keith Sinclair quotes a verse about the solemnity of work by Marris, Mulgan and Schroder:

Three Men who hold within their hand  
the Literary of the Land  
and lead this little pilgrim Band,  
Mulgan, Marris, Schroder.

Alas, these words will never bust  
into the Literary Column:  
Mulgan, Marris, Schroder must  
keep it Solemn, Solemn, Solemn<sup>221</sup>

Marris encouraged new work including that of J.C. Beaglehole who became a regular contributor after he returned to New Zealand in 1930 from studying abroad. McCormick makes an interesting point when he says that poets like J.C. Beaglehole are 'the product of that phase of lyrical nature-worship through which most New Zealanders must pass'<sup>222</sup> before Beaglehole could write the poem 'Meditation on Historic Change' (1934). Sinclair notes that Beaglehole's work forms 'a kind of bridge between the more traditional modes of New Zealand verse and the experimental work which began to appear about the time *Phoenix* flickered on the literary horizon'.<sup>223</sup> Hamilton makes the discerning point that Marris encouraged several important writers, notably Hyde. In addition, he also published and encouraged Stewart in his poetic career, and in response, Marris's work was published in the *Bulletin's* Red Page when Stewart became editor.

## 2. Stewart in the Context of New Zealand Literary Modernism

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<sup>219</sup> Curnow, A., op. cit., p. 48. See also Glover, D., *Selected Poems*, Penguin, Auckland, 1981, pp. 6-13.

<sup>220</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., p. 336.

<sup>221</sup> Sinclair, op. cit., p. 248. See also Glover, D., 1935, *Short Reflection on the Present State of Literature in this Country*, 1935, Caxton, Christchurch, (no page no.).

<sup>222</sup> *ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*, p. 187.

During the 1930s and 1940s, modernism, understood as a term that describes the break with what had become the dominant conventions of nineteenth and early twentieth century art and culture, began to shake assumptions concerning the nature and role of literature. Writing about modernism, Jeremy Hawthorn states, ‘The most important of these conventions is probably that of REALISM: the modernist artist no longer saw the highest test of his or her art as that of verisimilitude’.<sup>224</sup> Hawthorn’s reference to ‘art’, that is, performative, language and visual arts, includes ‘tonality in music with the attempt of various modernist writers to escape the constraints of traditional views of character and plot’.<sup>225</sup> His argument extends to another quality which ‘distinguishes modernism from romanticism, a generally more pessimistic, even tragic, view of the world — a world seen in the works of Eliot, Pound and Lawrence and other writers, as fragmented and decayed’.<sup>226</sup> This notion leads to his later identification of defeat as a mood of modernism.

In his essay ‘The Poetry of Douglas Stewart’, A.A. Phillips is quick to point out ‘The moments of experience which Stewart’s poems fit are usually the moments of delight and wonder — these are sources of poetic impulse out of favour with our guilt-ridden and sceptical generation’.<sup>227</sup> Stewart, as well as Phillips, understood it because it is a rejection of the modern sense of pessimism remarked by Hawthorn. Stewart’s personal philosophy of art in any form was that it should be concerned with a spiritual ‘Order and grace and clarity’<sup>228</sup> rather than with ‘explorations in depth of the human condition, or with the plying of the Freudian scalpel’.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, Stewart bemoans the fact that in 1942 ‘the Freudian concept is making some headway in Australia, so that one finds an art critic [unnamed] seriously

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<sup>224</sup> Hawthorn, J., *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, op. cit., 1992, p. 107.

<sup>225</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>226</sup> *ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>227</sup> Phillips, A.A., ‘The Poetry of Douglas Stewart’ op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>228</sup> Stewart, D., ‘The Pictures’, *Collected Poems*, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

<sup>229</sup> Phillips, op. cit., p. 103.

lamenting that there is too much joy and meaning in Australian painting and not enough melancholia'.<sup>230</sup> This notion is entirely in opposition to Stewart's understanding of what poetry and art should be about because even though the Freudian concept of life may give a clearer insight into human character, Stewart found it degrading, so that 'the harm far outweighs any advantage'.<sup>231</sup>

Stewart's attitude to modernism began and remained paradoxical, as well as infuriating many of his New Zealand and Australian critics who appear to be unaware that Stewart was 'accommodating himself to the idea of modernity all through his writing career'.<sup>232</sup> Throughout this thesis I have argued that Stewart's preoccupation with, and experiments in, writing with modernism in mind, is supported by Sharkey as well as Phillips who suggests that Stewart wrote 'within the modernism of his time'.<sup>233</sup> This notion is a line of continuity which contributes to Stewart's poetic philosophy which, in turn, influences his poetic oeuvre.

In Australia, Stewart reviewed contemporary poets and novelists from both countries, and wrote anonymous criticism of contemporary art for the *Bulletin*. His literary criticism was often appreciative of mainstream writers, but was characteristically disparaging of writing that he identified as modernist: he notoriously attacked the writing of Patrick White,<sup>234</sup> and was earlier dismissive of other writers he regarded as embodying Freudian, Poundian, Eliotian, Surrealist or other modern elements in their work. He could appear contradictory at times, promoting the 'Columbus' poems of Hart-Smith and the fiction of Hal Porter. To Geoffrey Dutton and many other Australian modernists, Stewart was a 'Janus-figure', 'an ignorant

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<sup>230</sup> Stewart, D., *The Flesh and the Spirit*, op. cit., 1948, p. 91.

<sup>231</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>232</sup> Sharkey, M., *Salt*, op. cit., 1996, p. 5.

<sup>233</sup> Phillips, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>234</sup> Bourke, op. cit, 1993, p. 45. Bourke explains that when Stewart was awarded the Britannica Australia award for literature, White wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'pointing out that the previous year the Britannica Council had ruled Christina Stead ineligible for the award because she was an expatriate, whereas now they were giving it to Stewart, born and bred a New Zealander'.

reactionary in art, a skilful and subtle poet and playwright' and a sympathetic editor.<sup>235</sup> As art critic, Stewart displayed similar contradictoriness, damning modernists like Picasso, Klee, Matisse, Henry Moore, and Australians Sali Herman and William Dobell, while remarking appreciatively on some of the work of some of the modern painters in the 1953 French Exhibition and works by Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd. It is clear, however, that in his insistence on the pleasure principle he was far from easy with works that demanded an effort of comprehension by readers and viewers, when some poets, writers and painters published work which was unintelligible in their efforts to acclaim 'modernism'.<sup>236</sup>

No plausible account of Stewart can portray him as wholly reactionary in his poetical taste. When Wallace-Crabbe writes that Stewart was 'the most powerful conservative force in Australian verse in the 1940s and 1950s, resisting the manifestations of modernism more or less wherever he found them',<sup>237</sup> he is correct to a point, but Stewart was not reactionary, but was selective in choosing poems for the Red Page that would maintain the national image the paper had built up over the years from 1880. McQueen's and Wallace-Crabbe's comments do not always relate to all of Stewart's poetry, but to his sense of the paper's polemical function. Stewart's modernist verse emerged gradually as he experimented with different forms, language and rhyme combinations. This becomes apparent in the tone of 'Cave Painting' that Stewart refers to as, 'a language of gesture startling and piercing as speech ... to breathe and speak for all humanity' (S.P., p. 227). This poem looks forward to a future time when Aboriginal and white men (in this instance fishermen), will become as one, and Indigenes will be equal with all other Australians. Written earlier in 1946, 'Rock Carving' elicits an affinity with the Aboriginal fisherman ('we cut our thoughts into stone as best we can' (C.P., p. 254)),

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<sup>235</sup> Dutton, G., *The Innovators: The Sydney Alternatives in the Rise of Modern Art, Literature and Ideas*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1986, p. 98.

<sup>236</sup> Stewart, op. cit., *Flesh and the Spirit*, p. 85.

<sup>237</sup> Wallace-Crabbe, op. cit., p. 225.



and this theme of mutual identification which the persona experiences continues as a line of continuity throughout his literary oeuvre, and this contributes to Stewart's philosophical preoccupations.

The conflict of opinion between conservative poets and modernists of the New Zealand *Phoenix* group, discussed earlier in this chapter, was an enduring one. When Stewart left New Zealand to live and work in Sydney, he found similar arguments were to be faced, but he was then in a position of control; he either accepted or rejected contributions to the Red Page according to his idea of the spirit of the paper's literary content initiated by J.F. Archibald, founder of the *Bulletin*,<sup>238</sup> and A.G. Stephens, first editor of the Red Page. While Stewart published poems by New Zealanders Arnold Wall, William Hart-Smith, Elizabeth Riddell, and other writers and poets, he initially rejected A.D. Hope's 'sexual and intellectual Jacobinism', an attitude to Hope's work that underwent a change over time with a favourable review of Hope's *The Wandering Islands*.<sup>239</sup>

Stewart allowed some traditional poetic forms and language in his editorial selections, while, at the same time, he experimented with modernist forms in his own poetry and verse plays. His conservatism continued to be a cause for comment by later critics because of Stewart's association with Lindsay, Slessor and FitzGerald who, with Stewart, were influenced by the pleasure principle. Further scrutiny of Stewart's poetry, however, reveals contemporary trends in his middle and later poetry; Geoffrey Page comments on 'Leopard Skin' (C.P., p. 61) which, he suggests, is a modern satirical sonnet echoing the earlier Petrarchan form and which gives joy to the reader. Page also notes that this poem is 'an example of how modern poets can take an old inheritance and adapt it for their own

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<sup>238</sup> Stewart, D., 1977, *Writers of the Bulletin*, op. cit., pp. 14-17. Stewart was alert to the nationalist Nature of the *Bulletin* and, in his editing and choice of contributions, kept in mind Archibald's stated aim.

<sup>239</sup> Wallace-Crabbe, op. cit., p. 225.

purposes'.<sup>240</sup> 'Reflections at a Parking Metre' (C.P., p. 15-19), and 'Professor Piccard' (C.P., 45-49) are all light verse with deeper themes, while poems such as 'Silkworms' (C.P. 49-50) and 'Rutherford' (C.P., pp. 96-105) pose questions to challenge modern-day readers, in modern language, and, to some extent, tone. 'Four-letter Word' (C.P., 19-24) is possibly the most risqué poem in Stewart's collection — it remains within the bounds of propriety, yet readers can appreciate the humour as they fill in the gaps. Some modernist influence in the poet's early verse can be detected in form and rhythm in 'Green Lions' (C.P. 313) and later, in 'Cicada Song' (C.P. 121).

In his essay 'Blaming the Age' (1942), Stewart agrees with T.S. Eliot's question 'What art ... other than the image of chaos, frustration and despair' does the age of World War II deserve;<sup>241</sup> and Stewart wonders about Spender's statement 'and if our readers don't get much fun out of our verses, it's their own fault: "Every age gets the art it deserves"'.<sup>242</sup> But in discussing art and the age of writing, he discovers, as he suggests Matthew Arnold should have done, 'that major art occurs in all ages ... whenever a great artist happens to be born'.<sup>243</sup> When Eliot defends his 'modern' poetry, Stewart says it sounds 'too much like a condemnation — Every age gets the art it deserves and every age must accept the art it gets'.<sup>244</sup> He disagrees with Eliot and says that Eliot's idea is 'utterly wrong, the exact reverse of the truth, which is that the poet creates the age, not the age the poet'.<sup>245</sup> Theresia Marshall suggests that as literary editor of the *Bulletin*, Stewart was able to 'explore new ways of re-thinking and re-vivifying the extremes — as he saw them — of modernist "experimentalism" and desiccated

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<sup>240</sup> Page, G., 'Douglas Stewart (1913-85)', *60 Classic Australian Poems*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2010, pp. 95-98.

<sup>241</sup> Stewart, 1948, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>242</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>243</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>244</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>245</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

traditionalism' in both Australia and New Zealand.<sup>246</sup> Here Marshall recognises Stewart's notions; in his verse plays in particular, he selected aspects of modernism and used them, thus inscribing in verse plays that dialogue in *Glencoe* through which many voices contribute to characterisation, as well as presenting a woman's point of view in *The Golden Lover*. In this way, he broke new ground in the language and preoccupations of verse drama, a move away from Georgian Romanticism which dominated traditional plays of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, to motifs of human relationships. Yet, Stewart's growth as a poet is not appreciated by many critics who find his diverse themes complex, thus leading to a paucity of critical comment about his poetry and verse plays.

Although Stewart disagreed with much that was modernist in poetry of the 1930s to 1950s, he remained an admirer of Yeats, and believed that:

The decadence of the nineties could have destroyed him [Yeats] as it destroyed Dawson and Johnson and Wilde. His dabbling in magic and mysticism set him on the road to frenzy, for the process of mysticism — the opening of the mind to a flood of images from the subconscious, formless, incoherent and unintelligible — inevitably destroys the poetic process, the essence of which is control, the isolation and clarification of the image.<sup>247</sup>

Whereas Yeats's poetry indicates a distaste akin to Eliot's for modern twentieth century life, there is a difference between the verse of these poets and Stewart's verse which strives for objectivity and clarity of imagery; it never reaches the nadir of depression. His reference to 'control, the isolation and clarification of the image' indicates his awareness of Pound's theory that images should be clear and precise; Pound's poem 'In a Station of the Metro', is an example that uses no word which does not contribute to the meaning of the poem, 'The apparition of these faces in the crowd / Petals on a wet, black bough', illustrates Pound's three principles of 'direct treatment of the "thing",' and secondly, 'use absolutely no word that does

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<sup>246</sup> Marshall, T.L., 'New Zealand literature in the Sydney *Bulletin* 1880-1960', Volume 2, PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 1995, p. 411.

<sup>247</sup> Stewart, *The Flesh and the Spirit* op. cit., p. 15.

not contribute to the presentation’, than, most importantly, ‘to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome’.<sup>248</sup>

Another New Zealand expatriate, Katherine Mansfield, also extended her poetic subject to include more modern themes. She was regarded as a modernist in England and New Zealand, and is represented in *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960), by the poem ‘To Stanislaw Wyspianski’ (1910). Allen Curnow comments in the Introduction to the anthology on the modernist aspect of her poem, although he is not speaking of technique, mainly because Mansfield’s poem is not ‘new’ in any technical sense. In particular, Curnow chooses the lines ‘I, a woman, with taint of the pioneer in my blood,’ to illustrate his interest in differing attitudes towards the concept of New Zealand as ‘home’. He compares William Pender Reeves’ 1898 poems ‘New Zealand’ and ‘The Colonist’: ‘It was all very well for Reeves to make romance out of the pioneer “with the old world at strife”; he was safe at “Home” in England when he wrote in that strain’ (A.C. p. 40).<sup>249</sup> On the other hand, the implications in Mansfield’s poem are of shame — the ‘taint’ of colonialism. Curnow rightly says, ‘The taint of New Zealand, at this stage of its incubation, offended a child of the nineties, where the colonist-child of the sixties had breathed fresh air’ (A.C. p. 40). Unlike Stewart who was supportive of New Zealand in his poetic images and themes in, for example, *The Golden Lover*, Katherine Mansfield denies New Zealand and criticises a paucity of aesthetics in the inhabitants’ perceptions of life, the social order and the materialism of colonialism, ‘a land with no history’:

My people have had nought to contend with;  
They have worked in the broad light of day and handled the clay  
with rude fingers;

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<sup>248</sup> Pound, E., *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>249</sup> Curnow, op. cit., p. 326. (See Curnow’s ‘Notes on the Poets’, for reference to Reeves, W.P., 1898, *New Zealand and Other Poems*. The poem ‘A Colonist in his garden’ became an anthology piece that particularly irritated Curnow.)

Life — a thing of blood and muscle; Death — a shovelling under-  
ground of waste material.  
What would they know of ghosts and unseen presences,  
Of shadows that blot out reality, of darkness that stultifies morn?<sup>250</sup>

This fragment is an indication that Mansfield's poetry for all its effort to make the speaker's uneasiness apparent in the long broken uneven lines, was more traditional than modernist. Mansfield's images are traditional and reflect the subjects of older New Zealand verse, but her modernist poetic techniques include abandonment of rhyme, and replacement by line punctuation which suggests speech rhythm. 'Paradoxically', Curnow concedes, 'her lines thus dignify the country they reject'. (A.C. p. 40).

Another theme in Mansfield's poetry is that of loneliness, a theme shared with Stewart in his later poems such as 'Distant Music' and 'Scarlet Dancer'. Mansfield's 'Loneliness' is metaphysical; the idea of loneliness is personified as a woman, old and weary. 'The Sea Child' (K.G. p. 25) is another extended metaphor for the loneliness, which in this case might have been a longing for home and family while she lived in Europe. In 'Sea Song' (K.G. pp. 25-26) Mansfield remembers home, and now likens memory to an old woman 'old and bent / With a pack / On her back'.

Hyde (a friend of Mansfield's) also wrote of themes of memory and loneliness, as well as being a prolific writer of novels, poetry and social comment. In 1938 she left New Zealand for England, but in Hong Kong she found a new and different world especially in parts of northern China where the Japanese were at war with the Chinese. Hyde's first collection of poetry, *The Desolate Star*, was published in 1929. Poems like 'Division', 'The Trees' and 'Ghosts', like Katherine Mansfield's poems, are concerned with loneliness and emotions of personal love. In 'Division' (K.G., p. 76), Hyde is clear about the 'deep abyss / Opened between us', but, she says 'I should have faith ... For Love knows patient ways of building

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<sup>250</sup> Mansfield, K., 'Stanislaw Wyspianski', in A. Curnow op. cit., 1960, p. 127.

strong / Bridges and stairs'; yet this is not enough, 'there is still more to conquer ... The pride, grown harsh at last for loneliness'. This poem marks Hyde as a 'Singer of Loneliness', and identifies her as a modernist writer in sentiment, and especially in style, even though this poem, together with 'The Trees' and 'Ghosts', appears in *Kowhai Gold*. Separation and loneliness appear again in 'Ghosts': 'We are two ghosts ... who are finally separated, 'Scarce I know why words are broken, eyes and faces wet'. Hyde's imagery is not unlike Stewart's, especially in the use of colour as symbol ('Look not too deep in purple sky or sea — / ... Ocean of space to sever you and me' (K.G., pp. 80-81), but for Curnow, Hyde's 'loose, irregular forms ... allowed her to speak her mind — which regular metres always distracted — and made room for her own kind of sensuous detail' (A.C., p. 58).<sup>251</sup>

Hyde's interest in Maori culture is reflected in her attempt to articulate the experience of Maori and women. In this regard, her writing shows an insight into issues which can be compared to some of Douglas Stewart's observations of Maori culture, their myths and legends. The manner in which he uses these myths and legends is, of course, most explicit in *The Golden Lover*, in which he explores a culture in which the love story of Whana and Tawhai occurs. This is one of the very few attempts by a male poet to bring a woman's loneliness within marriage into the open. It is in this verse drama that Stewart, like Hyde, at length, and in 'exile', found a distinctive New Zealand voice.

As well as admiring Hyde's poetry, Stewart was impressed with the prose and verse of her friend, Gloria Rawlinson, who, between 1947 and 1960, contributed 35 items of prose and verse to the Red Page and in 1952, together with William Hart-Smith, edited the first trans-Tasman issue of the *Jindyworobaks* anthology.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Curnow, A., op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>252</sup> T. Marshall, 'New Zealand Literature in the Sydney *Bulletin*', V.2, op. cit., p. 256. Douglas Stewart, Review of *New Zealand Short Stories*, D.M. Davin editor, 1953, criticises D.M. Davin's omission of

Rawlinson was much anthologised, for example, in *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, 1960, where Allen Curnow comments in his introduction:

It is not so surprising that some of the better verse of this last decade has been muted in tone, deficient in energy, a dulled mirror; it is the curious half-art of a half-people, too safe to be interested, sure of everything but themselves.

The mirror is broad, when it flickers back the brightness and amplitude of the Pacific Ocean, in Gloria Rawlinson's 'The Islands Where I was Born'.

(A.C., pp. 64-65)

'The Islands Where I was Born' is located in Tonga, and Rawlinson uses the island as a stimulus to inform nescient readers about the life and legends of the land of her birth as she contemplates her early childhood memories. She addresses her inner self, 'Heart, if you would mime / Journeys to where a child blinked half the truth'; the ambience of remembered images takes on a sinister tone outside the child's perception: 'Your flowery isles are masked in Medusa's blood / And the sapphirine elements wear a darker hood'.<sup>253</sup> It is hardly possible for the reader not to read more into this than a reference to past invasions, for example, the British invasion of Bligh's *Bounty* and the mutiny by Christian Fletcher and crew in Tahiti. As in Stewart's 'The Green Centipede', for example, the speaker indicates that danger and evil exist together with beauty in all aspects of life.

Rawlinson takes up universal issues in the same way that Stewart does in his early 'legendary' poem 'Tanemahuta' (C.P., pp. 90-92) when she asks whether 'we' fear to ask questions about dangers in paradise. She reinforces the adage that the key to understanding is

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Gloria Rawlinson who 'at her best, writes with a chrystalline vividness hardly seen elsewhere since Katherine Mansfield ... Gloria Rawlinson's stories, besides appearing in the *Bulletin* were thought worth printing in the *London Mercury* in J.C. Squire's time'. [Note: Squire was a quintessential Georgian, with pronounced un-Modernist taste]. D.M. Davin, 'New Zealand Greets the world', Review of *New Zealand Short Stories, Bulletin*, Red Page, 24.2.1954, p. 2.

<sup>253</sup> 'Medusa's blood' refers to the gorgon which turned people to stone. Her head was cut off by Perseus of Greek mythology and fastened to Athena's aegis. Robert Graves, *Greek Myths*, Cassell, London, 1965, p. 127.

taught in a child's formative years at her mother's knee, and this theme appears in varying ways in the verse of other women poets such as Duggan. Male poets are less inclined to employ these themes and images in their verse: A.R.D. (Rex) Fairburn (1904-1954) for example, is more easily drawn towards historically oriented themes, and Curnow attempts to encourage a new national literature for New Zealand without recourse to such imagery or analogy as Duggan's or Rawlinson's.

Rawlinson's diction in Section IV becomes informal as she relates an incident on a different voyage: 'Once on an island voyage ... circling bull,'. Tension increases from this point as internal rhymes 'flashed, clash, splash' leading into the climax, the resolution following with a sudden expression of peace: 'Down through the sea light's fathoms, into the ocean's night'. This description compares with Stewart's description of an iceberg in *Worsley Enchanted* (C.P., p. 184) (See Chapter 8) where he uses the same technique as Rawlinson when he describes the iceberg rising up then slowly sinking beneath the Antarctic waters.

The gradual move away from imperial influence on New Zealand literature and towards a new nationalistic literary preoccupation was given strength by Fairburn. Returning to New Zealand in 1932 after a visit to England, he published poems in the 1933 issues of *Phoenix* edited by R.A.K. Mason, and in one issue of the Caxton Club magazine *Sirocco* edited by Denis Glover. In this way he established himself with the new generation of writers coming together around the printer Robert ('Bob') Lowry in Auckland and printer-poet Glover in Christchurch.<sup>254</sup>

R.A.K. Mason, a poet of some distinction, some of whose early verse was published in *Kowhai Gold*, edited the third edition of *Phoenix* (March 1933) in which he was able to express his attitudes towards what he considered to be social wrongs, inequalities and public

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<sup>254</sup> Jackson, M., Introduction to *A.R.D. Fairburn: Selected Poems*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1995.



stupidities. It is significant to note that, like Stewart (See *Glencoe*, Chapter 8), Mason believed:

... poetry should and could be as it was so long in Scotland and Ireland, a thing of the people but at the same time profound. So the poem has a simple surface appearance but with deeper layers of significance beneath — I felt strongly the need for poetry and drama to move more closely together ... with drama benefiting by the bite and precision of poetry, while poetry should learn again the simple and open texture of drama.<sup>255</sup>

The result of this thinking was the verse play *Squire Speaks* (1938) which J.E. Weir calls ‘a fashionable example of the Marxist popular drama of the period ... primarily a political, not a literary exercise’.<sup>256</sup> This is significant because of the similarity of Stewart’s comments about his idea of the concepts of poetry and verse drama, particularly in his introduction to *Voyager Poems* and in the introduction to *Modern Australian Verse, Volume 2*,<sup>257</sup> in which he refers again to the pleasure principle, that poetry can be enjoyable and ‘I feel often enough, that is what poetry is all about’.

Stewart and Mason had similar ideas about some aspects of poetry, but Mason’s ‘thing of the people’ refers to his attempt to create poetry with ‘bite’ — poetry that jolts people into a realisation of their fellow-humanity with the poor and downtrodden. Mason is much more radical than Stewart. As a socialist, he identifies with the workers, the outcasts, the homeless and the despised, whereas Stewart believes ‘the poems which people really enjoy go on living unperturbed’. Both poets were impelled to refer back to Scotland; for example, Stewart’s later *Glencoe* (a protest against all cruelty and violence), is an example of the plight of mankind; it is a modernist work, mainly because the ballads are the songs of the people and the stories they told. At the same time, both Mason and Stewart experimented with verse drama; for example, Mason’s *Squire Speaks* (1938). In Australia though, Stewart is perhaps best known as a poet

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<sup>255</sup> OCNZL, p. 366.

<sup>256</sup> Weir, J.E., *ibid.*, p. 366.

<sup>257</sup> Stewart, D., 1954, Introduction to *Modern Australian Verse, Volume 2*, *op. cit.*, in *The Broad Stream*, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

for this espousal of the ballad form genre, because, as he states in his introduction to *Voyager Poems*, in which he refers again to the pleasure principle:

They tell, with varying degrees of completeness, a story; and even if their purposes go beyond narration into philosophy, politics or images of spiritual endeavour, nevertheless they retain that basis of story-telling which poets in all ages have adopted and which readers in all ages have found readable.<sup>258</sup>

This statement reflects Stewart's conservatism; he admired traditional techniques of structure, form and rhythm, in poetic form such as lyrics, sonnets and ballads, as well as formality in language. Even though he followed this inclination, at the same time, he was, as Phillips notes, well aware of modernist trends and 'conformed to the standards of modernism of their time'.<sup>259</sup> Sharkey's suggestion that Stewart was 'accommodating himself to modernity throughout his career'<sup>260</sup> is emphasised throughout this thesis; it is an important fact that many literary critics do not recognise in his poetry and verse plays.

A major area where Mason and Stewart differ is in their preoccupation with and poetic interpretation of death and immortality. While Stewart continues to be concerned with such abstract ideas, Mason was writing a thing of the people both in the sense that the mood of the era was not one of unrelieved joy, and also because, like Shelley and other Romantics who saw themselves as representatives (or, as Shelley claimed for poets, the role of 'unacknowledged legislator) of mankind', Mason really thought he might be a spokesman for change, or at least, saw himself as coming in that line of poets.

In his essay 'R.A.K. Mason and the Passing of Time', Joost Daalder refers to Mason as a modern poet because

The wish to escape from time can be viewed as Romantic, but if so, it is also characteristically modern ... it appears to me that Mason is both of these things. Still when it comes to reflect on the general despair of these poems, one must conclude that that is modern rather than belonging strictly to nineteenth century

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<sup>258</sup> Stewart, D., ed., Introduction, *Voyager Poems*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>259</sup> Phillips, 'The Poetry of Douglas Stewart', op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>260</sup> Stewart, *Salt*, op. cit., p. 5.

Throughout Mason's poetry there is a 'typically modern *uncertainty* about man and God' which, Daalder continues, 'accounts to a large extent for his fear and passing of time and his general anxiety'. Despite accolades by Reid that Mason is 'The most notable of the poets of this period',<sup>262</sup> and by Daalder that he is 'a hauntingly impressive poet',<sup>263</sup> it is doubtful whether, as Daalder concludes, it is 'possible to agree with Mason's own feeling that his art, at least, will last'.<sup>264</sup> In hindsight, Mason's poetry for the most part is religiously melancholy and, in language, dated.

Mason's poetry was, however, influential on later poets like James K. Baxter and Hone Tuwhare, as well as the earlier modernists Curnow and Glover (who were also influenced by Auden and Spender).<sup>265</sup> Curnow and Glover wrote satires on contemporary writing and culture, notably Glover's *Short Reflection on the Present State of Literature in this Country, 1935* and Curnow's 'bitingly satiric' poem 'The Potter's Field', in which the first three stanzas form a mock prayer to tourists, asking them to come and 'save' New Zealanders by spending their tourist dollars.<sup>266</sup> Like Mason, Curnow was influenced by Marxist theory; for example, the theme 'Money is God'; this is clear, just as it is stated or implied in Mason's verse and in Fairburn's 'Dominion'. Militant Marxism of *Phoenix* times later became muted, and Reid wrote that 'in nearly all of these [early poets], later years showed a distinct broadening of vision and a clearer sense of values'.<sup>267</sup>

The wrench of attention to political and economic themes has passed. We were a

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<sup>261</sup> Daalder, J., 'R.A.K. Mason and the Passing of Time', *Landfall*, Vol. 138, Caxton, Christchurch, 1981, p. 241.

<sup>262</sup> Reid, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>263</sup> Daalder, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>264</sup> *ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>265</sup> Sinclair, K., op. cit., 1986, p. 250.

<sup>266</sup> Curnow, A., 'The Potter's Field', *The Tomorrow Poems of Allen Curnow: Changes from 1930s to the Present Day, 1935, Tomorrow 3*, (1937), p. 628.

<sup>267</sup> Reid, J.C., op. cit., p. 32.

little late with our depression and its characteristic verse, as in other matters; and the war followed hard upon. Our verse has, I believe, gained much through the sharing of New Zealand in that experience, which in essentials was much the same here as in England or America.<sup>268</sup>

In the 1930s, it was inevitable that many poets, wrote about the hardships people suffered as a result of the depression. Stewart is an exception to this theme; his biographical *Springtime in Taranaki* takes no account of the depression, and at an early age he was exploring New Zealand landscapes and writing poetry reflecting the beauty of nature which were published in *Green Lions* and *The White Cry*. His philosophical preoccupation that the closer one moves towards nature the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth, began at this early age and continued throughout his poetic oeuvre; later he wrote about Maori lifestyles and culture which reflect his New Zealand upbringing.

Many poets who were not affected deeply by Marxist philosophy, wrote more about ordinary working people in New Zealand. Glover's 'Harry' and 'Arawata Bill' are marginal people, and like John Mulgan's Johnson in *Man Alone*, cannot be said to belong to a mass 'workforce'; this is clearly seen as Arawata Bill travels around New Zealand looking for gold:

With his weapon a shovel  
To test the river gravel  
His heart was as big as his boots  
As he headed over the tops  
In blue dungarees and a sunset hat.

Wicked country, but there might be  
Gold in it for all that.<sup>269</sup>

Colloquial idiom in this verse reinforces the solo 'working man' theme as his thoughts are on the riches a gold strike could bring him, but Curnow's comments are pertinent:

Of course, all of Glover's verse relies — as good poetry in English always has — on a happy agreement between 'regular' metre and the natural stresses of the speaking voice; *theories* of versification concerned him very little. He was at home, not in prison, among the traditional verse forms; so much at home, that the reader is seldom allowed to notice what the 'form' is.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Curnow, A., op. cit., 1945, p. 41.

<sup>269</sup> Glover, D., 'Arawata Bill', Curnow, op. cit., 1960, p. 223.

<sup>270</sup> Curnow, A., Introduction, *Denis Glover: Selected Poems*, op. cit., 1981, p. xxix.

But as Reid writes, ‘there is pity, irony and tenderness, and a considerably wider view’ in Glover’s ‘The Magpies’, the story of Tom and Elizabeth.<sup>271</sup>

Year in year out they worked  
While the pines grew overhead,  
And *Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle*  
The magpies said,

But all the beautiful crops soon went  
To the mortgage-man instead,  
And *Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle*  
The magpies said.

...  
The farm’s still there. Mortgage corporations  
Couldn’t give it away.  
And *Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle*  
The magpies say.<sup>272</sup>

This poem could also be read as an extended metaphor because the political, social and economic aspects of the post-depression years are quite clear in the metaphors in these verses. When Stewart wrote, ‘The Magpie’ in Australia, and for decades afterwards, the furthest thing from his mind appeared to be the effects of the Depression. Rather, his joyful bird image relates to his personal philosophy that birds and humans are close to the spirit of the earth. This attitude could have been related to the idea that his preoccupations were escapist; however, *Springtime in Taranaki* illustrates that the Stewart family was materially comfortable and did not suffer, as many families did, from no income when, as workers, they lost their jobs.<sup>273</sup> While Stewart shows in his poetry that he belongs to the natural and spiritual environment in both New Zealand and Australia, New Zealanders, according to Sinclair, were ‘alienated spiritually from Nature’.<sup>274</sup> This belief is directly related to the loneliness that is evoked in poems like Glover’s ‘The Magpies’, and is a prevailing theme of the 1930s in New

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<sup>271</sup> Reid, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>272</sup> Glover, D., ‘The Magpies’, in Curnow, op. cit., 1981, pp. 219-220.

<sup>273</sup> Stewart was a teenager in 1930 when the Depression began, so perhaps at that age and because he lived at home, it did not affect him as it did others; he was free to write his own style of poetry and live his own fantasies.

<sup>274</sup> Sinclair, K., op. cit., p. 252.

Zealand writing. Curnow pursued the feeling of loneliness, remoteness and isolation through *Phoenix* and *Tomorrow* because he believed that the depression felt by New Zealanders, the insecurity, the oppression, was caused by their rootlessness — they had failed to make the land their own,<sup>275</sup> suggesting that they were interlopers in the country. This concept is in no way similar to Stewart's philosophical preoccupations which developed to a more mature awareness of the relationship between nature and humankind once he joined the literary milieu at the *Bulletin* in Sydney where he became interested in the modernism of his time, and Sharkey's suggestion that Stewart began 'accommodating himself to modernity throughout his career'.<sup>276</sup>

The following section of this chapter focuses on expatriate writers and expatriation itself. When Thompson asked Stewart whether he was a New Zealander or an Australian, Stewart declared that he was both (he was a third generation Australian).<sup>277</sup> Bourke quotes Stewart: 'I don't agree with the use of expatriate as a smear word. The question of origin should not be raised. The only questions are: Is your writing of significance in your country, and is it any good?'.<sup>278</sup>

### 3. Stewart as expatriate and supporter of New Zealanders' poetry

Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away:  
For he shall return no more, nor see his native country.  
Jeremiah XXII, 10

Pine for the needles brown and warm,  
think of your nameless native hills,  
The seagulls landward blown by storm,  
the rabbit that the black dog kills.

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<sup>275</sup> *ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>276</sup> Stewart, *Salt*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>277</sup> Stewart, *Southerly*, No. 3 of 1967, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>278</sup> Stewart, D., quoted by Bourke in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 December, 1968, p. 4.

The embers of your old desire  
remembered still will glow, and fade,  
And glow again and rise in fire  
to plague you like a debt unpaid,  
to haunt you like a love betrayed.<sup>279</sup>

A case for New Zealand writers is offered by Brigid Magner<sup>280</sup> who explains that writers leaving New Zealand and the response of literary powers to the emigration of some ‘very good’ poets and novelists, including Stewart.<sup>281</sup> Magner’s argument, together with Stewart’s own short article, ‘In Defence of Arnold Wall’, in which Stewart indirectly comments on his own literary situation, supports Bourke’s contention that Stewart’s work remained unknown in New Zealand; he quotes Stewart’s letter to Mulgan (20 February, 1947) in which he spoke of New Zealand and ‘expressed his disappointment that his work went unrecognized in his homeland which is “the land one has most at heart”.’<sup>282</sup> Even though Magner says he disguised the fact that he was a New Zealander, Stewart was not an exile, but an expatriate by choice, and at no time denied he was a New Zealander: he declared, ‘Nobody ever spends all their life in the country town they were born in; and it’s in the native town that your loyalties lie’.<sup>283</sup> After trying to have *Springtime in Taranaki* published, Stewart explained, ‘publishers believe Australians won’t read about New Zealand and in New Zealand I’m not known or else wrongly thought an Australian’.<sup>284</sup> There was no doubt in Stewart’s mind about his being a New Zealander living and working in Australia. In her chapter, ‘Transformation’, Brigid Magner discusses the reasons for, and results of expatriation. The bias shown by New Zealand editors of anthologies was closely related to attitudes towards expatriation, that is, the

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<sup>279</sup> Fairburn, A.R.D., ‘To an Expatriate’, in Curnow, op. cit., 1960, pp. 154-155.

<sup>280</sup> Magner B., op. cit., pp. 212-214, 2001.

<sup>281</sup> Magner, *ibid*, p. 213. See also William Hart-Smith interviewed by Brian Dibble, 6 January, 1983, *William Hart-Smith: Hand-to-Hand Garnering* [H.H.], pp. 332-333.

<sup>282</sup> Bourke, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>283</sup> Stewart, D., *Daily News*, 21 January 1984.

<sup>284</sup> Stewart in Bourke, op. cit., p. 52.

movement of a person's place of residence from his or her homeland to another land, and this is an important element in any discussion of Stewart's move from New Zealand in 1938 to Australia. It is generally believed that ideas of expatriation are closely connected to concepts of nationalism and patriotism because expatriates become prone to exclusions and prejudiced reactions from two directions (B.M., p. 190). This argument can be supported by reference to Stewart who took advantage of Australian society and culture through his position at the *Bulletin* while, at the same time, retaining a strong sense of loyalty to his New Zealand heritage.<sup>285</sup>

Stewart's association with Australia from his childhood has been discussed already in Chapter 1; he and the modernists had disagreements, but according to the definitions offered by Gurr and Said, he cannot be called an 'exile', but an 'expatriate' who benefited creatively from his association with New Zealand and Australia. In *Writers in Exile*<sup>286</sup> Andrew Gurr explains the difference between 'exile' and 'expatriate'. This distinction is particularly relevant to Stewart's work, his attitude to New Zealand and New Zealanders' attitudes to him. Gurr insists that a 'creative exile' is a person who was born in a small conservative, traditional, conformist community, and who acquires a vision of the seductive freedom open to 'expatriates' who are born or who are familiar with the large, impersonal, individualistic metropolis. Exiles leave the small community 'to create art for themselves in the greater freedom of the anonymous darkness away from home. The result is 'creative exile'. Gurr proposes 'the pressures of creative exile on those modern writers who were born in colonies and who took flight to the metropolis could be enormously constructive',<sup>287</sup> but whereas the response to exile and alienation involves 'a search for identity, the quest for a home, through

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<sup>285</sup> Interview with J. Thompson, op. cit., pp. 188-198.

<sup>286</sup> Gurr, A., *Writers in Exile*, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1981.

<sup>287</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.



self-discovery or self-realisation’,<sup>288</sup> it leads to a question of a national consciousness.

In ‘Reflections on Exile,’<sup>289</sup> Said also defines expatriates as those who live in foreign countries by choice; they may ‘share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions’.<sup>290</sup> James Joyce, according to Said, was an exile by choice who, ‘to give force to his artistic vocation ... picked a quarrel with Ireland and kept it alive so as to sustain the strictest opposition to what was familiar’.<sup>291</sup>

When Stewart moved to Sydney he joined the ranks of expatriates like William Hart-Smith and others whose work was devalued by nationalist New Zealand critics such as Curnow. According to Bourke, the modernists Curnow and Glover did not take the *Bulletin* seriously.<sup>292</sup> As editor of the *Bulletin*’s Red Page, Stewart took a stand against the modernists, claiming that ‘the *Bulletin* was [...] the [...] centre of Antipodean literature’.<sup>293</sup> Bourke suggests that ‘Antipodean’ lets Stewart use a word that pretends there is no difference between Australia and New Zealand; this may be true from the Australian perspective, but it is ‘quite another matter from the New Zealand perspective’, because for Stewart, Bourke says, ‘the word ‘Antipodean’ comes to quietly overlap and merge with the notions of “Australian”’.<sup>294</sup>

Stewart supported poets such as Arnold Wall, whose work was also devalued by the New Zealand modernists who considered his works to be too closely related to Georgian Romanticism, and more descriptive of subjects than analysis of human experience, such as the Great Depression in New Zealand (1928-1930s). ‘In Defence of Arnold Wall’ appeared on the Red Page of 22 March 1944, in which Stewart questioned the reasons behind Wall’s

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<sup>288</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>289</sup> Said, E., ‘Reflections on Exile’, *Reflections on Exile*, Granta Publications, London, 2001.

<sup>290</sup> *ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>291</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>292</sup> Bourke, L. *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>293</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>294</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

exclusion.<sup>295</sup> He gives two reasons: Wall's style is not specifically 'contemporary', and he has a sense of humour. The essay was reprinted in *The Flesh and the Spirit: An Outlook on Literature*, 1948. While Stewart was defending Wall, he was also defending his own poetry from the kinds of criticism made by the modernists.<sup>296</sup> He begins with a reference to an article by Curnow in *Meanjin Papers*<sup>297</sup> which, Stewart says, is valuable for its survey of the work of Cresswell, Mason and Fairburn, but it is misleading because Wall is excluded from the discussion:

Misleading, because Mr. Curnow is specifically interested in poets in whose work New Zealand is made articulate; poets who, in contrast to the early versifiers, accept the New Zealand scene as their natural environment, using with equal ease the images of the imported and the native trees and birds, speaking as New Zealanders for New Zealand: and nobody has ever been more at home in New Zealand than Arnold Wall.<sup>298</sup>

Furthermore, citing an article in the centennial *Letters and Art in New Zealand*<sup>299</sup> which ignores Wall completely, Stewart accuses Curnow of following the critic M.H. Holcroft: Curnow excluded Wall from consideration because Holcroft tagged Wall's poetry 'gnomic'.

Stewart's selection of poems, which illustrate his major concerns about Wall's poetry, indicate his appreciation of the style and imagery in that poet's works. One example is 'About Our Birds':

And the gulls like foam flying,  
Hungriily crying,  
Their snowy wings  
Reflecting the green light of the wave  
In the underside;

(TBS, p. 112)

Stewart considers that these pieces 'are exactly what Mr. Curnow likes to find in New Zealand poetry, "the strange new speech of a poetry coming to be her own and already contributing to

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<sup>295</sup> Stewart, D., 'In Defence of Arnold Wall', *The Flesh and the Spirit*, op. cit., pp. 112-115.

<sup>296</sup> Bourke, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>297</sup> Curnow, A., 'Aspects of New Zealand Poetry', *Meanjin Papers*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1943, pp. 20-26.

<sup>298</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., pp. 112-115.

<sup>299</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 112-115.

her awareness”.’ (TBS, p. 112). Birds in the city present an alternative view to those in rural

New Zealand:

On the fringe of the city  
The warbler, hark,  
Loiters in gardens, threads the shrubberies,  
Haunts the park;  
Through the roaring of trams,  
And newsboys’ calls,  
His sweet, sad, semi-toned sibilance  
Rises and falls; (TBS, p. 112-113)

The poem is quite conventional in respect to rhyme, though Wall’s images are of modern urban and suburban life.

Stewart’s choice of ‘All Before Them’ as the most successful poem in Wall’s *About Our Birds* is an indication of his poetic preference and personal philosophy related to enjoyment in poetry as it attests to Stewart’s purist literary aesthetic, giving readers ‘something gay and free and shining that evokes all the charm of the settled country’:

I’ve just seen them,  
And paused to admire —  
Three goldfinches,  
Mr, Mrs and Friend,  
Perching on a wire  
With a couple of inches  
Or so between them,  
In the dawn grey and cold,  
Gossiping away  
(TBS, p. 113)

The poem ‘Kookaburras’ also imitates the birds’ ‘gossiping away’, an example of onomatopoeia, a technique also found in Stewart’s own later poetry such as ‘Kookaburras’:

I see we have undervalued the kookaburras;  
They think they are waking the world, and I think so, too.  
They gobble the night in their throats like purple berries,  
They plunge their beaks in the tide of darkness and dew  
And fish up long rays of light; no wonder they howl  
In such triumph of trumpets, leaves fall from the trees,  
Small birds fly backwards, snakes disappear in a hole.  
And all day long they will rule the bush as they please.  
(CP., p. 58)

Stewart’s poem is rigidly controlled while the rhyming pattern is inventive, especially with onomatopoeia: ‘They gobble the night in their throats like purple berries’, and it is ‘no wonder

they howl / In such triumph of trumpets'. While 'Kookaburras' is about an Australian icon, it compares favourably with Wall's poem, which 'is obviously a poem about the joy of being alive, a laughing defiance of fate. Why shouldn't it be taken as symptomatic of the spirit of New Zealand?' Stewart asks.<sup>300</sup> He becomes defiant about Curnow's exclusion of Wall's poetry for consideration in his anthologies.

In his essay, 'New Zealand's Arnold Wall', Stewart writes that Wall's work is wide, diverse and far-ranging in extent and subject matter — from the Stone Age to the atomic bomb and beyond to eternity, so 'there is no theme too vast for him to touch on and none too small' (TBS, p. 160). From Wall's *The Pioneers*, Stewart remarks on 'Child on the Bus' which, he says, 'will give some indication of how packed and crowded it is with all kinds of phenomena — animal, vegetable and mineral — how comprehensive and vivid':

The small girl in the bus  
Is only four years old,  
A lively, forward puss  
With big eyes and bold.  
Like a dram she stirs  
The sombre passengers.

...

She's like a gash of red  
In a grey sky,  
A ball of mercury  
Amongst the pigs of lead.

(TBS, p. 160-161)

The poem is tight; it is vividly descriptive and the rhyming pattern enhances the image of the little girl absorbing all there is to know about the world she lives in while adults sit sombre and untouched by the phenomenon of this child with a lifetime's experiences ahead of her. Most effective in this poem is the simile 'She's like a gash of red / In a grey sky,' which develops the initial simile 'Like a dram she stirs / The sombre passengers'. The technique is characteristic

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<sup>300</sup> Stewart, *The Broad Stream*, op. cit., p. 114.

of Wall's approach in other poems, especially those contributions with philosophical themes such as the enjoyment of poetry, which Stewart accepted for publication in the *Bulletin*.

Stewart's criticism of Wall concludes, however, that the poetry 'lacks the qualities that spring from passion, music and fire', but despite this, his 'moments of power, his august and impish personality, his completely civilized mind, and the massed weight of his work' places him in the 'very best poetical company in New Zealand and Australia'.<sup>301</sup>

Stewart's support for New Zealand poetry in the *Bulletin* extended to promoting that of William Hart-Smith and Elizabeth Riddell, both of whom had become expatriates as a result of attitudes of New Zealand publishers. Hart-Smith (1911-1990), the first poet to be published by Glover at the Caxton Press, was born in England. He travelled with his parents to New Zealand in 1924, then in 1936 came to Australia where he lived in Hobart. In 1941 he enlisted in the Australian army and in 1945 returned to New Zealand because of ill-health. He came back to Australia in 1962 and once again, because of ill-health, returned to Auckland in 1978 where he remained for the rest of his life.

Hart-Smith always considered himself an expatriate, and in an interview with Brian Dibble, remarked, 'I always have been. I was an expatriate at the age of 12 ... I was an expatriate — in Australia. But, of course, of the two countries, Australia is the country that I identify myself with, I love most; and I cannot alter that'.<sup>302</sup> In 'Poetry in New Zealand' (1947), he had stated that for a decade before writing the essay, he had been an expatriate living and writing in Australia, and had 'not yet become sufficiently familiar with poetry written in New Zealand during this time to be able to say much about it'.<sup>303</sup> Nevertheless, he makes two discerning comments in this respect; the first is that 'Little is known in New

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<sup>301</sup> Stewart, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>302</sup> Interview with B. Dibble, 6 January, 1983, in *Hand to Hand: A Garnering*, B. Petrie editor, Butterfly, Springwood, 1991, p. 337. All future references to this publication will be shown as (H.H.).

<sup>303</sup> Hart-Smith, W., H.H., pp. 349-353.

Zealand about poetry in Australia’ and secondly, ‘Next to nothing is known in Australia about New Zealand poetry’.<sup>304</sup> These statements are basic to an understanding of New Zealanders’ attitudes towards poets and writers and identify the reason why poets and writers such as Hart-Smith and Stewart not only published in the Sydney *Bulletin*, but also became expatriates in Australia. Hart-Smith does not denigrate New Zealand publishers and writes that he is ‘still very alive in Australia. I can understand New Zealanders not accepting me as a poet’ (H.H., p. 333). His verse matured as his own attitudes matured in Australia: ‘Nobody seemed to mind that I wasn’t writing “Australian” poetry. I liked it over there for that reason’ (H.H., p. 334). This sense of belonging in Australia contrasts strongly with feelings of isolation and loneliness in the poetry of Robin Hyde and other poets. Hart-Smith repeats that he is accepted as a poet and is always happy in Australia, but:

There seems to be a tendency here of New Zealand writers to be consciously aware that they are contributing at the time of writing to a New Zealand culture — I can’t say I’m feeling that I contribute to an Australian culture. It’s something that happens in me, a poem comes out, and I let it go at that; if they want to make it part of Australian literature, well it’s up to them. But in New Zealand you’ve got to be one of the Establishment.<sup>305</sup>

Hart-Smith gives credit to Stewart, who had ‘a very profound influence on me as a person’ (H.H., p. 327), and when Hart-Smith saw his own poem ‘Spider’ in the *Bulletin* while he was in a NSW army camp in 1941, he became a constant contributor. Hart-Smith remarked of Stewart that ‘The most important influence he has had in my life was his full-page, Red Page review of “Columbus Goes West”,’ (H.H., p. 327). This poem was published as ‘Christopher Columbus’ in *Voyager Poems* (1960).

In his essay ‘The Fine Art of William Hart-Smith’,<sup>306</sup> Stewart indirectly asserts the effect of modernism in ‘The Surrender’, a poem from *Christopher Columbus* which is, in one

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<sup>304</sup> *ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>305</sup> *ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>306</sup> Stewart, D., ‘The Fine Art of William Hart-Smith’, *op. cit.*, *The Broad Stream*, pp. 208-217.

respect, unique in Australian poetry in that it seems to be written under the influence of Pound's 'Cantos':

Billow the white robes of the Moors,  
and the rhythm of the riders slow,  
a tired rhythm ...  
Folded into folds the purple mountains  
and their white embroideries of snow.  
Folded into folds the emblems of our banners.<sup>307</sup>

Stewart says, 'one is glad that the whole of *Christopher Columbus* is now written in this style[;] there is no harm in Hart-Smith's thus trying out Pound's methods for a particular effect'.<sup>308</sup> Stewart obviously appreciates the sensitivity with which this poem is written, but it seems as though he is wary of being labelled 'modernist', preferring at that time to be considered 'traditional' in order to preserve what he considered essential poetic techniques of rhyme, rhythm and language in keeping with Archibald and Stephens' nationalist philosophy in the original *Bulletin*, even though, as stated earlier, he was, at the same time, experimenting with modernism in his poetry and verse plays.

In 1951 an attempt was made to publish a 'Trans-Tasman' edition of the Anthology co-edited by Hart-Smith and Rawlinson; this was not successful because as Brian Elliott remarks, it 'inclined increasingly towards "good poetry" and away from "good Jindyworobak poetry"'.<sup>309</sup> Rex Ingamells offered Hart-Smith an editorship of the movement in New South Wales, which Hart-Smith accepted (H.H., p. 317). Stimulated by his experience with Jindyworobak poetry and Aboriginal culture after his return to New Zealand in 1946, Hart-Smith became interested in all aspects of Maori culture and some resulting poems were published in the *Listener*, the *New Zealand Poetry Year Book* and the *New Zealand Arts Year Book*, 'but nothing much happened — it was a complete absence of any response, except from

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<sup>307</sup> *ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>308</sup> *ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>309</sup> Elliott, B., ed., *Portable Australian Authors: The Jindyworobaks*, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, 1979, p. li.

one or two close friends. A.R.D. Fairburn was one.’ (H.H., p. 335).

Charles Brasch, editor of *Landfall*, published some of Hart-Smith’s poetry, ‘but I still couldn’t crack that top level of the hierarchy and get inside — I always felt on the outer’ (H.H., p. 335). Despite this, Hart-Smith’s poetry, both New Zealand and Australian, was published in the *Bulletin* for nearly twenty-five years. At the same time, Vivian Smith, editor of *Quadrant* (1975-1990), also admired Hart-Smith’s poems because of their concrete, graphic style: he remarked, ‘they spoke to aspects of my own experience, they evoked the world I knew ... ’ (H.H., p. 309). This view compares favourably with Stewart’s idea of poetry and points up the contradictory nature of Stewart’s recognition that a poet of such modernist impulse as Hart-Smith could afford ‘enjoyment’. Smith writes that Hart-Smith:

was one of the most remarkable modern poets writing and publishing here and his continuing use of free verse during the more formalist and orthodox fifties and early sixties added considerably to the variety of the poetic scene. It was clear from his work that he had read and assimilated poets as different as D.H. Lawrence, W.C. Williams and Ezra Pound. He too was trying to make it new ... in my years as editor I have probably published more by him than any other writer (H.H., pp. 310-311).

Hart-Smith was not alone in his feelings of constraint and rigidity of the New Zealand literary establishment. The work of John Caselberg<sup>310</sup> suggests parallels with Hart-Smith’s work and the Jindyworobaks. Another New Zealand poet, Alan Loney, who migrated to Australia in the latter years of the twentieth century, ‘has reflected on the fact that he has never felt at home anywhere — essentially he has lived in an alienated state’.<sup>311</sup> Loney’s poem ‘Soma 1990’ attests: ‘I am estranged / from what is / most familiar’.

Feelings of loneliness and alienation experienced by Hart-Smith earlier applied to Elizabeth (Betty) Riddell (1910-1998), who moved to Australia from New Zealand in 1928 to

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<sup>310</sup> Magner, B., ‘States of Expatriation’, *Trans-Tasman Proximity and Detachment in New Zealand and Australian Literary Relations, Part Two: Liminal States & Textual Transfigurations*, PhD Thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, 2001, p. 214.

<sup>311</sup> *ibid.*, p. 214.



work on the *Sydney Truth*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Australian* and the *Bulletin*. While working in Sydney, Riddell won a Walkley Award for a series of articles on the brewing industry.

Riddell's poetry has precision and vitality, both of which are aided by poetic conventions of structure, rhythm and often clever rhyming patterns. Themes in her poetry are concise and clearly stated; this skill no doubt is a product of her long association with journalism, around which some of her poems revolve. Some poems are nostalgic; 'The Memory' recalls her early life at a Catholic boarding school:

It was a gentle time without rage or anxiety  
As we waited for the flames to die  
And for the wax to crust on the altar  
And for the last petals to lie  
On the marble and gilt  
And for the singing to end  
And for the prayers to fail, again.

(E.R., p. 31)

Riddell explains her isolation as a young person in an interview with Robin Hughes:

Everything was my fault. Everything was my fault that happened, and I use to lie in bed and look up at the hillside, where there was a great ... the pohutukawa tree, that's that New Zealand tree with the beautiful green leaves and the red flowers. And I would look up at that and make up stories and pretend stories, but they were never about New Zealand. They were always about ... they were always fairy tale stories about England.<sup>312</sup>

Unlike Mason and Rawlinson, who introduce unfamiliar words to lift their poems to a level above colloquial idiom, Riddell's poetic thoughts are always written in clear vernacular. The resulting clarity of her writing is evidenced in 'Under the Casuarina' in which 'The garrulous old man' is envisioned as both a young man and a mature one:

The dotard and the baby so are met. But where's the boy  
Who chased the lightning, where the youth who lied  
And kissed and fought and squandered, where the man  
Who married a woman for her wild red hair  
And under her lash of tongue and temper lived  
And bore with her in hatred till she died?

(E.R., p. 51)

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<sup>312</sup> Riddell, E., 'Elizabeth Riddell - full interview transcript, *Australian Biography*, Interviewer: Robin Hughes, December 10, 1992; retrieved from [www.australianbiography.gov.au/riddell/interview1.html](http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/riddell/interview1.html), p. 4.

This depiction of the old man is sympathetic, but at the same time, it reveals a different aesthetic than that of the poetry of the New Zealand modernists. In this poem Riddell's depiction relates to the woman's beauty as well as beauty in the image of the young boy who, as an old man, 'bore in hatred' her 'lash of tongue and temper'; in both depictions the aesthetic is the appreciation of beauty while, at the same time, it contrasts with ugliness which reflects the hidden violence and loneliness that occurs in some marriages. Stewart also protests against all forms of violence, a poetic preoccupation which contributes to his total philosophy, a line of continuity which appears in his verse plays such as such as *Glencoe*, while he writes of Tawhai's loneliness within marriage in *The Golden Lover*. In this way, both Riddell and Stewart were working within the modernism of their times, as they included philosophical themes of human frailties and human strengths in their works.

Riddell's poetry has not received a great deal of New Zealand literary criticism, and is only briefly mentioned in the *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*. The *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* contains a brief biographical note, but it is in articles such as the aforementioned interview with Robin Hughes and in Riddell's essays and book reviews such as 'Frank Packer' that her mastery of prose can be detected. Between 1961-1987, Riddell's silence meant that her poetry received little critical attention; even so, as the contributor to the *Oxford Companion* puts it, 'the form and context of her poems have drawn comparisons with Judith Wright and Kenneth Slessor'.

Riddell, Slessor and other writers including Stewart frequented 'Lindsay's Springwood mountain Arcadia' and Sydney's red light district, Kings Cross, which, like the artists' colonies of Melbourne's Fitzroy and Heide, were bohemian 'sacred sites' where artists 'lived, played, loved and fought', and which were the subject of 'Bohemian Rhapsody', an ABC documentary which traces key debates in Australia's intellectual and creative history,

‘focusing on those watershed moments when a new generation of thinkers and artists challenges the orthodoxies of their society.’<sup>313</sup>

Although, as the documentary relates, in their aims as ‘the shock troops of new styles and ideas the postmodernists recall the bohemians of earlier generations who shocked the wowsers and dragged conservative Australia into the modern world’, the postmodernists’ situation of later years is hardly an analogy for the New Zealand literary revolution in New Zealand in the 1930s.

Curnow’s comments about Stewart’s poetry, one of the reasons Stewart decided to live and work in Australia, were discussed at some length earlier in this Chapter when Curnow referred to Stewart’s poetry as “betrayed by rhetorical fancy, fond of lazy verbal flourishes, tossing words about to cause a sensation’ (See page 2). It is now of interest to note Curnow’s appreciative comments about Stewart’s ‘The Pine Tree’ in ‘Aspects of New Zealand Poetry’ in *Meanjin*: ‘There is a poem by a New Zealander in Australia, Douglas Stewart, which startled me by its affirmation of our growing experience of identity in place and time. In this poem, “The Pine Trees” (*New Zealand Best Poems of 1941*), Stewart writes:

It may be they stand for us; that the stranger’s axe  
Or the winter’s steady furnace of frost and moonlight  
Will beat them down as the ancient forests are down;  
But now, and to the horizon, they stand like islands  
Where my people have come to rest and built their houses  
And made their farms and bred their sons to work them.

Curnow, p. 25<sup>314</sup>

In 1947, Oxford University Press decided to update *A Book of Australasian Verse*, edited by Walter Murdoch, whose 1945 edition had included work by the Jindyworobaks, but had omitted Slessor, Hope, Wright and McAuley. New Zealand poetry was also trapped in a similar time warp, as though little had happened since 1920, a period when much New Zealand

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<sup>313</sup> (author unnamed) ‘Bohemian Rhapsody: Rebels of Australian Culture’. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/documentaries/bohemians/htm>, 14 October, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>314</sup> Curnow, A., ‘Aspects of New Zealand Poetry’, *Meanjin Papers*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1943, p. 25.

poetry was particularly weak. The term ‘Australasia’ irritated the New Zealand modernists who rejected Murdoch’s anthology as the out-dated colonialism of an English press, but it was of concern that at the same time Murdoch’s was the *only* anthology that could represent New Zealand poetry abroad, for only books printed in England could be distributed throughout the Commonwealth. For the 1950 edition of the anthology, Oxford University Press commissioned the conservative New Zealand journalist, Mulgan, to select an independent New Zealand section; only a few poets accepted his invitation and there was widespread hostility to the edition. When Mulgan and Murdoch adopted the neutral title, *A Book of Australian and New Zealand Verse*, Mulgan won over the dissenters and increased the quota of New Zealand poetry to one-third in the 1950 edition; he asked Stewart for permission to include his poems in the New Zealand section. Stewart agreed and suggested ‘The Dossers in Springtime’.<sup>315</sup> Mulgan reprinted ‘Green Lions’, ‘Heart of the World’ and ‘Watching the Milking’. (Eventually, Oxford University Press agreed to national anthologies. Robert Chapman and Jonathon Bennett, who edited the New Zealand anthology, included two of Stewart’s early poems, ‘Mending the Bridge’ and ‘Green Lions’.)

In the *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, Nelson Wattie considers that *Green Lions* and *The White Cry* represent Stewart’s ‘purest New Zealand verse’; but even after ‘Elegy to an Airman’ (1949) and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* (1941), written in Australia, ‘references to New Zealand and its people recur’. Wattie then adds that Stewart’s statements in articles and interviews ‘reveal that his sense of New Zealand identity never diminished’, and that it is a curiosity of literary history that ‘this writer, so profoundly respected and admired in Australia, is comparatively little known in his home country’.<sup>316</sup> The arguments put forward in this chapter seem to answer Wattie’s paradox.

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<sup>315</sup> Bourke, L., op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>316</sup> Wattie, N., *OCNZL*, p. 515.

Wattie's perception of Stewart's sense of belonging in both New Zealand and Australia contrasts with that of Bourke and Magner who argued that Stewart was eliding the fact that he was a New Zealander (See Introduction to this thesis for a detailed discussion). Bourke insists on Stewart's 'change of national identity' and the change from 'Antipodean' and 'Australian' amounts to little more than 'a redefinition of self redefining the past',<sup>317</sup> a theme which Stewart follows in his verse dramas of adventure and heroism such as *Fire on the Snow* and *Worsley Enchanted*. However, public forces of nationalism 'had become socially urgent and its importance was reflected in the cultural institutions'. After World War 2, both Australia and New Zealand were preoccupied with national identity, stressing the links between culture and nationalism; the emphasis on nationalism inevitably increased in respect of arts funding as it relies on the patronage of a government agency which must justify its actions and its budget in terms of national interest. As a result, 'Writers who become expatriates risk being cut off from the sources of funding and publication. They are also at risk in being denied the recognition that is involved in criticism'.<sup>318</sup>

In 1938, when Stewart began to work with the nationalistic *Bulletin*, there was an upswelling of patriotic fervour with the Australia First Movement, the Jindyworobaks and the sesquicentenary celebrations; this topic is considered more fully in future chapters. For the moment, however, it is time to consider closely the poetry that Stewart wrote in New Zealand before he settled in Australia.

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<sup>317</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>318</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

## CHAPTER 3

### DOUGLAS STEWART'S EARLY NEW ZEALAND POETRY

Now one who peers at sky's grey glazy swoon  
Seeking the silver image of his soul  
Might see (as the brown sailor men saw swine)  
A face that's *not his own*, and howl with terror.

'The Winter Crazed' (C.P., p. 320)

A white bell with a yellow tongue  
across my mind's dark ocean swung  
as shining as a choir of dew.

'Moment' (C.P., p. 327)

As an introduction to larger themes and larger works, this chapter prefaces an account of Stewart's move to Australia in 1938. His creative impulse allowed him to ponder both ordinary and extraordinary experiences and subjects so that his creative thought developed imagery and the metaphysical ideal, as a way of examining truth buried deep in mankind's consciousness. In Chapter 2, Stewart's interest in the modernism of his times was discussed; this is an important line of continuity which began with his early New Zealand poetry. For example, in 'Moon Not Allowed' (1936), Stewart's persona exclaims: 'Be angry, Mind!' (C.P. 327) in regard to the New Zealand modernists' reaction to literary traditionalism practised by Romantic poets and at times published in *Kowhai Gold*. Stewart's argument is presented in symbolic images: 'I'll wrench a bough from what is darkest seen / And hurl it like a curse in the world's teeth'. Finally, in 'Bell Rock' (S.P., p. 242-246), light from his metaphorical tower, constructed from his total poetic works, throws light on many and varied characteristics of his creative thought and philosophical perceptions which first began in New Zealand and developed into lines of continuity after Stewart's move to Australia and the *Bulletin*.

This line of thinking often led him into aspects of the supernatural and succession of lives in poems such as 'Heritage' (C.P., pp 272-3), which is a reflexive contemplation of

heredity: 'Past me and past my father / And before his father's time / Some young man bore my name / And wore my face and form'. In 'Hooves Through the Village' (C.P., p. 290), 'a man on a black horse' rides through the village and Stewart knows 'I am that rider's kin / And after him I ride'. Again in 'Perceived in Chill and Windy Dusk' (C.P., p. 291), 'the ghost assumes my form ... He stands within my body's frame'. In these poems, as well as in a later poem, 'Elegy' (S.P., pp. 235-6), Stewart is prompted to write, 'My father walks and my mother's blue eyes see'. This is one of Stewart's later poems written in memory of people and creatures he loved, but it follows a spiritual line of continuity that began while he was still living in New Zealand.

Although there is considerable overlapping of ideas and themes in Stewart's poetry, the poems could be classified as nature poems, meditations, humorous and light verse, narratives and ballads, love poems, situational poems and historical poems. It took many years for Stewart to refine the results of his creative impulse, but, at the same time, his early New Zealand poems were the first products of a young poet expressing his ideas in verse.

Stewart's journey from the sea to the source of his metaphorical river is revealed as his quest for answers to mysteries of nature and creation, which he endeavours to clarify in 'The River' (CP, pp. 247-8). When he discovers what he believes are universal truths, the discovery enables him to comment on the nature of the human spirit, a philosophical line of continuity which supports a belief in immortality and that mankind and nature are unified by the spirit of the earth.

Writing about his first publication, *Green Lions*, Stewart says that the poems are about the countryside of his New Zealand home at Eltham. After his visit to Australia in 1933, he writes: 'I hugged it [New Zealand] to my heart and tugged from it poems ... that soon found their way into my first book, *Green Lions*' (S.T., p. 231). He sent a copy to Cecil Mann at the *Bulletin* who 'reviewed it nobly', and another copy to John Cowper Powys who 'wrote to me,

all in italics and exclamation marks, words of tremendous encouragement'.<sup>319</sup> He also sent a copy to Edmund Blunden together with an appreciation of Blunden's own poetry, 'the influence of which is so apparent everywhere through my early writing'.<sup>320</sup>

When he was in England, Stewart met Blunden, whose poetry, he said, 'is as much about humanity as it is about nature, [that] remains deep and rugged and powerful'; he quotes Blunden's poem as an example of the influence on his own work:

You see me here,  
And you huddle past and shiver;  
One glance, you disappear,  
Leaving me, a dull brown thicket, beside a gray-gorged river.  
I beg no grace of yours;  
You have seen me, I go with you, in or out of doors;  
My thin blood will not wash out,  
My purple brambles will mantle you about,  
My thorny clasping pierce  
Into your verse.

Blunden's verse, like Stewart's, has a metaphysical quality about it, and it is this quality that makes Stewart's early New Zealand poetry so interesting with its promise of future development.<sup>321</sup>

Stewart finds the natural landscapes of New Zealand aggressive, like the green lions of the title poem, which crouch in 'the jagged hollows' of a bay 'gouged by the wind'. Yet, at the same time, there is a humane side to Stewart's poetry, exemplified in his city imagery, where 'men denied the jungle of young years / Grow taut and clench their fists' (C.P., p. 313), and 'So now, a single mass, the rank dank waves / Roar from the hollow building' (C.P., p. 310). Here he seems to be offering a critique of urban and metropolitan conformity, based on the price it exacts. Like A.R.D. Fairburn's 'Dominion' (discussed in Chapter 2), it is a poem that also points up regimentation and stifling of the spirit. The combination of landscape imagery and human contemplation seen in these two fragments reflects the poet's

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<sup>319</sup> Stewart, D., *ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>320</sup> *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>321</sup> Blunden, E., *Undertones of War*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, pp. 245-280.



philosophical state of mind at that time. His philosophy and attempts at modernism are not clear here — as a young and relatively inexperienced poet, he is unsure of the city's fatalistic or nihilistic effects on the creative mind. This idea is developed with the discussion of themes through distinctive imagery as Stewart's poetry is seen as a whole rather than as a series of individual, independent verses.

Vivian Smith has little to say about either *Green Lions* or *The White Cry*, but entertains the idea that there are signs in *Green Lions* that a different type of poet might have emerged; however, he is not specific about what type of poet this could have been. In these two collections, Stewart contemplates both the nature of rural and urban-metropolitan landscapes; that is, he was contrasting the 'natural' and 'contrived' or humanly-constructed world. He might have followed some impulse to compare or criticise, aspects of urban-industrial-modern life, in light of outdoors or 'natural' existence, and there are examples of these ideas in later poems, but close reading of all his poetry will prove him to be a versatile poet who wrote on numerous themes and who cannot be 'classified' in the way Smith perceives. Smith here considers these collections as 'apprentice books in which we see a young poet doing what he can with a not unlimited range of emotional and imaginative experience'.<sup>322</sup> This is a fair enough comment if Smith means that Stewart was a young man of little worldly experience writing about a country he loved. Yet later he wrote that Stewart was 'undoubtedly the most distinguished writer of light verse that Australia has produced'.<sup>323</sup> Since Stewart lived and worked in New Zealand until he was 23 years of age, it is debatable whether Australia 'produced' him; it seems more appropriate to say that New Zealand 'produced' him, but that Australia 'developed' him later, in the writing of light verse as well as more serious poetry and verse dramas. Smith introduces a positive note with his opinion that both books of

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<sup>322</sup> Smith, V., 'Douglas Stewart: Lyric Poet', *Considerations*, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>323</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 402-403.

early New Zealand poetry show ‘an almost symbolist awareness of colour and its peculiar power to evoke emotion — especially rose, blue, and above all white and silver, which are perhaps related to Stewart’s preoccupation with ice and snow’,<sup>324</sup> and this rather supports the fact that it was New Zealand that ‘produced’ his creative impulse in the first place.

On a more positive note, Nancy Keesing states that after his visit to Australia, Stewart was able to develop his perception of the New Zealand landscape ‘not any longer with the uncooperative eye of childhood, but as a young, questioning, assertive man’. Keesing concludes that *Green Lions* and *The White Cry* ‘belong to New Zealand and early manhood, and are informed by the same impetus. Their technique is alike and their treatment of themes of love, despair, determination and dawning pride are similar’.<sup>325</sup> These themes are considered later in this chapter as Stewart’s uncertainty about his own technical ability is finally shown to be surmounted.

As Keesing’s comments on Stewart’s early New Zealand poetry arise from attentive reading and consideration, so Clement Semmler’s ideas about the young poet’s works arise from his determination to understand Stewart’s deeper creative impulses. Like R.D. FitzGerald, Semmler detects Stewart’s ‘penchant for philosophizing in verse’.<sup>326</sup> As early as *Green Lions*, Semmler claims, it was obvious that Stewart had

a quite remarkable facility (for a young poet) to let his mind brood on ordinary experiences, using them to summon ghosts from the past, or, with metaphysical imagery, as a probe for something buried deeper in men’s consciousness.<sup>327</sup>

This notion of metaphysical imagery is an important one and is looked at further throughout this chapter in a discussion of *Green Lions* and *The White Cry*.

Stewart’s ‘penchant for philosophizing in verse’ is also a major point of discussion in

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<sup>324</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 403.<sup>#</sup> Keesing, N., *Douglas Stewart*, op. cit., p. 12.<sup>#</sup> Semmler, D., 1974, op. cit., p. 33.<sup>#</sup>  
*ibid.*, p. 33.<sup>#</sup> Semmler, D., op. cit., 1974, p. 33.

<sup>325</sup> Keesing op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>326</sup> Semmler, D., op. cit., 1974, p. 33.

<sup>327</sup> *ibid.* p. 33.

Fitzgerald's 'Motif in the Work of Douglas Stewart'.<sup>328</sup> Fitzgerald explains the idea of motif as 'the impulse behind theme, the directive force that develops the thought in a poem'.<sup>329</sup> For the purpose of this discussion of Stewart's early New Zealand poems, the concepts offered in Fitzgerald's essay initiate the investigation. Fitzgerald's aim in this article is:

To trace, if I can, the line of continuity that runs through the abundance and variety of Stewart's work. With great versatility, then, such as Douglas Stewart's, there will be considerable diversity of motifs, but with a thread of continuity running through them whereby is built up the poet's total statement, his contribution to our understanding of the universe we live in, in terms not of science or philosophy, but of occasions of experience or spiritual awareness.<sup>330</sup>

As mentioned earlier in the introduction to this thesis, then again in Chapter 2, the term 'line of continuity' has been retained because it continues to elucidate the manner in which Stewart was able to intertwine varied and sometimes philosophical themes in his poetry and verse plays and which contribute to readers' awareness of a modernist trend in language and symbolism (as well as metaphysical thought) about the universe we live in; this is particularly important throughout all of Stewart's works, especially when he uses the theme of 'belonging' in poems such as 'Lyrebird'. When Fitzgerald mentions that the threads of continuity are written in terms 'not of science or philosophy' he is referring to the language of the poem itself, not to scientific terminology or philosophical jargon; in this way, Stewart creates a personal vocabulary which is readily understood by readers who follow these lines of continuity.

Fitzgerald begins his discussion with excerpts from *Green Lions* in which can be seen Stewart's 'beginnings, the detail and craftsmanship, and the interest and attention given to what is near and immediate'. He believes that *Green Lions* shows 'extraordinary promise', and in later years he also found it extraordinary that when he reviewed Stewart's first publication, he took the poet to task because of clashing rhyme-sounds; in hindsight he

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<sup>328</sup> Fitzgerald, R.D., *The Elements of Poetry*, op. cit., 1963, p. 145.

<sup>329</sup> *ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>330</sup> *ibid.*, p. 145.

exclaims, ‘this master of technique, who understands rhyme today probably better than anyone living!’<sup>331</sup> According to FitzGerald, Stewart ‘wrote about what he knew, and knew what he was writing about; and he revealed the beginnings of those extraordinary powers of observation and visualization and detail which have been so marked a feature of his subsequent work’.<sup>332</sup> As well as writing about what he knew, Stewart was an explorer, especially in Australia, where he explored the landscape, its flora and fauna, learning their names, and in writing poems about them. Aspects of discovery and technical devices such as rhyme and rhythm are discussed further in Chapter 7, *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track*.

In his introduction to *Collected Poems* (1967), Stewart comments on the style of a poem, emphasizing ‘the time when it is written *is* the poem; it is the words and the rhythm you have found, to say exactly what you wanted to say’ (C.P., p. vii). This is an important and relevant comment, in addition to those in the introductory comments to ‘Early New Zealand Poems’, the name he gives to a selection of New Zealand poetry in *Selected Poetry*, 1973. The Table of Contents of *Collected Poems* is arranged in reverse chronological order because as Stewart says, ‘it always seems slightly absurd to me to open the book of a mature writer and find him swooning and roaring away at the age of sixteen’ (C.P., p. viii), and he finishes with a typical ‘Stewartian’ piece of philosophy: ‘if anybody wants to trace the course of a river, why not walk up to its source?’ So this chapter does exactly that. By following Stewart’s creative line of thought, I aim to discover the source of his metaphoric river. Instead of dismissing the poems as ‘amateur’ I will look at them individually, then as a whole, to indicate something of their initial impulse and lines of continuity, but for the moment, ‘The River’ from *The Dosses in Springtime* collection, (C.P., pp. 247-249), an example of Stewart’s poems, inspired by the Waingongoro River near Stewart’s boyhood home of Eltham in

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<sup>331</sup> *ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>332</sup> *ibid.*, p. 147.

Taranaki is a relevant example:

At the end of a life illusion falls away.  
When the city falls, oh then in that last day, river,  
I shall come back to you as a man to his lover,  
As the bird comes back when her wild blood sets the day  
And the first leaf breaks on the willow. Symbol or truth,  
Let the day disclose! But a man's what his spirit knows;  
And what I have known for truth, now as in youth,  
Is one clear river, coming down cold from the snows.  
(C.P., pp. 147-149)

In this final stanza of the poem, there is an uneven rhyming pattern: a, b, b, a, c, d, c, d; there is also internal rhyme, 'disclose' / 'knows', and 'truth' / 'youth'. Stewart has known 'what his spirit knows' as he knew for truth while he was a youth. Poems like 'The River' written in or about New Zealand, support my introductory statement that Stewart considered himself a New Zealander even while living and working in Australia as an expatriate, and like the bird in the poem, he looked forward to returning to the river where he 'belonged'.

Stewart's 'Early New Zealand Poems' contain poems from *Green Lions* (1936) and *The White Cry* (1939). It is in the first published book of verse that the poems themselves indicate the direction of his life-long interests. These poems represent an attempt to describe the beauty of the New Zealand landscape, and an attempt by a very young poet to come to grips with his psyche, his inner self. By introspection Stewart questions his own emotions using images that emphasise what there is in nature to rejoice in. So it is here in *Green Lions* as well as in *The White Cry* that stimuli rouse the poet's interest, and themes that emerge from the poetry include several lines of continuity that, like the rivers Stewart loved, run through the bulk of his work. Water images are developed to include rivers, creeks, lakes, oceans, snow and ice. As with all his poems, imagery is symbolic rather than merely seeking verisimilitude or naturalism, and his experiments with colour imagery often reflect a use of symbolism, not just a clichéd attempt to 'colour' a description. Backgrounds of mountains and plains in, for example, 'Poplar in the Mimi Valley' (C.P., P. 316), enhance images and become themselves

part of Stewart's extended metaphoric psychological journey; that is, his quest for answers to mysteries of nature and creation, the discovery of which enables him to comment on the nature of the human spirit.

For the most part, individual poems in *Green Lions* and *The White Cry* are autobiographical. Stewart attempts to associate an image with himself, so he *becomes* the images: 'I *am* the birds, I *was* the stream' (C.P., p. 335).<sup>333</sup> By treating the images in this way, by linguistically becoming the image itself, Stewart draws the reader into the poem as a spiritual experience. Spirituality is one of his strongest preoccupations, revealing much of his personality and creativity as lines of continuity throughout his poetry and verse plays.

While not greatly admiring Stewart's early New Zealand poetry, James McAuley proffers the opinion that the early volumes should not be dismissed because 'the Exclusive Brethren of Criticism care for none of these things,' that is, Stewart's 'strong feeling for heroic action, panache, and the qualities of leadership'<sup>334</sup>; they all contain individual successes, as well as offering the interest of following a developing 'talent' as, for example, McAuley's notion of the 'near perfect lyric,' 'Look Now for Country Atlas' (C.P., pp. 288-289).<sup>335</sup> Stewart's idea of poetry was always that it should be enjoyable to read, so when a poem such as 'Poplar in the Mimi Valley' (C.P., p. 316) is considered, the image of the golden coin shining against the darkness of an imminent storm brings with it joy and happiness the speaker experiences:

The slate-blue snarl of storm is on the south  
And northward looms Mount Messenger's surly bulk  
But burning at the centre yellow and gold  
The poplar towers and mocks the stunted growth  
Of native trees to bony east and west  
That have their thicker beauty but must sulk  
To darker green when autumn and unrest

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<sup>333</sup> References to *Green Lions* and *The White Cry* will be recorded in the body of this discussion as (C.P.)

<sup>334</sup> McAuley, J., 'Douglas Stewart', ed., G. Dutton, *Literature of Australia*, Ringwood, 1976, p. 441.

<sup>335</sup> *ibid.*, p. 430.

Warn them of rains and tremendous cold.

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 grass beneath,  
Have showered tribute even as I do now,  
Guinea on guinea, a golden cannonade;  
And I have thought that milkers of the cow  
In this harsh valley might rejoice as these.

(C.P., p. 316-7)

When we look back now to Stewart's early New Zealand poetry, 'Poplar in the Mimi Valley' seems to be awkward (or over-elegant), the diction enforced by the need to rhyme — it is a consciously 'poetical' diction in which the rhymes seem contrived for effect, at some cost to vernacular or colloquial ease. There *is* undoubted tension in his rather strangled rhymes in the earliest poems — tension that images his own uneasiness as to how to express emotion. This artificiality disappears in the poet's later work as rhymes become more easier.

The tree in 'Poplar in the Mimi Valley' provides the creative impulse to write a poem that is aesthetically satisfying. It arises from the poet's experience when he joined a circus and travelled through New Zealand's North Island (S.T., p. 207).<sup>336</sup> On this occasion, as well as on an earlier occasion of a family holiday, the gold splash of colour in the Mimi Valley made a cogent impression on the poet-observer as the anthropomorphic tree 'holds a golden coin between her teeth'; this image is strengthened by the repetition of this line, against the 'slate-blue storm' looming over Mount Messenger's 'surlly bulk' while the yellow and gold burn at the centre. Symbolically, mountains can appear as spiritual images as they do in this poem, suggesting an attitude of protection by the mountains of the poplar from the 'snarl of the storm'. Gold symbolism emerges from the poetry as a message of hope and happiness, but it goes further than this; it represents inspiration, learning and the intellect, all of which have contributed to Stewart's preparation to be a poet who uses these stimuli to lift his poetry to

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<sup>336</sup> Future references to *Springtime in Taranaki* are shown as ST.

heights above those of mere lyrical description. More importantly, gold is the symbol of the sun, giver of life and creativity, and it is here that two of Stewart's visions are embodied in his early New Zealand poetry: in 'A Summer Dusk' gold is reflected in the young girls' faces; 'gold summer', 'a dusk of summer', 'yellow sward', 'pools' and 'buttercups' all add to the joy of youth and the hope for the future (C.P., p. 283); in 'Green Pond' there are images of 'foam of gold', 'frozen gold', 'golden snow' (C.P., p. 293), while in 'The White Dancers' the creative urge becomes 'The sunbeams' grasses, gold and long' and 'White dance of body's love' (C.P., p. 299-300). In these poems gold is the colour of nature's rich beauty.

The second golden vision reveals Stewart's early use of symbols to convey philosophical ideas in the poplar image. In following J.C. Powys' technique of using darkness to illustrate the threat of danger and conflict, the golden glow of the poplar has multiple meanings: hope that the darkening slate-blue clouds of war in Europe would not eventuate,<sup>337</sup> then there is the threat of 'danger' from the literary modernists in New Zealand (See chapter 2), but the gold of the poplar gives the poet courage to continue, and so the poem adopts an heroic spirit to endure in the face of imminent danger. At the same time, spirituality is at the core of Stewart's philosophy. The poplar tree is a symbolic tower reaching towards God and uplifted thought; this tower is part of Stewart's list of favourite symbols.<sup>338</sup> He was concerned with exploring the universe, as he remarked to John Thompson in an interview, concerning his poem, 'The Green Centipede':

It's an exploration of the duality of God, of good and evil in the universe. Apart

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<sup>337</sup> Political unrest in European politics and the threat of war at this time caused much concern world-wide. Stewart therefore included feelings of imminent danger in his poetry together with hope for peaceful resolutions.

<sup>338</sup> Recurring tower imagery is a 'symbol of ascent, i.e., material height implies spiritual elevation - linking heaven and earth ... analogy between the tower and man: for just as the tree is closer to the human figure than are the horizontal forms of animals, so too, is the tower the only structural form distinguished by verticality ... However, it is possible to discover a dual tendency in the symbolism of the tower. Its upward impulse may be accompanied by a deepening movement; the greater the height, the deeper the foundations.' Cirlot J, op. cit., p. 344-5.



from that, I have always thought that one should keep in touch with the earth.<sup>339</sup>

So even at this young age, Stewart realised that danger, whether real or imagined, must be accepted in a positive way; this is where his philosophy is a major concern as his poetry takes the direction that the spirit of mankind and the spirit of the earth cannot be separated, and the danger and evil which exist in the physical world must be accepted positively for the goodness of humanity and the earth. Like 'Bell Rock' which brings *Selected Poems* to an end, the poetic spirit in 'Poplar in the Mimi Valley' is reaching ever-upwards for the creative impulse, whereas 'Bell Rock' tells the poet's story of his life's work, concluding that the light from the tower has been his inspiration and achievement: 'Here's just one stubborn Scottish engineer / Who piled up stones to make a light shine clear'. The stones he refers to are his imagistic poems, and 'Bell Rock' brings them together and consolidates them as a whole.

Another common theme in Stewart's early New Zealand poetry is a concern with introspective aspects of philosophy. His poetic subjects are often those from the world of nature while, at the same time, the subject allows him to meditate upon his inner self, the spiritual human. Many poems from *The White Cry* and *Green Lions* are understandably a direct result of the intensity of youth, but at the same time, they illustrate a hunger of the spirit, a desire to know, the solving of a personal problem as he uses friendly or hostile images to isolate the meaning of life itself. The poems, then, are individual statements of the person confronting the living earth to find answers to universal questions of life — questions to which there are often no answers, except that the spirit of the earth and the spirit of human kind are one.

Stewart's philosophy that the spirit of humankind is an integral part of the spirit of the earth which infuses 'Winter Morning':

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<sup>339</sup> Thompson, J., 'Poetry in Australia: Douglas Stewart, interview with Douglas Stewart', op. cit., 1967, p. 193.

The colours of dawn persist into day.  
 The sky gleams to the east, to two blue mountains  
 In streaming copper, in steel's cold grey.  
 Stone cattle are carved on the green, the cows of winter,  
 With no milk firing the shrunken udder.  
 The trees are sapless ...

Touching the face of a woman  
 The hand would pause; and freeze; and shudder.  
 In slow, dark easy curves, a hawk's wings  
 Scallop the sluggish bulk of the hedge;  
 In the chill silence, the sudden bark of a dog  
 Breaks in a hopeless sacrilege.

(C.P., p. 315)

This extended metaphor uses metaphysical imagery to describe the peace and harmony of the morning. The poem is reminiscent of Wordsworth's 'It is a Beauteous Evening' in which the evening is quiet, a holy time, 'Breathless with adoration ... Listen! The mighty Being is awake.'<sup>340</sup> The effect of imagery in 'Winter Morning' (C.P., p. 315), is like a religious experience as the hawk, 'In slow, dark easy curves, a hawk's wings / Scallop the sluggish bulk of the hedge', symbolises Stewart's creativity, and is part of the dawn; it is symbolic because birds are the only creatures to rise above the mundane life on earth — by association they are heavenly beings. The hawk is, therefore, part of the dawn itself. Yet, wherever there is beauty, there is something that destroys it, and at the point where the poet's spirit becomes part of the harmony of dawn, 'the sudden bark of a dog / Breaks in a hopeless sacrilege' which breaks the peace and quiet of the poet's experience of this spiritual time. Thus, in this early expression of Stewart's philosophical musings, the idea of the duality of good and evil in all beautiful things, as mentioned in his interview with Thompson, emerges.<sup>341</sup> However, the dog is also a part of the natural scheme, and he, too, belongs, just as the hawk and the 'stone cattle' as well as humans, belong and are unified by the spirit of the earth.

This notion of belonging continues throughout 'Early New Zealand Poetry' as the poet

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<sup>340</sup> Wordsworth, W., 'It is a Beauteous Evening', Miscellaneous Sonnets XXX, *Poetical Works*, Oxford University Press, London, 1978, p. 205.

<sup>341</sup> Thompson, J., *Southerly*, No. 3 of 1967, p. 193.

struggles to achieve an ideal form of poetry that rises above the mundane; in ‘Winter Morning’, he achieves this aim as he develops a sense of the divine by allusion and implication. Poetic sense is evoked by the symbolic use of colour — the soft colour of heaven and the divine in ‘two blue mountains,’ is a striking image, while the wonder of creation assuring the new day will survive is depicted in ‘streaming copper’ as the sun rises, sending its rays to warm ‘steel’s cold grey,’ an image which reflects light on dark, an early line of continuity which positively affected Stewart’s development as a poet. A sentient reader may metaphorically step into this image to become part of the poet’s experience as the colours of dawn enhance the image and the peaceful mood it creates.

In contrast to the beauty of varying degrees of light, darker colours appear throughout Stewart’s verse, sometimes ambiguously, and like ‘The slate-blue snarl of storm [that] is on the south’ in ‘Poplar in the Mimi Valley’ and ‘steel’s cold grey’ in ‘Winter Morning,’ they are introduced as adjectives, which add tone, shade, shadow and atmosphere to the poems. With symbolic use of colour, such as ‘Dark trees,’ and ‘wild black mares’ of ‘A Summer Dusk,’ (C.P., p. 283), Stewart presents readers with images of the New Zealand landscape. Though ‘in dark woods a dark wind wails and whirls’ may be an experiment in alliterative description, the feeling of New Zealand is present in ‘black and silver’ images. Black and silver are the national colours of the land, and Stewart’s perception of moonlight on snow which often appears as silver (symbol of spirit and spiritual matters which becomes a line of continuity in Stewart’s more mature works), provides the creative thought to use this image together with dark expressive language to comment on the human condition. The imagery of what he sees may also be taken as an expression of the poet’s mood at the time of his observation; he presents readers with images that elicit a different response from those resulting from the traditional nineteenth century poems in which darkness and the colour black often symbolise death or the dying. Stewart was not the first New Zealand poet to emphasise colour, of course,

and O.N. Gillespie, an older contemporary of Stewart's, uses the following in a ballad, 'The Sheep-Stealer':

Walled by the silver dusted night  
The hill sat hunched, a troglodyte  
Giant and grim, whose frown was bent  
Where laughs of summer lightning went.<sup>342</sup>

Like Stewart's Ned Kelly, and other bushrangers such as Ben Hall, the sheep-stealer is a romantic image much admired in the Georgian period; he is audacious, with a friendly likeable personality, reminiscent of the highwayman of English literature, such as 'The Highwayman' by Alfred Noyes.

There are several poems in *The White Cry* and *Green Lions* in which darkness and silver together provide a strong contrast, and enhance one another; 'scarred with years and fern / ... blacker magic than the moon's' in 'On the Crest of the Ridge' (C.P., p.281), refers not only to half the ridge, but to his own life as a poet at that time while he considers the peace and moonlit scene; yet the violins of his emotions are 'Crying the silver agony of night / So much of shade and silver' highlights his uncertainty as though he is asking whether he is, in fact, a poet, or whether his creative flame, like the extinct volcano, the angry 'Hostile Mountain' will fade and die, so all that remains is 'a hollow sound the crags toss to and fro' (C.P., p. 319).

Like his Romantic predecessor, Wordsworth, Stewart was a poet, not a philosopher, and it could be said of him, too, that 'his ideas and beliefs were founded less on rational principles than on his response to the experience of life'.<sup>343</sup> One recognises analogies in the verse of both Stewart and Wordsworth, of what Perkins calls 'the quest for permanence'. Perkins argues that this quest is a dilemma from which poetry will be made. The first is a

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<sup>342</sup> Gillespie, O.N., 'The Sheep-Stealer', *Kowhai Gold*, op. cit., pp. 14-16.

<sup>343</sup> Yarker, P.M., ed., *William Wordsworth: The Prelude*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Melbourne, 1982, p. xxiv.

‘step-by-step literalism ... a poetry of naked statement, intensified, of course, by passion, but basically expository or descriptive of the poet’s dilemma’.<sup>344</sup> Stewart’s poetry certainly fits comfortably into this category, but when the second part of Perkins’ suggestion is considered, it is quite apparent that his comment can also apply to Stewart in that poetry is ‘a way of writing which seems to permit condensation, suggestion, and a more sharply focused synthesis — in short, the use of symbol.’<sup>345</sup> So the symbols that emerge from the poetry can be seen as evidence of a Romantic affinity and as key images to help Stewart to investigate and present a ‘dense and often fluid complex of doubts, intuition, emotions, preoccupation and the like’.<sup>346</sup> This reasoning can be applied to the poems already discussed, particularly in relation to colours and the tower’s symbolic imagery.

Stewart’s symbolic ‘Turn Eagle, Lark’ (C.P., pp. 282-3), presents another metaphor that extends and deepens the significance of its subject, as well as being the principle on which the poem is organised and structured into nine couplets:

O singing heart turn hawk; turn eagle, lark:  
The air is cold, the dawn strains from night

And time’s gaunt landscape shambles up from dark  
To lie like iron in the harsh white light.

Be far, dark-winged dark-blooded bird be far  
With windy sweep towards the last sharp star

Over the wilderness of years and over  
The marshes conquered, peaks for climbing soon

And far and near and as far as flight can cover,  
A landscape crazed and monstrous as the moon.

Veer down my bird of prey, veer down to mark  
One flickering campfire braving out the dark

And in the convulsive stillness of the ranges  
Bloodshed and shouting by its lonely light

From travellers lost in time and mad with fright.

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<sup>344</sup> Perkins, D., *The Quest for Permanence*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1969, p. 7.

<sup>345</sup> Perkins, D., *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>346</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

No roads are here, the landscape never changes:

Turned eagle now, my dark bird veer and climb,  
And solitary and cruel range over time.

(C.P., pp. 282-3)

'Turn Eagle, Lark' (1936), offers a particularly strong image and metaphorical statement of Stewart's desire to become a forceful poet. In the early stages of his creative development, the poet compares his song to that of a tiny lark. The physical lark can transcend its earthly concerns as the poet transcends the commonplace in his verse; but this is not enough, and in his quest for immortality, the survival of his work for the enjoyment of future generations, the poet must become strong, a notion which contributes to another line of continuity in his future poetry and verse plays. His vitality and ambition must be as an eagle, replacing the lark which, to the poet, is an image of immaturity. In view of the criticism from the New Zealand modernists, Stewart's notion is not an exaggerated statement from an inexperienced student; it is a clear expression of an ambitious man knowing what he wants in his career and his efforts to develop his thinking to succeed poetically and intellectually.

Stewart realises that, if he wants to ascend to greater heights he must adopt a 'killer instinct' and symbolically become an eagle, to 'veer and climb / And solitary and cruel range over time,' (CP, p. 283). According to Cirlot, the eagle symbolises 'The ability to fly and fulminate, to rise so as to dominate and destroy baser forms'.<sup>347</sup> The metaphysical quality in 'time's gaunt landscape which shambles up from the dark' expresses Jung's idea of the collective unconscious which he claims is immanent in all people.<sup>348</sup> So Stewart's creative verse needs careful shaping, his ideas need refining, and the eagle which is able to fly so high becomes part of another world to lift the poet to unimagined heights as he, too, strives for perfection. It was at this stage in his poetic career that he began to 'accommodate himself to

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<sup>347</sup> Cirlot, op. cit. p. 92

<sup>348</sup> Jung, C.G., 'Collective Unconscious and Archetypes,' *The Modern Tradition*, ed. R. Ellmann and C. Fiedelson, Jr., Oxford University Press, New York, 1965, p. 642.

the modernism of his times',<sup>349</sup> thus forming another line of continuity which affected his future poetry and verse plays; the inclusion of fresh preoccupations to include the development of modern themes in poetry included the notion that life is a struggle and that a poet's life is also a struggle, the aim of which is to transcend the mundane in poetry to achieve higher or more profound themes or ideals. This attitude brought about change in Stewart's career development once he became associated with Norman Lindsay and the ambience of Springwood (see Chapters 4 and 7 for this development in poetic technique).

When he left the *Argus* where he was employed as a reporter, Stewart joined a circus and became a traveller; so he was able to enjoy once again the poplars in the Mimi Valley, the 'green paddock of Taranaki, shimmering golden with dandelions' and the beautiful beaches 'hallowed by so many glorious memories of holidays of camping and fishing,' (S.T. p. 207). At Otahuhu, a suburb of Auckland, his acquaintanceship with Charley and the circus came to an abrupt end, and he became a swagman, fed on tea and scones by farmers and their wives (S.T., p. 214). Like Matthew Arnold's 'The Scholar Gypsy',<sup>350</sup> Stewart's long poem, 'Day and Night with Snow' is not only autobiographical, telling the story of the poet's physical and spiritual journey; but it also reflects his change in self-image from traveller to wanderer as he moved from one place to the next with no clear object in mind. Once again, Perkins puts the wanderer into its literary context:

One of the most illuminating habits of romantic poetry is its tendency to dramatize the searching mind of man, and especially the poet himself as the quintessence of the searching mind, through the symbolic figure of the Wanderer.<sup>351</sup>

Here again, like Arnold's 'The Scholar Gypsy',<sup>352</sup> Stewart had a spiritual need for his wanderings around the North Island. According to Perkins, Wordsworth used images of

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<sup>349</sup> Sharkey, M., *Salt*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>350</sup> Arnold, M., 'The Scholar Gypsy', *Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold*, MacMillan, London, 1896, p. 273.

<sup>351</sup> Perkins, D., op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>352</sup> Arnold, M., 'The Scholar Gypsy', op. cit., 1896, p. 273.

mountains and sublime elements to suggest similar attitudes in his poetry. Byron, long afterwards, in poems like *Childe Harold III* and the verse-drama *Manfred*, believed that the poet 'associates himself with the sublimer elements of nature, with mountains, oceans, cataracts, and the like, because only in these can he find some mirror of his own titanic emotions'.<sup>353</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Stewart associated his own wanderings with these Romantic ideas which are reflected in his poetry that shows a preference for traditional forms as a result of this poetic background which had been recommended by Jas Leggart (*Springtime in Taranaki*, p. 128).

In his creative quest, 'Day and Night with Snow', he describes the landscape and includes, for example, the chestnut mare and her foal 'In softest resignation to the snow' in No. 1, Verse 1 (C.P., p. 332), or the brown bird that 'Ribbons a trail of terror through the fall / Linking the snow's cold flurry for a moment / To all birds that in silver salvoes call' as it 'rages' at the world. Here a key word, 'rages,' ties this poem and Stewart's perceptions to another short poem, 'Moon Not Allowed' in which the psychological torrent of uncertainty and frustration which rages within the poet becomes specific. The symbolic 'huge hills' are destructive forces which must be overcome by the poet who takes on the metaphysical persona of the moon that can 'climb the walls that move and breathe' (C.P., p. 327). His mood is set because the huge hills will not allow him 'To silver-tinge the bush or pools beneath / or gleam on leaves and let their eager quills / Write with a softer ink what now they grind'.

Stewart wants to write his own kind of poetry, not the modernistic style of verse demanded by Curnow and his New Zealand colleagues which would destroy the style of traditional verse he so admires. 'Be angry, Mind!' he exclaims, because in his own verse he can make 'glint on stones, make sheep with jewels burn / Spark eyes of wild pigs rooting in the

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<sup>353</sup> Perkins, D., op. cit., p. 27.



fern'. He declares he will 'wrench a bough from what is darkest seen / And hurl it like a curse in the world's teeth' (C.P., p. 327). This is surely one of the strongest statements of intention in *Green Lions*, that is, his decision to transcend the ordinary and to strive for higher ideals in his poetry. At this stage in his poetic career developed as his creative thought leads into the longer 'Day and Night with Snow,' as well as acting as a link or line of continuity with 'Turn Eagle, Lark'.

On the other hand, Stewart finds harmony and order in the natural world in 'Day and Night with Snow', a theme that he was to continue in his later poetry. The peace and harmony he experiences as a wanderer reaches almost mythical proportions in Section 2 as he observes the 'pale-green nacre,' the colours of mother-of-pearl and paua shell in which 'Chimes the huge shell's unearthly melody'. His observation becomes a mystical experience as the supernatural metaphors become almost irresistible, 'For one might taste the pale-green wine of madness / Too deeply drinking at this faery chalice' (C.P., p. 333).

After his stay with the Maoris, the poem returns to the image of a nacre coloured sky and the poet decides he must hunt 'the moon's green pearl' for a solution to his unrest to find 'the ocean where our spirits go' (C.P., p. 335). His decision means he must return to mundane everyday living even though he has experienced a state of becoming when 'From the brown lake of silence in the valley, / I was the stream that gashed the gorge and leapt / To unknown ocean with a silver clangour'; as a result, 'Here I am the birds that shriek ... their anger' (C.P., p. 335). Even though Stewart declares he is part of the natural landscape, that he has 'a tree's tongue now and speak for stone / And cattle's bony moods I've made my own' in 'The Growing Strangeness,' (C.P., pp. 318-9), he finds there is a difference and he feels like an alien, because 'Even in the fields I love I am a stranger,' though he wants to belong to that landscape and environment — to be, to become, but he finds that the natural world must be accepted on its own terms. To be part of the natural world, mankind cannot be in conflict with

it, so Stewart suggests in this poem that his spirit must join with the spirit of the earth which is part of his personal philosophy that continues from his early New Zealand attempts at writing poetry throughout his poetry and verse plays.

The poet's discontent and frustration illustrated in these poems continues throughout his early New Zealand poetry, so *Green Lions* and *The White Cry* may be considered as one collection, even though there is a time span of three years between dates of publication. In the poems discussed so far, the focus is on imagery and symbolism because it is through Stewart's own statements of the source of his discontent, as in 'I trudge the road ... along a colder and darker road', that he pre-empted 'I am to break into the conversation / With a word that tastes like snow ...' from *The Fire on the Snow* with 'To see how tree-ferns like the taste of snow' (C.P., p. 333). Here the emphasis is on colour symbolism as well as on human senses such as taste, or non-taste as one remembers eating snow or ice as a child. This image and experience is not positive because in *The Fire on the Snow* the bitterness leads to certain death, while in 'Day and Night with Snow,' the word 'taste' seems to refer more to the tree-ferns' reaction to the snow than an actual taste, so the snow takes on a more positive impulse which leads to the wonder of creation.

In the title poem, 'Green Lions' (C.P., p. 313) and in 'Crowd' (C.P., p. 310), the rhythmic arrangement and stresses in lines of verse bring a new interest into these early poems, even though the poet is still concerned with restrictions to his creativity. In 'Green Lions', differences in length of lines are an attempt at a modernist technique which interrupts the traditional pentameter or quaternary patterns in imitation of the anthropomorphic lions crouching, stretching and slouching, followed by the 'charge at the shore' before once more retreating with the sibilant alliterative 'stretch, / and slouch, / And sudden with spurting manes and a glitter of haunches / Charge at the shore / And rend the sand and roar' (C.P., p. 313). The repetitive use of 'And' slows the pace, thus emphasising the following words to give them

more power. Although green is the only colour mentioned specifically, the implied colours are in the image and one can see the gold of the sun in the ‘glitter of haunches’ as well as the white of the breaking waves in ‘spurting manes’ as the crash of the surf on sand can be heard in the way Stewart uses onomatopoeia.

The uneven rhythm in both verses of ‘Green Lions’ also highlights the rise and fall of primal emotion which builds up to the young poet’s frustration with his own conflicting world of sensualist disquiet. Thus in both images, that of the green lions on the beach and in ‘men denied the jungle of young years’ in the city, the emphasis is on the inner man while his physical and emotional response is expressed in metaphorical abstractions. The poem presents a markedly different use of oceanic imagery than, for example, New Zealander poet Charles Brasch’s ‘Oreti Beach’, where Brasch listens to the ‘Thunder of waves out of the dying west, / Thunder of time that overtakes our day’, and contemplates the ‘clamorous fall of night’.<sup>354</sup> Stewart’s ‘Green Lions’ deals with humanity’s personal conflict with its own emotions, and it succeeds because of its metaphoric complexity and its modernist approach to conflict with the inner self, and the relationship of humans and nature, as Stewart seeks the meaning of spirit as opposed to the physical. He will find in this rhythm of life symbolised by the ocean, that they are part of nature itself which he will accept as part of the human spirit. In ‘Green Lions’, the ocean’s surging and receding reflects the powerful source of the poet’s imagery which will be controlled as he and his poetry mature.<sup>355</sup> This concept is discussed further in the next chapter, in connection with Lindsayan ‘vitalism’ which was a strong stimulus to the writing of poetry about Springwood and its natural environment.

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<sup>354</sup> Brasch, C., ‘Oreti Beach’, *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, selected by Vincent O’Sullivan, Oxford University Press, London, 1978, p. 78.

<sup>355</sup> Judith Wright recognised the power of Stewart’s image in “Green Lions” and used the same force in the form of a grey wolf in her 1945 poem “The Surfer” which reflects a typical Australian image of a surfer in the waves rather than a New Zealand image of the threatening waves. J. Wright, *Collected Poems 1942-1970*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1971, p. 21.

The symbolic ocean is again portrayed in 'Crowd,' where the rhythm of life in the surge and ebb appears in an ocean of people. The poet is aware of his own individuality as opposed to the crowd which he likens to drops of water that 'plunged back to the sea':

Each of this salt and sullen mass has once  
Felt suddenly, desperately individual,  
And mad to lose that loneliness has plunged  
Back to the sea, at smothering flesh has plunged  
With a hot mouth, with a wild call.  
Each of these has once been singled out  
As one miraculous, a million suns,  
Green jewels and rubies, more strange than words could speak,  
And so adored, has answered sick with doubt,  
'I know you not; and I am not unique.  
I am no different at all.'

So now, a single mass, the rank dank waves  
Roar from the hollow building, and divide  
In two dark swirls, and merge, and onward surge,  
And roaring come and split, and onward surge,  
A headlong ocean, a blind tide.  
Standing defiant, the rock on which it shatters,  
I remember: each has been called more strange than mountains,  
Each is alone and each must die, must die:  
Each of that sea where the traffic screams and clatters  
Must fight his fellows, or follow, or stand as I  
Stockstill, and grinning with a hard pride.

(C.P., p. 310)

As part of the crowd of the human race, everyone needs others around, but each must 'fight his fellows, or follow, or stand as I / Stockstill and grinning with hard pride'. The voice of the speaker seems to be Stewart's voice as he realizes that each one is no different, and in the statement 'I know you not; and I am not unique. / I am no different at all,' he refutes one major idea of the Romantic poets such as Byron who depicts the poet 'as a type ... presented as a man with capacities beyond those of other men'.<sup>356</sup> Here lies a significant difference between Stewart and the acclaimed New Zealand modernists who considered his poetry to be too traditional in its focus on attaining verisimilitude; yet, compared with traditional verse, the rhythms of both 'Crowd' and 'Green Lions' are relatively adventuresome, with varying line lengths and rhyme and half-rhyme to either slow or quicken the pace of each poem. Stewart's

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<sup>356</sup> Perkins, D., op. cit., p. 27.

rejection of modernism and the modernists seems to be more political than literary, and he continues to experiment with modernist techniques while he retains a preference for traditional techniques such as rhyme and rhythm while he persists in his choice of adjectives which are relevant to his theme, not as embellishments.

Throughout his quest for the source of his creativity, Stewart's journey takes him to places where water imagery dominates his creative impulse. This line stretches from his childhood on the Waingongoro River to Australian rivers where he was fond of trout fishing around the Monaro and the Snowy Mountains areas of New South Wales, through the arid Birdsville Track with its dry rivers, to the drowned Adaminaby to the water lily in the fishpond in his own garden.<sup>357</sup>

Stewart's rivers are usually places of peace and tranquillity, an exception being 'Mending the Bridge':

Beneath the square of glaring light  
The river still is muttering of flood,  
The dark day when thick with ugly mud,  
Swirling with logs and swollen beasts (and some  
Still alive, drowning) it had come  
Snarling, a foul beast chewing living cud,  
And grappled with the bridge and tried to rend it,  
So now these stronger brutes must sweat to mend it  
Labouring in light like orange blood.

(C.P., p. 317)

The theme of this poem is a forerunner of later verse dramas when humans pit their courage and strength against uncontrollable forces of nature, 'Burnished with sweat and lanterns now they tower / Monstrous against the marshes of the night', as they defy the flood with an endurance that can end only in defeat; at the same time, the defeat is, as Stewart later propounds in *The Fire on the Snow*, *Worsley Enchanted* and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*,

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<sup>357</sup> This idea is discussed further in the Chapter 'Sun Orchids and The Birdsville Track' which is a discussion of *The Birdsville Track* poems. Stewart's *Garden of Friends*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1987, refers to the garden of his home at St. Ives in Sydney, the flowers and other plants, the wildlife and, of course, his cats.

to become a mythical success that FitzGerald calls ‘vitality in defiance’,<sup>358</sup> a continuing theme throughout his poetry and verse plays.

In poems such as ‘Tablet for the Lonely Water,’ (C.P., p. 330), the river is a holy, joyous place where the *elan vital* is always present. Like the underlying theme in ‘The River’, the river is a spiritual source, and Stewart seems to be deeply affected by the river’s power to withhold its secrets for all times. However, when the boy is exploring ‘the warm secrets of the hills’, he

Chanced on this lonely water, saw the carving,  
The rune of all our splendour, all our joy  
So burned in stone where water chimes and trills.  
(C.P., p. 330)

The carving is probably a Maori carving to mark a happening at this spot, but the boy’s imagination runs riot and he is desolate when the elders of his family laugh at his imaginative ideas. This one line, ‘such a tale / To make his elders ache their sides with laughing’, which appears to be at odds with the poem as a whole, is possibly the one clue that gives the reader a reason for wanting to escape the ‘sea-eaten town’ and move to Australia where the fields of opportunity are larger than in New Zealand, and creative minds are not so closed to ideas that have some merit.

Regardless of his family’s lack of sympathetic rapport with the young man, Stewart pursues the river that gave him the creative impulse to continue with his idea. The one puzzle that remains unanswered, and is probably also only an idea in the poet’s mind, the question of who is the subject of his musing? Images are of ‘the shifting white fire of her feet’ and he wonders whether the ‘dim flat moons’, ‘those moon-strange far configurations’ which are ‘not carven stones’ may be ‘her footprints so on stones’. The river ‘has nothing in it to remember / What naked feet or bodies made it holy’, but he feels ‘her fire that should have chiselled

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<sup>358</sup> FitzGerald, R.D., *The Elements of Poetry*, op. cit., p. 29.

stone'. With the idea that all joyous things should not die, he decides,

I must grave her image in still verse  
To gleam like snow and marble through a time  
When iron days all else may overcome  
This tablet will remain though she be gone.  
(C.P., p. 331)

The mythical quality of this poem is a quality Stewart produces successfully in his later works such as the Maori-inspired *The Golden Lover*, *Ned Kelly*, *The Fire on the Snow* and *Worsley Enchanted*. Sites such as that in 'Tablet for the Lonely Water' are described in *The Seven Rivers*, especially in Chapter 3, in which Stewart writes:

But now when I think back on those delectable miles of the Waingongoro from Egmont to the sea, from Ngaere down to Chiselhurst, it all seems to coalesce, to crystallize, in that one little central pool where we had our family picnics.

It was an insignificant pool, one among a thousand; but like the dusty cavern under the veranda at home ... it was one of those places, as vital and intimate as the solar plexus, where the whole existence of boyhood finds its centre.

(*The Seven Rivers*, pp. 25)<sup>359</sup>

It seems, however, that the most significant and aesthetically satisfying of all poems about rivers is 'The River', included in *The Dosser in Springtime*<sup>360</sup> but belonging to New Zealand, which is the reason for discussing it in relation to early New Zealand poetry even though it was written in Australia. This is a nostalgic poem in which the mature man looks back with love and yearning to the place of his youth. He is remembering days of sheer delight with family picnics at the Waingongoro river and recalls in the poem the wild duck and her ducklings, fishing for trout and learning to swim, all of which he talks about in *The Seven Rivers*<sup>361</sup>:

Into the man's mind, yes, the boy's unfurls  
In rings of water and light where the kingfisher dives  
To eel and crayfish living their shadowy lives  
By rocks that waver as the current glides and swirls;  
And the boy's mind comes with a sparkle of sun and the shock  
On the swimmer's limbs, till the body is free and flowing  
And flesh and mind and spirit like the wavering rock

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<sup>359</sup> Stewart, D., *The Seven Rivers*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1966, pp. 21-29.

<sup>360</sup> Stewart, D., 'The Dosser in Springtime', *Collected Poems*, pp. 247-249.

<sup>361</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1966, pp. 247-249.

Are one with the river, going where the water is going.  
(C.P., p. 248)

Despite the fact that his home is in Australia, and in opposition to the New Zealand modernists who criticise him for being more Australian than New Zealander, he maintains he is 'Bound to that place by what most lovely chain!', and once again the river and its inhabitants form a chain of continuity that binds the New Zealand poetry with the later Australian poems. In verse three Stewart takes this chain of continuity a step further, 'Bound to that place by what mysterious love!' (C.P., p. 245) as this river of life 'winding in me' is still part of him and he is part of the river. The duality of emotions and experiences in verse four changes the mood of the poem as he compares his clear river to 'the rivers of men and traffic'. Despite the fact that Stewart was later to live in the city of Sydney, and also the preference for depiction of city life in modernist poetry, city life is anathema to him and he recalls 'The lonely rage of the spirit wrestling with fate: / So much went into the making of a man'. The grey stones in the river are synonymous with parents and family, and they form a strong foundation, but even though life is a struggle, in hindsight Stewart knows the 'one clear river ran / And into the sea of life brought down the snow' that is his creative impulse.

In 'The River', Stewart uses water symbolically as a mediator between the mysteries of heavenly and earthly forces. He acknowledges God as omnipotent in the first stanza: 'God knows where the wild duck wintered — God knows what months of terror or delight she spent', and then there is 'the glistening tent' of Egmont (Mount Taranaki), a vast tower reaching towards heaven.

Stewart's Biblical reference to 'living water' is a constant image throughout 'The River', so whether it is in the form of snow, rain, or the 'flashing torrent', it falls from heaven to earth; therefore it has heavenly attributes, but at the same time, its 'cold purity' must be warmed and nurtured by the sun to become productive. The metaphoric snow as frozen water



and the poet's creative impulse suggest that both are unproductive and must be warmed by the sun, the life-giving force, to release its latent potential, a portent of the warm Australian landscape and its effect on his creative impulse. He rejoices in the thought that in 'fantasy or dream' he is 'a country man, or a painter of earth and cloud,' so away from the crowds in towns and cities, he sings his song in which he follows an elusive gleam, an ideal; but instead of following the river from the mountain to the sea, he begins at the sea and proceeds upstream, following the 'restless gleam', a gleam which is a reflection of refracted light, shining in many places at the one time. This is the poet's search for an underlying reality and he asks what life is about; where is the sense in the mystery? He recounts the journey:

Following from sea to snow this restless gleam:  
The sombre pools; the light in a sky of willows;  
The red and weedy roots where the eddy is dark  
And the dead leaf spins and yellows; the stony shallows  
Where the silver flames of the rapids flicker and spark;

The shingle bank where the gaunt old crusher stood  
And the big trout hid in he run or leaped and splashed  
When the stoneflies danced and the sunset colours flashed;  
The broken pillars of Chiselhurst's ancient wood,  
The haunted hollows where the sunlight came to dance  
Like a girl in a ruined temple: by twist and turn,  
By reach and run and banks where the mosses glance,  
Mile after mile till the snow lay white on the fern.

(C.P., p. 249)

The expressive imagery in 'The River' contains elements of hazards to be met on life's journey: sad times, quiet times, times of enlightenment, of joys and fiery passions, but it is when he returns to reality that Stewart realises his creative urge is the 'sombre water', that 'burns like stars in my night'. His compelling desire to sing his song, to explore the world and to discover the truth of the mystery of life, is epitomised by water imagery, so the 'living water' with its religious connotation is Stewart's belief that all living things emanate from the same source, and 'chill from the ice' the river will soon give life to 'summer's richness', just as the young poet will mature and be more productive than a boy can be. This, then, is the river, the natural representation of Stewart's creative impulse to create in poetry, which is basic

to the poet's nature just as the grey stones form the solid bottom of the river. At critical times in his experience, he knows that he can draw upon the grey stones, the firm foundation, 'That living water, chill from the ice, or bringing / All summers' richness, runs at the roots of my life'. At times of confusion, 'deep down / The hidden river pursues its calm course', and when there is 'the bitterest crisis of rage or remorse / Or the flowering of life — listen! Water on stone'.

As he metaphorically walks upstream, following the restless gleam, Stewart's maturity is most evident in the concluding stanza of 'The River' which brings the spiritual and intellectual meditation to a close. The final stanza begins with a significant statement, 'At the end of life illusion falls away', as the poet looks forward, seeing his illusions about disappearing when he returns to the river in his last days. In comparing himself with the duck, which knows by instinct when to return, he appears to be commenting again on the theory of the collective unconscious. The poet knows that on his last day he will understand all things, that he will understand the difference between symbol and truth, 'A man's what his spirit knows'; he knows that the clear river, his creative impulse, the *elan vital*, will be warmed by the source and truth, and nurtured to maturity.

Stewart's 'Early New Zealand Poetry' is, indeed, the work of a young man with a strong creative impulse. In his nature poetry, the imagery is probably the first aspect that readers notice, and like W.B. Yeats before him, his poetic process, the essence of which is control, 'the isolation and clarification of the image'<sup>362</sup> that is his main objective; within these images is a reverence for the divine by allusion and implication. He was criticised, mainly by New Zealand modernists, for this clarity, or verisimilitude, but the criticism is not always justified because the poetry contains oblique statements and veiled messages that often suggest

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<sup>362</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1948, p. 15.

by analogy what McAuley called ‘the pathos of the human condition and the metaphysical abyss surrounding it’.<sup>363</sup> One must agree with McAuley’s comment that ‘A Robin’, to use a specific example, is a delicate realisation of a scarlet robin bathing in a mountain rock pool in which ‘The human meanings are so lightly held that any attempted explication must seem intolerably clumsy’.<sup>364</sup> This small poem written in Australia had its precedent in a poem about the New Zealand tui:

Where kowhai’s golden foam of bells  
Rushing and ringing from the blue  
Comes tumbling down to spring’s green swells  
My harsh black mockery waits for you.  
In that deep gold a core of dark  
That yet can break to fire of dew  
More sweet than light, more sweet than lark,  
I care not, I, for you or you,  
But for myself or my wild mate  
Let crystal fire come rippling through,  
Then in that foam of gold elate  
Send mockery black and harsh for you.  
(‘Tui’, C.P., p. 330)

Throughout this chapter, I have shown that Stewart’s interest in natural landscapes, their creation, beauty and order, prompts his inquiry into the nature of creativity itself and these inquiries provide the poet with a vehicle to comment on the nature of the human spirit. The source of creation and his creative impulse appear to the poet as an idea that begins ‘in the mind’s dark ocean’ (‘Moment,’ C.P. p. 327) to be nurtured and developed until it becomes an image, shining as the dawn shines through the darkness: ‘The colours of dawn persist into day. / The sky gleams to the east, to two blue mountains / In streaming copper, in steel’s cold grey’ (‘Winter Morning,’ C.P., p. 315).

As this consideration of his early poetry has revealed, Stewart was a prolific and versatile poet even before he left New Zealand for Australia in 1938. His wide-ranging themes and subject matter are unmatched by other poets in his field of interest, and, as Semmler

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<sup>363</sup> McAuley, J., “Douglas Stewart”, *The Literature of Australia*, op. cit., 1976, p. 433.

<sup>364</sup> *ibid.*, p. 433.

argues, Stewart remains 'pre-eminent and unchallenged in his country, perhaps during this century, as a nature poet'.<sup>365</sup> An examination of his Australian lyrics, ballads and verse drama forms the greater part of this thesis. Through his quest for answers to the mysteries of nature and creation, Stewart discovers what he believes to be universal truths, enabling him to comment on the nature of the human spirit such as 'the closer one moves to nature, the closer one moves to the spirit of the earth'.<sup>366</sup> When he discovers what he sees as the essence of the image, his poetic vision takes form.

Stewart finds a whole new world in his observation and exploration of New Zealand externals, and it is the uniqueness of each tiny flower, bird or insect, or the vast landscapes of the Antarctic or Australia which provide the impulse for his creative thought. In Chapter 4, 'The Early Australian Years', a major topic of discussion includes the influence of Norman Lindsay's property at Springwood where Stewart enjoyed not only other poets' and artists' preoccupations with poetry and art, but the spiritual influence and ambience of the place and its natural environment. In addition to the lines of continuity discussed in Chapter 3, in Chapter 4 more profound themes become new lines of continuity which include Stewart's personal philosophy that humans and nature unite as the spirit of the earth, which theme he developed as he experimented with the modernism of his times.

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<sup>365</sup> Semmler, C., *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>366</sup> Stewart, D., *op. cit.*, J. Thompson, p. 193.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE EARLY AUSTRALIAN YEARS THE *BULLETIN*, LINDSAY, SLESSOR, AND THE INFLUENCE OF SPRINGWOOD

#### I. The *Bulletin*

In *Springtime in Taranaki* Douglas Stewart recalls his visit to England in 1937 where he, like writers before him such as Henry Lawson and Xavier Herbert, and New Zealanders A.R.D. Fairburn, Katherine Mansfield and Robin Hyde, hoped for recognition in the literary world. The pilgrimage was poetically unproductive as was his aim to become a professional writer in that country. Except, as he later wrote, for ‘some stray scraps of work from the *Daily Herald*, a paper which I favoured partly because its politics were Labour [sic], as were my own at the time, and partly because it was the only newspaper in London that would take any notice of me’ (S.T., p. 254), work was very difficult to find. Stewart wrote occasionally for the *Standard*, for whom he also reviewed a New Zealand book. The desperation in his tone of voice is quite clear:

But England, just when I was beginning to feel I could survive in it, increasingly filled me with dismay. I was not writing my customary poem a week. I was not writing anything. Moreover, I could not see where I could ever make a start. In the kind of country writing in which I was interested, everything in both verse and prose seemed to have been said before. ‘That’s *Hardy’s* moor!’ Yes, and that was W.H. Davies’ skylark, if it wasn’t Shelley’s or Wordsworth’s or Shakespeare’s; and that was Edmund Blunden’s biting stormy winter; and that was John Cowper Powys’s rolling, rich, Rabelaisian earth.<sup>367</sup>

Stewart’s visit to England was therefore, a learning experience. In this chapter it is evident that he was aware of modern literary trends both overseas and in Australia. His literary preoccupations such as ‘the kind of country writing I was interested in’, were already ‘exploited’ by British writers; therefore, as outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, Stewart

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<sup>367</sup> Stewart, D., *Springtime in Taranaki*, op. cit., p. 254. Future references to this text will be shown as S.T.

developed his poetry and verse plays to include modern ideas about New Zealand and Australia, and these fall into varied and significant themes, that is, lines of continuity, such as his personal philosophy that humans and nature all belong to the spirit of the earth. Themes at this time included abstract ideas such as the struggle to survive, suffering and loneliness as well as the joy of reading and writing well-written verse about his subjects and experiences.

This chapter is concerned with both traditional and modern literary modes in Stewart's poetry; at the same time, he follows a traditional approach in lyrics and ballads by way of structure, rhythm and rhyme. He wrote with his audience in mind, that is, simple nature poetry which 'ordinary readers' could appreciate and enjoy, and also poems and verse plays which a 'cultivated reader' may enjoy on a higher level of understanding as symbolic images and more profound philosophical ideas began to emerge.<sup>368</sup>

The aim of this thesis is to encourage people to read Stewart's poetry for a re-evaluation of his work with an awareness of his philosophy and modernist ideas with more pleasure and understanding than previously. The poems and ballads in *The Dosses in Springtime*, *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* as well as verse plays such as *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover*, lend themselves to readers' spiritual awareness and understanding of the world we live in. 'Lyrebird' (discussed later in this chapter), is an example of Stewart's poems in which he identifies with an aspect of nature and what lies beyond it,<sup>369</sup> a notion which became another line of continuity in his poetry; this device illustrates how each poem contributes to an overall unity, that is, his personal philosophy of life. In the sonnet 'Lady Feeding the Cats' (C.P., 228-229), Stewart's narration illustrates his philosophy that poetry should bring joy. The Lady's act of kindness to the cats is a joyous event as perceived by the poet:

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<sup>368</sup> Stewart, D., *The Flesh and the Spirit*, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>369</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., *Elements of Poetry*, 1963, p. 40.

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.  
(C.P., p. 229)

Stewart's choice of images reflect a royal occasion: 'banners', 'fountains', 'gracious', 'sweet' and 'queen' elucidates his philosophy that the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one gets to spirit. The beauty that Stewart perceives in the Lady's soul is repeated in the final verse of 'The Bunyip': 'Look for my soul, the bunyip says, for it was a jewel too' (C.P., pp. 226-228). These two poems, often overlooked by literary critics, are examples of the way Stewart was experimenting with new forms and subjects while working at the *Bulletin*, and the manner in which he worked within the modernism of that time; they encourage readers to look beyond mere words to Stewart's more profound perceptions of the world around him.

Stewart had been a regular contributor to the *Bulletin* since he was a schoolboy. As he recalls in *Writers of the Bulletin*, 'The traditional way of getting on to the *Bulletin* staff, it used to be said, was to write yourself on; and that is exactly the course I followed' (W.B.. 23).<sup>370</sup> As we have seen, he wrote to Cecil Mann, editor of the Red Page of the *Bulletin*, suggesting that he could run 'The Long White Cloud', the New Zealand section of the Red Page. Mann agreed to the proposition, so Stewart returned to Sydney to be Mann's assistant.<sup>371</sup>

When World War II broke out, both Stewart and Mann applied to enlist in the AIF, but Stewart was rejected because of poor health.<sup>372</sup> Mann was accepted, but was discharged after a short period of service. It was during this time that Stewart became editor of the Red Page.

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<sup>370</sup> Stewart, D., Boyer Lectures, *Writers of the Bulletin*, The Australian Broadcasting Commission, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1977. All references to *Writers of the Bulletin* in this chapter will be shown as (W.B.).

<sup>371</sup> McCooey, D., 'Douglas Stewart 1913-1985', op. cit., 2002, p. 358.

<sup>372</sup> On 4 June, 1940, a Medical Certificate of Unfitness was issued on behalf of the Australian Military Forces by the Assisting Recruiting Officer, Moore Park, Paddington. The medical certificate states 'Mr. Douglas Stewart is suffering from a Duodenal Ulcer', 21 May, 1941. Copies of these documents were provided by Stewart's daughter, Meg.

Under Stewart's leadership, as Hall and Shapcott remark, the *Bulletin* became 'the real centre of new impulses for Australian poetry; and this was continued between 1961 and 1963 by Vincent Buckley, when Stewart took up the position of literary adviser with Angus and Robertson where he remained until 1970'.<sup>373</sup>

The *Bulletin* was indulgent to some older contributors. According to Thomas Shapcott, when Stewart succeeded Mann as literary editor (1940), the pages of the *Bulletin* 'were filled with repeats of old attitudes, old bush yarns, old bush ballads'.<sup>374</sup> The paper's attitudes were, to many eyes at least, retrograde. The outbreak of World War II, and especially the arrival in 1942 of the American Armed Forces, provided new impulses for creative writing, but shifts in sensibility took some time to eventuate. During World War II, the *Bulletin* received many contributions of poetry from soldier poets in the AIF. Sometimes there were so many that the entire Red Page was devoted to them. At the same time, newer prose writers of distinction emerged, for example, John Fountain, Jack Lusby and T.A. Hungerford, whose short stories prepared the way for *The Ridge and the River*, Hungerford's novel about the drama of the island campaigns in the Pacific.

Stewart realised that re-writes of old material were unacceptable, and it is in this context that Shapcott writes about Stewart's influence on the *Bulletin*, whose 'importance as a literary forum was revived, strengthened and enlarged appreciably'.<sup>375</sup> Shapcott comments on the impressive number of poets and short story writers who first published in the *Bulletin* while Stewart was literary editor:

... it is a virtual roll-call of talent in a period that is one of the most significant in Australian literary history. It is perhaps a comment on the nature of Australian

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<sup>373</sup> Hall, R., and Shapcott, T., *New Impulses in Australian Poetry*, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, 1968, p. 7.

<sup>374</sup> Shapcott, T., 'Douglas Stewart and Poetry in the *Bulletin*, 1940 to 1960', *Cross Currents*, ed. B. Bennett, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1981, p. 145.

<sup>375</sup> *ibid.*, p. 149.



literary and intellectual life that (with two outstanding exceptions<sup>376</sup>) virtually every poet of interest in this country was published in the *Bulletin* over this period.<sup>377</sup>

Stewart's helpful guidance was largely responsible for this, as many references show.

Adrian Wintle, who was employed at the *Bulletin*, says that Stewart went out of his way to be helpful: 'He was quietly providing me with the very best kind of grounding any beginner in journalism could hope for'.<sup>378</sup> This helpful attitude appears again in Ric Throssell's *Wild Weeds and Windflowers*.<sup>379</sup> Throssell, Katharine Susannah Prichard's son and biographer, remembers Stewart's contribution to Prichard's autobiography, *Child of the Hurricane*, 1974:

She welcomed the careful, detached, editorial comments of Beatrice Davis and Douglas Stewart: rearranged chapters; gladly accepted the suggestion that a fuller description of the winning of the Victoria Cross be included; rewrote the brief introductory remarks on the days of her married life in Greenmount for the concluding pages of the book, and even acknowledged meekly enough Douglas Stewart's discreet suggestion that 'raw whisky' might not be an appropriate description of the colour of her first love's eyes. 'Delete raw', Katherine replied. 'I meant whisky before water is added. Didn't know the raw spirit isn't brown'.<sup>380</sup>

Furthermore, in *Focus on Judith Wright*,<sup>381</sup> W.N. Scott wrote in 1967 that during the years of World War II:

In Sydney the *Bulletin* continued to publish much poetry under the firm hand of Douglas Stewart, who was and probably still is the most perceptive critic we have. Stewart was the guide and mentor of many who began their literary lives in that cradle of writers. Being a fine poet himself he was never needlessly cruel, though his pen could raise blisters when he felt that blisters were needed.<sup>382</sup>

Judith Wright was one of these new poets with 'tremendous talent'. Scott recalls that Stewart was enthusiastic when *The Moving Image* was published in 1946, and that he had said 'these [poems] promise anything; everything; the world'.<sup>383</sup>

These three writers were not alone in their appreciation of Stewart's leadership. Shapcott lists poems that entered into the 'acknowledged mainstream of our literary heritage

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<sup>376</sup> *ibid.*, p. 149. These two exceptions were A.D. Hope and John Manifold.

<sup>377</sup> *ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>378</sup> Wintle, A., 'The *Bulletin* in the Fifties', *Southerly*, Vol. 54, No. 1, March 1994, p. 120.

<sup>379</sup> Throssell, R., *Wild Weeds and Windflowers*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1975, p. 188.

<sup>380</sup> *ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>381</sup> Scott, W.N., *Focus on Judith Wright*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>382</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>383</sup> Stewart, D., *Bulletin*, 16 October, 1946, p. 2.

[which] will illustrate this level of achievement that Stewart's editorship brought forth'.<sup>384</sup> It may be argued that Stewart developed a place in Australia for publication of his own poems (a task which proved difficult when he was writing in New Zealand), and was able to take advantage of his position on the Red Page to do this. He also took advantage of the position to advance a diverse range of talents, including Arnold Wall (See discussion in Chapter 2), as well as 'James Hackston' (the cartoonist and short story writer Hal Gye), David Campbell and John Blight, all prolific writers.<sup>385</sup> It was a period of change and transition, with many new, younger poets claiming most attention. Stewart's critical and editorial policy is, then, presented through his selection of others' work, and through his own reviews and essays in the Red Page as well as through his advice and editorial comments, especially to new writers.

In *Writers of the Bulletin*, Stewart recalls the interesting and exciting milieu of literary people who visited the *Bulletin's* offices:

Poets, writers, artists, men of large talent and men of small, but all still men of talent, I see them now in my mind's eye as, especially in the 1940s, I so often saw them — inclined to spin a little: a glittering, whirling circle ...<sup>386</sup>

Whether they met at the *Bulletin* office or at Batemans hotel next door, they were 'living in a continuation of the *Bulletin* tradition' (W.B., p. 37). There were people — 'cogent reminders from the past' — such as Will Lawson, Roderic Quinn, J.H.M. Abbott, and once, Father P.J. Hartigan ('John O'Brien'), called in with E.J. Brady. Then, on another occasion, Hugh McCrae arrived with the composer Alfred Hill. Miles Franklin brought Mary Gilmore to the *Bulletin*, 'two grand old ladies like high priestesses of the Australian religion', while once, 'in her high collar and button-up boots and stiff old-fashioned Victorian costume, I saw Daisy

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<sup>384</sup> Shapcott, op cit., p. 150.

<sup>385</sup> Hal Gye (1888-1967) had contributed cartoons to the *Bulletin* for many years, and he also wrote short skits. From 1936 he wrote a series of short stories about 'the Father', for the *Bulletin*. He published a collection of these in 1967 and, posthumously, a further collection appeared in 1969.

<sup>386</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1977, p. 36.

Stewart also mentions now famous, and some forgotten, literary visitors to the *Bulletin*. Life was exciting for Stewart, and he considered it to be 'a privilege' to talk to Wright, Keesing, Rosemary Dobson, and his friend Robert FitzGerald, (W.B., p. 33). In particular, Stewart admired Ronald McCuaig, the man and his 'delicate poetic impulse',<sup>388</sup> which is 'not only excellent in itself but is also of considerable significance in the development of modern Australian verse ...' (W.B., p. 45). McCuaig was a perfectionist, so he was not a prolific writer, and Stewart suggests that his shyness was at fault, but 'perhaps in our wicked world a poet needs to be seen sometimes to be heard' (W.B., p. 45). Peter Kirkpatrick comments: 'Perhaps so, but the myopia of critics is only too well known'.<sup>389</sup> Stewart's ability as a critic displays an insight into the spirit of poetry lacking in some of his fellow reviewers. Like Stewart's, McCuaig's poetry demonstrated 'the *spoken* sound of verse',<sup>390</sup> and McCuaig later wrote: 'poetry which cannot be spoken, and understood at the speed at which it is spoken, is to that degree less than the best'.<sup>391</sup> McCuaig and Stewart shared similar preoccupations in their interests, specifically in the sounds created by rhyme and rhythm that create the music in lyrics (for example, McCuaig's 'Music in the Air').

Both men could be realistic — Stewart's close observation of his natural subjects and his clarification of the image illustrate this. McCuaig's poems are, in Stewart's opinion, 'anything but self-effacing; they were startling', and he refers to 'this outrageous new poet' saying that his girlfriend's beauty was 'a lazy razor',

Edged with incuriosity  
Whom it cuts, or if, or why,

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<sup>387</sup> *ibid.*, 1977, p. 37.

<sup>388</sup> Wintle, A., *op cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>389</sup> Kirkpatrick, P., ed., Introduction to *Selected Poetry* by Ronald McCuaig, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1992, p. x.

<sup>390</sup> *ibid.*, p. xiii.

<sup>391</sup> McCuaig, R., 'Writing Poetry: The Why and the How', *Southerly*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1948, p. 213.

Her beauty is a lazy razor  
Drawn across the brain that has her.

(W.B., p. 49)

Stewart asks in 1949, ‘Was this poetry? ... Could you really rhyme “razor” with “has her”?’ Apparently you could. It was a revelation to me’ (W.B., p. 49). Stewart had arrived at the conclusion that ‘Poetry now wasn’t about beauty at all’ as he recognised contemporary poetry such as McCuaig’s ‘The Passionate Clerk to his Love’ no longer strictly followed earlier poetic traditions. In this way, McCuaig, like Stewart, was aware of the modernist trends of his time and used whatever devices or figures of language suited him for his own poetry.

The later satirical poem ‘Terra Australis’ (See Chapter 8) is an example of Stewart’s wit, but it is a different kind of wit to McCuaig’s witty realism in ‘The Fairy in the Suitcase’ or the ‘extraordinary medley’ in McCuaig’s amusing account of a paperback entitled *Tales out of Bed* which was popular with the American servicemen in Australia at that time (W.B., pp. 46-47).<sup>392</sup> McCuaig’s ‘The Cheque’, and *Vaudeville* poems such as ‘The Razor’ are also described as ‘startling’ and ‘astonishing’ — they were so different from other writers’ works. Stewart was of the opinion that it was McCuaig’s poetry that moved Australian poetry into the twentieth century (W.B., p. 50).<sup>393</sup>

While at the *Bulletin*, Stewart was taken by Kenneth Mackenzie, to the ‘Dickensian’ No. 12 Bridge Street to meet Norman Lindsay.<sup>394</sup> At first, Stewart found Lindsay to be somewhat formidable, with ‘his saintliness, his disdain of sordid commerce, his air of commanding authority’, and he found him alarming (N.L., p. 25). He wrote that he could not recall when he lost his fear of Lindsay. Perhaps it was through his growing friendship with

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<sup>392</sup> Ronald McCuaig wrote literary criticism for the Red Page and he became a member of the *Bulletin* staff in 1949. From 1950 to 1960 he made ‘valuable discoveries of new writers’ when he was short story editor under the pen-name ‘Swilliam’, and as its resident laureate of topical verse, W.B., p. 45.

<sup>393</sup> Stewart D., op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>394</sup> Stewart, D., *Norman Lindsay: A Personal Memoir*, Angus & Robertson Publishers, Sydney, 1975, p. 30. All references to this text are recorded as (N.L.).

Margaret Coen, who was to become Stewart's wife in 1946; then Norman Lindsay's pupil and acolyte, she prepared the artist's lunches for him, and Stewart shared them. Alternatively, Stewart says perhaps it was 'the truly tremendous letter he wrote me when I showed him the manuscript of a verse play, *The Fire on the Snow*, had something to do with it'. Or perhaps, he adds, 'I simply succumbed, as most people did, to the charm of his personality' (N.L., p. 26). Stewart and Margaret moved in to 12 Bridge Street, and lived there until 1954 when they bought a house at St. Ives after Stewart won a UNESCO scholarship to Europe (1954), where they spent six months.

The 1940s was a time of intense literary activity in Sydney. Stewart writes of May Hollinworth who produced her plays in tiny halls off back lanes 'decorated with drunks and garbage cans, and gave their first chance to many of Australia's finest actors, including Leo McKern' (N.L., p. 30). It was May Hollinworth who first produce Stewart's verse dramas *Ned Kelly* and *Shipwreck*. Significantly, in radio, Leslie Rees and Frank D. Clewlow were trying to foster an Australian school of radio drama.

Stewart recalls that in the field of criticism, along with the *Bulletin*, there was *Southerly*, edited in Sydney by R.G. Howarth, 'busy discovering or rediscovering such writers as Brennan, Shaw Neilson, Hugh McCrae, Joseph Furphy and William Gosse Hay', thus bringing Australian literature to the attention of the universities. At the same time, the Melbourne-based *Meanjin* was to become similarly influential (N.L., p. 31). *Meanjin* magazine was first produced in Brisbane by Clem Christesen, as *Meanjin Papers* (1940-47). Christesen moved to Melbourne in 1945, and the University of Melbourne provided the magazine with an office.

In the field of publishing, and directly influential in Stewart's career, was Angus and Robertson where, with the co-operation of W.G. Cousins (managing director of Angus and Robertson 1933-1970) and George Ferguson (director of Angus and Robertson 1936-1970 and

publishing director 1949-1970),<sup>395</sup> Beatrice Davis, an editor employed by Angus and Robertson, was reviving the publishing tradition inaugurated by George Robertson. At the same time, Waite and Bull and the Shepherd Press were producing fine art books, including Stewart's *Ned Kelly* and *Shipwreck* with their Norman Lindsay illustrations.

While this was happening in Sydney, Stewart recalls that the Jindyworobaks began in Adelaide. The Jindyworobak movement was a reaction to English traditional forms and content, including colonial bush ballads, and like Curnow's attempts to encourage writers to use New Zealand images and themes, it manifested a resolve by some writers to work against English influences on literary themes, styles and language. The new movement was led by Rex Ingamells, who, Stewart claims, was 'advocating a mystical union with the soil and the Aborigines' (N.L., p. 31). The neo-nationalistic anthology *Jindyworobak Review*, edited by Ingamells, began in 1938 and continued with different editors, until 1948; a further anthology, *The Jindyworobaks*, edited by Brian Elliott, was published by University of Queensland Press in 1979. As Elliott remarks, Stewart 'for a long time stood out against them on principle, as lax in their poetic standards. As a result Rex Ingamells for some years regarded the *Bulletin* as his natural enemy'.<sup>396</sup> Stewart contributed one poem, 'The Aboriginal Axe' (1951),<sup>397</sup> in which he perceives a link with the past:

Shaped with such care to fit the hand,  
Polished and washed by the crystal shower  
From stain of clay and smoother of sand  
Now it lies in my own,  
Warm to hold as the butcher-bird,  
Cold as the rotting flower.

(C.P., p. 164)

He did not accept Ingamell's invitation to offer more poems on the grounds that it would be in

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<sup>395</sup> George Ferguson was instrumental in the founding of the Australian Book Publishers Association, 1949; he was director of the Association from 1971 to 1975.

<sup>396</sup> Elliott, B., ed, *The Jindyworobaks*, op. cit., 1979, p. lxiii.

<sup>397</sup> Stewart, D., 'The Aboriginal Axe', op. cit., 1951, p. 199.

conflict with the Angus and Robertson anthology of 1941.<sup>398</sup> This brought an angry response from Ingamells, and the two men remained estranged until Miles Franklin arranged a meeting at the theatre for a performance of Stewart's *Shipwreck*, when their differences were resolved, and Ingamells wrote:

I met Douglas Stewart in Sydney, when I went along to see *Shipwreck*. Somebody carted me backstage (Miles Franklin), and Stewart put out his paw, saying 'This silly row has gone on long enough'. He was extremely decent, and I liked him very much. He's reviewing *Handbook* in *The Bulletin* soon, he says — and I fancy there'll be some policy remarks, the character of which I'll be very interested to note.<sup>399</sup>

Although Stewart was not a major contributor to the *Jindyworobak Review* he maintained an interest in Aboriginal art and in 1946 wrote 'Rock Carving' (C.P., p. 254) in which the poet and the long-dead Aboriginal artist are portrayed as kindred spirits through their art; while the poet shapes his art with sounds, the Aborigine carves his thoughts in rock, thus supporting the idea of the line of continuity between indigenous and white Australians in the image of a fishing line.

Vivian Smith postulates that along with the development of nature poetry in the 1940s by Stewart, David Campbell and Judith Wright, and the voyager poem tradition by Stewart, Francis Webb and William Hart-Smith, the Jindyworobak movement provided a stimulus with 'its sense of "environmental values", while other developments in the field of neo-classicism, cosmopolitanism and surrealism arose in positive opposition to all that Jindyworobak stood for'.<sup>400</sup>

Some contributors to the magazine *Angry Penguins* (1940-1946), edited by Max Harris, reacted against Jindyworobak insularity. Vivian Smith writes: 'it tried to adopt internationalism instead of nationalism, surrealism instead of social realism, and modernism in all its manifestations of cultural primitivism' (OHAL, p. 370). In a manner similar to that of

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<sup>398</sup> Stewart, D., *ibid.*, 1941, p. 243.

<sup>399</sup> Ingamells, R., ed., 'Jindyworobaks Review', 1938-1948, Melbourne: Jindyworobak, 1979, p. 247.

<sup>400</sup> Smith, V., *OHAL*, 1981, p. 370.

Curnow's group of young modern writers in New Zealand, Harris's Australian Angry Penguins revealed their 'youthful brashness and arrogance'; and this attitude was exposed by the 'Ern Malley hoax'.<sup>401</sup>

The Ern Malley poems were written by James McAuley and Harold Stewart who sent them to Harris, who accepted them and asserted they had 'genuine qualities'. McAuley and Stewart then revealed that the poems were 'deliberate concoctions, not intended to humiliate Harris personally, but to show how meretricious much contemporary poetry is'.<sup>402</sup> Stewart's reaction to the Ern Malley hoax poems was that 'they were very good parody, therefore near enough to the real thing to trick almost any reader who was prepared to accept the fashion of obscurity they copied and satirised' (NL., p. 31). The *Adelaide News* reported on 20 June, 1944 that students at Adelaide University 'now suspect that the authors of the [Ern Malley] poems may be Douglas Stewart, a Sydney poet, and author of the recently produced verse play for radio, "Ned Kelly"'.<sup>403</sup> However well-intentioned McAuley and Harold Stewart were in their hoax, it had a negative effect on Australian poetry at that time by limiting experiment with recent trends, and reflected the country's provincialism and its need to engage more with international trends in poetry.

Literary works that drew Douglas Stewart's attention included Eve Langley's *The Pea Pickers* (1942); Stewart's admiration for this novel can be seen in his comments about why he thought it the 'most delightful' of all Australian novels: he admired 'the lyrical beauty of its prose, its flashing gaiety and humour, its crowded galaxy of bush characters and its utterly authentic evocation of the Gippsland countryside' (N.L., p. 32).

In 1941, the first editions of *Australian Poetry* and short story anthology *Coast to*

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<sup>401</sup> *ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>402</sup> *ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>403</sup> Heyward, M. *The Ern Malley Affair*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1993, p. 130.



*Coast* were established by Angus and Robertson. This was a period of excitement and the new poets were encouraged, including McCuaig, Dobson, John Blight, Nan McDonald, Keesing, Wright, Campbell, and Hart-Smith, as well as the older and more experienced Slessor, FitzGerald and Webb. Stewart remembers that all this activity was welcomed, organised and reinvigorated at 12 Bridge Street (N.L., p. 35).

Poets sought out Norman Lindsay because his illustrations could do much to help a book into print, as they had done for Stewart's 'Elegy for an Airman', because, he says, 'Lindsay's illustrations meant an instant sale of at least three hundred copies to collectors, and with that flying start the book could be made to pay' (N.L., p. 35). Eventually, schools and universities began using these works as textbooks and they became profitable to the publisher. Lindsay continued to illustrate many of the younger writers' works, but Stewart says Lindsay was not a man whom poets could ask, or a publisher commission, to illustrate a book, and 'These gifts (for which he himself never took a penny in fees or royalties) had to come spontaneously, from his response to the poem' (N.L., p. 35).

There can be no doubt that Stewart enjoyed both the physical and cultural environment of Springwood, and received much of his impetus from the surrounding bushland. He says too, to be with people such as Slessor and other poets and artists, was to know that 'one walked and talked where great men had trod in the past' (N.L., p. 114). Visits to Springwood by the Stewart family became shorter when in 1954 they bought a house at St. Ives, but Stewart and Lindsay remained friends until Lindsay's death in 1969. Together with Sir Robert Menzies, Vice-Admiral Sir John Collins, Sir Norman Cowper, Sir Erik Langker, Dr. H.C. Coombs, Kenneth Slessor, Clement Semmler, A.R. Renshaw and Geoffrey Dutton, Stewart was a member of the Norman Lindsay Memorial Appeal committee. The money received from the appeal ensured that the National Trust (NSW) was able to purchase Lindsay's property at Springwood and to set up the house as a gallery (N.L., p. 183). Following the Appeal, and the

establishment of the gallery at Springwood, collections of Lindsay's art works and ship models were housed by art galleries, universities and libraries around Australia.

Stewart resigned from his position of editor of the Red Page of the *Bulletin* in 1961 when, he recalls in *Writers of the Bulletin*, it had a need to modernise itself, but it changed altogether when it modelled itself on *Time* and lost its Australian character and much of its influence in and on Australian literature. He began a close association with Angus & Robertson, and worked with George Ferguson as literary adviser; he was responsible for such publications as the Australian Classics series until his retirement in 1970.

## 2. Kenneth Slessor

When Stewart retired from Angus & Robertson in 1970, he did not retire from his literary interests. He wrote that his biography of Slessor, *A Man of Sydney*,<sup>404</sup> 'grew from [his] admiration for Slessor's poetry, and [the] pleasure in his personality as it manifested itself ... during about twenty years of acquaintanceship in Sydney and ten years of close friendship' (M.S., p. xiii). Stewart said that the book began in 1974 as an essay for a magazine (unnamed) which asked for a 'profile' of the poet, and 'This evolved into "A Personal Sketch" which, under the title of "A Portrait of Kenneth Slessor", somehow got diverted to *Southerly*, [Vol. 34, No. 4, December 1974, pp. 323-341] and now forms my first Chapter' (M.S., p. xiii). The book also includes 'The Collected Poems' ('Kenneth Slessor's Poetry') and 'Voyager Poems', two essays that appear in Stewart's book of criticism, *The Broad Stream*.<sup>405</sup>

Stewart first met Slessor in 1933 when he first applied for a position at *Smith's Weekly* where Slessor was editor (from 1935-1939 Slessor was editor-in-chief). Slessor was amused

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<sup>404</sup> Stewart, D., *A Man of Sydney: An Appreciation of Kenneth Slessor*, Thomas Nelson, West Melbourne, 1977. Future references to this text are shown as (M.S.).

<sup>405</sup> Stewart, D., *The Broad Stream*, op. cit., pp., 273-299, and pp., 226-232 respectively.

but not impressed enough to employ a twenty-one year old from Taranaki, whose qualifications were that he was a ‘poet’ who had published half a dozen poems in the *Bulletin* and the *Australian Woman’s Mirror*, but Slessor advised him to keep writing and submitting his work (M.S., p. 4).

After his first visit to *Smith’s Weekly*, Stewart recalls that Slessor’s poems, for example, ‘Pan at Lane Cove’ and ‘The Old Play’, struck him as bizarre because they were so remote from the world he had just left in New Zealand, and so different from the nature poems of W.H. Davies and Edmund Blunden who were then his favourite reading (M.S., p. 4).

On his return to Sydney in 1938 to take up a position as assistant to Mann, Stewart accompanied Kenneth MacKenzie to see Slessor once again. By this time Stewart had published *Green Lions*, and *The White Cry* was in the process of being published in London (M.S., pp. 5-6), so he felt on this occasion he could meet ‘the great man with a slightly better claim than before to the title I had awarded myself’ (M.S., p. 6). Slessor showed Mackenzie and Stewart the manuscript of one of his poems; ‘the poem, as I should like to believe, “Five Bells” or that much slighter little Sydney poem “Last Trams”.’ (M.S., p. 6). The book *Five Bells* with decorations by Lindsay, ‘an experiment in paperback at a low price’ (M.S., p. 6), was about to be published by Slessor’s friend, Frank Johnson. Stewart was fascinated with the manuscript:

... to see little towers of words here and there above and below the lines wherever, doubtful about his original choice of language, Slessor had written in alternatives and synonyms, so that he could study them at leisure. He would carry a manuscript around like this for weeks, so MacKenzie told me, considering and reconsidering every word till he had it perfect (M.S., P. 6).

This illustrates how punctilious a craftsman Slessor was. Like Stewart, the reader finds it informative to think that the poet who wrote poems such as ‘Five Visions of Captain Cook’ and ‘Beach Burial’ would need to show commitment to precision with the language and poetic techniques to produce poems of this quality.

Slessor wrote 'Beach Burial' (1942), one of his best-known poems, when he was Official War Correspondent in the African Western Desert, where Australian soldiers were involved in the battles at Tobruk and El Alamein in 1942; after the battle, the soldiers and sailors' dead bodies stirred his creative impulse: Stewart wrote that 'Somewhere on the desert coastline he must have seen, too, the burial of those unknown seamen whose fate was to inspire him to write what was probably the most moving of all the poems of World War II, "Beach Burial"' (M.S., p. 7).

Stewart later concluded *A Man of Sydney* with the observation that 'Ken never wrote a bad line in his poetry. I've just looked up and read the last published poem he wrote, "Beach Burial", dated El Alamein (1942), and it is as perfect as any other he wrote' (M.S., p. 175). Jaffa similarly praises Slessor in his biographical work, *Kenneth Slessor: A Critical Study*, saying that 'the art and revelation of Slessor's poems are timeless in their appeal, and increasingly, the older reader, as well as the young one, is rediscovering or discovering for the first time, their power, precision and delicacy'.<sup>406</sup>

After 1944 Slessor wrote little poetry, and Geoffrey Dutton comments, 'When people were tactless enough to ask why he wrote no more poetry [Slessor] would turn it aside by a jest, referring to himself as 'an extinct volcano'.<sup>407</sup> Dutton reports that once at a luncheon when Slessor 'was being tormented by questions about his poetic silence he said sotto voce to Stewart, "It's not for lack of trying".'<sup>408</sup> Stewart writes a more personal comment of this incident, adding, 'I believe, by about 1940 when he [Slessor] was entering his own forties, had said all that he really wanted to say in verse' (M.S., p. 10). The anecdotes contained in the remainder of *Man of Sydney* are written in the same tone of friendship.

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<sup>406</sup> Jaffa, H.C., *Kenneth Slessor: A Critical Study*, Angus and Robertson, Twayne, Sydney, 1977, p. 140.

<sup>407</sup> Dutton, G., *Kenneth Slessor: A Biography*, Viking, Ringwood, 1991, p. 317.

<sup>408</sup> *ibid.*, p. 317.

Slessor accepted the position of Government Censor, arguing 'if the Government now wanted a more enlightened censorship, which so far as he [Slessor], was concerned would be more interested in freeing books than in banning them, he felt obliged to give his assistance' (M.S., p. 55). Slessor maintained an interest in writing and writers until his death in 1971.

### 3. The influence of Lindsay and Springwood

Before Stewart returned from England in 1938, Slessor had been a member of the Lindsay group. Together with Jack Lindsay and Frank Johnson (a young Sydney bookseller who wanted to become a publisher), the group published four issues of *Vision*, a literary quarterly. Norman Lindsay drew black and white decorations for each issue and promised to write short stories and literary essays, and it was he who suggested the name 'Vision'. The first issue appeared on 1 May, 1923. John Hetherington states in *Norman Lindsay: The Embattled Olympian*, '*Vision* had some brilliant moments in its short life [but] There was no money to pay contributors, so Slessor, Hugh McCrae, Dorothea Mackellar, Robert D. FitzGerald, Phil Lindsay and others, filled its pages and worked for love'.<sup>409</sup> Eventually Slessor's visits to Springwood ceased, because his main interests, socially and literary, were then in Sydney (M.S., p. 113).

When Lindsay left Springwood after a quarrel with his wife, Rose, he leased No. 12 Bridge Street which became a popular meeting place for artists and writers from 1934 to 1956 when he returned to Springwood to live. As mentioned above, it was here that the Stewarts lived while awaiting the birth of their daughter, Meg, in 1948.

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<sup>409</sup> Hetherington, J., *Norman Lindsay: The Embattled Olympian*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1973, p. 167.

Although it was written many years before Stewart was known to Norman Lindsay, *Creative Effort* (1924), proclaims Lindsay's basic philosophy of art and literature. He begins with an explanation of the difference between existence and life. 'By Existence,' he writes, 'one comprehends the body and all that serves to supply its needs, to keep its machinery active'. However, although the body is the 'poor relation' of the mind, it is 'By Life one understands all that goes beyond the body the impulse that we vaguely call the mind, the soul, the intellectual process'.<sup>410</sup> He furthermore insists that it is 'only in creative art that one finds a way beyond the struggle for existence, the direction for Life' (C.E., p. 2).

Stewart relates Lindsay's argument to 'Nietzsche's terms [that] said 'yes' and not 'no' to life; he agreed with Matthew Arnold that 'unrelieved misery, mere hopelessness' (which Lindsay saw as much in vogue among Left-wing, realist novelists and short story writers of the 1920s and 1930s) was not a subject for art. Realism, however, was also employed by some on the Right (and Arnold had long before been challenged by nineteenth century Realists and Naturalists). Inevitably and incessantly Lindsay stressed the importance of continuous work, for that was the credo by which he lived: 'Drink, drugs and idleness destroy the cortex of the brain ... You do your work and your work will look after you' (N.L., p. 36). In *Creative Effort*, Lindsay develops his association of Art with Life in terms of vitality: 'the struggle for existence should endure, for it is by the struggle man develops. If it ceased, life became perfect — effort would cease; Life would cease. For Life is effort' (C.E., p. 18).

Writing about Lindsay's generosity and enthusiasm for literary effort, Stewart insists that the nature of Lindsay's influence has often been misunderstood: 'It would be more accurate on the whole to call Lindsay a 'stimulus' rather than an "influence"' (N.L., p. 38). Even though Stewart claims that Lindsay was a 'stimulus', this statement from *Creative Effort*

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<sup>410</sup> Lindsay, N., *Creative Effort*, C. Palmer, Sydney, 1924, p. 1. Note: All references to this text will be recorded as (C.E.).

indicates a far-reaching influence which is a contribution to Stewart's lines of continuity in his total works.

Struggle becomes a persistent theme in Stewart's poetry and verse dramas — the struggle for existence, the struggle to survive against often insurmountable odds, the struggle which becomes heroic in defeat in poems and verse plays such as *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, *Fire on the Snow* and *Worsley Enchanted*.

Writing in his memoirs about the friendship and literary association between Lindsay and himself, Stewart recorded fond memories of frequent visits to Springwood, 'a strange, resplendent, enchanted sort of place', and a weekend visit 'always filled me with elation' (N.L., p. 87). This elation was also stimulated by Lindsay's vitality and his philosophical thought expressed in *Creative Effort*. Not only Lindsay's vitality, but the ambience of Springwood and the interchange of ideas also stimulated Stewart into literary endeavour. It was here he found his creative impulse that led to poetry different in scope and tone from his early New Zealand poetry.

#### 4. Springwood Poems: An Introduction

In *The Dosses in Springtime*<sup>411</sup> (1946), Stewart writes about the Australian bush, and in experimenting with new ideas such as enjoyment of poetry for its own sake, by the poet and by readers of poetry, Stewart's lyrics and ballads in *The Dosses in Springtime* contribute to an appreciation of poetry as the observed image is understood. Readers often gain insight into deeper awareness as they become familiar with his philosophy — humans and nature are

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<sup>411</sup> Stewart, D., 'The Dosses in Springtime', op. cit., 1946, p. 256.

unified by the spirit of the earth. This is a major line of continuity which generated new and fresh concepts of life and its mysteries as well as his personal philosophy, to that in his early New Zealand poems; for example, that humankind and nature often struggle for survival which then forms another line of continuity throughout this thesis.

At 'Springwood'<sup>412</sup> Mr. Schipp, 'the tall powerful craggy mad gardener', who was mentally challenged, is one of the models for Stewart's poem 'The Dosser in the Springtime', and Stewart writes:

Rose would not allow him to sleep in any of the quarters usually available to servants, because he stank; so he made a lair for himself under a rock ledge below the swimming pool where he communed, so he told us, with spirits and possums (N.L. p. 100).

Stewart's sympathetic reaction to this man stimulated his creative impulse which emerges as a somewhat sceptical response to a lonely man living as one with nature, one which, as Vivian Smith suggests, is an example of the manner in which Stewart adopted evasive scepticism in his work by 'his ability to see both sides of the question and not commit himself to anything beyond making of the poem itself'.<sup>413</sup>

While walking through the bush at Springwood, Lindsay's daughter, Jane, 'stripped off her clothes and stood naked and white and golden under the crystal shower of the fall, looking like a Lindsay watercolour' (N.L., p. 104):

That girl from the sun is bathing in the creek,  
Says the white old dosser in the cave.  
It's a sight worth seeing though your old frame's weak;  
Her clothes are on the wattle and it's gold all over,  
And if I was twenty I'd try to be her lover,  
Says the white old dosser in the cave.  
(C.P., pp. 256-257)

This incident aroused the Dosser's imagination, and as the dosser fantasises about chasing the girl all over Australia, Stewart experiments with Australian imagery that he knows will have

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<sup>412</sup> Stewart, D., 'Springwood', *Norman Lindsay*, op. cit., 1975, pp. 87-186.

<sup>413</sup> Smith, V., op. cit., p. 171.



instant appeal to readers, especially those of the *Bulletin*. When Stewart imaginatively causes the dosser to become a swagman, ‘My swag on my shoulder and a haughty eye for work’, he sets up an acceptance of the bush ethic still fresh in readers’ memories after the hardships of the Great Depression and its aftermath in the 1930s. For emotional appeal the dosser imagines an Australian icon, ‘an old blue dog full of fleas at my heels’, while he travels from Bourke to Alice and across the burning desert. When he finds the girl, she will be ‘sleeping like a beauty in a palace / With the sunset wrapped around her’ (C.P., p. 256).

Like the young poet in his early New Zealand lyrics when his persona became part of the natural landscape, in this ballad the dosser (Stewart’s persona) has become part of his surroundings: ‘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’. Other technical devices which illustrate lines of continuity through much of Stewart’s poetry is, for example, the anaphoric ‘I saw my laugh I saw my laugh I saw my laugh go jumping / Like a jaunty old goanna with his tail up still / Till he dived like a stone in the pool below the cliff’ (C.P., p. 257); readers can imagine they hear the ‘ha ha ha’ of Stewart’s laughter as he is amused by his own image, but although he makes the dosser’s spirit laugh, the man is lonely, and it is this issue of loneliness as a further line of continuity, that Stewart is really concerned with: ‘the billy boils beside her ... But no one ever ate with me except the loathsome spider. / And no one ever lay with me beside the sandstone wall / Except the pallid moonlight and she’s no good at all’.

Throughout ‘The Dosser in Springtime’, Stewart is embracing modernist poetic experiment reminiscent of Slessor’s preoccupation with rhyme: ‘Alice / palace’ is one most unusual rhyme, and the use of assonance in ‘belly / gully’ and ‘bubbles / pebbles’ are all examples of Slessor’s unusual rhymes and language use. During her visit to Stewart’s home, he told Geraldine O’Brien:

I really do like rhyme — which nobody — uses now, and music, and there's very little of that ... these chaps who don't rhyme know they have got a poem right without the yardstick of good, old-fashioned technique.<sup>414</sup>

Unusual rhyming patterns continue to appear in later poems as with uneven line lengths that not only attempt, but usually succeed, in imitating actual speech. O'Brien continues: 'Later, over tea, he describes himself as old-fashioned, lamenting that there's not enough music in contemporary poetry'.<sup>415</sup> Occasionally it is this musical aspect (another line of continuity) of Stewart's ballads and lyrics which are just as pleasing as his subjects. Music gives enjoyment in his poetry and verse plays as this musical rhythm continues.

In 'The Dosser in Springtime', Stewart wrote a shorter lyric, 'Dosser' (C.P., pp. 273-274), about a man who, according to Nancy Keesing, the poet discovered 'in his cave down a gully in the innocent Sydney suburb of Cheltenham'.<sup>416</sup> This tightly structured poem contrasts with the sentiment in 'The Dosser in Springtime'; the poet's sensitivity is clear as he decries the lack of public response to someone in dire need of help:

No mark for the hand-wringer,  
No light for "Ah, so lovely,"  
No flame for bannered anger,  
No man, but knowledge only  
Of sun-up, sundown, hunger.

The image of 'mad old Jack' as he was known, is one of complete desolation, loneliness and degradation, and it is given poetic strength by the anaphoric 'No ...' in the first four lines. Stewart is asking here 'where is the anger?' for the dosser who 'entombed lies still' within the rock that 'folds / Around his bones until / Sun rises, seabird scolds'. While 'old Jack' is not

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<sup>414</sup> O'Brien, G., 'A Gardening Poet who Sings the Universe into Shape', *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 1, 1983, Sydney, p. 46-47. (Stewart was a lover of Mozart as was Slessor, but Slessor enjoyed the 'harsh, trident cacophony with its nasty tunes and its largely incomprehensible words' of Brecht's *hreepenny Opera*, a parody of William Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, and Stewart comments that he is 'puzzled as to what Slessor ... could have seen or heard' in it. *Man of Sydney*, op. cit., p. 16. This comment relates directly to the musical tone that sets the mood in much of Stewart's poetry and verse plays, for example, the poetical passages between Whana and Tawhai in *The Golden Lover*.)

<sup>415</sup> O'Brien, *ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>416</sup> Keesing, N., op. cit., pp. 8-9.

hurting anyone, Stewart considers the attitude of those who could help but do not:

There needs to be said  
Safe in your double bed  
That rock is old and mad  
And, quick or rotting, Jack  
Is an old man mad as rock. (C.P., p. 274)

Stewart leaves the problem unresolved (another example of Smith's 'evasive scepticism'), and as the old dossier is left to the innocence of the natural world of which he has become a part, while there were people who could have helped 'old Jack' living in comfort ; the modernist symbolic uncaring metropolis continues its out-of-sight, out-of-mind attitude.

### 5. Springwood Poetry: Modernism and Experiment

In *Norman Lindsay: A Personal Memoir*, Stewart recalls 'dashing up and down the gullies ... picking up small nature poems, like wildflowers off the bushes, wherever I went' (N.L., p. 116). His personal philosophy that man's spirit belongs to the natural physical world is expressed clearly when he writes:

I liked the strenuous effort of scrambling down to the creek beds through the thick undergrowth and of climbing back again to the ridge tops; I liked exploring the bush and finding places and plants and flowers and creatures that were new to me; and then as at all times, I was haunted by the great mystery of evolution in which, because of the beauty of pattern and form so many living things display, I felt that some creative spirit, beyond mere mechanical 'natural selection', must be at work (N.L., p. 116).

At this time Stewart was familiarising himself with the Australian ambience, enjoying Springwood which he refers to as 'a strange, resplendent, enchanted sort of place' (N.L., p. 87). The 'creative spirit' referred to above is at the centre of Stewart's total philosophy, that is, the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one moves towards spirit, which exemplifies his belief that nature contributes to his poetic creativity, the spirit of his inspiration. The 'elation' experienced at Springwood contributes to Stewart's poetry as a line of continuity that is intertwined with other aspects of his personal philosophy that poetry should be enjoyed by both the poet and by readers of poetry. His sense of *joy de vivre* is

evoked from a variety of subjects, images and more profound issues of the spiritual relationship of humans and nature.

The 1940s was a period of experimentation in Stewart's poetic development — 'The Cricket', Stewart's persona, introduces *The Dosser in Springtime* collection, and it indicates his point of view in the poem that he is an individualistic poet who will write the poetry he enjoys:

I pipe and I trill, said the cricket;  
...  
What is my song about?  
I leave it to you, said the cricket.  
...  
I like to announce that I am I,  
And that's what my song's about.  
...  
I shrill and the tall stars listen,  
Say what you darn well like.  
(C.P., p. 225)

The speaker in this series of octaves is an unobtrusive creature which is also a mask or persona for Stewart's own statement of his determination to write his own poetry in the way he finds enjoyable, that is, by way of images of nature expressed with clarity of language; it also demonstrates the poet's personal philosophy that the closer one gets to nature, the closer one gets to the spirit of the earth. Other poems include 'The Lizards' (C.P., p. 229), in which the theme that beauty is in the mind of the beholder is supported by the philosophical notion that love is the most important emotion in living creatures, including mankind, and like 'The Cricket', its song unifies the natural world with the spirit of the earth.

Like Ezra Pound,<sup>417</sup> Stewart admired order and grace in poetry rather than some

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<sup>417</sup> Pound, E., 'A Retrospect' (1917), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, Faber and Faber, London, 1954, p. 3.

modernist features of poetic style and expression, even though he experimented with modernism while writing *The Dosser in Springtime*. ‘The Scholars’ comprises two sonnets; Sonnet 1 has a rhyming pattern a, b, a, b, a, b, a, b, c, d, c, d, e, e, which pattern is repeated in Sonnet 2, and in these sonnets he explores tone, imagery, and techniques of rhythm and rhyme which anticipate larger themes in the ballads and verse plays. Although these sonnets and lyrics are pleasant to read and may prompt insight into slight philosophical thought about the relationship of mankind and nature, as in ‘The Bishop’ and ‘Lady Feeding the Cats’, there are limitations to deeper themes while Stewart’s traditional literary (mostly Romantic) education, places restrictions on his experimentation: whether to pursue lines of continuity such as traditional themes related to nature, or poems in anthologies such as ‘Kowhai Gold’, or to extend to modern themes of human relationships with the spirit of the earth and mankind’s responses to modernism of the time period which included World War II.

Dennis Robinson notes,<sup>418</sup> *The Dosser in Springtime* ‘is an invaluable preliminary step in his exploration of the ballad form’. Writing from his own experiences and observations during this experimental stage in his poetic career, Stewart had limited success with ‘The Dosser in Springtime’, and ‘Rock Carving’, although ‘The Lyrebird’ is a major advance approaching technical mastery. These poems, as well as other poems in *The Dosser in Springtime*, include narrative aspects which strengthen dramatisation and rhythm in his verse plays such as *The Fire on the Snow*, *The Golden Lover*, *Worsley Enchanted*, and the *Glencoe* ballads, all of which include the lyric form.

‘The Bunyip’ (CP., pp. 226-228), is more than a nature poem — it approaches a new consciousness in Australian poetry at that time and it is, in fact, an experiment in its adaptation of ballad form and its break with traditional description of the natural world. The bunyip is a

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<sup>418</sup> Robinson, D., ‘Douglas Stewart’s Nature Lyrics’, *The Dosser in Springtime*, *Southerly* No. 1, March 1987, p.54.

mythical Australian bush creature who ‘ate the Abo’s [sic] daughter once’; it takes the place of traditional fairies and witches found in English literature. In using this bush myth, Stewart moves away from traditional European literary myths and so pre-empted a stance, initiated by the Jindyworobak poets, which was not taken up in Australia until much later in the twentieth century when London was no longer seen as the ‘centre’ of literature regardless of the country in which and of which it was written.

The structure of ‘The Bunyip’ breaks from traditional forms in which a regularity of lines and rhythmic metre was maintained throughout the poem; in this poem, Stewart appears to have experimented with alternating lyrical quartets and other quartets with an iambic heptameter rhythm:

The water down the rocky wall  
Lets fall its shining stair;  
The bunyip in the deep green pool  
Looks up it to the air.

The kookaburra drank, he says, then shrieked at me with laughter,  
I dragged him down in a hairy hand and ate his thighbones after;  
My head is bruised with the falling foam, the water blinds my eye  
Yet I will climb that waterfall and walk upon the sky.

...

A lady walks across the night  
And sees that mirror there;  
Oh, is it for herself alone  
The moon lets down her hair?

The yabbie’s back is green for her, his claws are opal-blue,  
Look for my soul, the bunyip says, for it was a jewel too.  
I bellowed with woe to the yabbie once, but all I said was a lie,  
For I’ll catch the moon by her silver hair and dance her around the sky.

(C.P., pp. 226-228)

‘The Bunyip’ (1946) is a personal poem in which the ‘I’ of the bunyip hides the poet’s alter-ego behind a one thousand year old image, but, he is saying, even the old and the ugly can have a beautiful soul, so even though the pool reflects the real world, it is the bunyip which brings Stewart’s innermost concerns to the surface. The bunyip asks, ‘What did I do before I was born’, then tells 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'; even so, he declares, 'Yet I walk on the stars like stepping-stones and I'll climb them into the sky' (C.P., p. 227). This image leads the reader to a technique used in Stewart's early New Zealand poems, to express his ambition for literary success in the form of striking images. This lightness of subject matter and the humour and depth of thought illustrated in this poem are not found in the *Green Lions* nor in *The White Cry*; and because of this, Stewart's style and text have developed from that of an ephebe to a poet who is comfortable with his creative impulse and the diction which expresses it. In *The Dosses in Springtime*, Stewart's style and nuances had developed to include his early philosophical preoccupation with the spiritual relationship of mankind and nature; so when the bunyip says, 'look for my soul', the poet is following another line of continuity that contributes to this thesis.

It becomes obvious from the poems that the spiritual search for the soul, the quest for truth, is never far from Stewart's thought. His creative urge is stirred by this quiet place and its beauty, and while the bunyip 'knows the door of hell', the poet knows this place as a heavenly place where the moon and the bunyip can dance around the sky reflected in the pool. The waterfall, says the bunyip, is a 'shining stair' that leads to the stars, and although his head is 'bruised with the falling foam, the water blinds my eye / Yet I will climb that waterfall and walk upon the sky' (C.P., p. 226). The poet seems to be looking back nostalgically to his New Zealand past when his battered soul affected his creative impulse, but like the natural renewal of the Australian bush after disaster, his soul has been rejuvenated with the healing powers of the spirit of Springwood.

Stewart does not make a habit of explaining or enlarging upon the source of his subjects, but in the 'Springwood' chapter of *Norman Lindsay: A Personal Memoir*, he records cameos of his delight in discovering images of the surrounding bushland and transforming them into poetry. An instance of this 'great mystery of evolution' which, he says, haunted him,

was his finding a leaf-hopper:

I could see well enough how natural selection had worked to preserve it, as each generation of these slender long green creatures became more and more like a gum-leaf; but I could not see, and never will be able to, how or why it had decided to imitate in its wings the leaf's most delicate tracery of veins, which seemed a far more subtle piece of mimicry than would be needed to deceive some hungry magpie; while as for the final act of trickery, that the dead wing should turn brown and look exactly like a brown dead gum-leaf, this seemed to me to be, unless it was mere chance, the most absurd and exquisite and totally inexplicable phenomenon. (N.L., pp. 116-117)

So, he says, he wrote a poem about it:

Even now while I speak  
(He said; and who was he  
Who breathed in the green gum-tree?)  
The Kookaburra's beak  
Gobbles my daintiest things;  
So now is the time to try  
Something most slender and sly  
That has green leaves for wings ...

I do this for my art  
(He said; and who was he  
Who shook his leaf from the tree?):  
When this is torn apart  
By the ants no trick deceives,  
It shall dry to the red-grey-brown  
Of all the leaves fallen down  
And still be a leaf with the leaves. (N.L., p. 117)

The poet admits that this nature lyric may be too explicit in the way it suggests that 'the leaf-hopper was made or thought up by some spiritual being (that is, the 'I' in the poem) who developed the final dead-leaf mimicry purely for the pleasure of displaying his own artistry' (N.L., pp. 117-118), and because it was 'too anthropomorphic', he gives this as the reason that 'The Leaf Hopper' was not included in *Collected Poems*, an exclusion repeated in *Selected Poems*.

Both Leonie Kramer and FitzGerald believe that poems which originated at Springwood and which contributed to Stewart's creative effort, considered together, as FitzGerald remarked, express 'a mysticism that one did not previously suspect' in Stewart's



writing.<sup>419</sup> Kramer takes this idea one step further to say ‘much has been implied in some nature lyrics such as “The Gully” (C.P., p. 145) and “In the Rain”, (C.P., p. 151)’ and are like a mosaic which ‘finally assembled, reveal a design which gives the impression of being empirically designed, not predetermined’.<sup>420</sup> Stewart maintains ‘the moment you invested some kind of deity or demi-god who could make an insect like a dead leaf for the fun of it, you came up against the fact of apparent cruelty going along with beauty in nature’ (NL., p. 118); yet these were the kinds of problems that fascinated him.

In ‘Lyrebird’ (C.P., p. 54), Stewart recalls an experience at Springwood while he was bushwalking — the bird’s dance and mimicry, the impulse for his poetic thought. The poem is included in *The Dosser in Springtime* chapter because it belongs with other lyrics and ballads observed at the time of writing this collection (1946); the poem appears in Stewart’s *Rutherford* collection (1962), together with other poems such as ‘The Silkworms’ and ‘Rutherford’, often admired for their technical ‘mastery’, in contrast to the earlier *The Dosser in Springtime* experimental lyrics and ballads.

Stimulus for the subject in ‘Lyrebird’<sup>421</sup> came from Stewart’s observation of the bird at Springwood:

The lyrebirds lived, as they usually do, far, far down the gully. A man-made track led to their haunts from the ruined terraces near the roadside and, at the end of it, where it reached a stony platform sheltered by an overhang of rock and commanding a view of the final plunge of the creek into the still deeper main ravine, the unknown owner had built a stout wooden seat which still survived. No doubt he had seen before me what I too was now to see, just once and once only, the most exquisite of all the sights that Springwood had to offer, the lyrebird dancing as it sang. I cannot describe it ... I can only say that after he had given his sweet silver mimicry of all the birds of his neighbourhood, currawong, magpie, kookaburra, butcher-bird like a flute and thrush like drops of clear water, the chirps and trills of wren and robin and fantail, each sounding all the more melodious for their translation into his repertoire, suddenly, a chain away from me across the gully, there was this big red-brown bird running about in wild excitement on his dancing mound, and bowing and strutting

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<sup>419</sup> FitzGerald, R.D., ‘Motif in the Work of Douglas Stewart’ op. cit., 1963, p. 38.

<sup>420</sup> Kramer, L., ‘Two Perspectives in the Poetry of Douglas Stewart’, *Southerly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 1973, p. 296.

<sup>421</sup> The stimulus for ‘Lyrebird’ belongs in this discussion even though Stewart’s poem was published in *Rutherford* in 1962.

and turning and running in graceful steps with his tail shimmering like a fountain,  
'like a mist down there with every feather shaking'. (N.L., pp. 125-126)

'Lyrebird' is an example of Stewart's technical development — exploring a line of continuity which concentrates on the poet's personal philosophy that mankind's spiritual affinity with nature unifies humans and creatures like the lyrebird; that is, as FitzGerald suggests, 'Behind such themes is an intensification of the original motif: the personal sense of spiritual unity with nature'.<sup>422</sup> Technical development in this unusual poem illustrates first of all, the structure of the poem which comprises four sestet and a rhyming couplet. There is a rhyming pattern established in the first sestet, a, b, a, b, c, c:

And cannot always — pick pick pick — be fluting  
And floating — pick — down there with fall and fern  
Like fern and fall myself; have these exciting  
Bugs to find in moss, dead leaves to turn,  
So busy here — pick pick — with pick and fluster  
Scratching for food like any old red rooster.

(‘Lyrebird’, C.P., p. 54)

This pattern is broken in the second stanza, a, b, c, b, d, d, but the original pattern continues in stanzas four and five; a rhyming couplet completes the poem. In all stanzas Stewart's rhyming pattern often includes rhyming of sound rather than rhyming spelling, as for example, when he rhymes 'fluting' and 'exciting'. As he mentions to John Thompson in an interview, he is rhyming sound patterns in 'Rutherford', adding, 'That is correct assonance'<sup>423</sup> and he follows the same pattern in 'Lyrebird'.

Alliteration of the softly sounded 'f' in the first stanza: 'fluting', 'floating', 'fall', 'fern', 'find', 'fluster' and 'food' create a mood of peace in the gully, while the bird's natural instinct is defined by the onomatopoeic verb 'pick' within dashes that cause a break in dialogue, rhythm and 'busyness'. Although 'Lyrebird' is different to Stewart's earlier poems in which

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<sup>422</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., *Elements*, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>423</sup> Thompson, J., 'Poetry in Australia: Douglas Stewart Interviewed', 7 January, 1965, *Southerly*, No. 3 of 1967, p. 188.

he identifies with an aspect of nature and what lies beyond it;<sup>424</sup> this is just one device which illustrates how each poem contributes to an overall unity, that is, the poet's personal philosophy of life and his perception of spirituality which binds mankind to the natural environment and creatures.

There are two significant aspects to this poem: the first is the way Stewart dramatises it, and second is the way he uses the idea of 'becoming'. From the start and throughout 'Lyrebird', punctuation marks such as the dash, aid the dramatic effect as it continues with its natural daily task, 'with pick and fluster / Scratching for food / like any old red rooster'. A semi-colon after 'running about' provides a caesura between action and a reference to the bird's mimicry. Stanza one establishes the bird's identity in the natural environment even though the enjambment changes this identity when, in the anthropomorphic bird's opinion, he prefers the term 'pheasant' to 'rooster', as though the bird and the poet are enjoying wry humour of a private joke in the same manner used by conceited humans. As Stewart anthropomorphises the bird, he continues to pursue his philosophy that poetry should be enjoyed:

Say pheasant then. But plain, but drab, red-brown,  
Colour of weathered sandstone, dry withering leaves,  
Old apple gum bark — pick pick — cooked by the sun;  
And *am* but leaves, *am* rock from the standstone (sandstone) shelves,<sup>425</sup>  
Somehow running about; if bird you heard,  
Then very happy — just being a bird.

(C.P., p. 54)

During its metaphysical conversation with the poet's persona, the lyrebird expresses a feeling of one-ness with creation, 'and *am* but leaves, *am* rock from the sandstone shelves', so I must *be* them all'. Here Stewart introduces the concept of 'becoming', another line of continuity which began in his early New Zealand poems such as 'Day and Night with Snow' (C.P., pp.

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<sup>424</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>425</sup> Stewart's term 'standstone shelves' appear in the poem in both *Collected Poems* and *Selected Poems*, even though it is generally known in Australia as 'sandstone shelves'.

332-335):

From that brown lake of silence in the valley  
I *was* the stream that gashed the gorge and leapt  
To unknown ocean with a silver clangour;  
Here I *am* birds that shriek from skeltering hedge  
The boomeranging silver of their anger.

(C.P., p. 335)

This long poem, the final poem in *Green Lions*, illustrates Stewart's undeveloped philosophy that mankind 'should keep in touch with the earth';<sup>426</sup> this theme continues throughout his work and it becomes a strong line of continuity as shown in Tawhai's return to her Maori culture in *The Golden Lover*.

Identification with surroundings, as FitzGerald notes, 'lie at the heart of Stewart's thinking',<sup>427</sup> and in Stanzas three and four of 'Lyrebird', it is Stewart's voice the reader recognises when the bird's various calls 'pierce me through like shafts of moonlight waking / My silent dells that must *be* them all':

There is stillness, true, when you look up,  
There is a spray of light that falls through trees,  
There is a clear cool voice of mountain thrush;  
How emerald gleams the moss! And say that these,  
Old kookaburra turned to crystal water,  
Each smallest trill of robin, wren, tree-creeper,

Currawong's cry, sweet honey-eater's call,  
So pierce me through like shafts of moonlight waking  
My silent dells that I must be them all  
And sing them out with every feather shaking  
Like mist down there till all the rock-walls ring;  
Why, yes — pick pick — it is a pretty thing ...

So round the emerald cliff and out of sight  
And filled the gully twice with silver light. (C.P., p. 54)

As the lyrebird merges with his environment by imitating the songs of other birds, readers of Stewart's lyrics, longer poems and ballads, recognise his philosophical passion to be close to the spirituality of the earth and the spirit that provides unity between mankind and nature, as

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<sup>426</sup> Thompson, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>427</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 39.

well as the metaphysical thought of what lies beyond nature and the physical life of humans and creatures of the natural world.

In the 'Lyrebird', colour imagery and its related symbolism is a major poetic device which becomes another line of continuity in much of Stewart's poetry and verse plays. In this poem, the bird is readily recognised as Stewart describes it in colours of the Australian bush, 'plain, but drab, red-brown, / Colour of weathered sandstone, dry withering leaves, / Old apple-gum bark — pick, pick — cooked by the sun', dull and unassuming, yet 'very happy — pick — just being a bird'. As the poem continues, the creature's outer physical drabness becomes unimportant and irrelevant as it seems to be telling the poet about the beauty of the gully, 'There is a stillness, true, when you look up, / There is a spray of light that falls through trees,' and then how the stillness is broken by its song, mimics of other birds and creatures of the bush, until in the final couplet the poet returns with a typical symbolic image: 'So round the emerald cliff and out of sight / And filled the gully twice with silver light' (C.P., p. 54). At this point the lyrebird's song connects with that of the magpie's call in 'Brindabella' 1955 (C.P., 113-114) which 'sent out one ray of a carol, softened and silvery'. The symbolic silver colour adds to the thought that it represents spirituality, also found in 'The Snow Gum' (C.P., p. 122), 'the silver light of ecstasy / Flows where the green tree perfectly / Curves its perfect shadow' ends the poem which, as Dennis Robinson perceives, 'is an apotheosis of Stewart's art in these nature lyrics'.<sup>428</sup> Robinson adds that the tree's perfection indicates that 'something more fundamental than beauty is at stake, again surpassing the immediate situation'; words like 'eternity' and 'ecstasy' approach 'a mystic's capacity to gain more empathy with higher orders of being'.<sup>429</sup> Words like 'silver' in all its connotations of mood and tone, form a link with the spiritual nature of creativity and a vehicle with which to comment on the nature of

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<sup>428</sup> Robinson, D., op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>429</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

mankind and its physical and spiritual environment, one of Stewart's philosophical lines of continuity which is interwoven throughout his total poetic works.

The first of the two significant aspects to this poem mentioned above, is the way Stewart dramatizes it, and the second is the way he uses the idea of 'becoming'. The bird speaks for itself, and line 1 gives the impression it is so busy it is caught in mid-sentence, 'And cannot always ...'. This is an unusual way to begin a poem, but in context it is a clear way to introduce the subject, busy scratching and looking, 'these exciting / Bugs to find in moss, dead leaves to turn, / So busy here — pick pick — with pick and fluster / Scratching for food like any old rooster, / Say pheasant then', thus ending with Stewart's wry humour as though the bird and the poet are in conversation.

'Lyrebird' reflects Stewart's awareness and predilection for bright, strong colours of the Australian bush as well as for subtler shades and tones. He finds a whole new world in his exploration and observation of externals, and it is the uniqueness of each tiny flower, bird or insect that provides him with an impulse that gives impetus to his creative thought. Colour imagery and its related symbolism provides a line of continuity throughout a major part of Stewart's lyrical verse, longer discursive verse, for example, 'Rutherford', and verse plays. Thus, words like 'silver' in all its connotations of mood and tone, form a link with the nature of creativity and a vehicle with which to comment on the nature of man and his physical and spiritual environment.

Significant symbolic colour imagery in Stewart's poems can be found throughout *Collected Poems*; many have been selected for discussion. Examples range from varying levels of intensity from a pale yellow light shining on a winter landscape in 'Brindabella' (C.P., p. 113) to the 'two suns that talk to each other in flame' in 'Country of Winter' (C.P., p. 155). Then there are words like 'grace' in 'Green Centipede' (C.P., p. 159), one of the most powerful of Stewart's colour imagery poems in which the dominant colours of the Australian

bush — green and yellow, become vehicles of exploration into the duality of God.<sup>430</sup>

In 'Flying Ants' (C.P., p. 161), unlike his poems which are informed by colour imagery, Stewart creates an atmosphere which is hard, brilliant imagery, and which reflects the whole spectrum of fragmented colours while the object itself remains crystal clear and the tower (symbol of uplifted thought), results in bringing together all colours of light (symbol of truth, knowledge and enlightenment).

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 not there at all:  
For while the glimmering column holds them safe  
To dance their delirious dance of summer and love  
How frail and small it floats in the evening's brilliance:  
And, striking in shafts of light that burn their wings,  
Infinite space pierces the crystal wall  
Where thought itself floats glinting in that tower.

(C.P., p. 161)

The poet seems to be saying that this is where his thoughts converge to become a single unit and an ultimate truth is almost a reality 'Where thought itself floats glinting in that tower', but then, like the flittering finches mentioned above, the thought is as 'a crystal tower not there at all'. The concept that all art begins with a thought impulse which must be nurtured and developed if it is to survive, is relevant to this and subsequent chapters. Stewart's emphasis on the fragility of thought is usually expressed in terms of colour imagery such as 'Firetail Finches' (C.P., p. 53) in which brilliant colour strengthens

Such ragged scrub and such confusion  
Of perching green and flying crimson  
Where bottlebrushes tweak themselves  
Clean off the twigs with scarlet tails  
And finches dart and take their places  
Like crimson blossoms on the bushes.

(C.P., p. 53)

Here the flittering finches image becomes a thought impulse; once suggested it quickly evades

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<sup>430</sup> Thompson, J., op. cit., p. 193.

the poet's impulse, becoming a settled stimulus of creative thought, but like an idea that needs nurturing and developing, it expands 'through feather and leaf it slips / To deck them all with crimson tips'.

Robinson notes that the *Dosser in Springtime* (1946), 'is commonly dismissed by critics as of less importance than any of the volumes which followed it' and that *Glencoe* (1947) 'is usually felt to be Stewart's first work of his maturity'. Furthermore, Robinson points out that it is 'rather unfortunate in that [the *Dosser in Springtime*] underrates the pivotal role of the volume as a whole in Stewart's subsequent development'.<sup>431</sup> Some poems in this collection like 'The Bishop', 'The Bat' and 'Lady Feeding the Cats', are examples of his light-hearted sense of humour, but, taken as a whole, the *Dosser in Springtime* was significant in Stewart's exploration of the ballad form in his later, more mature poems discussed in later chapters of this thesis. Although 'Lyrebird' is different to Stewart's earlier poems in which he identifies with an aspect of nature and what lies beyond it,<sup>432</sup> a notion discussed in *Sun Orchids and The Birdsville Track*; this is just one device he uses to illustrate how each poem contributes to an overall unity, that is, his personal philosophy of life.

T. Inglis-Moore considers that Stewart's nature lyrics are sung with a 'double vision' because the poet sees his subjects with the eye of imagination then gives them a 'cosmic significance' as the lyrics 'move from the charm of minutiae to the sweep of the universal'. According to Inglis-Moore, Stewart was expressing his interest in the development of a current poetic trend in 1952, and whereas early Australian poets, like early New Zealand poets, were inclined to write about the beauty of nature, by the 1950s, poets like Stewart became interested in the modernist 'illumination of human destiny or significance contributing towards a deeper

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<sup>431</sup> Robinson, D., op. cit., *Southerly*, 1987, p. 53.

<sup>432</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 40.



understanding of the universe'.<sup>433</sup> It is significant that poets in the twentieth century had wide concerns, too, though their language reflected their concerns differently. The poems about orchids which follow are examples of how Stewart goes beyond the verisimilitude or the lyrical to introduce philosophical or mystical notions into these delicate songs in which there are hints of the vastness of the universe as well as an element of suffering or delight; because they remain hints, the poems are slight philosophically, stopping short at the moment of vision.<sup>434</sup> Inglis-Moore concludes that the rediscovery of the explorers and the narratives, is

allied to the philosophical and mystical exploration of nature: both are forms of a new romantic movement in our poetry. Both are strongly imaginative in character, as contrasted to the intellectual or emotional work of English and American social realists, satirists, and reformers. Both indicate a conviction that social realism is not enough by going beyond contemporary society and its problems to create extensions in the universe or in the past. In ranging widely through space and time both developments are at one in placing the final emphasis, not on the world of today, but on enduring elements in the universe and the spirit of man'.<sup>435</sup>

Stewart achieves this is by conveying the drama and comedy of the natural world through closely observed phenomena. He also conveys the great range of nature's moods as well as their influence on the spirit of mankind which is in reality, Stewart's personal poetic preoccupation, thus giving added force to his creative impulse.

The natural environment at Springwood played a very special role in Stewart's creative impulse, apart from the intellectual stimulation of Lindsay's philosophical ideas and notions of creation. Stewart writes in *Norman Lindsay: A Personal Memoir* that the stimulus for many of the poems in *Sun Orchids* came from Springwood, so when the orchid poems are considered as a whole rather than individually, a sense of the place emerges.<sup>436</sup> In available critical essays, much has been written about Norman Lindsay's influence on Stewart's work, but Stewart is quite clear when he insists:

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<sup>433</sup> Inglis-Moore, T., 'Orchids and Penguins', *Southerly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1954, pp. 116-118.

<sup>434</sup> Inglis-Moore, *ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>435</sup> *ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>436</sup> The orchid poems are discussed in Chapter 7, 'Sun Orchids' and 'The Birdsville Track'.

In all the years I knew [Lindsay] he did not once suggest a subject to me or ever try to guide or direct the way my work was going. He was content to receive what one brought him; and was just as delighted with a new nature poem as with a love lyric; he could respond to a long poem about the heroic spirit of voyagers and explorers such as FitzGerald, Hart-Smith and Francis Webb were then writing, just as enthusiastically as he did to a hymn to fecundity like Mackenzie's 'Our Earth'. (N.L., p. 38)

Furthermore, Stewart's opinion is that it would be more accurate to call Lindsay a 'stimulus' rather than an 'influence':

for people did not come to him to borrow his imagery — that had long gone out of literary fashion — or to accept all his ideas, but for the stimulus that came from the sparkle and profusion of his own work, from his belief in the importance of the arts, and from the generous and perceptive enthusiasm with which he read any new worth while piece of writing one cared to show him. (N.L., p. 38)

He continues his defence of Lindsay and explanation of what most artists and poets talked about while at Springwood, writing:

they preferred to deal with themes far removed from those of Lindsay's paintings, and we were chiefly influenced by talk and correspondence with each other, by seeing each other's poems in the Bulletin and in our books, by English and American trends in poetry and, essentially, by that mysterious spirit of the times — the Zeitgeist (drift of thought and feeling in a time) — which ordains that certain poets shall be writing about exploration while others, such as Judith Wright, David Campbell and Roland Robinson, shall be discovering the wildflowers and the wild creatures of the Australian earth. (N.L., p. 38)

James McAuley was not so enthusiastic about Lindsay's influence, but he also wrote in 1975 that the influence did not 'mean that all these poets [including Stewart] adopted the full range of Lindsay's ideas [but] ... most of those named (but certainly not Webb) shared a vitalist attitude, toned differently by temperament'.<sup>437</sup>

In the introduction to *Considerations*, Brian Kiernan<sup>438</sup> recalls McAuley's emphasis on 'Stewart's association with the Lindsayite vitalism that also influenced Slessor. The heroic is one aspect of this vitalism'.<sup>439</sup> Kiernan adds that 'vitalism is an evolutionist philosophy that conceives life as a constant struggle to achieve higher (and therefore ideal) forms'.<sup>440</sup> Stewart

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<sup>437</sup> McAuley, J., *Map of Australian Verse*, Note 14, p. 101.

<sup>438</sup> Kiernan, B., op. cit., 1977, p. xix.

<sup>439</sup> McAuley, J., 'Douglas Stewart', op. cit., 1964.

<sup>440</sup> Kiernan, op cit., p. xix..

also recognised the importance of the idea that ‘life is a constant struggle’ and in Chapter 7, ‘Sun Orchids’ and ‘The Birdsville Track’ this theme is discussed in relation to both nature lyrics and lyrics reflecting one way in which humans survive in their environment on the Birdsville Track.

Another critic, John Docker, points out that Lindsay’s concept of vitalism and its effects resulted in Lindsay, Slessor and Stewart becoming ‘members of a very powerful grouping in Sydney literary and journalistic life’.<sup>441</sup> This is true, especially when one considers Stewart’s role as literary editor of the Red Page, and Thomas Shapcott’s remark that Stewart made:

a wholehearted espousal of Norman Lindsay’s philosophy of culture, the Vitalist ethos that had been defined as early as the 1920s in the magazine *Vision*. Stewart translated his mentor’s belief in Creative Art as the highest, and most vital, expression of human achievement (and therefore not to be corrupted by the decadence of Modernist heresies and psychological unease) as an emphasis on the concept of man as Maker, and, indeed ‘vital’ in the physical sense. This, perhaps, explains why the heartiness of the old *Bulletin Reciter* tradition was maintained for so long under his editorship; it echoed aspects of simple mateship and bush resourcefulness that clearly gave a more popular resonance to Lindsay’s elitist concept of Carriers of The Sacred Flame.<sup>442</sup>

Throughout his autobiographical works, Stewart seems to be unconcerned about critics’ comments regarding Lindsay’s influence on either him or his work; instead he acknowledges Lindsay’s enthusiasm for creative impulse and creative effort: ‘Since I have no doubt that my own energy, wherever it may have originated, was fed and stimulated by Lindsay’s, I remain eternally grateful to him for those days ... and many before and after’ (N.L., p. 74).

‘Early Australian Years at the *Bulletin*’ (1938-1946) focuses on Stewart’s role as poet, playwright, reviewer and editor, all of which influenced his personal literary work. Writers such as Keesing, Smith and Robinson refer to Stewart’s energy and versatility during this period of change from his early life in New Zealand to one in which he was involved with the

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<sup>441</sup> Docker, J., *In a Critical Condition*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1984, p. 143.

<sup>442</sup> Shapcott, T., ‘Douglas Stewart and Poetry in the *Bulletin*, 1940 to 1960’, *Cross Currents*, p. 154.

literary milieu in Sydney.

The lyric was also a major interest to Stewart, and poems of this style, as well as the ballad, are found in ‘Elegy for an Airman’, *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, and the *Dosser in Springtime*, a collection of poems written in Australia with Australian subjects and images that provided the stimulus for Stewart’s many future lyrics and ballads. Stewart had been experimenting with lyrics and ballads that anticipated in tone, imagery and technique, the poems of his later collection, *Sun Orchids* (1952), by which time he was establishing his true ‘voice’. This becomes particularly evident in *The Golden Lover* in which Tawhai appears to be the poet’s voice. This voice becomes more perceptible in *Worsley Enchanted*, *Terra Australis* and in the later *Rutherford*, where a narrator guides interpretation of events.

Throughout ‘The Early Years’, the diversity of Stewart’s work indicates his versatility and energy, and as Smith later commented, Stewart was ‘a versatile writer, dramatist, critic, short story writer, literary editor and probably the most important man of letters in modern Australian literary history since Vance Palmer’.<sup>443</sup> Expansion of changing stimuli, images and techniques in *The Fire on the Snow* and later verse plays are indications of a more mature poet; *The Golden Lover*, *Glencoe*, *Worsley Enchanted* and *Terra Australis* illustrate this, and these poems are discussed in later chapters, together with *Sun Orchids*, *The Birdsville Track*, *Rutherford* and the many short lyrics included in these collections.

The focus for ‘World War II: ‘Elegy for an Airman’ (1940) and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* (1941)’, provides different thoughts, images and voices to those discussed in ‘The Early Years’. These differences contain ideas directly related to World War II — themes such as extreme violence of man to man and Stewart’s defiance of those responsible (also developed in *Glencoe*, a protest against all violence). This is only one instance of the way in

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<sup>443</sup> Smith, V., *OHAL*, 1981, p. 400.

which Stewart begins with an idea (a ‘flittering thought’) and then uses it in different ways, through specific language, imagery, rhyme and rhythm to form a line of continuity through poetic forms such as lyrics, ballads and sonnets. As future chapters unfold, Stewart’s versatility will become more apparent as his thoughts and ideas mature.

## CHAPTER 5

### WAR POETRY

Soon after Stewart began his new career in Sydney in 1939, World War II had started in Europe. As in 1914 when Australians joined the AIF to fight for Great Britain in France and on the Western Front, Australians again enlisted to fight for Britain — a fight which eventually became a fight for Australia against the Japanese. The resultant political changes inevitably had a personal effect on the poet, particularly when his life-long friend, Desmond Carter, was killed in action in 1939 while flying with the R.A.F. This event led Stewart to write ‘Elegy to an Airman’<sup>444</sup> followed by *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*,<sup>445</sup> a series of eleven ‘sonnets’ which Brian Elliott refers to as ‘unrhymed lyrics of fourteen lines’, that have ‘the musical qualities of a rough sonnet’,<sup>446</sup> in which Stewart wrote cynically about his reactions to war and human beings’ inhumanity to and degradation of other human beings.<sup>447</sup> The emotions and opinions expressed in these poems are quite different from those in his early New Zealand *Green Lions* (1936) and *The White Cry* (1937), in which the focus for the most part is on the poet’s concerns about his own literary creativity against a backdrop of the New Zealand landscape. Even so, there is a transitional reference to a place in New Zealand, Mokau, and his boyhood memories in ‘Elegy to an Airman’: ‘life was 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’ (C.P., p. 278). This mood of close

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<sup>444</sup> Stewart, D., 1940, ‘Elegy to an Airman’, op. cit., 1967, pp. 275-278.

<sup>445</sup> Stewart, D., *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1941.

<sup>446</sup> Elliott, B., Untitled review of *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, *Australian Quarterly*, Vol., 13, No. 4, 1941, p. 114.

<sup>447</sup> Stewart wrote ‘I find it now, in peacetime, very difficult to respond to the emotions we felt in the years of World War II’, in Introduction to *Selected Poems*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1973, p. vi.

friendship continued until they were men, and Stewart remembers this comradeship as he refers nostalgically to their time spent together in London (1937-1938). He never quite attains the same emotive response in his later poems.<sup>448</sup> Stewart continued to celebrate the bonds between men in his dedications of some poems, as well as in, for example, his poems of collective endeavour; this is illustrated in *The Fire on the Snow* and *Worsley Enchanted*. 'Elegy to an Airman' and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* are more than a turning point in his poetic development because they speak of deeper feelings for others; he now experiences the introspection that comes from personal loss.

Stewart's friendships with men like R.D. FitzGerald, and David Campbell as well as the bonds he built with them are important to him; they are quite different to his friendship with Carter. In 'Elegy to an Airman', he does not hide either the introspection he experiences at his friend's death or his own memories of happier times. He also reveals the 'mateship' and close companionship he feels for all soldiers of all wars in *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*. The way that male friendships are important to Stewart emerges from autobiographical works *Springtime in Taranaki* and *Fishing on the Monaro*, while *Letters Lifted into Poetry* are examples of the informal relationship he and Campbell shared. To these can be added dedication poems to men such as Slessor and Arthur Stacey; he also admired the heroism and companionship of men in *The Fire on the Snow* and *Worsley Enchanted*, and their collective endeavour. The manner in which Stewart found these important is discussed in later relevant chapters.

'Elegy to an Airman' and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* mark a turning point in Stewart's poetic development. With these poems and the response to the personal challenges he faced in 1940, he graduated from his status of ephebe, or 'apprentice' writer, to an

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<sup>448</sup> Stewart, D., *Springtime in Taranaki*, op. cit., 1983, pp. 252-254. Future references to this text will be shown as (S.T.)

accomplished poet, as his life-style changed from that which he knew in New Zealand. In this respect it is significant to note Brian Elliott's comment in a review of *Poems from the Mask* by Leonard Mann, and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* by Douglas Stewart, 'Both men are poets of sufficient quality to make a discussion of "influences" look foolish'.<sup>449</sup> It seems here that Elliott is referring to both Mann's and Stewart's intellectual and creative maturity — neither man was easily 'influenced' by other writers' ideas, they had outgrown earlier influences.

During Stewart's early years at the *Bulletin*, he began experimenting with poetic language and technical devices; his poetic style also changed insofar as his poetry became more emotionally charged with concerns for other people and particularly with world affairs and responses to, for example, World War II. Description and verisimilitude were used effectively for topical emphasis in 'Elegy For an Airman', *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* and 'The ,<sup>450</sup>Breaking Wave' (C.P., p. 230). At the same time, Stewart was 'accommodating himself to modernity' and this led to a number of lines of continuity throughout his collections *Selected Poems* and *Collected Poems*; themes and poetic technique developed through these lines of continuity and were concerned with human responses to, and concerns for, other people, often expressed in symbolic imagery in poems discussed in this chapter which Stewart insists is really 'a protest against barbarity, cruelty and violence in any age'.<sup>451</sup> Similarly, Stewart's philosophical line of continuity which began with an identification of the spirit of the earth and mankind, intensified the motif of spirituality; this theme continues in many forms until it emerges as the fourth man in 'Worsley Enchanted' (C.P., pp. 191-192).

Stewart's creative effort during 1939-1944 provides an indication of his great energy and variety of topics in which he was interested, especially when his work at the *Bulletin* is

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<sup>449</sup> Elliott, B., op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>450</sup> Sharkey, M., op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>451</sup> Stewart, D., *Selected Poetry*, op. cit., p. viii.



considered. However, Stewart appears to be searching for a more profound philosophical literary challenge than a description of the reality of war which some soldier-poets expressed in their poetry and short stories. At this stage in his poetic development, and particularly in the poems discussed in this chapter, his language and techniques were limited by experiment and efforts to work ‘within the modernism of his time’<sup>452</sup>; examples of these restrictions can be seen in an over-use of symbols, changes in tense, tone and mood, and an intensity of contrasting images of war and peace in opposing time frames. Stewart notes in the introduction to *Douglas Stewart* in the Australian Poets series (1963), ‘it takes a long time to realise that the proper things to strive for in poetry, usually, is absolute clarity’.<sup>453</sup> He admits that *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* ‘don’t split up very satisfactorily’, so he omitted them from the *Selected Poems* collection.

In ‘Elegy for an Airman’ and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, Stewart pursues images of life and death imaginatively and factually and, at the same time, advances in poetic technique and in attitude to both. It is clear from the title ‘Elegy for an Airman’, that this poem is about death, bereavement and grief. The epitaph begins ‘In memory of Desmond Carter’, and Stewart’s memory is made more potent by the funereal tone and mood of the poem created by strong iambic pentameter beat in which the unfaltering rhythm is maintained with long vowel sounds, as in ‘Only the trees were dark behind trees in the bush / And only the blackberries stained our mouths like blood’. These lines cannot be said quickly, and they set the tone of threnody or lament. This mood continues, and in Stanza 10 the poet writes:

I could wish that in death you had staked the claim of your dust  
In our land that is ruled by neither the dead nor the living  
But the wind and the bracken waving on masterless hills  
And the surf like an avalanche whitening the Mokau coastline.

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<sup>452</sup> Phillips, A.A., ‘The Poetry of Douglas Stewart’, *Meanjin*, Vol. 1, 1969, p. 97.

<sup>453</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., Introduction to *Australian Poets: Douglas Stewart*, Angus and Robertson, 1963, p. vi.

Here Stewart regrets that his friend could not have been buried in his own land; he reverts to that man-in-‘masterless’-nature theme that is present in his earlier New Zealand verse. Then, abruptly, the mood is relieved by short, sharp vowel sounds and one-syllable words: ‘But, living, you gave us your mirth and the strength of your limbs, / And your laughter is fresh on the rivers, your strength on the fields’ by short, sharp vowel sounds and one-syllable words. This change in mood is fairly typical of Stewart’s early poetry, and especially in this lengthy poem and later poems: just when the reader is caught up in an emotive passage, the mood and the resultant response changes.

Stewart deals with universal issues which in ‘Elegy for an Airman’ include concerns about war and its effects. In this poem he looks back to a time when he and his friend, Desmond,<sup>454</sup> lived in a fantasy world of their own making: ‘We lived in a mirror, too, where our faces were marble’ in a world that is a reflection of the real world, where metaphysically they became part of the natural world, the world of innocence, to which they belonged. Reference to ‘marble’ suggests endurance and the hardness of statuary seen in cemeteries — angels on gravestones were a significant image in books of past wars and on monuments in towns and cities. In addition, this particular image is Stewart’s way of remembering his friend, but at the same time, it gives the poem an heroic aspect to indicate bravery and endurance. To the boys, metaphorically they *were* the animals; they ‘were the knights and princes’ (Stanza 2) where ‘all of us lived for ever and were happy’ (Stanza 3), but it was only the boy, Desmond, who had a magic quality to be ‘the heart of it all’ (Stanza 4); it was he who made illusion reality, ‘the crystal core of the mirror’ (Stanza 4).

The ‘crystal core’ image is apt, especially when considered in terms of colour imagery, because crystal, like water, is a clear non-colour which refracts colour in the spectrum and

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<sup>454</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1983, pp. 68-88.

reflects it as myriad fragments of light, just as the boys' experiences are remembered by Stewart as fragments which together make this poem a whole. The reflection of the light of the fire is a consistent image symbolic of notions of courage, endurance, of energy, and most relevantly in this poem, to life itself and so truth; crystal has, like so many images in his poetry, become part of his personal vocabulary.

For the most part, death images in 'Elegy for an Airman' ask an age-old question — why should a man with a healthy mind and body die at such a young age? Despite her frantic efforts to avert disaster, in the dream sequence: 'A mother ran in a dream with her black hair streaming / And hacked the signpost down and broke its arms, / But it stood again in the morning, wooden and hostile' (Stanza 7); the mother cannot save her child once the signpost points the way to death, so death comes to everyone at the appointed time. But this is no comfort: 'And the fire is not lit because nothing can warm the heart' (Stanza 11). This young man died doing what he believed he wanted to do. He

... hungered for strife and triumph,  
And chose the brilliance of flight to complete the pattern  
Of speed and light he had learned from our mountain stream.  
(Stanza 9)

The mood of enjoyment in these few lines are reminiscent of another war-time poem, 'High Flight':

Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth,  
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;  
...  
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,  
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.  
(*Poems of Spirit and Action*, p. 93)<sup>455</sup>

Although the airman's death in 'Elegy to an Airman' is tragic, it is also an opportunity for the

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<sup>455</sup> Magee, J.G., 'High Flight', *Poems of Spirit and Action*, ed., W.M. Smyth, Edward Arnold, London, 1958, p. 93). An epilogue appears with this poem: 'A nineteen-year-old American fighter pilot wrote these verses on the back of a letter to his parents. Shortly afterwards he was killed on active service in England' (p. 93).

poet to comment on his images of death. 'Now the boy is dead' sounds so final — but is it? What happens after death? Stewart explores the universal search for immortality, another philosophical line of continuity which became part of his literary preoccupation, that is, human's basic instinct for survival, and says: 'your silver statement of laughter / Is a fountain they cannot bury under the clay / O my friend, your life goes echoing on through time' (Stanza 13). This indicates a belief in immortality, but because an echo is a repetition of something which has happened in the past, the boy lives on in the memories of the poet and those who loved him.

In writing this very personal poem, the poet comments on death at several levels: firstly, death is a game, and when they were children playing at burial, grief was part of the game, 'A word was a thing you could hold' (Stanza 5); but now he is a man, the 'game' is more serious and 'grief' is more than a word. Stewart protests against war and those responsible, as well as the insensibility of taking young lives for political causes. When he was a child, the airman 'began to die with the beast and fish, / To die with the wild duck shot on the lonely river' (Stanza 8); but these deaths were symbolic. When the time for reality arrived, the airman, still in a shining suit of armour [the plane], dies alone:

O my friend who have taken this other death alone,  
The castle was always a dream, but you lived like a king.  
(Stanzas 9)

Another form of death is the change from childhood to manhood ('This was my friend who died with me out of boyhood'), but it is the poet's friend who has 'taken this other death alone' (Stanza 9).

'Elegy for an Airman' is an emotive poem, and to Stewart the idea of death is all-consuming. Whether the poet's image of death is heroic or otherwise, it is the final reality that both humans and creatures face alone; there is no illusion, and no blurring of the death theme; its intention is never in doubt, and the precision of 'Now the boy is dead' is acute. In later

poetry such as that in *The Fire on the Snow*, Stewart's statement on death itself emerges from his poetry as a moment in time, but it is the living which is significant, not the death itself, and this idea appears in the verse play as Wilson tells Scott:

... life is  
Endurance; and afterwards, death. And whatever death is,  
The endurance remains like a fire, a sculpture, a mountain  
To hearten our children. I tell you,  
Such a struggle as ours is living; it lives after death  
Purely, like a flame, a thing burning and perfect.<sup>456</sup>

Here Stewart is pursuing the idea that 'fire, a sculpture, a mountain' are all symbols of endurance, but in doing so, he compounds the imagery which limits the readability of this verse. While 'flame is synonymous with spirituality, this expression also refers to the eternal flame which burns in the hearts of those who can, and do, remember. *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* begins: 'We did not bury him deep enough: break up the monument. / Open the tomb, strip off the flags and flowers / And let us look at him plainly, naked Man'. The 'naked Man' is suggestive of the Rayner Hoff sculpture in the Sydney War Memorial which represents heroic sacrifice influenced by the Christian crucifixion, but the words can be taken figuratively, too — its meaning in 'conflict and contradiction',<sup>457</sup> confirms the terror the majority of Australians felt at the prospect of another World War. In 'Elegy for an Airman', Stewart once again uses this reference to statuary imagery to symbolise concepts of bravery and endurance.

In 1940 and 1941 the dark mood of the Australian people is reflected in Stewart's poetry, yet New Zealand images promote a unity that interfuses with 'Elegy for an Airman' and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* which begins with an historical reference, not only to the Unknown Soldier of World War I, but to all soldiers in all wars. Sonnet 1 has 14 lines, but

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<sup>456</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1944, p. 27.

<sup>457</sup> Ashcroft, W. et. al., *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 169.

does not conform to the traditional Petrarchan sonnet that is structured with 14 lines and a final rhyming couplet. Although it is written in blank verse, not always iambic pentameter and a rhyming couplet in lines 13 and 14 is omitted, there is a combination of strong and weaker line beginnings, that is, some lines begin with an iamb while others use a trochee such as ‘Clothe him in fresh khaki’ (Sonnet 1), thus presents an irregular rhythm which emphasises an abrupt, conversational manner.

One weakness in this series is the use of cliches such as ‘the soldier / Dies for the rich man’s car and the slut’s fur coat’, and at times more profound protests are implied, as for example, ‘that war is the young men escaping / From the murderous old men guarding the gates of life’. The tone then undergoes an unexpected change: ‘And turned (Oh, turned in the night) to the far green valleys / Where childhood laughs like water under the willows’, (Sonnet 4). In this change, Stewart attempts to imitate Wilfred Owen’s war poetry, for example, in ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ (that is, the old lie: it is sweet and decorous to die for one’s country), images of peaceful humanity and nature contrast with the horror of the battlefield. Owen’s expression rises above mere anger, to reflect on the meaning of life, while Stewart had not yet perfected the sonnet form (but later experiment rectified this flaw in form). In breaking with the traditional sonnet form, Stewart is experimenting with a mix of colloquial and elevated speech favoured by poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound as well as some Australian contemporaries (See Chapter 9, ‘New impulses in a decade of transition: ‘Rutherford 1962’).

It was hardly possible for people of the 1940s (including Stewart) to look at war in the same way that people of the nineteenth century and very early twentieth century looked at it. Like modernist writers who challenged literary representations of heroes, Stewart rejects the notion of the Australian soldier as an heroic figure in the nineteenth century sense:

You see that fellow with the grin, one eye on the girls,  
The other on the pub, his uniform shabby already?  
Well, don’t let him hear us, but he’s the Unknown Soldier (Sonnet I)

Sonnet I is a provocative introduction to Stewart's observations about war and his sceptical response to those responsible for it. As the soldier wanders the city streets 'Where eyes so quickly inured to death's accoutrement / Will hardly spare him a glance, equipped to die for us', the poet's comment on Australian apathy soon becomes a comment on disillusionment with traditional attitudes of loyalty to the British Empire: 'he always comes when they want him ... He does the fighting'. In his essay 'Escapes from Art' (1942),<sup>458</sup> Stewart is critical of poets whose acceptance of the chaos, frustration and despair of wartime dominates their creativity and 'personal responsibility of the artist for the fulfilment of the talent with which he was born'. Throughout *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, Stewart pursues the notion that it is the poet's personal responsibility to urge readers to understand more than the lies and persuasive propaganda propounded by 'fools'; it is also the poet's personal responsibility to protest against violence in the manner of Wilfred Owen, in all eras. This theme is presented by satiric metaphor in Sonnets 8 and 9; it is discussed later in this chapter.

Stewart illustrates his opinion that we go 'apathetically to our doom' with a quotation from Stephen Spender in Tambimuttu's *Poetry in Wartime*:

I go to aid the battle and may now die  
A watching failure not many can comprehend,  
Available for death on land, on sea, in sky.<sup>459</sup>

He wonders with Stephen Spender 'whether Victory and Defeat are not "the same Hollow masks worn by shame"'.<sup>460</sup> The Unknown Soldier emerges from 'the hollow tomb' to walk along, then march down, 'hollow streets / the "hollow harbour"', 'when the ships push out through the Heads', leaving behind 'hollow' hearts and homes. The soldier 'will never hear the miraculous trumpet / calling up the dawn' in which the trumpet is symbolic of the second

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<sup>458</sup> Stewart, D., 'Escapes from Art', op. cit., 1948, p. 79.

<sup>459</sup> Stewart, D., *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>460</sup> Stewart, *ibid.*, p. 80.

coming while the dawn is symbolic of a new life. There religious-oriented images which become cliches in both Sonnets 2 and 3: 'miraculous trumpet' is analogous to the Biblical promise of the second coming of Christ in Sonnet 2; in Sonnet 3, 'the power in the soul of man when it rushes to darkness / Is the ancient chaos and the Flood that destroys the world' implies a protest that mankind can be convinced or impelled by a figure such as Hitler and his Nazi Party, who argued for a better world by exterminating the Jewish people and the dehumanisation of other people who were not of the Aryan race. Stewart explains by referring to 'darkness' which is 'the ancient chaos' of hell or the underworld. The 'Flood that destroys the world' is also a Biblical reference — it is also a comment on the historical fact that Nazism virtually inundated Europe in World War II. Sonnet 3 ends with a metaphysical Biblical allusion in 'the chaos of the underworld' in which the soldier becomes 'the light of the world', that is the Christ image, 'there you will see / The lonely flame', symbolic of light imagery Stewart uses to indicate courage in adversity, endurance, hope for the future and the light of knowledge which leads to truth, as opposed to Owen's 'old lie'. Implications such as these themes contribute to the way Stewart uses flame and light imagery as lines of continuity throughout his poetry and verse plays.

Realistic images of Sydney, 'A thousand bayonets flashing down Martin Place / Wheel into George Street' are well-remembered by those who saw the men marching off to war in the Middle East, for example, and no doubt Stewart was as impressed as others with the sight. This is one of the many images which are also indicators of death, but while death imagery is prominent, it is often either juxtaposed with images of life or is inferred as it is in 'flashing bayonets' as the sun strikes the metal blades. In these sonnets Stewart's symbolic language suggests life and survival as well as death.

The 'hollowness' in Sonnet 2 is synonymous with 'the cave of the priestess where things that are black in man's soul / howl with the voices of beasts'. The 'animal howl' is



‘Hitler invading Europe, bombs and machine guns’. The Australian soldier does not find comfort either in himself or his cause. He is there because ‘he always comes when they want him’, and he is not interested in ‘Heaven’s applause’, but fights ‘with a grin and a curse and is lost in the darkness’ (Sonnet 5). These sentiments are different from older qualities perceived as idealistic by previous generations who were loyal to the Empire and its values. Stewart, like Owen, does not subscribe to the Victorian idea of war. Instead of the noble dead, he implies an essence of nobility in the isolation and clarification of the image of the Unknown Soldier, the same nobility associated with the ‘hollow tomb’.

Stewart’s representation of images of Light and Darkness, that is, life and death, or alternatively, good and evil, is appropriate. In *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, he recalls the nation’s response to the early years of World War II, and he asks: ‘Have we not rushed / Mad through the darkness in search of some island of light’. The nation also ‘Stammered with Freud that war is the young men escaping / From the murderous old men guarding the gates of life’<sup>461</sup>. The young man, the ‘naked Man’, is not escaping from heroic endeavour (which assertion Stewart attributes to Freud),<sup>462</sup> or yearning for freedom and adventure, but is rising to the challenge of ‘the murderous old men’ who are prepared to use the young men as cannon fodder. Stewart is questioning Freud’s rationale, and claims ‘the “Spirit of the Age” is infinitely complex, and that our own time, depicted by so many writers as chaotic and despairing,<sup>463</sup> is reflected in more virile writing as heroic’,<sup>464</sup> a theme devalued by later modernist writers.

Sonnet 4 presents ideas ambiguously. It begins with ‘War is a time of decision’, which illustrates disillusionment with traditional reasons for war — sacrifice for God, King

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<sup>461</sup> ‘Stammered’ indicates lack of knowledge, and an unsure attitude.

<sup>462</sup> Stewart, D., 1942, ‘Escapes from Art’, op. cit., pp. 86-94.

<sup>463</sup> Eliot, T.S., cited by Stewart in ‘Blaming the Age’, op. cit., pp. 78-88.

<sup>464</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1942, p. 87.

and Country, and the muddled thinking which arises under the stress of danger. Stewart says: 'In all ages, men live and die in a vast muddle'. When he suggests, 'War is a time when half-truths, shadings of bitterness / Wither to ash in the flames of light or darkness', the propaganda and bitterness about political conflict mean little when he asks readers to look at 'The body of a London child, shattered by bombers' held up to the 'holy candles of the future'. The defenders, the military forces, are praised, but the child and the unknown soldier are the reality. It is not the European symbols which deserve compassion, but the children and soldiers of all nations in the madness that men call war. A.D. Hope criticises Stewart's

familiar false sentiment of the journalist's lowest-common-denominator appeal to the 'body of a London child shattered by bombers' — as though bombs never hit old women or fat men or if they do it doesn't matter.<sup>465</sup>

Hope's example does not consider Stewart's account of Hitler's exultation at 'Poland / Invaded, Norway betrayed, Rotterdam bombed, / Machine-guns on women and children'. Hope mocks Stewart's 'specious appearance of an intellectual vision', but it should be kept in mind that Hope was criticising the cliché, 'the body of a London child'.<sup>466</sup> In his review of *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, Hope challenges Stewart's argument that it is:

The man who fights and suffers and dies who keeps the world rolling on into light — as if his Unknown Soldier did not compose the majority of the men in all armies, on all sides in all wars — the armies that drag the world down into darkness as well as those that bring it back into the light.<sup>467</sup>

Hope sees all soldiers as typified by the 'Unknown' one; Stewart, in Hope's view, wants the unknown soldier to have more parochial significance — a sort of propagandistic role. The case is not clear, and Hope's mockery of Stewart's 'specious appearance of an intellectual vision' is not altogether a harsh criticism. By looking back into history and by quoting Thermopylae as an example of historical heroism, Stewart includes unknown soldiers of all

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<sup>465</sup> Hope, A.D., 'A Variety of Verse', *Southerly*, V.3, No. 1, April 1942, p. 26.

<sup>466</sup> The 'London child' image might have been familiar to Stewart from his reading of Dylan Thomas's well-known poem 'A Refusal to Mourn, The Death by Fire, of a Child in London'.

<sup>467</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1956, p. 9.

nations who, by implication, fight for Light, for their own nation and its future. The flame that burns in the heart of the Unknown Soldier is the same flame that burns through history — all soldiers are part of the Light, and part of the dramatic human story.

Stewart is cynical in this sonnet as he criticises people for their faith in religion while ‘The body of a London child, shattered by bombers’ becomes ‘the broken body / Is our only earth, its blood our only Communion’:

War is a time when half-truths, shadings of bitterness,  
Wither to ash in the flames of light or darkness;  
And we hold to the holy candles of the future  
The body of a London child, shattered by bombers,  
And praise its defenders, declare that that broken body  
Is our only earth, its blood our only Communion.  
(Sonnet 4)

There seems to be an anomaly here as ‘praise its defenders’ is juxtaposed with the journalistic technique of sensationalising images of the child’s body and bombers which, in reality, is a reflection of war’s ‘chaos’; but as the religious image, ‘the holy candles of the future’, lights the way for the spirits of the dead and Communion, it becomes more acceptable, but as Smith suggests, Stewart’s overall argument is weak and the reader may be more inclined to agree with Hope in regard to this sonnet.<sup>468</sup>

*Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* cannot be compared with war poetry written by poets such as Wilfred Owen, a British soldier-poet who responded to the horror of trench warfare and death on the Western Front (1914-1918) in poems like ‘Futility’ and ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’, for example. Owen’s experience as a soldier-poet contributes to the emotional appeal in these poems; he protests against dehumanisation when he asks: ‘What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?’ Stewart’s lack of experience as a soldier restricts the effort he put into *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, and even though he would have been aware of Owen’s

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<sup>468</sup> Smith, op. cit., 1981, makes excuses for the logicity in this sonnet by saying that Stewart is ‘a young poet with a limited range of emotional and imaginative experience’ (p. 401), but in 1941 Douglas Stewart was 28 years of age, and not entirely inexperienced in worldly matters.

poetry in which poetic techniques such as alliteration, onomatopoeia and anaphora appear, ‘Only the monstrous anger of the guns, / Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle’ evokes emotions of anger, grief, and shocked realisation that war is not noble or decorous — it is horrific and soul-stirring in the way that Stewart’s *Sonnets* are not. Other Australian poets who were writing from experience and who reached an admirable standard of poetic expression, include: Leon Gellert, ‘These Men’;<sup>469</sup> David Campbell, ‘Men in Green’;<sup>470</sup> J.S. Mansfield, ‘The Tomb of Lieut. John Learmouth, A.I.F.’;<sup>471</sup> Bruce Dawe, ‘Home-Coming’.<sup>472</sup> Most admired by Stewart was poet-journalist Kenneth Slessor, for his poem ‘Beach Burial’.<sup>473</sup>

In his quest for truth, Stewart reinforces his perception of those who rushed madly into the darkness with ‘the will that shrank from the stony paths of the light / Rushed to destruction and darkness’ in Sonnet 5. Here again he is critical of Australians who rushed to enlist in both World Wars I and II although he himself tried to enlist in the AIF but was rejected. Then there is reference to a change in purpose for the response to war in Europe, ‘Once in anger and arrogance, half in shadows’ pertaining to the first World War, and ‘Once in pity and horror, and both times, like rock / Sure of the light in its heart, England stood firm’ (World War II). Here ‘light’ imagery is symbolic of steadfastness in England as opposed to ‘War is the will of the people rushing from light’ in Verse 2. Stewart softens this tone and mood with a simile (‘As a cataract hurls itself down from the snow to the sea’) and once again he remembers images of New Zealand. Although ‘he fights with a grin and a curse and is lost in the darkness’, the man who fights against the torrent ‘Is touched with a light within; this light is strengthened as it is juxtaposed with the simile ‘the gleam of bayonets / For life is within him

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<sup>469</sup> Gellert, L., ‘These Men’, *Penguin Book of Australian Verse*, ed. H. Heseltine, Penguin, Ringwood, 1972, p. 144.

<sup>470</sup> Campbell, D., ‘Men in Green’, *ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

<sup>471</sup> Mansfield, J.S., ‘The Tomb of Lieut. John Learmouth, A.I.F.’, *ibid.*, pp. 275-277.

<sup>472</sup> Dawe, B., ‘Home-Coming’, *ibid.*, pp. 391-392. The theme of this later poem is the Vietnam War.

<sup>473</sup> Slessor, K., ‘Beach Burial’, *ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

and sunlight'. However, while 'light' is Stewart's symbol for life, the 'gleam of bayonets' is clearly a death image. Whereas he uses personal vocabulary, that is, 'gleam' and 'sunlight' as positive images which contribute to lines of continuity in his poetry and verse plays, in nature lyrics and references to sunlight on water as a thing of beauty that stirs the poetic imagination, here these images are associated with survival of life because they are 'the peaks of the future'.

Stewart begins Sonnet 6 with 'Not one man's war but a nation's' and then repeats it in line 1 'one man', where it becomes clear that he is writing about Hitler who '*Is the cave of the priestess where things that are black in man's soul / Howl with the voices of beasts*'. Here the traditional poetic device of personification is reversed — the 'animal howl' belongs to Hitler as the poet struggles to express metaphorically his deep horror of and disgust with mankind's inhumanity to other humans when '*We who have heard / The animal howl ... Have heard on the radio the ancient voice of the pit*'. Stewart introduces a modernist touch as he continues to experiment with themes relevant to this time in history.

Qualities of goodness, 'mercy and truth' are the 'mainsprings of bestial laughter' and all Europe cringes at the exultant onomatopoeic 'howl' that is elaborated on in the second verse: 'the creatures of chaos exult' in 'The dark of the cave' and 'the bottomless pit / Where Lucifer fell', and Stewart repeats the metaphor 'the dark of the soul of Germany'.

In verse 2, Stewart presents an image of Hitler as Hell's spokesman who becomes the metaphorical snake of the Bible story of Adam and Eve in 'Genesis', which 'at the roots of being, strikes at the light'. As in Sonnet 5, 'light' is significant — suddenly readers are transported back to Australia where 'lovers of sunlight meet with a snake in the bush / They break its back with a stick. The ants do the rest'. Although this analogy between good and evil draws on phenomena far removed from Europe, it is effective in the way Stewart moves from Europe to the more familiar vision of the Australian sunlight in the final couplet: 'When lovers of sunlight meet with a snake in the bush / They break its back with a stick. The ants do

the rest', complements the earlier life and death image of 'a thousand bayonets flashing down Martin Place'.

In Sonnet 7, except for the final statement 'And a man goes down into hell to bring fire for mankind', Stewart avoids poetic devices such as metaphors and similes as he keeps to fact as he considers Dunkirk where:

... 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.

Again, Stewart is critical of the decision for the catastrophe which made the evacuation of Dunkirk necessary in the first place as he is in verse 2,

When the Australians crashed singing on Tobruk  
He sang the loudest and was the first to die;  
And he will sing and fall and fight again  
Many times before the white dawn breaks on the world.  
(Sonnet 7)

This man, the unknown soldier, is a sacrificial figure, but he is no different to the man who died at Thermopylae, Waterloo, Gallipoli or Passchendaele. Stewart is arguing here that even though an image of ancient humanity does not fit directly into an Australian theme, it is still relevant because the spirit of *all* nations is there.<sup>474</sup> The Unknown Soldier 'will sing and fall and fight again / Many times before the white dawn breaks on the world'. Stewart is not an admirer of war and its inevitable consequences, but in the past as in the future, like Orpheus in the underworld, 'a man goes down into hell to bring fire for mankind', and the symbolic 'fire' will become the eternal flame of remembrance which is associated with courage and the values of a peaceful society.

Stewart continues the theme of chaos and the underworld in Sonnet 8: 'We stand on the threshold of darkness' and 'We who with light within us go down to the darkness', he may

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<sup>474</sup> Norman Lindsay's illustration of 'unknown soldiers' throughout history forms a frontispiece to the 'Sonnets'; this is a visual representation of 'the spirit of *all* nations'.

be referring to the Unknown Soldier, but it is also likely that ‘We’ are those, who, like the poets, are touched by spirit to ‘wrestle with fate’ and bring Light to the world in the future. Sonnet 8 is a satirical metaphorical presentation of Stewart’s understanding that it is the poet’s (and journalist’s) responsibility to promote an awareness that his argument is a protest against lies and propaganda offered to soldiers and the public in times of war. However, to accomplish this, insight into alternative meanings of colloquial idiom must be realised. Verse 1 begins with the personal pronoun ‘we’, not ‘I’, so readers relate to Stewart and all mankind as he refers to the ‘threshold of light’ which may be decoded as the commencement of peace or of knowledge which leads to greater understanding of complex situations such as causes of war — the truth opposes this as he repeats, ‘We stand on the threshold of darkness’. Stewart envisages a state, that is, a ‘pit’ of death and ruin before the war is finished. An example of ambiguous expression such as ‘eternal brotherhood’ is satirical because the soldier will always stand apart from the general community because of his experiences; he will never be part of an eternal brotherhood of ‘stay-at-homes’ he describes in Sonnet 9; only the mateship found at Anzac Day reunions have any real meaning.

Sonnet 8 turns away from causes of war and its definitions to speculate about the future and the effects of war on the soldier. Once more Stewart uses the allegory of Light and Darkness as images of peace and war. In the future, the speaker suggests to the soldier, ‘The fools will tell you we stand on the threshold of light’, that nothing has changed, ‘his girl has been true and his job has been kept’; things can only be better when the hostilities have ended. For now, ‘we stand on the threshold of darkness’; there is no peace, and peace will not come until ‘the pit is choked to the brim with ruin and death’. While the soldier is being warned not to be deluded into thinking that life itself will be a new paradise after the war in Sonnet 8, Stewart’s scepticism continues in Sonnet 9: This is the ‘soldier’s reward’:

Never fear, soldier, that we shall not reward you,

Though you do 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 for the men who are dead,  
Speeches and cheers for the living, the pubs wide open,  
And a girl in your bed at last; and after ten days  
The morning sunlight will taste like dirt in your mouth

In the days when the stay-at-home hates you for threatening his job  
And the smug intellectual you fought for calls you a fool  
And women and old men contrive to assure themselves  
It was they who sang in the desert and sweated and bled;  
In the long dull years of ordinary living,  
You shall know what you know: and that shall be your reward.

(Sonnet 9)

More significantly, Stewart's perception of the futility of war is a major concern throughout *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, mainly implicit, but in Sonnet 9 it is specific: there will be 'a column of stone in the park for the men who are dead', and in Sonnet 10, 'a slab of granite / With the poets and the kings in the [Westminster] Abbey'.

In Sonnet 10 Stewart's persona speaks again for the Unknown Soldier. Whether he is dead, 'One meaningless X in France' or alive, 'The Unknown Soldier dies in every war'. As for the living man, whether he 'sings in the streets for pennies' or 'Slaves on a stony farm' or 'he goes mad in the end', the point Stewart is making is that the unknown soldier can survive and conquer 'all but his memories' — a part of him still dies. This is the truth and knowledge Stewart has been searching for — the living human 'struggles all night / While the gunfire roars in the no-man's-land of dreams'. The 'stay-at-homes' of Sonnet 9 cannot understand the soldier's war experiences, so they live in ignorance and fantasy; so like the dead, he is the living dead.

Stewart's ideas in Sonnet 9, verse 2, 'In the long dull years of ordinary living / You shall know what you know: and that shall be your reward', are examples of his early attempts at presenting a modernist work which is apposite, illuminating, and an indispensable element of his overall argument that the Unknown Soldier will always be ready to fight and die for his country. However, the sonnets are weakened by his efforts of producing modernist



expression as well as his own lack of experience as a soldier in action.

In Australia, the war period represented crossroads in Australian literature where signposts pointed on the one hand to traditional colonial ideas and stereotypes, and, on the other hand, to a national awareness first promulgated by J.F. Archibald who first published the *Bulletin* in 1880 with a philosophy of nationalism in Australia.<sup>475</sup> Later, A.G. Stephens, editor of the Red Page, ‘modernised the business of criticism’ insofar as language and presentation of publishing techniques were concerned,<sup>476</sup> but the *Bulletin* remained a publication assuming ‘a nationalist framework underscored by pastoral or Anzac myths’.<sup>477</sup>

As editor of the Red Page, Stewart maintained the *Bulletin’s* traditional idea of nationalism while in his poetry and verse plays he worked within the parameters of writing in modern times, and as a New Zealand expatriate, much of his work relates to nationalism in both New Zealand and Australia. He recalls in *Norman Lindsay: A Personal Memoir* that in 1975, ‘We were all ardently trying to build up an Australian culture in those days’.<sup>478</sup> National identity is reflected in a country’s imagery of both its culture and cultural myths as well as in the natural landscape which contributes to Stewart’s lines of continuity, not only during the period of World War II, but throughout his poetic oeuvre, especially in *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track*, discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis and, particularly, in ‘Worsley Enchanted’ in which Stewart’s personal philosophy, the closer one moves to nature, the closer one moves to spirit; in this work most of his lines of continuity cohere as one in the fourth man.

The final sonnet in the series is a plea to future mankind to remember the Unknown

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<sup>475</sup> Levis, K., ‘The Role of the *Bulletin*’, *Australian Nationalists*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1971, p. 46.

<sup>476</sup> Crawford, R.M., ‘The Birth of a Culture’, *The Australian Nationalists*, OUP, Melbourne, 1971, p. 31.

<sup>477</sup> Carter, D., op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>478</sup> Stewart, D., *Norman Lindsay: A Personal Memoir*, op. cit., p. 13.

Soldier who will be ‘Coming up singing and cursing to fight on forever’; however, ‘cursing’ seems to be an appropriate verb, whereas ‘singing’, seen also in Sonnet 7, ‘Australians crashed singing on Tobruk’, weakens the image of Australian and New Zealand soldiers in the way it appears to be contrived to reflect the early idea of national identity as ‘young, vigorous, cheerful and *manly*, with a culture as wholesome as its climate ... Australia was projected as still a “living culture”, a classless organic community, a unified nation’.<sup>479</sup> In this final Sonnet, Stewart’s cynicism again dominates, yet he pleads for understanding for men who are often forgotten:

Remember him once for the lonely flame within him  
In the days when the mountains are lit and all the green valleys.

Even though he ‘Goes down into hell to save the light of the world’, it is difficult to avoid the allusion to Christ’s harrowing of hell. This is the flame of remembrance, symbol of the heroic spirit, in courage and endurance of the Unknown Soldier who is

the man they told to go and die for them  
In all the old wars. He hates to hear the old stories,  
He did the fighting, the bleeding, suffering and dying,  
And the light in him lived for ever. His name is Man.  
(Sonnet 11)

In keeping with the *Bulletin’s* traditional form of nationalism inherited by Stewart, national characteristics belonged to a pre-industrial pastoral world, and the Unknown Soldier reflects this identity. At the same time, Stewart was experimenting with modern values, so his poetry underwent a transition indicated by reference to human emotions and other personal responses such as the futility of war, suffering, grief and bereavement. This poetry was Stewart’s personal protest against violence in any form, a theme which continues throughout his future poetry and verse plays. As well as this protest, Stewart presents another line of continuity in his notion of defiance in the face of violence, and in his future dramatic works,

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<sup>479</sup> Carter, op. cit., p. 365.

the outcome is produced by his 'straight-forward attitude to language effects'.<sup>480</sup> Stewart's sense of place in *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* demonstrates his artistic and creative position in 1941. In Australia, the war period represented the crossroads in Australian literature where signposts pointed on the one hand to traditional colonial ideas and literary stereotypes, and, on the other, to a new awareness leading to a break with tradition and form. Stewart's major preoccupation in *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* is with the darker side of human nature that poses the universal question: what is it that makes humans act in the violent ways they do? World War II undoubtedly provided the topical impulse for Stewart's images of, and concerns about, the Unknown Soldier and about the death of his friend, in 'Elegy for an Airman', two different poetic representations of how Stewart perceives heroism. The first is a heroism forced on soldiers on the Western Front (1914-1918) at sites such as Villers Bretonneux in France and at Gallipoli where Australian deaths numbered in the many thousands (in 1940-1941 the greatest impact of World War II was as yet unknown). In 'Elegy for an Airman', Stewart sees heroism in a different light to the Unknown Soldier — the airman who, like the airman in Magee's 'High Flight', 'hungered for strife and triumph, / And chose the brilliance of flight to complete the pattern / of speed and light he had learned from our mountain stream' (C.P., p. 277); it is the romantic background of Stewart's creative thinking that formed his early years and poetry. Grief in this poem is that of Australians and New Zealanders at home mourning the deaths of their own men is also symbolised in the image of the Unknown Soldier: 'And the fire is not lit because nothing can warm the heart' (C.P., p. 277).

When Stewart was choosing poems for *Selected Poems* (1973), he wrote in the introduction to that anthology: 'I find it now, in peacetime, very difficult to respond to the

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<sup>480</sup> Smith, V., op. cit., 1977, p. 171.

emotions we felt in the years of World War II' (S.P., p. vi), and he is concerned that this final collection 'began to give the impression that the vast historical events of our time had made no impact on me at all: which was far from the truth'. He decided, therefore, to include the poem 'The Breaking Wave' (S.P., p. 34); this poem like 'Elegy for an Airman' and *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*, is also his reaction to 'the violence of our time' and this reaction, expressed by image and implication, is continued in *Glencoe* and the verse plays as an important part of Stewart's poetic philosophy.

'The Breaking Wave' (S.P., pp. 34-35), appears in *The Dossier in Springtime* collection. A poem of six quartets in which the pentameter rhythm conveys a feeling of conversation, it is located in Australia, 'Storming the forts of the hard Australian coast; / And nowhere peace' conveys by its image and implication the conflict which disturbs his peace of mind. This line of continuity appears in different forms in many of his later poems such as *Glencoe*, 'Worsley Enchanted, Tawhai's conflict in *The Golden Lover*, 'The Silkworms' and 'Rutherford' who overcame his vacillation in deciding to split the atom.

As mentioned earlier in the *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* discussion, Stewart was at a disadvantage because of his lack of experience as a soldier on the war front, yet the onomatopoeia conveys to his readers the sounds of war in the breaking waves, 'Too much like the roar / of guns in the heavy whiteness, too, like the gunfire / That shakes our world to pieces'. Strong verbs as the surf 'Explodes and crashes and stuns' in the second verse that he wonders whether 'The peace like a rock-pool' will ever return. In the fifth verse, Stewart returns in despair as he once again refers to 'sing' as he did when soldiers were arriving at Tobruk or leaving Dunkirk. Here he is referring to those who together formed the 'Coast Watch' brigade as they watched the ocean for signs of planes, ships or submarines, and he asks:

Who will take his stand on the cliff with the broom and tea-tree,

...

But will sing with the iron surf of mine and torpedo,  
Shipwreck and death by drowning, the droning bomber; (S.P., p. 34)

Once again, the word 'sing' seems to be inappropriate, particularly as wartime songs were mostly written to boost the morale of the troops and those they left behind. Imagery such as 'iron', 'mine', 'torpedo', 'Shipwreck' and 'droning bomber' in 'The Breaking Wave' all relate to instruments of war and violence, which, the seashells imply, are images of the spent shells from guns — 'Here was a pretty thing!', but the shells the character clenches 'tight in his hand' are also death images. Metaphors and images in this poem are those of the modern age in which Stewart lived and worked, but the poem would be stronger without lines such as 'My girl and I lay down in the sky together' and 'of a sky like sea and man like a shark beneath it' lose his desired effect.

Stewart's *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* enjoyed limited success; realising this, he reduced it severely in *Selected Poems* (1973). A major problem facing him when he was writing these sonnets was his lack of experience as a soldier on active service, so he relied on his imagination and reading of other war poets' works, to present his attempt at writing war poetry.

In the following chapter of this thesis, *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover*, lines of continuity discussed so far, will emerge again in these two dramas in which themes of conflict, violence and defiance are strengthened as Stewart continues to experiment with modern literary values such as imagery and language that surpass the mundane to produce more profound issues that relate to the modern world of Australian literature.

## CHAPTER 6

### VERSE PLAYS FOR RADIO: *THE FIRE ON THE SNOW AND THE GOLDEN LOVER*

#### 1. *The Fire on the Snow*

Douglas Stewart was editor of the *Bulletin's* Red Page at a time when new technology, such as radio, became not only a popular, but an essential form of world-wide communication. About this time (1940), Stewart accepted the challenge of writing for radio. As we will see in this chapter, he wrote in different, but related ways of myths — the myth of heroism connected with British exploration and that of Maori society. His first verse play, *The Fire on the Snow*, won him world-wide acclaim.<sup>481</sup>

It was in *The Fire on the Snow* that Stewart's poetic development changed. He began experimenting with the idea of modernity and introducing more profound themes than the traditional romantic subjects such as nature and love which he was accustomed to using in *The Green Lions* and *The White Cry*. Themes included in *The Fire on the Snow* focus on heroic aspiration defeated and the way in which Captain Robert Scott and his group of adventurers struggled for existence in Antarctica after they arrived at the South Pole after Amundsen. Defiance in the face of danger was a further developing theme, and in addition, Stewart's persona, Scott, questions his own decisions as he asks Wilson: 'How am I justified, / Wilson, how am I justified for Oates and Evans, / And Bowers ... and you?'<sup>482</sup> These new and modern themes became lines of continuity throughout Stewart's work and were the basis for his personal philosophy in many contexts which he acknowledges in his final published poem

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<sup>481</sup> *The Fire on the Snow* was first broadcast in 1941, but published for the Red Page of the *Bulletin* in December 1939, and then in complete form in 1944 with *The Golden Lover*. Future references to *The Fire on the Snow* will be shown as (F.S.) and references to *The Golden Lover* will be noted as (T.G.L).

<sup>482</sup> Stewart, D., 'The Fire on the Snow', *Four Plays*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1944, p. 29.

'Bell Rock' (SP., pp. 242-246).

While conflicts of the human spirit concern Scott, other significant issues in *The Fire on the Snow* are expanded as Scott and his group are against themselves as well as against the environment, and in *The Golden Lover* discussed in the second half of this chapter, Stewart develops the conflict of morality — man and woman versus traditional Maori society and culture. Both plays unify Stewart's developing outlook through fire and dream (or imagined) imagery and underlying symbolism of human identity with the life of the earth itself, so adding to Stewart's personal philosophy and lines of continuity such as the closer one moves towards the earth, the closer one moves towards the spirit of nature.<sup>483</sup>

These issues are the focus of discussion later in this chapter, but first, included is a discussion of radio and the influence of this modern technology which was the means of bringing Australian literature to many Australians who would otherwise remain unaware of Stewart's, and other playwrights', works. In Australia, the first radio licences were granted in Sydney in 1923 (Station 2SB),<sup>484</sup> then in 1928 the government introduced a national broadcasting system which in 1932 became the Australian Broadcasting Commission modelled on the British Broadcasting Company Limited.<sup>485</sup> Lawrence H. Cecil was appointed Head of Drama for New South Wales in 1933;<sup>486</sup> Charles Moses was the ABC's first General Manager (1935-1965); Frank Clewlow became the ABC's first Federal Director of Radio Drama in

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<sup>483</sup> Stewart, Interview with J. Thompson, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>484</sup> Lane, R., *The Golden Age of Australian Drama, 1923-1960*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>485</sup> Pybus, R., 'Radio Drama: The Australian Experience', *Radio Drama*, Longmans, London, 1981, p. 245. The British Broadcasting Company Limited was founded 18 October, 1922. The name was changed when the company became public funded in 1927 to the British Broadcasting Corporation after it was granted a Royal Charter of incorporation and ceased to be a private company.

Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC> 11 September, 2008.

<sup>486</sup> Lane, op. cit., p. 5. See also Blain, E., *Life with Aunty: Forty Years with the ABC*, Methuen, Sydney, 1977, pp. 48-51.

Melbourne, then in Sydney in 1936, and Leslie Rees became the first Federal Play Editor.<sup>487</sup>

Both Rees and Clewlow maintained a close working relationship between the ABC Drama Department and new and experienced writers.

Stewart was not the first poet to write verse plays in Australia as an extension of experiments with poetry; this experimentation contributes to lines of continuity in his development as a poet and playwright. Earlier Australian poets had written in this genre: John le Gay Brereton wrote *Tomorrow* in 1910; Helen Simpson wrote *A Man of His Time* in 1923; Charles Rischbieth Jury wrote *Love and the Virgins* in 1929, and Sir Mungo MacCallum wrote *Queen Jezebel* in 1930.<sup>488</sup> The phenomenon of radio enabled a new literary form in Australia. In the United States of America in 1937, radio had appealed especially to poets like Archibald MacLeish, whose verse play *The Fall of the City* (1937),<sup>489</sup> a denunciation of totalitarianism written for radio, reached a wide audience both in the United States and England.<sup>490</sup> Leslie Rees recalls that ‘Douglas Stewart acknowledged that he wrote *The Fire on the Snow* after reading MacLeish’s *The Fall of the City*’<sup>491</sup> [which] provided the stimulus to write *The Fire on the Snow* followed by *The Golden Lover* and *The Earthquake Shakes the Land* as radio verse plays. It was *The Fire on the Snow* that established Stewart’s ‘place in the history of broadcast drama in Australia [which] is equivalent to that of MacLeish in the United States, or that of Louis MacNeice in Britain’.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Pybus, op. cit., p. 246. Radio drama did not begin with the first broadcast of a play, *The Barbarous Barber*, was on 21 March, 1925 on the Melbourne station 3LO.<sup>#</sup>

<sup>488</sup> Rees, L., ‘Douglas Stewart and the verse drama of the Forties’, *The Making of Australian Drama*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1973, p. 214.

<sup>489</sup> Ousby, I., *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K., 1955, p. 588.

<sup>490</sup> MacLeish wrote three more verse plays: *The Trojan Horse* (for radio, 1952), reflecting the contemporary fear of Communist infiltration; *JB* (1958), about a modern job, which brought him a third Pulitzer Prize in 1959, and *Heracles* (1967), which explores the conflict between human needs, and reason and science. Ousby, op. cit., p. 588.

<sup>491</sup> Rees, L., op. cit., p. 234.

<sup>492</sup> Oliver, H.J., ‘Douglas Stewart and the Art of the Radio Play’, *Texas Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1962, pp. 193-203.



In Australia, Catherine Shepherd and Alexander Turner began writing plays for radio in the late 1930s, but it was Turner's *Australian Stages*, 1944, a verse play of World War II, that is admired for the 'aural and symbolic value of trains with a montage of male voices in the setting of a troop train journey'. Pybus illustrates this idea with 'the various rhythms of the train recited by the chorus ("Through Narngaloo Through Narngaloo Through Narngaloo ... Utakarra-Bookara, Utakarra-Bookara, Utakarra-Bookara ... ")', and reflective monologues are interwoven in a successfully inventive and atmospheric piece of radio'.<sup>493</sup>

The challenge of radio production provided Stewart with an incentive to write drama for a medium other than stage production. Leslie Rees attributes the ascent of Australian drama in the mid-thirties to social and technological factors. One was 'the lifting of the economic depression which had waged war on new general enterprise, national self-confidence and standards of employment and living from about 1928-1935'.<sup>494</sup> Another factor was 'the birth of radio communication using the human voice'.<sup>495</sup> Radio can exploit possibilities of speech and sound other than those demanded by stage realism; tone and timbre of voices: soft or loud passages of script; vulgar or refined interpretations; all challenge stage productions, particularly when action and suspense is conveyed through the spoken word. Weaknesses such as affected English accents are only too obvious in radio drama. Radio audiences are more likely than stage audiences to put their own interpretation on radio performances (perhaps because of preconceived notions or past experiences); this was a challenge for Stewart and other playwrights who consciously built suspense in their verse plays. The verse plays *The Fire on the Snow*, and *The Earthquake Shakes the Land* (unpublished, but broadcast in 1944), were original radio dramas sponsored by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Although

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<sup>493</sup> Pybus, op. cit., p. 248.

<sup>494</sup> Rees, L., op. cit., 1973, p. 154.

<sup>495</sup> *ibid.*, p. 154.

*Ned Kelly*, 1942, and *Shipwreck*, 1947, were intended for the stage, they were also later produced for radio.

As a cultural phenomenon, radio changed the way audiences perceived themselves and their society. It was an important part of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community'<sup>496</sup> which allowed listeners to visualise and respond emotionally to the action of verse plays such as *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover*.<sup>497</sup> The different dimension of radio expanded listeners' experience by introducing them to modern ideas and ideals in contrast to colonial and romantic genres. When Tyrone Guthrie produced *The Fire on the Snow* on the BBC in 1951, he declared it to be 'one of the few important works which radio had so far produced'.<sup>498</sup> It was important, mainly because it extended and enlarged audiences for literary drama who may not have read the play in printed form. Through radio they could hear the differences in the actors' voices which were familiar sounds to radio listeners at that time. In the first broadcast of *The Fire on the Snow* distinctive voices were those of Frank Harvey who played Scott (Peter Finch was to play Scott, but he joined the AIF four days before production), John Tate played Wilson, Lou Vernon played Oates, Peter Bathurst played Bowers, John Alden played Evans and Ida Osbourne played the Narrator (Announcer). The use of a woman's voice as the Announcer contrasted with that of the all-male cast; Stewart approved of producer Frank Clewlow's decision after hearing the production.<sup>499</sup> These actors had distinctive voices easily recognised by audiences of the 1940s; by overlooking this essential element in production, critics like MacCartney indicate a lack of understanding of early Australian radio and the habits of regular listeners at that time. Through radio they could hear the differences in the actors' voices and respond to Stewart's underlying themes and philosophical impulses such as

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<sup>496</sup> Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>497</sup> Sykes, A., 'Introduction', *Five Plays*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1977, pp. xx.

<sup>498</sup> Lane, op. cit., p. 230.

<sup>499</sup> Lane, op. cit., p. 230.

defiance and suffering in the face of overwhelming odds in *The Fire on the Snow*. In *The Golden Lover*, mythical man and earth-bound woman are symbolic characters who represent human identity with the spirit of the earth itself.

Radio provided a new manner of expression that required techniques of speech and sound different to those of stage drama. Whereas stage drama usually employs props and physical action, that is, body language, to create mood and atmosphere, radio plays require a different approach, and throughout this chapter it has been emphasized that the poet-playwright has only words to work with. Stewart shows his versatility and expertise in writing for a non-literary medium by using direct speech and natural speech rhythms, although in *The Fire on the Snow* the Announcer speaks in a number of verse modes that include traditional regular lyrical verse and free verse. Richard Lane writes, 'Radio was infinitely richer for his [Stewart's] involvement in it during the 1940s'.<sup>500</sup>

Following Stewart's appointment to the staff of the *Bulletin* in 1939, *The Fire on the Snow* was published in part in the Red Page in December. His success with *The Fire on the Snow* and later, *Ned Kelly*, as radio plays encouraged other Australian writers to similarly attempt this kind of verse drama; this led to acceptance of playwright Gwen Meredith, who 'acquired legendary status' for the radio series *Blue Hills* which was broadcast by the ABC from 28 February, 1949 to the end of the broadcast on 30 September, 1976.<sup>501</sup>

The radio production of *The Fire on the Snow* is reasonably short while the printed version (1944) is thirty pages in length. Michael Sharkey points out that book-length verse narratives such as *The Great South Land* by R. Ingamells, had become unpopular, so Stewart worked within the modernism of his times and kept *The Fire on the Snow* short while drawing on ideas of heroism to embrace a theme of tragic adventure on an heroic scale even though the

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<sup>500</sup> Lane, R., op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>501</sup> Lane, op. cit., pp. 235-236. (In 1972 there were 400,000 people listening to the 5000<sup>th</sup> episode).

idea of heroism was rejected by later modernists as an out-dated topic. As Sharkey says, ‘Stewart was accommodating himself to the idea of modernity all through his writing career — even if he seemed like an enemy to modernity by those who came hot on his heels’.<sup>502</sup>

Stewart writes:

I couldn't do anything for the first year very much, I think I was a bit uneasy and settling down, but in the second year I was here I wrote *Fire on the Snow*, which I'd tried to do for years and years in New Zealand and could never manage to.<sup>503</sup>

He says his uncle gave him Scott's *Journal* in his boyhood and ‘it always fascinated me as a story ... the combination of the two things, the snow and the story of Captain Robert Scott and his party of adventurers who reached the South Pole after Amundsen, but who perished in a blizzard only 11 miles from safety, probably inspired that’.<sup>504</sup> This statement suggests that Stewart's early life in New Zealand, where snow and ice were familiar occurrences, influenced the subject of *The Fire on the Snow* and the story of these men that ‘transcends the ordinary: Stewart is always a realistic romantic, and the subject of this play is romantic heroism’.<sup>505</sup> Robert D. FitzGerald takes this idea one step further, remarking that the play concerns ‘a theme of heroic proportions, with the motif of defiance, another of Stewart's lines of continuity, becoming a new motif of struggle and of the triumph that is struggle itself, even when struggle ends in failure’.<sup>506</sup>

Scott was a dreamer, a hero of the times in the periods in which he lived. In his own way Scott developed from a ‘pigeon-chested, narrow-shouldered lad whose doctor had predicted his inability to join the navy to a disciplined young man who began his career as a naval cadet on board the training ship *Britannia*’.<sup>507</sup> In his short biography of Scott, Fiennes

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<sup>502</sup> *ibid.*, p.

<sup>503</sup> Stewart D., 1965, ‘Poetry in Australia: Douglas Stewart’ *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 116.

<sup>504</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>505</sup> Green, H.A. *History of Australian Literature*, *op. cit.*, p. 1180.

<sup>506</sup> FitzGerald, R.D., *Elements of Poetry*, *op. cit.*, 1963, p. 30.

<sup>507</sup> Fiennes, Sir Ranulph, *Race to the Pole*, Hyperion, New York, 2004, p. 14.

notes, ‘Scott learned to work with his sailors and slowly discovered how best to control them, (and) in December, 1886, at the age of eighteen, he was posted to HMS *Rover* of the training squadron where his report summarized him as “intelligent and capable” with ... steel-like determination’.<sup>508</sup> It is obvious that Scott showed great promise; Fiennes quotes the description of him by the commander of the brig *Liberty* as a ‘zealous and painstaking young officer’,<sup>509</sup> but, says Fiennes, ‘Like the majority of mankind, Scott was not a so-called natural leader of men. Asserting himself over others did not come easily, so he had to learn the process as he might any other naval skill’.<sup>510</sup>

Scientists and naval men made up Scott’s expeditionary team. Evans and Oates suggested to Scott that he should change plans and making a race of it when they heard of Amundsen’s intentions to be first to the Pole, instead of making the geological specimens equally important to the expedition. In a letter to his mother, Caroline Oates, he wrote: ‘I dislike Scott intensely ... he is not straight, it is himself first, the rest nowhere, and when he has got what he can out of you, it is shift for yourself’.<sup>511</sup> Meares, Atkinson and Debenham, members of Scott’s support team, agreed with Oates’ opinion of Scott, and Debenham wrote in a letter to his mother:

I am afraid I am very disappointed in him (Scott) ... There’s no doubt he can be very nice and the interest he takes in our scientific work is immense, he is also a fine sledge himself and as organiser is splendid ... His temper is very uncertain ... In crises he acts very peculiarly ... I have been quite disgusted with him.<sup>512</sup>

Although Scott is perceived by some as a failure, at the same time, it has been shown (see *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*) that in Australia, failure contributes to legend, not only folk

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<sup>508</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15. Fiennes refers to L. Huxley, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>509</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>510</sup> Fiennes, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>511</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1. Letter to Oates to Caroline Oates October 11-28, 1911. Oates’ letters to his mother are kept at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge (Fiennes, p. 413).

<sup>512</sup> Debenham, F., *The Quiet Land*, ed. June D. Back, Bluntisham Books, 1992, pp. 214-215. (Fiennes provides this information in the Bibliography to *Race to the Pole*, but does not provide addresses for publishers)

legend but to the mythology of historical events such as ANZAC.

The question arises: What, then, is heroism? The many dictionaries at one's disposal define 'heroism' and 'heroes' in many different ways, but the most commonly used words are 'great courage'; 'remarkable physical or moral courage'; 'those who get inspiration from courage', 'spiritual ethics and values', and most significantly, 'those who, through their feats, lift themselves above the ordinary'. In romantic terms heroes define a nation; they tell new generations who they are, and what they aspire to — and that such heroes should be eulogised. On the other hand, twentieth century modernity was marked by the 'death' of heroes, but when Stewart writes about the epic in his introduction to *Voyager Poems*, he insists otherwise:

If, as Homer demonstrated and as Aristotle pointed out ... an epic is from one aspect simply a dramatic human story, a clash of vital personalities — Agamemnon against Achilles; Odysseus against the lordly wooers who are trying to steal his wife — it must be also, if it is to have national stature, a story about highly significant figures in the nation's history. Agamemnon, as well as stealing Achilles' favourite slave-girl, destroyed the power of Troy; Odysseus typified the hero returning from that same war to continue the business of the nation.<sup>513</sup>

The heroes of classical times, such as Agamemnon, Odysseus and Hercules, were super-heroes with god-like qualities and powers and were often helped in their work by gods or other heroes. In modern literature, however, there are changes in perceptions of heroism; despite varied cultures and different people and beliefs, writers of heroic stories were still influenced by traditional romantic ideals and were therefore out-dated. Andrew Taylor points out: 'The romance hero had failed in his quest ... in Slessor's "Five Visions of Captain Cook", the heroic figure which is a model of poetry is triumphant only in defeat'.<sup>514</sup> Taylor's argument is applicable to Stewart's *The Fire on the Snow*; however, in *Worsley Enchanted*, Shackleton's courage and leadership skills entitle him to the title of hero, particularly as his quest ended without the loss of one life, an historical fact which supports Stewart's depiction of Shackleton

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<sup>513</sup> Stewart, D., Introduction, *Voyager Poems*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1960, p. 11.

<sup>514</sup> Taylor, A., *Reading Australian Poetry*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1987, p. 66.

as heroic and Scott as heroic in defeat. It is obvious, but understated, even implied, that the notion of British physical and moral courage (as shown in *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*) is a quality valued by white settlers in both New Zealand and Australia — a quality that has been handed down through the generations until the origins have been obscured.

The prologue to Douglas Stewart's *The Fire on the Snow* is spoken in 'a different voice from that of the Announcer':<sup>515</sup>

#### PROLOGUE

*To be spoken in a different voice from that of the Announcer in the play.* Captain Scott's Antarctic expedition landed in McMurdo Sound on the Antarctic Continent on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1911. The march to the Pole, with dogs, ponies and motor sledges for transporting supplies, began from their base camp at Cape Evans on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1911. The time of the play is from 4<sup>th</sup> January 1912, when the last supporting party returned to 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1912, when the last supporting party returned, to 29<sup>th</sup> March 1912, when Scott's diary ceases. After living on the ice for five months, marching eight hundred miles to the Pole and about six hundred miles of the return journey, Scott, Wilson and Bowers perished in their tent; they were exhausted and short of food and a blizzard which raged four days prevented them from marching to their "One Ton Camp", eleven miles away, where there was food and fuel that might have saved them. Evans and Oates, the other two members of the Polar party, had died earlier.

This play opens at the point when Scott, Wilson, Bowers, Evans and Oates are about to leave the last supporting party before setting out on the final dash to the Pole. The Announcer speaks first. (F.S., p. 3)

This sets the scene for the action which begins on 4 January, 1912 and ends on 29 March 1912 to coincide with Captain Robert Scott's diary entry:

We were naturally late getting away this morning, the sledge having to be packed and arrangements completed for separation of parties. It is wonderful to see how neatly everything stows on a little sledge, thanks to P.O. Evans. I was anxious to see how we could pull it, and glad to find we went easy enough. Bowers on foot pulls between, but behind, Wilson and myself; he has to keep his own pace and luckily does not throw us out at all.<sup>516</sup>

In H.M. Green's view, Stewart's method of including factual historical information in prose introduces tension, that is, imaginative licence, between poetry and fact that encourages the

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<sup>515</sup> Stewart, D., *The Fire on the Snow*, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>516</sup> Huxley, L., *Scott's Last Expedition*, Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1913, p. 529.

audience to appreciate the power of his poetic imagination.<sup>517</sup> R.G. Howarth comments that the Announcer's role as 'presenter and commentator — to introduce the people, strikes the note of disaster, create the scene and invest it with atmosphere'. He believes that sound-effects 'would be an impertinence: the poet suggests the setting so well that no outside aid is needed'.<sup>518</sup> He also considers that the inclusion of the Announcer makes the journey 'actual and interesting'.<sup>519</sup> The Announcer in *The Fire on the Snow* marks a definite turning point in Stewart's quest; the continuing development of 'voices' in future plays such as *Glencoe* (CP. pp. 197-222) and poems like 'Farewell to Jindabyne' (CP. pp. 24-28), are examples of the way Stewart deals with poetic language to portray new characters their different experiences. In this way, as Sharkey points out, 'Stewart was accommodating himself to modernity' throughout his career.<sup>520</sup>

The form of *The Fire on the Snow* is 'a single scene which moves through time and space, a form which suits radio production rather than that of the stage'.<sup>521</sup> It is a sequence of events incorporating prose in the prologue in which Stewart pre-emptes the tragic heroism found not only in Scott's band of adventurers but also in that of human life itself. It is the Announcer's role to comment on the action of the drama, but before he has a chance to speak to the audience, another voice speaks in the first person: 'I am to break into the conversation / With a word that tastes like snow to say; / I am to interrupt the contemplation of the familiar headlines of the day' (F.S., p. 3); the personal approach here enhances the magnitude of this statement. In the twenty-first century, audiences are familiar with 'announcers' interrupting radio programs with what is now called 'breaking news', that is, news that is so important that

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<sup>517</sup> Green, H.M., op. cit., p.1180.

<sup>518</sup> Howarth, R.G., 'Two Radio Plays', 'Writer and Reader', *Southerly*, No. 1 of 1946, p. 38.

<sup>519</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>520</sup> Sharkey, M., op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>521</sup> Rees, L. op. cit., p. 216.



it engages world attention. In these six stanzas of seven unrhymed lines each, Stewart introduces his major images: flame, death, blizzard, flesh that is snow, and he ends with a statement that introduces Scott and his party:

Let the dead men tell what they know,  
Let them come to us now, these five men struggling  
Like tough flames on the snow.

(F.S., p. 4)

The Announcer speaks in a number of verse modes that include traditional lyrical verse and free verse with an occasional inclusion of a line or two of conversationally-inflected pentameter such as ‘That a free man should have his choice, / That the Pole keep its cold and the dead stay dead’ (F.S., p.3). Variety holds audience attention. Furthermore, the Announcer, Like a Greek chorus, does not speak in contrast to the conversational mode of the characters Scott, Wilson, Oates, Bowers and Evans; thus, as Flexmore Hudson noted, he gives ‘a philosophical commentary on the action, cunningly linking up the brief scenes and intensifying their meaning and feeling.’<sup>522</sup> Semmler later noted that Stewart had a penchant for philosophising in verse<sup>523</sup>

Stewart demonstrates his lyrical ability in poems spoken by the Announcer:

The confused farewells over,  
The words whirling, lost,  
Over the ice like starlings  
In a dusk bright with frost.

The five men in harness,  
The groups drawing apart,  
The heavy sledge moving:  
The step light, and the heart.

Cut off from all that moves  
Except the Antarctic wind,  
Cut off from all that speaks,  
But not from the song in the mind,

They march and they exult  
In the white shine of the sun,

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<sup>522</sup> Hudson, Flexmore, ‘Reviews: *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover*’, *Poetry*, 15 June, 1945, p. 21.

<sup>523</sup> Semmler, C., *Douglas Stewart*, Twayne, New York, 1974, p. 33.

For the past is lost as starlings  
And the proud future's begun.  
(F.S., p. 6)

Here the rhyming pattern, abcb, is used, making it sound more like the familiar 'poetry' that audiences can respond to, rather than the blank verse style spoken by the main characters in the play. When Oates' efforts to continue are reported by the announcer: 'Stumbling, Oates. Crashing. Scrambling to his feet ... like a stone' (TFS, p. 20), listeners are able to share with the group emotions of anxiety, as well as feelings of hostility towards the nature of Antarctica, while knowing that Oates is walking to his death. However, Howarth remarks:

the Announcer's interpolations, which are both rhymed and unrhymed, fall short of success — where the author, perhaps misled by the example of English experimenters in the radio play, thinks fit to employ complicated rhyme and consonance schemes'.<sup>524</sup>

When Howarth suggests that the Announcer's interpolations 'fall short' of success it seems as though words themselves cannot convey the emotions Scott and his men must have felt at the commencement of the long journey. At the same time, the internal rhyme of 'Falling', 'Hauling', 'Falling', 'Recalling' (F.S., p. 21) effectively evokes the sense of slow progress, and even though Howarth considers 'the rhyme-words do not ring true',<sup>525</sup> they 'convey' anxiety about the future to a listening audience.

Stewart varies the style of the Announcer's 'news report' with a long exposition in iambic pentameter to tell the story of what has become one of the most emotionally moving episodes of the expedition — Oates' walk out into the blizzard and certain death as he speaks his last memorable words, 'Nobody move, / I am just going outside. I may be some time' (F.S., p. 22). The style then changes suddenly from 'They let him go' to seventy-five lines of tense dramatic dialogue. Once again, this apprehension is intensified by Stewart's use of short sentences within a line of verse followed by enjambment, the run-on line:

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<sup>524</sup> Howarth, R.G., op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>525</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

They are silent for a while. They like to play with the notion  
That it hasn't happened, for it seems too monstrous to happen.

...

It is not an easy knowledge. Hard to restrain  
The feeling of guilt and shame though the knowledge they did rightly. (F.S., p. 22)

...

Three living men. And a gap. And the wraith of Evans. (F.S., p. 23)

The tension which caused the group's anxiety then changes to an acceptance of the force of the natural environment as they face the next stage of their journey:

They are rocks, locked in the cold, slowly borne  
On the glacier of their wills, on a long journey,  
Solemn and meaningless. (F.S., p. 24)

Then there is a shift from concrete nouns and words of one or two syllables to abstract nouns — a shift from solidity to intellectual matters. This is followed by three verses of short, sharp lines ending with a significantly single line in which the alliterative 'And a blizzard blowing' is repeated to emphasise the reason for the predicament faced by the remaining characters,

Scott, Wilson and Bowers:

Then they remember  
How close is safety.  
Fifteen miles  
To the depot now,  
The hope of rescue  
Certainty of food;  
Fifteen miles,  
Only fifteen miles.

A day's march once,  
Now far as stars  
And close of madness.  
Six miles to-day;  
Two days, three days  
To the depot now,  
Three days to safety.

Four miles staggered,  
Four miles.  
Eleven to go.  
And a blizzard blowing.  
The shriek of snow  
And three men lying  
Cold in the tent

And a blizzard blowing.  
(F.S., p. 24)

Stewart is careful to keep to the facts in Scott's diary:

Wednesday, March 21. — Got within 11 miles of depot Monday night; had to lay up all yesterday in severe blizzard. Today forlorn hope, Wilson and Bowers going to depot for fuel.

22 and 23. — Blizzard bad as ever — Wilson and Bowers unable to start — tomorrow last chance — no fuel and only one or two of food left — must be near the end.<sup>526</sup>

Although Stewart kept to the facts in Scott's diary, David Bradley and Flexmore Hudson both point out that Stewart made no mention of the thirty pounds of geological specimens which the team carried to the end.<sup>527</sup> Hudson writes that it would seem:

To adventure was enough for him (Douglas Stewart) ... It was *not* enough for Scott ... To beat Amundsen to the Pole was not the chief objective — it was to win new knowledge for science, ... (Stewart) makes no mention of the thirty pounds of geological specimens that they hauled to the very last — one of the sublimest actions of the whole journey. No. Scott is not fairly portrayed — he is shrunken, reduced.<sup>528</sup>

When Hudson refers to Stewart's motif in writing *The Fire on the Snow*, 'Such a struggle as ours / Purely, like flame', he writes, 'Excellent, exciting: but not satisfying to the intellect. Endurance is not enough. What is more important is the clear conceiving of the noblest aim, the sublimest dream for which it is worthwhile enduring all agony and defeat'.<sup>529</sup> Hudson is referring to the specimens, not to the theme of the play, so his criticism misses the point of Stewart's reasons for writing about Scott's endurance and struggle against the climatic conditions Scott talks about in his diary; Stewart's reactions to psychological aspects of endurance and struggle were those of a poet more concerned with the metaphysical struggle rather than with scientific evidence.

The style of language used by Stewart for the Announcer and the style of the

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<sup>526</sup> Huxley, op. cit., p. 594.

<sup>527</sup> Bradley, D., 'Second Thoughts about Douglas Stewart', *Westerly* No. 3, 1960, pp. 23-27. Bradley considers that *The Fire on the Snow* has been overpraised to an absurd extent (p. 23).

<sup>528</sup> Hudson, Flexmore, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>529</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

adventurers differs between formality and purpose. In this respect Julian Croft comments: ‘Because radio was not constrained by the naturalistic demands of the early twentieth century stage, it could represent consciousness. As well, language could be elevated without alienating the audience’.<sup>530</sup> Croft’s comment is apt when applied to the Announcer’s role as he keeps the action moving and reports and predicts the action in a way audiences are familiar with: radio ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’ programs and the conversational idiom that takes the audience out of the radio station and back to the Antarctic where they can imaginatively respond to the action and harsh environmental features:

Oates: I wish they’d give us a surface;  
This is like trying to march on top of a glasshouse.  
Wilson: Birdie amazes me, plodding along without skis.  
Oates: He looks like a cow in a bog.  
Bowers: I feel like one;  
You’ll hear me bellowing soon.  
Oates: Lost your calf?  
Evans: The wind’s cold. It’s a good job there’s the sun.  
Scott: We can’t rely on that for ever. But it gives us  
A flying start, and I haven’t a doubt we shall make it.  
Oates: I wish the sledge would decide to take up aviation;  
It wants to crawl to the Pole. (F.S. pp. 6-7)

Vivian Smith writes that free and direct speech is essential in a radio play: ‘the natural speech rhythms which predominate in Stewart’s verse after the writing of these plays is one of its most striking and persistent features’.<sup>531</sup> The informality of the idiom and the contracted words (‘wind’s’, ‘It’s’, ‘can’t’), as well as the of the humorous simile (‘He looks like a cow in a bog’), allows the audience to empathise with the men’s difficulties and frustration at this early stage of the journey.

Keith MacCartney considers that Stewart:

makes little attempt to differentiate the characters of Scott and his four companions: indeed, without the speech headings it would be impossible to know for the first few scenes which of the five men was speaking. Thus the play resolves itself into a poem divided between six voices rather than drama of characters in action ... it is

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<sup>530</sup> Croft, J., ‘Responses to Modernism’, op. cit., p. 421.

<sup>531</sup> Smith, V., op. cit., p. 403.

clear that the author's aim is to present his actors as 'rocks locked in the cold, slowly borne / On the glacier of their wills, on a long journey' (F.S., p. 24).<sup>532</sup>

One achievement of radio productions such as this is the effect of voice differentiation which avoids the need for the script to include indications of who is speaking at a particular time as in a written drama. Leslie Rees also comments on the 'over-subtlety in the individual presentation of the five men, and at times an absence of clear, distinct interrelation between them',<sup>533</sup> but he qualifies this statement: 'the intensity of telling was such that this lack of separation and of personality conflict in most of the play ... did not, for once, seem to matter' because the important conflicts were between 'men as a group and the elements, between a goal to be won and the struggle against death, between the hope of survival on the ice and glory everlasting in failure to survive'.<sup>534</sup> Clement Semmler concludes that 'Stewart's script does *not* fail in this essential'<sup>535</sup> because the producer provides the necessary contrast.

In his essay 'Tricks of the Trade' (1948), Stewart wrote about the poetic rhythm of some everyday conversation and its effect as drama:

I once heard a man speaking of his home in the country: "The air's so clear — ten miles away at night you can hear the whistle and the train coming into the station. You can hear it going away to Brisbane in the night, and that's ten miles away." Then he went on to rage against the city: "You can feel the air all thick with the people tramping the bitumen up off the roads."

He was speaking with emotion; and, in a line of five stresses, he was talking a quite tolerable poetry:

*The air's so clear — ten miles away at night*  
You can *hear* it going *away* to *Brisbane* in the *night*,  
And *that's* ten miles away.

You can *feel* the *air* all *thick* with the *people* *tramping*  
The *bitumen* *up* off the *roads*.

That is the natural speech rhythm on which all the academic measures of poetry are based.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> MacCartney, K., 'Reviews: *The Fire on the Snow and The Golden Lover*', *Meanjin Papers*, No. 1, 1945, p. 66.

<sup>533</sup> Rees, op. cit., p. 246.

<sup>534</sup> *ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>535</sup> Semmler, C., *Douglas Stewart*, op. cit., 1974, p. 70.

<sup>536</sup> Stewart, D., 1948, 'Tricks of the Trade', *The Flesh and the Spirit*, op. cit., p. 155.

This, then, is Stewart's method of presenting everyday conversation among the men in Scott's party, a mixture of conversational rhythm and varied line stresses. It is 'the rhythm of the awakened emotions, like the beat of the heart',<sup>537</sup> and it is this, even more than the concept of verse drama, that contributes to Stewart's artistic development in response to his experiments with modern language as a response to modernity. Smith notes: 'To move from *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* to *The Fire on the Snow* is to move in two different worlds of language. Both works celebrate endurance and the values of heroic fortitude'; this comment highlights once again the way Stewart uses language as a line of continuity throughout later verse plays such as *The Golden Lover* and *Worsley Enchanted* as 'his words work together to create a world'.<sup>538</sup>

The power of *The Fire on the Snow* as radio entertainment is essentially conveyed by Stewart's language, which is the only method available to the poet, unlike television in which visual aids may be used. This is illustrated mainly by the Announcer whose statements are pared to the bone, so to speak. Whether Stewart is using simple similes, such as 'The surface breaking like glass', or the alliterative 'The snow slowing the sledge' (F.S., p. 7), literal and metaphoric images create an atmosphere of suspense that elicit key issues of conflict between the men and the environment. Stewart had already shown his concern about this conflict (which becomes a line of continuity in later poems) in some of his early New Zealand poetry; for example, in 'A Walk in the Wind' (C.P., p. 287).

Scott's journey to the South Pole begins, like most other journeys, as a physical one, but like the journey undertaken by Voss in Patrick White's *Voss*, this journey is inevitably a psychic one. Antarctica becomes Scott's landscape of the mind, and 'Scott is a psychic

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<sup>537</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>538</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

adventurer and a “voyager” into the Great Emptiness, into the centre, the uncharted land of the human soul, who chooses his fate deliberately’.<sup>539</sup>

There is also the notion of the futility of Scott’s struggle and whether the struggle itself is worthwhile; Wilson sums up the philosophical reasoning behind the struggle in his dying speech:

Such a struggle as ours is living; it lives after death  
Purely, like a flame, a thing burning and perfect.  
(F.S., p. 30)

Here R.G. Howarth confirms the symbolic ideal of struggle in *The Fire on the Snow*: the hero of this radio play embodies the heroic quality in the spirit of man.<sup>540</sup> Keith Thomas perceives this play as being ‘of its time ... Endurance was in the air, the war raged, the Commonwealth required every man to pit his endurance against the enemy’;<sup>541</sup> moreover, he considers the theme of the play is ‘devotion to the ethos of endeavour, endurance, bungling, carrying on, suffering with a stiff upper lip’.<sup>542</sup> The theme of struggle is another line of continuity in Stewart’s drama and poetry that contributes to his quest for truth in the universe; whether it is in Scott’s failure to reach his dreamed-of goal or whether it is in the survival of the tiniest flower, bird, insect or animal which flows through all his nature lyrics. H.M. Green also considers the ideal of struggle in *The Fire on the Snow*: ‘not Scott nor Oates is the hero of the play; the hero is the spirit of adventurous attempt, the heroic quality in the spirit of man’.<sup>543</sup> The heroic aspect as presented by Stewart is not mankind, but must be an abstraction that is lifted above the physical to the higher form of the spiritual, and it is the answer to this question of spirit or the spiritual that Stewart seeks, as he does in *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*.

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<sup>539</sup> Maver, I., ‘Douglas Stewart and the Coleridgean Mythopoesis of his Voyager Poems’, *Readings in Contemporary Poetry*, Peter Lang, Bern, New York, 1977, pp. 60-61.

<sup>540</sup> Howarth, R.G., op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>541</sup> Thomas, K., ‘Fire of Yesteryear’, *Nation*, April 27, 1968, p. 17.

<sup>542</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>543</sup> Green, H.M., op. cit., p. 1183.



Stewart searches for the reason that Scott, or any one of the party, would choose such a foreseeable fate. More than Bowers, Evans, Oates, or even Wilson, who occasionally speaks with authority, Scott questions his own ability to lead, and asks Wilson,

How am I justified,  
Wilson, how am I justified for Oates and Evans,  
And Bowers ... and you? (F.S., p. 29)

While Scott torments himself with guilt, the blizzard rages until, metaphorically, it is the conflict that becomes almost madness in his solipsistic dream. This scene reflects the same situation in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Act 3, scene ii, when Lear's inner torment is reflected in the turbulence of the storm. Stewart does not provide a solution to this dilemma but leaves the audience to its own interpretation; Smith's notion of 'evasive scepticism' as mentioned previously, is relevant here.

Stewart's blizzard imagery expresses conflicts in terms of the forces of nature — not only Scott's inner conflicts, but those of all members of the expedition who are also affected by blizzards, literally and metaphorically. It is as though the blizzard is a beast with 'beaks and talons' (F.S., p. 23) which, after killing Oates (F.S., p. 22), stalks its other prey, the men who have become 'not beasts, but less than men ... Beneath a tree of silence on the ice'. Finally they are in the silence of death, and as Bowers says, 'My God, think of the silence, / Think of the silence' (F.S., p. 27). The 'tree of silence' is reminiscent of the New Zealand landscape where there are trees growing in snow country, a metaphor for a familiar image which the poet also uses in poems such as 'Country of Winter' (C.P., pp. 155-157). In Australia, the 'Snow Gum' (C.P. p. 122) faces the ravages of winter and survives despite the conditions and is included in 'The Birdsville Track' series of poems in which Stewart refers to the sounds of silence. Stewart uses silence as an epitaph which then becomes another line of continuity and an example of Stewart's method of working within the modernism of his times.

When Scott, Wilson and Bowers are in the tent at the last camp, Scott sees himself as



overdoes his own self-doubt, almost indulging in self-flagellation'.<sup>544</sup>

This opinion is based on a letter to Fridtjof Nansen (November 2, 1901): "I am distinctly conscious of want of plan — I have a few nebulous ideas centreing round the main object, to push from the known to the unknown, but I am quite prepared to find that such imaginings of inexperience are impracticable and that hasty and possibly ill-conceived plans must be made on the spot. Thoughts such as these cannot but show me how very much I am removed from the illustrious men who have led successful polar ventures hitherto."<sup>545</sup>

Schoolmaster Leonard Huxley prepared Scott's journals for publication, but he ignored instructions to 'whitewash' Scott from a committee formed in 1913 to handle publicity and finances. The committee comprised survivors of the *Terra Nova* and friends. Lord Curzon, president of the Royal Geographic Society, was chairman. *The Personal Journals of Captain Scott* (1913) contained 'a great many self-critical comments by Scott, some of which would probably have been removed had Scott edited the journals himself, as he intended'.<sup>546</sup> It is evident from these historical records that Stewart recognised the psychological impact in what Fiennes calls 'self-flagellation'.<sup>547</sup> It is also evident that Stewart recognised in these historical records the psychological impact of the journey regarding Scott's self-criticism, and *The Fire on the Snow* is an accurate interpretation of Scott's journal comment in the form of poetic drama.

Scott and the other men in the group are depicted as dreamers, and the fire becomes the attempt to achieve the dream. As Scott lies dying, he tells Wilson that it has been worthwhile: 'I wanted to teach my son / That 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' (F.S., p. 28). The unity of dream and fire symbolises courage, fortitude and endurance, and allows Stewart to develop these themes to a more abstract level surpassing the literal and naturalistic

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<sup>544</sup> Fiennes, op. cit., 2004, pp. 353-354.

<sup>545</sup> op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>546</sup> loc. cit., p. 353. Fiennes writes, 'The original private journals are on display at the British Museum, with copies available to the public, so it is not difficult to compare the original with the Huxley edited version.'

<sup>547</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 353-354.

descriptions of the landscape. They provide the poet with the opportunity to interfuse them with other plays such as *The Golden Lover*. Evans is 'Lost in a nightmare, lost / In the fog of another man's dream' (F.S., p. 16), and the critic John Burrows perceives such dreams, in these plays, as 'mostly confused ... ultimately spurious ... gigantic metaphors for one egoism or another'.<sup>548</sup>

Stewart's concept of the truth behind the images is articulated by the Announcer:

This journey is one man's dream  
As it is one man's burden  
And the man is Scott, the leader.  
The others do what they're bidden,  
Bearing their share of the load,  
But cannot tell what it means.  
Evans, who understood least,  
Was the first to die, a man  
Lost in a nightmare, lost  
In the fog of another man's dream.  
(F.S., p. 16)

The drama ends as Wilson supports Scott, who asks how he is justified for leading the men on this fateful journey:

Wilson:

All of us chose to do it,  
Our own will brought us, our 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,  
And cleaner, too, this simple struggle on the ice.  
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.  
(F.S., pp. 29-30)

James McAuley argues that one theme of *The Fire on the Snow* is 'man's courage and endurance, his capacity to make and abide by an heroic choice, his ability to turn defeat into a victory of the spirit'.<sup>549</sup> Stewart perceives this victory of the spirit as triumph that is 'always defeated, / And then, as we did, triumphs again in endurance' (F.S., p. 30). For Wilson, it is

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<sup>548</sup> Burrows, J.F., 'An approach to the Plays of Douglas Stewart', *Southerly*, No. 2, 1963, p. 100.

<sup>549</sup> McAuley, J., 'Douglas Stewart', op. cit., 1976, p. 436.

endurance that matters: ‘The endurance remains like a fire, a sculpture, a mountain / To hearten our children’ (F.S., p. 30).

Images of ice and fire are continually counterpointed throughout the play as antithetical symbolism of ice and flame, ‘the frozen rigour of the task and the fire of man’s hardihood, “The burning snow, the crags towering like flame”.’<sup>550</sup> R.G. Howarth considers that ‘Only human fire warms the land’ is illustrated by Stewart’s perception of ‘five men struggling / Like dark tough flames on the snow’.<sup>551</sup> Burrows takes the idea of Stewart’s complex fire imagery one step further. Following a discussion of dream imagery in *The Fire on the Snow*, *Ned Kelly* and *The Golden Lover*, he writes, ‘Even if these dreams are ultimately spurious, they are nevertheless both heroic and compelling’,<sup>552</sup> but then he continues, ‘Their almost hypnotic effect can well be seen in terms of Bertrand Russell’s account of the Byronic rebel’:<sup>553</sup>

when passions are roused the prudent restraints of social behaviour become difficult to endure. Those who, at such times, throw them off, acquire a new energy and sense of power from the cessation of inner conflict, and, though they may come to disaster in the end, enjoy meanwhile a sense of godlike exaltation ... The solitary part of their nature reasserts itself but if the intellect survives the reassertion must clothe itself in myth.<sup>554</sup>

Scott does not experience ‘a new energy and sense of power from the cessation of inner conflict’; he takes the conflict to his death.

While Ned Kelly (*Ned Kelly*) and Tawhai (the heroine in *The Golden Lover*) are more clearly Byronic rebels, the question arises whether Scott (*The Fire on the Snow*) is a rebel, and

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<sup>550</sup> Rees, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>551</sup> Howarth, R.G., ‘Writer and Reader: Two Radio Plays’, *Southerly*, No. 1, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>552</sup> Burrows, J.F., op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>553</sup> *ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>554</sup> Russell, B., *History of Western Philosophy*, London, 1946, p. 707. Russell continues to discuss the rebel in the following chapter, ‘Byron’ (pp. 716-721) in which he sees the ‘aristocratic rebel, of whom Byron was in his day the exemplar, [who] is a very different type from the leader of a peasant or proletarian revolt. The aristocratic rebel, since he has enough to eat, must have other causes of discontent ... It is obvious that an aristocrat does not become a rebel unless his temperament and circumstances are in some way peculiar’ (p. 717). Scott does not fit either stereotype, and should not be considered as such, even though Byron wrote, ‘Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most / Must mourn the deepest o’er the fatal truth, / The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life’. It was Nietzsche (in Byron’s opinion) who was godlike, and not a Byronic rebel accorded to Russell by Burrows.

the answer, keeping Russell's definition in mind, must be negative. Burrows is quoting from Bertrand Russell, and 'godlike exaltation' reminded him of Russell's version of the 'concept of the Byronic rebel'.<sup>555</sup> While one would agree with Burrows in his comment about fire imagery and endurance, it seems his references to 'godlike exaltation' and the Byronic hero / rebel are too extreme and somewhat confused in relation to Scott. Scott is not 'godlike' in the same way that Russell perceives the concept.

The complex fire imagery noted by Burrows arises from an observation by Scott when the party was preparing for its journey (See also 'Men Who Know Mountains'):

One night I walked to the cliffs alone, and the moon

Was pure and burning on those frozen spires and crags,  
So they leapt like flames. The ice was blazing.  
And the hut, when I came back, was a red island,  
A ship at sea, a fire of human beings,  
Warm and secure. (F.S., p. 29)

Scott's isolation and exaltation created by this experience can be seen here, and Stewart also perceives the exaltation experienced by Oates:

Oates in the pool of remembering.  
And clambering out, and like some water monster  
Lumbering ahead through leaves and lanes and lovers —  
Memories, memories, memories, faces like moons,  
Lost in a night that groans of beasts and rivers.  
Falling. Oates. Hauling. Falling in to-morrow,  
Recalling yesterday and suddenly finding to-day  
When comrades look at him with eyes of sorrow  
And the mind holds like a pebble the thought of dying,  
Curious, cold. Then black, shrieking of water,  
Reeking of water, breaking, rocking with sea.  
Oates, walking on ice, walking in the whiter  
Exaltation of death. (F.S., pp. 20-21)

Scott's observation, together with the solitariness he experiences and the fire imagery Stewart employs, are also closely related to Stewart's own observations of the effect of the sun shining on the snow on New Zealand mountains. Fire imagery also represents a secondary

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<sup>555</sup> Russell, B., *ibid.*, p. 707. 'It was my friend, Mr. R.S. Wallace, who reminded me of Russell's version of the concept of the Byronic rebel', Note 4. p. 102.

purpose in *The Fire on the Snow*. As Semmler states, it enables Stewart to ‘develop his awareness of the forces that direct, even impel, men and women to behave as they do’.<sup>556</sup>

For Stewart fire can represent the truth that man seeks, the courage that inspires him to seek it, and his endurance of inevitable but victorious defeat — which is often seen as fire ... centrally and constantly, fire above all represents the godlike exaltation of the dreamer.<sup>557</sup>

Here ‘godlike’ comes from suffering and agony, ‘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 out into joy’.

It is clear that Scott is, indeed, the hero of Stewart’s *The Fire on the Snow* and his character corresponds to some degree with Camus’ concept of the hero: ‘If he wants to feel alone, it must be in the terrible exaltation of a brief and destructive action’ — which Stewart presents as Scott’s questioning of his right to bring the group of men to their personal destruction as an end to the expedition. But Camus continues: ‘exaltation takes the place of truth. To this extent, the apocalypse, or revelation, becomes an absolute value in which everything is confounded,’<sup>558</sup> but as Scott mentions above, their story of endurance and agony which must be endured ‘until agony itself is beaten into joy’ (F.S., p. 28) that is exaltation.

Scott’s dream has been shattered, but in the end he is ‘remembering / The burning snow, the crags towering like flames’ (F.S., p. 30). In *The Fire on the Snow* there are two major issues: human endurance in light of environmental factors and humans against themselves, portrayed by Stewart as Scott’s inner conflict by which he questions his own ability to lead. Stewart’s interpretation of Scott’s diary entries is emotive, particularly when, as Tom Griffiths suggests, Stewart ‘imaginatively entered the tent’ in *The Fire on the Snow*

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<sup>556</sup> Semmler, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>557</sup> ibid., p. 102-3.

<sup>558</sup> ibid., p. 33-34.

while Scott remembers ‘The burning snow, the crags towering like flame’.<sup>559</sup> It is clear that Stewart acknowledges Scott and his party with honour in images of the eternal flame of remembrance. In contrast to Stewart’s portrayal, Griffiths refers to Roland Huntford who, in his book *Scott and Amundsen*,<sup>560</sup> debunks Scott as ‘that model of British moral and physical courage, that tragic, frozen hero — (as) a vain and incompetent fool’.<sup>561</sup> Clearly, Scott had doubts about his own leadership ability (as mentioned above), but Huntford goes too far with his accusations. One wonders whether this accusation is entirely fair or whether some blame for failure should be placed directly at the feet of the organisers of the expedition. Fiennes suggests that Huntford ‘damned Scott in the eyes of his readers through selective omission’.<sup>562</sup> A significant omission was the rock specimens that provided key evidence in the early theories of continental drift and the concept of a ‘Great South Land’, a Gondwanan super-continent that linked Australia, Antarctica, India and South America.<sup>563</sup>

Despite Huntford’s accusations, Fiennes and others support Scott and his men for their courage in that hostile environment. *The Fire on the Snow* is, as Wilde et al. comment, ‘remarkable for its radio drama technique and for its skilful verse variations, which range from the colloquialism of the blindly-struggling mortals to the solemn tones of the announcer reporting the progress of their fate’.<sup>564</sup> It is this that makes *The Fire on the Snow* a memorable poetic effort.

Whereas *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* is an extension of Stewart’s bitterness against those responsible for death and destruction and the dehumanisation of innocent people; in *The Fire on the Snow*, bitterness has changed to a more objective study and treatment of Scott’s

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<sup>559</sup> Griffiths, T., ‘Latitude: Scott to the Antarctic and Diaries’, *Journal of Contemporary Analysis*, Vol. 70, No. 6, November-December., 1998, pp. 20-25.

<sup>560</sup> Huntford, R., *Scott and Amundsen*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1979.

<sup>561</sup> Griffiths, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>562</sup> Fiennes, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>563</sup> Griffiths, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>564</sup> Wilde et al., op. cit., p. 258.



expedition to the South Pole. Oliver Reid writes that while *The Golden Lover* ‘glows with bright colour and the bush growth of a New Zealand setting’, images and symbols in *The Fire on the Snow* are the ‘cold, clear, dazzling white austerity of a limitless vista of snow and ice’ — the two plays are ‘the direct antithesis to each other’.<sup>565</sup>

## 2. *The Golden Lover*

The poet’s mood lightens in *The Golden Lover: A Radio Play* (1943), as Tawhai’s inner conflict with her own desires and states of belonging becomes a comedy with serious undercurrents. Stewart explains:

This play is not merely a comedy of love, or an evocation of New Zealand, or the dramatization of a Maori legend; it also seeks to express what I must call a view or a vision of life. It is a mistake to interpret it merely on a realistic level ... symbolism and realism are inextricably entwined in the play and on its deeper, symbolic level, Tawhai’s choice is not between her husband and her lover but between the life of the earth and the life of the sky—the immortal splendour which we can perceive or realize here only in flashes ... Whana is, ultimately, not real, not human, a fairy, a symbol of the spirit.<sup>566</sup> “Come home to life”, says the *tohunga* to Tawhai at the end. It is a play about the acceptance of life.<sup>567</sup>

In 1946 R.G. Howarth wrote, ‘Small faults aside, however, *The Golden Lover* must stand high — delightful to read, remarkably effective as a stage or radio piece. Its harmonious blend of earthiness, humour, fantasy and poetry, its technical excellence, distinguish it in recent writing’.<sup>568</sup> Whether a modern twenty-first century audience would accept this verse play as described by Howarth, is debatable, particularly when one considers changes in social

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<sup>565</sup> Reid, O., ‘Douglas Stewart: Poet, Playwright and Critic’, *Tasmanian Education*, Education Department, Hobart, 1963, p. 244.

<sup>566</sup> Reid, op. cit., p. 244. Reid refers to Whana as a ‘god’.

<sup>567</sup> Stewart, *Five Plays*, op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>568</sup> Howarth, op. cit., p. 42.

values and the effect of modernist literature presented in novels, the movie industry and television interpretations of real-life themes of adultery — readers of literature and movie or television audiences are no longer shocked by themes of morality; as Stewart says, ‘It is a play about the acceptance of life’.<sup>569</sup>

When *The Golden Lover* (produced by F.D. Clewlow) was broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Melbourne, in 1943,<sup>570</sup> Stewart had been living and working in Australia as a New Zealand expatriate for four years. During this time he became interested in learning more about Australian myths and legends, an interest encouraged by his Australian born father during Stewart’s childhood in New Zealand. With the idea of myths and legends in mind, and remembering those of his native New Zealand, Stewart wrote *The Golden Lover* based on the mythical faery people, the *patu paiarehe*.<sup>571</sup>

Julian Croft perceives radio productions as unconstrained by the demands of the early twentieth century stage, ‘language could be elevated without alienating the audience: time, too, could be easily juggled, and fantasy and hallucination accommodated’.<sup>572</sup> He further suggests that Stewart ‘could be seen as responding positively to some of the currents of modernism; furthermore, techniques of the experimental stage (based on German expressionism) can be seen in Stewart’s radio play’, and he further suggests that ‘The major outlet for the poetic imagination in dramatic form during the 1930s and 1940s was radio’.<sup>573</sup> It was not until Stewart’s *The Fire on the Snow* that Australian writers also became interested in writing for radio. *The Golden Lover* marks a further development in Stewart’s poetic work as he continued to embrace modernism, thus pointing to later works such as *Glencoe*, *Worsley*

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<sup>569</sup> Stewart in Sykes, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>570</sup> Lane, op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>571</sup> Stewart, *Five Plays*, p. 216.

<sup>572</sup> Croft, J., op. cit., *Modernism*, p. 421.

<sup>573</sup> *ibid.*, p. 421.

*Enchanted* and ‘Terra Australis’, in which attainment of higher levels of language than in earlier work together with technical quality of form, rhythm and abstract thought marked mature development in these later works.

Although *The Golden Lover* is a comedy in verse, the language used by Ruarangi and Tawhai (a married couple) is not comic — it is formal throughout and maintains the dignity of the Maori, and Standard English is coloured with some elements of Maori oratory (TGL, pp. 39-40). Stewart would have had access to, or already have known such collections of Maori lore such as Cowan’s *Fairy Folk Tales of the Maori* mentioned in the Announcer’s introduction to the play. Other collections of Maori lore include those of Sir George Grey,<sup>574</sup> John White,<sup>575</sup> E. Shortland,<sup>576</sup> J. McGregor.<sup>577</sup> Translations of Maori stories and poems include those by Elsdon Best, and Sir Peter Buck.<sup>578</sup>

Stewart again uses the Announcer to introduce the myth in the same way that he used an Announcer to introduce *The Fire on the Snow*:

The story of Tawhai and her golden lover, Whana, of which this play is a free interpretation, is told in James Cowan’s *Faery Folk Tales of the Maori*.<sup>579</sup> Tawhai was a young Maori woman and Whana was a man of the patu paiarehe, meaning ‘people of the mist’, the faeries of Maori legend. Quite possibly it is a true story, for, if the rationalistic explanation is accepted, the patu paiarehe, as a fair-skinned red-haired people of different origin from the Maoris, once really existed as a wild tribe of the forest. There are Maoris to-day who are proud of patu paiarehe blood in their veins, and who have light complexions and auburn hair to prove it. On that

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<sup>574</sup> Grey, Sir George, *Nga Moteatea: Poems and Chants of the Maori*, R. Stokes, Wellington, 1853.

<sup>575</sup> Foster, B.J., ‘White, John’, *Ancient History of the Maori, An Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, ed. A.H. McLintock, Government Printer, Wellington, 1966.

<sup>576</sup> Shortland, E., *Maori Religion and Mythology*, London, 1882. No publisher mentioned.

<sup>577</sup> McGregor, J., *Popular Maori Songs*, Auckland, 1902, and many others. No publisher mentioned.

<sup>578</sup> Note: Elsdon Best (1856-1931) was a soldier who was interested in the Maori War in the 1860s and its aftermath; he dedicated his life to recording aspects of Maori Culture and learning; many of his pamphlets and monographs were published by the Dominion Museum. Sir Peter Buck (1877-1951) was a medical doctor and anthropologist who wrote copiously on Maori culture from 1922 until his death. He was a member of the Ngati Matunga people. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, retrieved from [www.dnzb.govt.nz](http://www.dnzb.govt.nz) 15 January, 2010.

<sup>579</sup> Cowan, J., ‘Whanawhana of the Bush’, *Fairy Folk Tales of the Maori*, Holcombe & Tombs, 1925, (location unstated), pp.55-64. Retrieved from New Zealand Electronic Text Centre, <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-CowFair-t/-body-d4.ntml>. Stewart considers the Hinemoa and Tutanekei is ‘the Maori equivalent of the Hero and Leander legend’, (Stewart, *Five Plays*, p. 215).

(Note the difference in spelling. Stewart writes ‘Faery’ and *NZETC* records ‘Fairy’).

basis of fact is built this fantasy of Tawhai's yearning for what she will call

*The golden hawk  
Who hangs in the sky of my dreams.*<sup>580</sup>

*The Golden Lover* begins with marital discord. Tawhai and Ruarangi argue about whether Tawhai is lazy or whether it is Ruarangi's right as a husband and warrior to sleep late and expect Tawhai to collect and cook an eel for his breakfast. He reminds her of the Maori custom:

But also by custom  
It is not your place to speak to me of such things.  
You are young, and have much to learn.  
(T.G.L., p. 34)

While he develops this discordant story, Stewart also develops the play's characters. The myth of the patu paiarehe continues while Ruarangi has his breakfast. Tawhai tells Ruarangi about her emotions when she went to the river at sunrise:

I was frightened, Ruarangi, at the river this morning,  
Except for myself and the birds there was no one there  
And the white mist had not gone back to the bush.  
Who knows that the faery people, the people of the mist,  
Do not come down from the mountain, from dark Pirongia,<sup>581</sup>  
When the mist comes down, and move about in our fields? (T.G.L., p. 35)

Ruarangi is a self-deceiving, self-centred Maori 'warrior' with delusions of grandeur; Tawhai, the pretty and self-possessed heroine of the play. Stewart creates portraits of these two characters through vivid imagery; for example, Tawhai develops Ruarangi's appearance by using occasional descriptive statements:

Tawhai:            You gurgled and whistled all night like a boiling spring.  
  
Ruarangi:        I have never snored in my life. I have known myself  
For longer than you have, remember.  
(TGL., p. 34)

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<sup>580</sup> *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>581</sup> 'Dark' symbolism in Maori legends represents the unknown rather than evil. Whiro is the lord of darkness, or the embodiment of all evil. He inhabits the underworld and is responsible for the ills of all persons. His opponent is Tane, Lord of the Forest. Retrieved from [kotiro.pretermichaud.com/research/gods-and-goddesses/whiro](http://kotiro.pretermichaud.com/research/gods-and-goddesses/whiro) 16 January, 2010. Douglas Stewart wrote 'Tanemahuta', 'Tree beyond all the trees!' and 'presence of Tane' (C.P., pp. 90-92).

Although the simile ‘like a boiling spring’ adds emphasis to Tawhai’s description of Ruarangi’s snoring habit, the language is simple and realistic; it suggests disruption and irritation, and the listener readily conceives images of this older man married to a younger woman. As Tawhai tells Ruarangi that she is frightened to go to the river, her husband reveals his own weakness by criticising his wife in Maori vernacular:

This is a fine talk to talk to a husband  
At his peaceful breakfast, Tawhai. This talk of devils.  
I am a warrior, and I do not like to be frightened.  
(TGL., p. 36)

During their conversation Tawhai tells Ruarangi he is lazy, then that he is jealous (TGL., p. 37), but it is Ruarangi who ironically describes himself:

After all, you are married to me; which is an honour.

...  
Hurry to the fields, Tawhai,  
Lest you be the last at work, and I am disgraced.  
(TGL., p. 37)

...  
I, myself  
Have many a time walked almost as far as the field  
And sat on the hill and watched you women toiling.  
Nothing could be more refreshing. And healthy, too.  
It will make you strong. (TGL., p. 38)

The comic element in the way Stewart characterises Ruarangi then changes to a more sinister mood as Tawhai suggests that he could cook his own dinner if she is late from working in the fields:

Ruarangi: I, a warrior!  
The son of a warrior  
And the grandson of a warrior  
And the great grandson of a warrior  
And the great great grandson of a warrior  
And the great great great grandson of a great great warrior indeed!  
To do the work of a woman. Take that!  
[slaps her]

(TGL, pp. 39-40)

This mimics classic Maori recounting of one’s genealogy; Stewart is very close to his ‘originals’:

Tawhai: Oh!

Ruarangi: From a woman I will suffer much, expecting no more  
Than a man should expect from a bird or a female dog —  
A song, that is, or puppies; but I will not suffer  
Insult, Tawhai, to the dignity of a husband.  
No! take that!  
[slap] (TGL., pp. 39-40)

It could be argued that Tawhai deserves Ruarangi's explosive verbal abuse, but there is a critical element in this passage as Stewart develops a feminist theme which began in the late 1800s, that seems to pre-empt the feminist movement of the 1960s in which protest against violence towards women remains a major theme. At the same time, it also reproduces the older conflict of equality between strong-willed women and men in Maori life. Tawhai ends the scene with a determined 'I shall do what I please' (TGL., p. 40). Her self-assertion and her dissatisfaction with domestic life 'further prepares her to receive the Golden Lover'.<sup>582</sup>

In Scene 2, Tawhai's portrait is painted by the other women in the village:

Koura (to Wera):  
Your daughter of the proud breast and the mouth of love  
And the fierce high-curving nostrils.  
(TGL., p. 43)

...

Wera: You who are young and shudder from the Maori shark-oil

...

Tawhai: How dangerous it is to be so lovely.  
I wish I were fat as you, or skinny as Koura;  
Although, of course, it is lovely to be so lovely.  
(TGL., p., 46)

Whana is the golden lover, 'a man of the patu paiarehe' (TGL., p. 33), Chief of the faeries of Maori legend, who is introduced by Koura, an old woman, friend of Wera, Tawhai's mother:

His hair was flame,  
He was tall as a totara-tree; and the mist all round him;  
And round me, too, wet and silver on my skin  
Like the very cloak of witchcraft. On my wrists and ankles  
Cold, the bonds of enchantment. And I breathed it, Wera,  
The mist he breathed and exhaled from his demon body

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<sup>582</sup> Howarth, R.G., 'Two Radio Plays', op. cit., p. 41.

Like dank leaves burning in my nostrils, the air of enchantment.  
(TGL., p. 41)

...

Tawhai: Eh, was his hair red and his skin like gold?  
Was he tall and strong and fierce?

Koura: Aye, he was tall.  
Tall as a totara-tree was this man of the mist,  
With the mist around his shoulders like a cloak  
And his body strong and golden and his hair like flames.  
Taller and stronger than any man of the Maoris  
And fierce, and his eyes flashed, and his arms were long  
And he leaped towards me and made a sound like laughing  
(An evil spell, no doubt) and I covered my eyes  
And howled and ran. And again he made that sound  
Like the laughter of devils, and shouted enchantments at me. (TGL., p. 45)

The image Stewart creates here, of a big man using scare tactics to frighten an old woman is humorous in context. It relies on the supposed superstition inherent in the Maori culture, and Koura's perceived 'enchantments' are not metaphysical or even mystical, but merely Whana's attempts to be left alone by the village people.

In *The Golden Lover* as in *The Fire on the Snow*, Stewart follows the radio 'convention' that 'what cannot be seen should be suggested in words', and, Sykes adds, 'by the end of the play one has a clear though no doubt highly individual vision of what it (the village gathering for the meeting of Tawhai and the Tohunga) looked like; the characters ... the setting'.<sup>583</sup> In Scene Two, Stewart's tone and mood changes to one of mystery — the Maoris wonder about this man, surrounded by mist (perhaps he *is* the mist) 'like the very cloak of witchcraft' with his 'demon body' and his 'air of enchantment' (TGL., p. 44). 'His hair was flame' is not only descriptive — it is an early inference that he is a man of passion; all images of fire in the play are central to *The Golden Lover* as they are in Stewart's other plays and poetry. Images of fire and flame are consistently part of Stewart's personal 'vocabulary' as Burrows suggests, 'the extent of his departure from the literal and naturalistic are still more

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<sup>583</sup> Sykes, A., op. cit., p. xxii.

clearly displayed between play and play of these leading images'.<sup>584</sup> They thus provide unity throughout Stewart's work, despite the variation in themes and the way in which these images are used.

Throughout *The Golden Lover* the major images of fire and dream are intermingled and cannot be separated, but other images such as shark oil, the symbol of protection, are also relevant in this Maori context. Fire imagery does not apply to Whana alone.<sup>585</sup> Tawhai's passion for life and love are evident, especially when she tells Wera how lovely she is ('How dangerous it is to be so lovely. / ... / Although, of course, it is lovely to be so lovely' (TGL., p. 46), and that to remain lovely and desirable she does not want to work in the kumara fields or cover herself with shark-oil.

Ruarangi tries to warn Tawhai of the people of the mist who dislike the smell of the Maori cooking pots and shark-oil:

Ruarangi:  
It would not be safe for you who alone in the village  
Refuse to anoint yourself with that pleasant oil  
We squeeze from the dead sharks, and the smell of which,  
Like the smell of our cooking pots, for some strange reason  
The faery people dislike. The shark-oil, Tawhai —

Tawhai:  
Ruarangi, I do not wish to hear about shark-oil.  
I am not a shoal of fish. I am a woman.  
...

Not now or any time. I should be ashamed  
If a man with the wild red hair who chanced to see me  
Should have to run from my beauty, holding his nose.  
(TGL., pp. 38-39)

At the end of Scene Two, Tawhai and Tiki introduce Tawhai's dream:

Tiki:  
Look at the mist on the water.

Tawhai:                   It is like a dream.  
The silver water shining on the silver mist

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<sup>584</sup> Burrows, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>585</sup> Sykes, op. cit., p. xxii.



And the moon bright in the sky.

Tiki:                   It is not like a dream  
To be running behind you and never catching up.  
(TGL, p. 49)

This introduction is followed by the appearance of Whana:

Tiki:                   The patu paiarehe!  
He is tall as a tree. Golden! His burning hair!  
Flame from the darkness — run, Tawhai, run!  
(TGL., p. 49)

In these exclamatory statements the dream and the Maori legend have become reality as the symbolism of the golden flame links this scene with Scene Four. In *The Golden Lover* radio presentation, there is only language to convey ‘the illusion of his romantic perfection’ which, Harold J. Oliver writes, makes it easier for the listener to find, if he pleases, ‘a development through symbols of this theme that the perfect lover is merely the creation of the romantic mind’.<sup>586</sup>

Whana:  
You have dreamed about me. All your life you have dreamed.  
I know you, Tawhai. You have had lovers, a husband,  
And lovers and a husband they were not to be despised;  
But always beyond them, Tawhai, there was a dream.  
...

But who did you lie with in your dreams? With your golden lover!  
(TGL., p. 61)

Whana’s appeal to Tawhai modulated by a ‘golden’ voice speaking in words with long vowel sounds, and the regular iambic rhythm takes on a persuasive tone; Tawhai is caught in a web of desire:

Tawhai:                   How unfair you are!  
How can you say I am free and tell me to go  
When you know you have fastened me here with your wicked spells?  
Your hair is dark fire, and you lean above me  
Like column of golden moonlight, and your hands are strong.  
You have muttered some charm and bewitched me.  
(TGL., p. 62)

In this way, Stewart ‘can turn to his own advantage the fact that this new form of (radio) drama

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<sup>586</sup> Oliver, H.J., ‘Douglas Stewart and the Art of the Radio Play’, p. 194.

lacks the solid flesh'.<sup>587</sup> Oliver points out:

Stewart, like other good radio dramatists, can turn to his own advantage the fact that this new form of drama lacks the solid flesh. What cannot be seen can always be, and often must be, described — and as the Elizabethan drama so brilliantly demonstrated, description can be a dramatic virtue. Stewart's plays show that lack of scenery, for example, is no handicap if the author is skilful enough to paint his scene in words.<sup>588</sup>

Although Tawhai can be perceived as immoral, she is also a victim of Ruarangi's stupidity and a marriage without love, and as a result, she rebels, but she can be forgiven for her dream and her response to her dream lover. Whana, unlike Ruarangi, is sensitive to Tawhai's desires and tells her:

You have dreamed about me. All your life you have dreamed.  
I know you, Tawhai. You have had lovers, a husband,  
And lovers and a husband they were not to be despised;  
But always beyond them, Tawhai, there was a dream.  
You lay, I know you have lain, with your lover in the bracken,  
But who did you lie with in dreams? With your golden lover!  
With a tall man like a shadow on the fringe of the morning  
Who turned and was gone before you could ask his name.  
With a golden lover haunting the fringe of your dreams  
Laughed and was gone and left you forlorn and angry  
In the depths of your heart, and hungry — hungry, Tawhai.  
Look in my eyes and be glad. You cannot be frightened.

(TGL., p. 61)

The dream imagery here emphasises Tawhai's dissatisfaction with her life; she is 'angry and forlorn ... and hungry — hungry, Tawhai', an inner conflict that only her golden lover can satisfy. Tawhai's dream is her own dream, but it is the beauty of Stewart's lyrics that supports the dream; they (the lyrics) create atmospheric and auditory effects which, according to Bradley, 'reinforce his rather thin plots by a pattern of moods',<sup>589</sup> as in the following:

Whana:                                 When the tui sings,  
The bell through the green of the forest, clear and deep,  
Some form arises trembling among the music  
Like a silver ghost, my darling. You are that ghost.  
When the kowhai breaks into flower and the honied blossoms  
Your hair and your hands, your heart of the spring and its flowers.  
A green spirit in the forest, a dark in the earth,

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<sup>587</sup> *ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>588</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>589</sup> Bradley, D., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

A fire of silver burning now with the stars —  
Tawhai, Tawhai, you all the earth and the heavens.  
(TGL., p. 63)

By analogy and metaphor, Whana supports Tawhai's dream, but at the same time, his statement that she is 'the earth and the heavens' elicits a conflict not only in Tawhai's character but also in her own earthliness, 'You are not a woman beside me but the earth burning ... Fire of the sky in your spirit, / Fire of the earth in your body!' (TGL., p. 63). FitzGerald suggests 'something of the philosophical outlook of the author is inevitably discovered in the characters; so that in the plays too we get the same feeling of the part becoming the whole,'<sup>590</sup> and when Whana tells Tawhai: 'you *are* all the earth and the heavens' (TGL., p. 63), FitzGerald believes that *The Golden Lover* has 'an underlying symbolism of mankind's identity with the life of the earth itself'. Furthermore, FitzGerald suggests recurrence of this philosophy indicates 'a static rather than a developing outlook'.<sup>591</sup> The underlying symbolism identifies humankind with the life on earth and earth itself, much in the way that Stewart develops his philosophical themes in 'Sun Orchids and The Birdsville Track', where the poet's sense of spiritual unity with nature emerges.

Tawhai knows she can never belong to the *patu paiarehe* because, as she says, 'I am Tawhai indeed. Tawhai of the Maori people, / And you are Whana of the *patu paiarehe* ... I cannot leave my people'. Although Whana says, 'But you must, Tawhai', she realises she belongs to the earth as a Maori:

I cannot leave them for ever.  
Never again to see the little whares  
And the smoke of the fires and the fields where I worked with the women,  
Never again to see all the people I know —  
I could not bear it, Whana.  
(TGL., p. 64)

At this point the radio audience knows that Tawhai will return to the pa, as she tells Whana

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<sup>590</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., 1963, pp. 41-42.

<sup>591</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41-42.

‘You are all the world, but you cannot be my home’ (TGL., p. 64). The plot is complicated by Tawhai’s indecision — whether to stay with Whana or return to her Maori home: ‘In myself, of course, it is only you I want. / But my wretched Maori blood keeps interfering’ (TGL., p. 66), and she suggests that she could spend the days in the village and return to Whana at night. V.E. Koshey refers to this unusual arrangement as a ‘reconciliation of the contraries’, those of adventure and security, romance and communal bonding’, but when Tawhai is forced to make a final choice between Whana and Ruarangi, she realises that ‘she cannot live life on her own terms and the reconciliation of the contraries is impossible’.<sup>592</sup> Her inability to cut herself off from her Maori roots is a central part of *The Golden Lover* insofar as it indicates her earthliness, and Tawhai’s conflict becomes that of earth versus fire or complete acceptance of her Maori background and rejection of her fire of passion. Whana does not like the idea of Tawhai’s returning to the village at daybreak — it would be ‘Death in the reeking village! / The death of love. They will put their mark upon you’ (TGL., p. 67).

It is also Whana who makes Tawhai aware of the life of the typical Maori woman:

There where the women  
Grow shapeless with childbirth and gross with middle-age  
And bowed and bent and broken with toil in the fields;  
Where the smoke of the cooking-fire stains and begrimes their faces  
And the stench of the cooking-fire fouls their skin and their hair;  
Where their fingers grow blunt and dirty with grubbing in the earth  
And their fingernails are broken. You, my heron,  
To grovel in the dust and ashes!

(TGL., p. 64)

Whana’s argument is persuasive, but faced with her choice, Tawhai tells Whana, ‘I cannot choose. / I am fire for you; but when I was born I was earth’ (TGL., p. 78). When the morning star fades in the east, a new day is born and Tawhai says she must go to the Maori village ‘Once more, to look at it all, to see them all, / Once more to say farewell, then never again’

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<sup>592</sup> Koshey, V.E., ‘Reconciliation of Contraries: Douglas Stewart’s *The Golden Lover*’, *New directions in Australian Literature: Papers of the Inaugural Conference of the Asian Association for the Study of Australia*, ‘Creative Configurations’, 2000, Prestige Books, New Delhi, pp. 423-424.

(TGL., p. 87). Whana knows she is returning to the earth, 'The fire has gone out in the east'

(TGL., p. 88) and Tawhai's dream has ended.

In Scene Five when Tawhai returns to the village, she tells Ruarangi her plan:

So I thought of my plan. I talked till I made him agree.  
He did not like it at all, but I told him plainly  
That, bewitched as I was, only on my own terms  
Could I overcome my repugnance to the faery people

...

All day I am yours  
To admire and talk to, and then at night I am his  
To endure as best I can his insulting behaviour.  
I shall suffer it all for you. At first, Ruarangi,  
You will find it a little strange; I do myself.  
But soon you will grow resigned; I am resigned.  
Let us look on the happy side. And you know, Ruarangi,  
Even to have to look on a man of the mist,  
In spite of his beautiful hair, would make me sick,  
Were it not for his wicked spells. I am quite bewitched.  
My will is as water before him.

(TGL., p. 72)

Ruarangi is infuriated at the idea: 'It is death for him this morning ... I will kill this Whana'

(TGL., p. 73), and Tawhai asks him, 'Would you touch a woman bewitched? You dare not do

it! / You will fall down dead to the ground and foam at the mouth', but Ruarangi's need to

assert himself as a warrior then becomes farcical, 'Who shall I kill!' (TGL., p. 74). Tawhai's

realism 'forces *him* to face the truth',<sup>593</sup>

Tawhai:

Enough of this talk about killing.  
Stop waving the axe, Ruarangi; you will knock your head off.  
Put it there in the corner. This talk of killing is nonsense.  
You cannot do it; and besides, you do not mean to,  
You know I am not to blame for any of this.  
I told you my will was as water.

(TGL., p. 74)

Ruarangi 'approaches caricature', especially when he insists on the virtue of shark oil, and Stewart's persona criticises Tawhai's morality which, as Howarth implies in his question about Ruarangi, 'would he really say "All this comes from / From a woman refusing to anoint

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<sup>593</sup> Howarth, op. cit., p. 42.

herself with shark oil / And so be decently disgusting to handsome strangers”’.<sup>594</sup>

In his introduction to the play,<sup>595</sup> Stewart refers to Cowan’s depiction of Tawhai who is ‘more distressed at her ravishment than she is in the play, and actually joins Ruarangi in calling in the *tohunga* (Te Kawau) to put an end to her love affair’, and when Ruarangi finds his wife in the forest with Whanawhana (Whana), he finds that Whanawhana

had cast a most powerful spell upon her: the effect of this was that although she would be returned to her husband in the daytime, by night she must become again the bride of the fairy.

The husband and wife returned to their home, but as the evening approached the thick fogs and mists rolled down from the mountains and all in a moment Tawhai-tu vanished from Ruarangi’s gaze. The *patu-paiarehe* had carried her off again.

In the morning Tawhai-tu was returned to her husband in the same miraculous manner. ‘Alas’, she said, ‘I have slept once more with the *patu-paiarehe*. His spell is upon me — my will is as the water of yonder river before his incantations and his fairy *mana*’. And that evening Ruarangi found himself powerless to hold his wife with him: she vanished in a breath with the cloudy coming of her fairy lord; and as before, in the morning, she stood weeping on the threshold of the house on the Waipa bank.<sup>596</sup>

While the major dramatic issue arising from the relationship is conflict, the basis for Stewart’s discourse is morality. An audience’s reaction to an issue such as adultery in the context of literary action, is a reaction to listeners’ or readers’ culture, its myths and beliefs; life experiences also affect an audience’s response. The time when this drama was written can also affect responses to questions of morality, so what may have shocked an audience in the 1940s may hardly be an issue in the twenty-first century. Stewart’s attitude to working within the modernism of the time strengthens his idea of freedom of expression regarding Tawhai and Whana’s love affair; while he is still traditional in his personal philosophy that life should be ordered as finally he returns Tawhai to the Maori life and the earth to which she belongs.

Another issue is truth — is the myth of the faery people fact, or is it just a ‘fairy tale’ in which people can become bewitched? Conflict between Whana and Ruarangi provides

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<sup>594</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>595</sup> Sykes, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>596</sup> *ibid.*, p. 215-216. See also J. Cowan, ‘Whanawhana of the Bush’: A Tale of the Fairy Folk.

Stewart with the means to discuss subtle socio-cultural concerns and, at the same time, creates an opportunity to laugh at these opponents, while the audience is well aware that this is happening contemporaneously.

In Scene Seven, Tawhai has returned to the village and the chorus informs the audience of what is happening around them. Te Kawau (the tohunga, or witch-doctor) believes Whana will come, for Tawhai stands ‘With her head down and her hands at her sides twisting’ (TGL., p. 94). The second woman continues:

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! —  
(TGL., p. 94)

Once more Stewart presents the audience with a description of the scene which, although it is a verbal description for radio, can readily be ‘seen’ as the expectant atmosphere of the situation increases. As all the Maoris wait for Whana to appear, Tawhai stands with Te Kawhau who holds a gourd of shark-oil. She speaks to the crowd and to the audience:

Am I to stand before you  
Shamed, with my head bowed, like a captive woman,  
Like a slave? Women and men of my tribe, hear me!  
I am not ashamed, I stand here in pride before you  
And wait for my lover to claim me, my golden Whana  
Of the patu pairarehe. (TGL., p. 95)

She calls to Whana to come to her, then bids farewell to family and villagers. She asks them not to judge her too harshly but to remember her for her laughter and the way she could make their smiles ‘dance in the sun’ (TGL., p. 96). Tawhai refers to her lover, ‘The golden storm that has washed away my will’ to describe her inner conflict. She argues that she is ‘the sky / Blazing with stars, that is washed away in the morning; / ... light of the moon’ and calls for Whana. In a final stand against the Maori culture which Whana knows is Tawhai’s earthliness, he asks her to:

Look on your father. Look on the man you married,

With whom you have lived in peace. Look on the youth  
Who follows with a dog's eyes your lightest movement.  
(TGL., p. 97)

But Tawhai persists, 'Oh, why do you torment me? I have looked on them all, / And I am yours for ever?' (TGL., p. 97).

Whana makes his mistake as he delivers his long speech instead of walking from the village with Tawhai. Feeling confident he tells Te Kawau, 'Throw down the gourd, / Old man, throw down the gourd. You are wise in enchantment, / But I have the voice of love', but the chorus of voices begs Tawhai to stay. It is not the pleas of the voices that persuade Tawhai to take the gourd but Te Kawau and the power of his argument:

And truth, though it hides, abides.

...

Dreams, Tawhai, dreams.  
The golden dream. It is not Te Kawau you fear,  
Not me, but the truth. And truth is a bitter fruit  
For a girl in love.

(TGL., p. 99)

Stewart knows the truth in this dilemma is that Tawhai's bond with her Maori background is stronger than her dream. Tawhai has always known her life with Whana and the *patu paiarehe* has always been a dream: 'Three nights ... in splendour' (TGL., p. 99). Te Kawau summarises Tawhai's dream while at the same time he emphasises fire imagery. Here Stewart pulls together threads of the play as Te Kawau warns Tawhai that Whana is 'a man / Golden in the firelight, but no fire burns for ever' and impresses on her that she is 'a woman awake' and that she should 'dream no more'. Tawhai knows the truth, that is, that she is a Maori and belongs with her people:

Kawau:  
The golden lover — what is that but the god of a dream? —  
A dream that will break as the day breaks on Pironga.  
You know, and he knows too, it is only a dream,  
A love like another love, the dream of a night  
To fade with the dawn, turn ugly or nothing in a year,  
Or die at the best to the little embers of laughter.

(TGL., p. 99)



Tawhai is now awake from her dream, and when Te Kawau offers her the gourd of oil, she takes it as Whana calls to her, ‘Tawhai, Tawhai, you cannot do this thing. / Put down the gourd!’ (TGL., p. 100).

The women of the chorus describe Tawhai’s surrender:

First woman: Tawhai is lifting the gourd!  
Second woman: She tips the bowl, the oil splashes in her hair  
It runs down her face, her shoulders, all over her body.  
(TGL., p. 100)

Shark oil is ‘the symbol of one’s ideals and one’s past that makes one foul the dream’,<sup>597</sup> and Tawhai is ‘sick and ashamed’.<sup>598</sup> Whana departs with, ‘You will wake in the night, Tawhai, and turn to me. / For the blaze of my love, and your hands will be filled with ashes’ (TGL., p. 101). Te Kawau’s final words are prophetic, and as Stewart’s persona says, ‘It is sad when the dreamer awakes’, and Tawhai says she hates him and everyone else in the village, but when Nukuroa tells Ruarangi, ‘She will soon recover / And smile upon you’, Tawhai’s response is ‘Truly I shall smile on him / If the child is born with red hair’ (TGL., p. 101).

*The Golden Lover* ends on an ambiguous note. When Tawhai exclaims ‘My golden husband!’ (TGL., p. 102), the audience wonders whether she is referring satirically to Ruarangi as her rightful husband, or to Whana, her golden lover who becomes her dream husband and father of her child. Stewart’s language here is typical of the way he makes a statement, leaving it open to interpretation. This is an example of Stewart’s ‘evasive scepticism’<sup>599</sup> that also appears in other works as a line of continuity which contributes to the poet’s central philosophical oeuvre.

Stewart avoids ending *The Golden Lover* on a moralistic note as Tawhai returns to her

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<sup>597</sup> Hudson, F., op. cit., p. 24. Flexmore Hudson suggests here that Stewart may also be using the shark oil of the mercenary compromise with the humdrum world of jobs and home and family. Stewart implies similar ideas in his earlier New Zealand poems, for example, ‘Crowd’ from *Green Lions*, 1936 (C.P., p. 310).

<sup>598</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>599</sup> Smith, V., op. cit., p. 401.

husband and to her life as a Maori, by presenting a modern version of the Maori legend of Hinemoa and Tutanaki as a comedy. He escapes criticism for challenging the traditional male chauvinist stereotype because the audience is sympathetic to Tawhai,<sup>600</sup> whose husband is the ‘warrior’ who does nothing to support this honour and who cripples his wife’s independence and self-respect with physical and mental abuse. As Koshey remarks, Tawhai’s need to escape from Rurangi and society’s inhibitions to freedom and fulfilment ‘finds expression in a more limited and private sphere’. In this reading, Tawhai finds ‘some measure of self-actualization within an inescapable, male-dominated social context’, and her unusual arrangement helps her ‘to reconcile the contraries, adventure and security, romance and communal bonding’.<sup>601</sup> In this challenge to the image of the male ethos, Stewart’s method is to depict character roles and the servile position of women in society. He wrote: ‘we are all in these post-Freudian days expected to investigate the profound personal and psychological necessities that motivate a work of art. I suppose I had better admit that it was some natural interest in the behaviour of women that operated at this point’.<sup>602</sup>

Even though Tawhai’s inner conflict is not resolved in *The Golden Lover*, the audience is entertained by her ‘faery tale’ romance with her golden lover, her dream lover who sets her passion on fire, because they know that in the end she will return to her Maori culture. The final ‘winner’ in this play is, therefore, Ruarangi because the restraining conventions of the society are stronger than Tawhai’s dream. Like Scott in *The Fire on the Snow*, Tawhai is a dreamer; like him she is defeated by a dream. In both *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover*, Stewart’s fire and dream imagery add unity, consistent with his deployment of such

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<sup>600</sup> The audience sympathy is not unlike the reader’s response to Margaret in Mathew Arnold’s ‘The Forsaken Merman’, and one empathizes with Whana as he calls ‘Tawhai, Tawhai’ in the same manner as the Merman calls ‘Margaret, Margaret’. See also R.G. Howarth, op. cit., p. 40, ‘The fable resembles that of the “Forsaken Merman”.’

<sup>601</sup> Koshey, op. cit, p. 423.

<sup>602</sup> Stewart, in Sykes, op. cit., p. 216.

images elsewhere in his poetry.

Stewart's radio verse plays mark a transition between his early New Zealand poetry and his residual nostalgia, and his new life and new work in Australia during World War II. Pybus perceives Stewart as 'an outstanding figure in terms of his artistic imagination and the quality of his writing, even if this reputation rests largely on his *The Golden Lover*', and he articulates the opinions of most critics referred to in this chapter.<sup>603</sup> Sturm also appreciates the predominant images in *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover* as well as those in *Glencoe*, *Worsley Enchanted*, *Ned Kelly* and *Shipwreck* which are not only the physical and metaphysical recurring images of fire and dream, but also in those of the human spirit, 'in the spectacle of heroic aspiration defeated'.<sup>604</sup>

Discussion in this chapter has focused on themes in *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover* that are contrary to each other. Conflicts in each play expand and develop significant issues: in *The Fire on the Snow* it is Scott and his men against themselves as well as man versus the environment, while in *The Golden Lover* it is mythical man and earthbound woman versus traditional society and culture. Both plays are ultimately unified through fire and dream imagery and underlying symbolism of human identity with the life of the earth itself, *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover* illustrate a significant change in Stewart's poetic development which anticipates stronger dramatic effects in his later verse plays such as *Glencoe*, *Worsley Enchanted* and 'Terra Australis', together with long poems of which 'Rutherford' is a favourite of many literary critics.

Stewart won two competitions run by the ABC in the early 1940s with *The Golden Lover* (1943) and *Ned Kelly* (1942): one for a verse play, the other for a play written in any form the author pleased. Referring to the 'apathy or scepticism, if not downright prejudice'

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<sup>603</sup> Pybus, op. cit., p. 250.

<sup>604</sup> Sturm, op. cit., p. 226.

among intellectuals at that time, Leslie Rees wrote in 1945, that Douglas Stewart challenged this attitude and *The Fire on the Snow* brought about changes. In assessing the contribution of radio to Australian drama, Rees adds that *The Fire on the Snow* is ‘an indisputably magnificent piece of writing by an acknowledged poet. It has dramatic passion and suspense almost in spite of itself, and the form in which it was cast was suitable for radio alone’.<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> Rees, op. cit., 1973, p. 210.

## CHAPTER 7

### ‘SUN ORCHIDS’ (1952) AND ‘THE BIRDSVILLE TRACK’ (1955)

... a consistent thread running through the various themes and developing motifs ... he has built up his special world of poetry.

R.D. FitzGerald,<sup>606</sup>

#### 1. Sun Orchids

Stewart’s literary relationship with Norman Lindsay, as well as the aesthetic influence of Springwood and the surrounding landscape on the poet and his poetry were discussed in Chapter 4. In that chapter I conclude that, while he appreciated Lindsay’s critical input and personal response to the poet’s ideas, Stewart denies complete acceptance of Lindsay’s insight or influence. The poems arose from his own intense contemplation of the subjects of his poems such as flowers, insects, birds and small creatures which are presented as the objects themselves, as abstract images, and as stimulus to his creative thought.

Lindsay’s personal philosophy expounded in *Creative Effort* was influenced by Nietzsche’s philosophical thinking, and Stewart adopted the theme that is a struggle to survive in both physical and cultural aspects of the universe; yet he realised there were more profound issues to be explored through poetry, verse plays and prose. At this time (1940s and 1950s), Stewart and other poets such as Kenneth Slessor, R.D. FitzGerald and David Campbell were interested in literary modernism which was popular in Europe and America. Stewart began experimenting with modernism while he worked as literary editor of the Red Page of the *Bulletin*, and Michael Sharkey suggests that Stewart was ‘accommodating himself to modernism throughout his career’;<sup>607</sup> it is noted that the poet’s diverse themes changed from

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<sup>606</sup> FitzGerald, ‘Motif in the Work of Douglas Stewart’, *Elements of Poetry*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1963, p. 27.

<sup>607</sup> Sharkey, op. cit., p.5.

traditional nature lyrics which were often descriptive in style, as in ‘The Green Lions’, with underlying hints of humankind, their needs and contributions to New Zealand society. A greater change in tone and mood occurred after his move to Australia, the focus of which is discussed in this chapter.

Stewart developed his argument about poetry and poetic effort over a fairly long period. His first point of view argued that the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth; therefore, nature and spirit, as well as the spirit of mankind, are unified by this approach. *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* series reflect this philosophy which is considered in later discussions of individual poems in this chapter. Following this early development in his creative writing and his pursuit of higher ideals, Stewart argued that there were many issues related to reactions to human experiences. Social, cultural and economic changes such as World War 2, the atomic bomb, the Cold War and Vietnam were important world-shaking events which changed people’s ways of thinking and behaving; the changes affected not only their everyday lives — they affected intellectual life, and so we find reflections of immense proportions and significance related to literary modernism in Australian literature. Stewart’s reaction involved his attitude towards language use; in referring to *The Fire on the Snow*, he argues that an everyday conversation may contain techniques which can be found in both old and new ballads.<sup>608</sup> Vernacular and colloquial dialogue often contain more profound issues, but direct speech was eventually accepted as ‘poetry’ in ‘Terra Australis’, for example, which Smith refers to as one of Stewart’s ‘best’ poems because of its dramatic dialogue, wit, whimsy and humour.<sup>609</sup>

The third component of Stewart’s argument is to be found in his comment: ‘The language of even the most traditional kind of poetry must change as the language of the nation

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<sup>608</sup> Stewart, *Modern Australian Verse* 2, op. cit., p. xxvii.

<sup>609</sup> Smith, op. cit., p.

changes, or it will no longer be in touch with life'.<sup>610</sup> This is a reflection of the philosophy Stewart developed as a mature poet and playwright, and it rebounds from Yeats' suggestion that poets should use 'the natural words in their natural order'.<sup>611</sup> Stewart's poetic preoccupations formed an argument over time and the lines of continuity produced as a result of this thinking contribute to his total philosophy.

Features of Stewart's central philosophy introduced as lines of continuity in earlier chapters such as *The Dosses in Springtime* are developed and added to in this chapter as the poet experiences new physical landscapes such as The Birdsville Track, and subjects which stimulate his creative thought, are revealed in discussions of a selection of poems in this chapter; this in turn highlights his belief in spirituality and its influence on his creativity. The notion 'If the mind is challenged, it automatically sparks the fuel that will ignite a flow of energetic and unique ideas'<sup>612</sup> is appropriate when applied to Stewart's journey to and observations of the natural environment in the Centre of Australia in 1953. There is a change of tone and mood in many of these poems as Stewart creates a different world of poetry in which more profound issues can be deduced from the language chosen, a dialectic between art, nature and human society. In *Sun Orchids* Stewart questions life's force, 'a continuing thread running through the various themes and developing motifs in his special world of poetry'.<sup>613</sup> He questions its unity and harmony and human relationships with nature. In this way, the poet experiments with a variety of form, and modernist contemplations of his subjects are perceived in poetic development in his later lyrics, longer poems, ballads and verse plays.

The notion of spiritual influence on creativity continues throughout Stewart's work as a

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<sup>610</sup> Stewart, op. cit., p. xvii.

<sup>611</sup> *ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>612</sup> Author unstated, 'Understanding the Psychology of Creativity in Order to Capture Yours', *Psychology of Creativity*, pp. 103. Retrieved from <http://www.todays-women-and-health.com/psychology-of-creativity.html>, 21 May, 2011.

<sup>613</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 43.

line of continuity, a statement of his belief in his own spirituality; he knows that his creative spirit will live on in his poetry and ensure his immortality as in ‘The Flames’ (C.P., p. 270) discussed later in this chapter, in which flames are metaphors for Stewart’s great inner satisfaction with his own creativity which he is reluctant to claim as his own because it conflicts with his idea of spiritual influence and creativity.

As an important contribution to lines of continuity, duality of thought develops more profound issues into the poetry in this chapter, an example of which is ‘The Robin’, in which Stewart describes a delicate bird, but it is also about human ‘need’, ‘To feed the heart’s great hunger’ (C.P., pp. 146-147). Unlike humans who are tied to the earth, flying creatures which appear in poems such as ‘The Bat’ (C.P., pp. 16-17) or ‘The Robin’, as well as flowers and trees are, according to the poet, representative of all spirit, the essence of all creatures including humans; Stewart argues that the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one moves to the spirit of the earth.<sup>614</sup> Other lines of continuity which contribute to Stewart’s total philosophy include the motif of elusive thought; that is, the poet’s thought cannot always be captured and made concrete, and this is discussed in the poem ‘Bird’s-Eye’ (C.P., p. 114) later in this chapter.

Stewart paints a picture; that is he creates images, through his carefully chosen language, of a dialectic between art and the images of nature and society. It is this dimension which is the focus of discussion throughout this chapter (and reiterated in chapters 8, 9 and 10) in which Stewart’s original motif (FitzGerald defines it as ‘the impulse behind the theme, the directive force that develops the thought in a poem’<sup>615</sup>) becomes his philosophy of mankind’s spiritual unity with nature. Stewart’s early perception of his personal philosophy was the ‘one should keep in touch with the earth’, and as mentioned above, the closer one moves towards

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<sup>614</sup> Stewart, ‘Interview with Douglas Stewart’, op. cit., Thompson, p. 193.

<sup>615</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 42.



nature, the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth, eventually to become aware of some underlying reality: ‘the poems are, as I say, an exploration of the truths of the universe’ (J.T., p. 193), which are illustrated in ‘The Green Centipede’: It’s an exploration of the duality of God, of good and evil in the universe’ (C.P., p. 193). This theme becomes another line of continuity which contributes to Stewart’s central philosophy in his poetical oeuvre.

When Stewart wrote the *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* poems, he had been experimenting with modernism in literature<sup>616</sup> which was gaining strength in Australian literary circles at that time. If poems such as ‘The Flames’ appear to have a leaning towards Romanticism, it soon becomes clear that Stewart modernises the language of the lyric form which often carries a profound statement pertaining to both natural and human existence and survival. In the *Sun Orchids* collection, Stewart questions life’s force, its unity and harmony, and whether mankind is part of its rhythms and essence. In *The Birdsville Track*, lyrics that form the first part of the series, there is a difference — a change in tone and mood to a more positive awareness and appreciation of the subjects of his observations such as ‘The Wombat’ and ‘Bird’s-Eye’, ‘Everlasting’ and ‘The Night of the Moths’.

The theme of survival is continued in ‘Spider-Gums’ on Kelly’s Plains, ‘Where winter’s snow and crashing rain / Have forced the snow-gums to their knees’ (C.P., pp. 116-118); the tone and mood enable Stewart to rise above his own subjectivity to maintain an aesthetic quality in his perception of the image itself. This poem, as well as those mentioned above, are discussed later in this chapter, particularly in regard to Stewart’s language use, rhyme and rhythm and how these techniques are developed to provide links between the two texts. In these poems there is evidence of changing attitudes towards the natural environment to include modernist considerations of human life in, and human responses to, that

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<sup>616</sup> Sharkey, M., op. cit., p. 5.

environment, all of which provide a diversity of motifs as lines of continuity which contribute to Stewart's total philosophy. The idea that Stewart's preoccupation with two landscapes is encapsulated in this section: the first is the physical landscape and the way the poet perceived it in his early New Zealand poems as well as in the 'Springwood' poems; the other, the landscape of the mind, is the symbolic representation of observed images which leads to Robinson's perception of 'duality of thought', illustrated in 'The Robin'. While the image is a delicate bird, the poem is also about the human 'need'. This philosophical line of continuity is found in many other poems in *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track*; together with another line of continuity, that of elusive thought, a concept of psychological creativity that contributes to Stewart's central philosophy about nature and humans, is included in longer considerations of Stewart's poetry as this chapter progresses.

Stewart's sense of objects as things-in-themselves in both his prose (for example in *Norman Lindsay: a personal memoir* which includes comments about Springwood) and poetry, especially in *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track*, illustrate his aims to get as close as he can to an accurate account of the objects he observes or, in a musical sense, the music they 'hear' (a line of continuity discussed later in this chapter). Stewart's close observation of phenomena are related to Kant's conviction that the mind acquires knowledge from experience; this principle is further akin to Stewart's perception that 'the mind imposes principles upon experience to generate knowledge'.<sup>617</sup> In Kant's philosophy, while things have an existence in themselves, we can never know things in themselves, but only their appearance; therefore, poets are limited by the language available to them and by the depth of their own imagination. Furthermore, the idea that Stewart presents the subjects of his observations such as birds, flowers, insects and small creatures not so much as objects-as-

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<sup>617</sup> Stokes, P., 'Kant, Immanuel: 1724-1804', *Philosophy: The Great Thinkers*, Eagle Editions, Hertfortshire, 2007, pp. 140-141.

themselves, but as abstract images which are sometimes limited by the language available to the poet. He creates images through carefully chosen language, of a dialectic between art and the images of nature and society. It is this dimension which is the focus of the later discussion of language use in *The Birdsville Track* series.

The concept of verbal 'images' relates to the nature of language and how it mediates everything he (or anyone else) seeks to present, because language can convey different 'images' according to readers' experience of the world as illustrated in respect of 'Flying Ants' together with the idea of 'flittering thought' in 'Firetail Finches' (C.P., p. 53) and 'The Finches' (C.P., p. 110). These are Stewart's symbols of the process of thought, and even though the subjects of his observations and meditations are real, they provide a stimulus for his creative thought; the difficulty the poet faces is how to express these thoughts within the limits of the language at his disposal. It is here that Stewart has built up his personal dictionary of symbols which not only includes traditional symbols of flame, water, snow and other symbols more familiar to readers of traditional poetry, but he also creates his own poetic vocabulary, a grammar of symbols, which, together with his developing interest in the modernism of his times, the reader learns to read as Stewart's personal idiom.

Stewart faces the difficulty of language in presenting the 'reality' of something non-human. This concept of the difficulty and variety of the language, especially in his nature lyrics, contributes to the reasons that sometimes readers feel they perceive the 'message' behind the poet's contemplation, but like the finches, his 'flittering thought' remains undeveloped and results in what Vivian Smith calls his 'evasive scepticism'; that is, the poet's ability 'to see both sides of the question and not commit himself to anything beyond the making of the poem itself'.<sup>618</sup> Smith also suggests that this habit derives from Stewart's work

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<sup>618</sup> Smith, V., *OHAL*, op. cit., p. 401.

as a dramatist.

This chapter focuses on the themes and issues which emerge from the poems in *Elegy for an Airman* (1940), *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* (1941), *Sun Orchids* (1952) and *The Birdsville Track* (1956). In 1967, Geoffrey Lehmann argued that some of the younger poets ‘have perhaps become provincial by attempting to be too cosmopolitan’,<sup>619</sup> but he points out that the Australian landscape has been ‘the chief theme of Australian poetry to date [but] Stewart, like Yeats, is a strongly local poet, who, firmly planted in his own landscape, has been able to reach out to a number of themes outside it’.<sup>620</sup> Chris Wallace-Crabbe writes, ‘The younger poets are too involved in the contradictory post-war years’ to emulate the ‘optimism of Douglas Stewart and FitzGerald, the disciplined clarity of McAuley and Roland Robinson, the political gusto of Manifold: all these qualities are recognizably those of older men’.<sup>621</sup> (See also Appendix 1).

A.A. Phillips suggests that *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* poems, mostly short lyrics as opposed to some longer discursive poems, are sometimes more profound than would appear on the surface.<sup>622</sup> This is often suggested by implication or by the tension that arises between reasoned observation and emotive abstraction; Stewart writes that the art of the lyric, ‘essentially minor but beautiful in its singleness — is to record a moment of vision ... at the utmost intensity of [its] being’.<sup>623</sup> It appears that what Stewart means by ‘minor’ is not so much an inferior or unimportant form of literary technique but rather that the lyrics are a reflection of the image itself, as Stewart tells Thompson: ‘You try to distil the absolute reality

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<sup>619</sup> Lehmann, G., *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 1967, p. 20.

<sup>620</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>621</sup> Wallace-Crabbe, C., ‘Habit of Irony: Australian Poets of the Fifties’, *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1961, p. 174.

<sup>622</sup> Phillips, A.A., ‘The Poetry of Douglas Stewart’, *op. cit.*, 1973, p. 187.

<sup>623</sup> Stewart., ‘The Moment of Vision’, *The Flesh and the Spirit*, *op. cit.*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

of whatever creature you're writing about'.<sup>624</sup> Of course, the humorous 'a quarter of an inch' is not meant to be taken literally, but because each lyric is so compact, its strength comes from the precise use of language and its inferences, so that in one short statement, 'All the arts, as far as I can see, have one great purpose: to reveal the existence of spirit ... The higher arts of poetry, painting and music bring the world of spirit to us by direct revelation'.<sup>625</sup>

FitzGerald believed in the power of the life force, the *elan vital* associated with Lindsay's concept of vitalism: 'To be up and about and moving and ever upon quest / of new desires of the spirit, not sunk in soft'<sup>626</sup> exemplifies the positive poetic common ground FitzGerald and Stewart shared; philosophical inferences contained in the lyrics of both poets include the idea of spirit and the universe. Associated with this notion is that of spiritual abstraction, and this is seen clearly in poems such as Stewart's 'Mare and Foal' (C.P., p. 150); here dream, vision and thought have an identical goal, which unites beauty and tranquil love, but not passion, in the imagery of light.<sup>627</sup> Spiritual awareness is an important area of consideration for FitzGerald also:

With great versatility, then, such as Douglas Stewart's, there will be considerable diversity of motifs, but with a thread of continuity running through them whereby is built up the poet's total statement, his contribution to our understanding of the universe we live in, in terms not of science or philosophy, but of occasions of experience or spiritual awareness.<sup>628</sup>

Paul Kavanagh, too, observes a state of dreaming as a 'heightened state of awareness' in Stewart's poetry.<sup>629</sup> The dream begins with meditation on an orchid or other natural object, then the light in darkness comes with understanding of the power of the image (as in 'Mahony's Mountain' (C.P., p. 168) and corresponds with a consciousness in time. This motif

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<sup>624</sup> Thompson, J., op. cit., 1965, p. xxsvii.

<sup>625</sup> Stewart, op. cit., p. 279.

<sup>626</sup> FitzGerald, R.D., op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>627</sup> Kavanagh, P., 'Preternatural Mimicry: The Lyric Poetry of Douglas Stewart', *Southerly*, No. 3, 1983.

<sup>628</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., 1963, p. 27.

<sup>629</sup> Kavanagh, op. cit., p. 269.

is discussed together with other poems from *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* later in this chapter.

Stewart was individualistic; poems written in the period 1941-1956 reflect this individuality through his close observation of images. One of the most revealing of the poems to emerge from the collection from *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier* is 'The Flames' (C.P., p. 270), a personal poem which can be read on two levels; the first is the way the poem is read literally with a recognition of its structure and language:

When the east reddens my burning begins  
And it feels in me as if autumn had turned crimson  
The dark-green needles of the unalterable pines.  
The flames crack and break me, I cry out for water,  
The streams of my childhood plunging their snow over stones  
And the ferns that sprang like fountains in the black bush ...  
In the blue smoke of mid-day waters and flowers  
Whirl up like sparks, and dust whirls up in the desert:  
Broken with heat and colour I cry out for water,  
The hands of the women who rippled about my youth.  
The dew falls; but the sun, O the sun sets the  
Solid pines and the clouds and rivers on fire.  
Have mercy on my great joy, cool me with your hand,  
For I know that heaven, like hell, is flame without end.  
(C.P., p. 270)

Although there is no traditional rhyming pattern, the fourteen lines ending with a half-rhyming couplet, 'hand / end', it could be classified as a 'Petrarchan' sonnet, but in a sense it tends to modernist practice in its poetic technique and language use. Personal pronouns, 'my', 'me' and 'I', give readers subtle sense impressions that the poet is taking them into his confidence when he tells them 'I cry out for water', 'about my youth' and 'my great joy', so the reader can imaginatively share his experiences. He creates sharp visual images — of dawn, for example: 'as if autumn had turned crimson / The dark-green needles of the unalterable pines', and 'In the blue smoke of mid-day'.

'The Flames' belongs to Stewart's many poems often referred to as 'nature' or 'landscape' verse, but there is another dimension to the poem. The flames of his burning are within the poet — his creative soul is thirsting: 'I cry out for water'; that is, the symbolic

water of life, love and inspiration, or poetic impulse. The poem's mood becomes nostalgic as he looks back to his childhood and 'The streams of my childhood plunging the snow over stones ...'. In line 8 a colon separates two ideas while containing them in the one 'sentence', joining together the dust of the desert of his broken soul, his creative spirit, with his cry for water and the women of his youth<sup>630</sup> who gave him comfort; he also appears to be crying out for the security of home and family he left in New Zealand to come to Australia. In line 11 the sharp, short sentence 'The dew falls' once again indicates the change of time as evening approaches; funereal images of 'dark-green needles of the unalterable pines' are present, the clouds and rivers are lit up by the setting sun and the poet asks for a blessing. Meg Stewart advises that Stewart's mother, Mary Stewart, died in October, 1939.<sup>631</sup> I consider 'The Flames' and 'Distant Music' can be read as personal laments in memory of the poet's mother because of the way his loss is expressed; I therefore refer to the poet directly and avoid the term 'persona'. There are two perspectives in this poem, grief after death and the joy of living; the emotion felt by the poet in this instance cannot be compared with the grief he experiences in 'Elegy for an Airman' (C.P., pp. 275-278) as Stewart's poetic technique had reached a more mature state of development, while his language changes when expressions such as 'Have mercy on my great joy' evokes a powerful master, a godly or spiritual being, even the sun itself, as anthropomorphic beings. Stewart leaves this idea open to readers' interpretations and, because the expressions are ambiguous, readers will subjectively construe their own meanings.

'The Flames' is like a prayer — a talk with a 'creator' who 'paints' these images with fire: 'Have mercy on my great joy'. Flames are metaphors for his great inner satisfaction with

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<sup>630</sup> Although he evades identifying them, it seems as though Stewart is referring here to the New Zealand women poets such as Hyde, MacKay and Bethell who gave him inspiration in his youth, as indicated in Chapter 2.

<sup>631</sup> Interview with M. Stewart.

his own creativity which he is reluctant to claim as his own because it conflicts with another line of continuity — his idea of spiritual influence and creativity. Even though the poet asks to be ‘cooled’, he knows the flames (symbol of his poetic passion) and his burning creativity will continue. This reflects a psychological theme that purports that when one is challenged, as in Stewart’s concern that his muse has deserted him, more ideas will arise in response to this challenge.<sup>632</sup> This is also a clear statement of Stewart’s belief in his own spirituality and the idea of his own immortality, for he says, ‘I know that heaven, like hell, is flame without end’. He also knows that his creative spirit will live on in his poetry, and to reinforce this, like his contemporary, Gwen Harwood, who was a musician and church organist, and who refers to her poem ‘The Sharpness of Death’ which is a line from ‘Te Deum laudamus’, ‘We praise Thee O God’ in the *Anglican Common Prayer*, refers to prayers and responses in the language and style of the Anglican prayer-book, such as ‘Have mercy on us’ and ‘world without end’, as the sacrament brings the prayer to a close. Because the poem ends like a prayer, it suggests a personal belief in a spiritual power, perhaps Stewart’s Muse, or the women of his youth whom he asks to ‘cool me with your hand’, although he does not say this directly. At this stage in his quest for truth and knowledge, Stewart’s ‘creator’ of the beauty in this poem remains a subjective impulse.

Light and colour references in ‘*Sun Orchids*’ poems highlight and enhance the poet’s meaning through implication; for example, light and darkness may represent good as well as evil, as the notion of dark and blackness as it does in ‘Kindred’ (C.P., p. 166) where ‘Earth’s darkest impulses brood’, and ‘Tall crimson orchids appear ... To spill on the green air / Their dewdrops of dark thought’; yet, light also relates to spirit and awareness that there is a presence controlling the pattern of nature, that is, an ultimate unity which includes human

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<sup>632</sup> Anon, ‘Psychology of Creativity’, op. cit., p. 103.



beings. Most importantly, though, light is a symbol of creation and creative thought, significantly seen in many other lyrics. On the other hand, the symbol of darkness goes further than representing evil in the world, but in Maori legends dark symbolism represents the unknown; for example, 'how frail the chain / That dews the dark again' (C.P., p. 270) is an abstraction used by the poet to indicate an uncreative mind or the temporary loss of the poetic muse. In 'A Distant Music' (C.P., p. 270) the poem makes sense when understood in this way as it contrasts with the burning impulse in 'The Flames' when the poet's despair is conveyed by images of darkness, loss of the poetic muse and creative impulse:

Sometimes on my despair  
Her voice of bird breaks clear  
In raying light more fine  
Than that thin gleaming line  
That links the eye to star.

Light-year by crystal year  
Strains my despair to her,  
But frail, how frail the chain  
That dews the dark again,  
Then fades in the cold air.

(C.P., p. 270)

While 'Her voice of bird' is his song, or poems, the 'thin gleaming line / That links the eye to star' is the line of continuity mentioned above. Of course, the feminine pronoun is symbolically the muse to whom the poet appeals for inspiration which is probably at rest at that moment in time. Through metaphors the poet speaks of his muse and when she speaks the poem 'breaks clear / In raying light'; this connection is miraculously 'more fine' than the miracle of sight 'That links the eye to star', the miracle that enables the human eye to see the stars light years away, in all their unreachable glory. The connection is 'frail', indicating that the 'chain' is easily broken and 'fades in the cold air' as the powerful 'dew', another form of water, ushers in the 'dark', literally the night, or figuratively the darkness of the unknown and fear of the loss of the poet's creativity. The notion of psychological creativity is also relevant here. As mentioned above, when the mind is challenged (as it is in this group of poems), it

‘automatically sparks the fuel that will ignite a flow of energetic and unique ideas’.<sup>633</sup>

When Stewart faces this challenge, inspiration returns, sometimes with observed images from the natural world which in turn develop a symbolic or philosophical theme. This idea approaches the mysticism Thompson recognised in his interview with the poet.<sup>634</sup> An example of the way in which orchids listen to the silence, the ‘call of the wild’ which is beyond the ability of humans to hear, forms part of the mysticism found in poems such as ‘Mahony’s Mountain’ and in orchid lyrics — ‘Nodding Greenhood’ (C.P., p. 145), ‘Helmet Orchid’ (C.P., p. 158) and others. Together with this motif of silence is that of music, also heard in ‘Helmet Orchid’ as nature ‘listens’ to eternal music that is a symbol for the rhythm of life which further becomes a line of continuity in Stewart’s poetic preoccupation relating to the mysteries of the universe, thus contributing to his total philosophical poetical oeuvre. When Stewart writes that he considers ‘As well as the more exalted virtues in poetry — melody and feeling in the lyric, structure and movement in the narrative — I like things that are alive, odd, humorous, out of the way ... The thing I do not enjoy is dullness’.<sup>635</sup>

Like a dog whistle which is set at too high a pitch for the human ear but can be heard by the dog, the music of nature is so attuned that it also cannot be ‘heard’ by the human ear. This ‘music’ is one of the great mysteries of life, and one imagines that it comes from a huge metaphoric orchestra conducted by a similarly metaphoric maestro.

This is the music the orchids listen to in ‘Helmet Orchid’:

What could it hear but silence?  
Yet where the orchid listens  
Low in its purple hood  
Among the trees’ immensity,  
Out of the depth of the world  
Dark and rainy and wild

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<sup>633</sup> Anon, *Psychology of Creativity*, op. cit., pp. 1-3.

<sup>634</sup> Thompson, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>635</sup> Stewart, *Modern Australian Verse 2*, op. cit., 1964, pp. xxi-xxiv.

Sounding through all eternity  
Silence like music flowed.  
(C.P., p. 158)

The implication here questions whether humans also respond to a rhythm of life, and this theme continues throughout this chapter until Stewart's response is clarified. Stewart uses key words such as 'eternity', 'listening to something secret', 'silence'; he says that the tiny helmet orchid 'looks like a little purple ear bent to the ground' (N.L., p. 122), and this simile undoubtedly gave the poet inspiration for the lyric which, in its rhythm, reflects the music he imagines the orchid is listening to — the sounds of silence. The discovery is one of delight; in the vitality of the tiny and fragile colony and the giant bloodwoods, all are part of the same unified whole and all 'listen' to the same 'voice'. Stewart recognises this and presents the cycle of creativity and life in the bush as mystical; plants and creatures have this mysterious 'knowledge' that is beyond human understanding.

The poet contrasts the metaphoric silent music in 'Helmet Orchid' to music in the songs of birds and insects; for example, there is the joyous sound of the 'Cicada Song' (C.P., p. 121) as Stewart welcomes the summer, in a comic imitation of the words of the Medieval song, 'Summer is icumen in'. He appears to be swept up in the intensity of sound as he imitates it with the high-pitched sibilant in 'Sing, cicada!' and encourages it as he appears to conduct the choir with repetition in the final lines, 'Sing cicada, Sing cicada, / Sing cicada now' and the Doubledrummer 'Shrilleth past all reason'. Unlike the silent music the helmet orchid listens to, 'Cicada Song' is noisy as it heralds in both summer and Christmas in Australia. It is a song of defiance in the face of the dangers that summer brings, 'Bulljo nippeth, black snake slippeth / Sun biteth harder / ... Red bark cracketh, blue smoke tracketh, / Bushfire stealeth closer'. The nursery rhyme meter is enhanced by the parodic 'eth' added to hard verbs, and the tone of what could have been a mundane exercise in sound mimicry is

lifted to a mood of rejoicing found also in the carols of the magpie.<sup>636</sup>

The sound of magpies is a familiar one in Australia, not only in the bush but in cities and urban areas also. Their music is found in ‘Brindabella’ (C.P., p. 113) and ‘Sun Shower’ (C.P., p. 161). Stewart’s depiction of the magpie as a larrikin as it ‘Tobogganed down the old green tree’ is amusing and it strikes at the heart of Australians’ idea of themselves and their Australian characteristics; that is, as bush workers — stockmen, drovers, shearers, and so on as illustrated in Stewart and Keesing’s *Australian Bush Ballads*. The bird is a ‘wicked’ old magpie who:

... carolled on the gum-tree behind the shack  
For it was a mad season of black-and-white weather  
When sun showers swept the mountains in dazzling waves  
And shadow and shine seemed mixed in one tower of joy;  
And loud he sang, then like some larrikin boy  
Magpie and sun shower, splashing on the wet bright leaves,  
Tobogganed down the old green tree together.  
(C.P., p. 161)

The poet’s response to the *joie de vivre* mood on this occasion contrasts with that of the magpie in ‘Brindabella’ in which the bird is in tune with the ambience of the place and listens to the ‘white words’ as they fall on the mountain:

Then it was, struck with wonder at this soliloquy,  
The magpie lifting his beak by the frozen fern  
Sent out one ray of a carol, softened and silvery,  
Strange through the trees as sunlight’s pale return,  
Then cocked his black head and listened, hunched from the cold,  
Watching that white whisper fill his green world.  
(C.P., pp. 113-114)

The carol rises in a crescendo then quietly, the cadence becomes a whisper as the silvery sound dies away. These two poems illustrate both the way the birds adapt to their environment and the effect this thought has on the poet and his response to it. It is clear that Stewart tries to understand the mystery of nature’s survival, sometimes in adverse weather conditions. As he

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<sup>636</sup> The theme of defiance in the face of adversity has become part of the Australian psyche and is discussed more fully elsewhere. Stewart’s recognition becomes more effective as it continues to appear throughout his poetry and dramatic verse.

conveys ‘both the diversity of nature’s moods and their influence on his own’ he forces us to realise that the interaction is at the heart of the knowledge he seeks’,<sup>637</sup> and comes closer to discovering the effectiveness of his enquiry into ‘the absolute reality of whatever creature you’re writing about’.<sup>638</sup> Birds, animals and vegetation do not literally ‘hear’ the words as suggested in the poem, nor does the magpie ‘carol’; these have human connotations, but Stewart always strives for precision, and while the flora and fauna are not human and so cannot use the words in the same sense as the poet, the language he uses to describe them suggests his conclusions. Whatever he discovers about the subjects of his enquiry, Stewart is always focused on the effects of nature on mankind and the role of humans in the general scheme of things.

In his appreciation of *Sun Orchids*, Thomas Inglis-Moore suggests that ‘a new romantic movement’ can be discerned in the poems of R.D. FitzGerald, Peter Hopegood, Judith Wright, Roland Robinson and Stewart, in which there is ‘some illumination of human destiny or significance contributing towards a deeper understanding of the universe’.<sup>639</sup> Inglis-Moore indicates that although ‘it is the universal link rather than any cosmic revelation that emerges’ from Stewart’s nature lyrics, ‘They stop short at the moment of ‘vision’, and while the *Sun Orchids* poems are lyrically satisfying and possess charm and humour, lyrics such as ‘Oh No, Mister Thrush’ are ‘pure song’ (C.P., p. 117), and while the songs in *Sun Orchids* are sung sometimes gently and sometimes with great gusto (such as in ‘Cicada Song’), the music and songs of the bush are often connected by the poet to the ‘silent’ sounds of nature that only the bush and its creature can ‘hear’.

The concept of silence and the way it relates to renewal in the natural world can be

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<sup>637</sup> Robinson, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>638</sup> Stewart, ‘Poetry in Australia: Douglas Stewart’, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>639</sup> Inglis-Moore, T., ‘Orchids and Penguins’, op. cit., 1954, pp. 116-118.

found throughout *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* lyrics. In 'Brindabella' (C.P., p. 113) where the mountain (that is, Mahony's Mountain) 'made no sound but talked to itself in snow', the poet's use of silence expresses his wonder at the scene. As mentioned previously in the discussion of language and 'Brindabella', Stewart again uses metaphor; the mountain does not literally 'speak' any language — language as we know it is human. The ambience is one of respectful silence as Stewart implies that the cave is like a natural cathedral as 'I heard the mountain talking in a tall green cave / Between the pillars of the trees and the moss below'; perhaps the poet himself was 'struck at this soliloquy' and adopted the persona of the magpie to sing his song as he, like the magpie, becomes part of the earth and its wonders. Stewart reveals through these lyrics that his way of understanding the mystery of creation is to assume that the plants, animals and insects 'listen' to a silence that tells them it is time for the rhythm of life, the metaphysical music of the natural environment, to become a reality.

Stewart continues the theme of silence throughout *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* as he observes, for example, the yellow double-tailed orchid in 'Mahony's Mountain':

Nothing but the huge grey silence, the trees and — look,  
There where the mountain breaks on its granite peak,  
The double-tail orchid, O like some fairytale fox,  
Whistled from earth by a wilder call than ours,  
Pricks up its yellow ears and stares through mist.  
(C.P., p. 168)

This instance reveals Stewart's 'moment of vision', in which the image is presented with 'utmost intensity'. This is, like 'Distant Music', the light in darkness that comes with an understanding of the power of the image and which corresponds with a consciousness in time as the yellow ears listen to the voice of the creative spirit.

Another interesting idea unfolds in this unusual poem: the mountain, solid and grey in the rain, offers an image of struggle by man to climb to the top. As Stewart and Jack Snow<sup>640</sup>

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<sup>640</sup> Stewart, *Fishing Around the Monaro*, Angus and Robinson, Sydney, 1966, p. 37.

climb higher up the mountain, the 'stony spurs and candle barks darker and huger / Where Mahony's Mountain towers in drifts of rain', all is quiet and still, 'Nothing but bush and silence'. Silence also predominates in 'Country of Winter' (C.P., pp. 155-157) and the landscape is reflected in the icy waters of the Badja at Countegany near Mahony's Mountain.<sup>641</sup> The rivers of the Monaro, the Badja, the Duckmaloi and the Snowy, as well as other far-flung fishing places, are to Stewart 'river(s) of many memories',<sup>642</sup> and these memories provide the impulse for his poems particularly those in *Sun Orchids*. Memories of 'two suns that talk to each other in flame ... alone they commune, like gods in splendour and cruelty' (C.P., p. 156), highlight the 'sounds of silence' that recur in Stewart's nature lyrics and in this more sustained poem, and silence also prevails when 'Silence at dusk the platypus sank in the deep / As if the river itself turned to sleep' (C.P., p. 156). In addition, memories of sally-gums that 'might have been trees of moonlight and danced together / Across the dim paddocks where shadows and moonrays flow', or the cold moon 'that now goes walking on the river' are all images of the order and harmony to be found in the bush and the peace and contentment that comes with winter:

O soon at the spawning the trout will go mad with desire  
Burning together, down in the dimness folded;  
And fold upon fold, like the country clenching its fist,  
Ridge in the river glitters to ridge in the mist.  
(C.P., p. 157)

Soon the silence of winter will be gone and the silence will be that of 'The Mopokes' that call to each other then enter the whirling 'night's crystal centre ... shadow flying to shadow there and silence calling silence' (C.P., p. 162). As Stewart contemplates the birds, human's perception of ugliness, 'Feathers on end and glaring eye and murderous beak and talons', changes from the blackness of the night to one of brilliance that reflects the crystal

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<sup>641</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 33-53.

<sup>642</sup> *ibid.*, p. iii.

centre of life: 'Oh but how bright the centre whirls where they grapple and blaze in love'. In this short poem Stewart suggests that beauty exists in the mind that contemplates it.

Stewart also sees beauty in 'Flying Ants' in which the 'crystal centre' of 'Mopokes' becomes a 'crystal tower':

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 not there at all:  
(C.P., p. 161)

The excitement the poet creates here is reflected not only in the imagery, but also in the rhythm supported by 'Pouring', and like the crystal centre that 'whirls' as the mopokes 'grapple and blaze in love', the flying ants also 'whirl' in their crystal tower. Stewart does not colour the image precisely, but instead the clear crystal that, like his many water images, reflects the 'evening's brilliance' as it glimmers with 'their delirious dance of summer love'. The tower itself is 'frail and small' and suddenly the observer discovers 'shafts of light that burn their wings'. Because the tower is metaphoric, it is not a tower at all but is a symbol of uplifted thought that 'floats glinting in that tower', and the flying ants are the stimulus for the poet's impulse; Stewart seems to be saying that as light is a symbol of truth, knowledge and enlightenment, and that this is where his myriad of varied thoughts converge to become a single unit, and an ultimate truth is imminent, but the reality of the idea becomes ephemeral and once more like the crystal tower, it becomes fragmented and there is no real substance to it.

Preoccupation with aesthetic thought is typical of Stewart's nature lyrics, and an earlier example of this 'The Bat':

A fluttering thought  
From the grey rocks wrought,  
Tricky to follow,  
Not to be caught.  
(C.P., p. 256)

The light tone and peaceful mood of this small verse does not disguise Stewart's concern that



his thoughts appear then disappear before they become precise.

As thought flitters in 'The Bat' and by implication 'floats' in the crystal tower in 'Flying Ants', so too, in 'Tongue Orchid', 'thought itself floats glinting in that tower' (C.P., p. 161). Flying is also closely related to the theme of 'flittering thought' and this is considered as Stewart sets a meditative mood here with consonance reminiscent of Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'The Windhover', 'I caught this morning morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon'<sup>643</sup> with 'Day's clear blue and sunlight dappling / Apple-gum and she-oak sapling'. Juxtaposed with this peaceful scene, is an uncertain interplay of images, 'Moth or flower, flower or moth, / Neither moth nor flower but both / in one sweet crystal flesh'; the soft 'f' enhances the delicacy of the flowers which appear to be flying as the poet asks 'from what grey depths of time / These flowers fly in their white dream' as his thought moves from the present to a past primordial state of creation.

The satisfaction experienced by Stewart in his contemplation of 'Tongue Orchid' is another indicator of images that are released from the earth's hold to exist between the earth and heaven; that is, unlike humans who are tied to the earth, flowers like the tongue orchid, towers of whirling insects, trees, bats and birds, are, according to the poet, representative of all spirit which brings wonder to the thoughts of a thinking observer. This theme of flying is a dominant one in *Sun Orchids* lyrics such as 'The Robin' (C.P., p. 146), 'The Moths' (C.P., p. 155), 'The Bees' (C.P., p. 160), 'Flying Ants' (C.P., p. 161), 'The Mopokes' (C.P., p. 110), 'White Cockatoo' (C.P., p. 118) and 'The Night of the Moths' (C.P., p. 119).

In these lyrics Stewart goes beyond physical description to what James McAuley refers to as 'the most metaphysical of all Stewart's poems, the most profoundly so when there is least

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<sup>643</sup> Hopkins, G.M., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Poems*, ed. W. Davies, Dent, London, 1940, p. 67.

comment'.<sup>644</sup> In 'The Robin'<sup>645</sup> the metaphysical aspect is present 'simply in a special sense of being, a sheer awareness of a thing's act of existence',<sup>646</sup> and Stewart's intensification of focus becomes more ephemeral as he suggests that the abstruse vital spirit, the essence of the natural world, is in its tiniest features like the robin that 'feeds the heart's desire'. Here again, flittering thought appears as the poet combines the delicate beauty of this tiny image with the mystery of 'the heart's great hunger':

The vast cold silver sky  
Gleams in the pool on the bluff  
And the bush is grey after rain;  
Little, oh, little enough

Is a morsel of wild bush robin  
As long as your little finger  
— A thing you could hide in your hand —  
To feed the heart's great hunger

That could devour whole skies  
Flaring with sunset red,  
Mountains of fiery colour ...  
Bright black eyes, black head,

And one white feather in his wing,  
Flashing from twig to rock,  
From rock to the shallow pool  
That reels with the tiny shock,

The robin darts to bathe  
Breast-deep in the sky's reflection,  
And all that icy trance  
Breaks in most sweet destruction.

Little, oh, little enough  
To fill the heart's great need,  
But when he has splashed his wings  
And dipped his dainty head

And spilled the drops down his back  
And flown as quick as he came,  
There is no need any more  
To wish the mountains to flame,

For still it seems in the pool  
That breast of crimson glows

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<sup>644</sup> McAuley, J., 'Douglas Stewart', *Map of Australian Verse*, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 222.

<sup>645</sup> Cirlot, J.E., *Dictionary of Symbols*, op. cit., p. 26: 'Every winged being is symbolic of spiritualization. The Bird, according to Jung, is a beneficent animal representing spirits or angels, supernatural aid, thoughts and flights of fancy'.

<sup>646</sup> McAuley, op. cit., p. 222.

And over the whole cold sky  
Runs wave after wave or rose.  
(C.P., pp. 146-147)

The poet's idea of flame once more arises to express Stewart's heart-felt desire that the muse stay with him (as already considered in 'The Flames' above) in which his soul thirsts for the symbolic water of creativity; this is also present in the bush pool's reflection, 'Fearing with sunset red, / Mountains of fiery colour' that contrasts with the hard, cold brilliance of the opening line 'The vast cold silver sky' (C.P., p. 146).

It is possible to gain only a fleeting glimpse of poetic statement in 'The Robin' as it rests for a moment in time then flits as the bird flashes 'from twig to rock, / From rock to shallow pool' and the universe is reduced to 'that icy trance'. In his effort to satisfy his voracious appetite for the need to comprehend the vastness and mysteries of the world in which he lives, the poet discovers the answer in 'A thing you could hide in your hand', so small it could be overlooked by the observer. In his attention to detail and close observation of the miniature creatures of the Australian bush, Stewart once again introduces duality of thought as another line of continuity so that while 'The Robin' is about a delicate bird, it is also about more profound underlying themes such as human universal need.

The theme of elusive thought is continued in 'Bird's-Eye' (C.P., p. 114); like the 'green bird that darts and sings', Stewart's thoughts cannot be captured and made concrete, but as he muses about them, he suggests that 'a word by wattle and water / Must be as true as any darker' if it is thought up in a mood of joy. The mood is indeed one of joy as it is in 'The Robin'. Like the robin, the honeyeater energetically 'flings / the water drops from his green wings', and as the poet's song becomes reality, the bird that stimulates his imagination 'shakes that brighter song in the sun' — the progression through word, deed and joy to its inevitable end in a musical lyric is achieved.

In his mature poetry, it is unusual for Stewart to use figurative language in the same

way he did in his early New Zealand poems, but in 'Bird's-Eye' he decides 'I'll *be* that olive honeyeater / In some lost corner of my mind'. The idea of *becoming* is clearly his acceptance of the Australian bush and its creatures, and this indicates that the poet now considers himself to be part of that environment. In this poem, themes discussed earlier come together in the bird, 'And in its crystal eye' the poet speculates that he may discover some universal truth 'Floating up from time's great dark'. Here again is the contrast of light and its connection to creative impulse and spiritual awareness; the metaphoric darkness is an abstraction that alludes to non-creativity. Stewart's reference to dreaming is also significant as he evokes images of 'Stream, red ridge and ironbark' from the primeval darkness with a 'thought / Sweet as song from that green throat', and the bird's song becomes the poet's song perceived through the subject's crystal eye. The music of both bird and poet's songs are reminiscent of this theme in 'Distant Music' as its rhythm and music such as 'flings / The water drops from his wings', emerge from the poet's choice of words and phrases and the emphasis he gives them.

## 2. *The Birdsville Track*

Whereas in *Sun Orchids* the poet questions life's force, its unity and harmony, and whether mankind is part of its rhythms and essence, in *The Birdsville Track*, lyrics that together form the first part of the series, there is a difference — a change in tone and mood to a more positive awareness and appreciation of the subjects of his observations.

Stewart's *Sun Orchids* nature lyrics continue in *The Birdsville Track*, but with a difference. His collection, *The Birdsville Track and other poems*, 1955,<sup>647</sup> contains a group of

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<sup>647</sup> Stewart, D., *The Birdsville Track and other poems*, 1955.

twenty-seven poems sub-titled 'The Birdsville Track'.<sup>648</sup> These poems were written after Stewart visited the area from Marree in South Australia to Birdsville in Queensland in 1953 with the Shell Film Unit of Australia.<sup>649</sup> Stewart and John Heyer co-wrote the script for the documentary, *The Back of Beyond*, which was a public-relations exercise by an international company aiming to represent the product as essential to the good life of the people of the twentieth century.<sup>650</sup> Like the introduction to Stewart's *Voyager Poems*, the script for *The Back of Beyond* is a narrative. It tells the story of a Euro-Australian, Tom Kruse, and Henry, a laconic Aborigine, who take the Royal Mail from Marree to Birdsville and return fortnightly. Stewart notes the track passes 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 red sand ridges of the Simpson Desert.

Ross Gibson points out:

Shell strove to conjure a nation of British modernists, for whom petrol-fired technology was innate to the known world. The company aspired to be part of the 'natural order' of British contemporaneity.<sup>651</sup>

A second documentary was made in 1999 to celebrate Tom Kruse's long career.<sup>652</sup> Many workmen took it upon themselves to restore the old vehicle and a re-enactment of the trip from Birdsville to Marree was filmed and shown on Australian television.

The Birdsville Track is an area of Australia often referred to in the country's literature as a hostile environment, and Stewart referred to it thus, in 'The Fierce country':

Three hundred miles to Birdsville from Marree.  
Man makes his mark across a fierce country  
That no flower but the whitening bone and skull

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<sup>648</sup> Stewart, D., *Selected Poems*, op. cit., 1973.

<sup>649</sup> Gibson, R., *South of the West*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992, pp. 63-81.

<sup>650</sup> Stewart, D. and Heyer, J., *The Back of Beyond*, documentary film for the Shell Film Unit of Australia, 1953.

<sup>651</sup> Gibson, R., op. cit., 1992, pp. 135-157.

<sup>652</sup> National Trust South Australia, 1953, p. 1.  
Retrieved from [http://www.nationaltrustsa.org.au/heritage\\_icons\\_2003.htm](http://www.nationaltrustsa.org.au/heritage_icons_2003.htm).

Instead of the new modern world envisaged by Shell, Australian conditions of historical and geographical displacements, far from European origins, meant new means were required to present the Company's aims. Through Stewart and Heyer's script, together with visual images of the Birdsville Track, this part of Australia is presented not as part of the British Empire, but as a land still untamed by alienated European settlers, despite the English accents of the actors and voice-overs intended to reinforce British imperialism and superiority. This achievement was due in no small measure to the efforts of Stewart whose mythopoeic ends were almost certainly in the minds at the Head Office'.<sup>653</sup> Whether the slogan "You can be sure of Shell" succeeds economically, or whether the film reveals more profound aspects of Australian culture can only be answered in a post imperial context which takes into consideration plurality of cultural identities.

### 3. *The Birdsville Track* Lyrics

Stewart's themes of concern in *Sun Orchids* continue as lines of continuity in *The Birdsville Track* lyrics, but there is a noticeable difference; as mentioned above, there is a change in tone and mood to a more positive awareness and appreciation of his subjects. In this discussion subjects are often those of humankind, together with their personal responses to their experiences. As well as Stewart's responses to this previously unknown physical landscape, there are contemplations of it in the landscape of his mind; that is, the manner in which his creative thought is challenged by human concerns and reactions to it.

To provide a transition to a more advanced phase of his poetic development, Stewart's themes in *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track*, the lyrics approach a more narrative style:

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<sup>653</sup> Gibson, R., op. cit, p. 135.

‘The Wombat’ (C.P., p. 109) is strong, ‘Ha there! Old pig, old bear, old bristly and gingery / Wombat out of the earth’ introduces an Australian icon in a playful way. Some of the strength of this poem arises from these adjectives as well as in ‘sound’s fierce absence’ and ‘Be easy, old tree-root’s companion’. The only verb that recalls the *Sun Orchids* delicate images is ‘I see the dewdrop trembling upon the rushes’, but at the same time, this contrasts effectively with the stronger ‘Pool lump of movable clay, snuffling and blinking’ and ‘snorting and plunging like red flood-water / To earth again’. The simile here blends the poet’s description of red flood-water into an otherwise colourless image, but unlike some earlier subjects of his poems, it is neither overpowering nor used as a technical device in an effort to come to grips with poetic expression. Uneven line lengths and half-rhymes are used to good rhythmic effect as one can imagine the wombat — ‘Too thick in the head to know what thumps in your thinking’ — which is startled by the poet’s smell, not knowing which way to go, then plunging back into the protection of its burrow.

A reminder of Stewart’s involvement in Lindsayan vitalism and by Nietzsche’s theme that life is a struggle is prominent in ‘Everlasting’ (C.P., p. 120). This image of a familiar small papery flower ‘Rustling your stiff petals’ of bright yellow contrasts with ‘the Badja’s granite bend’. As he contemplates the flower, the poet personifies it as ‘you’, giving it a human personality as he suggests the flower could ‘pass for your great lord the sun’; then, ambivalently, he compares the sun to a daisy, pouring ‘his light indeed forever / That heaven and earth chime as one’, and the musical reference to time, ‘A flower, a clock, an everlasting’, is an indication of time everlasting, ‘And clear and golden is the time / In the space from here to the sun’.

The motif of struggle depicted in ‘Everlasting’ is also evident in ‘The Night of the Moths’ (C.P., pp. 119-120). As Stewart observes the swarming of the giant moths he sees it, not as a peaceful emergence but as a violent one as ‘the black earth flings / Its passion of blind

black life to meet the rain'. The onomatopoeia in the sounds of 'bl' in 'blind' and 'black' as well as the 'fl' in 'flings' imitates the sound of the moths' wings as they become 'one with the storm, with the trees as they shudder and strain', then they become 'One with the mountain'. Theirs is triumph over adversity as 'Up the dark ridge they fly, and are gone'. Concrete nouns and active verbs give this poem a strength that is lacking in 'Murrumbidgee' (C.P., pp. 118-119) which is weakened by too many similes. The one simile in 'The Night of the Moths', 'the giant moths like sparrows!' not only gives the reader an idea of the size of these creatures, it is also an indication of the poet's amazement of this unexpected happening. The poem is again strengthened by the grouping of couplets in a rhyming pattern of aa, bb, cc, while the rhythm responds to the 'great whirring moth by moth' as they struggle against the wind and the storm. Colours, too, are indicative of a stormy night as the alliterative 'black rain beats on Bindo', 'bodies of gold' and 'black earth' as the black and gold image shines in the darkness, inviting the poet's creative impulse that 'emerges from the mind's dark ocean' to become a lyrical expression of this experience of survival.

In 'Spider-Gums' (C.P., pp. 116-118), Stewart continues the theme of survival 'Where winter's snow and crashing rain / Have forced the snow-gums to their knees / High in the sky on Kelly's Plains'. The tone and mood of this poem allows the poet to rise above his own subjectivity to maintain an aesthetic quality and the way in which he perceives the image 'As though some pigtailed fossicker here ... Had drawn a Chinese sketch on air', and the beauty of 'These frail and delicate spider-trees' affects the imagination to a degree that the sketch almost becomes reality. The long vowel sounds in the second verse that contribute to this peaceful mood are contrasted with sounds of fast movement 'where the Murrumbidgee's / Tussocky rapids flash and race', then the rhythm returns to the familiarity of 'summer's huge hot noon / Lost drifts of winter linger still', and one can feel the ambience of this spiritual place. Throughout 'Spider-Gums' sounds and rhythm create a musical opus that lingers long after the



poem has been read.

Smith refers to Stewart's 'Spider-Gums' as a 'beautiful virtuoso piece which shows that he can also be a poet of unexpected literary artifice and sophistication.'<sup>654</sup> Smith's opinion is relevant to this discussion of Stewart's work at this stage in his career (1956) because the change of thought shown in *The Birdsville Track* series of poems has developed through motifs in *Sun Orchids* to become an assertion of his major themes as lines of continuity in his representation of mankind's relationship with severe and often cruel aspects of the Birdsville Track. Aesthetic images emerge from these elusive thoughts; the 'pigtailed fossicker' is an example of a metaphor for a long-dead artist who had 'drawn a Chinese sketch on air / To speak for him when all should change'. This alludes to Stewart's practice of using voices as a line of continuity that is directly linked to his argument as outlined early in this chapter. Robinson suggests that Stewart can 'convey both the diversity of nature's moods and their influence on his own and make us realise that that interaction is at the heart of the knowledge he seeks'.<sup>655</sup> From close reading of 'Spider-Gums' and 'The Snow-Gum' (C.P., p. 122), Stewart's close observation of metaphors and imagery help the reader to focus on the way the poet is influenced by them. Stewart seeks to understand the theme behind the tree's image in 'Spider-Gums'; furthermore, he uses the idea of thought in this poem, and once again the thought is evasive; just as it seems he intends to expand on the idea, it disappears:

As though in earth's deep dream of stone  
Some leafy thought was taking form  
And fled before the dream was done,  
Half-finished out to sun and storm;  
(C.P., p. 117)

He pursues the idea of how the earth and earthly things change over time; it is 'As though, as though —' and the reader is reminded of the Aboriginal dreamtime, 'As though in earth's deep

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<sup>654</sup> Smith, V., op. cit., 1981, p. 402.

<sup>655</sup> Robinson, op. cit., p. 59.

dream of stone / Some leafy form was taking shape'. The theme continues until the poet uses a caesura to give rhetorical emphasis to his 'knowing':

As though, as though — but now I see  
The white clouds covering the blue,  
A chill breeze beating on the tree  
That hardly shakes as it goes through,

Stewart was not a scientist although he admired scientists such as Rutherford; instead, his exploration is mystical, but even though the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth, he knows that time changes all things, including poetry, and the knowledge he seeks of a time long past is philosophically unattainable. What he does know from his contemplation of his observation in this poem is that:

... earth took deepest thought  
In this cold kingdom of the winter  
To make some shape of grace to float  
On high while snow-gums crack and splinter,  
(C.P., pp. 117-118)

And as Smith suggests, 'the reality exists beyond the poet's experience of it ... there is a constant sense of what is beyond the moment, and how it is related to other moments [in time].'<sup>656</sup> Lines of continuity including those mentioned in 'Spider-Gums' are emphasised in this chapter to provide links with Stewart's perceptions of subjects of observation and the way his poetry changes with time as his literary development becomes more profound as it expands to include instances of nature and their effect on mankind, including the poet himself. At the same time, though, Stewart paints a picture through his carefully chosen language, of a dialectic between art and the images of nature and society. It is this dimension which is the focus of this discussion.

McAuley writes about Stewart's evasiveness:

The best of the nature poems, in *Sun Orchids* and later volumes have moved a long way from the anthropomorphic whimsy and pseudo-popular idiom of *The Dosser in Springtime*. They are delicate notations of things observed with an intense fascination. The best of

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<sup>656</sup> Smith, op. cit, 1987, p. 9.

them go beyond the physical: indeed they are the most metaphysical of all Stewart's poems, most profoundly so when there is least comment'.<sup>657</sup>

McAuley's observation is also applicable to 'The Snow-Gum' (C.P., p. 122) in which the metaphysical exists in 'a special sense of being, a sheer awareness of a thing's act of existence',<sup>658</sup> and as the 'Spider-Gums' are touched by 'grace' that implies a spiritual force, so too in 'Snow-Gum' there is a metaphysical sense that there is more to this image than a tree and its shadow. Stewart writes: 'It is the image that lives most vividly in art, the thing made; the sudden little flash of light that reveals a tree as it has never been seen before'.<sup>659</sup> In considering this, Plato's myth of the cave seems germane:

The only thing visible is the wall of the cave upon which appear shadows cast by models or statues of animals and objects that are passed before a brightly burning fire. Breaking free, one of the individuals escapes from the cave into the light of day. With the aid of the sun, that person sees for the first time the real world and returns to the cave with the message that the only things they have seen heretofore are shadows and appearances and that the real world awaits them if they are willing to struggle free of their bonds. Escape into the sun-filled setting outside the cave symbolizes the transition to the real world, the world of full and perfect being, the world of Forms, which is the proper object of knowledge.<sup>660</sup>

Stewart sees the tree in 'Snow-Gum' as something special, made perfect by 'the silvery / Flowering of light on snow / Performing its slow miracle / Where upon drift and icicle / Perfect lies its shadow'. Whereas the tree's perfect image is initially seen as a reflection, with 'the silver light like ecstasy' shining on it, it becomes 'the green tree perfectly / Curves to its perfect shadow' and the new image 'reveals a tree as it has never been seen before and the experience in the poem is the result of control, 'The isolation and clarification of the image'.<sup>661</sup>

'The Snow-Gum', the final poem in Part One of *The Birdsville Track*, ends the focus on the haunting delicate quality of nature that is crucial in Stewart's development in both *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track*; a major theme in these poems that may appear slight at first

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<sup>657</sup> McAuley, *A Map of Australian Verse*, op. cit., pp. 221-222.

<sup>658</sup> *ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>659</sup> Stewart, op. cit., *The Flesh and the Spirit*, p. 182.

<sup>660</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, Part 7, lines 514-520, trans. H.D.P. Lee, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1970, pp. 279-280.

<sup>661</sup> Kavanagh, P., op. cit., p. 266.

reading illustrates the way in which humanity is part of the whole picture of nature and is linked to the never-ending rhythm of life in the natural world.

Part One of *The Birdsville Track* is the tessera<sup>662</sup> or link between these two volumes. Poems like 'Spider-Gums' and 'The Snow-Gum' differ in tone and mood from earlier nature lyrics in *Sun Orchids* to suggest themes that include the role of mankind and the desert environment in Part Two, *The Birdsville Track* which is structured along the lines of a non-continuous narrative series of poems with a variety of subjects and voices. Stewart uses many different voices in the sequence and this technique is not only an example of his poetic versatility and mastery of the language, it is also a precursor of dramatic verse like *Glencoe* and other voice poems that are the subject of another chapter.

The first thing that impresses the reader in *The Birdsville Track* poems is Stewart's change in tone, mood, language and attitude to this environment which is entirely different from his previous lyrics in both ethos and ambience. Although some themes such as evasive thought and spirituality are there in the background, old themes of struggle and survival are stronger representations of the poet's interpretation of his observations along the Birdsville Track. Emotion is clearly controlled as the poet adjusts to the land, its flora and fauna and its human occupants, a diaspora of races and cultures all struggling to survive.

Major themes in these poems are death, defeat, defiance and madness. All life struggles to survive in spite of the environment, and those who accept it survive because it is here that Nature and natural forces dominate; climate affects all things, so humanity, like the creatures that inhabit this place in the Red Centre of Australia either adjust or die. In 'The Fierce Country' (C.P., pp. 122-123) Stewart's picture of the landscape includes images enhanced by colour and active verbs where 'the world ends in a shield of purple stone ... The

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<sup>662</sup> Bloom, H., *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 66.

white stones flash, the red stones leap with fire'. This is the outback, the 'back of beyond' where the personified physical landscape and the sun are at war: 'The sun glares down on the stones and the stones glare back'. This poem introduces major themes that together give *The Birdsville Track* its strength; 'I will kill' is a warning that the desert 'wants no interlopers here', and that death and devastation will come to all who attempt to control the environment. Humans may settle and enjoy 'the good season / When the Diamantina floods' but the mirage is watching 'with glittering eyes' to end the man's struggle which Stewart confronts in 'The Mirage' (C.P., pp. 133-135).

In Stewart's early New Zealand poems water offers a line of continuity in his poetry, but in *The Birdsville Track* it is the lack of water until the sporadic flooding of the Diamantina that changes perceptions of his new surroundings both physically and metaphysically. Once the river was 'The shining majestic continent of water / Moving across the desert in creaming flood' where ducks and swallows, pelicans and cattle all benefited from the life-giving water, but now the monsoons to the north have failed.

Now ten years later  
The grey road follows the ghost of a ripple in the mud

...

The uncanny lily  
In shallows of dust still waits for the next flood  
That, not yet born, flows down through time so slowly.  
(C.P., p. 138)

The strength of 'The Fierce Country' and 'Diamantina' comes from the way Stewart uses language, not only in symbolic colours that add meaning to his observations, but also in the words themselves. Adjectives portray the country as 'fierce' and this points to the theme of death in 'whitening bones', 'long-dead cattle', 'the first hot wind', while the 'glittering eyes' of the mirage wait on the 'waterless plain' and the sun 'glares down' and the 'stones glare back'. clearly the poet's first impression of the land was one of hostility and hardship which

he sums up in 'The Fierce Country' with the statement by the personified desert: 'I will kill'.

'Diamantina' also contains adjectives that express the poet's preoccupation with themes of death and dying: 'The grey road', 'the ghost of a ripple', 'The dead lignum' and 'withered water'. Unlike the descriptive six lines that recall 'Forty sparkling miles of Diamantina ...', where the response to water evokes notions of the *elan vital* similar to earlier *Sun Orchids* lyrics, the waterless land appears to lack the spirituality of Nature experienced in earlier poems, but at the same time, one asks whether this is, in fact, the case; Ballyn notes that Stewart suggests the reader 'explore the different relationships Man establishes with nature on a more spiritual plane',<sup>663</sup> a line of continuity which contributes to his central philosophy.

Throughout his life Stewart had been used to the moist, fertile landscapes of New Zealand and eastern Australia, and in *The Birdsville Track* he asks, 'O where's the green world gone' ('Grasshopper', C.P., p. 127). Ballyn suggests that 'It is here in the desert environment, that Nature appear to synthesise the inevitable end to all life: death. Nevertheless Stewart sees that from the aggressive dislocation of the desert there emerges a world in which 'Man and Nature are seen to establish empathies and concomitances with each other'.<sup>664</sup> Even though he used death imagery in earlier poems such as 'Winter Crazed' (C.P., pp. 320-322) and 'The Growing Strangeness' (C.P., pp. 318-319), it seems as though Stewart is surprised and shocked by the reality of this desert area and the struggle to survive which contrasts so strongly with the more familiar land and its creatures.

Positive and negative forces of life and death are evident in 'The Brumby' (C.P., p. 128); the sun is responsible for all evil, even though in a more equable climate it is the giver and nurturer of life. When the stallion dies from thirst — 'The tawny dog and the white bitch ... When they had ate and drunk their fill / loped into the blazing west' — there is a key to

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<sup>663</sup> Ballyn, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>664</sup> Ballyn, op. cit., p. 28.

survival in the desert — the dingoes have learnt to adjust to the conditions, taking only what they need for survival.

A poem of great poignancy that presents Stewart's perception of his environment is 'The Mirage' (C.P., pp. 133-135), which takes on a tragic ballad form as the poet traces the madness of this 'Raw new-chum / Who soon enough would be pulling off his clothes / And raving in crazy circles till he perished / While the water that was not water flowed on him'. As in 'The Silkworms' (C.P., p. 49), 'Some lost far voice cried "No!" but he was swimming / And round and round, could no way sight the coast, / Until the bright flame took him and he sank' in his delirium. His body will become food for 'That cloud of eaglehawks wheeling above the plain' and other creatures like the dingo who survive because of death. It is clear that Stewart perceives an order and harmony in the environment of the Birdsville Track; yet in the poetry there is tension between opposing tendencies that is unresolved, and until some state of equilibrium is reached, they will continue to be unresolved.

There is a reflection of the socio-cultural mores in poems about the men and women who inhabit this inhospitable place — the laconic dogger and the whipmaker for example — their adaptation to and acceptance of the conditions, while humour (sometimes black and sometimes broad, but mostly ambiguous) is present; in 'the Humorists' (C.P., pp. 128-129), in which Dan Corcoran 'took a bullock's skull / And wrote on it with a pencil: / 'Here I lie on the Birdsville Track / Driven to death by Scotty Mac.', and Scotty Mac laughs when he sees it six months later, then writes, 'Here I lie like an old tin can / Kicked down the Track by droving Dan — / Thus drover joked with drover'. 'The Humorists' is another example of the black humour that is also present in 'The Nameless' where 'The lucky dead men', buried in the desert:

Each in his glinting mount  
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.  
(C.P., pp. 124-125)

This is an example of what came to be known as ‘typical Aussie humour’ and which became a problem for New Australian settlers later in the twentieth century. Stewart’s comment that ‘A bullock could write on theirs’ contains the implication that like the bullocks, nobody cares anyway, and it is ironic that the men will more than likely finish up dying in the desert, food for the dingoes and birds of prey.

Not all poems contain the negativity of ‘The Mirage’ and ‘The Ruins’ (C.P., p. 129), but the promise of on-going life and love expressed in the ‘Two golden butterflies mating over the ruins / Of the iron house’ is shattered when Stewart introduces the old woman who live on in the ruins of her house and her life ‘until the mirage unfurled / Its ocean of steel, it tore a great gap in her mind’. Unlike the butterflies, she lives on in the false reality that she is protected from the desert which will inevitably claim her too.

In stark contrast to the *Sun Orchids* lyrics in which a creature needs to be provoked to be a danger to humans, dangerous conditions in the arid Centre of Australia need no provocation; instead, mankind is alienated from the environment and, as David Robinson says, ‘human victories seem rather precarious and evidences of defeats are everywhere’.<sup>665</sup> Among those who have survived are ‘The Afghan’ (C.P., p. 126), old Father Vogelsang in ‘Lutheran Mission’ (C.P., p. 137) and ‘The Rainmaker’ (C.P., p. 139), all three of whom are driven by spiritual concerns and because of their faith they have either adapted to the land instead of endeavouring to control it, or like Father Vogelsang, are not yet aware that this is what he must do to survive.

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<sup>665</sup> Robinson, D., op. cit., p. 68.



The Afghan is totally absorbed in his faith, living by the credo of the *Koran* and supported by his compass:

Old Bejah in baggy trousers, bearded, immense  
...

The gestures, the voice, all larger and wilder than human,  
Some whirlwind of the desert.

(C.P., p. 126)

The image of the 'whirlwind of the desert' has overtones of the dervishes dancing in the desert of Afghanistan, so Stewart is not afraid to include a foreign culture in the Australian landscape, and it is here his description of the Afghan is not so much to introduce a diaspora of foreign cultures into an otherwise nationalistic poetry of the time, but to present the man as an accepted part of the society. Through unfamiliar language used by the Afghan, Stewart creates a different kind of music of the desert, firstly as he tells his tale of finding two dead young men in the desert:

Oh, ya, oh ya, the young man dead in the sands,  
I dig with my hands, I find him, and fifty yards further  
The other, both dead, so young; no water, no water.

(C.P., p. 126)

The music here in the rhythm of these long lines is made more profound with the continuing theme of no water in the outback. Yet there is a second idea encapsulated in the Afghan's character who is wholly absorbed in his faith and his personal philosophy of life:

Oh, ya, believe in God; young man no care;  
God save, God help; oh ya, need help out there!  
And fondled his box of brass and kissed his book  
So passionately, with such a lover's look  
He whirled in the deserts still, too wild for human.

(C.P., p. 126)

The ambiguity here is also thought-provoking: one idea is that the desert is 'too wild for humans', and a second is that Bejah is too wild for the desert. He understands the environment in which he lives and has adapted to it supported by his faith, and by portraying his character in this way, Stewart has introduced a deeper meaning into his observation of the arid desert that kills all creatures and men who neither adapt to nor accept the code of living set down by a

remorseless natural landscape. In this regard, Susan Ballyn's interpretation of 'The Afghan' and the reality of the young men's deaths is that, in the eyes of Bejah, they were faithless and 'have no Koran or God to call upon for help and whose death the Afghan considers to be the result of divine retribution for their act of unbelief'.<sup>666</sup> If, as Ballyn suggests, Stewart reveals the Afghan as 'evading both the recognition of his true dimension in the natural world and as his role as an individual within the Universe' because of the faith which sustains him, Bejah's faith and obstinate endurance are consonant with the attitudes of Rutherford, Ned Kelly, Worsley and other larger-than-life characters in Stewart's work. According to Ballyn, it seems as though the man's ability to adapt to this land and his willingness to take only what he needs to survive in it is ignored, particularly by virtue of the fact that this is the major theme on which Stewart bases his perceptions not only in character studies, but also in the short, sharp lyrics such as the dingoes in 'The Brumby' (C.P., p. 137), that go hand-in-hand with character studies like 'The Afghan' and 'Lutheran Mission' (C.P., p. 137).

Stewart's depiction of Father Vogelsang in 'Lutheran Mission' is an accurate presentation of one aspect of white settler colonisation (although Lutheran missionaries would more than likely be German, not English Christian, so both the Afghan and Father Vogelsang are non-British aliens in a dominantly British settler colony). In all good faith and Christian charity, missionaries were determined to save Aborigines from themselves and their culture, but what some now think was a mistake with devastating consequences was clear to Stewart when he investigated old Father Vogelsang, his passion for spreading the Gospel and the results of this biased view. There is an old proverb which affirms the concept 'the road of good intentions leads to hell', particularly when the traveller cannot see both sides, so 'As he preached to the blacks / And the swans and the ducks', his message is ambiguous and the

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<sup>666</sup> Ballyn, op. cit., p. 27.

whole exercise futile. Instead of creating peace and harmony among the tribes, they quarrel among themselves even as ‘they knelt at his feet’. Stewart’s argument is a plea to the missionary, ‘Old man, old man / Convert the sun, / He is stealing the lakes / And the sheep and the wool / And the roof and the wall: / Strike down the sun’. The message is clear: the missionary has no more chance of converting the Aborigines than he has in converting the sun. ‘As he preached to the blacks / And the swans and the ducks’, the humour and the near-comic rhyming of place names is an indication of Stewart’s personal sense of humour, a line of continuity which pervades his poetic oeuvre and contributes to his total philosophy; the short sing-song lines (almost playground rhymes) also help to create tone. Yet, like many of the poems in *The Birdsville Track*, there is a more serious side to the humour. The short, sharp lines which suggest orders emphasise the futility of the priest’s actions, thus a tragic mood dominates the poem, despite the jaunty rhythm of what is a ‘light’ incident. Father Vogelsang is an outsider, an alien without any understanding of what he aims to change, so he, too, will fall from grace like the victim of the mirage, who cannot adjust to the conditions and learn to survive according to the lore of the desert.

A third character portrayed by Stewart as a spiritual leader of Aboriginal culture is Joe in ‘The Rainmaker’:

‘Ooroowilanie!’ I heard him cry,  
‘Ooroowilanie!’ now low now high,  
Eaglehawk feathers  
Flying in a bunch  
In his lean hand stretching  
Like a thorn-tree’s branch,  
Commanding, beseeching  
The masters of weathers  
With eaglehawk’s screeching,  
With eaglehawk’s screeching,  
With eaglehawk’s eye,  
That the rainstone melt  
In the old iron pot  
And the grey storm pelt  
Where the plain’s red-hot;  
(C.P., pp. 139-140)

Here is a man who is thoroughly immersed in the land, its people and their culture. He is

trusted and respected as he lives with his lean dog in his 'ragbag humpy', a true part of his community, even though they know the rain will not fall. Stewart's effort to create an Aboriginal chant-effect that imitates the speech-rhythm of the rainmaker was also used by Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuncal) in her first book of poems.<sup>667</sup> The poem itself is not strictly regulated in either length of verse or in line length, but the short sharp lines such as 'Joe the rainmaker / Stamps on the gibbers'<sup>668</sup> give it a strong rhythm that approaches the spiritual music of this seemingly god-forsaken land; as the rainmaker whirls and turns and stamps in tune with the rhythm, the reader becomes part of the ceremony as the rainmaker commands and beseeches 'the master of weathers' to send life-giving rain, building up to 'Cloud come now' followed by a denouement in which Stewart indicates that Joe has given hope to the tribe who will survive despite their hardships and peace reigns. At the same time, the poem ends with a denial because 'no rain fell / In all the country', yet despite their hardships, peace reigns.

Stewart's ironic mode in 'The Afghan', 'Lutheran Mission' and 'The Rainmaker' all contrast 'faith' with 'reality', but he can only present the reality through a verbal image and language which carries its own connotations so readers can interpret his message in different ways according to their own past experiences and cultural backgrounds. 'The Rainmaker' is a poem which leaves the reader with the impression that, like Joe, there are those along the Birdsville Track who have learned to overcome the desert's hostility and superiority. In poems 'The Dogger' (C.P., p. 137) and 'The Whipmaker' (C.P., p. 125), Stewart reassures himself and readers of his poems that while the inevitability of death is always with us, there is always hope and a positive vision for the future that all who visit the Birdsville Track are not doomed

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<sup>667</sup> Walker, K., (Oodgeroo Noonuncal), *We Are Going: Poems*, Jacaranda, Brisbane, 1964.

<sup>668</sup> 'Gibbers' are the stones in the Australian desert. They are the result of rock exfoliation as a result of alternative heating and cooling.

to inevitable failure.

Stewart offers a different perspective in his response to the Birdsville Track; whereas in *Sun Orchids* his poetic concerns were directed towards the natural world, in *The Birdsville Track* collection Stewart focuses on mankind and the way humans do or do not adapt to their society. This shift of perspective is an interesting one as, like a video camera, the poet's mind contemplates the panoply of human occupants of the desert, their successes and failures. The movement of concentration and awareness here is towards a deeper, more inclusive one than in the earlier nature lyrics so that the poems give a more intellectual view of the contrast in both human and natural environments. Depictions of characters such as 'The Afghan', 'Father Vogelsang' and 'The Rainmaker' provide evidence of this, and the theme is further developed in 'The Whipmaker' (C.P., pp. 125-126) and 'The Dogger' (C.P., pp. 137-138). These characters may initially appear as stereotypes of the outback, but they are, in fact, real; the reality is made clear in the film 'The Back of Beyond' which supports the accuracy of Stewart's observations.

The whipmaker has accepted the physical and cultural conditions of the Birdsville Track, and 'One thousand miles from everywhere ... Alec Scobie sits plaiting whips' (C.P., p. 125). Once Scobie was a 'Kidman drover, station owner', but eventually the lack of water destroyed that life-style when 'drought walked in in "seventeen"; / The grey walls crumble at Ooroowilanie, / The red stones bake where the dam was green:'. With the results of the failure of the rains, Stewart observes 'Those who tread the Birdsville Track / Make a whip for their own back'. The analogy rings true, and it is made even more credible by more recent experience of drought. When Stewart compares the whip to a red snake, 'When it coils in a red snake / It's not him it means to strike', it is a warning to others not to under-estimate the climate of this area because the forces of it are always against humans who may think they are equal to it but who will eventually be beaten by it.

In Alec Scobie, Stewart sees the stoicism and defiance necessary for survival 'Where league on league the red stones glare / And summer rolls in clouds of dust'. Scobie is a survivor because he accepts the conditions offered by the Birdsville Track and is content to sit in the shade of the veranda where 'He twists the burning country in / Sixteen strands of kangaroo hide', but it is in 'The Dogger' (C.P., pp. 137-138) that Stewart sees a man who has truly adapted to his environment:

Who'd be a lonely man,  
Who'd be a dogger  
Following where the dingoes follow  
Sly shadows of water?

Who'd drive the hot red plain  
In an old tin Lizzie,  
Round and round on stone and sand,  
Sun blazing crazy?

Who'd lay the poison bait  
When the moon is lonely,  
Hanging his scalps in the coolabah-tree  
That rustles like dry money?

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.  
(C.P., pp. 125-126)

The series of questions Stewart asks in this poem emphasise the dryness and emptiness of the physical landscape and the landscape of the mind, and at the same time, reiterate themes that the poet associates with the Birdsville Track. Loneliness has always been a concern of poets as they observe those around them who are 'loners', who do not seem to need other people's company, and old Jack Clark is one such person. Stewart wonders why anyone would choose the life of a dogger, following the dingoes to 'Sly shadows of water'. Lack of water and heat on 'the hot red plain' are themes that recur throughout *The Birdsville Track Part 2*, and it becomes clear that this hot, dry landscape is symbolic of the condition of this old man who drives his 'old tin Lizzie, / Round and round on stone and sand, / sun blazing crazy'. At night the lonely moon shines on the lonely man as he 'lay(s) the poison bait' and hangs 'his scalps in

the coolabah-tree / That rustles like dry money'. The dogger is an essential part of the mosaic<sup>669</sup> that forms the overall picture of people, creatures and plants that struggle to survive virtually insurmountable odds, but unlike Scott and his part in *The Fire on the Snow* or Worsley in 'Worsley Enchanted', the people who do not adapt are not heroes — they are the victims of a landscape Stewart sees as evil and unrelenting in its aim to kill all those who cannot or will not adapt to its conditions. On the other hand, the land itself is not so much 'evil' as impervious to human thought. Stewart's 'Birdsville' poems are different illustrations of this concept, each one offering a variation on how humans, himself included, deal with the phenomenon. By using language 'tools' to tame the idea, he shows some views as futile, others hopeful, others adaptable and co-existing.

Although the idea of heroes and heroism is challenged by modernist thinkers and writers, a theme of the heroic emerges from both Stewart's verse dramas and his poetry in which the struggle for survival, sometimes referred to as vitalism,<sup>670</sup> can be seen not only in the deeds of men who become heroic giants because of the urge to discover the unknown, but also in the minutiae to be found in places like the Birdsville Track. Sometimes Stewart combines these two ideas and it is apparent in the image of the Aboriginal 'cowboy' in 'Sombrero' (C.P., p. 131), whose awareness and understanding of the desert which is his world, allows him to be 'his own hero', just as the coolabah-trees, an everlasting daisy, and budgerigars have evolved to survive even though 'the creek was dry and stony'. The main issue in 'Sombrero' is vitalism illustrated in the freedom of this man who has learnt to survive, but the moral implication which is at first recognised is not, in fact, the true image. Yet, as has been noted earlier in this discussion, the humour that emerges from these conditions is a contributory

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<sup>669</sup> Krama, *Southerly*, op. cit., p. 296.

<sup>670</sup> Kiernan, B., Introduction, *Considerations*, op. cit., p. xix, writes 'In its origins, vitalism is an evolutionist philosophy that conceives life as a constant struggle to achieve higher (and therefore ideal) forms'.

factor in survival for both humans and the creatures of nature. In the satirical ‘Sombrero’, Stewart perceives the young aboriginal ‘cowboy’ who does not care for the ‘old men under the gibbers’ but is interested only in the ‘lubras’ hot wild eyes’.

‘Lizard’ illustrates another side of life and culture on the Birdsville Track and is a further example of Stewart’s humour as he sees the funny side of survival of the fittest in the natural world:

The bicycle lizard heard a noise  
And shook in his bony frame;  
Though life’s no more than a diet of flies  
Fried on a red stone’s flame  
Or a butterfly picked with great good luck  
From a silver saltbush bubble,  
The dingo snapped and the eaglehawk struck  
When somebody moved the pebble;  
And life was sweet in the glare of steel  
On the purple stones that day —  
The bicycle lizard stood on his tail  
And rapidly wheeled away.

(C.P., p. 132)

In contrast, ‘The Branding Fire’ depicts the human side of Stewart’s humour as ‘the stockmen bronze and hard / Roll their smokes in the high stockyard / And watch that wild young bull break loose’ (C.P., p. 139); significantly, he uses ‘fire’, one of his most important and frequently used symbols, ‘Like man’s own will I see that fire, / Who stamps the stones with his desire’ to convey an admiration for adventurous men like these and the heroes of verse drama to be discussed in the next chapter.

Stewart perceives ‘Birdsville’ (C.P., p. 140) as a place where ‘time stands still’, where ‘No more the drovers / Roaring drunk, / The herds from Queensland / Like wild red rivers / All gone in a dust storm’; but time does not stand still, and in the twenty-first century the ‘Birdsville pub’ and the ‘Birdsville races’ draw crowds of people who enjoy the atmosphere of the environment, culture and life-styles which are so different from modern day urban life. Modern transport now moves the cattle quickly and efficiently. The heroes of yesteryear may no longer be the subjects of the Australian legend — men like Leichhardt and Sturt searching



for an inland sea — but the Flying Doctor lives on. While Stewart perceived ‘The heroes, the giants / Still striding that land’, response to his portraits of *The Birdsville Track* in the twenty-first century takes the form of tourist buses, trains like ‘The Ghan’ and aircraft that bring the flying Doctor on his missions of mercy, and it is this heroic image that impresses modern sensibilities.

At the beginning of this chapter I articulated my interest in considering Stewart’s images and the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of the poet’s point of view, and how he responds to a variety of themes. Consideration of these themes leads to an understanding of his ideas and how they relate to higher aesthetic values. If, sometimes, *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* lyrics appear to have a leaning towards romanticism, it soon becomes clear that Stewart modernises the language of the lyric form that still carries an often profound statement pertaining to both natural and human existence and survival. Close reading of these two collections has shown that Stewart uses the lyric form as a powerful means of presenting his ideas and beliefs which are the lines of continuity contributing to his central philosophy.

Unlike the ballad, lyric poetry does not always tell a story, but it is a literary form in which the poet can address the reader directly, to inform him or her of personal responses, points of view and perceptions. Stewart’s lyrics do this. Like many romantic precursors, Stewart’s lyrics are stark, pared down to the bone, and the lyric form aimed at a brevity, clarity, and the unity of theme — just as modern lyrics do. Stewart relies also on rhythm that emerges from his language, and as mentioned in an earlier chapter, in this way he illustrates FitzGerald’s opinion that he understood rhyme probably better than anyone else living at that time.

In reply to John Thompson’s question about rhyme (for example, ‘certainty, ‘Germany’ and ‘barbarity’ in ‘Rutherford’), Stewart explains: ‘What you’re getting there is the rhyming of three dactyls ... all have the sound, so really, I’m rhyming there a rhythm, rather than a

sound'. This gives the idea of 'music' in Stewart's poetry a new perspective which must be considered, not only in the lyrics but in discursive verse about humans and the universe also. Spiritual themes are prominent in these lyrics as well as the concerns of humanity and its response to the environment and society, especially the way both mankind and nature react to the struggle to survive.

The sterility described by Stewart in *The Birdsville Track* is an abstraction of the way he sees into the minds and hearts of the men and women in this dry environment. This is an extension of the thread of continuity which began with his early New Zealand poetry and is developed here at a higher aesthetic level; that is, without water there is no impulse to survive and the creative spirit of man is lost and consumed by aridity, heat and madness.

*Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* provide a kaleidoscope of responses, and Leonie Kramer's reference to a 'mosaic' is apt;<sup>671</sup> unless all Stewart's lyrics are seen as a whole, the reader's response cannot be complete, and as Smith writes: 'only when we can define the nature of his lyric talent will we come to see his work in perspective'.<sup>672</sup> This is especially the case when the poet offers comments on two landscapes: one is the physical landscape and the other is symbolic, the landscape of the mind; this is most evident in *The Birdsville Track* in which Stewart's characters blend as a whole and take him out of his comfort zone at the *Bulletin* office, as well as his favourite fishing places, to give him a new perspective of the universe; this idea is pursued in Chapter 9 where more mature and profound themes that affect world-wide humanity are considered in the discursive poem 'Rutherford' and elsewhere.

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<sup>671</sup> Kramer, *Southerly*, op. cit., 1973, p. 296.

<sup>672</sup> Smith, *Considerations*, op. cit., p. 169.

**CHAPTER 8**  
**‘GLENCOE’, ‘WORSLEY ENCHANTED’ AND ‘TERRA AUSTRALIS’**

1. *GLENCOE*<sup>673</sup>

This chapter explores Douglas Stewart’s interest in heroic struggle, expressed in long poems which are both contemplative and narrative, especially in the sequence of the Glencoe ballads that reflect style and structure of the older Scottish border ballads. Much of the groundwork for writing ballads was done when Stewart was writing *Dosser in Springtime*,<sup>674</sup> *The Fire on the Snow* and *Ned Kelly*, in all of which, to different degrees, he used both lyrics and ballads to tell a story dramatically. Susan Ballyn writes, ‘it is my belief that it is in *Glencoe* that the poet actually reaches a watershed in the maturity of his writing’,<sup>675</sup> and that it is ‘a pivotal work in the corpus of Stewart’s production’.<sup>676</sup> The ballads in this chapter clearly are not ‘apprentice’ poems but are the work of a mature, imaginative poet who is more than competent in his chosen form. Ballyn’s judgement might also apply to other work such as *The Birdsville Track* series of ballads and lyrics that highlight survival and failure of all living things.

Stewart was not alone in his attempt to experiment with the ballad form, and like the literary ballads of some of his contemporaries (such as Denis Glover in New Zealand, or William Hart-Smith in Australia), his ballads do not follow the folk or traditional ballads, in that they are not songs transmitted orally. Instead, they are literary ballads of the sort that Abrams defines as ‘narrative poem[s] written by a learned poet in deliberate imitation of the

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<sup>673</sup> Stewart, D., ‘Glencoe’, *Collected Poems*, 1967, pp. 197-221.

<sup>674</sup> Stewart, D., *Dosser in Springtime*, 1946, 1967 and 1973.

<sup>675</sup> Ballyn, S., ‘Douglas Stewart and the Bulletin’, *Short Fiction in the New Literatures in English*, Nice, 1989, p. 60.

<sup>676</sup> *ibid.*, p. 57.

form and spirit of the popular ballad'.<sup>677</sup> Stewart took advantage of the ballad form's flexibility to develop what R.D. FitzGerald described as 'symbolism and allegory and he could still entertain his reader even when he mystifies him'.<sup>678</sup> Stewart was able to achieve in *Glencoe* a poetic voice with imaginative motifs, supplemented by voices of his characters and expressed in varied ballad forms. Some of these motifs, along with the interplay of voices, are topics of focus in 'Worsley Enchanted' that follows.

The *Glencoe* ballad sequences are the result of Stewart's research into both the historical nature of the massacre as well as into the ballad form itself. These ballads, like the Border ballads of Scotland, are tragic and severe. In his introduction to *Australian Bush Ballads*, Stewart wrote that the ballad is 'generally blunter in sensibility, shallower in thought and more elementary in technique than poetry of the highest order [but] it is not necessarily inferior'. He also demonstrates this in the *Glencoe* ballads that may strike the reader as the Border ballads struck Stewart, as 'deeply exciting and beautifully accomplished poetry as well as magnificent balladry'.<sup>679</sup> Stewart was clearly familiar with a great variety of ballad forms when he wrote this in the Introduction to *Australian Bush Ballads* in the 1955 edition, but it was in 1947, when he wrote *Glencoe*, that he put into practice his ballads research summed up in the Introduction to *Australian Bush Ballads*:

When you turn from the fairy ballads and the keenest miniature dramas of clan against clan, love against husband or son against father or mother — dreadful deeds like those of the Greek tragedies that take on their intensity from something unnatural, almost supernaturally wrong, in the crime — to the simpler stories of action such as 'Chevy Chase' or the Robin Hood series, there is obviously a drop in the poetic content'.<sup>680</sup>

Nancy Keesing points out that Stewart 'began experimenting with ballad forms at about the same time as he wrote *The Fire on the Snow* as a deliberate exercise in mastering yet

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<sup>677</sup> Abrams, M.H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, op. cit., 1971, p. 14.

<sup>678</sup> FitzGerald, R.D., 'Motif in the Work of Douglas Stewart', op. cit., 1963, pp. 25-50.

<sup>679</sup> Stewart, D, and Keesing, N., Introduction to *Australian Bush Ballads*, D. Stewart, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1955, p. 24.

<sup>680</sup> Stewart D., op. cit., pp. 25-26.

another tool in the craft of poetry'.<sup>681</sup> Stewart contributed to Australia's mythology with the appearance of heroic figures such as those in *Glencoe*, 'Worsley Enchanted' and 'Terra Australis' and the later anthology, *Voyager Poems* (1960)<sup>682</sup>.

The intense emotion and rhythm that Stewart admires in 'the best of the dramatic ballads, such as "Edward, Edward" with its perfect purity of style and its fierce intensity of emotion,' contributes to violence in *Glencoe*:

And what will ye do wi' your tow'rs and your ha',  
Edward, Edward?  
And what will ye do wi' your tow'rs and your ha',  
That were sae fair to see, O?  
'I'll let them stand till they doun fa',  
Mither, mither;  
I'll let them stand till they doun fa',  
For here never mair maun I be, O.'

'And what will ye leave to your bairns and your wife,  
Edward, Edward?  
And what will ye leave to your bairns and your wife,  
When ye gang owre the sea, O?'  
'The world's room: let them beg through life,  
Mither, mither;  
The world's room: let them beg through life.'<sup>683</sup>

In all poems used in this chapter, Stewart focuses on heroic struggle, an aspect of Lindsay's vitalism; Stewart's philosophy, too, is one that perceives life as an on-going struggle to achieve extraordinary qualities of courage and bravery. It is relevant here to reiterate that, although valuing Lindsay's opinion of his work, and, while appreciating any positive feedback, Stewart pursued his own philosophy that, like a nation's language which must change as the nation changes, poetry also changes as modern life changes with the times.<sup>684</sup> Stewart preferred features of poetry such as structure, rhyme and rhythm, so he continued to accommodate himself to modernism in his poetry and verse plays<sup>685</sup> while at the same time he

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<sup>681</sup> Keesing, N., *Douglas Stewart*, 1969, p. 18.

<sup>682</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1960.

<sup>683</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., pp. 25-26.

<sup>684</sup> Stewart, op. cit., Introduction to *Modern Australian Verse 2*, p. xxvii.

<sup>685</sup> Sharkey, op. cit., p. 5.

maintained themes such as the struggle to survive by humans and nature, he experimented with new techniques such as the inclusion of distinctive voices; this provided the opportunity for the poet to pursue changing moods and attitudes in these ballads. Success or failure in the will to survive is one of the universal mysteries of life, a line of continuity that Stewart investigates in *Glencoe*, *Worsley Enchanted* and 'Terra Australis'.

Stewart's interest in the ballad form is shown earlier in both 'The Dossier in Springtime' and 'The Bunyip',<sup>686</sup> but he had been experimenting with the ballad form in the 1930s in New Zealand, and this can be seen in 'A Song Across the Sea' in his 1939 collection, *The White Cry* (C.P., p. 298). *Glencoe* reflects his past experiences in New Zealand (where the cold of the winter snows is comparable to those in Scotland), as well as his personal visits to Culloden and Glencoe.<sup>687</sup> As well as depicting the natural world of both Scotland (the home of his ancestors) and New Zealand (his own home before he settled in Australia), Stewart foregrounds social and political strife, with images of the Glencoe massacre, thus continuing and developing themes and issues first presented in 'Early New Zealand Poems', 'Green Lions' (1936) and 'The White Cry' (1939).

Throughout Stewart's earlier poetry and verse plays, several motifs contribute to unity, continuity and his personal vocabulary: Taaffe suggests motifs of darkness and snow, blood and drink, fire and sword, 'recur at key moments of the cycle and characterise the nature of the action'.<sup>688</sup> This is evident when the 'black' Earl of Breadalbane and the 'blackberry bush' indicate corruption and treachery that contrasts with the snow upon which the blood of victims of the massacre will fall. The anger in Ballad 14 evokes anguish, foreboding and dread in the

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<sup>686</sup> Stewart, D., *Collected Poems*, p. 226.

<sup>687</sup> Stewart, D., *Springtime in Taranaki*, op. cit., 1991. Stewart visited Culloden and Glencoe in 1937, p. 245.

<sup>688</sup> Taaffe, B., op. cit., 1995, p. 167.

voice of the servant's questioning 'Dinna ye hear ...' and in the dialogue and dialect, the rhythm of the Border ballads (4, 3, 4, 3), and the continual questioning, all of which give strength to and heighten the lyrical quality of Ballad 15. Snow also supports tragic drama when the hand of an innocent child is found in Ballad 15.

Stewart generates a mood of grief and anger in the present tense verb forms in ballad 15 (20 lines structured with five stanzas of four lines each and three stresses per line), while observing the site of the massacre and, at the same time, conversing with the wind and the river, apostrophising the wind and the river to heighten the effect of the massacre so long ago:

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

(Ballad 15, C.P., pp. 220-221)

He conjures images of the physical setting as he contemplates historical events on the bank of the Coe and images which stem from the peaceful surroundings he observed during his visit to the site in 1937. The change to the present tense strengthens the theme of violence, not only in the Glencoe massacre (where 'They found the hand of a child / Lying upon the snow'), but in all lands in all times: 'Life *is* fierce and wild', 'the earth *is* stone,' and 'the hand of a murdered child / *Will* not bear thinking on'; written in the present tense, Stewart's protest against violence, is not only about the massacre of Glencoe, it is written in a modern sense against the murder of many thousands of Jewish children during World War II. This is an example of the way the poet illustrates his practice of accommodating himself to modernism and modern themes in the literature of his time.

'Glencoe' has a circular structure that provides a framework within which Stewart's persona, a twentieth-century narrator, tells the story of the seventeenth-century massacre. His

proposed verse play with its unmanageable characters<sup>689</sup> was to become a successful series of ballads when he decided on its present form. It contains dramatic elements that depend on voices as well as motifs in thirteen of the sixteen ballads while the poet adopts the role of narrator in ballads 2 to 15. The three ballads in which the narrator's voice is strongest are ballads 6, 10 and 15. Stewart's cameo portrait in Ballad 6 shows John Dalrymple, Master of Stair, the 'weasel', as cunning, scheming and violent. The image of a 'weasel' clearly conveys Dalrymple's machinations and treachery. In ten quatrains of rhyming tetrameter couplets, Stewart gradually changes the description of the Master of Stair from a gentle, fat little man who has a 'smiling face' to a completely different person:

The dark eyes narrow, the soft lips twitch,  
They say Dalrymple's dam is a witch;  
The blackberry clump is the weasel's lair:  
John Dalrymple, Master of Stair. (C.P., P. 211)

Stewart knows this is folk-lore ('They say'), but the metaphoric 'blackberry clump is the weasel's lair' is sinister in its inference and symbolism.

In ballad No. 10 the mood changes completely as the rhythm changes to stanzas of six lines with stresses of 5, 6 and 7, all long lines bearing narrative burden, for example, 'skirling up the valley, row by kilted row, / A hundred bonny soldiers go marching to Glencoe' (C.P. 214), and if readers listen carefully they can 'hear' the music of the bagpipes as the climax to the violence of the massacre approaches. Geoffrey Grigson suggests that some poets are gifted with 'verbal melody'<sup>690</sup>; Stewart creates his own verbal melody with words like 'skirling' in which the 'ir' following 'sk' is an accurate presentation of the 'music' of the bagpipes, while the onomatopoeic sound of marching soldiers can be heard in strong consonants at the beginning of all words except the initial 'A', followed by strong vowel sounds in 'soldiers', 'go', 'marching', 'to' and in the 'coe of Glencoe' rhyming with the

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<sup>689</sup> Stewart, D., Introduction, *The Golden Lover*, op. cit., 1958.

<sup>690</sup> Grigson, G., Introduction, *The Penguin Book of Ballads*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1977, p. 13.



repetition of ‘row’ in the previous line (C.P., p. 214).

Onomatopoeia continues in most stanzas in Ballad 10. As the Campbells march through the heather and pine trees, Stewart creates a peaceful rural scene, but this is disrupted; the change is quick,

Run, you black-faced ewes, now; stare you shaggy cattle;  
Seldom breaks the silence here with kettledrums all drumming;  
Is it avalanche or flood, is it distant sounds of battle,  
The thunder in the mountains when the Campbell men are coming?  
(C.P., p. 214)

The rhythm in this stanza rises in a crescendo in keeping with the drumming of the kettledrums to announce the arrival of the Campbell men — it is the start of the action in *Glencoe*, and it provokes in the reader dread of what is to come. In the final stanza of Ballad 10, Stewart asks, ‘Whose the shade that stalks there beside King William’s flag?’ He offers no answer but John Prebble includes an explanation in his later discussion of the massacre:

For some days the *Bean Nighe* (the shade) had been seen by the waterfalls of the Coe, a supernatural washing-woman who cleansed a shroud again and again, and none who saw her had the courage to ask whose it might be. For several nights the *Caoineag* had been heard, the keening woman who could be neither approached nor addressed, but who always foretold death.<sup>691</sup>

In keeping with his practice of not including extraneous detail, Stewart simply referred to the ‘shade’ (a synonym for Death) because he was aware that this was one of the superstitions of Scottish folk-lore in the seventeenth century.

Ballads 1 and 16 take place after the massacre; this separates the narrative into two strands; Ballad 1 is set in an ‘ale-house’ in Edinburgh where, as Taaffe suggests, Stewart ‘establishes the dramatic mode of opposing voices in which the cycle is cast’.<sup>692</sup> Hostile encounters between ‘bottle-nosed Jock’ and Robert Campbell are dramatised in Ballad 1, and between the landlord and Jock in Ballad 16. These two ballads show animosity between the Campbell and MacDonald clans that led to, and followed, the massacre. Ballads 2 to 15

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<sup>691</sup> Prebble, J., *Glencoe*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, p. 205.

<sup>692</sup> Taaffe, B.J., *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 167.

indicate the strength of the structure of *Glencoe*. They separate the dark humour of Ballads 1 and 16 from ‘the violence and pathos of the inner tale, and therefore correct(s) the odd shift of tone’<sup>693</sup> that weakens *Glencoe* when omitted from *Selected Poems* (pp. 73-85).

## 2. WORSLEY ENCHANTED

Michael Sharkey’s suggestion that Stewart was ‘accommodating himself to modernity in his poetry throughout his career’<sup>694</sup> is significant in Stewart’s development as a poet, and it is evidenced in ‘Worsley Enchanted’, the story of Worsley’s return to Antarctica with Shackleton; they and the crew members are depicted as courageous sailors who endure hostile conditions in order to survive the journey to South Georgia. As well as defying the physical landscape, Stewart’s characters are affected by the landscape (that is a landscape of the mind), as lines of the continuity contribute to the poet’s total poetic oeuvre.

Stewart agreed with younger poets who claimed that new developments in modern poetry were necessary, but he also remarked that ‘there is no reason for disparaging the fine and varied treatment that the voyager theme has had; it is only that it now seems possible to sum up what has been accomplished’.<sup>695</sup> Stewart defends his choice of narrative poetry [such as his own and others poets’] dismissed by critics ‘as if they [narrative poems] were a valid term of disparagement’. He cites the *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, *The Ancient Mariner* and others all built around tension as examples of the most effective long poems throughout the course of literature.<sup>696</sup> At the same time, he points out that merely telling a story is not writing poetry. His idea was that narrative poetry not only tells a story, but it can also be an epic about the fall of mankind such as in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, or a vehicle for comments on life such as

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<sup>693</sup> *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>694</sup> Sharkey, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>695</sup> Stewart, D., *Voyager Poems*, p. 10.

<sup>696</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

Byron's *Don Juan*, while 'even the autobiographical meditations of Wordsworth and Shelley's most ambitious flights into outer space have a narrative construction and movement'.<sup>697</sup>

Although writers of prose and poetry were affected by contemporary thought in the 1940s (See Chapter 9, 'A Decade of Transition'), Leonie Kramer notes (1981) that modern writers 'convey a sense of present time, even while dwelling remarkably often on the past'.<sup>698</sup> This trend is obvious in Stewart's work and that of others included in the *Voyager Poems* anthology for whom the nineteenth century meant convicts, bushrangers, gold rushes, drovers and shearers, but for whom the main focus from 1940 is on exploration and discovery, the origins of the country, and personal history, even while the past grows more remote. Thomas Shapcott remarked that Stewart could not have foreseen 'how widely the voyager concept might range ... The energy of much recent Australian poetry derives as much from this opening up of the voyager tradition as to the infusion of recent American examples and challenges'.<sup>699</sup> Stewart's poem points decidedly forward to the future, the quest itself, and the acknowledgement that Worsley's search may be materially unrewarding.

Frank Worsley was born in Akaroa in 1872.<sup>700</sup> In 1851, according to Worsley's autobiography, his grandfather, Henry Worsley, 'an English gentleman with the air of a prince but no business instincts ... fired with the spirit of adventure' (p. 7), emigrated to New Zealand. Henry Worsley's second wife and the families of three of his relatives accompanied him. Their eldest son, Henry Theophilus, then aged 17, later became Frank Worsley's father. The Worsley men were all adventurers; for example, as Worsley relates in Chapter 1 (*New Zealand Emigrants*), when a group of brothers and half-brothers, led by Henry Theophilus

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<sup>697</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>698</sup> Kramer, *op. cit.*, 1981, p. 17

<sup>699</sup> Shapcott, T., 'The Voyager Tradition, *South Pacific Images*, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, 1978, p. 105.

<sup>700</sup> Worsley, F., *First Voyage in a Square-rigged Ship*, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1938, p. 17.

(Harry) rounded-up wild cattle from the hills (called Mesopotamia) and drove them to Christchurch across the flooded Canterbury Plains. Frank recalls that his brother Harry (Hal) and he ‘were keen on exploration’; and tells the story of a day when they ‘took a day off school’ to watch a Maori shark hunt; after leaving the Maori hunters, they explored the area around Akaroa, Hal having walked 28 miles and the younger Frank 23 miles in the one day (p. 18). Hal was apprenticed to the New Zealand Shipping company and sailed in their clipper ship *Waitara* from Lyttleton. The *Waitara* sank in a collision with the *Hurunui* five days out of port, but Hal was saved (p. 39). At the age of sixteen Frank became an apprentice on a wool clipper; after his apprenticeship, he became an expert navigator in the Royal Naval Reserve.<sup>701</sup> By 1914 he had become a Lieutenant-Commander in the Canadian trade.

Stewart writes:

Worsley ... said that he joined the expedition as the result of a dream — “One night I was navigating a ship along it [Burlington Street, London] — an absurd dream. Sailors are superstitious, and when I woke up next morning I hurried like mad into my togs and down Burlington Street I went”. Then he saw the headquarters of the [Imperial] Trans-Atlantic Expedition, and within a few minutes Shackleton had engaged him.<sup>702</sup>

In commenting on the popularity of Rupert Brooke’s wartime poems and John Masefield’s narratives, Stewart argues, in his introduction to *Voyager Poems*, that poets should not write down to cheap popular levels, either in the ballad or the narrative, to achieve popularity; instead, they should meet the public halfway ‘by returning to the basis of the narrative, as the poets in this anthology have done’.<sup>703</sup> He follows his own advice in the

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<sup>701</sup> After his journey with Shackleton, Worsley distinguished himself in World War I as commander of a navy P-Boat (P61), sinking a German U-Boat; he was awarded a DSO; then in 1918 he was awarded a second DSO for leading a land raid against the Bolsheviks. After the war, he received an OBE for services to Great Britain, in the HMS Endurance Tracking Project.

Retrieved from

[www.visitandlearn.co.uk/TopicalFactFiles/EnduranceObituaries/FrankWorsley/t](http://www.visitandlearn.co.uk/TopicalFactFiles/EnduranceObituaries/FrankWorsley/t), 23 November, 2008.

<sup>702</sup> Stewart, 1960, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>703</sup> Stewart, D., op. cit., 1960, p. 8.

narrative poem 'Worsley Enchanted'<sup>704</sup> (1952), 'a dramatic story of harsh endeavour' that shares with the ballads qualities which appeal to readers: 'their interest in adventure; their robustness and masculinity'.<sup>705</sup>

'Worsley Enchanted' (C.P., pp. 175-194) is a poetic account of the story of Ernest Shackleton's expedition to the Antarctic in 1914-1916.<sup>706</sup> Frank Worsley, Captain of the *Endurance*, wrote a recount of the journey 'almost seven years after the rescue'.<sup>707</sup> *The Great Antarctic Rescue* reads like a novel made exciting by way of its authenticity and Worsley's racy narrative, characterised by active verbs and heightened vignettes in a popular-adventure form. Some of the events in *Worsley Enchanted* can be identified in Worsley's autobiographical recount of the expedition, for example in Section VII, 'He watches Shackleton'. Stewart said that 'The chief sources for this poem were Commander Frank Worsley's book *Endurance*<sup>708</sup> (also his *First Voyage in a Square-rigged Ship*) and Sir Ernest Shackleton's *South*<sup>709</sup>'.<sup>710</sup>

In *The Fire on the Snow*, Stewart portrayed Scott as a 'gentleman adventurer'. Although not aristocrats, Scott, Worsley and Shackleton were depicted by Stewart as gentlemen adventurers who were distinguished by their social obligation, breeding and education. All were trained as men of the sea: Scott as a naval cadet, and Worsley and Shackleton as navigators who had been trained on square-rigged ships. Shackleton and Worsley were both New Zealanders, and according to Worsley, Shackleton was a great leader:

It seemed to me that among all his achievements and triumphs, great as they were, his one failure was the most glorious. By self-sacrifice and throwing his own life

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<sup>704</sup> Stewart, 'Worsley Enchanted', *Voyager Poems*, *ibid.*, 1960, pp. 33.

<sup>705</sup> Stewart, D., 1960, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>706</sup> Worsley, F.A., *The Great Antarctic Rescue: Shackleton's Boat Journey*, introduction by 1977.

<sup>707</sup> *ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>708</sup> Worsley, F., *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>709</sup> Shackleton, E., *South: The Story of the 1914-1917 Expedition*, William Heinemann, London, 1920.

<sup>710</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, 1960, pp. 117-118.

into the balance he saved every one of his men — not a life was lost — although at times it had looked unlikely that one could be saved.

His outstanding characteristics were his care of, and anxiety for the lives and well-being of all his men<sup>711</sup>

In Section VII, Stewart captures Shackleton's leadership in a rare moment:

Here half-way to South Georgia in the midst of the ocean  
Are one man sick, and two men weakening, and Worsley,  
And Crean, that saturnine bear, with his tireless devotion —  
How much do I care for them all? I care for them fiercely,  
That each should do well for himself, so well for me,  
And proudly come swaggering home, each knowing his courage,  
And none to be wasted, dead on the snow or the sea  
With the seagulls screaming the wreck and ruin of the voyage.  
(C.P., p. 183)

Unlike the language of 'He travels into the country of his dream' (C.P., p. 176), there are no abstractions in this verse. Keeping to historical facts,<sup>712</sup> Stewart emphasises Shackleton's concern for the men in his charge by beginning many of these lines with 'And'; the anaphora thus emphasises Shackleton's concern for the well-being of his men. Stewart's New Zealand characters, Stewart seems to imply, because of their backgrounds with snow, ice and cold, possessed endurance to cope with the harsh climate of Antarctica where ice and flame are images of 'both the challenge and the victory of endurance'.<sup>713</sup>

The dream motif is one of Stewart's numerous lines of continuity which contribute in various ways to his total philosophy. A remote feature of the poet's philosophy in 'Worsley Enchanted' that the closer one moves towards nature the closer one moves towards the spiritual is an underlying and profound theme which Stewart demonstrates with the 'fourth man' in the journey across the mountains to Stromness Bay. When Worsley dreams of a previous visit to the Antarctic, Stewart's persona is referring to a conventional dream, that is, a vision that happens while the dreamer sleeps.

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<sup>711</sup> *ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>712</sup> *ibid.*, Introduction by Sir Edmund Hillary, pp. 11-29.

<sup>713</sup> Perkins, E. 'A Perspective on Australian Drama 1941-1971: Aspiration, survival and expansion as Themes in English, American and Australian stage drama', unpublished thesis, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, 1983, p. 38.

Stewart begins 'Worsley Enchanted' with a dream. The introduction to the poem is in prose:

His voyage begins with a dream which, "because sailors are superstitious men, sends him to Burlington Street, where he finds the office of the Imperial Trans-Atlantic Expedition, 1914 (C.P., p. 175).

Recurring fire and *dream* images begin the poem with the couplet: 'Commander Worsley, fired with a purpose, / Plunged in his dream like a stocky porpoise' (C.P., p. 175). Images like this are links with *The Fire on the Snow* and *Rutherford*, and repetition of dream imagery adds unity to Stewart's themes, in verse about adventurous explorers like Scott, Worsley, Quiros, Lane and Rutherford, the scientific explorer. However, the conventional dream motif is developed throughout 'Worsley Enchanted' to include different connotations of the motif itself. The word can mean: fantasy, reverie, contemplation or the delusion Quiros and Lane experience in 'Terra Australis', but it can also mean ambition to succeed or to experience again a remembered situation such as Worsley and Scott undergo. This type of dream or aspiration compels the characters into action.

Dreams also appear in a number of Stewart's lyrical poems in *Collected Poems* and *Selected Poems*. Stewart expands his notion of dream imagery in 'Spider-Gums' in which he suggests that the Creator of the earth itself had a vision of an earthly paradise: 'As though in earth's deep dream of stone / Some leafy thought was taking form / And fled before the dream was done, / Half-finished out to sun and storm' (C.P., 117). The dream motif reappears in 'The Silkworms' which returns to the dream or vision that appears in a sleeping or dying state: 'There is that pang of joy on the edge of dying — / Their soft wings whirr, they dream that they are flying' (C.P., pp. 49-50). The dream of ambition is strongest in 'Rutherford', the atomic scientist who 'felt he was living in a dream' (C.P., pp. 96-105).

'Dreams are dreams and waking waking', Worsley thinks as he returns to everyday life,

and he ‘supped his porridge’. In this Section (as in other poems in *Worsley Enchanted*) Stewart seems to become Worsley when he presents the man’s more profound desires to once again experience the Antarctic environment, as Worsley reminisces about a previous journey to the Antarctic, and his excitement increases as he day-dreams about his new adventure:

“I have loved the sea, but that took courage,  
To steer a ship through a sky of sleet  
And a mad green sea in Burlington Street.  
Dreams are dreams and waking waking  
Yet still in my mind those waves racing”.

Commander Worsley put on his clobber:  
“Had no grog but I’m green-seas over.  
There aren’t white icebergs in city streets  
But pretty women and bowler hats,  
I don’t want hats and I don’t want women,  
I follow the wild white goose of an omen”.  
(C.P., p. 175)

Once again Stewart prefers the colloquial idiom ‘clobber’ while the more philosophical ideas are presented as metaphor (‘A mad green sea in Burlington Street’), and when Worsley says, ‘I follow the wild white goose’, he knows it is ‘an omen’ in the way the Ancient Mariner knows the albatross is an omen. Whereas the albatross means death in Coleridge’s poem, Stewart’s wild white goose is a symbol of extreme danger which results in outstanding heroism. By juxtaposing colour imagery of ‘white icebergs in city streets’ and ‘I follow the wild white goose’, Stewart develops the idea of enchantment, as he does in *The Golden Lover*.

Stewart’s poetic devices include alliteration, repetition and other rhetorical ploys as well as traditional rhyming patterns to enhance the tension and excitement that his character Worsley feels. At the same time, Stewart creates dream imagery as he does in *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover*, and this interfusion of reality and dream creates a unity characteristic of his dramatic and narrative work.

Images in ‘Worsley Enchanted’ are given added strength by metaphors such as ‘His blunt nose buffeted sheets of ice, / A snowstorm smothered the kelp of his eyes’ (Section I) that act as indicators of what is to follow later in the section, particularly during the voyage



from Elephant Island to South Georgia in the *James Caird* (Section VII), as ‘streamers of kelp show brown in the gap of the reef’ (Section XII, ‘He sees the end of the journey’ C.P., pp 189-190). It is as though the decision is not Worsley’s to make as he

Squared his shoulders,  
Grinned at his boots like to black boulders:  
‘Whether it’s daylight, whether it’s dream,  
Whether you sink me, whether you swim,  
Whether you walked or were pushed or rolled  
It’s you and me for the end of the world’.  
(C.P., p. 175)

Whether the decision is Worsley’s or that of some higher being (for example, the ‘fourth man’ in Section XV), it is made, and especially with the anaphoric ‘whether’ that enforces his decision, this poem stimulates readers’ curiosity as they wonder whether Worsley and Shackleton will suffer the same fate as Scott and his ill-fated expedition. Even so, it is typical of Stewart to include a hint of humour in this poem as he does in other poems with a serious theme; in this instance, colloquial expressions such as ‘Commander Worsley supped his porridge’, ‘Commander Worsley put on his clobber’ and ‘Commander Worsley squared his shoulders / Grinned at his boots like two black boulders’ provide relief from the built-up ‘poetical’ phrasing that precedes them. In line with his idea that poetry should have broad appeal, Stewart undercuts his own seriousness when it veers toward sombreness.

Like Scott in *The Fire on the Snow*, Worsley’s struggle with the environment begins with a dream, one of the several threads of reality and drama that give Stewart’s work unity. On the other hand, his personal philosophy that the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth — earth is life, and all creatures, humans and beasts, are part of that life in their struggle to survive, as shown in *The Birdsville Track* series. A.J. Hassall writes, ‘Like the unexplored heart of Australia, Antarctica inspired epic journeys of courage and endurance, not against heat and thirst, but cold and starvation, as it provided

stories of heroic <sup>714</sup>endurance and survival'.<sup>715</sup> Stewart's series of ballads and lyrics portray dramatically Shackleton's struggle to survive against unbearable odds in a hostile environment. At the same time, he does not decry Scott's courage and heroism in defeat. In his review of *Sun Orchids*, S.L. Ovenden suggests that voices of characters Shackleton and Worsley are intense, expressing thought, and external by which 'the interplay of temperature and illusion is indistinguishable from reality'.<sup>716</sup> Furthermore, Ovenden acknowledges Stewart's 'masterly achievement' in 'the shift of mood and the development of subtle depths of hyper-reality throughout the poem as it modulates through facet after facet of experience'. This remark is relevant to many sections in 'Worsley Enchanted', especially in Section VII: The beauty of the image of an iceberg and the internal rhyme 'throats' and 'boats' convey terror:

And an iceberg coming and terror gripping our throats  
While slowly, superb and deadly, it sails its path  
Straight for the boats in the sparkling light of the spring,  
Towering upon us, so noble a shape of death  
My heart rose up to meet that majestic thing ...

And then when it comes it rushes beyond all reason,  
The wave of my fate so vast I thought some tempestuous mass  
Of cloud and thunder banked upon the horizon  
Had lifted, crested with light, and begun to race.  
Cries Shackleton pointing to the wave, to the sea itself,  
Risen in a wall, in the sky, in a midnight deluge.  
All racing under, all hurtling round to engulf  
The boat and the men and the heart's most secret refuge.

(C.P., pp. 182-185)

The rhythm of this passage draws the reader into the poem by way of the rise and fall of language such as 'rushes beyond all reason', 'tempestuous mass / Of cloud and thunder', and 'crested with life, and begun to race'. These add to the terror that Stewart imagines was felt by Shackleton and his men as they experience the magnificence of the iceberg which threatens

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<sup>714</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>715</sup> Hassall, A.J., op. cit., 1988, p. 393.

<sup>716</sup> Ovenden, S.L., 'Worsley Well Done: Review of *Sun Orchids*', *Austrovert*, Volume 8, No. 5, 1952, p. 5.

their lives; it seems to have a life of its own in wanting to clear its environment of the invaders. The pentameter beat insists on the inevitability of fate, but at the same time, Worsley says his heart ‘rose up to meet that majestic thing’:<sup>717</sup> Stewart imagines what it must have been like to experience the terror of the moment and, at the same time, to wonder at the majesty of nature in its own habitat. In this image, Stewart again alludes to the men’s bravery in the ‘spirit of the founding fathers’ of the nation, and as Shackleton says in Section XII, ‘it would have been wrong to perish ... I have beaten the wind, he says, and the sea and the ice’ (C.P., p. 189).

‘Worsley Enchanted’ tells the story of Shackleton’s Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914, when Worsley commanded the ship *Endurance*. The expedition aimed to ‘cross the Antarctic from the Weddell Sea to the Ross Sea by way of the South Pole, but the ship was trapped in pack-ice in January 1915 and was crushed and destroyed in October’.<sup>718</sup> Stewart writes: After that, ‘the twenty-eight men drifted for six months on an ice-floe until the breaking-up of the pack let them launch their three boats, the *James Caird*, the *Stancomb Wills* and the *Dudley Docker*, in which the crew made their way to Elephant Island’.<sup>719</sup>

The rescue party, Shackleton, Worsley, Crean, McNeish, Macarty and Vincent, set out from Elephant Island for the whaling station at South Georgia, a distance of 800 miles,<sup>720</sup> in the *James Caird* on 24 April, 1916. Worsley’s recount of the journey is told in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of *The Great Antarctic Rescue*. Stewart’s interpretation of the journey appears in: Section V, ‘Crean’s Song’ (C.P., p. 180); Section VI, ‘Crean hears the undersong of that ‘flat, dreary but somehow heartening tune’ (C.P., pp. 180-182); Section VIII, ‘He [Worsley] watches Shackleton’ (C.P., PP. 182-187); Section VIII, ‘He [Worsley] looks at a sick man’ (C.P., 185-

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<sup>717</sup> Hopkins, G.M., ‘The Windhover’, *The Mentor Book of Major British Poets*, ed. O. Williams, New English Library, London, 1963, p. 351. This image is a reflection of Stewart’s admiration of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ ‘The Windhover’, specifically in the lines, ‘My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird, the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!’.

<sup>718</sup> Stewart, D., *Voyager Poems*, p. 117.

<sup>719</sup> *ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>720</sup> *ibid.*, p. 117.

186); Section X, 'He [Worsley] hears the sick man' (C.P., pp. 188-189); Section XII, 'He [Worsley] sees the end of the boat journey' while Shackleton speaks (C.P., pp. 189-190), and finally, Section XIII, 'The landing' (C.P. p. 190). This short poem brings to a close the progress of the journey from Elephant Island. In Section VI, Crean 'sang at the tiller' and hears in his mind 'The sound of a keel on shingle', which image is repeated in Section XIII.

In 'Worsley Enchanted' Stewart's persona is the omniscient figure, somewhat like the Announcer in *The Fire on the Snow*, who separates the speakers throughout the series of poems through his main character. Prose headings introduce each Section and indicate Worsley's role as he watches the other men as they express Stewart's version of what they are saying or thinking. These 'headings' are indicators of speakers' identities and they support speakers with that distinctive speaker's dialogue. Colman points out that 'the contrasting viewpoints of a variety of speakers, each with his own role to play in the story'<sup>721</sup> add to the dramatic effect of Shackleton and Worsley's journey. Colman continues his argument that 'repeated changes of speaker and rhythm are important'; not only are comments voiced by the explorers themselves, but also 'one incident is recounted from the point of view of nine Emperor-penguins ... [that] regard the men as only a special sort of dark penguin, "a race of birds / majestic, beyond belief".'

Worsley meditates on the penguins in the heading; he thinks that their wailing cries 'sounded like a dirge for the ship', the 'Endurance', destroyed by pack-ice (CP., p. 177). Every verse in Section III ends emphatically with the line: 'Said the nine Emperor penguins'. The penguins are anthropomorphic creatures which give 'imaginative body to the sense of doom running through the whole sequence'.<sup>722</sup> This 'sense of doom' is evoked through Stewart's language: 'without hope', 'They rocked and shook with grief', 'crushed that ship in

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<sup>721</sup> Colman (Review of) *Collected Poems*, *Poetry Magazine*, No. 1, February 1968, p. 28.

<sup>722</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

her grave', 'we were alone and afraid', 'we thought of death', so by personifying the birds, Stewart moves philosophically towards nature and in doing so moves closer to the earth's spirit, thus foreshadowing the presence of the fourth man in Section XV, 'Grave and indifferent' (CP., p. 192), unlike the penguins who deify the men: 'Something had happened to our gods ... Nobody knows where they went, / They came from the sky and are gone'. As the narrative unfolds in 'Worsley Enchanted', Worsley's enchantment is, as Kramer suggests: 'the contrast between dream and reality that is an important part of the psychic landscape of the poem' and the dream becomes the reality he (Worsley) must seek'.<sup>723</sup> FitzGerald suggests that the idea of the 'fourth man' is consistent with Stewart's 'philosophy of mutual identifications',<sup>724</sup> an identification of the original motif: the personal sense of spiritual unity with nature'.<sup>725</sup> The penguins give 'imaginative body to the sense of doom running through the whole sequence'.<sup>726</sup> Again, as in earlier evocations of Stewart's philosophical work, the poet has modernised his goal to achieve higher ideals by concentrating on the motif of human aspiration and the struggle to achieve a double reality.

As Crean, Worsley and Shackleton sail the *James Caird* to South Georgia in a rescue bid, Crean's song (C.P., 180), illustrates Stewart's ongoing interest in the ballad form:

'Nine hundred stormy miles'  
The wet wind sang to Crean,  
And Crean sang at the tiller  
'The Wearin' o' the Green'. (Section V)

The ballad form is stronger in No. VI:

It's cold, says Crean at the tiller,  
And dim in my mind I hear  
The sound of a keel on shingle  
And surf on a faraway beach  
Where ice and pebbles mingle  
And, thin for a moment, a cheer

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<sup>723</sup> Kramer, op. cit., p. 287.

<sup>724</sup> FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>725</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>726</sup> Colman, op. cit., p. 28.

Dying on crags out of reach.

...

Crean sang in the storm  
The loneliest song on earth  
Of how the heart was warm  
And yet a man might come  
With his hand on the tiller firm  
To his last setting-forth  
Gaunt, frozen and dumb.

(C.P., p. 180-182)

The rhyming pattern in verse one, Section V, (a, c, a, c) sets the scene for Crean's mood. He is cold and miserable as illustrated by a downbeat on 'cold' in line 1, Section VI, and the reader can imagine him using a low voice so his complaint will not worry the others in the boat while he thinks of the sound the keel will make on the shingle when they land. In this verse the rhyming pattern is a, b, a, c, a, b, c. In verse two, Stewart uses assonance, a rhyming pattern a, b, c, a, c, b, a, that matches sounds in a rather unusual way (although Stewart is fond of matching sounds rather than full rhyme). Words such as 'storm', 'come' and 'dumb' end the lines ending the 'a' lines while 'earth' and 'forth' conclude the 'b' lines separating the 'c' line endings, 'warm', and 'firm', all of which confirm Crean's loneliness even though his heart is warm and his body is 'Gaunt, frozen and dumb'. The uncomfortable nature of the journey is matched by the 'off' rhymes.

On the fourteenth day of the journey, 'the coast (of South Georgia) was visible to port and starboard', but both Shackleton and Worsley considered that 'it would have been madness to land, in the dark, with a heavy sea, on a beach we had never seen and which had never been properly charted'.<sup>727</sup> In Section IX, Stewart captures the disappointment felt by the six men sailing in the *James Caird*:

Land, land! Stony and monstrous but land!  
Shackleton cries, watching the burst of the breakers  
On cliffs of granite and ice in the fog and wind.

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<sup>727</sup> Worsley, op. cit., p. 141.

...

It is land, it is life,  
It is victory white and tremendous; and a breath is blowing  
Of hurricane coming; and we cannot land in that surf.  
(C.P., pp. 186-187)

On the historical voyage, the men suffered from thirst and exhaustion, and stood off South Georgia for another two days in a hurricane that threatened their lives. Worsley makes no mention of his emotions during the hurricane in his recount of the journey, but in Section X, Stewart's persona adopts Worsley's place empathetically and writes:

But on what fool's errand bent  
To cross the Antarctic continent  
Came I here to the South at all?  
  
Not the shrieking knife of the gale  
Slashing off the comber's crest,  
Not the land we found and lost,  
But here the whole world stands on its head  
Crazy alive and crazy dead.  
Stand up straight or upside-down,  
Die in your bed or swim and drown  
But why and in what shadow play  
Fights a man till break of day  
Where the hurricane that raves  
Where the midnight, where the waves  
Are shadows of some vaster doom  
Shaking the spirit, seen in a dream?  
(C.P. p. 187)

Worsley, like Scott, questions his original dream as the shadow of death indeed shakes the spirit. The mood and tone of this passage act as a link to Section XI in which the sick man considers his own death by drowning, and repetition of the idea of 'crazy' in Section X is continued in Section XI, 'Crazy with thirst and cast on that terrible ocean' (C.P., pp. 188-189). The final six lines challenge Stewart's personal philosophy that the 'land, it is life', and tension arises and develops when the men are seen to be deprived of the success they so earnestly hope for. Here Stewart contemplates why men would subject themselves to this kind of struggle under potentially fatal circumstances: it is not the kind of experience ordinary men seek. Stewart persisted in defying the modernists — even though his philosophy leaned

towards Romanticism, the voyager and exploration themes such as *Glencoe*, 'Worsley Enchanted' and 'Terra Australis' would instil their awareness and appreciation of other forms such as lyrics and ballads. Heroes and heroic struggle were devalued by literary modernists when Stewart was writing 'Worsley Enchanted', but he makes no attempt to reconcile the conflict, and he provides no answer to Worsley's questions; this mode of writing demonstrates Vivian Smith's suggestion that Stewart's poetry and verse dramas, contain evasive scepticism, a line of continuity which is again demonstrated in 'Worsley Enchanted' and which contributes to Stewart's central philosophical philosophy.

FitzGerald suggests the settings for the Antarctic pieces 'are simply an extension of the snow scenery and the real knowledge of conditions of cold which his own early surroundings provided him with, and which so many of his early poems [such as 'Day and Night with Snow' (C.P., pp. 332-335)] celebrated'.<sup>728</sup> Like the inhospitable Antarctic in *The Fire on the Snow* and the Pass of Glencoe, this description of the landscape and elements as well as the consistency of Stewart's abstract language continues in themes of humans versus nature in his New Zealand poems can be seen as flashbacks to poems such as 'Hostile Man' (C.P., p. 319) and 'Winter-Crazed' (C.P., p. 320-322) from *Green Lions*, 1936.

The mystique of the overall plight in which the voyagers find themselves provides the dramatic suspense that reinforces the rather stoic tone that first surfaced in Stewart's New Zealand South Island verse such as 'Morning' (CP., pp. 307-308). The heroic effort put into the rescue mission carries overtones of Lindsay's vitalism only to be found in endurance and creative effort. In Section XII, 'Sixteen days out from Elephant Island', Shackleton is able to rub his eyes 'with a frost-bitten hand, / I have beaten the wind, he says ... as he stood up straight in the bow' (C.P., p. 190). The mood has changed from doom to one of triumphant

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<sup>728</sup> Fitzgerald, op. cit., p. 33



achievement.

The supernatural is ever-present in 'Worsley Enchanted', and Stewart consistently reminds the reader that images, and motifs, of dreams and fire in particular, are symbols of spirituality. In Section II, 'He travels into the country of his dream', Stewart describes the landscape in these terms: 'With the glare of five suns in the sky, five wheels of fire ... and gentle as dream ... across the mind' (p. 34). Then, enchanted with the spirit of the place, Worsley asks: 'Is it the natural world through which we pass / or the supernatural?' The conflict of the real or the surreal increases as Worsley states: 'I have seen the two as one, and gripped with my hand / The wood of a boat, and longed for solid land' (C.P., p. 177). The *James Caird* was unseaworthy when the party eventually landed 150 miles from Stromness Bay, so Shackleton, Worsley and Crean<sup>729</sup> walked across the mountains. Through the voice of Worsley, Stewart describes the journey metaphorically, 'Our shadows in long black rivers across the snows, / That we are dwarfed reflections and our shadows real, / Warring with shapes of mountains' (C.P., p. 191). As the poem continues, each section develops not only the story, but Stewart's philosophy of heroic life and Worsley's spiritual endeavour as well. During the journey, the men feel that a fourth man is walking with them: 'Casting no shadows he follows / Our long black following shadows' (Section XV).

They speculate about his identity, 'Some seaman's ghost perhaps? / Some traveller from the crevasses?' Once again, Stewart provides no answers; the men know only that the spirit is there, a presence, and the rest is left to the reader's imagination. Even though the spirit seems to be Death, the poem's tone indicates protection, that the spirit is taking care of them. On the other hand, it could be the Christ figure walking alongside them, leading and protecting them. This is one of the most powerfully emotive passages in Stewart's *Voyager*

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<sup>729</sup> Tom Crean is also mentioned in R. Fiennes' *Race to the Pole*, op. cit. He was one of the group who discovered the tent and the bodies of Scott, Bowers and Wilson, pp. 342 and 358.

*Poems*; it is based on Christian values and the Christian Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Ghost (that is, spirit) and on the poet's idea of myth. The voyagers are led by the (Christ) light<sup>730</sup> to safety:

He gives no direction, no warning,  
He is light in the sunlight burning.

All things flower out of nothing:  
Here nothing itself is moving;  
For this man is nothing, intangible,  
Yet he is with us, unchangeable,  
Travelling in the snowfields, somebody,  
Keeping us silent company.

(V.P. p. 51)

In 'Worsley Enchanted', the description of the ghostly image is made tighter and stronger in stanzas of six lines comprising three couplets in tetrameter and demonstrates the poet's poetic maturity as time passes. There is a lyrical quality to Section XVI; like the rhythm of ballad No. 15 in *Glencoe* ('Sigh, wind in the pine / River weep as you flow' (C.P., p. 220)), the rhythm of three stresses and a rhyming pattern which is a mix of full and half rhymes (such as 'warning / 'burning' and 'somebody / company'), provides a pattern that reflects the emotive response that Worsley (and, imaginatively, Stewart) experience in this hostile land. Throughout Section XV, individual speakers are not identified in the conversation, and it seems that Stewart is expressing his philosophy intentionally by portraying the men who voice their anonymous comments, exchange of ideas and speculations as they struggle towards Stromness Bay. In stanza 3, Stewart's persona as narrator becomes stronger than the other men as he expresses his opinion with metaphor, 'Creatures of tempests and mists?' and he places the men in a spiritual category with this supernatural helper. The poet's logic is shown in the phrase: 'This is no country for men' (CP., p. 191). The analogy 'A land like the back of the moon' effectively associates this part of the Antarctic at this time (1952) with a yet

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<sup>730</sup> This reference to the 'Christ light' is from St. John 8:12: 'I am the light of the world; he that followed me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'.

unexplored area of the universe.

When Stewart wrote 'Men Who Know the Mountains' in 1941, he appears to have considered that all men are heroic: 'Those who have known the snow upon their faces / Know that the naked valour of mankind / Marches with gods in those white lonely places'; but it is men like Shackleton, Worsley and Crean who have risen above the ordinary to become the heroes of legend.

When in 'Worsley Enchanted' Crean, Shackleton and Worsley are safe at last at Stromness Bay, having come to the end of their struggle with the Antarctic environment, the conflict between humans and nature becomes another dream; the conflict between an imagined state and reality in 'Worsley Enchanted' is an important part of the poem's hostile landscape. Kramer points out that Stewart's notion of a bewitched Worsley is 'never entirely absent, and its possibility is supported by Stewart's description of the unearthly aspects of the Antarctic landscape',<sup>731</sup> which is always present, but the desolation and austere beauty of the ice desert in 'Worsley Enchanted' is similar in motif to that of the arid desert landscape in *The Birdsville Track*.<sup>732</sup> Stewart creates a poetic drama of tragic Australian mythology in 'Worsley Enchanted', from history and legend that are far removed from contemporary themes and settings of Australian realism.<sup>733</sup>

Although there are similarities with *The Fire on the Snow*, 'Worsley Enchanted', McCooey<sup>734</sup> notes: 'the sequence is less abstract and more concerned with the physical and psychological experiences ... making it less concerned with heroism and endurance than with, according to *Douglas Stewart*, the strangeness of all human experience, the mystery of our

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<sup>731</sup> Kramer, L., op. cit., 1977, p. 129.

<sup>732</sup> See Chapter 7, 'The Back of Beyond'.

<sup>733</sup> Sturm, T., 'Drama', *OHAL*, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>734</sup> McCooey, op. cit., 2002, p. 362.

existence'.<sup>735</sup> This theme continues throughout Stewart's poetic oeuvre and is at the centre of his total philosophy of life and poetic oeuvre.

As 'Worsley Enchanted' begins, so it finishes:

Commander Worsley ...  
But bright's the sunlight and bright's the stream  
And a man can walk in the midst of a dream.  
(C.P., p. 193)

### 3. *TERRA AUSTRALIS*

Stewart says that one of the special values in narrative poems is 'that dealing with the voyagers and explorers who first approached these shores or walked the vast spaces inland, they deal with the adventurers who made our Australian civilisation possible'.<sup>736</sup> This is illustrated in 'Terra Australis' (1952)<sup>737</sup>, another 'voyager' poem, which David McCooey calls 'a "meta-voyager" poem that describes an imaginery meeting between the sixteenth century Portuguese explorer and missionary, Captain Quiros and the nineteenth century Australian radical, William Lane, both going in opposite directions looking for the new Australia.'<sup>738</sup> The impulse towards heroic endeavour on the part of the two visionaries demonstrates the 'excitement and dangers of exploration, the qualities of character it demands and elicits, and the mystery of the impulse towards heroic endeavour',<sup>739</sup> even though neither of the men's visions eventually came to fruition. Smith suggests that the strength of Stewart's best poems 'resides in their evasive scepticism', that is, as mentioned above, 'his ability to see both sides

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<sup>735</sup> Stewart, op. cit., 1963, p. ix.

<sup>736</sup> Stewart, *Voyager Poems*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>737</sup> Stewart, D., 'Terra Australis', *Collected Poems*, pp. 168-172.

<sup>738</sup> McCooey, D., 'Douglas Stewart' *Australian Writers, 1915-1950*, op. cit., 2002.

<sup>739</sup> Kramer, 1981, p. 17.

of the question and not commit himself to anything beyond the meaning of the poem itself'. In 'Terra Australis', with its zestful tone, potentially negative energy of mockery is turned into the good natured refusal to be defeated'.<sup>740</sup>

Before this discussion of 'Terra Australis' proceeds, it is essential that reference to terms such as 'fable', 'mockery', 'satire', and 'humour' is made by some critics and by Stewart himself. Stewart's philosophy of bringing joy to both readers and other writers of poetry is evoked in this long poem and is another line of continuity. Keesing called the poem a 'mocking but profound satire upon immoderate idealism',<sup>741</sup> and Stewart's intention to amuse his readers is by implication rather than actual statement, indicating his philosophy that 'the idealism of the human spirit is often thwarted by the weaknesses of human nature'.<sup>742</sup> His persona asks in verse 1, Section 4 that 'the tales we tell may not be fable?' while Stewart questions the reality of Quiros's and Lane's visions of finding their utopias in 'Terra Australis'; however, the visions are fallacious and the poem may be recognised as satire in which Stewart employs irony, sarcasm, mockery, wit and humour to convey criticism of folly which it holds up to scorn.

The name 'Terra Australis' means the 'South Land'. The dream of discovering Terra Australis became more than a dream; it was an obsession with the sea voyagers of Spain, Portugal and England from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century,<sup>743</sup> beginning with Captain Quiros, then Abel Tasman, William Dampier and James Cook. This myth, with which European Australia began, attracted other Australian poets, for example, James McAuley and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, who wrote poems in which they were seeking 'a mythic structure to

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<sup>740</sup> Smith, V., *OHAL*, op. cit., p. 401.

<sup>741</sup> Keesing, op. cit., 1969, p. 29.

<sup>742</sup> *ADB*, op. cit., p. 653.

<sup>743</sup> Wilde et. al., 1985, p. 674.

embody their perception of a contemporary, and newly Australian cultural awareness'.<sup>744</sup> In Douglas Stewart's four-part poem 'Terra Australis', the two idealists, Quiros and Lane, share a mutual disillusionment in their ideas about Australia. These two characters are comic figures whose voyages are parodies of Worsley and Shackleton's Antarctic experiences.

McAuley writes that 'Douglas Stewart's "Terra Australis" is his critique of fanatical utopianism', a different perception to McAuley's preoccupation which expresses 'a rejection of the myth of revolution ... my Captain Quiros agrees with Douglas Stewart in rejecting all utopianism, religious or secular, though it does so from a different point of view'.<sup>745</sup> Philip Meade argues that 'Stewart's "Terra Australis" [is] perhaps a more ambivalent poem than McAuley allows, and imagines a ghostly encounter between William Lane and Captain Quiros somewhere in the South Pacific; like the Flying Dutchman, they are dead, but still sailing'.<sup>746</sup>

Historical records show that Captain Quiros was a religious fanatic,<sup>747</sup> and despite this, his character in Rex Ingamells' *The Great South Land* and McAuley's 'Captain Quiros' is treated as somewhat of a cult-hero, in an attempt to create 'a rather artificial ... attempt to construct a new mythos'.<sup>748</sup> Stewart's dexterity in constructing 'Terra Australis' ambiguously through a disjointed narrative emphasises the confusion in the minds of Quiros and Lane. Stewart invites the reader to read the poem as a poetic analogy as he reflects evasively on Australia, its political and social structure (both domestic and world-wide) as well as the distance from its European (British) background. At the time of writing 'Terra Australis' in 1952, Stewart was aware, as William Lane was, that Australia was a nation still coming to grips with who its people were and where they were heading. Communism was a controversial

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<sup>744</sup> Hassall, A.J., op. cit., 1988, p. 391.

<sup>745</sup> McAuley, J., 'Continuity and Change in the Fifties', *A Map of Australian Verse*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1975, p. 265.

<sup>746</sup> Meade, op. cit., p. 251.

<sup>747</sup> *ADB*, Vol. 2, 1788-1850, 1979, op. cit., p. 358.

<sup>748</sup> Spate, O., 'Quiros and the Poets', *Overland*, Vol. 112, October 1988, p. 69.

issue, and Lane's role in the poem presents Stewart's preoccupations about the success or failure of such an ideology. The post-war period in which he composed 'Terra Australis' was one of indecision about world influences; with improved transport the world was 'shrinking' as new books and ideas about literature arrived more quickly than in the past. The Cold War generated a continuing state of tension between the USA and the USSR whose different interests led to mutual suspicion and escalating hostility. Stewart's depiction of Quiros subtly represents also the rivalry between Australian Catholics and Protestants who, privately if not publicly, continued their own personal 'cold war', heightened by Irish violence both in Ireland and England.

This state of affairs influenced Stewart (who was from a strong Presbyterian background) to use Quiros as his main character in 'Terra Australis'. In this way, Quiros presents underlying problems of bigotry and confusion in his idealistic program. Meade observes that 'Whether Stewart consciously sought to maintain a predominantly Protestant version of the Voyager mode is a moot point, but he certainly excluded any Quiros-based Voyager texts from his canon'.<sup>749</sup>

Pedro Fernandez de Quiros (1563-1615) was a navigator on Portuguese merchant ships. When Spain and Portugal were united in 1580, Quiros was appointed chief pilot of an expedition of four ships under Alvaro de Mendana, setting out to colonise the Solomon Islands. This voyage was unsuccessful, mainly because of violent resistance by of the Island natives.

In Section I, 'Terra Australis', Stewart adopts Quiros's voice as he tells Lane about his failure to establish a successful settlement at Espiritu Santo where he 'lay down and wept / Because no faith in men, no truth in islands / And still unfound the shining continent slept'

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<sup>749</sup> Meade, op. cit., p. 226.

(C.P., p. 167). Although Quiros was, in the words of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*,

full of zeal and enthusiasm, he failed in the management of his men. Often weak and vacillating he had insufficient will power to control the turbulent and to cheer the half-hearted, and was by no means fitted for the task of forming new settlements.<sup>750</sup>

This points to the difference between men like Quiros and Shackleton in 'Worsley Enchanted'. Whereas both were 'full of zeal and enthusiasm', and both failed in their tasks, Shackleton was a competent leader of men in contrast to Quiros (and later William Lane), and it is this dimension that Stewart concentrates on in both 'Worsley Enchanted' and 'Terra Australis'.

William Lane, a journalist who arrived in Brisbane from England in 1885 and worked as a journalist, was a teetotaler whose goal was to establish a communist colony. In the long run, alcohol among the settlers was a contributory factor for the failure of Lane's South American settlement.<sup>751</sup> In May, 1891, the New Australian Settlement Association 'appointed Alfred Walker to visit South America and negotiate with the Argentine Government for the settlement of a co-operative community of agriculturalists and wool growers in that country'.<sup>752</sup> The outcome of that negotiation was that Lane and the colonists (including poet Mary [nee Cameron] Gilmore), left Australia in 1893 on the *Royal Tar* to found the Utopian-socialist New Australian Settlement in Paraguay. In *A Peculiar People*, Gavin Souter writes an historically-based account of the 'long and turbulent voyage' of the *Royal Tar* and the disputes that occurred during that voyage.<sup>753</sup> Souter's report is comprehensive in its details of the failure of the first settlement, which broke up in discord, as well as the next settlement at

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<sup>750</sup> *ADB*, Vol. 2, op. cit., 1979, p. 358.

<sup>751</sup> Souter, G., 'William Lane', *ADB*, Vol. 9, 1983, p. 658. In 1890, Lane became editor of the Brisbane *Worker* in which he advocated 'full-scale socialism, supported the maritime strike of 1890 and The shearers' strike of 1891, campaigned for the rights of women, in letters under the nom-de-plume 'Linda Sharpe', and persistently mooted the idea of a 'Co-operative Commune' either in Australia or abroad.

<sup>752</sup> Souter, op. cit. pp. 22-23.

<sup>753</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.



Cosme,<sup>754</sup> which also failed for multiple reasons including drunkenness, lack of willingness to work hard, incompetence of men who were occupied in farming tasks, and disloyalty.

Both Lane and Quiros cite many of the same reasons for abandoning their settlement plans; as Hassall records, ‘that idealistic dreams die hard in Australia is evident in the socialist expedition led by William Lane in 1893 to set up a utopian New Australia in Paraguay, an endeavour that ended, like Quiros’ settlements in Graciosa Bay and on Espiritu Santo, in failure and disillusionment’.<sup>755</sup>

In Stewart’s recension, Lane tells Quiros:

Westward there lies a desert where the crow  
Feeds upon poor men’s hearts and picks their eyes;  
Eastward we flee from all that wrath and woe  
And Paraguay shall yet be paradise.  
(C.P., p. 170)

Lane’s view of Australia’s inland is heightened by the metaphoric ‘Feeds upon poor men’s hearts’, with ‘and picks their eyes’, but Paraguay as a paradise is ironic in view of an imaginary conversation in which both Lane and Quiros outline the supposed reasons for the failure of their quests and the ways in which the ideals of each were shattered by reality. The conversational style in Section 3 records part of the discussion that concentrates upon Lane’s ‘200 brothers’: conflicts about money, drunkenness, lust and indolence were the main problems; these add a realistic element to the poem. Murder, hatred, ignorance and doubt ruined the Spanish expedition, and Stewart points out the similarities in both stories. Both men refuse to accept death and defeat.<sup>756</sup> Instead of scuttling their ships, both voyagers cry, ‘Hoist the mainsail’, and they ask: ‘how do we know that we are truly dead / Or that the tales we tell may not be fable?’ (Section 4), and so they hoist sail and resume their voyages.

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<sup>754</sup> loc. cit., p. 112.

<sup>755</sup> Hassall, A.J., op. cit., p. 395.

<sup>756</sup> Smith, R., ‘Terra Australis’, op. cit., 1973, p. 30.

In 'Douglas Stewart: *Terra Australis*',<sup>757</sup> Ross Smith perceives 'Terra Australis' as a fable:

In spite of defeat and death, however, the bright goals still lie ahead, and man is capable also of enterprise, endurance, devotion and idealism ... The questing human spirit is indomitably committed to sailing into a brighter future.<sup>758</sup>

While Smith considers that 'Terra Australis' is a fable that expresses Stewart's own optimistic faith in the future of mankind, Stewart's version of the tale is satiric. The term 'satire' is that expounded in *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* as: 'A literary composition, originally in verse, essentially a criticism of vice or folly which it holds up to scorn ... its chief instruments are irony, sarcasm, invective, wit and humour'.<sup>759</sup> It is this definition which contributes to lines of continuity throughout Stewart's poems and verse plays in which language devices are intertwined. The effect of satire in 'Terra Australis' is that of humour which Abrams refers to as 'wit'; whereas the denotative meaning of humour is 'a mental quality which apprehends and delights in the ludicrous and mirthful',<sup>760</sup> Abrams relates humour to a comic speech and to a comic appearance or mode of behaviour. It is within the bounds of Abrams definition of 'wit' that 'humour' is used in relation to Stewart's mode of language and the manner in which characters' voices are employed to amuse readers; while 'wit' is always verbal, 'humour has a much broader range of reference, as, for example, in the way characters such Charlie Chaplin, Malvolio and Falstaff look, dress and act'.<sup>761</sup> Humour usually evokes laughter, either sympathetic or intentional, but Abrams points out that Freud distinguished between 'harmless' and 'tendency' wit; therefore, humour is 'the harmless form of the comic' employed by Stewart in 'Terra Australis' — it is without malice, and the ridicule is that pertaining to human weakness approaching the ludicrous.

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<sup>757</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29-34.

<sup>758</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>759</sup> MacDonald, A.M., ed., *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Chambers, Edinburgh, p. 1200.

<sup>760</sup> Abrams, *Handbook of Literary Terms*, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>761</sup> *ibid.*, p. 179.

There is a sense of humour in the poem's account of adventurers sailing around half the world looking for their Utopias — and both failing. The tale of their shattered hopes (like those of *The Golden Lover*), is presented as a parable about human failure. Humour in 'Terra Australis' is found mainly in Stewart's imagery and language. Humour is in the language and the ludicrous situation in 'Terra Australis' that Stewart exploits, as two ghosts are remembering their experiences. They both want to know, 'How do we know we are truly dead?' Again, this contributes to the idea of fable as they wonder whether anyone will believe them; perhaps others will think it is a traveller's tale.

Like the Flying Dutchman, Quiros continues to seek his Terra Australis for three centuries before he meets Lane in the *Royal Tar*. If the humour in this idea escapes the reader, the description of the *San Pedro* (which 'rolled, / High-pooped and round in the belly like a barrel,') captures it. There is incongruity in the ships' names — secular and religious motifs.

Stewart as narrator presents the two adventurers in a light mood as 'the sea of light began to dance / And plunged in sparkling brine each giddy brain' (C.P., p. 172). It is clear that Stewart perceives this improbable story as a fable in part only and partly a story of two demented men trying to find a new utopia after the disappointments of their past experiences. The line, 'The wind from Heaven blew both ways at once' brings this yarn to a close as the winds blow the *San Pedro* westwards and the *Royal Tar* eastwards, both in the direction of the unsuccessful settlements. The poem continues in a humorous mood as the two men proceed to continue with their quests into the unknown.

The meeting described in Section 2 allows Stewart to reflect ironically upon the way in which Lane's non-de-plumes, 'John Miller', 'Tohunga' and 'Lucinda Sharpe', expressed the view that 'the idealism of the human spirit is often thwarted by the weaknesses of human

nature,<sup>762</sup> a more accurate comment about Stewart's opinion of Lane than that of Smith.

Like other voyager poems, 'Terra Australis' is concerned with endurance, and in these poems Stewart draws on the essence of his own and other poets' creative effort in regard to human will and curiosity. Stewart's quest for 'Terra Australis' is an intentional metaphor — the search for the Great Southern Land is Quiros' vision of a Utopia on a metaphysical level, and like Lane's voyage for a new Utopia in Paraguay, it is a voyage of the mind, a voyage to self-discovery. Quiros anticipates a future Utopia without oppression and sin, 'Where men shall walk at last like spirits of fire / No more by oppression chained, by sin besmirched' (C.P., p. 169). However, his dream of cities of gold, beautiful women and glory were delusions of glory, and 'Out at sea, surrounded by nothing but the wind and their own fears', Quiros's volunteers are not so sure; the men know that Quiros has failed in his dream and that his madness could lead them to a worse state in the future.

Stewart introduces metaphors of lunacy throughout 'Terra Australis' which emanate from imagery pertaining to moonlight. In Section 1, he introduces his two characters sailing in a quiet part of the Pacific Ocean, in 'some highway shunned by trading traffic'. This is a metaphoric place where the Pacific Ocean lies 'in the world's skull like a moonlit brain'. The moonlight in the simile suggests madness, an addled, or muddled, brain, and the men approach one another in a crazy way, 'zigzag, in confusion / Lane from the west, the Spaniard from the east', and as the confused pattern of direction leads from Stanza 1 to Stanza 2 we are given another image, 'Their flickering canvas breaking the horizon / That [metaphysically] shuts the dead off in a wall of mist'. The lonely highway unused by trading traffic soon becomes the same high, lonely place because it is 'a place of the dead'. Quiros speaks first, twice referring to a metaphysical place where there is 'no sun, no land, but this wide circle / Where moonlight

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<sup>762</sup> ADB, op. cit., p 653.

clots the waves'. Finally, to end Section 1, 'upon this ocean of the moon', (C.P., p. 169), Stewart clearly states his theme of madness, a line of continuity in 'Terra Australis' as readers recognise the symbolic implications of everyday words: moon, moonlight and the association of lunar and lunatic, which leads into a trope in several places.

Quiros narrates his version of the failure of his experimental settlement in Espiritu Santo in Section 1. He continues with his introduction in Section 2 that begins with the meeting between himself and Lane who then tells his story. This poem illustrates a mutual disillusionment: 'And it may be we have both been deceived' (C.P. p. 170). Stewart's reference to the deception Quiros refers to seems to be what, at that time in history, was associated with the human spirit that survived under insurmountable difficulties, and, as Smith writes, 'The poet represents him as trudging on (and like Captain Scott 300 years later), in the attempt to fulfil his purpose, till the end of time'.<sup>763</sup> Stewart's continuing theme of the human spirit, failing yet victorious in *The Fire on the Snow*, is as challenging as Quiros and Lane's journey of the mind.

Quiros's disillusionment is shared by Lane, who advises the Spaniard that Australia in the nineteenth century is not the Utopia Quiros expects, and here, through imagery that conjures the familiar Australian traditional dislike of crows and their attacks on sheep, Stewart offers Quiros a more sinister view of his expected Paradise. Their knowledge about the two 'paradises' increases as Stewart perceives their voyage is worthwhile as representing voyages into the unknown (human) future.

Stewart adopts a conversational style in Sections 2 and 3, and as each ghost takes his turn to speak the variation in diction becomes more obvious. Lane begins, 'Alas, alas, I do remember now; / In Paradise I built a house of mud' (C.P., p. 170). The repetition of 'Alas,

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<sup>763</sup> Smith, R., op. cit., p. 29.

alas' is not an indication of disaster in the building of the house, but of what follows: 'And there were fools who could not milk a cow / And idle men who would not though they could'. Stewart's cliches in this common expression includes colloquial idiom and assonance in 'would / could / though' which add to Lane's tone of anger and frustration in his inability to relieve the men of their lethargy. There is a hint, too, that Stewart is suggesting that Australian workers are indolent, yet in Stanza 3, Section 3, when he comments on unpleasant environmental factors, the diction becomes more formal, 'Some had strange insects bite them, some had lust, / For wifeless men will turn to native women' (C.P., p. 171); Stewart's understanding of the failure of the settlement at 'Paradise' and Lane's version both emerge in this Section of 'Terra Australis'. Lane's diction moves between colloquial and the formal expression used by educated people such as Lane. Quiros speaks in a contrasting register which leans towards a 'bookish' register while it remains conversational:

I too came once, or thought I did,  
To Terra Australis, my dear western haven,  
  
 'And broke my gallows up in scorn of violence,  
Gave land and honours, each man had his wish,  
Flew saints upon the rigging, played the clarions:  
Yet many there were poisoned by a fish  
  
 'And more by doubt; and so deserted Torres  
And sailed, my seamen's prisoner, back to Spain.'  
 (C.P., p. 171)

The anaphoric 'And' emphasises Quiros's efforts to be co-operative and to act in a Christian manner in accordance with the ideal ways of Utopia, but it also expresses his disappointment at difficulties such as those who were poisoned by a fish, as well as mutiny and desertion led by Torres. Section 3 continues and brings to a close Quiros's disappointment outlined in Section 1 in which abstract images such as 'no faith in men, no truth in islands / And still unfound the shining continent slept / And swore upon the Cross to come again' (CP., p. 169) in order to cure 'the fever, thirst and mutiny'. Like the metaphoric description of the Earl of Breadalbane in Glencoe (blackberry bushes are symbolic), the alliterative and metaphoric imagery of

‘poison spiders spun their webs in Spain’ represents the treachery of those in Spain who were plotting against Quiros while he became a victim of lunacy, ‘Where moonlight clots the waves with coils of weed, / Until I thought to trudge till time was done/ With all except my purpose run to waste; / And now upon this ocean of the moon, / A shape, a shade, a ship, and from the west!’.

Colman suggests that Stewart’s verse plays had developed his gift for the dramatic and that Stewart ‘was not slow to re-employ it in narrative poetry’.<sup>764</sup> It is in ‘Terra Australis’ that the drama is more obvious. Sections 1 and 2 introduce the two main characters through dialogue as both Quiros and Lane narrate their stories while, at the same time, the major theme of insanity is introduced through imagery discussed above. This section is followed by ‘There was a certain likeness in the stories / And Captain Quiros stared at William Lane’ that allows Stewart to act as a mask, to state his point of view as he did by including the Announcer in *The Fire on the Snow*.<sup>765</sup> As Quiros stares at Lane, it is clear that they have reached a final decision that it is useless dwelling on the past — their quests for knowledge and truth must continue for all time.

In the last section of ‘Terra Australis’, voices talking across each other introduce confusion — the voices include that of the poet himself as he concludes that both men have a ‘giddy brain’ (C.P., p. 173), and it seems as though each man speaks at the same time. There are no concluding speech marks closing Stanza 3, and Stanza 4 begins with ‘As if a blast’, so it could be assumed the speaker in Stanza 3 is the speaker in Verse 4, while ‘Divert me from the land that I must find’ is supported by reference to ‘the Virgin’ and the land Quiros searches for ‘cannot be behind, for there is death’. The only positive indication is the closing speech marks

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<sup>764</sup> Colman, E.A.M., *Poetry*, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>765</sup> Stewart, D., ‘Author’s Foreword’, *The Fire on the Snow*, op. cit., Stewart quotes MacLeish’s definition: The Announcer is “the man who explains things and links things together”. Stewart admits, ‘I used my Announcer [in *The Fire on the Snow*] simply as a mask for myself’, p. ix.

at the end of Stanza 5, while Stewart's conclusion as 'Announcer' emphasizes 'the sea of light' and 'sparkling brine' in Stanza 6, thus ending Section 3 and 'Terra Australis' itself. Stewart appears to have deliberately employed this dramatic 'trick' not so much to confuse the reader, but to (very cleverly) introduce a harmless or tendency comedy aspect into the otherwise seriousness of the historical theme of this long satiric poem.

Although he refuses to call the voyager poems 'epic', Stewart arrives at the conclusion that narrative poems such as voyager poems, are dramatic stories:

It is a search ... for gods, demigods and heroes, the men or divinities who have founded the nation and whose deeds and characters, whether for good or for ill, an inspiration or as a warning, are still felt to be working through it.<sup>766</sup>

In considering these philosophical issues, Stewart is offering a method of approaching an ontological paradox made difficult by immanent values. Stewart is investigating some of the nation's basic myths such as Francis Webb's *A Drum for Ben Boyd*, associated with Australian literary movements. On the other hand, he refers to ancient heroes and the dramatic stories of Argamemnon, Odysseus and others in ancient Greek history (VP., p. 11). He argues that:

It is not correct to confine the Australian movement to the present century nor to maintain, as critics are sometimes tempted to do for the sake of convenience, that it originated with Slessor's 'Five Visions of Captain Cook'.<sup>767</sup>

In Kenneth Slessor's biography, *A Man of Sydney*,<sup>768</sup> Stewart points out that the theme not only goes back to the early days of the white settler colony, but it also looks forward to the future where adventurers like those in *Voyager Poems*, 'Worsley Enchanted', and 'Terra Australis' as well as *Rutherford* investigate the unknown of the real world as well as the unknown world of the human mind. He adds that the narrative or the long poem:

provides the opportunity for greater variety of mood, music and imagery, for more sustained thought, for more prolonged and therefore more complex human drama, for a

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<sup>766</sup> Stewart, D, 1960, p. 11.

<sup>767</sup> Stewart, D., 1977, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>768</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159.



broader development of theme, and, above all, for the art of construction in which the poet's craftsmanship is tested to the full. (VP., p. 15)

The origin of new nationalistic literature is, in Stewart's formulations, one of conflicting and diverse speculation, 'as is usually the case with a literary movement'.<sup>769</sup> Stewart states unequivocally that he has no doubt that Slessor has been the greatest single influence in its development. Yet, he concludes, the voyager poems under discussion bring into our poetry and into the national consciousness, 'thousands of miles of trafficable seas ... and hundreds of miles of outback and burning desert. They re-create, in memorable form, some of the great ancestors of the [human] tribe'.<sup>770</sup> This is Stewart's aim in writing 'Terra Australis', in which the focus is on two men from far different backgrounds in search of a mythic or unknown, still-to-be-found land or idea, and not a poem about Australian exploration such as Patrick White's *Voss* (1957).

Struggle, sometimes conflict, and even failure, are incentives to effort. In Lindsay's view, whether the effort is to discover a new Utopia or to re-create the nation, or to write a new poem, 'To strive and fail may be at least to hand on the power to strive and succeed'.<sup>771</sup> Stewart was concerned with re-creating nationalistic literature in the 1940s and 1950s; he arrived at the conclusion that the gratitude for creative effort to past lives must be expressed by handing on life to the future.<sup>772</sup> This concept is similar to Jung's theory of immanent philosophy — we are the sum of all who have gone before us.

Meade points out that 'Australia's origins lie well back beyond historical discovery in the minds of "brooding [European] Austromancers"'.<sup>773</sup> Stewart was of the same opinion as Meade as evidenced in 'Worsley Enchanted': 'Commander Worsley, fired with a purpose, /

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<sup>769</sup> Stewart, D., 1960, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>770</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>771</sup> Lindsay, N., op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>772</sup> *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>773</sup> Meade, op. cit., p. 120.

Plunged in his dream' (C.P., p. 175), and 'He travels into the country of his dream' (C.P., p. 176), while in 'Terra Australis', Captain Quiros's dream was to discover *terra australis* or *terra incognita*, and William Lane dreamed of a socialist utopia.

Although the three texts discussed in this chapter differ in time and space, they are strong indications of Stewart's continuing and maturing development as a poet and balladeer. He brings to a level approaching perfection the technical mastery<sup>774</sup> of the ballads with variations that add to the readability of the narratives. But it is the collective voices of characters that inform readers of implications behind the action, often through symbolism and motifs, and it is this that provides continuity through 'Glencoe', 'Worsley Enchanted' and 'Terra Australis' rather than a continuous theme linking the three works.

The indomitable spirit and will to triumph are given substance by the several 'voyagers' into the unknown — their struggles and their heroic endurance. This pattern of conflict, physical defeat but spiritual triumph, is readily identifiable as lines of continuity which contribute to Stewart's total philosophical oeuvre in much of his most ambitious and most significant work.<sup>775</sup> Quiros and Lane, Worsley and Shackleton, then the intellectual voyager, Rutherford, are examples of his protagonists whose courage and the will to succeed lifted them above the ordinary to extraordinary heights of achievement.

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<sup>774</sup> Phillips, A.A., 'The Poetry of Douglas Stewart', *Meanjin*, Vol. 1, 1969, pp. 100-101.

<sup>775</sup> Smith, R., 'Douglas Stewart: Terra Australis', 1973, p. 31. Note: 'Rutherford' is another voyager poem, but because its scene is New Zealand and England, it is not discussed here even though Professor Rutherford, like Professor Piccard, is an explorer in science. See chapter 9.

## CHAPTER 9

### DOUGLAS STEWART: NEW IMPULSES IN A DECADE OF TRANSITION, AND *RUTHERFORD*

#### I. *Poetry, 1960s*

The 1960s was a period of transition and changing impulses in Australian poetry. During the 1950s, poets including Stewart, Wright, Robinson, Campbell and FitzGerald consolidated a revived interest in nature lyrics as an expression of their preoccupation with poetry that reflected a national outlook in Australian arts. Stewart was influential in re-establishing interest in nature lyrics by way of his collections in *Sun Orchids* (1952) and *The Birdsville Track* (1955), while his support for older and newer poets in the Red Page benefited from his personal interest in the modernism of his times. His philosophical preoccupation that the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth, was reinforced in these texts. In this way he took themes that were important to him to a new level of intensive thought, and particularly in *The Birdsville Track* sequence of poems, heroic failure and heroism through struggle to survive points the way to further investigation in *Rutherford* (1962), discussion of which is the main focus of this chapter concerning Stewart's journey and his deepening knowledge of Mankind and his society. Throughout earlier chapters of this thesis, there are many diverse motifs which contribute to lines of continuity in Stewart's poetic oeuvre, while his interest in experimenting with modernism in his poetry and verse plays contributes to his total philosophy.

Stewart's verse plays are in effect long poems in which he presents major themes in a discursive mode that allow him the scope to consider and to reflect upon social issues concerning Australia and Australians, their backgrounds and their futures, in the post-World

War II period. Other poets interested in writing long narratives and discursive poems included Fitzgerald ('Heemskerk Shoals', 1949 and 'The Wind at Your Door', 1964), William Hart-Smith ('Christopher Columbus', 1948), Francis Webb ('A Drum for Ben Boyd', 1947-1948 and 'Leichhardt in Theatre', 1952), Rex Ingamells ('The Great South Land', 1951), James McAuley ('Quiros', 1964), and Rosemary Dobson ('The Devil and the Angel', a sequence published in the *Bulletin* 1945-1946). These long poems were published between 1940 and 1960 — before poet and critic A.D. Hope published *The Cave and the Spring*<sup>776</sup> (1956) which included the essay 'The Discursive Mode: Reflections on the Ecology of Poetry' (See Appendix I).

These long poems were often a 'sequence' or series of interlocked poems that approached the subject from several angles, some employing different speakers. Stewart used this method in *The Birdsville Track* and, to a lesser extent in *Rutherford*, and Slessor had previously adopted the same style in 'Five Visions of Captain Cook', in this way breaking from the single voiced long poems by Victorians (for example, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, (1842) and Robert Browning's *Men and Women* (1855). Modernist poets had exploited the sequence at least as far back as 1920 (Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*), and William Carlos Williams' epic sequence *Paterson* began appearing in 1946 in the United States of America; Australian examples appeared in numbers around and after this period.

The esteem in which both Stewart and Hope held each other and their work is clearly demonstrated by the frontispiece to Hope's *Native Companions*, 'TO DOUGLAS STEWART in gratitude and friendship' and in the Preface, 'I must thank my friend Douglas Stewart for his help in selecting and arranging the text'.<sup>777</sup> Thus each man felt at liberty to write from his own

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<sup>776</sup> Hope A.D., 'The Discursive Mode: Reflections on the Ecology of Poetry', *The Cave and the Spring*, Rigby, 1965.

<sup>777</sup> Hope, A.D., *Native Companions: Essays and Comments on Australian Literature 1936-1966* Angus

perspective in poetry and to criticise the other without personal animus.

Although Stewart continued to write discursive and longer poems after Hope's critical essay, on the evidence of his past record of successful publications, it seems that Vivian Smith may have overemphasised Hope's influence on Stewart and established poets such as McAuley, and Campbell, when he states:

They are poets of the same generation, a few years younger than Hope, who started to experiment at this time along lines indicated by Hope's essay. All three started to question and redefine and ultimately deepen their poetic practice ... The fourth leading poet of this generation, Judith Wright, was to spearhead the opposition.<sup>778</sup>

Nevertheless, it was during the 1950s that Hope and McAuley consolidated their reputations as two of our leading modern poets and seemed to exercise a powerful influence over a considerable band of younger poets such as Vincent Buckley, Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Evan Jones. These poets and others were mostly located in the universities.<sup>779</sup>

In 'The Habit of Irony? Australian Poets of the 'Fifties',<sup>780</sup> Chris Wallace-Crabbe indicates a 'new direction' for younger writers:

The optimism of Douglas Stewart and FitzGerald, the disciplined clarity of McAuley and Roland Robinson, the political gusto of Manifold: all these qualities are recognizably those of older men. The younger poets are too involved in the contradictory post-war years to emulate them.<sup>781</sup>

The qualities referred to in Wallace-Crabbe's essay include irony, 'an imaginative dimension'; it is a quality that lifts ordinary poetic structures of language to 'a richer and more suggestive level' than in the past. The effects Wallace-Crabbe suggests are:

First, and most important, it can suggest that the poet is holding two sets of possibilities in mind at once and seeking a position between them; second, it can convey the impression of objectivity, of distancing the writer from the chaos of events; third, it can play an important part in communicating the sheer complexity of human experience; and, fourth, through its elements of surprise and paradox it can present a

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and Robertson, Sydney, 1974, page unnumbered.

<sup>778</sup> Smith, V., 'Experiment and Renewal: The Missing Link in Modern Australian Poetry', *Southerly*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 1987, p 7.

<sup>779</sup> Heseltine, H., Introduction, *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*, Ringwood, 1972, pp. 50-51.

<sup>780</sup> Wallace-Crabbe, C., 'The Habit of Irony? Australian Poets of the 'Fifties', *Meanjin Quarterly* Vol. 20, No.2, 1961, pp. 164-174.

<sup>781</sup> *ibid.*, p. 174.

specific experience with particular sharpness and freshness.<sup>782</sup>

It seems from these extracts of Wallace-Crabbe's essay that he is proposing qualities that can as easily be found in Stewart's *Rutherford* collection, particularly in 'The Silkworms' and 'Rutherford' which are discussed later in this chapter with regard to the 'complexity of human experience' perceived by the poet as an 'imaginative dimension' of post-World War 2 Australian thought. Although Wallace-Crabbe outlined the definitive qualities (technical and imaginative) of much of the best verse of the 'fifties, Harry Heseltine says 'what he perhaps missed, in associating the practice of irony with movements of poetry overseas, was the native tradition of scepticism in Australia'.<sup>783</sup> Smith also recognised an 'evasive scepticism' in Stewart's work as Stewart's 'ability to see both sides of the question and not commit himself to anything beyond the making of the poem itself'.<sup>784</sup>

In Joan Kirkby's opinion, themes of human experience as subjects of 'poetry overseas' and, more precisely, American poetry were, before the 1960s, more subjective than those in Australian poetry, and the differences for this arose from 'a different perspective' from which to assess cultural and literary traditions of poetry:

Australian poets were struck with the diversity of American poetry — its potential for inner exploration, its emphasis on sense perception, its subjectivity, its attempt to incorporate the physical world into its idiom and rhythm, its striking regionalism, its experimentalism, its development of modes of uniting public and private feeling, as well as the American poet's sense of poetry as a vocation, an ongoing process, the daily business of getting her / his life 'right'. The encounter with American poetry provided a different perspective from which to view the culture and literary tradition of Australia; it was an opportunity for lateral growth.<sup>785</sup>

Despite the trend towards American ideas of what poetry is or should be, Kirkby cites James Tulip who wrote about Australian poetry before the 1970s, 'No tradition of Modern literature ... has stood out quite so firmly as has the Australian against the principle in poetic

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<sup>782</sup> *ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>783</sup> Heseltine, H., Introduction, *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1972, p. 51.

<sup>784</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

<sup>785</sup> Kirkby, J., ed., Introduction, *The American Model*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, p. 6.

imagination of the primacy of the self ... There is something in the Australian personality which turns away from the dramatic outbursts of ego'.<sup>786</sup> On the other hand, Stewart's preoccupation with the modernism of his time is evident in his verse dramas in which his poetic voice focuses not on probing and dramatising the inner self seen in, for example, Emily Dickinson's poetry, but on the dramatisation of the complexity of the mysteries of life as well as the human experiences of characters such as Worsley, Shackleton, Rutherford and Scott.

## 2. *New Impulses in Australian Poetry*

In 'Douglas Stewart and Poetry in the *Bulletin*, 1940-1960'<sup>787</sup> Thomas Shapcott writes when commenting on young contributors to his and Rodney Hall's anthology *New Impulses in Australian Poetry*:<sup>788</sup>

Creative writers cannot ignore the change [in preoccupations — both in society and literature] any more than a poet in the 1940s could ignore the new vision of Australia given by Slessor, FitzGerald, Stewart and Wright — the leaders of the last revolution in our poetic attitudes.<sup>789</sup>

Shapcott remarks, of all the 'new' poets, Those who have taken the achievements of the last revolution as a starting point, who are responding to the new tensions and urgencies of what can no longer be called the post-war world.<sup>790</sup> Bruce Dawe and Les Murray were two young poets who, at that time in their literary careers, were affected by the new preoccupations of the 1960s. Les Murray's first book, *The Ilex Tree*, was published in 1965 in conjunction with Geoffrey Lehmann. His first sole collection, *The Weatherboard Cathedral*, was published in 1969, to be followed by many others in succeeding decades. Dawe's *Sometimes*

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<sup>786</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>787</sup> Shapcott, T., 'Douglas Stewart and Poetry in the *Bulletin*, 1940-1960', *Cross Currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*, ed. B. Bennett, Longman Cheshire Pty. Ltd., Melbourne, 1981, pp. 148-155.

<sup>788</sup> Shapcott, T. and Hall, R., *New Impulses in Australian Poetry*, *op. cit.*, 1968, pp. 2-13.

<sup>789</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>790</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

*Gladness* later became a popular modernist text appreciated by older students.

Stewart's poetry and that of other poets of his generation were excluded from Shapcott & Hall's *New Impulses in Australian Poetry* (1968) and, generally, by editors of later anthologies of the 'newer' poetry, Harry Heseltine, John Tranter, Robert Kenny, for example, but in *Poetry Magazine* No. 6, December 1967, Stewart judged the poetry award and commented:

The first thing to look for is some touch of freshness, something to show that the writer is of his time, "with it". But also, one must look for some indication that he is a genuine poet, or capable of being one; there must be a command of technique.

From the technical point of view, I thought "Decision" [by Wilhelm Hiener] the best single poem submitted ... as it is fresh enough in its wit to rank as modern though the style does not attempt to go beyond the conventions used by satire.<sup>791</sup>

The prize of \$100.00 was divided equally between Wilhelm Hiener for 'Decision' and B.A. Breen for 'Fragments of O'Flaherty', Nos. (1) to (5), of which only the first fragment is quoted here:

O'FLAHERTY IN A SERIOUS MOOD

Three dark men walk in my  
waking dreams, in my night, in  
my uneasy still-dark  
awakenings three dark men  
walk.

Not even with footsteps, sil-  
ent that pad-fall behind  
my mind; no flicker of lips, no  
twitch of nostrils, Rodin-eyed  
they walk ...

SPEAK  
YOU BASTARDS but  
only their coming is any  
response only  
their coming.

The prize-winning poem was a fairly conventionally-rhymed poem in four quatrains, about the entrapment of Venus and Mars by Hephaestus, but Stewart's choice indicates his understanding of modernism, a line of continuity which contributes to his overall philosophy

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<sup>791</sup> Stewart, D., 'Judge's comments on this year's award', *Poetry Magazine*, No. 6, December 1967, pp. 5-8.



of poetic worth. Another poem published in *Poetry Magazine*, No. 5, December 1967 is Donald Jon Daniels' 'Au Go-Go'. This poem reflects the tone and mood of the late 1960s as well as in its idiom and rhythm that reminds the reader of the 'go-go' dancers of that period. Even Daniels' way of structuring the poem is an imitation of their movement. Like a piece of written music, the poet gives an instruction on how this is to be read and interpreted by using the word 'Presto':

AU GO-GO

Presto.

Frenetic figures, disco Technicolor, sweat and blisters,  
The pulsation of 250 decibels pounds  
  through the ear  
And bursts  
  into a thousand colours  
  in the mind.  
The drug of primitivism shows itself  
  On the faces of the addicts  
  In their movement,  
  dress  
  and sex  
and they breathe in deeply  
  the pot  
  of sweat  
and take a trip through the realms of fantasy.  
Strips of blue  
  and green  
  and orange  
and men with jewels flashing as their fingers move  
  on gut.  
  
Fantastic speed, the sticks beat on the hide  
of some long-dead beast  
  and clash on metal  
Shattering the symbiotic dreams  
Yet up again  
To live  
  and live  
And not stand still,  
and stave off death  
  for five more hours.<sup>792</sup>

While techniques and idiom in this poem reflect preoccupations and values of the young generation, its rhythm and energy are calculated to give pleasure, a requirement, for Stewart,

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<sup>792</sup> Daniels, J.D., 'Au go-Go', *Poetry Magazine* No. 5, December 1967, p. 20.

of all poetry.

Changes in Australian poetry during the sixties was hardly revolutionary, but gradual until a more trenchantly ‘new’ poetry emerged in the latter half of that decade, promoted by John Tranter, Robert Adamson, Melbourne poet Kris Hemensley and others, for whom Dransfield and their contemporaries constituted what came to be known as the ‘generation of 1968’.

Earlier in the 1960s, about the time of Stewart’s *Rutherford*, many emerging poets were excited by these newer contemporary directions in American poetry. Bruce Beaver, Bruce Dawe, Julian Croft, Thomas Shapcott, Rodney Hall, and others born between the early 1930s and mid-1940s adopted some aspects of the modes of their American contemporaries as a reaction against old-fashioned formalism. Beaver’s 1969 *Letters to Live Poets* influenced the style and direction of much Australian poetry by his younger contemporaries in the 1970s. The *Letters* are directed, as Beaver says, to the ‘most-impossible creative reader, a live poet in his or her own sense’. They begin with a letter to the American poet Frank O’Hara:

God knows what was done to you.  
I may never find out fully.  
The truth reaches us slowly here,  
is delayed in the mail continually  
or censored in the tabloids. The war  
now into its third year  
remains undeclared.  
The number of infants, among others, blistered  
and skinned alive by napalm  
has been exaggerated  
by both sides we are told,  
and the gas does not seriously harm;  
does not kill but is merely  
unbearably nauseating.  
Apparently none of this  
is happening to us.<sup>793</sup>

The poetic series of ‘Letters’ deals with issues of contemporary life: ‘the Vietnam War; international complicity in corruption; the commercialism of modern society; the vegetable

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<sup>793</sup> Beaver, B., ‘Letters to Live Poets, I’, *Letters to Live Poets*, South Head Press, Sydney, 1969, p. 9.

existence and mindless passivity of people who demand only the material trivia of life and none of its beauty and fullness'.<sup>794</sup> Beaver's concerns became the concerns of many poets of his and later generations, and thus the mood, style and subject matter of Australian poetry underwent a change that reflected new perspectives in Australian society.

John Tranter, born 1943, was, as the editors of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* remark, 'an outspoken, even rabid opponent of conservatism in Australian poetry',<sup>795</sup> and his critical writings, as well as poetry collections including *Transit*, *Leatherjacket* confirmed 'his strong advocacy of modernism in Australian writing'.<sup>796</sup> In Joan Kirkby's *The American Model: Influence and Independence of Australian Poetry*, 1982, Tranter outlines the developments in poetry as a result of 'the generation of 1968' and new poetry:

One of the aims of any new movement is to replace the old, and a large part of the energies of these young writers went towards overthrowing what they saw as the tradition of conservatism that had dominated poetry in this country for many years ... It was this image of cautious, conventional verse that was attacked most energetically by the new generation of poets. They called out for new freedoms in their lives and in their poems: freedom from conscription — we were at war with North Vietnam at the time — freedom from bureaucracy and capitalist exploitation, freedom to experiment with drugs, to develop a sexual ethic free of hypocrisy and authoritarian restraints, and freedom from the handcuffs of rhyme and the critical strictures of the university English departments ... No other group of poets in Australia's history has produced such a sheer mass of published writing.<sup>797</sup>

Tranter explains that the reaction against the conservative tradition was because of three major faults:

It was largely derived from enfeebled English models; it was too closely aligned with the conservative establishment that had dragged us into the shame of the Vietnam war; and it was built upon a mid-Victorian understanding of poetry's role that had been convincingly demolished in Europe and the Americas decades before.<sup>798</sup>

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<sup>794</sup> Wilde, W.H. et. al., *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 415.

<sup>795</sup> Wilde et.al., *ibid.*, p. 689.

<sup>796</sup> *loc. cit.*, p. 689.

<sup>797</sup> Tranter, J., 'Anaesthetics', *The American Model: Influence and independence in Australian poetry*, ed. Joan Kirkby, 1982, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, pp. 104-105.

<sup>798</sup> *op. cit.* p. 105.

His near-contemporary in age, Michael Dransfield was a talented poet whose themes included protests against the Vietnam War; he also ‘explored issues related to drug use and the fragility of human relationships’.<sup>799</sup>

Some older poets insisted that the ‘new poetry’ (See Appendix 2) was formless and inappropriate to Australia. Stewart, Campbell, McAuley and Hope wrote defensively about the new American-inflected poetry, although Geoffrey Dutton, Tom Shapcott and other writers born in the 1920s and 1930s, welcomed the direction. Stewart, as mentioned previously, was ‘accommodating himself to modernity’<sup>800</sup> and appeared to be ambivalent in his opinions, but preliminary signs of his awareness of modernist change can be seen in entertaining satirical poems like ‘Reflections at a Parking Meter’ from *The Flowering Place*, 1962-1967, that suggests that modern man is owned by his car, and the mock- / serious ‘Leopard Skin’ from *Rutherford* 1962. Here, the diction seems to be rather deliberately archaic and satirical, for example in ‘look, virgins’ and ‘capered’. Geoff Page argues, however, that ‘Leopard Skin’ is a modern poem: ‘Poetry is not at all a matter of nobly described heroic events and sublime enjoyment of nature — or of love at a distance. It’s about clothes-lines and somewhat pathetic wearers of leopard-skin underpants’.<sup>801</sup> In ‘Leopard Skin’, the reader is aware of Stewart’s amusement when he sees ‘Seven pairs of leopard-skin underpants / Flying on the rotary clothes-line’; his philosophical sense of enjoyment which so many of his poems evoke as lines of continuity, is explicit as it emphasises the poet’s modernist approach.

In the long poem ‘Four Letter Words’ from *The Flowering Place* 1962-1967, Stewart infers the use of taboo words while still maintaining a sense of propriety. Here the subject is

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<sup>799</sup> Dransfield, M., *AustLit* Data Base, 2009-2010.

<sup>800</sup> Sharkey, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>801</sup> Page, G., ‘Leopard Skin’, *60 Classic Australian Poems*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2009, pp. 95-98.

modern but the mode is not — its structure, vocabulary and language is traditional, and Stewart is careful about technique, rhyme, rhythm, mood, tone and creating what he considered to be an acceptable poem in contrast to more blunt vernacular of the more recent period.

Stewart's comments in reviews of other poets' work, especially reviews written in this era of change, give a clear indication of his opinions regarding the qualities of successful poetry and what poetry is, and this appears throughout his perceptions of poetry as lines of continuity which contribute to his philosophical poetic oeuvre. Significantly, in *The Broad Stream*<sup>802</sup> he comments on Judith Wright's early (1940s) poem 'Trapped Dingo' (early 1940s), the first poem of hers that he saw, and on later collections such as *Woman to Man*, *The Gateway*, *The Two Fires*, *Birds to her Collected Poems 1942-1970*:

An anthology usually calls for a fairly short poem, objective, complete and perfect within itself, final as a sculpture in bronze; and this, irrespective of her Australian significance, is where Judith Wright excels. These are the qualities of what we call, not quite correctly, the lyric;<sup>803</sup>

These comments proved astute as Judith Wright moved towards poetry aimed at an audience with modern, if not modernist tastes. Although she targeted an audience in *Woman to Man* with new and intellectually exciting ideas, she did not accept the possibilities of 'new poetry' of the late 1960s and 1970s until later in the 1970s.

All readers did not respond to Stewart's idea that poetry is 'an art meant to provoke not argument but pleasure'.<sup>804</sup> Stewart referred to works by Wordsworth, Hopkins and Browning as being as enjoyable as the rhyming essays of Pope because they have 'the same qualities as from the lyric'.<sup>805</sup> He stated that the principle of enjoyment of a poem was his principle of selection for *Modern Australian Verse*, and 'it made a useful test for my artistic conscience,

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<sup>802</sup> Stewart, D., *The Broad Stream*, op. cit., 1975. This review, 'Judith Wright: Poet of Australia' first appeared in the *Australian*, 25 April, 1971.

<sup>803</sup> *ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>804</sup> *ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>805</sup> Stewart, D., 'Modern Australian Verse', *The Broad Stream*, p. 264.

and a useful guide for decisions'.<sup>806</sup> By following this practice he defends his choice of poems, particularly those of Kenneth Slessor, and Judith Wright's 'Wonga Vine', about which he said 'It is not one of her more "important" poems; it has no obvious intellectual content; it is not particularly Australian in the way that "Bullocky" is; yet, ever since I first read it many years ago, it has haunted me. It seems to mean so much more than it says, and it is so profound a piece of melody'.<sup>807</sup> By the time of publication of works like her satirical 'Poem' (in her 1971 *Collected Poems*), Wright revealed an approach to form and structure that was as playful as anything she had attempted in 'pleasing' traditional forms:

"To break the pentameter, that was the first heave."  
Afterwards it wasn't so difficult.  
First sentences had to go.  
Next, phrases.

Now we stand looking  
with some kind of  
modesty, perhaps?  
at the last  
and trickiest  
one.

Come on boys it's easy.  
Come on.  
it's

Here, she satirises the styles of the generation of 1968, but changed forms of expression are exemplified in her 'Advice to a Young Poet' (pp. 273-40).

Stewart's insistence on direct speech in poetry no doubt influenced his perception of 'modern' verse which ignored the traditional conventions of poetic language use. Throughout his review of *Modern Australian Verse* Stewart's perception of 'modern' as a concept is clarified, and he qualifies this as he shows that the term is relative to the times and conventions in which the poet is writing; for example, he quotes Leon Gellert's *Songs of a Campaign* (1917), which could begin a 'modern' anthology published in that year, and then declares:

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<sup>806</sup> *ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>807</sup> *ibid.*, p. 265.

But if the essential nature and style of poetry do not alter very much from generation to generation, some changes do nevertheless occur ... Language, imagery and subject matter in more serious Australian poetry became, in general, more Australian and more closely in touch with contemporary life.<sup>808</sup>

Stewart was correct in this respect; Gellert was breaking with Victorian and Georgian diction by 1917.

Although poets become interested in themes and subjects (such as voyager poems, in his case), Stewart maintains that ‘poets cannot be confined in these tidy categories, any more than they can be imprisoned in a given period of time — poets change, develop, interchange ideas and vary their themes and styles far too much for such a generalisation to be wholly true’.<sup>809</sup> These comments are relevant to other qualities Stewart admires and practises in poetry: language, style, appropriate figurative language and poetic devices, qualities readers have come to expect from his own poetry, despite the major literary change which occurred in the 1960s. His preference for the qualities of correct English expression and for precise imagery continues throughout the *Rutherford* collection of nature lyrics and longer discursive poetry, while he continued his awareness and interest in the literary modernism of his times.

### 3. *Rutherford*

Lines of continuity such as Stewart’s poetic preoccupation that the closer one moves towards nature the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth and the mysteries of nature and humankind provoke questions regarding the ‘meaning’ of poems such as ‘Rutherford’; these questions often elicit profound underlying themes when readers’ awareness of the poet’s total philosophy is understood. In his later poems and verse plays, Stewart’s attitude towards

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<sup>808</sup> *ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>809</sup> *ibid.*, p. 270-1.

literary modernism developed by the time he wrote 'Rutherford', a long poem in which implications of his positive philosophical preoccupations are evoked. This is supported by Phillips who states that Stewart 'rejects the modern sense of defeat' of the early modernists, and in 'Rutherford', Stewart reflects on, and sometimes questions, the mysteries of life, the frailty of humans, as well as the heroic (even though this theme was challenged by modernists), and the drama of life.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Stewart was aware of Hope's essay, 'The Discursive Mode: Reflections on the Ecology of Poetry' (1956),<sup>810</sup> but Stewart wrote *The Fire on the Snow*, *Worsley Enchanted*, *Ned Kelly* and other verse plays before Hope's essay appeared in *Quadrant*, so it cannot be argued that his own ideas of the discursive mode were influenced by Hope to a great degree. Stewart was also sensitive to change in poetry — changes in impulse and changes in rhyme, rhythm, imagery and language which, as stated earlier, Stewart believed, 'must change as the language of the nation changes, or it will no longer be in touch with life'.

'Professor Piccard' is the first poem in the *Rutherford* collection (C.P., pp. 45-49). Stewart's choice of his mock-hero, Piccard, is important for two reasons: the professor's research reveals nothing of importance from the stratosphere to the floor of the Ponza Deep, while Professor Rutherford's research results in a discovery which is to change the world. Piccard's bathyscaphe, 'like a bubble of living sunlight', has a circular shape that introduces the pattern of circles and wheels that continues throughout *Rutherford*. Stewart develops circle and wheel imagery until he speculates, 'The trend of all wheels, the highroad of human destiny ... Wheel beyond wheel and world beyond world to infinity' will be the final outcome of Rutherford's research (C.P., p. 98). *Rutherford* (1962) was written in Australia, but like

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<sup>810</sup> Hope, A.D., *Quadrant*, 1956, op. cit., p. 9.



Stewart, Rutherford looks back to New Zealand, in, for example, poems about his father and the country that formed the character of Lord Rutherford (the new Zealand scientist who split the atom).

McAuley's comment on structure in 'Rutherford' is relevant as it is the form of this poem which consists of 36 stanzas of eight lines each. Most noticeable are the long lines, mainly pentameter, that Stewart prefers when meditating on poetic motifs, figurative language such as metaphors, and his use of symbolism. Regular stress and equal line length add a rhythmic quality to this poem as it does in most of Stewart's poetry, especially the lyrics, thus creating a musical effect when the poem is read aloud. In this poem, as in his previous works, Stewart highlights forms of expression with words taken from his personal poetic vocabulary — words that can be descriptive, metaphoric, symbolic, or all three; it is a 'shorthand' method which in 'Rutherford' expresses the poet's quest for the gaining of knowledge and truth about the mysteries of life. Familiar adjectives recur: 'sparkling', 'dazzling', 'gleam', 'glitter' and 'crystal', and in Stanza 23, 'island after island / Rose in his mind's eye with their dazzling gleam' (C.P., p. 101) to suggest that the impulse to creative thought, often evasive, will provide an idea lit by 'lamps like lights of courage / Where lonely scholars sought for truth in stone' (C.P., p. 96), as the consequence of thought lies in wait 'while the white stars glittered above the college' (C.P., p. 97).

John Thompson finds Stewart's techniques (especially rhyming patterns) 'interesting', but he takes Stewart to task for rhyming 'destruction' with 'corruption' (Stanza 31, p. 103), to which Stewart replies, 'That's very correct assonance', then goes on to explain that 'certainty', 'Germany' and 'barbarity' 'is the rhyming of three dactyls ... I'm rhyming there a rhythm, rather than a sound' (Stanza 34, p. 104).<sup>811</sup> Stewart tells Thompson he had always been

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<sup>811</sup> Thompson, J., Interview with Douglas Stewart in *Southerly*, op. cit., p. 195.

interested in Rutherford as a scientist. Here he makes a similar comment about another heroic voyager, Scott of *The Fire on the Snow*, who ‘seemed a very significant modern figure to me’, and he states that ‘the poem really derives from the dramatic monologues of Browning, where you’re thinking for the character’.<sup>812</sup>

Stewart’s language in *Rutherford* (1950-1962) in both the lyrics and ‘Rutherford’ remains close to standard English — it does not move too close to the formalism favoured by some older English writers such as Pope or Dryden, nor does it sink to the level of the vulgar expressions practised by some younger writers of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Stewart’s Yeats-like ‘isolation and clarification of the image’ expounded by Ezra Pound, increased as he developed his preoccupations into the 1960s with his collection of short and long poems in *Rutherford*. The clarity of images he uses to express his thoughts on themes is enhanced by his musical rhythm short poems such as ‘Nesting Time’ (C.P., p. 50), ‘Firetail Finches’ (C.P., p. 53), ‘Smoke Haze’ (C.P., p. 53), ‘Lyrebird’ (C.P., pp. 50-51), ‘The Silkworms’ (C.P., p. 49) whose themes relate by implication or direct statement to those in ‘Rutherford’ (C.P. pp. 96-104). In these poems themes include exploration into the mystery of creation of the universe and the source of creative thought, as conceived by ancient Greek and Buddhist, Christian and other world religions. Music and song in nature as an analogy for life and creation or the *elan vital* stimulated Stewart’s thought; the abstractions are his way of expressing his perceptions, and ‘Rutherford’ is a reflection on the source of life itself. In 1909, Rutherford showed that atoms were mostly empty space. There is much speculation, but research into atomic theory so far is not definite about the source of life itself; only the atom as the source of matter is explicable. It seems as though Stewart’s philosophy of life is in keeping with scientific philosophers and he continually suggests this through his nature lyrics, that is,

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<sup>812</sup> *ibid.*, p. 195.

that matter is innately spiritual, the lines of continuity which contribute to modernism and Stewart's overall philosophy.

When John Thompson asked Stewart whether there was any philosophy behind his constant contemplations in the lyrics, Stewart gave the precise answer, 'Yes there is. They're all a method of exploring the universe'.<sup>813</sup> He then makes another statement about 'The Green Centipede', 'It's an exploration of the duality of God, of good and evil in the universe ... the poems are ... an exploration into the truths of the universe'.<sup>814</sup> 'The Green Centipede' appears in the *Sun Orchids* collection 1952, but it was an expression of Stewart's personal philosophy which developed profoundly as shown in *Rutherford*.

Throughout his exploration of the mysteries of the universe in *Rutherford*, Stewart draws on his personal vocabulary of images which could be called a 'grammar of symbols' because they are used in combinations that one can read as constituting his personal idiom. Stewart had become acculturated to most Australian conditions, and his poetry reflects this experience in a positive way; for example, he knew which themes, symbols and images he could rely on to appeal to the Australian reading public, so he introduces 'Rutherford' with a collection of lyrics. Like the *Sun Orchids* and *The Birdsville Track* collections, these lyrics include the music and songs of nature.

'Kookaburras' (C.P., 58), a poem about an Australian icon, reflects patterns of movement and the bird's call through use of figurative language such as onomatopoeia which develops a rhythm akin to music:

They gobble the night in their throats like purple berries,  
They plunge their beaks in the tide of darkness and dew  
And fish up long rays of light; no wonder they howl  
In such triumph of trumpets. (C.P., p. 58)

As the birds herald the dawn, alliteration adds to the clarity of the image in 'darkness' and

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<sup>813</sup> Thompson, J., op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>814</sup> *ibid.*, p. 121.

‘dew’, ‘triumph of trumpets’ and ‘gobble’ in line three with ‘gullies’ and ‘exulting’ in the final simile ‘Like waterfalls exulting down gullies’, a use of assonance which Stewart developed and honed to a point of near perfection. Juxtaposition of sounds of ‘k’ and ‘g’ imitates the highs and lows familiar in the kookaburra’s laugh, and this, together with alliteration, emphasises Stewart’s perception of these birds and as king ‘they will rule the bush as they please’. They are the survivors which, like the magpies in ‘A Country Song’ (C.P., pp. 66-67) play the old gum-trees ‘like a flute’ — they belong to the bush and the bush belongs to them. The honeyeater is also a survivor and belongs in her environment at ‘Yarrongobilly’

But chirp in peace you small green honeyeater  
Who hung your nest so cunningly over the water;  
Till we have hatched those eggs out in a sonnet  
That catches in its music, soft and shrilly,  
Something of a bird-song, something of Yarrongobilly. (C.P., p. 72):

This sonnet has an unusual rhyming pattern which, as Stewart explains to John Thompson in regard to rhyming in ‘Rutherford’, has ‘very correct assonance’. The idea of the ‘pink eggs that match the teetree blossom’ hatched in a sonnet isolates the image and connects the new life and survival of the species with the ‘new’ sonnet variation. The simplicity of tone and mood in ‘Yarrongobilly’ is deceptive as Stewart is once again contemplating the mysteries of the earth’s source of creation and life: ‘How can a little bird with a brain like a feather / Provide against so many dire emergencies?’ He is fascinated by the bird and the way she protects her eggs resting in ‘That cup of lichen trembling over the river, / Looped on the twig there like a wisp of flotsam’.

The musical theme continues in ‘Terrigal (C.P. 65) and as the poet experiences the *joie de vivre* the bellbirds give him. Onomatopoeia clearly illustrates ‘the ringing and dinging of the bellbirds’ which evokes in the poet a curiosity and he asks ‘what is the mood of the bellbird / when it says ding in a tree?’ This simple question relates to his stated philosophy regarding the mysteries of the universe and his questioning of the nature of life itself. ‘Ding’ is also

German for 'thing'; therefore the poem is reaching for a metaphysical answer.

Stewart's interest in rhyme and rhythm as the musical basis for these lyrics is not limited to attempts to capture the natural environment but extends to human's urban areas and social instincts. 'At Circular Quay' (C.P., p. 61) portrays Sydney commuters going about their everyday lives 'With no more meaning so it seemed / Than any glinting speck of the sea'. They are compared to a whitebait shoal, and like the whitebait, 'Round and round the people swam' — the association of circular motion at Circular Quay<sup>815</sup> experienced through the language and rhythm presents a merry-go-round effect so the reader can 'hear' the familiar music of an actual merry-go-round and this in turn becomes related to Stewart's idea of the rhythm of life. This poem also introduces the concept of 'the wheel in endless motion', the major image in 'Rutherford', like the same image in 'Firewheel Tree' (C.P., p. 55). Unlike the irregular rhyming pattern in 'At Circular Quay', Stewart uses 'fire / desire', 'spun / sun', 'blazed / amazed', as well as the more intricate assonance in 'tree / intricacy', 'sombre / another', and 'agony / symmetry', all of which contribute to the movement of 'those wheels of fire ... whirling in that dark-green tree'. He takes this image one step further as he perceives 'flame whirled into symmetry', indicating harmony and order in the natural environment, and once again, like the 'endless motion' in 'At Circular Quay', the poet has a vision of his personal life in 'Firewheel Tree', 'To see my life in wheels of fire / go round that dark and silent tree'. Here, though, the darkness is lit by the strength of fire, symbolically an image of new life and creation, in the simile 'Like scarlet star and crimson sun / In all the leaves' intricacy', another lead into 'Rutherford', as Stewart contemplates the universe as intricate in its structure as it is in his personal life. Unlike the moon and unreachable stars reflected in

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<sup>815</sup> There is a circular brass plaque commemorating Stewart's contribution to Australian Literature (specifically *Ned Kelly*) in Writers Walk near the International Shipping Terminal, Circular Quay, Sydney.

'The Bunyip' (C.P., pp. 226-228), now they are attainable as scientists like Rutherford explore the universe and the atom to find on a minute scale the symmetry, harmony and order found in nature.

Stewart's theme of harmony and order continues throughout his nature lyrics as he observes his subjects in 'Nesting Time' (C.P., pp. 50-51), 'Firetail Finches' (C.P., p. 59), 'Goldfish' (C.P. pp. 58-59), 'Waterlily' (C.P., p. 59) and 'The Lamps' (C.P., p. 60). The poet seems to be suggesting, as he does in earlier collections, that the observation itself brings joy, but it is the constant reminder of vitalism in nature, the struggle to survive that is important to him. Not only does the survival instinct occupy the poet's thought in 'Nesting Time' as the tiny honeyeater 'thinks it must have hair to line its nest / And hair will have, and it will chance the rest', it is also the heroism of one small creature which instinctively knows that to survive and reproduce, it must take risks like landing on the heads of the poet and his daughter to pluck hairs to line its nest. This 'knowledge' is not taught but has been inherited from the 'collective unconscious' of past generations of honeyeaters as it is in all creatures of nature, and as Stewart says, 'There's just this gap in Nature and in man' that makes all the difference.

In 'Firetail Finches' Stewart is suggesting again that there is harmony and order in nature, and in the birds' struggle to survive they bring joy to the observer; Vivian Smith's comments on 'A Robin' (C.P., 146) are also apt here when he says the nature lyrics 'are marked by a joyful reticence and a controlled flow of feeling, without dryness and untouched by preciousness'.<sup>816</sup> In this sonnet both language and rhythms support the music of nature as the finches 'sing in sunlight'. Alliteration is critical, especially in soft sounds of 'f' in 'flashing', 'flower and feather', 'flying' and 'finches' juxtaposed against harder sounds of 'b' in 'blossoms on the bushes', 'breaks in bottlebrush' and 'bird's beak' as they imitate the bird's

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<sup>816</sup> Smith, V., op. cit., p. 405.

movements. This reflects the same image which stimulated the poet's thought in 'The Finches' (C.P., p. 110) as their 'flittering' becomes associated with his flittering creative thought — just as he feels he has an idea it 'flitters' from that to another thought, and his idea of controlling the poem is as ephemeral as the bird itself. The fact that he does control it is undoubtedly because of adherence to his ideas of the qualities of good poetry mentioned previously. As the 'finches dart and take their places / Like crimson blossoms on the bushes', order and harmony are present because nature provides a home for the finches in the bottlebrush bush as well as protection from predators in the form of colour, so they are free and able to survive to perpetuate the species.

Whereas finches enjoy freedom of their environment, Stewart's silkworms are not free but are controlled by the 'Hands' as they live 'All their lives in a box!' His persona is of the opinion in 'The Silkworms' (C.P., pp. 49-50) that 'centuries of masters, not meaning to be cruel / but needing their labour, taught these creatures such patience ... There is no word to tell them that they are free' — it is the acceptance of living their lives in a box which inhibits them from their flight to freedom. All thought in this discursive monologue is negative — it is a metaphoric indictment of human society conditioned into believing that independent thought and freedom to live their own lives is not an alternative to authority. Unlike the silkworms which accept the authority, new generations of modernist writers discussed in Chapter 8 of this thesis defied authority, and as Tranter argues, Waking from 'that long swoon', when the buddleia 'gives / Its nectar like lilac wine for mating ... They stir, they *think* they will go', but inherent conditioning is too strong — 'they remember, remember / It was forbidden, forbidden, ever to go out' (CP., p. 50). Repetition of 'remember' and 'forbidden' emphasises the strength of their society and its controlling influences, 'the Hands are on guard' and their collective

unconscious, 'The ancestral voice', says 'Don't, and they do not'. Capitalisation of 'Hands'<sup>817</sup> and 'Don't' are clear representations of law and order that strengthen Stewart's preference for order and harmony, not only in human society, but in nature also (See 'Pictures', CP., p. 56-57). Hands are also symbolic of protection so the soothing assurance that comes with the whispered 'Sleep, sleep, you shall be wrapped in me soon' is an offer of a better life, an inducement to work hard and they will be safe in their cardboard 'factory' — a promise reminiscent of social upheavals in an historical sense, a promise of a utopia which emanates in a false society, a dystopia.

Inherent conditioning, that is, the inherited values and traits of past generations handed down to new generations, is analogous to human conditioning; historical fact has taught each generation that complacency can lead to takeover by a foreign force as it does in 'Easter Island' (C.P., pp. 82-89) — a static society will not progress creatively, and reality is an illusion as frail as a cardboard box. Under circumstances presented by the poet, this acceptance of a state of being is now basic to their way of life, and like the human condition, it is a retreat from exploration of the unknown and from the responsibilities of younger generations to build a better world with new attitudes and mores which embody the fundamental moral views of the group. The loss of their universal identity is caused by their acceptance of an unnatural existence and so they live in fear.

Gooneratne suggests that responses to ancestral voices vary according to culture and tradition and that reaction to the human aspects of 'The Silkworms' can be either subjective or objective.<sup>818</sup> The discernment of this thought is relevant insofar as the poem can be (and

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<sup>817</sup> Cirlot, J., op. cit., pp. 344-345. Hands are 'the corporeal manifestation of the inner state of the human being ... expresses an attitude of mind in terms other than the acoustic ... the raised hand is the symbol of voice and song ... the hand signifies protection, authority, power and strength.

<sup>818</sup> Gooneratne, Y., 'Douglas Stewart's "The Silkworms",' *Australian Poems in Perspective*, ed. P.K. Elkin, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1978, p. 128.



should be) read on two levels — the physical and the metaphysical, and Stewart makes it clear that the silkworms' loss of vitality is the loss of universal identity caused by their acceptance of an unnatural existence and so they live in fear; this idea anthropomorphises the creatures, but really has no real analogy to human life.

As he searched for answers to seemingly unanswerable questions, Stewart turned to the writings of philosophers like Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, whose ideas he soon dismissed. In 'Theories of Life and Art', Stewart quotes from H. G. Baynes' introduction to *Mythology of the Soul* in which the author gives the core argument of his (and Jung's) philosophy:

Before the human mind had ever set itself to the labour of thought, the myth already flowed like a natural fountain out of the unconscious. Within this stream of living images the naïve mind is enfolded, as a trout is contained by the river. Like a fish to its native stream, the morale of a people also abides in their relation to their myth: when this is destroyed by intellectual sophistication or by other causes the virtue of a people departs.

With the individual it is the same: every man needs to be contained psychologically in a living stream. Call this stream, if you will, tradition; essentially it is the continuity of general psychic life in which the individual psyche is contained, and by which it is nourished. Often the stream of tradition seems to lose itself in still pools, as, for example, when the family or the clan or the church stagnates in ancient custom, forgetting to cherish the new forms which a living myth begets.

Most of the people who come to an analyst with serious purpose come because they have lost touch with, or been prised away from, their original background.<sup>819</sup>

Stewart is of the opinion that Baynes 'is fundamentally concerned not with his own frustrations, but with the myths that are the lifeblood of the race. His purpose is to give new life to the archetypal images, new validity to the eternal truths'.<sup>820</sup> He finds parts of Baynes' work 'illuminating', even though much of Baynes' philosophising is not directly related to literature. Stewart is specific about Baynes' belief that 'myths [that] are the lifeblood of the race', and Stewart is interested in the collective unconscious which Jung defines as such:

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I

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<sup>819</sup> Baynes, H.G., *Mythology of the Soul*, quoted by D. Stewart in 'Theories of Life and Art', *Flesh and the Spirit*, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>820</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

call it the *personal unconscious*. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from acquisition but it is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term 'collective' because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal ... the contents of the collective unconscious ... are known as *archetypes*.<sup>821</sup>

With Jung's theory in mind, Stewart questions the idea that the silkworms have a 'collective' and 'personal' unconscious and assigns them human characteristics that are related to human experience. Meditation on this philosophy is typically by way of poetry, and 'The Silkworms' acts as an impulse to further thought, mostly metaphorical, through symbols and images. The box that contains the silkworms represents a static society in which new ideas cannot be developed into constructive thought, so Stewart made this trait analogous to the twentieth century human condition, and in doing so, the poem becomes a criticism of unawareness or apathy of the world's population in regard to important and profound issues affecting the state of humankind. This then becomes a topical debate or line of continuity and Stewart's preoccupation with modern concerns in 'Rutherford' because, in Rutherford's view, as expressed by Stewart, people were unaware of, or uncaring about, the potential danger of that scientist's experiments of splitting the atom.

Unlike the silkworms who have no constructive thought as they dream they are flying, Stewart presents positive attitudes in 'Rutherford', an imaginative recreation of moral conflicts faced by Professor Rutherford in his quest in 1909 to split the atom at Cambridge University where he 'worked now in an atmosphere of protected, isolated thought'.<sup>822</sup> Rutherford left his New Zealand farming community to discuss his experiments with leaders of the scientific world at that time; this is the focal point of Stewart's long discursive meditation and the contrast between Taranaki, an Arcadia, such as Abrams defines as a 'green refuge from the troubles and complications of ordinary life, where all enmities are reconciled, all problems

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<sup>821</sup> Jung, C.G., op. cit., p. 642.

<sup>822</sup> FitzGerald, R.D., 'Motif in the Work of Douglas Stewart', op. cit., 1963, p. 45

solved,<sup>823</sup> but Cambridge forms a central image that contributes to the scientist's moral conflict:

But he had grown to like  
This life of power where scientists met together  
And felt they were priests and rulers. He liked to talk  
With his great peers that language wrapped in mystery —  
But he'd be plain if he could. No, it was rather  
He liked the thought that what he touched was history,

As in truth it was; he'd have his personal pride.  
(C.P., p. 102)

The significance of his discovery is that of undreamt-of power which in hindsight, Stewart knows could destroy the world if unleashed:

And here in this spinning atom he had unloosed  
Such motion and force as made the senses reel —  
Or would, if you could not control them, but he could!

...

Look at it this way, that way, face the thing squarely.  
Could some fool in a laboratory, he'd asked his assistants,  
Blow up the world with this?

(C.P., p. 99)

The paradoxical situation of both good and evil consequences of this discovery and Rutherford's responsibilities are of concern both to himself and to mankind. Physical and metaphysical issues of conflict are proffered from both the persona's and from Rutherford's points of view, and the tension generates conflicts of purpose in both their roles. Both men are in search of knowledge and truth — Rutherford seeks scientific fact while Stewart's quest is to understand the mysteries of life and the universe, and it is precisely this type of knowledge and cognisance of truth that provides the conflict, 'Impossible to disguise / That what he had found could do mankind grave hurt', (C.P., p. 178).

Stewart's answer is that fear is the greatest force which ensures the survival of Man; when humans are complacent they become apathetic and like the inhabitants of 'Easter Island'

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<sup>823</sup> Abrams, M.H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Sydney, 1971, pp. 120-121.

(C.P., pp. 175-194), they are defeated. As Robinson argues, value judgements such as these ‘are vital to the poem: the crisis that Rutherford faces in the course of it are whether or not he should continue since his life work may do more harm than good to civilization’.<sup>824</sup> In hindsight the truth of this conflict is clear in the devastation that was Hiroshima and Nagasaki; so in ‘Rutherford’ the conflict is between the physical and metaphysical, reality and the dream. At this stage of discovery, though, the major conflict of how to stop man from destroying ‘the whole teeming world that man had made’, Rutherford must struggle to come to terms with impending destruction and his own search for success as the scientist who split the atom.<sup>825</sup> He looks to the metaphysical for answers to his inner conflict.

Stewart is also concerned with the moral conflict that man is easily corrupted:

Easy to say

That only science could turn this force to destruction  
And science must not; but fiercely though it lay  
On each man’s conscience, there was such soft seduction  
In science itself, and power and place and pay,  
You could do evil or fall into taking a bribe  
Almost without your knowing; and, clear of corruption,  
Still you could make your conscience that of the tribe

And do its bidding without one trace of guilt  
But rather, as he well knew, with a clear ardour.

(C.P., pp. 103-104)

Through Rutherford’s character, Stewart argues that science is seductive, and humans have feet of clay — give them power and they will destroy other races. The moral conflict here is implicit in the question that asks whether humans are strong enough not to abuse the power which they are to be given.

The issue of Rutherford’s unresolved moral conflict is directly related to the challenge to attain one’s dream,

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<sup>824</sup> Robinson, D., ‘Douglas Stewart’s Rutherford’, *Southerly*, No. 2, 1987, p. 153.

<sup>825</sup> *ibid.*, p. 157-158. Robinson quotes from Rutherford’s ‘Norman Locker Lecture of November, 1936’: ‘It is sometimes suggested that scientific men should be more active in controlling the wrong use of their discoveries. I am doubtful however whether even the most imaginative scientific man, except in rare cases, is able to foresee the ultimate effect of any discovery’.

Alone in this still room  
With these uncanny electrons whirling and shielding  
The inviolable core, he felt he was living in a dream.  
(C.P., p. 100)

Yet, for his dream to eventuate, he needed the assurance of a power stronger than his 'Mere human powers', such as that of his father, builder of waterwheels,

And sometimes it seemed, alone in the universe  
In the laboratory at night, they worked together,  
That craftsman's hands still moving inside his own.  
It was a haunted place, this tower of knowledge,<sup>826</sup>  
Calm with old books but wild with thoughts unknown,  
All dark except for lamps like lights of courage  
Where lonely scholars sought for truth in a stone.  
(C.P., pp. 96-97)

Rutherford is well aware of his pride in his place with other scientists and with the knowledge that his experiments have world-wide significance, but he also knows that 'A man alone must show what he could do', because the 'final inner truth' is that there is something more, 'something outside' when 'hands not his own, like a mist, came creeping through / His own work and made what he was making' (C.P., p. 102). As in Stewart's many other poems, spirit is acknowledged in 'Rutherford' as being the real truth, the real knowledge, as the poet's philosophy of life is evoked in statements like this, ambiguous, but carefully disguised and hidden within events unfolding in the work; this is Stewart's poetic voice expressing his own point of view in a modern way.

Once Rutherford accepts spirit's intervention, 'out of the dark, from nowhere, flashed the conception / Like force in the atom and filled him with its radiance ... it moved him in silence / Until at last what it wanted to do was done ... through the mind of man' (C.P., p. 179). Stewart is careful in giving credit to spirit; he presents the conflict between the supernatural, 'some quite unknowable powers / Dark and divine', and a more physically human emotion, inherited from ancestors, that is the collective unconscious, in the form of his

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<sup>826</sup> *ibid.*, p. 137. The 'tower of knowledge' is an intermediary symbol linking the spiritual and the physical.

preoccupation that ancestors such as those in *Voyager Poems* who illustrate ‘the spirit of the race’. Yet, Rutherford must face the facts because ‘they gave him the same clear answer of progress’ that it was ‘Thought and the hand had lit our civilization’, and Stewart is saying that once man begins to think creatively, progress cannot be stopped.

These issues take the reader into the romantic convention of the pastoral and lines of continuity such as modernism which also provide a link to Stewart’s personal philosophy — the closer one gets to nature and the earth itself, the closer one moves towards the spiritual, but spirit becomes ambiguous and Stewart subtly asks readers to determine whether his meaning is about the spirit of the race<sup>827</sup> and its identity, or whether it is the general feeling of excitement, the challenge to attain one’s dream.

Rutherford’s dream, and his acceptance of spirit or a superhuman power, parallels Stewart’s belief in the isolation and clarification of the image, as the scientist contemplates the atom: the idea of creative thought by way of imagery in the poems leading up to ‘Rutherford’ by imagery and inference, but in this longer poem the method is explicit,

Thought would go outwards, expansion; his was a shrinking,  
How to get mind and hand so small, that was the problem,  
That in one final thrust of concentration  
They would be able to move inside an atom  
(C.P., p. 173)

While Rutherford daydreams about his quest to ‘go in there and watch the atom unfold / Its innermost secrets’, he thinks about the ‘force that no savage yet had dreamed of wielding ... he felt he was living in a dream’. It is here that Stewart’s concentration on the whirling atoms becomes the major image in this work — that of the wheel as ‘the racing electrons whirled / Circling that radiant centre, the white-hot nucleus, / — Held in your hands, almost, huge as you were, / Pierced by your thought like a neutron’ (C.P., p. 96). As Rutherford thinks about

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<sup>827</sup> Spirit of the race: Stewart develops this theme in in his verse dramas and voyager poems. In this respect Rutherford is considered to be an intellectual voyager who contributes to the spirit of the race of Mankind and discovery of the unknown in science.

the miracle and how it came about by ‘The common stuff of the earth’, ‘the white stars glittered above the college / A wheel moved somewhere far away in the dark’ (C.P., p. 97). Though thought is dark, latent, eventually the light of awareness shows the way to knowledge, and Rutherford realises he is at the beginning, not at the end, because new areas of thought — areas of unimagined ideas, even in the recent past will emanate because of the splitting of the atom, a discovery as important as the discovery of the original wheel:

such a wheel  
He knew would carry man and all his future

It was as if in one swift generation  
He had bridged the years from the first man to the last,  
Run the whole course of civilization  
Since some half-naked craftsman far in the past  
First shaped a wheel and set the thing in motion;  
All moved on the wheel, and the force that drove the wheel  
(C.P., p. 98)

Stewart further develops the thought concept in Rutherford’s daydream; his return in imagination to New Zealand in Stanza 5 begins with images of the wheel, (‘And huge it was’) encompassing the universe. The subtlety of the poet’s imagery expresses problems of duality; by association of ideas, the wheel is an image of cosmic rotation, and the waterwheel ‘far away in the dark’ of the past in New Zealand. The wheel ‘battered in the dark’ of ignorance until the ‘Dewdrops like stars’ of enlightenment appear. Rutherford is a dreamer as well as a scientist, and his thoughts wander to his childhood home, ‘Under the mountain towering’ where ‘the white snow sparkled, the stream glittered’ in glad response to an ordered society. Order, grace and clarity are qualities of life and art much admired by the poet, who says in ‘Pictures’, ‘On whose clear art the light so moves and gleams /... its hidden / Order and grace and clarity’ (CP., pp. 56-7). Stewart presents Taranaki as an idealised pastoral setting, and he uses this Romantic convention as a further vehicle for thought, seemingly to imply his personal philosophy that the closer one gets to nature and the earth, the closer one moves towards innocence and spirit. Stewart pursues this thought in imagery as he describes how Rutherford

vows 'I'll dig no more potatoes!', (a basic 'symbolic representation of a life involved with the earth as he is lifted to a position of utmost importance and influence to humankind) when the telegram from Cambridge arrives,

And dug no more indeed, nor milked nor ploughed  
Except in the great seas of thought and fame;  
And where the surf broke high and white and loud  
In wonder watched as island after island  
Rose in his mind's eye with their dazzling gleam.  
(C.P., p. 101)

Images of 'island after island', that is, isolated thoughts set off by chain reaction imply a similar reaction of the atomic wheel:

It was the most fascinating thing in the world  
And out of it too, like watching some new star:  
To go in there and watch the atom unfold  
Its innermost secrets, right to the very core  
(C.P., p. 96)

But as Stewart says in 'Waterlily' (C.P., p. 59), 'All images and fancies coalesce and cancel / In mystery at last', and Rutherford realises that no matter what happens in the future, the wheel that is the universe and the wheel that is the atom, the basic building blocks of all physical matter, will remain a mystery. The world recognises the scientist, 'the famous Lord Rutherford conquering such vastitudes, but Rutherford sees 'that old savage with his wheel', realising that he knows no more about the consequences of his discovery than the original inventor of the wheel knew about this.

Images of the wheel take many forms in *Rutherford*, and in particular the wheel represents a mandala which is also evoked by flowers like the waterlily and subjects of nature lyrics which not only support the themes in 'Rutherford'; they also suggest protection; for example, the wheel of endless motion in 'Circular Quay' (C.P., p. 61). Stewart takes wheel imagery a step further and argues that Rutherford knows the potential danger of splitting the atom, 'But now since it threatened the whole existence of man / We must not, could not, dare not let it continue' (C.P., p. 104). He argues that Rutherford, although tempted to surrender,



yielded to progress, even though his actions may not have been justified at that time in human history. In this respect, Leonie Kramer offers an apt suggestion:

The most extensive statement of his [Douglas Stewart's] interest in intellectual effort is 'Rutherford'. Structurally, it is based on interlocking images of the constellations, the wheel and the atom, and the correspondences between them. This aspect of the poem is its real strength; less persuasive is the argument given to Rutherford, which at times becomes prosy and tendentious, and cannot, I think, be justified on the grounds that Rutherford is presented ironically.<sup>828</sup>

This point of view differs from that of A.A. Phillips who writes that Stewart 'simultaneously creates a personality, suggests an atmosphere, and pursues an argument with firmness and good sense. Of these three, atmosphere is the least organically essential but the most remarkable achievement'.<sup>829</sup> Phillips' belief that Stewart 'rejects the modern sense of defeat',<sup>830</sup> together with the idea that Stewart 'holds that man's spiritual potentiality is no less eternal and therefore a continuing force', pervades much that he has written but comes close to explicit assertion only in 'Rutherford' and *The Fire on the Snow*. The argument, 'an effective rebuttal of the modern pessimism' is an assertion of Stewart's preference for more optimistic (and often profound) themes and forms in his poetry and his preoccupation with the modernism of his time is evident throughout 'Rutherford', and this line of continuity remains in his total works. In Phillips' opinion, the later sections of the poem come close to prose discussion, but this does not include 'the admirably judged' final stanza:

And yet as he looked at the sky so dark with warning  
Vast over earth and its towers, the night heaved over  
Close and familiar as a waterwheel turning  
And shed its stars like drops of crystal water  
And radiant over the world lay the clear morning.  
Men moved in darkness truly, but also in the sun  
And on that huge bright wheel that turned for ever  
He left his thought, for there was work to be done.  
(C.P., p. 105)

Nancy Keesing agrees with Phillips' view of the poem's general drift:

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<sup>828</sup> Kramer, L., 'Two Perspectives in the Poetry of Douglas Stewart', *Southerly* xxxiii, 3, 1973.

<sup>829</sup> Phillips, A.A., 'The Poetry of Douglas Stewart', *Meanjin* I, 1969, pp. 97-104..

<sup>830</sup> *ibid.*, p. 102.

It is a truly unified work, and within its boundaries sums up and draws together every major theme that Stewart has explored in his writing. Man's good and evil are in it — his endurance through every age — his future necessity, his depravity and his capacity for grandeur.<sup>831</sup>

FitzGerald suggests that 'Rutherford' has 'three parallel themes ... all on the same motif of inevitable progress'. Alluding to Stewart's earlier verse plays, FitzGerald writes, 'Stewart has used his dramatic powers to full advantage to present a real and vivid picture of Rutherford when the scientist was facing new discoveries'.<sup>832</sup> Rutherford as craftsman, like his father in New Zealand, adds interest to the poem, but more significant is the theme: 'the irresistible advance of knowledge itself and its possible effects on the destiny of the human race' is a concept that challenged Stewart's thought.

Robinson also recognises the parallel between Stewart's and Rutherford's careers and achievements, but follows a different argument which focuses on moral conflict. Whereas Rutherford's achievements in science are recognised, and he is on the threshold of his most important one that will be judged by its contribution to mankind, Stewart's *Bulletin* work has ended, but his career is not yet over; like Rutherford's, his contribution to the community that is 'the most interesting parallel with Rutherford'.<sup>833</sup> Certainly, Stewart was not a scientist and Rutherford was not a poet, so the pursuit of truth and knowledge as presented by Stewart must be understood separately. Yet the correspondences are there, but unlike his early poetry in which he indirectly comments on the state of the literary scene in New Zealand, Stewart is more subtle with his inferences in this more mature poem, considering pursuits of knowledge through wheel symbolism (the wheel equates with knowledge and its endless motion symbolises progress). In this respect Stewart is suggesting parallel endeavours of both himself and the scientist.

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<sup>831</sup> Keesing, N., *Writers and their work: Douglas Stewart*, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>832</sup> FitzGerald, R.D., 'Motif in the Work of Douglas Stewart', op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>833</sup> Robinson, D., op. cit., *Southerly*, pp. 152-153.

In his essay 'Douglas Stewart', James McAuley writes about Stewart's 'meditation in the form of a personality-revealing monologue' the balance between interest in Rutherford and concern with his conflict:

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 with 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 the discursiveness and gives it imaginative strength and coherence.<sup>834</sup>

Unlike the silkworms who have no constructive thought and dream they are flying, Stewart presents positive attitudes in 'Rutherford', a discursive poem about moral conflicts faced by Professor Rutherford in his quest to split the atom at Cambridge University. Like Stewart, Rutherford was a New Zealander, but this does not preclude the poem from its place among Australian poems of discovery and exploration, and in the same manner as Scott in *Fire on the Snow* and Worsley in *Worsley Enchanted*, Professor Rutherford was a man of heroic action. He was no less on a voyage of discovery than Stewart's other heroic adventurers who evoke values that contributed to the spirit that gave birth to the spirit of ANZAC and Australians' sense of their own identity in the 1940s.<sup>835</sup>

'Rutherford' is an imaginative recreation of a particular chapter at a turning point in the scientist's career. In this case, the turning point is significant not only to Rutherford the hero, but also to all mankind because he has made the most potentially significant discovery of all — how to split the atom and thereby unleash unimagined power. Professor Rutherford, a pre-World War II scientist, who was called from a simple life in a remote New Zealand farming community to discuss his experiments at the centre of the scientific world at the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge University, is the focal point of Stewart's long discussion, and the contrast between these two elements in his background forms a central image in the poem. In

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<sup>834</sup> McAuley, J., 'Douglas Stewart', *Literature of Australia* ed. G. Dutton, op. cit., p. 435.

<sup>835</sup> See also *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*.

this setting Rutherford is ‘Mostly too busy to think — too busy thinking’. Like Professor Piccard, ‘Our emblem and our hero’, an explorer of unknown physical environments, especially of the ocean’s depths, ‘And up and up to the stratosphere,’ (CP., pp. 45-49), Rutherford is one of ‘Stewart’s other heroes, his intellectual discoverers’<sup>836</sup> who is faced with the paradoxical situation of both good and evil consequences of his discovery and his responsibilities as a scientist both to himself and to mankind.

Issues of conflict, both physical and metaphysical, are present from the points of view of both the poet and the scientist. Creative thought, an issue shared by both the poet and the scientist, and the tension which arises from that thought, contribute to conflict of purpose in both their roles. Another issue arises as both men are on a quest for the gaining of knowledge and truth; the conflict is contained in the type of knowledge and the cognisance of truth. Furthermore, ‘Rutherford’ presents its readers with a dream, thus forming a link with other adventurers in Stewart’s verse dramas, but unlike the defeat of Scott and Lane, Rutherford succeeds even though he is left with his unresolved moral conflict.

Whereas the concept of creative thought is examined mainly through imagery in his shorter poems, it is explicit in ‘Rutherford’. In Stanza 1, there is a two-fold idea of thought: there is no time for thought because it expands;<sup>837</sup> conversely, because Rutherford’s world is a shrinking one, the problem is how to bring the hand and mind to the size of an atom, resulting in precise concentration of thought such as the bringing together of the sun’s rays through a glass with such intensity that a fire can be started. Only when this intensity of concentration is reached will humans be able to ‘move inside an atom’. Thought is dark, latent, until the light

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<sup>836</sup> Kramer, L., ‘Two Perspectives in the Poetry of Douglas Stewart’, *Considerations*, ed. Brian Kiernan, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>837</sup> Anon, ‘Psychology of Creativity’, op. cit., p. 1.

of awareness shows the way to knowledge,<sup>838</sup> so ‘while the white stars glittered above the college / A wheel moved somewhere far away in the dark’. In Stanza 12 Rutherford realises that he is ‘Not at the end of things but at the beginning’; the splitting of the atom will open up vast new areas of thought — areas undreamed-of even in the recent past. Stewart pursues thought imagery as Rutherford,

... dug no more indeed, nor milked nor ploughed  
Except in the great seas of thought and fame;  
And where the surf broke high and white and loud  
In wonder watched as island after island  
Rose in his mind’s eye with their dazzling gleam.

The poet uses ‘dazzling gleam’ as a technique of language he has previously used, ‘sparkling, dazzling, gleaming’ to express a quest or the gaining of knowledge and truth. Images of ‘island after island’ which appear as isolated thoughts set off by chain reaction imply a similar reaction of the whirling atom:

It was the most fascinating thing in the world  
And out of it too, like watching some new star:  
To go in there and watch the atom unfold  
Its innermost secrets, right to the very core  
Where star within star the racing electrons whirled  
Circling that radiant centre, the white-hot nucleus,  
—Held in your hands, almost, huge as you were,  
Pierced by your thought like a neutron. It was miraculous (CP., p. 96)

Rutherford’s dream develops Stewart’s philosophy of creative thinking, a major concept which not only expands Stewart’s creative thought but, at the same time, becomes precise concentration as Rutherford contemplates the atom:

Thought would go outwards, expansion; his was a shrinking,  
How to get mind and had so small, that was the problem,  
That in one final thrust of concentration  
They would be able to move inside an atom. (CP., p. 173)

While Rutherford daydreams about his quest to ‘go in there and watch the atom unfold / Its innermost secrets’, he thinks about the ‘force that no savage yet had dreamed of wielding ... he

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<sup>838</sup> Cirlot, J., op. cit., writes, ‘the tower of knowledge’ is an intermediary symbol linking the spiritual and the physical’, pp. 344-5.

felt he was living in a dream'. The moral conflict he faces is one which is 'Impossible to disguise / That what he had found could do mankind grave hurt', (CP., p. 178). With the truth of this knowledge Rutherford knows that 'He liked the thought that what he touched was history', (CP., p. 179). He knows that this is the truth, but at the same time he knows the irrelevancy of the old saying, 'A man alive must show what he could do;' because the 'final inner truth' is that there is something more, 'something outside' when 'hands not his own, like a mist, came creeping through / His own at their work and made what he was making'. Unexpectedly, as in Stewart's many other poems, spirit is acknowledged as being the real truth, the real knowledge, as the poet's philosophy of life is evoked in statements like this, ambiguous to a point, but carefully disguised and hidden within events unfolding in the work. At this stage of discovery, though, the major conflict of how to stop man from destroying 'the whole teeming world that man had made', Rutherford must struggle to come to terms with impending destruction and about his own search for success as the scientist who split the atom. He looks to the metaphysical for answers to his inner conflict.

Moral conflict in 'Rutherford' contributes to Stewart's collection of mature poetry and his growing concern for human society and its responsibilities. 'Rutherford' speaks for both the scientist and the poet and it can be read as Stewart's personal comment about his poetry and ambition. This can be read into the poem as his symbolism and language are often ambiguous. Not only does Rutherford finally decide it is time to return to work, but this applies to Stewart also.

Stewart's *Rutherford* moves in part from microscopic and intensive observation of an image to a wider view of the world in which intellectual and heroic endeavour are achievements. In 'The Flowering Place' which follows this discussion of *Rutherford*, it will be seen that many notions introduced in this chapter are continued in images of scientists and explorers, many of whom are mock-heroes like Professor Piccard, unlike the scientific hero

Stewart develops in 'Rutherford'.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE FLOWERING PLACE AND LATER POETRY: CONCLUSION

*The truth is, there is a place beyond the divisions of the schools and movements  
where poetry meets.*

[MAV 271]

*... there remain always, beyond new scenes and new patterns of living,  
the eternal truths and mysteries of human existence: the poetry  
of love, the poetry of metaphysics, the poetry of humanity. [MAV 272]*

*In the end — or in the beginning — it is the poetry that counts.*

[MAV 272]

Douglas Stewart<sup>839</sup>

Stewart's *Collected Poems 1936-1967*, begins with a group of poems titled 'The Flowering Place'; the title poem is appropriately called 'The Flowering Place' (C.P., pp. 3-4). This collection is structured in reverse chronological order, unlike *Selected Poems* (1973) which ends chronologically with 'Later Poems'; here, the leading poem is also 'The Flowering Place' (S.P., pp. 185-186). Poems from the 1967 collection in 'Later Poems', are included but 'One Yard of Earth' (C.P., pp. 5-7), 'Audubon and the Pirate' (C.P., pp. 8-10), 'Flying Crooked' (C.P., pp. 28-29) and 'Moreton Bays' (C.P., pp. 30-31) are excluded.

Mock-hero, 'Professor Piccard' (C.P., pp. 45-49) introduces *Rutherford* in which the discursive long poem 'Rutherford' (the subject of discussion in the previous chapter), appears. Rutherford is the explorer-voyager who changes concepts of a scientific nature and who is opposed to the possibility of destruction of the known world; Piccard discovers nothing of value. Poems about scientists and explorers in 'The Flowering Place' and 'Later Poems' include Kingdon Ward, 'The Flowering Place'; Charles Darwin, 'One Yard of Earth'; Henry White, 'B Flat', and 'Mungo Park'. In these poems about their quests for knowledge of the

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<sup>839</sup> Stewart, D., Introduction, *Modern Australian Verse*, op. cit., pp. 271-272.



unknown there is often a satiric tone and an underlying profundity which include lines of continuity discussed throughout this thesis, and which contribute to Stewart's philosophical poetic oeuvre.

The setting for 'The Flowering Place' is Burma where Kingdon Ward climbs Karpo Razi to gather rhododendron seeds, and where 'on the rock-ledge [he] stopped appalled / To see the naked edge of the world'. The unusual rhyming couplet in the second sestet demands attention, and as the reader wonders why Ward is 'appalled', Stewart's 'evasive scepticism'<sup>840</sup> surfaces as it does in earlier poetic works. Consideration of the explorer's amazement leads to reconsideration of motifs which provide lines of continuity throughout Stewart's poems and verse plays. New Zealand imagery, 'Peak with ice and wild with snow / Peak and crag leapt up to meet / Reeling in the wind's cold shock / Barren space with barren rock' (C.P., p. 3), is reminiscent of early New Zealand poetry such as 'The Country of Winter' (C.P., p. 155), verse plays *The Fire on the Snow* and *Worsley Enchanted*. The next verse provides a gradual transition into a temperate zone between two opposing forces of ice and snow and the green forest. Ward is Stewart's persona who illustrates the poet's philosophy that the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one moves towards the spirit of the earth; he sees 'shale and tussock', then 'eyebright primula, silver daisy / First small sparks of living flame', metaphors that represent the beginnings of creation; this continues the link with 'Rutherford' 'Where star within star the racing electrons whirled' (C.P., p. 96).

Familiar metaphors of ice and flame are not isolated in 'The Flowering Place' in which colours of 'Purple and crimson, mauve and white' are recognizably those of Stewart's personal vocabulary. In *The Fire on the Snow* Scott remembers,

One night I walked to the cliffs alone, and the moon

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<sup>840</sup> Smith, V., *OHAL*, p. 401.

Was pure and burning on those frozen spires and crags,  
So that they leapt like flames. The ice was blazing.  
And the hut, when I came back, was a red island,  
A ship at sea, a fire of human beings,  
Warm and secure.

(S.P., p. 54)

New Zealand images here link Stewart's memories with the Antarctic landscape where Scott's metaphysical perception of heroic action and bravery of his group of men burning like flames on the ice is precognitive, like a dream.

Dream sequences are effective links whereby Stewart continues and develops this theme, notably in *The Fire on the Snow*, *Worsley Enchanted*, *Terra Australis*, and *The Golden Lover* in which characters such as Scott, Worsley and Shackleton, Lane, Quiros, and Tawhai are dreamers. In the end, a dream is just that — a dream that can disappear with the light of dawn, but Ward's dream does not melt into oblivion as he collects the minute rhododendron seeds and takes them home to England, 'knowing how the world was made'. Stewart reflects on Ward's success in the final verse of 'The Flowering Place' as the explorer:

Saw now like lights of dream  
On their far-off mountainside  
White azalea lit its gleam,  
Rhododendron flared in pride,  
All his island flowered between  
Savage snow and jungle green. (C.P. p. 4)

Light symbolism is repeated as Ward observes the forest, 'Tree fought tree to reach the light' and the vines struggle in their effort to eventually emerge 'out into the shining sun'. The idea is contiguous with the notion of Stewart's personal struggle to understand life's mysteries until (finally in 'Bell Rock'), he discovers the light of understanding.

There is a satiric tone in 'The Flowering Place' conveyed by Stewart's verbal imagery as he perceives England as a flowering garden, but the humour in this series of sestets lies in Taaffe's suggestion, 'the disjunction between the grandeur in an immense setting and the

smallness, almost the triviality, of the rhododendron seeds themselves'.<sup>841</sup> Taaffe's comment here opens up a further area of discussion taking as its theme the Red Page as Stewart knew it (the grandeur in an immense setting), and the triviality of many contributions which were gathered and sorted, the best finding their way into Stewart's 'flowering place'.

Stewart's blend of humour and sincerity is not repeated in 'B Flat' (C.P., pp. 7-8), while Henry White finds that owls hooted 'Precisely in the measure of B flat', although 'we cannot claim his crumb of knowledge / Was worth much more than virtually nil', Stewart sees him 'walking still / With eager ear beneath his clerical hat', listening for the sound of B flat. This poem is one of Stewart's meditative lyrics that implies a contrast in his 'reaction to the violence of our time'.<sup>842</sup> The sympathetic tone reflects the significance of various types of humanity, and White should be respected in a violent world as 'The most harmless, the most innocent of mankind'.

In his introduction to *Modern Australian Verse*, Stewart reflects on different schools of thought which preceded world-wide changes in the 1960s: 'poets change, develop, interchange ideas and vary their themes and styles for ... generalization ever to be wholly true'.<sup>843</sup> Discussion relating to Stewart's conclusion in this regard appears in Chapter 9, 'Douglas Stewart: New Impulses in a Decade of Transition, and *Rutherford*' that focuses in part on Stewart's attitude to the modernists of the 1960s, a period of transition and changing impulses in poetry. Stewart perceived Modernism as a force that opposed traditional verse and traditional language, as well as what has become known as 'The Establishment' of which he was a member; yet Stewart 'accommodating himself to modernity throughout his career'.<sup>844</sup> As mentioned in that discussion, the younger generation of writers of poetry in Australia (John

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<sup>841</sup> Taaffe, B., op. cit., p. 297.

<sup>842</sup> Stewart, D., Introduction, *Selected Poems*, op. cit., p. vi.

<sup>843</sup> Stewart, *MAV*, p. 271.

<sup>844</sup> Sharkey, M., op. cit., p. 5.

Tranter, Robert Adamson, Kris Hemensley and others), disliked the restraints of traditional forms of poetry, and the ideological assumptions inherent in the language some mainstream poets preferred. They looked towards experimentation, new approaches to subjects and themes relevant to changing times and their own ambitions. These are the oppositions referred to by Stewart in 'The Flowering Place'. There are two underlying themes in this poem: firstly, poetry grows from minute impulses which are the 'fertile soil' of a poet's perception, not in opposing forces of snow-capped mountains and green forests where plants (or poems) struggle to reach the light of the sun; secondly, as James Logenbach perceives, 'the dilemma that modern poets inherited ... Growing out of romanticism, [grew] into postmodernism, this hope for the power of poetry was both the dream and nightmare of the Modernist'.<sup>845</sup> The 'class of 1968' (younger poets mentioned above) forced their own insights, and (like Curnow in New Zealand in the 1930s) excluded Stewart's poetry from their publications, notably Shapcott and Hall's *New Impulses in Australian Poetry* (1968) and (later) Tranter and Meade's *The Penguin Book of Australian Poetry* (1991).

Stewart indicates in poems such as 'Leopard Skin' (C.P., p. 61) 1962, and 'Four Letter Words' (C.P., pp. 19-24) 1962-1967, that he is prepared to write on modern subjects, even though he admires much of that structure, vocabulary and syntax used by earlier poets. He is always careful about technique, rhyme, rhythm, mood and tone. His idea of a comic poem in a popular mode is contrasted to more blunt vernacular of the young modernists. At the same time, however, Stewart is not altogether against the idea of modern poetry — he takes from the concept what is useful to his own purpose at a particular time, and it becomes obvious that he is writing within the scope of modern interpretations, yet he still maintains his own expertise in areas of language and poetic expression, and other technical devices such as structure, rhyme,

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<sup>845</sup> Longenbach, J., 'Modern Poetry' *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. M. Levenson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 100-129.

rhythm and figurative language.

Stewart's choice of poems included in *The Flowering Place* and in *Later Poems* is significant — together, the poems draw together impulses that eventually present motifs as lines of continuity, as in 'The Peahen: A Meditation on Natural Selection' (C.P., pp. 10-13), that illustrate Stewart's variety of themes and preoccupations throughout the two anthologies. Like 'Lyrebird' (C.P., p. 54), 'The Peahen' begins with the conjunction 'And' which breaks into a lyrebird's meditation as it scratches 'for food like any old red rooster' and as it struggles to survive (See Chapter 4, 'The Early Australian years: the *Bulletin* and some Sydney poets'). The 'And' in 'The Peahen' is a continuation of Stewart's meditation as he ponders 'this miserable bird / Conversing in doleful whimperings, humble and muddy / before the jewelled splendours of her lord' (C.P., p. 10). During his meditation, Stewart compares the emergence of the peacock's glory to that of a poem. The bird motif arises from his consideration of the peahen's selectivity (as he does in 'Day and Night with Snow': 'I *was* the stream ... Here I *am* the birds that shriek ... their anger' (C.P., 332- 335)). In 'The Lyrebird', the bird seems to be telling Stewart '[I] *Am* but leaves, *am* rock from the standstone [sandstone?] shelves' (C.P., p. 54). At this point in 'The Peahen', the poet *becomes* the 'miserable bird', selecting, until generations later, 'each feather fell into place like a rhyme', and eventually, a poem emerges to be included in Stewart's 'great fountain sprinkling'.

As he pays homage to peahens and their role in the evolution of the Whitmanesque peacock 'Who yawped his barbaric yawp, himself like a poet', Stewart's humorous verbal imagery (as he shows in *The Golden Lover*), probes unobtrusively feminist ideas current in the 1960s. Stewart gives the topic serious thought as he wonders about the mystery of the female mind and asks whether human women choose the father of their children as selectively as the peahen:

It could not be sufficient explanation;

And if it were, what of the peahen's mind  
We'd proved responsible for his creation?  
Instinct or taste in her was so refined  
That she who had made him perfect and sought no sequel  
Must deep within her clearly be his equal,

In this way, Stewart's idea of female equality with the male of the species is sympathetic to the female in this continuing notion:

Her sensibility glorious as his plumage,  
Could it be so? That dull drab miserable bird?  
We viewed her with new respect; we paid due homage;  
But sometimes thought, whatever part she had played  
In bringing that blazing splendour out of the dark  
Some utterly unknown principle was at work.

(C.P., pp. 12 and 13)

Stewart ponders this challenge as he did when portraying Tawhai in *The Golden Lover* where lines of continuity, including colour imagery, indicate his range of critical interests, in a way that, as McCooey suggests, 'makes him critically problematic'.<sup>846</sup>

Colour imagery in 'The Peahen' is as remarkable as the real-life splendour of a peacock's fan-like tail. Stewart's interest in colour, firstly in early New Zealand poems, published in *Green Lions* and *The White Cry*, persisted as part of his personal poetic vocabulary. In 'The Peahen' verbal colour imagery contrasts the 'shy' and 'modest' brown peahen with the 'end product', a new generation of 'blazing splendour' in the same way that a poem is conceived to become an object of beauty. Stewart asks whether poetry evolves like natural selection or, as in the case of the peahen, whether it is selective mating of the critical aspects of poetical effects and techniques, or whether, perhaps, it is some 'unknown principle' at work, the same principle that not only creates life but ensures survival against odds — a principle that 'tells' the natural world how to live and behave. Stewart puts the idea eloquently in 'Waterlily', 'All images and fancies coalesce and cancel / In mystery at last' (C.P., p. 59).

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<sup>846</sup> McCooey, op. cit., p. 365.

The truth is, ordinary human beings do not know because scientists cannot explain the energy we call 'life' or the capacity to think on a higher or metaphysical level.

This study of Stewart's poetry and verse-plays shows his masterful skill in conveying preoccupations, sometimes ambiguous, through word groupings, diction, figurative language and technical devices, all of which clarify images of his close observation. His quest is for understanding as in 'Granite' in which he finds truth in the objects themselves, that is, truth is the underlying reality.<sup>847</sup> Stewart expresses Aboriginal people as metonymic 'hands' in 'Cave Painting', in which, he observes:

Look there are dark hands in the black rock,  
Man's hands, woman's hands, child's hands hiding in a cave,  
Shadows of hands, but with such a living look  
They seem to waver and beckon, they seem to move  
In a language of gesture startling and piercing as speech.

And they are so close and yet so far and wild  
They seem to breathe and speak for all humanity.  
(S.P., p. 227)

In this poem, Stewart finds an overarching truth as he did in New Zealand, where, in 'The Growing Strangeness' he stated that he had 'a tree's tongue and [can] speak for stone', (C.P., 318).

Close reading of Stewart's poetry and verse plays reveals also Stewart's concern regarding the unpredictability of creative thought. In both 'Firetail Finches' (C.P., p. 53) and 'The Finches' (C.P., p. 110), birds 'Flit flit flit ... In a flurry of soft green bodies, red beak and tail; / And flit they do when they have picked what they wanted', like the poet's creative thought; they disappear and become bottle-brush flowers which in turn become firetail finches: the idea of experience that cannot be held and retained becomes the elusiveness of the poet's creative thought. As the impulse moves him to poetic expression, it flitters away momentarily

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<sup>847</sup> FitzGerald, *Elements of Poetry*, op. cit., p. 39.

until eventually it becomes the motif in a poem. Contrary to Stewart's comments on 'flittering thought' in 'Firetail Finches', there is no flittering in 'The Peahen', 'The Flowering Place' or 'Bell Rock' — Stewart's quest for precise language to articulate his experience with certainty has been achieved while his creative thought has matured.

The third and final poem in this discussion is Stewart's most informative of the three ambiguous and sometimes confusing poems. This ambiguity occurs when he writes metaphorically of natural and historical phenomena in the same poem. At the same time, he expresses his attitude to poetry as he does in 'The Flowering Place' and 'The Peahen'.

Stewart's impulse for 'Bell Rock' (S.P. pp. 242-246) emerged from a Scottish legend. The subject of 'Bell Rock' is the shipwreck of 'the tall proud "Duke of York" / with all their sailors drowning'.<sup>848</sup> Stewart was justified in writing about Scotland; many other first, second and third generation Australian and New Zealand writers and readers of poetry, were descendants of those born in Scotland, imbued with myths, legends, culture and language styles that established a mood of belonging. Stewart explains, 'The stones were laid, ye ken, by Tay-side masons ... Blood of my blood, faith of my faith' (S.P., p. 244). Stewart affirmed this idea and illustrated it in 'Bell Rock' and in *Glencoe*, poems that brought an intellectual 'joy' to readers who appreciate these Scottish legends.

An element of defiance in 'Bell Rock' is another line of continuity in Stewart's work. It is particularly strong in 'The Fire on the Snow' and 'Worsley Enchanted' in which Scott and Shackleton and members of their expeditions defied environmental factors to reach their goals;

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<sup>848</sup> Robert Stevenson, assistant lighthouse engineer, was entrusted with the development of the Bell Rock project. In 1800, months after seventy vessels were shipwrecked on Bell Rock in a single storm, planning for the lighthouse began. The first stone was laid in 1808 and the work was finished in 1810.

The light from Bell Rock provided safety for shipping for Scotland's rock-riddled entrance to the Firth of Tay. Stevenson's son became writer Robert Louis Stevenson. Elinor DeWire, 'Bell Rock: Scotland's Proudest Sentinel', *Mobil Compass*, No. 3, 1985 (no page numbers given).

Retrieved 13 September, 2009; retrieved from:

<http://www.elinordewire.com/bellrocklighthouse.htm>, pp, 1-4.



it is also portrayed in *Sonnets to the Unknown Soldier*. In *Glencoe*, MacLan defies environmental factors of ice and snow to deliver his submission paper to authorities representing the English King. Defiance in 'Bell Rock' contains notions of heroic bravery in building a lighthouse on Bell Rock, but unlike unsuccessful examples above, this lighthouse is successfully completed. More significant to the purpose of this study, the tower is a verbal image which is Stewart's final statement about his own poetry and the way he defied those who put obstacles in the way of his quest to make a light shine. In his introduction to *Modern Australian Verse*, Volume 2, he states that 'poetry ... is written on any subject, seen freshly and intensely; and there remain always, beyond new scenes and the new patterns of living, the eternal truths and mysteries of human existence' (MAV, p. 272).

Bell Rock itself is granite, which Stevenson considered the most suitable stone to create a strong foundation; Stewart recalls the granite stones in 'Granite' that 'seem so old and so stable' that he 'bent his forehead down / Seeking to understand What voice might speak from stone' (S.P., p. 229); no actual 'voice' is heard (cf. 'Mahoney's Mountain' ):

And though I never heard  
For all its giant brooding  
More than the silent word  
Of old stone saying nothing  
S.P., p. 104

Stewart's touch of granite 'Seemed word enough for the moment / And deeply satisfying' (S.P., p. 229). He seems to remember too, the strong foundations he found in New Zealand in 'The River' (S.P., pp. 24-26); granite is symbolic of strength and everlasting life in Stewart's poetry, thus the motif becomes another line of continuity contributing to his philosophical poetic oeuvre.

There are two voices speaking in 'Bell Rock': first, Stevenson's, the lighthouse engineer who begins with the first sestet, in a flashback in which he introduces the legend of Bell Rock, defiant to the end: 'They said no man could build upon Bell Rock ... And there

was human stubbornness forbye’, but as Stewart says in his introductory remarks, ‘There then, it’s done, and may no wave knock it over ... And there in the wind’s teeth I have built my tower’ (S.P., p. 242). Stewart’s voice overpowers that of Stevenson; even though the words are the same, his poetic voice emerges strong and clear. This is the voice that links notions in ‘The Flowering Place’, ‘The Peahen’ and ‘Bell Rock’ by way of diction, rhyme and rhythm. Varied rhythms in these poems set the tone and mood of each lyric, sonnet or ballad and the result is Stewart’s idea of poetic ‘music’ in ‘Bell Rock’. Stanza 14 illustrates this technique: ‘(And) wearily, wearily, flew the storm’s white shower, / Wearily, wearily tossed our little ship, / Wearily, scarily, crouched our men in the tower’ (S.P., p. 245).

A transition occurs in Stanza 15 when Stewart seems to revert to his own experience. Slowly the reader realises the poet is concluding reflexively and symbolically, ‘Here’s just one stubborn Scottish engineer / Who piled up stones to make a light shine clear’. From this point, the poet is the engineer, the stones are his poems, and the light is his quest for understanding of inspiration. In Stanza 16, the ‘tall golden tower and lamp’ symbolize intellectual stimulation; ‘Bare at low tide, deep in water at high’, are the obstacles faced in the course of his work. Verbs in ‘the sea *welled* up and *flung* its spray to the top’ are dramatic and add strength to the description while ‘[the tower of poems] stood *trembling* a little in the water and sky’ reflects doubt about these experiences. The line ‘When the big waves *battered* against it’, may represent doubt about his capacity or his reaction to critical relegation, but the tower which is Stewart’s total work, ‘did not fall’. The poem ends on a positive note, ‘There shall be no more shipwrecks on Bell Rock’ (S.P., p. 246).

Since 1985 there has been a paucity of useful literary criticism about Stewart’s work, so I have aimed to rectify this deficiency with close reading and analysis of his poetic output. Throughout this thesis, my task has been to persuade readers to re-evaluate Stewart’s poetical achievement and his relationship to the literary culture of his time. This re-evaluation is

opportune; the close reading involved enabled me to arrive at a feasible critical opinion in order to give Stewart ‘the attention he’s worth’, as suggested by Hooton.<sup>849</sup>

The force that emerges from many of Stewart’s lyrics, ballads and verse plays is closely related to the rhythmic drive that is the result of his selectivity of words themselves — he was determined to use the most appropriate words to clarify poetic images. It has been shown throughout this discussion that Stewart’s poetry employs vernacular language, language capable of dwelling on profound philosophical concerns, particularly in his later verse and plays.

Themes associated with nature, solitude, heroic effort, success and failure, preoccupations evident in Stewart’s New Zealand verse, continued to surface in his Australian poems. The variety and diversity of themes and subjects were often critically problematic, resulting in some critical discussion of separate themes by literary critics rather than overall analyses that can be had only by close reading of all texts. Criticisms selected for mention throughout this thesis are mainly focused on Stewart’s poetry and verse plays, his preoccupations with language and the way he employed vernacular (even colloquial) register that is also capable of dwelling on profound and sometimes pantheistic philosophical concerns. Motifs in the poetry and verse plays are important, not only to Stewart’s basic philosophy that the closer one moves towards nature, the closer one moves towards spirit, they became lines of continuity significant in Stewart’s developing literary maturity as he experimented with modernity; consequently, lines of continuity contributed to the poet’s total philosophical poetic oeuvre throughout his career.

Stewart’s dramas such as *Ned Kelly* and *The Fire on the Snow* made his reputation, but

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<sup>849</sup> Sorenson, ‘Fired from the Canon’, ‘Spectrum’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1944, p. 8A.

critical focus on these and on his extended verse sequences does not always recognise the continuity of his work considered as a whole. This thesis is concerned to show the continuity.

## APPENDIX 1

### A.D. Hope and the Discursive Mode

When Hope published 'The Discursive Mode: Reflections on the Ecology of Poetry' in 1956, the idea of the discursive mode in preference to nature lyrics was already an established style, so his essay did not break entirely new ground in Australia, or thought and expression in the writing of Australian poetry. What he seems to have been advocating, however, was a more unified single-style, / single-voice poem than the 'sequence' type of modernist poem.<sup>850</sup> Hope was a versatile poet, writing in various modes such as satire, meditative verse, discursive longer poems and, ironically, short nature lyrics with sometimes startling images not too far removed from the ones he dismisses in 'The Discursive Mode'. In his own lyrics, Hope moves away from the particular to the general statement or argument, unlike the fine detail in Stewart's *Sun Orchids* and later nature lyrics in *Rutherford*.<sup>851</sup> Hope's aim in writing his essay was to encourage a more ambitious poem that could compare in quality to the Italian and English discursive poems he admired, and were landmarks in the literature of those countries; these included works by Dante, Ariosto, Chaucer, Dryden, Pope, Cowper, Byron (whom he imitated in his 'Letter from Rome', a poem addressed to his younger friend and fellow academic Leonie Kramer), and Robert Browning.

Hope's aim to improve the quality of Australian poetry began before 1956 when he had criticised the *Jindyworobaks* and *Angry Penguins*; concerning the former, he wrote, 'to the majority of Australians, the point of view and culture of the Aboriginal is still more alien and remote, and the poet who tries to write like a second-hand Abo. [sic] is no more likely to

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<sup>850</sup> Hope, A.D., 1956, 'The Discursive Mode: Reflections on the Ecology of Poetry', *Quadrant* VI, No. I, pp. 27-33.

<sup>851</sup> Kramer, L., Introduction, A.D. Hope, *Collected Poems*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1966, p. ix.

produce sincere work than the poet who writes like a second-hand Englishman'.<sup>852</sup> His recommended cure for the malaise was twofold: to reintroduce the discursive mode or the more relaxed middle style of poetry, and to encourage the practice of satire,<sup>853</sup> but there are also two weaknesses in this premise. First, Hope fails to acknowledge the long Australian poems mentioned above, possibly because he considers them to be narrative rather than discursive poems, and second, his own satiric rage with which he attacks his world in 'A Commination' seems to be out of proportion to his subject; it invites the response that it is hardly philosophical, or intellectual but mere posturing to gain notoriety, and as Stewart says, 'When Hope bursts out cursing and swearing in the most robust Anglo-Saxon way in, say, "A Commination", I am not quite sure whether he really feels quite as savage as all that about television or whether he is not trying to put over a Swift one'.<sup>854</sup> Despite this negative response, Stewart answers a question arising from an earlier *Bulletin* review of Hope's *The Wandering Islands*: 'one of our mutual friends said he agreed with most of what I had written but wondered how I could say that much of his writing was, of all things, "puritanic".'<sup>855</sup> Stewart's answer is not wholly satisfying: 'Well, men are complex creatures, none more so than the poets. It is quite possible, as Milton showed, to be essentially a puritan and yet to write the most luscious descriptions of Eve'.<sup>856</sup> This in itself is unexceptional, but then he continues: 'Poem after poem is a revulsion from what he calls "the love-trap" ... and, though he seems in the end to go beyond horror of sex to horror of Mother Nature, if all this is not

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<sup>852</sup> Hope, A.D., 'Culture Corroboree', *The Jindyworobaks*, edited Brian Elliott, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1979, p. 249. Stewart, D., 'Mahony's Mountain', 'Sun Orchids' and 'The Aboriginal Axe', in Rawlinson, Gloria, and Hart-Smith, W., eds., *Jindyworobak Anthology, 1951*, Jindyworobak, Melbourne, 1952, pp. 10-11, 'The Fierce Country', 'The Nameless', 'World's End' and 'The Mules', *Jindyworobak Anthology, 1952*, Jindyworobak, Melbourne, 1953, pp. 9-12.

<sup>853</sup> Kramer, op. cit., p. x.

<sup>854</sup> Stewart, D., 'A.D. Hope's Poems', *The Broad Stream*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1975, p. 258.

<sup>855</sup> Stewart, D., 'A.D. Hope Arrives', *The Bulletin*, October 19, 1955, p. 2.

<sup>856</sup> op. cit., 1975, p. 257.

puritanic I do not know what else to call it'.<sup>857</sup> Here Stewart appears to be searching for a positive statement with which to defend Hope's ideas and the manner in which he expresses them. Stewart observes:

There is something private and personal in this outlook. It lacks universality. It limits the appeal of these poems; and though we must admire the immense courage with which he faces the facts of life as he sees them, and though there is something in the theory that this is a necessary journey through hell towards an affirmation of life, I feel about Hope's horror as A.G. Stephens felt about Brennan's gloom: 'We sit and admire a performance we do not often join'.<sup>858</sup>

Together with his criticism of some of Hope's verse, especially the 'love-trap' theme, Stewart presents a more positive conclusion: Hope 'is at his best when loathing is transmitted into love, as it is in a dozen or more beautiful lyrics'<sup>859</sup> such as 'Imperial Adam', 'Phallus' and 'Conquistador'.<sup>860</sup> Hope's 'An Epistle: Edward Sackville to Venetia Digby' is in effect 'a hymn to love'.<sup>861</sup> The poem illustrates the control of technique, finesse of language and music of rhythm and rhyme that Stewart admires.

In 1955 Vincent Buckley wrote from St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, U.K., to Hope: 'Did you see D. Stewart's review? [of *The Wandering Islands*] I thought it very fair from a man of his allegiances. He is head and shoulders in mental stature above his bloody mates, though they all got their quietus with the bare bodkin of your review in the S.M.H.'<sup>862</sup> In his review, Hope again refers to his and Buckley's 'more foolish contemporaries' who make claims for 'these artless rhymes simply because they are so Australian', and while he does not name the contemporaries, he is scathing in his comments about older versifiers such as A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson.

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<sup>857</sup> *ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>858</sup> *ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>859</sup> *ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>860</sup> *ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>861</sup> Hope, A.D., *Collected Poems*, 'Imperial Adam', pp. 83-84, 'Phallus', pp. 30-31 and 'Conquistador', pp. 34-36. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1975.

<sup>862</sup> Buckley, P., Introduction, 'A.D. Hope and Vincent Buckley: A Correspondence (1952-1955)', *Southerly*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 2001. There are no page numbers in this text. Correspondence is in Date order of writing.

## APPENDIX 2

### Changes in Sensibility: The Little Magazines

About the same time that the *Bulletin* changed hands and direction (1960), Stewart was writing *Rutherford*, and younger Australian poets advocated a new direction for younger writers of poetry in Australia. This represented an early change in the thinking of a generation who disliked the restraints of traditional forms, structures and language use. They looked towards experimentation, new approaches to subjects and themes relevant to the changing times and their ambitions. A growing unrest in Asia was to result in war in Vietnam, and most importantly, unpopular conscription by ballot, irrespective of class, culture or personal preference would provide further disruption of old attitudes.

A movement towards change in Australian literature had previously begun with the Aboriginal oriented Jindyworobak program (1938) whose editor, Rex Ingamell's, aim was to 'cleanse Australian poetry of dead poeticisms, and try to find a new range of words for local sights, sounds and things. It helped to enlarge the whole sense of landscape in Australian poetry'.<sup>863</sup> Stewart was not a regular contributor but, as remarked earlier, he submitted a poem to two annual anthologies (1951 and 1952).

Change was slow to come about as shown by the 'Ern Malley Hoax' in the 1944 issue of *Angry Penguins* (1940-1946). Harold Stewart and James McAuley, the authors of the sixteen hoax poems, explained that their actions arose from their anxiety over what they saw as 'the gradual decay of meaning and craftsmanship in poetry': they believed that the *avant-*

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<sup>863</sup> Smith, V., *Oxford History of Australian Literature*, op. cit., p. 369.



*garde* poetry was ‘insensible of absurdity and incapable of ordinary discrimination’.<sup>864</sup> Smith’s account of the affair records the assertion that the actions of these two poets and the Ern Malley hoax ‘killed genuine experimentation in Australia’ for the next decade;<sup>865</sup> there was less attention to literary modernism in Australian poetry than may have been the case, but nevertheless, Stewart worked within and experimented with the idea of modernism throughout his career.

*Poetry: A Quarterly of Australian and New Zealand Verse*, a poetry magazine founded and edited by Flexmore Hudson and published in Adelaide between 1941-1947, was uncommitted to any particular ideology. It published both notable and negligible talents and changed its sub-title in 1946 to the *Australian International Quarterly of Verse* to reflect the subsequent inclusion of British, Irish and American poets. Contributors included Judith Wright, ‘Brian Vrepont’, Gina Ballantyne, Rex Ingamells and A.D. Hope. On 20 December, 1946, Nancy Cato and Roland Robinson joined *Poetry* as assistant editors. Robinson’s ‘Charada’, an Aboriginal love song, and ‘Doorick the Emu’ appeared in Issue No. 11. In December 1944 (issue No. 13), the magazine was renamed *Poetry: The Quarterly of Australian Verse* and Flexmore Hudson remained as editor. Contributors to Issue 14, March 1945, included established poets such as William Hart-Smith, Rex Ingamells, Ian Mudie, Roland Robinson, Judith Wright and Flexmore Hudson

Familiar names of contributors continue to be seen in these issues during the late 1940s — names such as Rosemary Dobson, Shaw Neilson, Tom Inglis-Moore, John Thompson and William Hart-Smith. Leonard Mann’s ‘The Kokoda Track’, as well as Rosemary Dobson’s poetry reviewed by A.D. Hope appeared in Issue No. 17, 1945.

Following the demise of *Poetry* in 1947, it appears that the *Bulletin*’s Red Page gained

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<sup>864</sup> Smith, V., op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>865</sup> *ibid.*, p. 371.

in strength under Stewart's editorship, and between 1940-1961 contributors included Wright, Dobson, McCuaig, and Hal Porter. The *Bulletin*, however, remained set in its ways and became anachronistic. The slogan 'Australia for the White Man' replaced 'Australia for the Australians' in 1908 and was only removed when ownership of the *Bulletin* changed hands in 1960. Although Stewart was experimenting with modernism at this time, he did not actively promote innovation in poetry, but he gave continued encouragement to established writers and assessed the potential and assisted in the development of newer writers such as Wright, McAuley, Webb, Campbell, Dobson and John Blight. Many of his critical essays and reviews were published as *The Flesh and the Spirit* (1948), and *The Broad Stream* (1975).<sup>866</sup> Vincent Buckley became editor of the Red Page following Stewart, and presided over a period (1961-1963) when the tone and style of poetry was changing rapidly.

*Australian Letters*, a South Australian quarterly founded by Geoffrey Dutton, Max Harris and Bryn Davies, appeared in 1957. It continued until 1968 and produced an annual anthology called *Verse in Australia* (1958-1961). The tone of this magazine was cosmopolitan and urbane and a distinctive feature was an interest in art. It carried reproductions of original drawings or paintings executed by Australian artists. These included partnerships such as Russell Drysdale and David Campbell, Stewart and Donald Friend, among others.<sup>867</sup>

In 1958 contributors to *Verse in Australia* included Stewart as well as Bruce Beaver, David Campbell, Gwen Harwood, Thomas Inglis-Moore, John Thompson, Francis Webb and others. Poems for the anthology were selected from *Australian Letters*, the *Bulletin*, *Meanjin*, *Overland* and *Southerly*. Stewart's 'Kookaburras' appeared in the 1959 issue (p. 58) and in 1961 'Gang-gangs' (p. 49), and it can be seen from choices of poets and their verse that

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<sup>866</sup> Stewart, D., *The Flesh and the Spirit*, 1948, and *The Broad Stream*, 1975, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

<sup>867</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59.

preferences were for verse of more established writers rather than that of innovation and experiment in subject, language and form practised by poets writing later into the sixties.

*Poetry Magazine*<sup>868</sup> (a journal of the Poetry Society of Australia), edited by Grace Perry and assisted by Roland Robinson and others, began in 1961 and ran until 1970 when a dispute about the question of how much space should be devoted to American and English writers saw its disappearance and replacement by *New Poetry* in February, 1971. To John Tranter, a notable figure in the 'New' poetry, post-1968, *Poetry Magazine* was conservative; it rejected the rulings of the literary-academic hierarchy in *Australian Letters* and upheld a radical dissenting approach to verse.<sup>869</sup>

*Poetry Australia* (a new version of *Poetry Magazine*), a quarterly Sydney-based magazine founded, managed and edited by Grace Perry, was first published in 1964 when Perry led a movement away from the Poetry Society of Australia and its journal *Poetry Magazine*. Perry was aided by editorial advice and assistance Bruce Beaver and Les Murray, and critics and academics such as Ronald Dunlop, James Tulip and Leonie Kramer. The magazine published both new and established Australian writers and modern overseas poetry including issues of international poetry in translation and commemorative issues on Francis Webb and David Campbell, and poetry of the various Australian states. *Poetry Australia* also played a leading part in poetry readings and workshops, in literary seminars, and in visits by overseas writers of distinction.<sup>870</sup>

From the Tables of Contents of these magazines can be seen a gradual change occurring away from the established poets of the 1940s and 1950s to younger poets who were

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<sup>868</sup> *Poetry Magazine* began as *Prism* in 1954 and the name was changed when Grace Perry became editor.

<sup>869</sup> Tranter, J., 'Four Notes on the Practice of Revolution', *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 8., No. 2, October 1977, p. 128.

<sup>870</sup> 'Poetry Australia', *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, op. cit., p. 618. A comprehensive account of the raison d'être of *Poetry Australia* and of its history is given by Les Murray, its acting editor 1973-1979, in 'Inside *Poetry Australia*', *Quadrant* (1983).

experimenting with new forms, structure, language and themes, and adopting a self-conscious *avant-garde* way of thinking and presentation of their works. They worked against general conservatism or lack of experiment in Australian poetry that persisted into the 1960s, accompanied, as the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* puts it, by a discursive over-explanatory dullness in many poems'.<sup>871</sup> Stewart declares that among the things he dislikes most in poetry is dullness, hence his emphasis on enjoyment for both the poet and the reader.<sup>872</sup>

In a 1971 anthology, Alexander Craig included twelve poets who, in his view, represented changes in Australian poetry from 1950 to 1970. One poet in particular who was influential in the 1950s was Vincent Buckley, who, in Craig's view, was

able, at his best, to project a sort of particularized general intuition and awareness which all men can share, especially in his lyrical vein. From the middle and late '50s, Buckley was the virtual leader of a small, loosely organized group of surprisingly divergent poets — divergent also politically, in social background and beliefs — domiciled or temporarily living in Melbourne. Both R.A. Simpson and Wallace-Crabbe were members, when it published its *Eight-by-Eight* anthology with Jacaranda Press in 1963 (a few months, actually, before the group broke up). Bruce Dawe and Evan Jones, among others, also joined it for varying periods.<sup>873</sup>

Dawe's poetry first attracted attention and 'began to be influential from the mid-'50s'.<sup>874</sup> 'Enter Without so Much as Knocking', unpublished until Dawe's first anthology *No Fixed Address* (1962), was written in 1956. The poem is a clear indication of changes in form, tone, imagery and language which were to become more widespread among poets of the 1960s. The satire and colloquial nature of this and later poems like 'Drifters' and 'Up the Wall', as well as the broad humanism apparent in all his work of the 1960s were to become trademarks of Dawe's future poetry. Craig concludes that Dawe 'greatly helped to release our poetry from its Georgian restraints and staidness, achieving this with bite and exhilarating wit in an

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<sup>871</sup> Craig, A., ed., *12 Poets 1950 to 1970*, Jacaranda Press, Sydney, 1971.

<sup>872</sup> Stewart, *Modern Australian Verse* 2, op. cit., p. xxiv.

<sup>873</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>874</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

indigenous way.<sup>875</sup>

Robert Adamson, Carl Harrison-Ford, Tim Thorne, David Rankin (who later became a painter), and Vicki Viidikas all members of the ‘generation of 1968’, became involved early with Grace Perry’s magazine *Poetry Australia*. After Perry’s resignation, Roland Robinson became editor, but in 1969 the magazine became the responsibility of Robert Adamson, Greg Curtois and Carl Harrison-Ford and was renamed *New Poetry*. It supported the new American poetry and contemporary Australian verse.<sup>876</sup> Tranter comments that the influence of Donald Allen’s *The New American Poetry* which arrived in Australia in the mid-1960s, was incalculable: ‘it showed the young local poets that there was a real and vigorous alternative to the world of Henry Lawson and A.D. Hope’. In addition, it showed:

The complete overhauling of philosophy, anthropology and linguistics that had revolutionized European thought in 1950 had a strong effect on many Australian writers around the late 1960s. Its most important conclusion, for some poets, was that poems were no longer seen as necessarily embodying moral, religious, social or ethical imperatives. A closer attention to the act of writing, and a more thorough analysis of literature in the overall structure of language was found to free poetry from misplaced critical expectations, and to allow the poet a proper autonomy in deciding what and how to write.<sup>877</sup>

In 1970 Cyril Pearl, writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, presented a controversial article hostile to the new poetry, in particular a poem by Rudi Krausman published in *Poetry Australia* :

the evening,  
stands here

with the ash  
in the belt

on the table  
i design  
an EVENT

everything

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<sup>875</sup> The meaning of the word ‘indigenous’ is now used contemporaneously with ‘aboriginal’ whereas at the time Craig was writing it referred to all Australian-born people.

<sup>876</sup> Tranter, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>877</sup> *ibid.*, p. 105.

is more or less  
as it was  
Once

Pearl makes the point that the way to attract readers of poetry is not by ‘Stirring a brew of obscurity, banality, and imperception in a solipsistic lubber land’.<sup>878</sup> Krausman was quick to respond, explaining, point by point, the inferences in his poem which end, he says, in ‘an attempt to find consolation for this state, “everything / is more or less / as it was / once”, and I am forced to find it, unfortunately, in a philosophical cliché’.<sup>879</sup> John Tranter, too, responded in defence of Krausman’s modernity:

For a long time the Australian reading public has been fed an enfeebling diet of uncritical adulation for the ‘old masters’ of local poetry: Slessor, Hope, FitzGerald and so on; usually served with a dessert of mixed incomprehension and dislike for the so-called ‘moderns’.<sup>880</sup>

Tranter also refers to an unnamed article by Clement Semmler and a review by Kenneth Slessor as examples of this statement. He believes the poets of the Establishment, as he called them, ‘though generally a little short of originality, are at least honest, technically competent and often creative’ (p. 5). This comment is an indication of Tranter’s positive attitude towards poetic craftsmanship, but on the other hand, he suggests ‘perhaps it is simply that the new poetry is dealing with issues beyond the experience of an older tradition’.<sup>881</sup> In addition, Tranter concludes,

To have successfully ignored the last fifty years of European and American poetry is quite an accomplishment in itself, but to regard this as sufficient qualification for evaluating modern poetry is surely to carry ignorance into the realm of the ludicrous.<sup>882</sup>

Certainly a man of Stewart’s wide reading ability and interest in the modernity of these times,

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<sup>878</sup> Pearl, C., ‘On the Margin’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1970, Sydney, p. 1.  
Retrieved from: <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/tranter/docs/pear-rk-jt.html> pp. 1-7.

This article includes the following two footnotes:

<sup>879</sup> Krausman, R., *Poetry Australia*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>880</sup> *ibid.*, Tranter, J., p. 5.

<sup>881</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>882</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

would have no difficulty when interpreting poetic devices such as Kaufman uses, although his appreciation of the poem may not have been enthusiastic.

Cyril Pearl's essay was prompted by Clement Semmler who posed the question: 'what is the audience for poetry?' in Australia in the 1970s. Pearl says that Angus and Robertson Publishers, the 'Old Firm', appear to agree with Semmler,

Australia today needs poets and more poets as never before ... in some puzzling way he (the poet) is still news, and behind the superficialities, and the politics, and the violence and the skulduggery that is going on about us, there is still a shadowy notion that what he is up to is ancient, honourable and worth keeping going.<sup>883</sup>

The author of this comment sounds suspiciously like Douglas Stewart because of the views expressed and the syntax used. Pearl agrees with Semmler 'whose admiration for what he calls the Establishment poets such as Kenneth Slessor, Douglas Stewart and A.D. Hope ... contemporary poets have only themselves to blame if no one reads them'.<sup>884</sup> Krausman says in his reply to Pearl, 'I, too, can appreciate their poetry, particularly their variety of themes, their humanity and their control of language; but my touch-stones are Ezra Pound and Paul Celan'.<sup>885</sup> The alternatives that these arguments provided allowed for a reassessment of the literary values in Australian poetry which was no longer seen as embodying moral, religious, ethical, psychological and social values inherited from the eighteenth century. Poets like Krausman, for example, could now write as they chose without critical expectations, for they had autonomy in deciding their own topics and subjects and the language used to express their ideas.<sup>886</sup>

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<sup>883</sup> Pearl, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>884</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>885</sup> *ibid.*, Krausman, p. 4.

<sup>886</sup> Tranter, J., op. cit., p. 105.

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