

ROSEMARY DOBSON AND DAVID CAMPBELL : AN INTRODUCTION

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# C O N T E N T S

	Page
ABSTRACT	vi
PREFACE	viii
CHAPTER ONE	
DAVID CAMPBELL : FIRST VOLUMES	1
1.1 <i>Speak With The Sun</i> : Defining values.	
1.2 <i>The Miracle of Mullion Hill</i> : Consolidation and development.	21
CHAPTER TWO	
ROSEMARY DOBSON : FIRST VOLUMES	30
2.1 <i>In a Convex Mirror</i> : Time as a dominant theme.	
2.2 <i>The Ship of Ice</i> : Development of Time.	47
2.3 <i>Child With a Cockatoo</i> : Poems of Experience.	54
CHAPTER THREE	
THE MIDDLE YEARS	65
3.1 David Campbell, <i>Poems</i> : The pastoral tradition.	67
3.2 Rosemary Dobson, <i>Cock Crow</i> : Personal poetry and use of mythology.	83
3.3 David Campbell, <i>The Branch of Dodona</i> : A wavering of faith?	96

	Page
CHAPTER FOUR	
NEW FORMS	104
4.1 <i>Devil's Rock and Other Poems: Campbell's</i> personal poetry.	105
4.2 David Campbell, <i>Deaths and Pretty Cousins</i> and Looby/Campbell, <i>The History of Australia:</i> The contemporary mode.	116
4.3 Campbell and Dobson, <i>Moscow Trefoil</i> and <i>Seven</i> <i>Russian Poets: On translation.</i>	126
CHAPTER FIVE	
POETRY OF THE LATE SEVENTIES	137
5.1 Rosemary Dobson, <i>Greek Coins</i> and <i>Over the</i> <i>Frontier: An interim summation.</i>	
5.2 David Campbell, <i>Words with a Black Orpington:</i> Human fragility.	151
5.3 David Campbell, <i>The Man in the Honeysuckle:</i> "Walking Naked."	160
5.4 Conclusion.	169
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	174

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text or in the footnotes.

Signed

J. Andresen



## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Acknowledgement and thanks are due for the continuing support of my supervisor, Dr. Margaret Scott, Lecturer in English, University of Tasmania.

Thesis presentation follows the guide lines set down by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert in the *MLA Handbook: For Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Student edition. (New York: Modern Language Association, 1980).

## A B S T R A C T

The early 1940s saw an impetus in poetry writing in Australia and two poets to emerge at that time, Rosemary Dobson and David Campbell, were seen as representative of the two main factions in Australian literature, the Nationalists and the Internationalists. Campbell, as a farmer, was considered by many to be in the vanguard of a new wave of parochial bush balladists. Dobson was a little more difficult to classify. She was quickly condemned as "bookish," but due to her allusions to the European past was uneasily grouped with the Internationalist school. It took considerable time before it was realized that neither of these poets (nor many others who were being grouped under these labels) fitted into these categories.

At this stage it would appear that Australian poets were well ahead of Australian critics, for in both Campbell's and Dobson's work it can be seen that their interests lay well beyond geographical boundaries. Their poetry, from the start, moved towards a recognition and understanding of wide-ranging human values. Yet the ethos of each poet is in some sense peculiarly Australian.

Despite their long standing as Australian poets, Dobson's and Campbell's poetry has not received the critical attention or recognition that it deserves. Thus it is the intention of this thesis to provide an introductory critical evaluation to the work of these two Australian poets.

## P R E F A C E

Rosemary Dobson and David Campbell both started publishing poetry in Australia in the 1940s. The two poets first became acquainted during their early years of publishing, but it was not until Dobson settled in Canberra in 1971 that the friendship was renewed. During the intervening period, however, the two developed an appreciative regard for each other's work<sup>1</sup> which facilitated the success of their long-term collaboration on rendered translations<sup>2</sup> of Russian poetry.

Initially Dobson's and Campbell's approaches to poetry, and the poems they wrote, appeared to differ considerably. Campbell's early work was informed by the landscape of his immediate environment, whereas Dobson's tended to be inspired by her consideration of the European cultural heritage. Critics responded to Campbell's early work by describing him as a bush-balladist of the Nationalist variety, while Dobson's poetry was

<sup>1</sup>For example see Campbell's perceptive analysis of Dobson's concept of Time in, David Campbell, "Time and the Mirror," *Southerly* 17, No.1 (1956), 42-44.

<sup>2</sup>The term "rendered translations" is used to point out that the poems are not straight literal translations. What Dobson and Campbell have done is to examine and discuss the original translation, and then write their own versions of the poems.

placed, somewhat uneasily, in the "Internationalist" school.

It is now evident that Dobson and Campbell belonged to neither faction, but that they were part of a new movement amongst Australian poets which, despite a certain conservatism, was to bring Australian poetry fully into the twentieth-century.

Since the two poets were writing in the same period it was almost inevitable that some thematic similarity should occur. At first the concept of "Time" was a common theme; both poets explored the relevance of past traditions to the present and future. Campbell, in his exploration, emphasized the continuity of time through an exposition of past people and events, which he then expanded into his theme of the assimilation of man into his environment. Dobson's concern centred more on a questioning of the verity, or significance, of details and historical events recorded in the paintings and artifacts of a past era.

Naturally, both poets, as well as many others who started publishing in the 1940s, were influenced by the same cultural and political events of their time. For example, the conservatism of the period was reflected in the traditional techniques used by Dobson and Campbell. Yet, as each poet has matured, each has shown an acute awareness of the need to develop their techniques as Australian poetry has moved from the Modern into the Contemporary period.

Dobson specifically mentioned her awareness in an address to the English Teachers' Association Conference in July 1964,

when she noted fellow Australian poet, Bruce Dawe's, attempts at "a true and vital expression of our own day," which she related to her feeling of a need for change and progression in her own poetry; a need to set her poems "in our time."<sup>3</sup>

Campbell's concern for a contemporary quality in his work is mentioned by Dobson in her tribute to Campbell immediately following his death. In her article Dobson recalls Campbell's defence of his use "of a very contemporary word" in his version of a Russian poem when "he exclaimed . . . with great conviction, 'I can't write a poem which is not *of my time*'."<sup>4</sup>

Early shared influences also included the work of Yeats and Slessor, and, at a later date, both were influenced by the work of the American poet, Robert Lowell. However, the major similarity that appears in Dobson's and Campbell's work is the conviction, shared by both, that poetry could make a positive contribution to the quality of life. / ?

For a period of nearly forty years, until David Campbell's untimely death in 1979, the two wrote poems that delineated their individuality, but at the same time their work

<sup>3</sup>Rosemary Dobson, "Modern Australian Poetry - A Personal View," Proc. of English Teachers' Association Conference, July 1964, in *The Teaching of English*, No.5 (October 1964), p.20.

<sup>4</sup>Rosemary Dobson, "A rare poet of his time," *The Age*, Aug. 4, 1979, p.24.

expressed a similarity of interest which can be seen in their continual examination of past traditions and the relevance of those traditions to the values of a changing society.

Since Campbell's death, Rosemary Dobson has continued publishing poetry, but the work examined in this thesis is drawn from the period before Campbell's death.

## CHAPTER ONE

### DAVID CAMPBELL : FIRST VOLUMES

#### 1.1 Speak With The Sun: Defining values.

In 1942 the first of David Campbell's poems to be published in Australia appeared in the literary pages of *The Bulletin*.<sup>1</sup> The poems had a distinctly Australian quality, and encompassed both the ballad and lyric forms. In 1949 Campbell published his first volume, *Speak With The Sun*, which was praised by the English poet and critic, C.Day Lewis, as containing "some of the freshest, most varied, most exciting poetry which the 1940's have produced."<sup>2</sup>

One could dismiss such a statement as a mere publicity blurb (Day Lewis at that time was editor of Chatto and Windus, Campbell's publisher), but, as a comment on a first volume, published in London, and including poems with titles such as "Humping a Bluey," "The Stockman," "Kookaburra," and concluding with a glossary of Australian terms, it did evoke a genuine response of curiosity about author and volume. Initially the

<sup>1</sup>Campbell previously published at Cambridge. See Graeme Kinross Smith, "David Campbell - A Profile," *Westerly*, No. 3 (1973), p.33.

<sup>2</sup>C.Day Lewis quoted in Douglas Stewart, *The Broad Stream: Aspects of Australian Literature*, Perspectives in Australian Literature Series (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1975), p. 223.



questions arise as to why this volume of very Australian verse was published in London, and to what extent the book merited Day Lewis' comment.

The reasons for the volume's publication in London are related to the background and early influences on Campbell. David Campbell was born at "Ellerslie," an isolated pastoral property near Adelong in the Canberra region, in 1915. Having spent his early years as a "country boy," he was then educated at King's School, Sydney, and later graduated in Arts at Cambridge. It was at Cambridge that he first started writing poetry under the tutorship of E.M.W. Tillyard. Later, Campbell sent the manuscript of his first book to Tillyard, who liked it and passed it on to his own publisher, Chatto and Windus.

Campbell was fortunate in striking a poet of Day Lewis' calibre as editor of Chatto and Windus, for much of this first volume, despite the glossary addendum, must have been incomprehensible to anyone not familiar with life in Australia. It can be assumed then that Day Lewis was looking at Campbell's work with professional regard for its craftsmanship and poetic excellence. What justifies Day Lewis' comment, however, is the delight and joy-in-living that infuses the whole volume. This in itself is not a gratuitous joy, for throughout the book Campbell juxtaposes the themes of loneliness, harshness, desperation and death with his songs of hope, pride, integrity and continuity. It is this combination of joy coupled with an acute awareness of adversity that has shaped all of David Campbell's poetry, and places him firmly as an example of A.D. Hope's conception of a poet, "as a man looking out from the

place inside where thinking and feeling goes on and celebrating what he sees."<sup>3</sup>

What Campbell was seeing in this first volume was Australia in the forties. The old split between the Nationalists and Internationalists was still evident, together with all the parochialism that had built up during the twenties and thirties. Additionally, one major effect of the war years had been to intensify the feeling of isolation, and the tendency towards isolationism. Concurrent with this, James McAuley writes, "was a period . . . of new challenges, of quickening industrialization; the atmosphere was vibrant with the realization that Australia was going to be different from now on . . . ."<sup>4</sup> Different from what? Australia, as a nation, had failed to find any cohesive identity. The splits in society permeated all ideologies, and a reflection of this is seen in the dual aspect of Australian literature. What is evident in the literature of that period is that the time was not only ripe, but well overdue, for a new way of thinking and feeling, and for expressing what one saw.

Charles Harrington in his thesis postulates this theory: "In a sense the development of any defined body of literature is the story of an accommodation to the landscape, especially if the concept of landscape is broadened to mean the human environment."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>A.D. Hope, *Native Companions*, Perspectives in Australian Literature Series (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972), p.12.

<sup>4</sup>James McAuley, *A Map of Australian Verse* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.124.

<sup>5</sup>Charles David Harrington, "Landscape in Australian Fiction, The Rendering of a Human Environment," Diss. University of Indiana, U.S.A., 1970, p.14.

It was no accident, then, that the person to indicate new ways of developing Australian literature, should be an educated farmer. Campbell's personal background encompassed pastoral roots going back far enough to have become part of a continuing tradition, but these were tempered by the professional occupation of his father, and later by an education far superior to that of the majority of people in Australia at that time.<sup>6</sup> Thus Campbell was in a much better position than his city counterparts to understand the landscape and to give expression to the relationship between man and environment in new and universal terms.

On reading *Speak With The Sun* one is immediately struck by the maturity of vision that the poems reveal. In this book Campbell sets out to describe his immediate environment, but his descriptive landscape is set against a wide-ranging background of literary and social traditions. Despite faults, which will be discussed in relation to individual poems, his major achievements at this stage are his exploration of time and continuity in relation to his concept of tradition, and his use of landscape as a symbol central to his assimilation of man with the environment.

*Speak With The Sun* can be roughly divided into three sections; namely, poems concerned with tradition, a small selection of war-related poems, and poems of celebration.<sup>7</sup> All three

<sup>6</sup>For a summary of Campbell's pastoral background see Manning Clark, *David Campbell 1915-1979 : Words spoken at his funeral* (Canberra: Brindabella Press, 1979).

<sup>7</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems referred to in this section are from David Campbell, *Speak With The Sun* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

sections explore the theme of time and continuity through the use of landscape imagery and symbolism.

With his concern with tradition Campbell draws from the past in order to define present values. Thus in his early poems such as "Flumping a Bluey," "The Stockman," and "Harry Pearce," Campbell is using memories of the men who worked and appeared in and around the setting of his early years.<sup>8</sup> Not only does he look to the past to inform the present, but he also places many of his poems in a chronological sequence. An example of this sequencing can be seen in three poems which illustrate both Campbell's concern with continuity, and the relationship of present time to continuity. The first two of these poems, "Harry Pearce" (p.9) and "The Stockman" (p.10), both employ the same technique, a ballad-like quatrain followed by a rhyming or half-rhyming couplet. In these poems the influence of the early balladists can be seen. Campbell's use and development of this style supports the belief prevalent during the Nationalist period that the ballad was an appropriate form to depict the vigour of a young country. However, Campbell's refinement of the form, as seen in these poems, is an example of the emergence of the ballad as poetry.

The first poem, "Harry Pearce," is a simple statement of the power of memory to recall the past to the present, a power that will continue as long as past memories continue to be transmitted. The notable aspects of the poem, however, are its colour (the "red stock route" and the "amber sky" both serve to emphasize the "heat of noon"), and the mystic quality of the dream-like atmosphere

<sup>8</sup>For Campbell's comments on these men see Kinross Smith, *Westerly*, p.33.

implied in the image of the bullocks drifting through the mirage. It is a surrealistic visual representation which at the same time elucidates peculiarly Australian customs and speech. The first two lines:

I sat beside the red stock route  
And chewed a blade of bitter grass,

illustrate just one instance of Campbell's use of selected natural images as vehicles or symbols of established habits. In this case the lines portray physical attitudes believed to be commonly adopted by the countryman when he stops to rest. Additionally, the repetition of the truism, "The flies are bad," and the implied language of the bullock driver both form part of the Australian stereotype, and their use emphasizes the continuity of such traditions. That the traditions are securely entrenched in the poet's mind is explicit in his lines:

For years he wandered in my brain:  
And now he lodges here.

The second poem, "The Stockman," is set firmly in the present as evidenced by the very modern visual image in the line, "The coolibahs were twisted steel." As with the first poem, time is arrested while customs are examined. The pause is broken by the vividly Australian metaphor of Time as a swagman, followed by the image of the mirage which is again used to illustrate the distortion of time within memory. As the stockman rides off, the trick of light of the mirage leads to the poet's vision of continuity and timelessness, which, in turn, leads to the conclusion of the final couplet:

It seemed in that distorting air  
I saw his grandson sitting there.

The third poem, "Winter Stock Route" (p.17), one of Campbell's early lyrics, is also set in the present, but the correlation of the changing seasons and the descriptive technique moves the poem from the past to the present and to thoughts of the unknown future where in stanza two:

Printless the white road lies  
Before my quiet skis.

In the final stanza the simile between the landscape and the "deserted stage," both waiting for an act that will be repeated over and over, confirms the poet's belief in the cyclic aspect of continuity. Thus it appears that to Campbell it is the isolated figures who pass over the landscape (however transient their passage may be) and the repetition of their passage by following generations that forms the traditions of a nation and shapes the relationship between man and environment.

Nevertheless, Campbell's use of Australian stereotypes has been criticised by Vincent Buckley as "the Australian's dream of himself . . . based on cliché."<sup>9</sup> Buckley uses the poem, "The Stockman," as an example of a facile presentation of the Australian's dream of himself, but fails to state why Campbell's description could not be an accurate portrait. Also, "The Stockman" is used in comparison with Judith Wright's "Bullocky," a rather arbitrary choice, as a far more equitable comparison might have been made between Wright's poem and Campbell's presentation of a mad bullock drover in "Old Tom Dances" (p.16). The credibility of Wright's bullocky would have been called into

<sup>9</sup>Vincent Buckley, *Essays in Poetry: Mainly Australian*, Essay Index Reprint Series (1957; rpt. New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), p.166.

question as Campbell's Tom, of limited intellectual ability, riddled with superstition and the worse for rum, is a much more believable character than Wright's bullocky with his Moses' obsession.

As Buckley's aim was to illustrate the difference in each poet's use of stereotypes, his claim that Wright's poem, "give [s] both richness and universality to the bullocky,"<sup>10</sup> merely emphasizes the different aims of these two poets. Buckley's earlier claim, therefore, that there is an "immense difference . . . in the way of *conceiving* the subject matter"<sup>11</sup> points to the crux of the difference between the two writers. Campbell was more concerned at that time with defining the values, within a given society, which he felt were enduring and positive. Wright, on the other hand, appeared not so satisfied with her world and almost goes back to the Colonial stance of searching for a prophet to reveal the "Promised Land."

Buckley also does not acknowledge Campbell's introduction of a relatively rare figure in the Australian landscape, the skier of "Winter Stock Route," who is pictured surveying not the expected red dust of the stock route, but a snow-covered landscape. That Campbell also appeared to be fully conversant with dispelled myths is noted in "The Sundowner's Dream" (pp.11-12), where he uses the legend of the inland sea juxtaposed with the crow as a symbol of death, in order to point out the illusionary quality of the old dream of a fertile centre in Australia. Thus he is able

<sup>10</sup>Buckley, *Essays*, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup>Buckley, *Essays*, p. 166.

to conclude "The Sundowner's Dream" with the lines:

The black fire burned,  
And a tune came from  
The billy *as I turned*  
*Back the way I had come.* (Italics mine).

Buckley's criticism that the tone of "The Stockman" is "toughly whimsical, bordering on sentimentality,"<sup>12</sup> points, however, to one of the weaknesses in Campbell's early work. In a few of his early poems, such as "At the Sheep-Dog Trials" (p.21), the closed end-rhyme and regular rhythm do have the tendency to push the reader into a facile recitation of the poem, so that he misses too easily the intent and actual statement. But this is not the case in "The Stockman" where the overall balance of two movements, with a medial pause, adds to the evenness and quiet tone of this poem, which, in turn, allows a simple statement to effectually create a pause in the narrative of time. Buckley seems mistaken in confusing the restraint of "The Stockman" with whimsical laconicism.

The term "trite" has also been used in connection with Campbell's poetry. This will be mentioned further when dealing with the poem, "At the Sheep-Dog Trials." For the present group of poems the visual effectiveness and the startling new images, such as "The coolibahs were twisted steel" and "Time took up his solar swag," together with the use of strongly vernacular language, make the poems both effective and enduring.

In this first volume Campbell also shows he can look at customs and habits with a great deal of humour. The comic hyperbole employed in "Summer" (p.15), which begins with two lines of visual

<sup>12</sup>Buckley, *Essays*, p. 166.



delight:

When hatters talk to ears of grain  
And hawks cut figures in the sky

and then goes on to outline the disasters that can occur in summer, is a humorous example of the ironic realism evident in Australian literature since the Nationalist period. Campbell's "Summer," however, I feel would leave Hartigan's "Hanrahan" speechless.

A different form of realism is used in the next group of poems under discussion; those related to the war years. It is generally conceded that Campbell's ballad, "Men in Green" (pp.40-41), ranks as one of the finest Australian "war" poems. The effectiveness of this poem lies largely in the sombreness of a well-known rhythm (Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*), coupled with the artistic detachment obtained by writing it from the point of view of an observer, in this case the airman. The movement of the rotation of the troops once again points to Campbell's concern with cyclic continuity. In this poem it is placed within the microcosm of the jungle war arena. As the men arriving surveyed those departing:

It seemed they looked upon themselves  
In Time's prophetic glass.

Two of Campbell's other war poems use the idea of things remembered that carry the soldiers through the harshness of war. In the first one, "Soldier's Song" (p.37), the juxtaposition of the waters of the Murray with the desert and jungle allows the persona to change the ill-wind of war (as symbolised in the "desert wind" and "tropic wind") to a wind carrying memories which will sustain one through the storms and desolation of war. In the other

poem, "The Soldier and The Mermaid" (p.38), the memories are prompted by the seashell the soldier carries. Both poems have affinities with T.S.Eliot's concept of a "still centre" as a source of peace and strength. In the present poems it is the thing given, which can be either memory or object, that provides the invariable element in the process of change.

One other of Campbell's war poems, "Fighter Pilot's Mate" (pp.49-50), demonstrates Campbell's awareness of social adversity. The poem is basically about forced, accelerated maturity under abnormal conditions and its consequential problems. The savagery of war is symbolized in the use of animal imagery throughout the poem; thus in the first stanza the boy going from schoolboy to fighter pilot (conveyed in the metaphor of the tiger) quickly learns the art of hunting and killing. The poet, however, obviously saw normal human development as being arrested under war-time conditions and so at this stage the boy hunts and kills in a "high ice haze." The second stanza is a description of the girl in a state of innocence, with the implication of the cumulative effect of stress observed in the lines:

She'd sing, above tight pain; but song and heart stopped,  
Each time the post-boy passed her in a hurry.

The final section of the poem is set in the post-war period and the problems of establishing normality are outlined in the imagery of the laws of jungle warfare being transferred to the home. The girl is no longer portrayed as "gentle" and "merry," instead she is now equated to the tigress and therefore well able to hold her own. As a finale, sympathy is directed to the offspring of this union.

"Fighter Pilot's Mate" is a direct social statement, and, in

the concept and imagery used, reminiscent of Blake's "Songs of Innocence and Experience." It is not entirely successful, one reason being that Campbell has tended to develop his metaphor too explicitly, and this has resulted in some confusion and wordiness in the first stanza. The major problem, however, is an underlying tone of bitter cynicism which is atypical of Campbell's work. This tone of cynicism occurs most often when Campbell self-consciously attempts to distance himself from his subject matter. It frequently gives the impression of an exaggerated indignation, or, as in the poem under review, leads to the flippancy of the introductory lines to the final section where he comments:

Still if you wish to weep-  
For sentimental endings are in fashion-.

Campbell did not include this poem in his *Selected Poems*, but did continue writing poems of direct social statement. It is evident in his early work that poems of this nature are the type Campbell was least at home with, and this unease resulted in a tendency, although on a diminishing scale, to duplicate the problems inherent in "Fighter Pilot's Mate."

The third group of poems, loosely termed poems of celebration, give to the book a dominant note of great delight and joy in living. The range on the scale is wide, forming a continuum from meditative lyrics to songs of exuberance, containing at one end a poem such as "Spring Hares" (p.18), which is full of energy, exuberance and colour, while at the other end the title poem, "Speak With The Sun" (p.61), gives a more subdued presentation of the same image.

In both the above-mentioned poems Campbell appears to lean towards Jung's symbolic interpretation that sees the sun as a symbol

of the source of life and of the ultimate wholeness of man. In "Spring Hares" the symbolism is overt with the sun spreading across the entire continent, illuminating the hares and sparking the fires of renewal, or continuity. All is "Locked in the sun's irradiant eye."

In "Speak With The Sun" the symbolism is more complicated and indirect. The basic analogy is to the growth of a seed, preserved first in the dark of the ground awaiting fertilization that is achieved through the warmth of the sun, and so enabled to move into the light. It is the actuality and possibilities of what is revealed in this full light that Campbell is concerned with. Thus in stanza one of "Speak With The Sun" there is a movement from "night" to "light," and the song of the bird becomes a celebration of the possibilities of creativity. In stanza two, the sea imagery of stanza one is repeated, the movement being from sea to air. The "warp" and "woof" of line two and the "net" of line three all indicate the idea of an obstacle to be sifted through, and are thus representative of the ritual of purification as the song moves from "ten-thousand years of light" to "myriad galaxies." Stanza three is primarily a repetition of stanza one where the "light" (personified) ignites the dark causing "bubbles of delight" to rise. In the final line the stars are symbolic of human freedom and thus of the freedom to transcend existence through creativity, to be able to "speak with the sun." The representation of symbols as contained in this poem continues throughout Campbell's work.

Although the overall tone of the poem is one of delight, the heavy alliteration in the final line sounds almost like a sigh of

relief. One could hear in this an underlying emotive tone signifying relief that a cohesive point-of-view had been collected and subjected to the ordered pages of a book, thus increasing the possibility that the poet's creative voice would indeed be heard. Such an interpretation is not purely conjectural but emerges from an overall picture of Campbell as a poet who is concerned with the traditional craft of poetry as a suitable medium for delineating continuity relevant to both present and future values.

Additionally, "Speak With The Sun" is important in that the complex imagery repudiates the occasional accusation that Campbell's early work is too simple. Campbell's complexity can be seen in the extent to which he utilizes his regional images. Under the category of "poems of celebration" there are a number of love poems, both in ballad and lyric form. In these particular poems Campbell's use of natural images as symbols of the essential nature of love transcends the parochialism of the period in which he was writing, while at the same time allowing a much freer and less prejudiced expression of sensuality than had previously been used in Australian poetry.

One example, "The Season of the Year," the longest poem in *Speak With The Sun*, is a love lyric in a sequence of five sections. "The Season of the Year" is strongly reminiscent of the cadences heard in the poetry of William Butler Yeats. Campbell, at this early stage, also shows a tendency to repeat Yeats' prolific use of bird and tree imagery. There are, in fact, very few poems in this first volume which do not include either one or both of these

images, and they remain throughout as symbols of constancy and change. The tree, in particular, is used as a symbol for natural growth and renewal, while concurrently a constant reminder of the movement of time. Even in its most desolate state, as in "the wreck of tree" in "Speak With The Sun," the tree provides the base for continual growth. And, in the same poem, the bird provides the sound or the voice that accompanies the movement of time.

The first section of "The Season of the Year" represents a simple progression of changing seasons, from good to bad. The most notable aspect of this section is the mature and warm use of sensual images, which, as mentioned before, was in itself innovative.

Section two is basically a Yeatsian dance. The influence of Yeats, particularly of his later work, has been acknowledged by a number of poets who came to prominence in the 1940s. This particular poem of David Campbell's gives an indication of some of the reasons for Yeats' appeal.

Yeats' desire to formulate a national literature, together with his ambivalent attitude towards the more fervent nationalism of his contemporaries, tended to place him in moral isolation, a condition which could be readily understood in Australia, a country where moral isolation had been almost an automatic condition of any creative endeavour. Campbell did not consciously set out with the purpose of creating a national literature, although in using the traditions and stereotypes available, he was, to some extent, achieving this.

In "The Season of the Year," however, the vacillation and fluctuation of the human condition within a predestined framework

is Campbell's major concern. Section two is a generalisation of these concepts, and follows closely Yeats' theory on the organic structure of art. Yeats, in his essay, "The Symbolism of Poetry," writes:

All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions . . . and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation . . . they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion.<sup>13</sup>

The "musical relation" of section two of Campbell's poem lies in the symbolism of "the dance" to the tune of "the bird" which represents natural harmony of movement within a predestined framework. Thus Campbell concludes this section:

Those who listen to the tune  
Are mysteriously one  
Moving to the dancer's time  
While the hidden bird is calling.

In the first part of section three Campbell presents the individual attributes of sound, colour and form, to give the precise emotion of harmony found in love. A note of discord is introduced in the second last stanza, and is confirmed in the final stanza, where Campbell's concept of the blowing wind disturbing the harmony is likened to human inconsistency.

Campbell's almost verbatim line, "But I shall miss you," taken from Yeats' "A Cradle Song,"<sup>14</sup> leads to section four in which

<sup>13</sup>W.B. Yeats, "Ideas of Good and Evil," in *Essays and Introductions*, (London: MacMillan, 1961), pp. 156-57.

<sup>14</sup>*Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Introduction and Notes by A. Norman Jeffares (London: MacMillan, 1962), p.13.

the attributes of suspicion, and the consequent fluctuating disharmony, are symbolised in the ripening and subsequent cutting-down of the crops. This tendency to dwell on the transient nature of life is seen to cause inaction and pain. Thus in Yeats' "A Cradle Song" the man, as he kisses the infant, sighs in the realization that the moment inevitably passes. Likewise, Campbell, in section four, contemplates possible changes, and although in the final stanza he comes back to the present, he is unable to entirely shake off the feeling of pain. Once contemplated, or experienced, the image remains.

Campbell's answer to this problem gives us one of his finest earlier lyrical passages, where he states in Section five:

He is the season's fool  
And nothing earns but banter  
Who sighing meets his girl  
As if he did not want her.  
Oh such a spendthrift of his care  
Shall find he'll lie with nought but air.

He continues in this vein in the first four lines of the final stanza, where he concludes:

He is the fool of Time  
Who'd tinker with the minute  
Because the mocking worm  
Curls like a spring within it.

Altogether the poem is a rather curious combination of Yeats and Blake, but Campbell's voice comes decisively through in his call to recognise the values of the present moment. Only by fully experiencing the present can one find delight and joy in living, while, at the same time, acknowledging the lessons of the past which in turn can be of value to the future. Of more importance, however, is that this poem combines Campbell's exploration of time and continuity as related to his concept of



tradition, with his use of a symbolic seasonal landscape assimilating man and environment.

Overall *Speak With The Sun* denies the negative implications of the Australian post-war intensification of feelings and tendency towards isolation. To Campbell, isolation and integration were merely different aspects of the human condition; both could carry negative and positive qualities. Given the tendency towards increased isolationism, and the problem of Australians in defining a national identity, this was not the general view in the 1940s, and this difference in sentiment partly explains the failure of Campbell's poem, "At The Sheep-dog Trials" (p.21).

As mentioned earlier, the term "trite" has been used in connection with this poem. For example, Rodney Hall, in a review of Campbell's *Selected Poems* (the review humorously entitled "Earth, sky and a drunken swaggie"), postulates that "predominantly short lines . . . combined with a multiplicity of rhymes . . . results in simplistic monotony."<sup>15</sup> Hall continues, "Nowhere is openness more vulnerable, more precariously balanced on the edge of seeming triteness, than in the close patterning of full-rhymes." As an example of the lack of subtlety in the use of rhyme threatening the openness of the poem, Hall cites the stanza:

He is of collie stock:  
Austerity of rock  
Lent his mind and bone<sup>16</sup>  
The toughness of its stone;.

Hall's argument in regard to the difficulty associated with

<sup>15</sup>Rodney Hall, "Earth, sky and a drunken swaggie," Rev. of *Selected Poems 1942-1968*, by David Campbell, *The Australian*, 15 May, 1969, p.15.

<sup>16</sup>The original line in *Speak With The Sun* is "Has lent his mind and bone." "Has" is deleted in *Selected Poems*.

close patterning of full-rhymes is no doubt correct. However, the stanza he quotes, in its sparsely defined image, is the most effective stanza in the poem, and may also be seen as being seminal to Campbell's development. The refinement and success of the technique of using concisely pared images is demonstrated in one of Campbell's final poems in which the rhyme, varying between internal and end-rhyme, is both compact and unobtrusive. Campbell, in looking at the origin of his verse, writes:

Poems  
Can move as slow as  
Blood from a wound or  
The rose pruned at your door.<sup>17</sup>

A more obvious reason for the failure of "At The Sheep-dog Trials" appears to be an intellectual overstatement which crossed an undefined line of acceptability. In this instance Campbell, as in many of his poems, takes an animal and attempts to relate it to the world around him. In the first four stanzas he is successful, his concern with timelessness and continuity and the adaptation of the traditional to fit into a new landscape is explicit. It is in the final four stanzas that Campbell introduces incompatible elements. In attempting to explain the primeval quality of the animal he has selected very active images, such as that of the fox hunt in stanza five, which emphasise the wild, untamed side of the dog's ancestry. In stanza six, he soars almost into the realm of black magic with the connotation of such words as "moon and tides" and "hidden vixen," "craft" and "blood". It is, perhaps, Campbell's desire to forge connections between images such as the lonely

<sup>17</sup>David Campbell, "Poems" in *The Man in the Honeysuckle* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1979), p.57.

stockman and his dog, and universal figures of wider myths that, at times, create some strain and even bathos in his poems.

Overall this poem fails simply because Campbell, at this stage in his work, has not developed sufficient skill to always convincingly blend his images with the era and setting of his subject matter. One other poem that fails in this manner is "Race Book for Randwick!" (p.20), where Campbell attempts to relate the jockey's pride to the splendour of his early Roman counterparts.

Campbell in *Speak With The Sun* succeeds in synthesizing man with his environment, whereas the first Australian poet to attempt this assimilation (Charles Harpur, 1813-68) failed. Primarily Campbell's success was due to his ability, on most occasions, to find a mode of expression suitable to his aims; one that is distinctly Australian but also applicable to a universal literature. Moreover, Campbell's views have proved more acceptable than Harpur's partly because a lapse of almost one-hundred years has bred a new climate of opinion and partly because Campbell's social standing allowed him to be fully accepted as a poet, whereas Harpur's did not.

It was largely this social ease that allowed Campbell to extend beyond Harpur's depiction of landscape. Where Harpur included people in his poems it was in the form of a juxtaposition of man and landscape, and the solitariness of each was a counterpoint to the other, and thus emphasized the isolation of man from his environment. In Campbell's poetry the human figures form an integral part of the landscape.

## 1.2 The Miracle of Mullion Hill: Consolidation and Development.

David Campbell's second book, *The Miracle of Mullion Hill*, was published in Australia in 1956. This second volume is basically an exploration into style and theme, and is divided into four sections, each section roughly corresponding to a change or variation in style.

"Flame and Shadow," the title of section one, is also the title used by Campbell in his publication of collected short stories in 1976. In both uses the implication of the title is that of images of life and death forming a backdrop against which the individual acts and thinks.

The first poem in this section, "The End of Exploring" (p.1),<sup>18</sup> delineates a framework for the whole book. In his later publication, *Selected Poems*, Campbell, as an introduction to the section from *The Miracle of Mullion Hill*, quotes from T.S.Eliot the lines:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.<sup>19</sup>

Campbell, in his stylistic use, does diversify widely, but the

<sup>18</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems are from David Campbell, *The Miracle of Mullion Hill* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1956). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

<sup>19</sup>Lines referred to are from T.S.Eliot's "Little Gidding," section V, and are as quoted in David Campbell, *Selected Poems*, enlarged edition (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), p. 34.

final outcome is the consolidation of his growing reputation as a lyrical poet.

There are still strong echoes of Yeats, especially in section one, in poems such as "The Beggars" (p.5) and "The Dance of Flame and Shadow" (p.11), but as Vivian Smith points out it is now only a "superficial influence of Yeats."<sup>20</sup> Campbell's integration of Yeats into his own world and time is demonstrated in stanza three of "In Summer's Tree" (p.10), where he writes:

One world is of time,  
And the other of vision,  
And the magpie's song  
Brings peace and fusion:.

The two most successful poems in section one, "Who Points the Swallow?" (p.7) and "Night Sowing" (p.8), both remain high on the list in Campbell's complete oeuvre. Of the two, "Night Sowing" exemplifies more precisely a change of direction in Campbell's work. The poem illustrates the meditative tone and conciseness of expression that Campbell increasingly refined throughout his verse. It also emphasizes his tendency to move towards a more personal exploration of the Monaro landscape, that, according to literary historian, Graeme Kinross Smith, remains "the signature of David Campbell's poetry."<sup>21</sup> Campbell, himself, realized his change in direction, and when writing notes for the University of Queensland Press publication, "Poets on Record," mentions, "As the more generalised images from the bush ballad and jackerooing dropped

<sup>20</sup>Vivian Smith, "The Poetry of David Campbell," *Southerly* 25, No.3 (1965), 195.

<sup>21</sup>Kinross Smith, *Westerly*, p.38.

away I found more and more that my poems were triggered by immediate experiences, the moon crusting dark furrows or the daylight moon in a lunar landscape of white trees."<sup>22</sup>

In the second section, entitled "Hogan's Daughter," Campbell again looks to the past to inform the present. His recasting of Paterson's ballad characters and places in the title poem, "Hogan's Daughter," recalls the ballads of the Nationalist period. During these recollections Campbell effectively uses eerie images where light and colour heighten the mysticism of his use of the mirage as an image of the past. But strong as the thoughts of the past may be, the present remains to be explored, and thus the "Clancy" figure in "Hogan's Daughter" becomes the swagman ordained to continue wandering "across the hill."

The second poem in this section, "Windy Gap," borrows from the initial line of Yeats' "Running to Paradise." However, Campbell's drover, travelling through Windy Gap under threat of the hawk and accompanied by the song of the magpie, is seen to be in a paradise of his own making. This idea is carried on in the eclogue, "Beside the Track." In the ballad, "The High Plains," the power of stored memories is again recalled to describe the ideal world of summer. Although now buried under snow, the images of renewal juxtaposed with the dreamer's power insist again on continuity.

<sup>22</sup>David Campbell, *David Campbell Reads from his own work*, Poets on Record series (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1975), Notes, p.15.

But Campbell is still basically looking at the idea of exploration that will enable him to observe with renewed vision. Thus in "The Monary" (p.22), Willy Gray "will sit and stare . . . / the whole day long," until he absorbs the landscape into himself. He is then able to contemplate the present with "a lover's eye." The final lyric in this short section, "Noon Has all Day" (p.23), completes the outline of this paradise. The paradox of the first line, "Noon has all day, a lifetime," is reiterated in the images of life and death caught in a still moment of time as the hawk, "hooded in reverie, / Has come to rest upon that tree." Campbell's given vision of paradise must include all aspects of the natural world.

In the third section, "The Miracle of Mullion Hill," Campbell attempts for the first time three long satires in a ballad-like narrative style. The first two, "The Miracle of Mullion Hill" and "The Speewah Picnics," both suffer from the overuse of rhyming couplets. Although Campbell achieves an occasional variation in rhythm, primarily through the use of enjambment, the lengthy repetition of rhyming couplets becomes monotonous. Unfortunately this does give the impression, in spite of many genuinely witty lines, that Campbell's fabliau has become too drawn out to achieve the required satiric effect.

The third poem in this group, "The Westing Emu," follows more closely the ballad form, and also it is shorter than the other two. Its main strength, however, lies in the sophistication of form achieved through incorporating an occasional lyrical image, an example of this being stanza four where the poet writes with a combination of fantasy and humour:

Although at dusk the scarlet pea  
 Hearing the horseman in pursuit,  
 Ran like a lizard up a tree  
 And clung there, trembling to the root . . . .

Campbell is more successful in the three bushman's yarns which follow, "Donoghoe and the Wattle" (p.38), "Kelly and the Crow" (pp.39-40), and "Jack Spring" (p.41). All three revert to the use of short, concise lines, primarily monosyllabic words, and a calculated satiric anti-climax. "Donoghoe and the Wattle" explores more fully Yeats' "musical relation" through use of internal and half rhyme, and assonance. Thus the whole concept of wine, women and song, and high-living is evoked through the lines of stanza four when the fossicker, Jack Donoghoe, making his second wish for a "yellow town-house / Beside the Tiv," sings:

"And there will be music  
 And johnny-cakes and janes  
 And a coloured rouseabout  
 To hand round the wines."

In his poem following this group, "Under the Coolabahs" (p.42), Campbell turns his attention to the sung ballad and in the chorus depicts in a few words a setting which could only be that of Australia in the forties and fifties:

Under the coolibahs  
 In their grey singlets  
 Shearers are dancing with  
 Barmaids in ringlets.

In "Come Live with Me" (p.43), Campbell borrows Marlowe's lines to create an Australian version of the old minstrel theme of a woman following her lover into battle, or quest, of one type or another. The final four poems in this section turn again to the lyrical form with a dominant use of sound, light and colour.



The twelve poems comprising the final section of *The Miracle of Mullion Hill*, under the title of "The Gift," represent Campbell's most sustained and difficult poems up to this point. Although the lyric still predominates, one notable change is a freeing of form, both organically and structurally. Another move is seen in the setting of the poems. Of the twelve, only two poems are directly related to a rural background; the remainder have an urban setting.

It has been alleged that Campbell's development towards a relaxed freedom in his lyrics, "owe[s] something of their ease to Auden."<sup>23</sup> Certainly, in his use of quatrain, sonnet and conversational tone, the influence filters through. For example, Campbell's "North Shore Soliloquy" (pp. 60-61) parallels the straightforward, conversational tone with its underlying note of unease and regret that Auden uses in a poem on a similar theme, "A Healthy Spot."<sup>24</sup>

It is however the note of unease or discord that requires further perusal, for this is atypical of a writer whose work has been described as presenting "an uncommon gospel in a period dedicated to the literature of alienation."<sup>25</sup> But as mentioned previously, Campbell was well aware of problems in human relationships, and nine of the twelve poems in "The Gift" look at these problems, primarily within the domestic sphere.

There are three sonnets included in this section, the title

<sup>23</sup>Smith, *Southerly*, p. 196.

<sup>24</sup>W.H.Auden, *A Selection*, ed. Richard Hoggart (London: Hutchinson Educational Ltd., 1961), p. 155.

<sup>25</sup>Leonie Kramer, "David Campbell and the Natural Tongue," *Quadrant* XIII, No.3 (May/June, 1969), 17.

poem, "The Gift" (p.53), "After the Elopement" (p.54), and "As an Old Cow" (p.62). All maintain a compressed narrative within the fourteen lines, coupled with a perceptive use of detail. Many of the details are superimposed on the background, invoking a note of discord which reminds us again that Campbell continues his search for harmony.

In "The Gift," the problem of assimilating the new with the old is redefined in the light of post-war immigration. Thus the persona from "a bombed country" represents the mystery and lure of an old and enduring civilization. In equating her to Hera, a Mother figure, Campbell uses the gift of "the she" as a synthesizing agent in reconciling the European background with the new world. Whether old customs can bind the two worlds remains unstated, the seasons are seen as passing, and the stolidity of the husband gives credence to the implication of Hera as a protector of marriage. The next sonnet, "After the Elopement," is almost a denial of "The Gift" as the old couple have never reconciled their action in eloping with the long process of living together. The final sonnet, "As an Old Cow," is one of the two with a country setting, but again gives an uneasy view of marriage. In the allegory of the cow Campbell gives a compressed, visual portrait of a down-trodden country wife. He is not entirely disillusioned with human relationships, however, as in the final lines the cow/wife is seen having her moments of defiant joy, for:

Sometimes she will swing her head and flag her tail  
And buck with udders flying through the astonished day  
(For hills leap up!) shaken by life's quick fever.

Another three poems in the group look at different activities in city life which appear to be artificial or insufficient and which leave a feeling of incompleteness and emptiness. But not even the city can be all dismay and in his poem "In William Street" (p.63), Campbell tells of a cheerful encounter with a prostitute. This is followed by a long narrative satire on marital infidelity, "The Golden Cow" (pp.64-69), that, like the earlier satires, has some delightful moments but overall is too lengthy for the slightness of the tale so that many sections lack momentum.

As can be seen by the brief description of the concerns of these poems, Campbell was still searching for and assessing the values which would be of significant benefit to the encroaching world of modernity. In *The Miracle of Mullion Hill* he makes one further excursion in looking at the craftsmanship of art in two poems, "To the Poetry of Kenneth Slessor" (p.56), and "To the Art of Edgar Degas" (p.57). Both poems refer to successes of the artists, in the first instance Slessor's poem, "Five Bells," and in the case of Degas, his ballet girl paintings. Success, however, is not Campbell's prime interest, rather, it is the process of creation. Both poems are written in heroic quatrains, are meditative in tone and addressed directly to the artists. In this respect they could be loosely termed as elegies written as a lament for the passing of both the men and their values.

In "To the Poetry of Kenneth Slessor," Campbell is obviously more familiar with the values and world of poets. The creative process and effort required in writing poetry is aptly illustrated through Campbell's allusion to the drowned man of Slessor's "Five

Bells". Thus his phrases "Dumb fumbler" and "drowned voice sounds" followed by the simile of traffic leads one to think of the muffled rumbling sounds of distant traffic, which can then bring to mind the first rumblings or the germination of an idea for a poem. The consequence in this instance is the poetry that breaks through to make journalists such as Slessor "sing like lyrebirds / And song give back the human voice." The last line quoted here is probably Campbell's first recorded recognition of his later stated belief that a poem is partly given. But having been given the initial image, the process of elucidation and cultivation of the initial thought into the reality and timelessness of art belongs to the poet.

In turning to the world of visual art in his poem to Degas, Campbell reveals one of the attributes which is responsible for much of his ability to develop with his time. Visual art requires a different initial response to that of poetry, and Campbell's willingness to learn in order to understand is coupled with a refreshing tone of wonder. In fact the lines written to Degas could well apply to Campbell:

With what tense patience you refine  
The everyness of everyday.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ROSEMARY DOBSON : FIRST VOLUMES

#### 2.1 *In a Convex Mirror*: Time as a dominant theme.

Like many other poets during the early 1940s Rosemary Dobson first came to be noticed through the pages of the revitalised *Bulletin*. Her first submission to *The Bulletin*, "Australian Holiday, 1940," was atypical of Dobson's work, being one of her few early poems that related directly either to Australia or the fact that Australia was at that time involved in World War II.

Her first volume, *In a Convex Mirror*, was published in 1944. At a time when the Jindyworobaks and Angry Penguins were fully vociferous, *In a Convex Mirror* makes a notable contrast to the themes and styles affected by the adherents to each respective group. However, Dobson was not entirely isolated from the mainstream of Australian literature. In acknowledging her debt to the work of Kenneth Slessor, Dobson writes, "The influence of his modernity in thought and technique, his brilliance and sophistication, has been widely disseminated through the work of later Australian poets, for I think that Slessor's work has a dazzling impact on a young writer . . . . I consider I was extremely fortunate to come under the influence of *One Hundred*

*Poems* when I was at the outset of my career."<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that Australian writers were at last turning to the work, not just the ideologies, of their own predecessors and, more importantly, being influenced by this work. In part this could be attributed to the intensified isolationism resulting from the war but, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this isolationism was concurrent with an atmosphere vibrant with an awareness of the possibilities of change. As Dobson said, it was a time that gave one "a heightened sense of awareness, of being alive."<sup>2</sup> This period of ferment gave to the poets of the forties the impetus to emerge feeling confident they would at last be heard, despite the extraordinarily illiberal censorship of the time. A fermentation similar to this period was not experienced again until the early 1970s when, following the awakened awareness engendered by the Vietnam War, there was a short-lived resurgence in poetics expressing the need and hope for change.

In 1944, however, *In a Convex Mirror* shows the author as lacking a wide social awareness,<sup>3</sup> no doubt due in part to her background. Rosemary Dobson was born in Sydney in 1920, educated at Frensham School on the NSW South coast, a school founded by Winifred West, one of the first advanced educationists in Australia.

<sup>1</sup>Rosemary Dobson, "Modern Australian Poetry - A Personal View," Proc. of English Teachers' Assoc. Conference, July, 1964, in *The Teaching of English*, No. 5 (October 1964), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Dobson in *The Teaching of English*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Rosemary Dobson, "Australian Poets in Profile: 2," ed. G.A. Wilkes, *Southerly* 40, No. 1 (March 1980), p. 10.

After a short period as an apprentice teacher at Frensham, Dobson studied for two years at Sydney University, and in the early 1940s joined the publishing firm of Angus and Robertson. Although Dobson's schooling was of a high standard, Frensham did provide a cloistered environment. Moreover, Dobson's social environment was not radically changed during her years at University and with Angus and Robertson for her contacts remained those of the world of art and literature.

It was during these years that the poems comprising her first book were written. Given this background and the author's age when her first volume was published, it is not surprising that there was a lack of wide social awareness. Dobson, however, did not appear to live in an entirely insular world, for an increasing realization of the difficulties that life could present, runs throughout her first volume. Overall, *In a Convex Mirror* is an exploration into form and style but out of this emerges four interconnected major concerns. These concerns, stated briefly, centre on the complexity of "time"; the relationship between art and life; a search for order in a world of constantly changing values; and an inquiring contemplation of the unknown and mysterious.

Time, the first of Rosemary Dobson's major concerns, has, of course, long been the subject of literature and art.<sup>4</sup> In modern literature this preoccupation has been influenced by the alienation of past concepts and traditions which has led to a more intense focusing

<sup>4</sup>See for example, Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), and Elizabeth Salter, "Piers Plowman and the Visual Arts" in *Encounters: Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (London: Studio Vista Publishers, 1971), pp.14-15.

on the different values inherent in psychological and chronological time. Basically these studies have concentrated on two forms of time, the suspended sense of duration as associated with psychological time, and the all-embracing moment where the whole of past time becomes an ever-present inclusive Now.<sup>5</sup>

In the first and title poem (p.5)<sup>6</sup> of *In a Convex Mirror* Dobson primarily uses the latter concept of time. As it is intended to look at "In a Convex Mirror" in detail, the poem is reprinted in full:

See, in the circle how we stand,  
As pictured angels touching wings  
Inflame a Dutch interior  
Bespeaking birth, foretelling kings.

The room is still and brushed with dusk;  
Shall we not disregard the clock  
Or let alone be eloquent  
The silence between tick and tock?

Shall we be fixed within the frame,  
This breathing light to clear-cold glass  
Until our images are selves  
And words to wiser silence pass?

But ruined Rostov falls in flame,  
Cities crumble and are gone,  
Time's still waters deeply flow  
Through Here and Now as Babylon.

And swirling through this little frame  
Will rive the two of us apart,  
Engulfing with unnumbered floods  
The hidden spaces of the heart.

This poem is based on a fifteenth-century Dutch painting

<sup>5</sup>For detailed discussion of these two aspects of time see, A.A.Mendilow, *Time and the Novel*, Intro. J. Isaacs (London: Nevill, 1952), especially Ch. 10.

<sup>6</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems in this section are from Rosemary Dobson, *In a Convex Mirror* (Sydney: Dymock's, 1944). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.



known as Van Eyck's "Arnolfini Wedding Portrait," and is a contemplation of details incorporated in the painting of a past event. One such detail is a convex mirror through which is reflected an image of the artist. This aspect of the painting, together with the title, dictates the form of the poem as a dramatic lyric. The persona, or voice, represents the poet as an artist speaking to the painter, also an artist. Thus in stanza one, the initial line, "See, in a circle how we stand," represents the persona going back in time to take her place next to the painter within the convex mirror. The simile in line two, "As pictured angels," not only conveys the comparison, but lists another detail of the painting that, together with the phrase, "touching wings," brings to mind the two protagonists of the painting who are standing side-by-side holding hands, and who are also reflected in the convex mirror.

In line three the word "Inflame" is central to the dual image of time stayed and time moving. In the first instance the persona is commenting on the colour of the static painting. However, "inflamm" suggests also a phoenix symbol, and followed by line four, "Bespeaking birth, foretelling kings," leads to the subject of the painting which is a wedding portrait of fifteenth-century nobility. The wedding is the starting point for future generations and possible heirs and is therefore the unspoken tenor for the metaphor of the natural continuity of life. Concomitantly, the sexual allusion of "Inflame" as passion, together with the "angels" as good omens and the coloured room, "brushed with dusk," all support the image of the picture as "Bespeaking birth" and so

ensuring the continuity of life.<sup>7</sup>

In stanza two the persona suspends time as she further describes the painted room from the imagined point of being within the mirror looking out into the room. It is an evening scene, the ending of a day ("dusk"). But the question being explored now is that of artistic selection. The painter has finished his picture with his final stroke of dusk. The persona, as poet and artist, at this point sees the painting as complete so now poses the question to the artist as to whether the painting can be read purely as a recording of an event and moment, when she asks, "Shall we not disregard the clock"? However, the paradoxical nature of "eloquent silence" underscores the paradoxical nature of regarding a painting as finite. The selection of details can image a moment but viewed in retrospect prompts contemplation of the movement from past to present. The "clock" can only stop for and with the painter; time itself continues to the present. Thus the "silence" between "tick and tock" becomes the unspoken and unpainted gap between past and present, while also implying the silence of eternity. The question being asked now is how much will one's artistic selection be an apt and fluent elucidation of one's time.

In stanza three the content repetition of line one of the poem emphasizes the contrast between continuity and stasis. The emphasis leads to the obvious conclusion that the persona cannot

<sup>7</sup>The angel motif was consistently used in paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a prophecy of the birth of Christ. The Arnolfini portrait is one of the first secular paintings to include this motif.

become "fixed" within this particular "frame". She can, however, mentally step within the frame, and, from the shared artists' viewpoint, metaphysically observe the scene. However, their reflection on the scene must now be illuminated from the present ("breathing light"). Thus in line two, stanza three, the "clear-cold glass" as an image of death marks the point beyond which the persona cannot penetrate. She can now only reveal her personal meditation on the images and symbols the painter of the past has selected and left for posterity. This barrier of glass reflects back to the poet her own image (line three) which leads to a contemplation of whether her artistic selection of words will have significance when she has "passed-on" (line four).

The emphasis on the selection of detail does point to some uncertainty and tentativeness which can be noted in Dobson's early work. For example, the word "wiser" in line four ("And words to wiser silence pass?"), also conveys the foggiess occurring when one breathes on glass. "Wiser" could then indicate confusion in the present, thus showing the poet's difficulty in knowing whether the words she has selected will give a clear image of her time.

Stanza three is also pivotal to the entire poem. The past is put into perspective, the present is viewed, and the future contemplated. Thus the first two stanzas of the poem convey a feeling of stillness viewed from a point of stillness. There is a momentarily established bond between the two artists and between two moments in time, just as the subject matter of the painting is a recording of the moment establishing a matrimonial bond. The final two stanzas (four and five), move from stillness to action.

Time, seen in retrospect, is now viewed as a moving, relentless force, destroying momentarily established relationships, and inflicting unknown trials.

In stanza four the choice of events recalled reflects Time as destructive of both closely established relationships, and a multiplicity of societies. In line one of this stanza the war connotation of "ruined Rostov" is analogous to male activity, and in line four "Babylon," a city known for its excessive luxury, has, through connotation, become a feminine image. The use of the phrase "falls in flame" denotes the result of war, the destruction of the male, and the phrase, "cities crumble and are gone," recalls the fall of Babylon and thus implies the destruction of the female. "Flame" as a destructive force is contrasted to "Inflame" (stanza one) as a symbol of the continuity of life. Therefore the male-female symbolism is a microcosm of the establishment and fall of a multiplicity of cultures. Despite destruction life does continue and the poet uses a proverbial connotation, "Time's still waters deeply flow," to prove this. The use of "still waters" also relates back to the painting. The contemplation of a still image gives rise to contemplation of selected events and confirms continuity. "Waters" is a dual symbol of both destruction and fertility. Thus as a new civilization flourished from the ruins of Rostov and Babylon, the same waters can be seen as fertilizing the present, the "Here" and "Now".

In the final stanza the poet continues the use of flowing waters as a metaphor of destruction. In line one of stanza five the words are carefully chosen to provide links with past events.

"Swirling," through syntax and alliteration, relates to line one of the poem, and the "frame" relates to the contradiction of line one found in line one of stanza three. Thus "swirling" becomes a metaphor for the vortex of time, and the motion it produces severs the relationship between the persona and painter ("rive"), as they are of two different axes of the vortex. It has also separated the two lovers through death, with "rive" here taking the archaic poetic meaning of "strike asunder."

The poet finishes the last two lines meditating on the events that could occur within any relationship. "Unnumbered," like many other words in the poem, is used for a dual purpose. The poet is recalling events that have been obliterated through non-selection, while, at the same time, relating back to the "Dutch interior" of stanza one, in which many minute and homely details are recorded in the painting. In this use the cyclic continuity of time is reiterated where the final word of this line, "floods," echoes the assonance of stanza two and the "flow" of the waters in stanza four. In the final line, "The hidden spaces of the heart" again relates to the painting, the point being that the selection of detail within any given space can never be entirely comprehensive. The innumerable and "deep flowing" anxieties and anguish confronted by all people and civilizations largely remain hidden. They become part of the "silence between tick and tock" and remain unknown in the silence of eternity.

It is obvious from this close perusal of "In a Convex Mirror" that there are a number of problems inherent in this poem. In the

first instance a surface reading of the poem conveys time as a destructive force, however, any further attempt to explain the poem produces a number of contradictions to this reading. It is only through taking the "we" of line one as representing the poet and painter that the poem becomes clear by showing the obvious concern of the poet in looking at the past to discern its relevance to the present and possibly the future. Time can be transposed, but the poet is here uncertain as to the extent that the ravages of time alter the meaning of the past. This uncertainty in regard to the destructive elements of time is duplicated in many of the poems in this volume. Dobson's development in her understanding of the metaphysics of time will be seen to be closely linked with her development as a poet.

The second major problem lies in the degree of general knowledge one requires to give this poem a satisfactory meaning. It is difficult to explain the lines of continuity, and allusions within the poem, unless one has a knowledge of the particular painting on which the poem is based. This problem occurs again, to a lesser extent, in the poem "In a Cafe" (p.13), where Botticelli, sitting in a cafe musing over the details of his painting, "Birth of Venus," is used as the catalyst between past and present. Although this poem is more specific, and the contrasts between past and present more overt, the narrative detail found in many of Botticelli's paintings gives Dobson's poem an enhanced meaning if one is aware of Botticelli and his work. This problem is partly resolved in later work as Dobson attempts to subjugate the external objects used in her poems to

the concepts she is writing about.

Another major difficulty lies in the poet's attempt to elicit the appropriate details required for an apt elucidation of her concerns. In *In a Convex Mirror* Dobson frequently tries to overcome this problem by being more explicit in her allusions. An example can be seen in her poem, "Address to a Letter" (p.19). This poem is concerned with the disorder and chaos created by what the poet sees as diminishing values. In this instance, as in a few other poems of a similar nature, the poem is over-long and the point belaboured. Dobson was aware of the possibility of this problem occurring, as evidenced in her lines in "Address to a Letter" where she states, "Well, I run on."

The above phrase well illustrates Dobson's concept of time throughout her first volume, which centres on the idea of chronological time inevitably running on. In this regard it is very similar to Slessor's use in "Five Bells" where he envisages "'Time' . . . as a merciless, unceasing, impersonal flow."<sup>8</sup>

In a more positive vein, Dobson, through her concern with the relationship between art and life, tends towards a growing belief in the continuity of life that can at times be evidenced through the artifacts of past ages. These include not only visual art but also the stories and legends which have been passed down in both written and verbal form. The limitations of these artifacts are recognised, an example being in the poem, "The Portrait" (p.15),

<sup>8</sup>G.A.Wilkes, *Australian Literature: A Conspectus*, Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, Univ. College of Townsville, Monograph No. 2 (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1969), p.76.

which outlines the impossibility of the artist capturing perfection, for perfection cannot be absolute, being subject to the processes of time and memory.

Therefore what is required is an imaginative recreation of past events in order to give them relevance to the present. In her poem "The Fire" (p.7), Dobson combines the legend of the Phoenix with the story of Helen of Troy juxtaposed with the polarity conveyed in depicting the momentary brilliance of the artist in contrast to destruction and death. In a clever combination of "fire" and "desire" the poet creates an almost sensual rebirth of the phoenix, which contrasts to the objectivity of the symbolism of "flame" and "inflamm" noted in the poem "In a Convex Mirror."

A further example of the poet's recreation of past artifacts and events is seen in her poem, "The Tempest" (p.9). This poem also incorporates another concern in Dobson's first volume, that is an inquiring contemplation of the unknown and mysterious.

The title of the poem relates back to Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, and the images used are from "Ariel's Song," Act 1, Sc.ii, lines 397 to 403.<sup>9</sup> A perusal of the poem and "Ariel's Song" together shows immediately the extent to which Dobson has used Shakespeare's symbols and images.

"The Tempest"

Washed by what waves to pearl, these eyes?  
 Changed to what coral these sea-strewn,  
 Sea shifted bones, once intimately  
 Held heart to heart, known, understood;

<sup>9</sup>William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Revised Edition, 1969), p.1378.



Now fathom five, remote, alone  
Uncared for by the incurious sea?

Sailor, young man, is this not strange?  
Sang the sea nymph to the second lieutenant  
And the wind blew back no answer.

"Ariel's Song"

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell.

Dobson's poetry is about the mystery of the unknown, the feeling that there is always something more to be found, and a compulsion to seek this awareness. In using "Ariel's Song" Dobson is looking at the wonder of the unknown but is also concerned with the paradox of illusion and reality. Despite the delicate humour in the poet's action of turning a character from *The Tempest* into a second lieutenant who is sung to by a sea nymph, the poem tends to have an over-anxious tone. It would appear to be related to the poet's anxiety to make her meaning clear, and the uncertainty she, as a young person, feels in regard to the problems and dangers one can encounter during one's lifetime.

In the first section of "The Tempest" the transitional and undulating nature of the sea, conveyed in the words "washed" and "waves," is followed by the "bones" of presumably unknown sea victims being transmuted to "coral." The bones are then "strewn" and "sifted" until they are deep down and thus "remote" and "alone." Together these images convey the idea of obscure and unknown forces which are nearly always out of the reach of one striving to

find clarity in what lies beyond a recognisable point. The idea is an echo of the words of Shakespeare's Ferdinand when immediately following Ariel's song he states:

The ditty does remember my drown'd father.  
This is no mortal business, nor no sound  
That the earth owes. I hear it now above me.  
(Act 1, Sc.ii, lines 406-408).

The first line of Prospero's reply to Ferdinand, "The fringed curtains of thine eye advance," is used by Dobson throughout her poem in the form of a pun on "sea". Shakespeare's metaphor and Dobson's emphasis on the vowels and internal rhyme of "bones," "once," "known," "remote" and "alone" shapes the questioning of the poem in contrast to the statement of "Ariel's Song". The questioning, of course, is striving to understand the unfathomable, to unravel further the mystery of the unknown, to see that which is stated in "Ariel's Song" as "rich and strange."

That such clarity of vision is not often the case is outlined in the three lines forming the concluding stanza. The sailor as a "young man" denotes youth, and as a "second lieutenant," inexperience.. The emphasis on the naval rating also represents an institutionalized figure. As such, the sailor is the transitional figure on the surface oblivious to the wonder moving around and below him. He has not yet learnt to meditate and question the unknown, and so cannot hear the song or recognise the existence of the sea nymph, who is a creature of legend and mystery. The implication is that he has many storms, or tempests, to pass through before he will be able to recognise the song of mystery and pass back an answer on the wind.

When Dobson's poem is set beside Shakespeare's, one becomes aware of inherent danger hovering in the unknown elements of life. The use in the first stanza of the pun on "sea", together with the coral image, gives a visual image of a coral reef with the tip showing and much that is unseen below. Thus the bones of the drowned, the melancholy assonance of "strange," "sang" and "answer" and the song of the sea nymph being also heard as the luring song of the sirens, together with the blowing wind, all blend to give warning of the unseen dangers that might occur as one travels through life. Incidentally, this image relates back to "In a Convex Mirror" where Dobson posits the idea of innumerable anxieties and anguish as largely remaining hidden.

The tension caused by the final line, "And the wind blew back no answer," points to the poet's presupposition that mystery is an inherent part of living, and hopefully should prompt an imaginative response by those who wish to gain an understanding of the diversity and order within their lives. It is incomprehensible to her that people should go through life without questioning its meaning.

In "The Tempest," and other of her poems of a similar type (e.g. "Foreshore" p.8), Dobson's link with one of the earlier Australian poets, Christopher Brennan (1870-1932), becomes apparent. Brennan, in much of his work, used sea imagery as representing the unknown which produced a restlessness that led to meditation and dream. Frequently in Brennan's poetry the resultant meditation and dream took the form of concepts of alienation and the visible presence of evil. Similar concepts can be found in Dobson's

"Windfall Apples" (p.18), through her observation that when the natural phenomena are out of balance the result is evil and disharmony. Dobson does not appear to be consciously following Brennan's lead. She is, however, the first Australian poet since Brennan to produce a volume based on a philosophical universal mythology.

"Windfall Apples" can also be seen as an example of Dobson's fourth concern, that is her search for order in a world of constantly changing values. In her overt use of Christian imagery Dobson attempts to show a correlation of the spiritual and physical sides of men as epitomising harmony. Thus, in stanza one, in a beautifully descriptive image, she outlines a vision of perfect harmony through the use of colour symbolism. The evening "folding into darkness" is medially linked by "grasses" which symbolise the connecting colour between life and death. This is followed by the galah whose alternating flashes of pink and grey imply the harmony of spiritual and physical, with pink relating to resurrection and grey to the earth.

In stanza two the juxtaposition of the visual and sensory imagery conveys a tone of excess and implied corruption. The "glowing crimson" of the fallen apples, the heavily "hanging branches," the smell sensed in the phrase "sweet cidery," and the further meaning of "Windfall" all convey this tone of excess, whereas "rot" and "shadow" imply the corruption that frequently accompanies excess. The third line in this stanza takes the image a step further. The apple is symbolic of temptation and earthly desire, and thus the fallen rotting apples, together with the implication of "Evil," are related to fallen man, man who has

fallen from grace through succumbing to his desire to taste the apple.

The poem continues in the same vein with allusion to crucifixion, resurrection and the "thorny" path to salvation. However, in the final stanza the persona in her musing on the fallen apples recalls a past love. She recalls it in terms of the natural phenomena, with the imbalance of the many morning frosts and "suns too hot and eager" indicating excesses of hot and cold which resulted in an unstable relationship, and again a state of disharmony. The affair was not saved and was "shovelled to an unquiet grave." The final line has a tone of uneasiness, a possible indication that the persona in her eagerness and desire to continue the excitement of excesses was not willing to face and overcome obstacles in order to salvage her love. Thus it is condemned to remain buried in limbo, an "unquiet" shadow of the past. The poet appears to find that the biblical pathway to a sense of harmony is no more certain than any other mythological avenue.

The uneasiness experienced by youth is also emphasized in "Young Girl at a Window" (p.6), when the eyes' journey from "grass" (youth) to "sheaves" (maturity) and finally "snow" (death) outlines the inevitability of the normal journey through life. It is, however, the "chance assaults" that cause the feelings of hesitancy, and, concomitantly, expectation experienced by the young when contemplating their future. The route to a state of harmony, at this stage in the poet's work, remains unclear. This leads to one of the notable features of Dobson's work; her intellectual perseverance in exploring the possibilities of overcoming problems.

Thus in a later poem in this volume, "Picnic" (p.32), the juxtaposition of adult and childhood vision suggests one way of recapturing past feelings of harmony and applying them to the present moment.

## 2.2 The Ship of Ice with Other Poems: Development of Time.

In the early 1940s television had not arrived in Australia thus radio broadcasting was a major source of communication and entertainment. With the involvement of a large percentage of the population in a war some thousands of miles away, listening to the daily news broadcast became a national pastime. It was inevitable that this increased listening audience would flow over into the general programmes, and this in turn prompted a heightened interest in creative writing for radio.

The poets were not left behind in this endeavour, and two of the most successful plays written in the form of verse drama specifically for radio were Douglas Stewart's, *The Fire on the Snow* (1941), and *The Golden Lover* (1944). In both these plays Stewart is preoccupied with "the situation of the dreamer, who would live a life of illusion, compelling reality to conform to his vision."<sup>10</sup>

Both of Stewart's plays touched on Rosemary Dobson's interest in the problems of defining illusion and reality, and in 1946 Dobson followed in the use of this medium with her award-winning verse drama,

<sup>10</sup>Wilkes, *Australian Literature: A Conspectus*, p.103.

*The Ship of Ice.*<sup>11</sup>

"The Ship of Ice"<sup>12</sup> is based on a nineteenth-century true story of an English schooner which was locked in an ice barrier in the Antarctic circle for thirty-seven years. When discovered those on board were found to be in a perfect state of preservation. G.A.Wilkes in his lecture, "Some Trends in Australian Verse," posits the idea that in her dramatization of this incident Dobson uses conventions that, by the mid-forties, had come to be recognised as distinguishing features of the Australian historical narrative. The difference from the more usual narrative form, Wilkes claimed, lies in the result that through "applying themselves to historical themes, Australian poets have produced narrative poems whose interest lies not in the action itself, but in what is expressed *through* the action."<sup>13</sup>

Three features Wilkes noted in this method are the time shift where the writer departs from the natural time scheme of the events related, making considerable use of retrospect and

<sup>11</sup>John Thompson in writing on broadcasting in Australia mentions, "Rosemary Dobson's verse-play for radio, *The Ship of Ice*, was awarded First Prize in the Poetry section of the *Sydney Morning Herald* Literary Competition in 1946. It contains some fine poetry maintained at a consistent level, and it has been broadcast once or twice, but it is better on the printed page than on the air, where (because of the author's inexperience in radio) it sounds long-winded and wordy." For the complete article see, John Thompson, "Broadcasting and Australian Literature" in *Literary Australia*, eds. Clement Semmler and Derek Whitelock (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1966), p. 105.

<sup>12</sup>As the text being used is that of Rosemary Dobson, *The Ship of Ice with Other Poems* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948), further reference to the verse play will use quotation marks to distinguish from the volume title. Page nos. only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

<sup>13</sup>G.A.Wilkes, *Some Trends in Australian Verse*, The Commonwealth Literary Fund Lecture 1956. (Canberra: University College, 1956), p.12.

anticipation; a use of multiple points of view which support the time shifts because the overall succession of events does not become clear until all points of view have been heard, and thirdly, a tendency to emphasize the dramatic possibilities of the narrative action.<sup>14</sup>

In her use of the first mentioned feature, the time shift, Dobson sets out to produce a convincing illusion of reality. Time arrested is given as an image of a ship suspended in a bottle of ice. The reader, or listener, is able to visualize this image while the story is enacted as a microscopic drama with the whole of the thirty-seven years condensed into this frozen block of Time. The visual aspect of the continuing tableau of characters supports the idea of the multiple point of view by acting as a series of stills, each making a small contribution to the eventually completed picture.

It can be seen that Dobson has now taken her concept of Time a step further. She no longer sees it primarily as a driving, relentless force, but is able to investigate the dramatic possibilities of a private sense of duration. Throughout "The Ship of Ice" there is a contrast between movement and frozen stillness, between warmth and cold, and between death and living, and it is only when reality takes over from illusion and dream that a resolution can be obtained:

Finally, Death released them,  
Death in the guise of discovery.  
But playing at skittles at the end of the alley with Life  
Forgot her errand for forty years, then remembered

<sup>14</sup>Wilkes, *Some Trends in Australian Verse*, pp.13-15.



The names and address, which was vague, being only  
 "A bottle of Time and Ice in the Southern Regions."

The ironic humour found in this resolution is also used in the first section of this volume in a series of dramatic dialogues under the title, "The Devil and the Angel." It appears that "The Devil and the Angel" series drew more attention to Dobson's work than did her earlier volume or her award winning radio drama. Douglas Stewart commented that, "Rosemary Dobson's first notable achievement was an entertaining and imaginative sequence of poems entitled "The Devil and the Angel."<sup>15</sup> L.J.Blake, when including Dobson in his *Australian Writers*, mentioned the series as poems "that delight with deft structure and humour of the unreal."<sup>16</sup>

Stuart Lee in a more detailed review claimed that the series pointed to a new development in Dobson's work in her use of "the conceit that life in a painting is a kind of purgatory, a stage of suspended animation between life and death which serves for thinking about Heaven and Hell."<sup>17</sup> Lee uses the second poem in the series, "The Dutch Tavern Portrait" (p.4), as an example of the notion of a living death. In this poem the subject of the portrait is described as caught between the "floor and ceiling, Heaven and Hell" and as having for "Hundreds of years" been "Prisoned more surely than a courthouse drunkard."

<sup>15</sup>Douglas Stewart, "Contemporary Australian Poetry," in *An Introduction to Australian Literature*, ed. C.D.Narasimhaiah (1964; Aust. edn. Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1965), p.62.

<sup>16</sup>L.J.Blake, *Australian Writers* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1968), p.227.

<sup>17</sup>Stuart Lee, "Rosemary Dobson," *Quadrant* 9, No.4 (1965), 58.

The idea, the same as in one of the poems in the second section of the book, "Still Life" (p.19), and "The Ship of Ice" (pp.35-49), is that art can restrain or freeze Time. This, in turn, leads to a contemplation of the inherent possibilities related to the selection of an event or artifact. Thus in "The Devil and the Angel" the interrupted method of time shift is used by Dobson to show the complexity of life. No longer, as in her first volume, does she feel confused about the selection of artifacts or events, for the poet now realizes that it is one's reaction, not action itself, that gives duration to Time. For example the subject of "The Dutch Tavern Portrait" can ignore the Angel's remonstrating that "Time gave you knowledge surely; silence, wisdom / To choose that path you travel in the future." Instead of learning from his hundreds of years of purgatory, as one would expect, the subject takes the alternative possibility and completes his arrested action of drinking from the flagon. He is last seen, much to the Angel's disgust, carousing with the Devil.

Dobson's curiosity about the unknown and mysterious remains unabated and the ironic reconstruction of what might have caused the longevity of Methuselah (p.10), or the intimation of "kindred souls" in "An Interlude" (p.7), where Devil and Angel meet while both "in a pose of sad soliloquy," explores these possibilities. At the same time these poems show a development of the strain of ironic humour, hinted at in her first volume in, for example, "The Fishermen and the Moon" and maintained throughout her later work.

In the second section of *The Ship of Ice* there is a collection of poems under the heading "Chance Met." These poems touch on many

different subjects, while retaining the concerns of Dobson's earlier work. The most interesting feature of this section is that it explicitly defines Dobson's range of interests and ambition. It is almost a statement of intent which itself predicts the path the poet is to take.

The traveller motif has been noted in Dobson's first volume but in this section of her second book the motif surfaces in one way or another in every poem. The final four lines in "The Dancing Ships" (p.30) should be sufficient to make clear the overriding ambition at this stage of the poet's career:

Without the Heads there lie  
Unvisited seas, those wind-delighted wastes,  
The Mare Incognitum of my life,  
And all's to see and know that's yet unknown.

Throughout this section there is a great zest for living, exploring and searching for the boundaries of possibilities. For example, in the first poem, "A Fine Thing" (p.17), there is a delightful description of man-made objects, but as such their range is limited. This concept is also seen in the previous section in "The Scarecrow" (p.5), where the Devil and Angel are both seen creeping away upon realizing that the scarecrow cannot make either the trip to Heaven or Hell. In the title poem of this section, "Chance Met" (p.18), the arrival of morning opens up the possibilities of each day. The following poem, "Still Life" (p.19), gives pause and nourishment to the traveller in Time and, as James McAuley has pointed out in his perceptive analysis of the poem, "Still Life" is an excellent example of Dobson's ability to perfect the shape of a poem in verbal space.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>James McAuley, "The Poetry of Rosemary Dobson," *A.L.S.* 6, No. 1 (1973), 3-6.

In "Wonder" (p.20), Dobson starts with the Van Eyck painting previously used in "In a Convex Mirror" and continues through stages of exploration and wonder until her final lines:

Wonder is lastly finding the Pole, with only  
Amazement flowering in a waste of snow.

In "Painter of Antwerp" (p.21) the possibilities of being dazzled by too much that is new are looked at, and this is followed by "Traveller's Tale" (p.22), a good example of the use of dramatic monologue, which in describing the fancifully illustrated maps of a past era shows only too well how confused the traveller may become.

The following poem, "Family Progress" (pp.24-25), is, J.F.Burrows claims, "Rosemary Dobson's first serious venture into the Australian past."<sup>19</sup> Actually it would appear that the poem tends to be a more serious look at the possible obstacles to the evolutionary trip of any family. The only indication that the family in the poem is Australian is in mention of the well-used Australian motifs of "crows" and "paddocks" that are found in the final two lines. It would seem, apart from incorporating an Australian background, that being Australian is purely incidental to the poem.

What is of importance is the metaphor of the wavering track for the hesitant and shaky pathway through life. For some the obstacles become too much, thus "James" falls by the way. Additionally, in her use of stock characters such as William, Cousin Rose, Batty Tom and Dot (all names previously found in literature, especially nineteenth-century literature), Dobson is emphasizing the continuity of the universal human problem of finding

<sup>19</sup>J.F.Burrows, "Rosemary Dobson's Sense of the Past," *Southerly* 30, No.3 (1970), 171.

a straight path through life. The tendency towards melodrama in this poem enhances the poet's attitude towards the multi-faceted nature of existence.

A variation of the diverse nature of human existence is noted in the poem "Country Press" (pp.26-27), which shows not only the poet's interest in typography, but also explores the unpredictable results of a serious intent. In this case the "result" is a humorous jumble of news, notices, births, deaths and marriages, that is often a feature of country newspapers. This poem differs slightly in the poet's use of humour, for it is a straightforward humour of delight in things given, rather than ironic humour. Ironic humour takes over again, however, when the paradoxical is looked at in "Monumental Mason" (p.28), in such lines as "an hour glass - for Eternity" and the idea of "everlasting daisies" rendered in stone.

All these poems, once again, are concerned with memory, the selection of details recorded for posterity, and movement within Time. Ultimately it would appear the poet is claiming that it is left to the artist to select her own Time and details for recording. Thus in the final poem of Section two, "Everyman His Own Sculptor" (p.32), the poet describes the tools that she will set forth with to,

take  
What life can give - what I can make.

### 2.3 Child With a Cockatoo: Poems of Experience.

By the time *Child With a Cockatoo* was published in 1955 Rosemary Dobson had taken two important steps in her life, both

of which influenced her poetry. In 1948 she travelled to England and, although she does mention "it probably wasn't a very good time to go,"<sup>20</sup> the experience of first-hand viewing of many of the paintings which had always had a keen fascination for her prompted, upon her return, a series of painting poems. The other event to take place was her marriage and the subsequent birth of two children which resulted in some of the poems that appear in section three of this volume. These particular poems foreshadow a preoccupation in some of her later poems with involvement in the birth and growth of children.

*Child With a Cockatoo* is printed in three sections. The first section, the only one with a title, is comprised of fifteen "Poems from Paintings." The second section of sixteen poems deals more broadly with other art forms, and the final eight poems in Section three look more directly at universal human experience.<sup>21</sup>

It has been noted before<sup>22</sup> and must be stated again that not all the poems in "Poems from Paintings" are based on actual paintings. Many of the poems are based on imagined paintings, while others merely take a particular aspect of a painting as a focal point. Other influences on these poems have been noted, an example being the first in the volume, "The Raising of the

<sup>20</sup>Rosemary Dobson, Tape No. 365, recorded 25 March, 1969, held at the National Library, Canberra.

<sup>21</sup>For a similar classification see Stuart Lee, "Rosemary Dobson," *Quadrant* 9, No.4 (1965), 56-62.

<sup>22</sup>See A.D.Hope, "Rosemary Dobson: a Portrait in a Mirror," *Quadrant* 16, No.4 (1972), 10.

Dead." (p.3). This poem, Dobson points out, owes something to both a minor painting of the Sienese School, (di Pietro, "S. Bernadino resuscitates a dead child"), and Robert Browning's, "An Epistle from Karshish."<sup>23</sup> What appears to be of importance are the various interpretations of received experiences.

James McAuley in his introduction to his section on Rosemary Dobson in *A Map of Australian Verse* uses "The Raising of the Dead" to illustrate the diversity of meaning so often found in Dobson's work. He concludes, "above all, the picture is an image of eternity: its reality is stilled into an endless Now: it acts and lives and is, but timelessly, without succession or motion; and in the stilled instant outside time our world is transfigured, transformed by art."<sup>24</sup>

Dobson has finally arrived at the conclusion that Time can be conquered by Art, but as David Campbell noted soon after the publication of *Child With a Cockatoo*, "it took much thought and art before she was able to dismiss Time so confidently."<sup>25</sup> And as Campbell points out her latest development is explicitly stated in the final four lines of "Paintings" (p.4), where she writes:

"What is Time  
Since Art has conquered it? I speak  
Five hundred years ago. You hear.  
My words beat still upon your ear."

<sup>23</sup>See introduction to Rosemary Dobson, *Selected Poems*, Australian Poets Series (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963), pp.vii-viii, also "Poetry in Australia: Rosemary Dobson," transcript of interview with John Thompson in *Southerly* 28, No.3 (1968), 205.

<sup>24</sup>James McAuley, *A Map of Australian Verse* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp.249-50.

<sup>25</sup>David Campbell, "Time and the Mirror," *Southerly* 17, No.1 (1956), 42.

Her private sense of duration can now include a universal sense of duration if one allows her communion with the past to have relevance to the actuality of the present. But it is not only the present that is illuminated, for a vision of the future can be discerned through meditation on the narrative structure of many of the old paintings. This allows a multiplicity of vision which is demonstrated in "Two Visions" (p.16), when in the last stanza the painter is heard to say to St. Anthony:

"Well, dream your dreams, Saint Anthony,  
We have our visions, you and I,  
And who can say where Truth may be -  
In holy dreams, or in my paint  
Which shows the wonder and the saint -  
Since both can pierce beyond the sky."

Another aspect to be noted in "Poems from Paintings" is a new emotional depth that ultimately is a concern for the quality of life. This concern continues throughout Dobson's work and parallels David Campbell's quest for enduring and positive values.

There is, however, a contradiction in Dobson's "Poems from Paintings," as the Europe Dobson saw in 1948 was still suffering from the devastation and aftermath of World War II, but in none of these poems is there any direct mention of this phenomenon. Instead Dobson writes poems such as "The Bystander" (p.5), where the "silly soul" or "dullard dreaming" not only misses the action around him but fails to comprehend it, or "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian" (p.7), where the viewers, intent on praising the technical excellence of the painting, fail to comprehend the story of suffering related in the subject matter. A more humane instance is found in "Detail from an Annunciation by Crivelli" (p.6) where



the child, half concealed, watches the painter bring to life a vision of the annunciation, but no-one will believe that she had viewed this miracle, despite the evidence within the picture.

It would be incorrect to assume that a poet of Dobson's proven sensitivity would ignore the ravages of war, and a close reading of this section does reveal a probable answer. Her concentration on the survival of many of the Old Masters, various other artifacts, and historical buildings (the latter two seen in Sections two and three) is again a confirmation of her belief in the use of positive values of the past to inform the present and future. Again this parallels Campbell's similar conviction at this time, and is indicative of the conservative hopefulness and isolation of the early fifties when it was generally believed in Australia that World War II was the final war.

Dobson appears to be suggesting an awareness of the landmarks and still centres that one can withdraw to as a way of overcoming so much destruction. In "Landscape in Italy" (p.13) she writes:

But Art, more durable than thought  
Between event and memory  
Has interposed her coloured chart  
To show in perpetuity.

Thus in an elucidation of the gracefulness and serenity that the contemplation of art can bring she implies an idyllic moment in the final lines of "Landscape in Italy,"

. . . but five steps from where we lay  
Drowsing upon the short, cropped grass  
Lightly, with all her springtime flowers,  
Did Botticelli's Flora pass.

But however positive and hopeful one can be, the vision of

the future can only be hinted at, and Dobson's awareness of this is noted in the title poem, "Child With a Cockatoo" (pp.18-19). Here the truth is viewed in retrospect, for although the "sulphur-crested bird" held the secret of a new land, no one wondered enough, thus the bird remained:

. . . a sign unread,  
A disregarded prologue to an age.

In the early poems of Section II of *Child With a Cockatoo* there is an uneasiness which subconsciously tends to concentrate on sexual role playing. Dobson, herself, states that she would "rather be judged as a poet . . . than as a poetess"<sup>26</sup> and overall she has, as Jennifer Strauss claims, "achieved a measure of the androgyny which Virginia Woolf set up as an artistic desideratum in *A Room of One's Own*."<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, during the period of the early fifties, when one can assume these poems were written, it does seem there was some tension in role playing which causes these to be the least satisfactory of Dobson's poems.<sup>28</sup> Primarily it is poems with the emphasis on the poet as creator like "The Alphabet" (p.23) "Ampersand" (p.25) and "The Missal" (p.27), which, although showing Dobson's interest in typography and being enjoyable for their humour, are lacking depth, and are the closest Dobson comes to "tub-thumping"

<sup>26</sup>Thompson, *Southerly* 28, 207.

<sup>27</sup>Jennifer Strauss, "The Poetry of Dobson, Harwood & Wright: 'Within the Bounds of Feminine Sensibility'?" *Meanjin* 38, No.3 (Sept. 1979), 338.

<sup>28</sup>The tension noted in these poems appears to be the early stirrings of conflict felt in the poet's loyalty to her young family, versus the need to write. The varying aspects of role division is written about more fully in Dobson's following volume, *Cock Crow*.

about anything. This gives to these poems a stridency that clashes with Dobson's usual classical restraint.

Such restraint does impose its own problems in masking a passionate note and level of deep involvement. As a consequence the strength of feeling that informs so much of Dobson's work has sometimes gone unrecognised. This lack of perception appears to be the basis of criticism by Patricia Excell when she writes, "In the poetic world of Rosemary Dobson neither love nor empathy would seem to have a place, and this constitutes the gravest criticism of her work."<sup>29</sup> Excell cites the final two lines of "On a Tapestry" (p.28) as an indication that Dobson, herself, recognised this lack. It would appear however that Excell missed the point of the poem, for if the final *three* lines are quoted the meaning of the poem is made manifest. Thus, when in the poem the lady of the tapestry claims, "in loving is my sum of happiness," the poet's reply, "Oh, all the sadness in the world-" I cried / Who loved not, whether loved or unbeloved," is obviously a censure of the narrowness of one whose life is dedicated to a "grand passion." This is stated more directly earlier in the poem when the poet comments on the lady's "disregarded riches of her life."

That Dobson can by this time experience and convey a great depth of feeling is noted in "Azay-le-Rideau" (p.29). Full of music and colour, this poem conveys a sense of deeply felt gratitude for the opportunity to see and experience the preserved beauty of

<sup>29</sup>Patricia Excell, "The Poetry of Rosemary Dobson," *Meanjin* X, No.4 (1951), 375.

a past age. It is an experience of renewal and extends the poet's total comprehension of that which had previously been viewed only on canvas or in a Book of Hours. It therefore becomes the epitome of art defeating Time for, as the poet stated, "This fabled grace gives back its youth to Age."

There is also a degree of compassion, but more importantly, a recognition of human dignity in "The Conversation" (p.39). The complete harmony between the child and the mute old madman is realized through both having a flexible imagination. As the poem is written from the point of view of the adult it has a similarity with "Picnic" from *In a Convex Mirror*, where it was previously noted that the juxtaposition of adult and childhood vision suggests one way of recapturing past feelings of harmony and applying them to the present moment. Thus the poet is able to finish Section two on a more assured and positive note which helps to dispel the unease created by the earlier poems from this section.

Section III of *Child With a Cockatoo* introduces a new development in Dobson's work. There is a strong emphasis on water symbolism in various forms, coupled with a new fluidity in thought. Resultantly, there is some ambivalence in the early poems in this section. Many have a tragic undertone which relates to human limitations, but also contain what could be termed a "symbolic mistiness." This contributes to a generality of meaning which has been noted before in Dobson's poems. An example can be seen in the first poem, "The Lost" (p.43), where the subject can be explained as regret for a child lost before birth, or, alternatively, could be read as a longing for the persona's own childhood,

concurrent with a rebirth of childhood vision.

The final three poems in this section set out more directly the motifs Dobson is to develop in her later work. In "Dew, Frost, and Snow" (p.48), the juxtaposition of spiritual illumination with terrestrial existence emphasizes the purity and perfection that can be found in natural elements, revealing them as a source of wonder to an earthbound existence.

In the next poem, "The Birth" (p.49), the wonder related to conception, gestation and birth, is reiterated in a combination of numerical symbolism and natural growth. Unlike the dew, frost and snow of the previous poem "That knows no hard and bitter birth," this time the birth is root-bound in human experience where:

Sharp are the pains, and long the way  
Down, down into the depths of night  
Where one goes for another's sake.

The poem is divided into three stanzas, the first denoting conception, the second gestation, and the final stanza, birth. However, the crux of the poem can be found in the final line, "I speak as of a mystery." Concurrent with the progression of the theme is a movement from dark to light, from celestial to terrestrial, together with a contrast between physical reality and temporal abstraction.

There is a subtle linking of symbolism throughout the poem. In the first stanza the symbolism of the wreath, like that of the garland, denotes bonds. Coupled with "snow" it presumably indicates human bonds, thus mortal. The bond in this poem represents the act of procreation, while, at the same time, the dualism of the flowers reminds one of the concept of death in order to give life.

This finite element of humanity is reinforced in the following lines when the flowers in bloom indicate ephemeral beauty.

In Dobson's earlier work the dual nature of mortality is emphasized, at times, by over-contrast.<sup>31</sup> By the time "The Birth" was written Dobson was able to express her philosophy of continuity in metaphysical terms. Thus the "tree" in line three is again depicted as a dual symbol, the tree of life and tree of knowledge. It therefore contains in it the essence of human experience. It is seen as being "rooted in the dark" though it "draws from dew its breath of light." The simile that follows, where the tree is likened to the "glittering branch of stars," signifies the soul uniting spirit with matter. It thus becomes here a symbol of guidance and growth. It moves into the light, and at the same time, moves from a state of dormancy to a state of activity.

In the second stanza, number "eight" is symbolic of regeneration. This symbol runs parallel to the cyclic imagery of ritual death and rebirth evident in the idea of a descent into darkness for someone else's sake, which recalls such myths as Orpheus and Eurydice, or the crucifixion. "Eight" is also an ambivalent number, being an intermediate form between the square, which represents terrestrial order, and the circle, which represents eternal order.

In the final stanza the branch is broken, the movement has been made towards becoming wholly human. Thus the rose, a symbol of consummate achievement and human love, flowers fully. The

<sup>31</sup>Burrows, *Southerly* 30, 170.

"mystery" itself lies in the revelation of experiences which are at once spiritual and earthly. The regenerative nature of birth and duality of life are delicately expressed by Dobson. At the same time she gives to this poem a legendary quality through her use of myths and stories which hold in themselves symbols central to the human experience.

In her final poem, "The Birth (II)," dedicated to "A.L.B." (p.50), sea imagery as the source of all life dominates. The poem, which is concerned with the loss of a child at birth, has an air of poignancy and bleakness which is dispelled only by a balancing of spiritual growth against mortal despair.

In reversing the opening phrase, "Unknown, never to be known," to the line in the third stanza, "Unknown, yet always to be known," the persona is able to draw on her brief knowledge of the child, which in itself can be sustained as an eternal memory. It is a note of confirmation in a period of grief, a restrained, pellucid statement driven by an underlying emotional force, which is emphasized in the measured beat of the first two stanzas. In the final two stanzas the poem takes on a quieter note, descending to a tone of acceptance.

This final poem in *Child With a Cockatoo* appears yet again to show Dobson's receptivity to the possibilities inherent in any experience. This time, however, the poet's fully mature vision makes the poem a universal statement readily accessible to all readers. Additionally, it dismisses any doubts about Dobson's empathetic sensibility.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE MIDDLE YEARS

For both Rosemary Dobson and David Campbell the 1960s was an era of consolidation and a period when both fully established their reputations as prominent Australian poets.

During this decade both poets were included in the Australian Artists and Poets booklets (Adelaide: Australian Letters), and both had a cumulative volume of *Selected Poems* published, Dobson in the Australian Poets Series (Angus & Robertson) in 1963, and Campbell in 1968.

In 1964 David Campbell was appointed Poetry Editor for *The Australian* and with Literary Editor, R.F.Brissenden, "established a policy of regularly publishing poetry in order to bring it before a wider, newspaper readership."<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Dobson, in an address to the English Teachers' Association Conference in July, 1964, also worked at furthering the cause of poetry in stressing "the importance of acquainting children with the work of contemporary poets."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Peter Ward, "The Man from Monaro," *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, Aug 4-5, 1979, p.2.

<sup>2</sup>Rosemary Dobson, "Modern Australian Poetry - A Personal View," Proc. of English Teachers' Assoc. Conference, July, 1964, in *The Teaching of English*, No.5 (October 1964), p. 6.



Both edited anthologies during this period. Dobson, in support of her previously stated view, edited an anthology of Australian poetry for children between the ages of nine and fourteen, called *Song for all Seasons* (published Angus and Robertson, 1967, reprinted 1971), while Campbell edited *Australian Poetry 1966* (Angus and Robertson) and a substantial volume entitled *Modern Australian Poetry*, published by Sun Books in 1970. Also in 1970, Campbell received the Henry Lawson Australian Arts Award.

In this decade Dobson became the first Australian poet to have a collection of poems translated into French. This was done by the Swiss poet, Louis Dautheuil, and a Viennese Doctor of Literature who was living in Sydney, Margaret Diesendorf. The volume was published under the title, *L'Enfaut au cacatoes*, in the "Autor du monde" series published by Seghers in Paris in 1967.

In 1966 Dobson, with her family, moved to England where she was to spend a period of five years. During this time she worked on her edition of the Poets on Record Series which was produced by the University of Queensland Press in 1970. Also during her stay in England Dobson turned to prose and wrote a monograph on the work of Australian artist, Ray Crooke, entitled *Focus on Ray Crooke*. This was published by the University of Queensland Press in 1971.

At a much earlier period, at the end of the 1950s, David Campbell had also turned to a new genre and published his first series of short stories, *Evening Under Lamplight* (1959). These stories were later included in *Flame and Shadow*, a volume of selected stories published in 1976.

*Evening Under Lamplight* is a lively evocation of images of the past, relating in prose the concerns that informed Campbell's first two volumes of poetry. One important aspect to be seen in Campbell's use of prose is his development of language in extending his visual surrealism towards a literary surrealism. As Robin Wallace-Crabbe noted, "it was not only the landscape that held his attention. He observed people and had a fine ear for conversations, for the meaning of words and their tenuous link with action."<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1 David Campbell, *Poems*: The Pastoral Tradition.

The linking of language and visual stimuli fully culminates in Campbell's third volume of poetry, which is simply entitled *Poems*, and was published in 1962. In a brief summary of *Poems*, Vivian Smith comments that the book exemplifies, "originality of observation and precision of image."<sup>4</sup> Smith went on to conclude, in a statement on Campbell's development, that "His later landscapes are no longer inhabited by the creatures of Australian tradition and tale: they are landscapes of the mind, places of solitude for communion and awareness."<sup>5</sup>

Smith's latter statement needs some qualification for there are many examples in this volume of magpies, crows, stockmen riding by, and as Paul Hasluck points out, such a poem as Campbell's "Pallid

<sup>3</sup>Robin Wallace-Crabbe, "David Campbell: An Appreciation," *Overland* 79 (1980), 55.

<sup>4</sup>Vivian Smith, "The Poetry of David Campbell," *Southerly* 25, No.3 (1965), 196.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, p.197.

Cuckoo" (p.13)<sup>6</sup> "adds a new value to an accustomed sound."<sup>7</sup>

Hasluck emphasizes the regional nature of the poem when he asks:

[W]ould the English poet grasp the meaning unless he had heard the pallid cuckoo on a still morning in the Monaro or unless someone had explained to him that the call of the bird is in five notes rising in the scale like the sound of water being poured into long bottles?<sup>8</sup>

What emerges from Campbell's book is the poet's development in internalizing his physical images "into a clear, harmonious and deliberately circumscribed land of the imagination."<sup>9</sup>

Nowhere is this synthesizing element in Campbell's work more apparent than in the first section of *Poems*. This section, comprised of a sequence of twelve poems under the title "Cocky's Calendar," is a collection of contemplative lyric verse centred around observations of the natural landscape. It is a landscape inhabited by the flora and fauna of Campbell's rural region, but it is a landscape that becomes a microcosm of the creative mind and world of man.

The title of this sequence immediately directs one's attention

<sup>6</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems in this section are from David Campbell, *Poems* (Sydney: Edwards & Shaw, 1962). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

<sup>7</sup>Paul Hasluck, *The Poet in Australia: A Discursive Essay* (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1975), p.59.

<sup>8</sup>Hasluck, p.60.

<sup>9</sup>Chris Wallace-Crabbe, *Melbourne or the Bush: Essays on Australian Literature and Society, Perspectives in Australian Literature* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), p.137.

to the Pastoral tradition, and Campbell's elegantly formal language, reminiscent of the Elizabethan period, specifically directs one to Spenser's pastoral eclogue, *The Shepheardes Calender*. Spenser's concentration on following Chaucer in aiming at a purer but colloquial use of the English language led his *Shepheardes Calender* to be described as "a genuine attempt at a diction not more elaborate, but purer, simpler, more English than the literary language current in his day."<sup>10</sup> At the same time his experimentation in metrical variety in *The Shepheardes Calender* is on the one hand innovative, having no precedent in the pastoral tradition, while on the other hand it takes as a starting point traditional models of an earlier age, especially the models used and developed by Chaucer. In *The Shepheardes Calender* Spenser develops these traditional models to explore the capability of his native language for expressing a poetic ideal while at the same time using simplified images to give an immediacy to theme.

Thus Helen Cooper in her work on the pastoral is able to argue convincingly that:

Renaissance pastoral is made up of the merging of two main streams, which had intermingled occasionally from as early as the thirteenth century: . . . the Latin eclogue tradition; and the entirely independent tradition of vernacular pastoral . . . . The fusion of the two is seen at its most complete in the work of Spenser, and his poetry appears, not as a Renaissance corruption of antiquity,

<sup>10</sup>*The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, eds. J.C. Smith & E. De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), pp. xviii-xix.

but as the high point of the two mediaeval traditions illuminated and transformed by Renaissance humanism."<sup>11</sup>

Cooper also points out that "the essence of the pastoral mode is the search for an ideal; but not an escapist one." Thus, to the Elizabethans, she found that:

" . . . the Pastoral mode had come to provide a kind of dialectic framework in which to work out the tensions between court and city, culture and country simplicity, between Paradise and hardship, unfettered freedom and the responsibilities and limitations of normal life, between Nature and Art."<sup>12</sup>

Many of these tensions remain today as problems central to the human experience, so that it is not very surprising that a poet of Campbell's background should take Spenser as a model and transmute the high peak of Elizabethan pastoral tradition to a contemporary Australian setting. Where Spenser takes the role of poet/shepherd as a vehicle for simplifying the complexity of theme and language, Campbell, in "Cocky's Calendar," takes up the role of poet/farmer to explore the complex relationship of man and nature in his rural environment.

This was not the first time that the pastoral tradition had been incorporated into Australian literature. One aspect of the pastoral concept, the idea of the city man going into the country in search of a golden age or Arcadia, can be seen as having a parallel in Australia when the Bush was depicted as

<sup>11</sup>Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* (Suffolk: D.S.Brewer Ltd., 1977), pp. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup>Cooper, p.7.

an "idealized vision" or a "lost Eden."<sup>13</sup> That the concept was not further developed in early Australian literature is due to the fact that the tradition was not fully assimilated. William Empson defines the basic idea of the function of pastoral as "the process of putting the complex into the simple."<sup>14</sup> Although this definition does appear to be too simple for the historical complexity of the pastoral tradition, too often in Australian literature the reversal of the definition has applied.

The pastoral concept did surface, however, in the art of the Nationalist period, especially in the work of the artists belonging to the Heidelberg School. Amongst the poets, Paterson most closely fitted the tradition in his poems celebrating the "idyllic" past as well as in his stance as a city man idealizing country simplicity. This attitude is epitomized in his poem, "Clancy of the Overflow." Paterson's concentration on the narrative and ballad traditions precluded, for him, any further development in the pastoral. Campbell, on the other hand, like Spenser, uses language with a melodic elegance to express a poetic ideal, while at the same time using the everyday images of his surrounding environment to give immediacy to his theme.

In Campbell's work three aspects of the pastoral tradition fully emerge. The first is his use of the lyrical mode. In writing on the development of the pastoral into epic and dramatic

<sup>13</sup>Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788-1972* (Melbourne: Wm. Heinemann, 1973), p.66.

<sup>14</sup>William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), p.23.

forms, Peter Marinelli points out that "The initial impulse to pastoral is essentially lyric, and the lyric note persists through the many modifications of the form."<sup>15</sup> Campbell's lyrical impulse, combined with a constant theme of pastoral, the interpenetration of man and nature, is fully developed in "Under the Wattles" (p.13), the ninth poem in his "Cocky's Calendar" series. The lyrical note is especially evident in the first stanza, but here the poem is quoted in full:

Now, here and there, against the cold,  
The hillsides smoulder into gold  
And the stockman riding by  
Lifts to the trees a yellow eye.

It's here the couples from the farms  
Play in one another's arms  
At yes and no - you'd think the trees  
Sprang from their felicities.

So may our children grow up strong,  
Got while the thrush drew out his song,  
And love like you and I when we  
Lie beneath the wattle tree.

The interpenetration of man and nature, according to Marinelli, is "allowed full expression . . . [when] the changing seasons of the year are metaphors for the progress of human life from its spring to its winter."<sup>16</sup> This format is fully expressed in Campbell's poem. In the first stanza the end rhyme change from "cold" to "gold" is associated with the changing season, with the "gold" of the spring growth reflected in the stockman's eyes. That Spring is a time for renewal of both man and nature is implicit in the second stanza, where the fertility of the

<sup>15</sup>Peter V Marinelli, *Pastoral*, The Critical Idiom Series, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), pp.73-74.

<sup>16</sup>Marinelli, p. 50.

"couples from the farms" is equated with the growth of the spring trees. In the final stanza the enduring order of nature is given emphasis in the lengthening of the vowels in "strong" and "song", and thus it seems inevitable that "children" will continue the cycle of life and love, even when the parents are buried "beneath the wattle tree."

Throughout his "Cocky's Calendar" series Campbell maintains a total awareness of natural progression and diversity, which leads to the second aspect of his use of the pastoral. Campbell's awareness adheres very much to what Marinelli calls the "informing idea of the history of pastoral," that is "constancy with change." Marinelli claims that the emblem of "changeful constancy" relates back to "the ancient myth of Arethusa, traditionally the source and patroness of pastoral poetry, [and] is that of a spring which flowed underground from her home in Greece and emerged amid new surroundings in Syracuse."<sup>17</sup>

As has been mentioned previously, Campbell used both tree and bird imagery in his earlier work as symbols of constancy and change,<sup>18</sup> and as informing ideas they are obviously basic to Campbell's concept of continuity seen through tradition. In the "Cocky's Calendar" poems continuity is exemplified through the creative mind of man, which is seen through a symbolised element of nature. The series both starts and finishes with the symbol of the "hovering hawk."

<sup>17</sup>Marinelli, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup>Refer Chapter One of this thesis, p.12.



In a later poem in this volume, "Fisherman's Song" (p.29), Campbell more explicitly uses the original myth. It should also be noted that although the poem is related to the pastoral tradition, the cyclic concept of the romantic myth, and biblical imagery relating to the Christian myth are also evident. Campbell's use of Christian mythology is not frequent or overt in most of his poetry. Rather, there is a strong religious view centering on a belief in the mysticism of man and not adhering to any particular doctrine. However, in "Fisherman's Song" Christian imagery is used throughout to denote a search for spiritual purification and communion.

Basically "Fisherman's Song" in its quiet rhythm, and in portraying the joy and solitude of the fisherman, is a reaffirmation of Campbell's belief that harmony can be found within a natural order, and that contemplation of the elements and events that contribute to this process can give impetus to creativity. The tension of the poem, however, is obtained by the underlying rhythm of continuity being juxtaposed with the symbolism of spiritual dryness, and the mental struggle required to overcome this state of being.

The pastoral elements in "Fisherman's Song" can be traced through Campbell's use of the fisherman as mute narrator (a role traditionally played by the shepherd), and in his use of simplified natural images as a means to understanding the complex interpenetration of man and nature. This introduces the third element of pastoral used by Campbell, the tension between Nature and Art. Additionally, the myth of the vanished river and its reappearance as a sacred spring is reiterated in the "vanished

river's shallows" emerging in the "quiet lake " as an inspired and inspiring landscape. In order to examine these inter-related aspects I have quoted the poem in full:

There I would cast my fly  
Where the swan banks and follows,  
Though stars are foxed, the dry,  
The vanished river's shallows -  
And all of time in her cry.

By rock and silted bend  
Where the buried river ran  
And grass sings in the wind,  
I would follow the swan  
To the reach of her mind -

Till rock and mirage break  
And stars double and float  
Upon the quiet lake.  
There I'd put out my boat  
As the herons wake,

And tossing to the floor  
An empty spindle,  
I'd rest upon an oar  
Watching the dawnlight kindle  
Christ's fire on the lake shore.

There is much that recalls Spenser in this poem. For example, the use of the fisherman's cloak to disguise the poet in his spiritual quest is reminiscent of Spenser's use of the shepherd's cloak as a disguise for a variety of roles and attitudes, foremost amongst them being that of the poet attempting to be heard. Additionally, Campbell's use of natural elements as symbolic of a state of mind in the first two stanzas of "Fisherman's Song" parallels a similar use by Spenser. This similarity is noted, for example, in Spenser's first eclogue, "Januarye," where he laments:

You naked tress, whose shady leaues are lost,  
Wherein the byrds were wont to build their bowre:  
And now are clothd with mosse and hoary frost,  
Instede of bloosmes, wherwith your buds did flowre:  
I see your teares, that from your boughes doe raine,  
Whose drops in drery ysicles remaine.

All so my lustfull leafe is drye and sere,  
 My timely buds with wayling all are wasted:  
 The blossome, which my braunch of youth did beare,  
 With breathed sighes is blowne away, and blasted  
 And from mine eyes the drizling teares descend,  
 As on your boughes the ysicles depend.<sup>19</sup>

Campbell, however, does not spend as much time as Spenser in "wayling," but he does use the same method of contrasts to imply the temporary nature of the "winter" period. Thus in the first stanza of "Fisherman's Song," although he starts his search (line 1) in a state of spiritual frustration (lines 3 and 4), the juxtaposition of the swan (lines 2 and 5) points to one of the major concerns of the poem. The swan, as a bird dedicated to Apollo, the God of music, because of the mythic belief that it would sing sweetly when on the point of death, indicates to the poet that although feeling on the edge of spiritual death he may still have a song to sing.

The swan is also a symbol of rebirth, and, coupled with the river as a mythical symbol of the boundary between life and death, reiterates Campbell's implication within the poem of the precarious balance of nature. The narrow division between life and death is implicit in the flight of the swan with one wing pointing up and one down as she banks, with the whole extent of time, or continued existence, articulated in her cry. The time sequence of the poem further echoes the continual movement of time articulated in the cry of the swan. The first phrase of the third line in stanza one, "Though stars are foxed," can be

<sup>19</sup>Edmund Spenser, "The Shepheardes Calender," in *The Poetical Works*, p.422 (lines 30-42).

interpreted on one level as the distorted stars of early night struggling to fully emerge. This gives to the poem a background of progression, with the time span covering the early night in stanza one, the stars out fully in stanza three, and the last stanza bringing the onset of dawn. This time scheme parallels progress from spiritual dryness, to the breaking of the drought, to renewal of hope.

The "dry" and "vanished river," with only the shallows to mark where it had been, links with the drought imagery of "rock" and "silted bend" of stanza two and emphasizes the poet's spiritual dryness. However, the Yeatsian line, "And grass sings in the wind," in the context of the pastoral tradition demonstrates a move to examine details of fertility of nature which give hope for renewal within both nature and the poet. Imagery related to drought and desert conditions is also an indication of how fully Campbell had assimilated the Australian environment. His "winter" period is not dripping with "ysicles," it is, instead, compared with the desolation of a season of drought.

Campbell's use of the term "buried river" in stanza two also touches on the quest motif found in romantic imagery. The combination of bird and hidden water was frequently used in early Australian literature, where the bird (often a heron or pelican) was supposed to lead man to the essential life-giving source of water. More often than not the theory failed and the desert took its toll. The idea marks the original Australian quest for an inland sea or river, and frequently portrays a juxtaposition of the romantic quest with a realistic description of the effect of the elements on man travelling through

the Australian outback. In this use it is a reversal of the Old Testament myth which has the bird going from water to find land. It does, however, parallel the Christian myth in that it is a search for new hope, new land (a side effect of any water found in dry inland areas), and thus, new inspiration. There is, of course, much of the pastoral tradition incorporated into Christian mythology.

The sequence of continual movement is followed throughout stanza two until the final line which depicts a momentary state of suspension of action, and a period of reflection. The underlying motion with the movement of time breaks this spell in stanza three when "rock" and the illusion of the moment ("mirage") break. The poet, however, is still mentally reflecting, for in his use of "stars double and float" there is again a dual image, that of reflection and that of movement towards a resolution. The emphasis focuses on the almost imperceptible movement, and is measured in an even rhythm as the lake takes the place of the vanished river, and the fisherman replaces the poet as he breaks up the water's surface.

The change from swan to heron at this point could indicate the success of the "quest" going from the bleakness of the cry of the swan over the dry river to the coupling of the heron with the lake. It is, at the same time, representative of the re-emergence of Arethusa. The "heron", as the bird of dawn, also relates to "dawnlight kindle" and thus renewal of the day. The duality of fisherman/poet continues in the final stanza, with the fisherman representing action, and the poet contemplation. The poet can still

momentarily suspend motion in order to watch the sunrise, which, in addition to the inevitable cyclic action of renewal, he translates into the incipient glimmer ("dawnlight kindle") of the desired divine ("Christ's") inspiration.

Throughout "Fisherman's Song" the multiple symbolism and images noted in the birds, stars, river, the fisherman/poet, and suspension of time and movement of time, serve to form a framework for the theme of constancy with change. The natural order is seen as the symbol for constancy with all elements of this order being subject to change and adaptation.

Accordingly, immobility is supposedly an illusion. Here the balance between Nature and Art is brought into question. According to the pastoral tradition nature can be extolled by the artist to elevate the simple to the divine level to indicate an ideal state. Therefore, as an artist, Campbell claims man's right to illusion and dream as a process of isolating moments which will result in contemplation, observation and questioning. Thus, in order to find an ideal state, the poet, as artist, as a result of his contemplation and questioning, must delineate, harmonise and articulate his relationship to the cosmic movement of time. Using a combined mythical framework, Campbell has given an excellent demonstration in his "Fisherman's Song" of how this can be achieved.

The second section of *Poems* is a collection of twelve sonnets and in the first of these, "When Out of Love" (p.17), Campbell expressed perfectly the artist's contemplation of nature as inspiration. The poem itself expresses this view without need

of further comment:

When out of love, and reason goes  
 From bird to book and finds no rest -  
 For songs are silent, sonnets prose,  
 Without a singer in the breast -  
 I stand and stare at a green stone,  
 A hill, a hawk above the hill  
 That hangs upon the wind alone;  
 And suddenly my mind is still.  
 It hovers with the dreaming bird;  
 Below in briars the wrens begin  
 Their summer song, and at a word  
 O all the coloured world comes in  
 With cocks and larks, and then I find  
 I have a sonnet in my mind.

In his use of sonnets Campbell is again experimenting with traditional forms. In this section he evenly divides his sonnets between the Italian (Petrarchan) and English (Shakespearean) rhyme schemes. In only two of the sonnets does he adhere to iambic pentameter lines, the remainder being tetrameters. The two sonnets in which Campbell adheres most closely to the traditional forms, "New Australian" (p.26) and "On the Birth of a Son" (p.27), both speak of continuity expressed through the interaction of man and nature, and of the vision that can be derived from this interaction. The style and subject matter, with its concluding homily, found in "On the Birth of a Son," is strongly reminiscent of the style of American poet, Robert Frost, and particularly directs one to Frost's poem, "Mending Wall".

The synthesizing element in Campbell's work continues in his sonnets with the language expressing with preciseness an interlocking of theme and visual clarity. The first three poems in the sequence are concerned with the artist's expression of natural harmony (as is seen in the example already quoted, "When out of Love"), but in the two following, "Among the Farms" (p.20)

and "Dear Maurice" (p.21), Campbell's use of sardonic wit comes to the fore and is coupled in "Dear Maurice" with a parody of the colloquialism of the pastoral.

Of the five remaining sonnets not already mentioned, four are love poems, still imbued with the world of snowgum trees, birds and everlasting daisy, although in "The Picnic" (p.22) Giorgione's painting is transformed with graziers and shedhand,

. . . and in the fore-  
Ground such young women as Dior  
Might dream of, if they had not been  
So elegantly naked, . . . .

The tone of gentle irony, evident in the above lines, is repeated in "Love's Truth" (p.24) and "Lover's Words" (p.25). In the final sonnet, "Droving" (p.28), the theme of timelessness and continuity is again reiterated.

In the remainder of *Poems* Campbell continues his metrical experimentation. For example, a traditional scheme is used in "As Much in Your Anger" (p.36), which has been written in terza rima format. The emphasis, however, is on songs and ballad forms to express a juxtaposition of ironic humour and mature vision.

Of note in these latter poems is a collection of three poems under the title "Songs of Childhood" (pp.43-45). This small group relates to another aspect of the pastoral tradition, that of the pastoral of childhood. The essential elements of nostalgia and wisdom portrayed from the perspective of the adult looking back on childhood are evident in all these songs.

The final two poems to be mentioned, "Hear the Bird of Day" (p.32) and "The Heart of the Matter" (p.33), not only show the



direction in which Campbell was working, but relate to a recent observation made by Mark O'Connor. O'Connor claims that there is a trend towards the use of a new mythology, which he calls the Evolutionary Myth. O'Connor describes the Evolutionary Myth "as a new resource for nature poetry," and he sees it "as essential for making sense of the Australian landscape."<sup>20</sup>

Campbell, in these two poems, appears to have started using this resource twenty years ago. Both poems are linked with physics, and in the first one, "Hear the Bird of Day," the concentration on detail and selection of the correct symbol in order to give clarity culminates in the line of refrain, "What's matter but a hardening of the light?" In the following poem, "The Heart of the Matter," the question of the relationship between matter and light is extended to include the spontaneous energy of atoms. Both poems appear to be an ecological extension of Campbell's clarity of vision. As Robin Wallace-Crabbe noted, Campbell's "earlier, metaphysical concern for . . . time and bright illumination - finds a degree of physical clarification." In defining these parameters Wallace-Crabbe accurately noted the step Campbell was taking when he commented that Campbell was "moving into a landscape, becoming part of a continuum of matter, energy, light: the amazing universal glow."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Mark O'Connor, "Evolutionary Myth in the New Nature Poetry," *Meanjin* 40, No.2 (July 1981), 233.

<sup>21</sup>Robin Wallace-Crabbe, *Overland* 79, 57.

### 3.2 Rosemary Dobson, *Cock Crow*: Personal Poetry & Use of Mythology.

During the 1960s Rosemary Dobson's output of new work was not prolific but the one volume of completely new work to be published during this decade, *Cock Crow* (1965), showed a deepening of vision and personal awareness. Concomitantly, the poems in the early section of *Cock Crow* point to one of the reasons for Dobson's reduced output.

The first section of *Cock Crow* focuses entirely on poems concerned with childbirth and parental responsibility. If classification is necessary it would be appropriate to label these poems as being of a personal, feminine nature. That they are, at the same time, universal is explicit through their underlying statement of human vulnerability.

The feminine aspect of these poems, however, is conveyed not only through the subject matter, but through emphasis on the boundaries of role and time. Defined within these boundaries the poems are therefore an expression of the culmination of specific experiences within a given period of the female life cycle. Undoubtedly many of the poems could have been written by a male, but the immediacy of images related in a matter of fact tone indicates a desire to convey the quality of deeply felt personal experiences, rather than to supply narrative detail.

The first point to note in *Cock Crow* is Dobson's further development of concerns that informed her work from the start. Restated, these are concerns with the complexity of time, the relationship between art and life, a search for order in a world of constantly changing values, and contemplation of the unknown

and mysterious.

In Chapter Two of this thesis Dobson's interest in the metaphysics of time was seen to be developed to the stage where she was able to put time confidently in perspective in her observation that "art conquers time." In *Cock Crow* Dobson looks at the unknown boundaries of our present time. In "Child of Our Time" (p.3), the first poem in section one, the new era is introduced in the words, "Child of an age beyond my dreams."<sup>22</sup> The age is described as no longer "bounded by / the narrow circuit of the world," it now extends to the "perilous" world of space travel and nuclear weapons. The poem is inspired by awe of the unimagined possibilities of this new age. That, soon after publication, it found its way onto the nuclear disarmament platform<sup>23</sup> does not make it only a protest poem. Rather it is an early recognition of the impotence felt by the individual as the world moves into the nuclear age. The point is again brought up in her poem, "Into Winter" (p.10). In this poem the declining values of the world are juxtaposed with the persona's doubts about bringing a child into the present world. That the doubts can no longer be fully expelled by recourse to past values is made plain in the tension created by the questioning of the last line of the final stanza. The stanza reads:

Take heart from hearsay, and believe  
One bore the child to be the man

<sup>22</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems in the section are from Rosemary Dobson, *Cock Crow* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

<sup>23</sup>Pat Westcott, "An Angel Tips Her Halo: Rosemary Dobson's place among our poets," *The Bulletin* Jan. 11, 1964, p. 17.

To save the world at the last hour  
Was this not how the story ran?

Again, in the second section of *Cock Crow*, the poet's dismay at the spreading problems of the nuclear world is more humorously stated, but with no lessening of concern, in "The Sailor: May, 1960." (p.39).<sup>24</sup>

Despite the uncertainty of an alien universal time, present day-to-day living continues and Dobson in the next six poems in section one captures the small segments of time that mark the events of one's individual lifetime. At this stage in the poet's work the events centre around the conception, gestation and birth of children.

In "Out of Winter" (p.4), time becomes a healing agent, sweeping clean past anguish in order that the persona may again have faith in "The simple truths of early paintings / Births, deaths, and belief in visions," so that she may await with patience "the tremor / Of life in the veins". In "Annunciations" (p.5), conception, gestation and birth are dramatized in mostly unrhymed, eight syllable lines. That this poem, and many of a similar style succeed, despite this characteristically flat form, is due to what Robert D. FitzGerald felt was Dobson's "almost perfect understanding of the varying values of vowels and consonants."<sup>25</sup> The second stanza of "Annunciations," itself a very moving and dramatic image of the period of gestation,

<sup>24</sup>It is assumed that the date refers to the build-up of conflict which resulted in the American-Cuban crisis of 1961.

<sup>25</sup>Robert D. FitzGerald, "Rosemary Dobson, *Cock Crow*," Review, *Southerly* 26 (1966), 135.

provides an example of Dobson's use of this technique. In this stanza she contrasts the stasis of waiting with the inevitable movement towards birth:

Lulled by the drumming of my blood,  
The distant thunder of my heart,  
You slept upon the moving tide  
Of darkness, sealed in mortal flesh.  
Once more immortal wings were stilled,  
I heard the word that bade you come.

The following poem, "To Meet the Child" (p.6), is a non-dramatic soliloquy advocating patience during the waiting time until the wonder of birth is re-enacted. Dobson's recognition of wonder and mystery as giving an enhanced dimension to the quality of life is reiterated in "The Edge" (p.7), a poem concerned with the actual time of birth.

"Journey" (p.8), the next poem in the sequence has unfortunately been omitted from Dobson's later edition (1973) of *Selected Poems*. The poem, although slight, does act as a link between the poems in section one. Additionally, it expresses a uniquely feminine viewpoint. Initially, "Journey" expresses momentary irritation and a desire to regain one's identity. It is a feeling common in the latter stages of pregnancy, and Dobson conveys this emotion when she enunciates her longing to be on ,

. . . the white road plain before me  
Out of this fertile valley  
Over the rim of the mountains  
To that lost, fair, singing country.

In many of these poems there is a recognition by the poet of freedom of choice in undertaking the role of mother/parent. That any chosen role engenders its own problems is obvious in the

poet's unease about the state of the world into which she is bringing her child. However, the arrival of the child adds to the individual's world a new dimension of experience which balances out the loss of former freedom. What the poet has gained is "the indestructible thread of love," ("To a Child," final line, p.9), and although the poet's excursions into the "Enchanted country" of dreams ("The Two Countries," p.11) become rare she recognises that these moments can be recaptured through the child. Thus, in the latter part of this section, in "The Cry" (p.12), the poet is able to regain her individual identity, and once again combine art and life.

That this is not easy is spelt out in the title poem, "Cock Crow" (p.13). Much has been written about this poem<sup>26</sup> which is concerned with the problems of conflicting roles of obligation and duty and personal needs. The poem makes a universal statement as this type of conflict occurs in many situations. However, the point that should be stressed is that it is a statement of identity crisis, while at the same time revealing an acceptance of responsibility and need for natural order. To the poet,<sup>27</sup> to deny her Mother and daughter would be a betrayal of herself as Mother and daughter, and thus destroy the line of continuity of which she has chosen to become part. Despite this choice, "Cock Crow," with its final line,

<sup>26</sup>See for example Leonie Kramer's concise analysis of "Cock Crow" in Leonie Kramer, "The Poetry of Rosemary Dobson," *Poetry Magazine*, No.2 (April 1968), pp.3-4.

<sup>27</sup>I use "poet" here as Dobson has stated that "Cock Crow" is a personal expression. See comments in Graeme Kinross Smith, "The Intricate, Devised Hearing of Sight . . . : A Profile of Rosemary Dobson," *Westerly* No.3 (September 1974), p. 59.

"Thinking I knew his meaning well," gives a feeling of uncertainty, which again shows the poet's realization that no choice can be absolute.

The note of continuity and choice has been stressed as the final poem in this sequence, "The Fever" (pp. 14-15), appears to get little comment other than that it is a "love poem, pure and simple,"<sup>28</sup> or words to that effect.<sup>29</sup> That it is an integral part of the whole sequence can best be shown by quoting the poem in full:

Outside the children play like flames  
Over the scorched veranda boards,  
The sun burns through the shrinking vine  
And Floury Baker calls; his bread  
Will not be sold, although all day  
He makes his one persistent cry.

My mind like a white butterfly  
Moves from the curtain to the sheet,  
From sheet to mirror, which returns  
All it receives of sky. I seek  
The gravity of etchings, lines  
As thin as veins, as light as cinders.

You take my temperature and hold  
My wrist between your fingers, watch  
The seconds pass, attentive, dark,  
In city suit, late for your train,  
The fitful fancies of my fever  
Insist that you have called, a stranger:

Your brief-case is a doctor's bag.  
We have not met before, to you  
I am a woman sick in bed  
Whose children, unattended, play  
Outside their shrill, staccato games:  
Not yours and mine, of both our making.

<sup>28</sup>FitzGerald, *Southerly* 26, 133.

<sup>29</sup>J.F.Burrow, "Rosemary Dobson's Sense of the Past," *Southerly* 30, No.3 (1970), 168, where he makes the curious statement, "Or conscious that one will never be a mother, one might turn instead to "The Fever," Rosemary Dobson's only mature love-poem and a very fine one, . . . ."

If this were so would not my heart  
 Leap up to recognize with passion  
 The claim of love for love, to make  
 Insistent as the shrill cicada  
 The cry of need, the want of knowing,  
 One urgent phrase reiterated.

And would you from your unknown life  
 Of surgery and morning calls,  
 And home, and wife, and children doubtless,  
 Would you not meet with recognition  
 That doomed, entangled, piercing cry?  
 There is no need for you to answer.

Certainly "The Fever" is a love poem, but it is also the final poem of a cohesive group of poems concerned with the multiplicity of experiences related to having children. However, the actual period of conception, gestation and birth is finalised, (see line 3, "The sun burns through the shrinking vine"), and the persona now seeks purification of mind to direct it towards other creative processes. The symbol of a "butterfly" is fittingly used at this point. At varying times the butterfly has symbolised the purification of the soul by fire. It has been used in psycho-analysis as a symbol of rebirth, and by the Chinese, as a symbol having secondary meanings of joy and conjugal bliss. It appears that Dobson is well versed in her knowledge of symbolism, and has carefully chosen the butterfly as representative of the mind flitting over events of past, present and future.

Thus, in the projection of her fevered imagination, the persona in "The Fever" restates the claims of love. But as the daily bread is rejected, so would her cry of love be rejected by the daily life of a stranger. It is the passion of consistency that is creative. Both protagonists have experienced this passion, (that the Doctor has is assumed by the implication of home, wife, children). Thus the poem posits the individual cycle of love -



children - life as a general and universal situation. There is some ambiguity in "The Fever." One cannot be absolutely certain that the persona's cry would be rejected. But the fact that the poet has emphasized the incident as "The fitful fancies of my fever," and states, "There is no need for you to answer," defines the boundaries of the actual experience, while at the same time, it creates imaginative possibilities which extend beyond the present time. It is a fitting conclusion to a group of poems that give an eloquent and sensitive view of the whole period of the procreative experience.

As an extended sequence the poems are firmly bounded by experience out of which two points emerge. In the first place Dobson has been able to take her femininity and put it into the perspective of general experience. She no longer feels tension about sexual role playing, and this appears to have been achieved by her determination to enact the poet's role of expressing "truth." Additionally, she has made a step forward in attempting to answer her need to set her poems "in our time."<sup>30</sup>

In section two of *Cock Crow* Rosemary Dobson turns to old myths and legends and attempts to explore their relevance to present day attitudes and events. The unifying principle of this second section is that of human vulnerability, which relates back to the underlying statement of section one. This gives to

<sup>30</sup>This need has previously been mentioned on page ix of this thesis, and is stated in Rosemary Dobson, "Modern Australian Poetry - A Personal View," Proc. of English Teachers' Assoc. Conference, July, 1964, in *The Teaching of English*, No.5 (October 1964), p.20.

*Cock Crow* a cohesiveness which illuminates Dobson's statement in her introduction to *Selected Poems* (1973), where she writes:

Poems in series are not just substitutes for longer works that will never be written . . . they provide an opportunity to arrange ideas in relation to one another, as one might arrange objects in space to construct a harmony, each expressing something by itself and something else in relation to other objects.<sup>31</sup>

The first ten poems in Section two directly use stories or characters taken from European mythology. In the first poem, "The Passionate Poet and His Muse." (p.19), the difficulty the poet has in capturing his Muse is related in the first stanza. That the Muse can never be completely captured is implied in stanza two through the analogy with the story of Daphne and Apollo. In two later poems in this section, "Dry River" (p.35) and "The Spring" (p.36), Dobson again looks at the difficulties encountered in writing. In "Dry River" Dobson, like Campbell in "Fisherman's Song," uses the "dry river" as a symbol of the dry period a poet may have. Also like Campbell, Dobson realizes it is probably only a temporary state and she, too, awaits the re-emergence of the lost spring to bring "A flood of poems, a rain of rhyme." In turning to the poem following, one could well use the old maxim, "It never rains, but it pours." In "The Spring" Dobson uses the metaphor of the pseudo-scientific "divining rod" and ends up with a gushing well of words. That many of the words will be lost, due to human limitations of memory and ability, is expressed in the final stanza:

<sup>31</sup>Rosemary Dobson, *Selected Poems* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973), p.xii.

Like thirsting, shipwrecked sailors who  
 Cup hands to catch the falling rain  
 I stretched my hands to catch the words  
 And caught as much as may be kept  
 In the threads of nothing's net  
 Or in the eye of violet.

Dobson articulates this aspect of human limitations again in her introduction to *Selected Poems*, where she talks about the feeling that "there is always something that eludes one . . . that poems . . . are part of a search for something only fugitively glimpsed; a state of grace which one once knew, or imagined, or from which one was turned away." She concludes: "Surely everyone who writes poetry would agree that this is part of it - a doomed but urgent wish to express the inexpressible."<sup>32</sup>

In her poems on mythology Dobson tries a new tactic; instead of stepping back into the past she now brings the past to the present. In "Variation on a Legend" (p.21), the poet steps into the role of a modern-day Thetis to retell the story of Achilles as a parable on human mortality. The same method is used in "Across the Straits" (p.22), "The Rape of Europa" (p.24), "Andromeda" (pp.25-26), "The Gorgon's Head" (p.27), "The Dolphin" (p.28), "Ceres Near Eleusis" (p.30), and also in the Christian parable "Eutychus" (pp.32-33). In "For a Young Child" (p.29), the poet projects the relevance of myth and legend into the future in an attempt to point out her view of the magic quality of human love.

Dobson, in these poems, experiments with style, using primarily stanzaic verse ranging from ballad form to rhyming

<sup>32</sup>Dobson, *Selected Poems*, p.xiii.

hexameter couplets. In her poems on the more serious traits of human nature she tends to use masculine endings, while the lighter comments on human foibles achieve a lightness of tone through a greater concentration of feminine endings.

In "The Dolphin," Dobson departs from her normal traditional use of metrics and ventures into free verse. That this poem is successful is again due to Dobson's recognition of the values of vowels and consonants, with the necessary emphasis achieved through the subtle use of internal rhyme and alliteration. Dobson has stated that she considers the writing of poetry to be a "very serious matter" but feels that this should not prevent one from at times being "quite light-hearted about it."<sup>33</sup> "The Dolphin" is an example of this combination, for although the poem makes a serious comment about the mundane side of man, no-one could fail to be amused by the visually descriptive passage comparing the dolphin to the,

. . . swallow-tailed, top-hatted gentleman, pausing  
On the steps to the Court of St James.

Dobson's use of myth to restructure contemporary events is the first attempt to transpose European myths to an Australian setting since the work of Lindsay, McCrae, and the early poetry of Elessor and FitzGerald. Dobson succeeds, where the early attempts failed, through her concentration on the human situation.

As can be seen in "The Dolphin," Dobson's humour increasingly centres on an imaginative reconstruction of the absurd elements

<sup>33</sup>Rosemary Dobson, "Australian Poets in Profile: 2," ed. G.A.Wilkes, *Southerly* 40, No.1 (March 1980), 10.

of visual stereotyping. In the latter section of *Cock Crow*, where the poet looks at the people and places and the ordinary situations of daily living, a poem such as "Captain Svenson" (pp.40-41), with its delightful metaphor of white-veiled sisters as fillies juxtaposed with the itemising of hospital habits and equipment, wittily gives a visually stimulating evocation of both the habitual and alien elements of a hospital environment.

In a more serious vein, in "Interlude at a Primary School" (p.45), the timelessness of the situation is emphasized through listing the visual landmarks juxtaposed with an imaginative projection of the possibilities of alternate situations. By the time *Cock Crow* was published Dobson had already expressed an interest in "the urgent contemporary quality in Robert Lowell's work."<sup>34</sup> In itemising the objects and customs of her surroundings, Dobson appears to be using Lowell's method of listing a myriad of surrounding paraphernalia. Such perception of detail is not new to Dobson's work (being very much evident in her painting poems), but in using her perceptive vision as a device to express a view of her immediate world, she has achieved in the latter part of *Cock Crow* a comprehensive interaction of place, people and objects. A further Lowell influence is evident in "Amy Caroline" (p.37), an anecdotal poem, primarily using free verse, but notable for its laconic precision and rhythm reminiscent of Lowell's family poems in *Life Studies*.

The final poem to be looked at in *Cock Crow* is "The Ecology

<sup>34</sup>Dobson, *The Teaching of English*, No.5, p. 20.

of Fishes" (p.44). This poem is again written in free verse, a point which Dobson emphasizes in her lines:

Lacking the rigidity of pattern, as the lines of a  
poem may waver and tremble  
Endeavouring the fluidity of fish.

Again Dobson uses the Lowell method of itemising objects which results in a humorous environmental analogy between fish and human. A further pertinent point to be made about the poem is that Mark O'Connor in his article on the Evolutionary Myth mentions Rosemary Dobson, along with Bob Brissenden, as "Poets who have actually recorded in verse their experience in mastering this new resource of poetic metaphor . . . ." <sup>35</sup> O'Connor gives as an example Dobson's "Ecology of Fishes," citing the first two lines:

Coming late to a study of ecology  
I have learnt about the corrugated skin of sea-horses.

O'Connor seems to have attempted an explanation of an interesting phenomenon which is obviously a useful tool in the analysis of poetry in defining the very unusual environmental balance in this country. He does, however, appear to be erroneous in his claim that he is writing about a new mythology for new nature poetry. His very examples (including Judith Wright's "The Cycads," written over thirty years ago) belie the "newness" of the poets' understanding and use of evolutionary and environmental systems.

With both Campbell and Dobson having used this evolutionary myth by the mid-sixties, it is obvious that both these poets,

<sup>35</sup>O'Connor, *Meanjin* 40, 230.

through perceptive analysis, had fully assimilated their own environments.

### 3.3 David Campbell, *The Branch of Dodona and other poems: 1969-1970: A Wavering of Faith?*

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David Campbell's *The Branch of Dodona*, published in 1970, shows Campbell examining more closely problems connected with the moral issues of a not altogether satisfactory world. In an interview with Kevin Hart, Campbell points out that *The Branch of Dodona* marked the beginning of new concerns in his poetry, and that one of the reasons for this change of direction was the Vietnam War.<sup>36</sup>

The first poem in *The Branch of Dodona*, "My Lai" (p.3),<sup>37</sup> conveys Campbell's opposition to the mindlessness and viciousness of much that was happening in Vietnam. "My Lai" is not an entirely successful poem, being too explicitly descriptive, and ending with the facile rhyme of the final couplet, "cow/chow". The poem, however, does register Campbell's poetic range in going beyond his immediate Monaro environment and, as a poem voicing a specific concern, compares well with other poems included in the Vietnam anthology, *We Took Their Orders and Are Dead*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Kevin Hart, "Interview with David Campbell," *Makar* II, No. 1 (June 1975), 4.

<sup>37</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems in this section are from David Campbell, *The Branch of Dodona and other Poems: 1969-1970* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1970). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

<sup>38</sup>Comment on *We Took Their Orders and Are Dead*, published in 1971, is included in a review by Peter Pierce of Australian literature arising out of the Vietnam war. Pierce argues that, "The most important common feature of the [anthology] is the non-combatant status of

Campbell follows "My Lai" with a series of twelve poems under the Hesiodian title, "Works and Days". Although having many elements of the pastoral; these poems are primarily descriptions of work on the land, and its slow seasonal change. As Campbell states in his introduction to *Selected Poems* (1973), "These poems spring from the shop of countrymen,"<sup>39</sup> and indeed the laconic, conversational tone of the poems is reminiscent of the frequently heard, markedly unhurried tone typical of many Australian farmers.

However, the title of the sequence has not been used gratuitously. Hesiod, in his *Works and Days*, sets out to show that peace and prosperity are the hallmarks of a just society, as opposed to the violence engendered in an unjust one. Campbell, in his series, paints a perceptive picture of a deeply satisfying

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almost all the authors," and that the consequence of this, although unnecessary, was for the majority "to strike socially desirable attitudes: to write the poems that history expected." Pierce omits two obvious explanations for these attitudes (although he does move in this direction at the end of his article). They are the remnants of Australian isolationism, and the selective media censorship still being practiced in Australia. Media censorship had the effect of ameliorating the worst aspects of the war so that, although condemning what was known, the poets were for the most part writing from a partially informed and physically remote stance. A comparison of the American Vietnam literature would emphasise these points. Pierce does mention the obvious urgency of the American writers, but does not draw any conclusions. See: Peter Pierce, "The Australian Literature of the Viet Nam War," *Meanjin* 39, No.3 (October 1980), 290-303. Campbell's opposition to the Vietnam War had been noted much earlier than the publication of the anthology, and was recorded as being as early as 1968. See Robin Wallace-Crabbe, "David Campbell: An Appreciation," *Overland* 79 (1980), 57. For discussion of Australian censorship of Vietnam news, see Anthony Blackshield, "Censorship and the Law," in *Australia's Censorship Crisis*, eds. Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1970), p. 9.

<sup>39</sup>David Campbell, *Selected Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), preface, n.p.



life lived in a peaceful environment, which is in complete contrast to the devastation seen in "My Lai". This contrast exemplifies the organizing principle of *The Branch of Dodona* which is the juxtaposition of violence and disharmony with a celebration of life.

*The Branch of Dodona* is divided into seven sections, but in order to give a more comprehensible view of Campbell's rapid changes in subject and technique, I will treat Sections II to V as one unit.

Three developments which are indicative of the shift in Campbell's approach to his art occur in this group of poems. One development is a move from a rural background to an urban and, at times, an urbane situation. In this manner Campbell moves from the foxes and farmhouses of the poems in Section II to his surrealistic description of watching the disintegration of a city from the ninetieth story of a skyscraper in "Operation Moonprobe" (p.41), until, in the final poem in Section V, "The Voyage of S.S.Ark" (pp.42-44), he tells of the voyage of the ark over the landmarks of New York city, such as the Empire State Building, and then wittily describes the mutiny of the animals soon after floating over Chicago.

The second development, which runs in conjunction with the move from rural to urban, is a change in pace and tone. The increase in pace, although showing an assured handling of technique, is primarily achieved through the rapid change of persona and subject matter. The change of tone correlates with the change of subject matter.

In his interview with Kevin Hart, Campbell, while voicing an enhanced awareness of the general violence in the world, noted three statements that he had started to feel were of importance to poetry. Campbell states:

One came from *Hamlet*, in which Hamlet, after killing Polonius, says 'I will [sic] lug the guts into the neighbour room,' the other is Alec Hope's line from his poem about Yeats in which he talks about 'The brutal mouth of song'. Another is Auden's remark in an essay of his, that poetry, because it tells the truth, is disenchanting.<sup>40</sup>

The influence of these statements is evident in this section of *The Branch of Dodona*. Campbell is no longer viewing an harmonious world. Instead, he looks at the varying nature of violence, pain and frustration. From being chained to the pain of the convict in "Murder of a Ganger" (p.14), the poet, in "The Ages of Women" (pp.22-23), takes a sardonic look at the role of women through the persona of a woman: "You see, I'm a woman now: I need Virginia's / Room of one's own." In the sequence "At a Ruined Millionaire's" (pp.26-27), the poet portrays the alcoholic Maggie Dylan in "The Stripper," and in the same sequence touches on the suicide of the "girl-haired schoolboy." In "The Family Life of a Biologist" (p/29), disorder is at its peak in "III. Amongst Flowers" which reads:

Godlost, the world's biologist was sick  
 Among mad marching flowers  
 Outside the laboratory. Draining his flask,  
 His daughter asked, Daddy, do you feel less lonely?

Running parallel to the change of tone is a Blake-like progression from the world of innocence to the world of experience.

<sup>40</sup>Hart, *Makar* 11, 4.

In "Nurseries Revisited" (p.21), the first poem, "The Cot," surveys a new life:

A womb of scents and shadows and his two  
Sisters, critical of all things new,  
Scaling his brass-bound zoo  
To gain, with rising brows, a closer view.

By the time the poet reaches "The Bronze Bulls of Colchis" (p.39), (itself an introduction to Section VII, which is subtitled "A Commentary on the Lives of Jason and Medea"), the persona has gone through the period of initiation and reached a new level of experience. This change is described in the first lines of the poem:

We have yoked the brazen cattle of the sun-  
A delicate operation involving some magic  
But now the job is done  
And they work smoothly for us.  
With infancy have gone  
Our nostalgic whistling at the plough:

In this poem Campbell compares the myth of the past with the myth of contemporary harmony. That there is no easy answer to the disorder found in the world is conveyed in his final couplet when he asks:

Where have our flowers gone  
And our rebellion?

The contemporary dilemma is further explored in "Talos of Crete" (p.40), a poem which makes an ironic comment on the seemingly insoluble problems connected with psychological and physical pollution caused by increased industrialism.

The third development in this section is Campbell's experimentation in writing syllabic verse. In "At the Ruined Millionaire's" and "The Family Life of a Biologist" he attempts his own version of the Welsh Englyn form. "The Nursing Sister,"

(quoted below), the first poem in "At a Ruined Millionaire's," illustrates some of the patterns found in the Englyn, such as light rhyme, cross rhyme and linked rhyme:

She comes in with the freedom of out there  
Still fresh about her. In austere  
Nursing starch and white, her scarlet hair  
Yet speaks of coral-trees and maidenhair.

The second syllabic form Campbell uses is the Japanese Haiku, an extended example being his poem, "Retiarius Spider" (p.34), where every syllable contributes to the charged reverence of the poem. In this particular poem Campbell extends the Haiku to include internal rhyme, end rhyme, assonance and alliteration. The result is a tightly-knit poem fully exemplifying the conciseness that Campbell had been refining since his first volume. Campbell further explores the Haiku in "Bikinis" (pp.35-36), a series of fifteen brief vignettes portraying yet again the flora and fauna of the poet's rural habitat.

Section VI, entitled "Ku-Ring-Gai Rock Carvings," continues Campbell's experimentation with the Welsh Englyn. These epigrammatic poems are an expression of Campbell's interest in the Aboriginal paintings and rock carvings to be found in caves not far from the original European settlement in Australia, and in the graffiti that has been imposed on these works of art over the years. The poems fit into the continuity of *The Branch of Dodona* in attempting to clarify the poet's response to the layers of meaning revealed, while at the same time seeking the relevance of the paintings, carvings and graffiti to the contemporary period.

The final section of the book, "The Branch of Dodona: A

Commentary on the Lives of Jason and Medea," is written in the modified form of a Greek drama, complete with a list of Dramatis Personae. The poems, for the most part, are delivered as dramatic monologues. In this section Campbell follows Dobson's lead in bringing the characters from Greek mythology to the present to retell their stories as contemporary happenings.

Campbell's perceptive analysis of attitudes expressed through language dominates throughout this section. For example, in "Murder of a Prince" (p.58), the stunned silence after Medea's gruesome murder of her brother is broken by the awkward *faux pas* of Heracles, "I wouldn't mind, eh? some barbecued steak?" This emphasises the horror of being involved in a situation where the relief of escape is silenced by an almost incomprehensible horror of the means used to escape, which, in turn, is tinged with an uneasy guilt.

The poems in this final sequence progress through the break-down of marriage, the incineration of the new bride by a napalm bomb, to "Single Apartments" (p.73), where:

A step ahead of the police  
But not of her past,  
Medea frequented the psychiatrists of Athens.

The poem follows on with Medea's self-justification, but the general hardening of attitudes towards violence is emphasised through the glib comment of the final two lines:

Her crimes  
Are in tunes with the times.

Throughout, Campbell links the sequence with recurring analogic images and words, which themselves repeat images from the earlier sections. Altogether, *The Branch of Dodona* is a

coherent look at the problems and increasing violence evident throughout the world at the end of the sixties, and an exploration into new forms suited to expressing the turbulence of that period.

Interspersed throughout the book, however, are poems concerned with the individual's search for peace and harmony. These poems reveal a real possibility of order against a background of disorder, and two contrasting poems of this nature confirm the poet's faith in life. The first poem, "Delivering Lambs" (p.7), shows in the final stanza the persona/farmer in an ultimate moment of achievement:

Delivering lambs, *you're* god: tug at the forelegs  
And drag it, yellow, by the tight lips of the ewe  
Until she starts to lick and the lamb starts butting.  
Walk home as tall as your shadow in the dew.

The second poem, the last of the Jason and Medea series entitled "The Return of a Captain" (p.74),<sup>41</sup> shows the poet as a man of letters celebrating a life fully lived, when he writes:

What is there to lament?

Here by the *Argo's* prow,  
The Branch of Dodona  
Nods to me now:  
Men and boughs break;  
Praise life while you walk and wake;  
It is only lent.

<sup>41</sup>In the *Selected Poems* this poem has been included under the title, "The Return of Jason."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### NEW FORMS

For David Campbell the 1970s was a period of prolific output in which he published considerably more verse than he had in his previous thirty years of writing poetry. During these last nine years of his life Campbell's publications included five volumes of poetry, two volumes of rendered translations of Russian poets,<sup>1</sup> written in collaboration with Rosemary Dobson, and the poems for *The History of Australia*, illustrated by the artist, Keith Looby. Additionally, Campbell's *Selected Poems* was re-issued in an enlarged edition in 1973, his edition of "Poets on Record" was produced in 1975, and, as mentioned previously, his second volume of short stories, *Flame and Shadow*, was published in 1976.

Rosemary Dobson's activities during this decade centred more on editing, and on her collaboration with Campbell on the Russian translations. The first anthology she edited was commissioned by the Canberra Fellowship of Australian Writers

<sup>1</sup>An explanation of "rendered translations" is given in the preface to this thesis, fn. p.vii.

to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the federation of the Australian states. This was published in 1975 by the Australian National University Press and was entitled, *Australian Voices: Poetry and Prose of the 1970s*. Her second anthology, *Sisters Poets 1*, was published in 1979. In the latter half of the decade Dobson published two volumes of poetry, *Greek Coins* and *Over the Frontier*. These two volumes will be discussed in the following chapter.

One point to be made about *Greek Coins* is that it was published by Brindabella Press, a private printing press operated by Dobson's husband, Alec Bolton. The volume is dedicated both to the art of printing, and to the art of poetry, and further emphasizes Dobson's earlier mentioned interest in typography. *Starting From Central Station*, David Campbell's volume following *The Branch of Dodona*, was also published in a limited edition by Brindabella Press in 1973.

The ten poems that comprise *Starting From Central Station* are also incorporated in Campbell's next publication, *Devil's Rock and Other Poems: 1970-1972*, published in 1974, and will be included in my discussion of *Devil's Rock*.

#### 5.1 *Devil's Rock and Other Poems: 1970-1972: Campbell's personal poetry.*

One of the major influences on contemporary Australian poets was the publication in 1959 of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*. In the previous chapter Rosemary Dobson's acknowledgement of Lowell's work was mentioned. At a much later date, (1974), John Wright lists Bruce Beaver, Vincent Buckley, Geoffrey Lehmann



and Evan Jones as well-known Australian poets who were working in a style which followed the Lowell pattern of personal poetry using "a protagonist working through the material of his personal life in his poetry, and examining himself in the context of his family, his immediate society and the broader culture generally."<sup>2</sup> Tentative stirrings amongst the younger generation of poets towards more questioning and self-awareness had started in the early sixties,<sup>3</sup> however, Wright's article indicates it took almost a decade after the publication of *Life Studies* for Lowell's work to be assimilated in Australia.

Lowell was not the only American poet to be using what has been loosely termed "the confessional mode." Lowell's slightly older contemporary, Theodore Roethke, published his first volume, *Open House*, in 1941, and from the beginning Roethke traces with frankness and honesty his long journey towards self-knowledge.

The work of both these American poets had a minor influence on David Campbell's sequence, "Starting From Central Station".<sup>4</sup> Initially, the Lowell pattern is obvious in Campbell's use of autobiographical detail, however, "Starting From Central Station" differs from *Life Studies* in its concentration more on the family and past history, with the "self" being less obtrusive. Roethke's

<sup>2</sup>John M. Wright, "What Kind of Self?: The Authorial Presence in Some Contemporary Australian Verse," *Meanjin* 33, No.4 (Dec.1974), 364.

<sup>3</sup>See James McAuley, *A Map of Australian Verse* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.2.

<sup>4</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems in this section, including the sequence "Starting From Central Station" are from David Campbell, *Devil's Rock and Other Poems: 1970-1972* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

influence is directly acknowledged in No. 8 of the sequence, "Dance Undressed" (pp.5-6), which is sub-titled "(Tune: Mr. Roethke's Waltz)".<sup>5</sup>

While the influence remains slight, there is more affinity between Campbell and Roethke's work than between the poetry of Campbell and Lowell. Although undeniably different in personality, both Campbell and Roethke, sharing a reverence for nature, continuously use images and symbols of nature as analogous to the condition of man. Both poets were initially influenced by the poetry of Yeats and Blake, and both maintained a belief in the "musical relationship" of the poem as an integral impulse to the psychic energy of a poem. In Campbell's work the resultant rhythmic vitality has frequently evinced a tone of "characteristic energy and curiosity".<sup>6</sup>

The most interesting correlation between Roethke's and Campbell's work is in their similar use of movement from dark to light. Both poets concentrate on the positive symbolism of "dark" as being embryonic to growth. It is, at the same time, used as an area of confinement which one must overcome to evolve into light. For example, Roethke in "In a Dark Time"<sup>7</sup> attempts to break the bondage of himself when he writes:

<sup>5</sup>The poem Campbell is referring to is Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz," first published in 1948.

<sup>6</sup>For example, see comments by Yasmine Gooneratne in "It's Droughty in the Morning," *Hemisphere* 19 (Nov 1975), 36.

<sup>7</sup>"In a Dark Time" was first published in 1960, and republished in *The Far Field* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), p. 79.

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,  
 I meet my shadow in the deepening shade:  
 I hear my echo in the echoing wood--  
 A lord of nature weeping to a tree.

A similar use is seen in Campbell's lines in *Devil's Rock*, when in a less emotionally-charged poem, "Rivers"(p.15), he writes:

That broader river where the mind's at work  
 Evolving in the dark  
 Slow metaphors and metamorphoses  
 And platypus glide like Noah in his ark.

The point to be made is that both poets arrived at a means of poetic growth, and a means of overcoming disillusionment, by using the symbol of darkness as a positive starting point. Unfortunately, Roethke did not live long enough after writing "In a Dark Time" to explore many new avenues. Campbell, however, takes this starting point to overcome the disillusionment expressed in *The Branch of Dodona*.

In the sequence, "Starting From Central Station," Campbell explores ways of expressing, in middle age, poetry that will belong to the time in which he is writing. In the title poem of this sequence, the metamorphoses of father and son indicate the poet's intent to develop new ways of bringing the past and present together. Thus in the final stanza, although the daylight "Puts father in a box / And shoves him in the dark," the poet's communion with the memory of his father allows the story of his family to develop from this "dark point", which, in this context, is symbolic of stored memories. The change from Campbell's previous method of using the past to inform the present is that the poet discards the role of omniscient commentator. Memories are no longer just meditated about, they are now re-lived with the poet as a conscious part of the story.

The sequence goes on to weave past and present into an evocative mosaic of an evolving world. The poems are all skilfully written but are by no means innovative, using primarily variants of conventional form.

As Lowell in *Life Studies* uses the change from horse-drawn vehicles to automobiles as a motif for a changing lifestyle, Campbell, in the final poem of "Central Station," "Ellerslie Revisited" (pp.6-7), uses the motif of environmental change from rural to suburban. The difficulty of assessing the values inherent in rapid change when one is part of that change is a theme common to both poets. Lowell's automobiles remain housed in the stables, while Campbell brings the immediacy of the problem to one's attention when in "Ellerslie Revisited" he surveys the "ring-barked" trees, which "are not yet dead". While the poet previously saw the past as in a mirage, it is now the present that appears unreal, and thus he states:

The past will go on living in my head  
More real than this mirage that remains  
Of melting-moments with their concrete swans.

The remainder of the poems in *Devil's Rock* attempt to grapple with this problem of assimilation of the present.

In the two poems following the "Central Station" sequence, "August Air" (p.8), and "Local Habitations" (p.9), Campbell voices the difficulties encountered in refreshing one's vision in middle-age. Gone now, he claims in the latter poem, is "the ironic poise / Of forty and eighteen." His claim is refuted by the poems that follow and towards the end of the book one of the

individual poems, "On Not Becoming the Sea " (pp.34-35), demonstrates Campbell's recognition that his imaginative vision and wit have not deserted him, and thus he is able to walk from the sea with "A Muse on either arm."

Having served a long apprenticeship to his craft, Campbell realizes it is not only "ironic poise" that contributes towards creating poetry. In "Pallid Cuckoo" (p.41), the ordered notes of the bird (as explained in regard to Campbell's first "Pallid Cuckoo" poem from the Cocky's Calendar sequence)<sup>8</sup> are given as a reminder that regardless of subject matter, whether it be tragic or humorous, "the strict principles of art" will assist the poet to define experience with precision, and thus enable him to give a sharpness of focus and new freshness to the song he is singing.

Almost as if they were written for this purpose, two poems stand out as examples of the defects possible when not containing one's art, and of the effectiveness of adhering to the strict principles of art. "The Tourist Trade" (p.26) is a satirical ballad about the destructiveness caused by tourism. Despite some humorous lines, there is an underlying note of savagery that detracts from the poem. As mentioned in Chapter One, cynicism or savagery is atypical of Campbell's work, and frequently leads, as is the case in "The Tourist Trade," to an exaggerated indignation. By contrast, "The Shortest Line" (p.32), a poem

<sup>8</sup>For explanation see Chapter Three of this thesis, p.68.

that protests the short-sightedness and destructive stupidity of man, contains theme and technique within the strict form of the villanelle. It is a combination which effectively directs the poet's anger into a sharp and lucid statement.

To adhere to the strictness of the villanelle, however, is not necessarily the only way to write a poem, and thus Campbell turns to the quatrain and a more relaxed, conversational tone to write a sequence of four poems entitled, "Letters to a Friend". Dedicated "For Douglas Stewart," these poems pay tribute to Stewart's friendship and advice, and his encouragement of Campbell to continue writing his poetry. Stewart was also responsible for giving Campbell a great deal of information on the background of the Kuringai rock carvings.<sup>9</sup>

The poems in "Letters to a Friend," however, go beyond merely being a tribute to Stewart. In the first poem, "Sandstone Country" (p.12), Campbell evokes a feeling of an ancient land, while at the same time describing the countryside and recalling past excursions with Stewart. In the second poem, "Rock Engravings" (p.13), the fascination of the engravings takes over as the poet asks:

Whose was this artist's ochre-stencilled hand?  
And what mythology  
Kept rock alive although the tribe was dead?

The interest in his family history that previously was the concern of the "Central Station" sequence now turns to an interest in Australian history and the relics of the Aborigines, and their

<sup>9</sup>Kevin Hart, "Interview with David Campbell," *Makar* 11, No.1 (June 1975), 8.

relevance to the present. In "Wells Station" (p.14), the poet returns to his own locality and tries, not too convincingly, to place the imminent threat of encroaching suburbia into the "reality" of his created world. It is an assimilation, that to Campbell, requires working on, and in "IV. Rivers" (p.15) the passage quoted earlier, "That broader river where the mind's at work / Evolving in the dark" again delineates the proposed archetypal journey of the poet's mind.

There are four remaining sequences in *Devil's Rock*; two concentrate on specific Australian legends, while the other two extend the imaginative recreation of subject matter prompted by the rock carvings. Of the two sequences concerned with legend, "Kelly Country" and "Mackenzie of Mackenzie Country," Campbell has stated that the "Mackenzie Country" poem was commissioned by the B.B.C.<sup>10</sup> As he assumed the B.B.C. was expecting a country poem, "Mackenzie Country" was written as a longer version of his previous country poems and does not represent a new development in Campbell's work.

The other legend sequence, "Kelly Country," is written as an imaginative recreation of moments and events of the Kelly story viewed from the present. The juxtaposition of past and present is occasionally marred by a catch-phrase such as "Make Love not war" ("Power's Lookout," p.17), but this is compensated for by the rhyming couplets of "The Eleven Mile Creek" (pp.18-19), which end with a remarkably compressed image:

<sup>10</sup>Hart, *Makar* 11, 4.

Four eagle-nests in the one tree:  
A country rich in poverty.

In "Glenrowan" (p.20), physical poverty remains in the form of the run-down town. However, Glenrowan does boast two new churches and this leads to the final poem, "If it Moves" (pp.20-21), where Kelly, although likened to animals of a predatory nature, also shares with them a spiritual freedom far above that of the lifeless in flesh and spirit, "Businessmen / [Who] Sleep quiet in bed". The ability of institutions to quell spiritual freedom is reiterated in the ironic finale;

"If I'd my way  
I'd shoot or hang  
All thinking men  
While they are young."

"Kelly Country" is successful in that Campbell has shown the qualities that attract people to the legend, but his disillusionment with the present remains.

The next sequence to be discussed, "Devil's Rock and Other Carvings," is comprised of fourteen, four-line poems which are similar in their use of the Englyn form to the poems from the "Ku-ring-gai" sequence in *The Branch of Dodona*.

Of major importance in the "Devil's Rock" sequence is Campbell's perfection of the serial form. In "Devil's Rock" each poem can be taken as a statement complete in itself, while, at the same time, each poem builds up and embellishes the story the poet is telling. In "Kangaroo and Ship" (p.22), the theme of the story encompasses the emblems of the Aborigines, the arrival of the Europeans and the subsequent destruction of the blackmen, all compressed into the four lines:



The boomerangs hit home, yet the kangaroo,  
 Shy sandstone beast,  
 Is already vanishing, a sailing ship  
 Tattooed like a cancer on his chest.

The poem justifies Campbell's use of the syllabic form for every word contributes to the complexity of the story. An example can be seen in the single work, "cancer". The word blends past and present in relating to the sailing ship that brings the Europeans, while also standing out as a prophetic evocation of the slow and painful death of the Aborigines and their way of life, which results from the arrival of the Europeans.

A similar compression marks his following poem, "Hatchings" (p.22), which takes the emblem of "cancer" and relates it to the spread of suburbia with its subsequent destructive effect on the environment. Campbell's development in his ability to compress is emphasised when one recalls that in "Town Planning," from *Poems*, it took five stanzas to make the statement he is now recording in four lines.

The sequence continues in this compressed manner, using the actual rock engravings and superimposed graffiti to recreate the links between the world of the Aborigines and the world of the Europeans up until the withdrawal of the tribesmen who survived the white settlement.

"South Country," the final sequence to be considered, is again a recreation of the early days of European settlement, including, this time, a further development of Campbell's family history. The sequence is written in sonnet form, using both Shakespearean and Petrarchan rhyme schemes, which gives to it a compressed eloquence, while the frequent use of enjambment introduces

a relaxed, conversational tone.

Again the sequence is started from an image of "darkness". This can be seen in the first poem, "Black Gins' Lookout" (p.36), in both the title of the poem and the simile of the "banksias" as "full-lipped and dark in their green caves / Like wives of tribesmen . . . . " "South Country" combines many of the experiences of other sections of *Devil's Rock*. The mystical quality of the bush which was voiced in the rock carving poems where "Magic haunts the bush" ("Emu Hunt" p.22), is again evoked in "Black Gins' Lookout" as the "Mist clings" and "trails" as the persona is "Riding through bush in rain with the hush and drip / Of raindrops from my hat." The pervasive note is that of isolation, so in "Burning off: Depot Beach" it comes as no surprise when the "smoke columns rising blue between / The patterned columns of the spotted gums" prompt a recollection of the links between Cook carefully noting the fires of the Aborigines, and the Aborigines drawing a picture of a ship with "a whole world arched between".

In "The First of the Lumber Men: Little Pebbly" (p.37) and "Piers for Campbell's Wharf: Pebbly Beach" (pp.37-38), Campbell turns his attention to the lives lived by the early European settlers. This time the poet concentrates on the positive qualities of the new arrivals, such as braveness and perseverance, qualities which enabled his "great-grandfather" to moor "at a clansman's wharf." The poet's recognition of human transience is evident as he surveys the relics of past places of settlement. It is these relics, with their stories which have

been told and which remain to be told, that form part of an evolutionary history.

It is at this point that Campbell does appear to come to terms with the assimilation of the present. In "Sanctuary" (p.38), the past and present are integrated in the imagery of the "kangaroos" as ghosts of the victims of a revolution. The juxtaposition of the persona's alienation with that of the poet is exemplified, and, at the same time, resolved in the sestet where:

Now in age in a strange and alien land  
 She stands with her kangaroos in the dusk to look  
 For hunters in her sanctuary, and her mind  
 Rounds like the cat's-paw sea memories like rock  
 Into manageable shapes smooth to the touch  
 And not like lovers' heads rolling on the beach.

The final poem in this sequence, "Rock Pool" (pp.38-39), summarises Campbell's whole development in juxtaposing the renewal of nature with the renewal of man. For in going back to the very elemental amoeba of the rock pools he again looks at the eternal movement from dark to light, and thus is able to continue singing:

Praise and be praised!  
 An amoeba wandering in her cave caressed  
 With its ghost-hand the darkness, and its cell  
 Divided. In that blaze the two embraced.

#### 4.2 David Campbell, *Deaths and Pretty Cousins* and Looby/ Campbell, *The History of Australia: The Contemporary Mode.*

One of the reasons for David Campbell's increased output during the seventies was the award of a three-year Senior Fellowship by the Literature Board in 1973. Now able to reverse his time allocation for his two major roles in life, Campbell

spent more time writing with farming reduced to an incidental activity. It was also during the seventies that it was realized that Canberra had become something of a literary centre, having, as Geoff Page claimed in 1976, "more good poets per head of population than any other city in Australia."<sup>11</sup> This additional contact with other poets and their work, especially younger poets, had a stimulating and freeing influence on Campbell's work.<sup>12</sup>

Another influence on Campbell's work was his collaboration with Rosemary Dobson and the translator, Natalie Staples. In late 1971, Natalie Staples began making literal translations of the work of the Russian poets, Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam. These translations were passed on to Dobson and Campbell, who then wrote their own interpretations. Campbell was particularly influenced by the depth of experience which informed Mandelstam's work, and the discipline of working on the translations, Campbell felt, "had a great freeing-up effect on [his own] writing."<sup>13</sup> The book that resulted from this collaboration, *Moscow Trefoil*, was published in 1975, and will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

*Moscow Trefoil* was but one of the two books that Campbell

<sup>11</sup>Geoff Page, "The Poets in Canberra," Review of five poetry volumes including Campbell's *Deaths and Pretty Cousins*, in *The Canberra Times*, Jan.9, 1976, p.6. For a more detailed comment on The Canberra literary scene, see R.F.Brissenden, "Remembering David Campbell," *Quadrant* XXIV, No.113 (Jan-Feb), 1980, p.19.

<sup>12</sup>This point has been made on many occasions and is referred to in Campbell's interview with Kevin Hart, see *Makar* 11, p.7.

<sup>13</sup>Hart, *Makar* 11, 5.

published in 1975.<sup>14</sup> The other, *Deaths and Pretty Cousins*, shows that Campbell's mature and synthesizing talent had brought him fully into the contemporary period.

In *Deaths and Pretty Cousins* the initial clue to Campbell's full recognition of contemporary modes is in the introductory quotation which is taken from Willem de Kooning's, "Three Americans," "Then there is a time in life when you just take a walk: / And you walk in your own landscape." One can legitimately relate a statement such as this to Campbell's earlier rural poems about the Monaro landscape on which Campbell had already commented: "Sometimes I had the feeling that I was living and riding around in a world of my own creation."<sup>15</sup> Indeed if one looks back to the poems concerning matter and energy in *Poems* (1962), one can see that Campbell was already taking a step into a concept which would relate to a clearly envisioned inner landscape.

In the volumes following *Poems*, Campbell has increasingly sought ways of understanding and expressing the physical and moral shifts in society. In *Devil's Rock* Campbell's awareness of the discontinuities of a known world forces the poet to look more closely into himself where the mind will evolve "slow metaphors and metamorphoses." What eventually emerges in

<sup>14</sup>1975 could be classified as Campbell's most successful year. In addition to the two volumes mentioned, his edition of "Poets on Record" was produced, and he also received the Patrick White Literary Award.

<sup>15</sup>*David Campbell Reads from his own work*, Poets on Record 14, ed. T.W.Shapcott (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975). Quotation from "Notes," p.15, which were written in March, 1973.

Campbell's work is an effect similar to that which Andrew Taylor claims marks the contemporary quality of Robert Bly's poem, "Listening to President Kennedy Lie about the Cuban Invasion." Taylor states:

The final, accumulated effect is one of freedom of spirit and a resilient psychic toughness which is not, in any simple sense, nourished by mother Nature, but which shares in her energies and processess. The poem doesn't explain that sharing, it declares it in its rhythms and its language.<sup>16</sup>

These attributes are clearly evident in the poems that Campbell was writing at this time, which were prompted by the early drawings of Keith Looby. Looby's drawings and Campbell's poems, plus his "Ku-Ring-Gai Rock Carvings" sequence from *The Branch of Dodona*, were published in association with an exhibition at The Macleay Museum of The University of Sydney in 1976 under the title, *The History of Australia*.<sup>17</sup>

Campbell, in commenting on "The Looby Songs," claims Keith Looby's drawings showed "matter coming alive in much the same way he had imagined it would."<sup>18</sup> What gives inner harmony to "The Looby Songs" is the idea that thought also evolves from matter and thus the dance cannot be divorced from the song. In "The Looby Songs" Campbell takes more liberty with language than he had previously done, and this results in a contemporary

<sup>16</sup>Andrew Taylor, "Irrationality Individuality Drug Poetry Romanticism - Where We Are Today," *Meanjin* 31, No.4 (December 1972), 377.

<sup>17</sup>The exhibition was about Aboriginal-European Inter-relationships and was entitled *The Moving Frontier*. Campbell's "Looby Songs," a sequence of six poems, are re-published in his later book, *Words With a Black Orpington*.

<sup>18</sup>Hart, *Makar* 11, p.6.

literary surrealism which emphasizes the irrational flow as mind and energy recreate primeval man. All this is made plain in the first poem of "The Looby Songs," which strangely enough, (or not so strangely, as it captures the element of fantasy that Looby was striving for), recalls the tone and language used in the children's story, *The Bunyip of Berkley's Creek*. Again, Campbell uses the symbol of darkness as an embryonic growth of consciousness. This is quite explicit in the first song which reads:

In the beginning word and light were one.  
 Matter is light in chains.  
 From bonds of darkness, tender blades of thought  
 Twist green tongues round the vowels of night.

Thought flickers in the darkness like a tree.  
 What is a tree? My dream.  
 I woke and broke the rock and am a tree.  
 The question begging now is, Who are you?

Is, Who are you? Is, Who are you? The owls  
 Think themselves into trees.  
 And I am green in love with green. We dance,  
 And flowers release like stars their energy.

The sequence goes on to relate in very sensual terms a sophisticated and witty view of the evolution of man and nature and the confusions of early childhood, while in the final song the full maturity of the male/female relationship is reached.

Campbell, throughout his work, has written many sensitive and warmly sensual love poems, but occasionally his zest for living breaks through into a swagger, which, I feel, viewed subjectively, can mostly be forgiven because of the bounce and delight evoked in poems of this nature. The final stanza of the sixth "Looby Song" is an example of this swagger, but it is, however, ameliorated by the poet's punning on "beard", which is

used both to reveal the ageing process as well as the process of arriving into the clear light of maturity. The lines read:

The sun is a chauvinist pig. He walks  
Whistling our hair away.  
I came by day to beard him, and he stepped  
Into the meditation of the sea.

The combination of "The Looby Songs" and Keith Looby's drawings is a good example of the correlation of two art forms. Both poet and painter have arrived at a view of evolution which is both individual and complementary, and synthesizes in the ability of both artists to render a mature vision of the many mysterious, irrational, humorous, and yet serious attributes, which all contribute to their picture of man in evolution.

The multiplicity of attributes that Campbell incorporated in his "Looby Songs" were previously expressed at greater length in *Deaths and Pretty Cousins*. In *Deaths and Pretty Cousins* Campbell writes about a wide range of subjects, all concerned with reality as the individual sees it, and with the means of expressing that view of reality so as to go beyond the individual. Ultimately, it is the landscape of the poet's interior world that emerges, and the precision with which this landscape is depicted reveals new insights into a familiar world.

That this is the poet's intent is obvious in the first poem, "Snake" (p.1), where snakes are likened to a line of poetry, "Setting ears back, hair on end," and the poet's ultimate ambition is to write "A line like an icicle!" This can only be achieved if false social inhibitions are cast off, thus in the two poems following, "Dovecote" (p.2) and "Fairy Martins" (pp.3-4), the desire to escape inhibiting attitudes and



physical restrictions is expressed.

A second theme of importance to the poet in *Deaths and Pretty Cousins* is that of environmental issues. In "The Anguish of Ants" (pp.6-7), through its use of the study of ecology, the analogy of the ant-world to the human world turns a condemnation of environmental destruction into an ironic comment on man's self-destructive tendencies and anxieties that arise out of the thoughtless pursuit of questionable progress. Further poems on environmental problems are "Wether Country" (p.30), a sonnet on the clearing of farmland to make way for pine forests which are intended for the pulp industry, and "Bellbirds" (p.31), in which forest clearance for housing settlements leaves the bellbirds deprived of their natural habitat. Australian literature, and concomitantly life, have come a long way since Colonial times. No longer do we have the anomaly of the early poet, Henry Kendall's, bell-birds singing Maytime songs in September.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the bellbirds of Campbell's contemporary poem are now confined in cages where they rarely sing at all.

As a group these poems make an interesting comment on exploitive ecology. The cumulative effect of such exploitation is posited in "Portents Over Coffee" (p.32), in which three forms of aberration, resulting from over-exploitation, are detailed. Using free-verse to emulate the tone of journalistic objective reporting, Campbell conveys the underlying devastation of all three situations. The juxtaposition in "Portents Over Coffee" of animals, humans and birds, reiterates the poet's awareness of man as an integral part of the ecological balance, while managing to

<sup>19</sup>See Kendall's poem, "Bell-Birds" (line 10) in *Selected Poems of Henry Kendall*, ed. T. Inglis Moore (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1957), p.4.

avoid the intrusive self-consciousness which mars some of Campbell's previous poems of social censure.

The contemporary relevance of de Kooning's lines in regard to walking in one's own landscape is noted in Campbell's immersion in the energies and processes of an all-encompassing nature. While the landscape in the environmental poems in *Deaths and Pretty Cousins* emphasizes ecological imbalance, a new set of rock carving poems, "Sydney Sandstone" (pp.34-36), emulates the rhythms of nature in an attempt to internalize man in an historical landscape. This sequence of poems on rock carvings concentrates more on the fragility of things in the context of the inexorable process of nature, rather than emphasizing the emblematic meanings as was done in the previous rock-carving poems.

Thus the paradoxical nature of permanency can be noted in "Seagull" (p.34), where the flight of the bird is "stayed" in stone, not for all time, however, but as "A moment weathering to eternity". In "Woman and Whale" (p.35), the "girl" in the jaws of the whale is seen as "doubly lost" as the carving is slowly being erased by the natural weathering of the rockface. And in "Ball's Head" (p.35), the human imposition of the rumbling city implies that the "flat rock among / The wharves and tankers" will eventually be swallowed by the city, as surely as the carving depicts Jonah being swallowed by the whale.

The "Sydney Sandstone" sequence does not have the compression and freshness of Campbell's earlier rock-carving poems, but as history is preserved in many forms, Campbell shows that he too can

interpret his historical sense in new and varied forms. In the poem following "Sydney Sandstone" Campbell writes a macaronic entitled, "Le Wombat" (pp.37-38). In this poem the incongruent nature of some of the early historical records is evoked in genial terms, but the final line of the poem could well describe Campbell's increasing willingness to be open to new experience and new forms, that is his willingness "Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau*!"

James Tulip, in a two-part article on contemporary poetry came to the conclusion that, "The challenge for Australian poetry in the 1970s is to find its "Integrator," someone to bring the extremes together."<sup>20</sup> It cannot be claimed that Campbell fully realized this ambitious role. However, the eclectic nature of the poems in *Deaths and Pretty Cousins*, with a combination of formalism in technique, concomitant with experimentation with language and form, does cast Campbell in a minor way as an integral figure between two generations of poets.

An example of this dual role can be noted in Campbell's use of the sonnet form. Having looked at the first thirty years of Campbell's poetic endeavour, one may see that the sonnet stands out as one of his favourite and most-used technical forms. *Deaths and Pretty Cousins* contains its share of sonnets. One, "Wether Country," has already been mentioned. Additionally

<sup>20</sup>James Tulip, "Contemporary Australian Poetry--1," *Southerly* 32, No.2 (1972), 99. The second part of the article is published in *Southerly* 32, No.3 (1972), 176-95.

there is a sequence of five sonnets in the earlier section of the book which look back on personal friendships, and the people and places which form part of Australian literature and history.

Although there is some looseness in the use of enjambment and the occasional colloquial term, the objective formalism of an older generation is retained in these earlier sonnets. By contrast, when compared to the seven sonnets which make up the title sequence of *Deaths and Pretty Cousins*, the earlier group can be considered strictly formulaic.

"Deaths and Pretty Cousins" (pp.63-67), is a highly compressed sequence which recounts family history from the time Grandmother left her family to live with Mr. Hughes, until her death. The success of the sequence lies in the immediacy of image obtained through the poet/persona's rapid role changing. These changes allow a dislocation of sense and imagery which is heightened by Campbell's kaleidoscopic colour imagery, and which enables the poet to weave in the disparate elements which eventually contribute to the overall history. The sequence is written with increasing suppleness, Campbell's surrealism is now more essentially concerned with the experiences of the subconscious than with any incongruous juxtaposition, but what makes the sequence fit into the contemporary field is not only Campbell's freeing of thought and form, but also his complete identification with values of both the past and present. This allows the poet to move from the merely personal to the social element and is basic to the sequence, for the tension of the poem is obtained through the portrayal of the individual's quest for freedom set against past social expectations.

The individual's quest for freedom is also the theme of a group of poems under the title, "Red Bridge" (pp.39-51). Taking for



way in which the project was handled. In the first place, Staples made a literal translation of the poem. Then Dobson and Campbell proceeded to write their own versions, retaining as closely as possible "the quality and character of the original poem."<sup>22</sup> Most of the poems in *Moscow Trefoil* are printed in three versions; the original translation, and then a poem each from Dobson and Campbell. Occasionally there is only the translation and one poem printed.

*Moscow Trefoil* also includes an enthusiastic Foreward written by A.D.Hope, in which he proffers the opinion that "the book consists of a series of independent poems standing in their own right on themes treated by the two Russian poets and taken up by the two Australians in something the way that Pope's *Epistle to Augustus* is based on Horace's *Epistle to Augustus*." Hope also delineates the different approaches of Campbell and Dobson in a descriptive image which has Campbell "descend like the eagle of Zeus on the poem he is to render," while Dobson, "flows round and over and through the poem."<sup>23</sup>

Hope's image to convey Campbell's approach is rather too emphatic, however, in many of the renderings of Osip Mandelstam's poems, Campbell frequently writes a version giving added strength or urgency to the original translation. Dobson, on the other hand, often starts from a personal meditation which allows her

<sup>22</sup>Rosemary Dobson and David Campbell, *Moscow Trefoil: Poems from the Russian of Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam*, transl. Natalie Staples, Foreward A.D.Hope (Canberra: ANU Press, 1975), p.xiii.

<sup>23</sup>A.D.Hope in Foreward to *Moscow Trefoil*, pp.vii-ix.

to absorb the moment or event, and then extends it to an objective statement.

It is difficult to give too many examples when there are three versions of each poem, however, in this case a reprinting of Dobson and Campbell's version of "Cold tickles the crown" would illustrate more clearly the effectiveness of each approach. Campbell's version (p.12) reads:

Cold prickles in my hair;  
There is so much to tell!  
Time wears me down like a pair  
Of shoes to a crooked heel.

Life gets over its shock,  
Sounds slowly melt and chime;  
But something is always held back  
And there is no time, no time!

It was better once; green blood,  
There is no comparing how  
Leaves rustled then in the wood  
With how they rustle now.

No doubt we must pay and pay  
For the act of the lips' telling:  
The tree-tops stir and sway,  
Axe-marked for felling.

Dobson's poem on page 13, reads:

A sudden chill. My words are stopped.  
Is it a footfall on my grave?  
Time wears me through and cuts me down  
As use wears down a leather heel.

I learn to overcome, recover,  
Little by little sound comes through,  
But there's this constant want - this need  
For something that one cannot name.

Wasn't it better long ago?  
There's no comparing then and now -  
The stir and fever in the blood  
With this dry rustle on the bough.

The poet pays the highest price  
Who, like the flautist, shapes his words

With moving lips. He is that tree  
Whose leaves are tossing as it falls.

At times the forcefulness of Campbell's versions, and his ability to compress, succeeds in capturing a note of urgency that surfaces in many of the Mandelstam translations. Dobson, for her part, captures more successfully the note of wonder and timelessness which informs an early Mandelstam poem, "Hagia Sophia" (1912), (Dobson's version page 42), and which is still retained in "Impressionism," written in 1932. (Dobson's version p.45).

In 1912, Mandelstam, Akhmatova, and her husband, Nikolai Gumilev, founded a Poets' Guild whose members were later referred to as Acmeists. Basically Acmeism was a revulsion against the "hectic romanticism, 'ideological' preoccupations, and high-priestly pretensions" of the Russian Symbolists of that time.<sup>24</sup> The Acmeists, in rejecting the Symbolists, rejected their apocalyptic view of chaos. Instead they looked to culture and tradition, and especially to the constructive values that they felt were epitomised in many of the massive architectural structures, as values on which they could build their poetry.

Dobson, in her version of "Hagia Sophia," captures this concept when in the third stanza, referring to the builder, she asks:

<sup>24</sup>Max Hayward, "Akhmatova (1889-1966)," in *Poems of Akhmatova*, trans. Stanley Kunitz (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1974), p.8. The ideas in the paragraph following are also gleaned from Hayward's notes.



Was he, too, stayed with wondering -  
 The framer of your high design  
 Who bodied forth exhedra, apse,  
 To east and west for all the world?

And in the final stanza, continuity despite chaos is revealed  
 where:

Wisdom's embodied in the sphere  
 That turns and turns through infinite time.  
 From the dark gilding far above  
 Eternally cry the seraphim.

In the following poem, "Notre Dame" (p.43), Campbell  
 captures the sense of the immense power of order which is  
 epitomised in the structure of the roof of Notre Dame, in his lines:

You step outside if you need proof  
 How flying buttresses may rear  
 To keep a mass of stone in air  
 Against the downthrust of the roof.

Mandelstam's final stanza in this poem foreshadows the events  
 of his life. Staples' translation (p.42), reads:

But the more attentively, stronghold Notre Dame,  
 I studied your monstrous ribs,  
 The more frequently thought I: from an evil weight  
 I, too, one day shall create beauty.

Campbell's distinct voice comes through very strongly in his  
 version of this paragraph which reminds the reader that these  
 poems are being rendered from a translation into the language  
 and customs of another country. In most of the poems there  
 is also a considerable lapse of time from when they were created,  
 and this shows up in the final stanza of "Notre Dame". Campbell's  
 version is extremely skilful, but his very sophisticated 1970's  
 outlook fails to capture the primitive awe of the original. For  
 comparison, Campbell's lines are:

Ah Notre Dame, you steel my eyes,  
 Yet weigh like evil on my skull:  
 Ambiguous and beautiful  
 One day like you my songs shall rise.

In turning to the work of Anna Akhmatova, the major problem one encounters is to translate and interpret the scope of her work and life in just a few poems. Dobson and Campbell, in the preface to *Moscow Trefoil*, appear to be more impressed with Mandelstam, "Whose world view, whose strong feeling for history and the philosophy of history, and whose strict observance of poetry as a vocation to be taken with great seriousness and dedication" made, they claimed, "a very strong impression on us all."<sup>25</sup> Akhmatova, however, lived from 1889 to 1966. It was a lifetime that spanned a period from the days of the Tsars (Tsar Alexander III) until the comparatively lenient Soviet regime of Leonid Brezhnev. One of the most remarkable things about Akhmatova is that she survived through the turbulence of revolution, wars, and political persecution, while retaining, intact, her love for her country.

The selection of Akhmatova's poems in *Moscow Trefoil* covers the period from the early 1940s (when the first long-standing ban on Akhmatova's work was lifted) and finishes with the title sequence, "Moscow Trefoil," written from 1961-1963. The first of her poems printed in *Moscow Trefoil* comes from her "Northern Elegies" sequence. Although written in 1945, the first poem looks back to the time of Dostoevsky's Russia, and culminates in the birth of the poet.

Campbell's version of the first "Northern Elegy" (pp.61-63), captures the changing scenes and remembered places and people by

<sup>25</sup> Campbell, Dobson & Staples, Preface to *Moscow Trefoil*, p.xiv.

delineating each scene with a conciseness of language which gives the impression of viewing a series of transparencies. For the most part he is writing free verse which is held closely in check with an occasional use of internal and end rhyme. The increasing foreboding of change, in the final stanza, is given emphasis in the terseness achieved through the use of increased rhyme and shortened syntactical lines. Judging by the comment by Robert Dessaix that Akhmatova's style was "succinct, chiselled and spare,"<sup>26</sup> it would appear that Campbell in this poem has correctly rendered a close imitation of the original.

Similar in its success through technique, although a very different technique, is Dobson's version of "The First Long-Ranger in Leningrad" (p.92). Staples' translation of "The First Long-Ranger" is a sixteen-line poem. Campbell chose to write his version in quatrains in three stanzas, whereas Dobson has written her version in seven couplets, each with a shortened second line. Her poem is well balanced with the first three couplets moving into the fourth couplet, and the remainder moving out from the fourth couplet. Concurrently, the first four couplets are paired, each pair comprising a statement and then a negative qualification, until the fifth couplet which presents an image of death. This is projected to the persona's fear of death for her child, which is expressed in the final two couplets.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Dessaix, "Akhmatova," Review of *Akhmatova: A Poetic Pilgrimage*, by Amanda Haight (OUP) in *Quadrant* XXII, No.6 (June 1977), 75.

The final poem I wish to mention, "Moscow Trefoil" (translations and interpretations, pp. 108-109), one of Akhmatova's last poems, is actually a cycle of three poems. Symbolically the trefoil is also an emblem of the trinity. When it is located upon a mountain it comes to signify knowledge of the divine essence gained by hard endeavour, through sacrifice, and can be regarded as equivalent to ascension.

Philip Roberts, in a review of *Moscow Trefoil*, felt the title of the book was not particularly appropriate "for a book in which two Russian poets are translated by two Australian poets - unless it . . . [referred] to the three versions of each poem which are printed."<sup>27</sup> For a poet of Roberts' acumen it is a surprising statement, for the use of the emblematic "Trefoil" in Akhmatova's poems of farewell is a most appropriate symbol of ascendance in keeping with her strongly held religious beliefs (which were one of the reasons for the first ban on her work). It is also an appropriate title for the volume, for the poems are a tribute to the ascendance of Moscow over the destructiveness of man, and re-establish beauty and love as motifs of inspiration for future poets.

The first poem of the cycle, "Almost an Album," has only the translation and Campbell's version printed. Of the two, Staples' translation has greater clarity, especially in her final

<sup>27</sup> Philip Roberts, "3 Australians tackle 2 Russians," Rev. of *Moscow Trefoil: Poems from the Russian of Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam*, trans. by David Campbell, Rosemary Dobson, and Natalie Staples, in *The Australian*, Weekend Magazine 7, Feb. 12, 1977, p.25.

lines:

And so it shall be on that Moscow day,  
When I forever shall forsake the town  
And speed to a longed for sentry-post  
  
As yet leaving my shadow in your midst.

The lines written by Campbell seem to contain an unnecessary  
ambiguity:

It will be like this in Moscow on the day  
When I walk out of the town and in my mind  
Hurry to a crenated sanctuary  
Leaving with friends my shadow life behind.

Campbell redresses the balance in the second poem, "Without a  
name," when he captures Akhmatova's dramatic sense in his lines:

No parting was more unreal: but you and I  
Enjoy our theatre, so I suppose we win.

The final poem, "Another Toast," which only has Dobson's  
version, when compared to "The Last Toast," a poem written by  
Akhmatova in 1934, is a reaffirmation of the poet's sense of  
having struggled through to a state of peace and regained faith,  
and the dignified calmness of this state is rendered in Dobson's  
formal use of metrics:

To your faith and to my loyalty,  
And that we live in Time together,

And though we are ill-starred, spell-bound,  
There's never been such marvellous weather.

Snow-crystal crosses in the sky,  
Bridges and chains that float for ever.

I drink to this bright air-borne world,  
To never seeing one another.

And, though that way the door's shut fast,  
I drink to all I dream of last.

The success of *Moscow Trefoil* must be looked at with  
reservation. Although giving some impression of the poetic

vision of the two Russian poets, the small range of poems printed can only serve as an introduction to their work. The volume, however, does show the value of using mature poets, such as Dobson and Campbell, whose craftsmanship has been developed over a number of years, in attempting the difficult process of rendering the poems of another language and country into intelligent, significant poems in our own language and country.

Dobson and Campbell continued working on Russian poems and in 1979, shortly after Campbell's death, *Seven Russian Poets* was published. The first half of the volume concentrates on poems by Osip Mandelstam. Two of Mandelstam's contemporaries, Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva, start the second half of the book and they are followed by four younger women poets. The translations for this volume were done by Olga Hassanoff, and later, with the added help of the poet/translator, Robert Dessaix.

*Seven Russian Poets* differs from *Moscow Trefoil* in that the literal translations are not printed, and in most cases only one of the rendered versions is given. This allows a greater number of poems to be printed, and in the Mandelstam section, enables a wider representation of his work. A small selection of Campbell's versions of Mandelstam's poems which are not printed in *Seven Russian Poets* are included in Campbell's final volume, *The Man in the Honeysuckle*. The greater number of poets in the second half of the book does curtail their work to only a small sample from each poet. *Seven Russian Poets* also includes brief introductory notes to each poet.

Mandelstam's section, apart from the first poem, is in chronological order covering the period from 1908 to 1937. The selection is a far better introduction to Mandelstam's work than the poems in *Moscow Trefoil*, for it appears that Dobson and Campbell have assimilated Mandelstam's poetry to the extent that the "imitations" they write are similar in style and intensity. Dobson, in her later volume, *Over the Frontier*, writes a poem entitled "Reading Mandelstam." In three compact stanzas she delineates Mandelstam's world, going from the decadence of the Art Nouveau period to the harshness of the social realism of the Stalin era and finishing with Mandelstam's death in a forced labour camp near Vladivostock in 1938. The uncertainty surrounding the exact circumstances of Mandelstam's death is juxtaposed with images of the blunt finality of death in the final stanza of Dobson's poem when she states:

We followed as far as we could that earlier traveller.  
His steps went over the edge and into darkness,  
the line of the type broken, the letters scattered  
like cramp-irons, as he called them; pincers, staples -  
like bird-marks printing the page's final hard-packed  
snow-drift. The journey ended in snow and silence.<sup>28</sup>

The remainder of *Seven Russian Poets* can only serve as a brief introduction to the work of the other Russian poets, but, at the same time, confirms again the quality of the work and the breadth of vision of the two Australian poets.

<sup>28</sup>Rosemary Dobson, *Over the Frontier* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1978), p.18.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### POETRY OF THE LATE SEVENTIES

#### 5.1 Rosemary Dobson, *Greek Coins* and *Over the Frontier*: An Interim Summation.

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For Rosemary Dobson the latter half of the 1970s was a very productive period. In addition to her work on the Russian poets and anthologies, in 1977 *Greek Coins* was published, and in 1978 this was followed by *Over the Frontier*. A selection from *Over the Frontier*, plus further poems based on the travels of Pausanias (Pausanias being also the inspiration for *Greek Coins*), are included in an enlarged edition of *Selected Poems*, published by Angus and Robertson in 1980. Additionally, in 1979, Dobson was awarded the Robert Frost Prize for Poetry.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Greek Coins* was published by Brindabella Press. As well as being dedicated to the arts of typography and poetry, the book includes line drawings by Dobson which are an indication of her continuing interest in visual art. Dobson, in her Preface to *Greek Coins*, does mention that in writing these poems she "thought of each one as setting out a visual idea, which could be contained within the circle of a coin - that is, within the coin-sized



four-line stanza."<sup>1</sup> Thus the subject matter is seen to dictate the technique used in writing these poems.

Nearly all the poems have been based on what has frequently been referred to as the first travel guide, Pausanias' *Guide to Greece*, written in the second century A.D. Dobson acknowledges the use of translations by J.G.Frazer and, more specifically, the Penguin edition of the *Guide*, edited by Peter Levi and published in 1971.

*Greek Coins*, with other poems inspired by Pausanias' travels, is also published in Dobson's next volume, *Over the Frontier*, and will be looked at within that context.

*Over the Frontier* is divided into two sections, the first under the title, "Over the Frontier," and the second, "Poems from Pausanias." In the first section three groups of poems are discernible. They are poems concerned with daily living; poems about writing poetry; and poems that reflect an interest in pre-history and biology.

Although the poems can be classified under these headings, each heading is no more than a bare statement of basic themes. It has been noted previously in this thesis (Chapter Three, p.91) that Dobson tends to write poems in series or groups with the intention of arranging ideas in relation to one another. By the time *Over the Frontier* was published, Dobson had perfected her technique

<sup>1</sup>Rosemary Dobson, *Greek Coins: A sequence of poems with line drawings by the author* (Canberra: Brindabella Press, 1977), Preface, n.pag.

of writing poems in series with interrelated ideas, but now she was also condensing interrelated themes into a single poem, and very often these themes spill over into the concerns of poems from another group.

An example of condensing a number of concerns within one poem is found in "Callers at the House."<sup>2</sup> Written in couplet form, the poem ostensibly is about a medical team visiting the poet's sick mother. At the same time the poem includes a consideration of the problems of choosing a profession; dwells on the poet's interest in typography; refers to the stoicism and pioneering spirit of her mother's generation; and recalls the myth of Athene and Diomedes. As can be seen from this poem the choice of direction from a given point can lead to endless possibilities, if one is open to them.

In the title poem of the volume, sub-titled "(Reverie on a poem by Zbigniew Herbert)" (p.3), the possibilities of order within the universe assume metaphysical proportions viewed from a still point. Thus the object or poem steps from non-existence over the frontier into existence. "It has assumed shape and purpose," and paradoxically, one of the purposes is to remind us of the possibilities of the objects and poems that have not yet come into existence. The final stanza of this poem sums up Dobson's belief that the essence of a poet is embodied

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems in this section are from Rosemary Dobson, *Over the Frontier* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1978). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume. "Callers at the House" is on p.7.

in "flexibility and receptiveness, a 'negative capability,' [which] will prove more valuable to the poet than inflexible convictions,"<sup>3</sup> Thus the analogy to the poet is seen in the last three lines:

So a plate spinning on a stick  
is the essence of plate, a still one,  
absolute plate with a fish on it.

Dobson explores the subject further in "The Artist's Wife" (p.4). Her use of the symbols of regeneration in the first two stanzas leads the poet into a consideration of the work of the early Italian painter, Giorgio Morandi. In this poem Morandi is viewed as the still centre reaching out to explore all the metaphysical ideas "of separateness, of joining, and relation" to find the "meaning for the mysteries of existence" out of the questions that evolved around him during forty years of painting, etching and drawing a group of pots upon a table.

The clarity that Dobson felt could come from searching for an "inner essence" is made plain in the compressed lines of her poem, "For the Painter Ben Nicholson" (p.11). Dobson's whole philosophy of writing poetry is summed up in the first two stanzas:

Finding and learning  
the inner essence,  
making and showing  
by signs and symbols  
  
that a tree like a glass  
contains its tree-ness  
and frost is white  
on the rim of darkness.

<sup>3</sup>Rosemary Dobson, "Australian Poets in Profile: 2, Rosemary Dobson," ed. G.A.Wilkes, *Southerly* 40, No.1 (March 1980), 5.

In "Greek Archaeologist" (p.9), Dobson offers a slightly ironic view of the lack of vision that results from inflexible convictions in her juxtaposition of the archaeological students sifting amongst the ruins from the past, with the past still present in the form of the men labouring in the vineyards. It is a more sophisticated version of the concerns of an earlier poem, "The Bystander," which comments on the person who, for various reasons, always misses the obvious.

"Greek Archaeologist" also shows a delight and joy in the eagerness and pleasures of youth, but in "Primitive Painters" (p.12), a different type of innocence is revealed in the simplified vision of the primitive's landscape. There is not much deviation or choice if one adheres to a world "peopled by the saints / on billboards - holy Doctor Morse, / the carbide-battery man," etc. However, in the following poem, "Oracles for a Childhood Journey" (p.13), Dobson again reverts to a technique, used from the start of her work in regaining a flexibility of vision, by looking at something from a child's point of view. Thus, in a clever use of language and rhythm, the poet has the painted billboards sing their message in a rhythm emulating that of a train, and the resultant dislocation of thought and visual signs leads to a re-arrangement of the billboards' messages.

In "Mrs Potts the Flat-iron" (p.14), Dobson's humour and delight in a given object resurface in her personification of the old-fashioned flat iron. The use of the iron, together with a listing of paraphernalia and well-known brand names that were common household words in the 1920s and thirties, recalls a whole

way of country living of the not too distant past. This is exemplified most successfully in the fourth stanza:

A puppy wearing a top-hat sits in a basket  
on the calendar in the kitchen.  
The days of Mrs Potts are marked upon it  
in black; the Tuesdays.

The stanza describes the innocuous kitchen calendars that adorned all kitchen walls in those days, while at the same time household routines are implied. The very fact that the ironing was done in the kitchen recalls the family-size kitchens of country houses, and having the ironing day marked in black is indicative of the dislike that most people had for what was, especially in the heat of summer, an onerous chore. And that it was "Tuesdays" recalls in a single word the inflexible household routines which were very widespread, Mondays, washing; Tuesdays, ironing, and so on. Despite the subject matter being a recollection of a past way of living, the poem has a contemporary quality which Dobson obtains through her ability to identify with the past without being sentimental or nostalgic, and in her use of free verse. All three features, humour, empathy and free verse culminate in the final stanza:

At night the air is cool outside by the water-tank.  
Peppercorns hang in clusters, buzzing and humming,  
talking to Mrs Potts, put out to simmer  
down, on the back veranda.

In the following poem, "At Carcoar" (pp.15-16), the dramatization of a bushranger legend is a tentative step towards literary surrealism. The juxtaposition of image, time and thought in rapid succession builds up to the final expletive burst which releases a whole flight of thoughts which had resulted from the

visit to Carcoar.

"Mrs Potts" and "At Carcoar" are both metrical experiments, and while not entirely new to Dobson's work they do take a step forward in gaining a sense of immediacy which is essential to contemporary poetry. They are poems "of our time" and Dobson's recognition that she has achieved contemporaneity gives rise to the following poem, her delightful lyric, "Canberra Morning" (p.17), which I will quote in full:

Morning: such long shadows  
like low-bellied cats  
creep under parked cars  
and out again, stealthily  
flattening the grasses.

At the bus-stop  
a flock of starlings:  
school-children, chatterers,  
swinging haversacks,  
pulling ribbons.

The driver's got a book by  
Sartre in his pocket.  
He wears dark glasses,  
listens moodily  
to the Top Forty.

Life gets better  
as I grow older  
not giving a damn  
and looking slantwise  
at everyone's morning.

The final group of poems from "Over the Frontier" all reflect Dobson's interest in pre-history, which includes a study of the scientific techniques used in this discipline. In a lecture given in Hobart in 1979, Dobson discussed the use of her studies in pre-history in her poetry. Although she felt pre-history embodies some marvellous ideas, often the terminology was dull. In order to compensate for this dullness, Dobson, in these poems,

embeds stratigraphically a little of Shakespeare, much in the same manner that pollen is embedded in rock.<sup>4</sup>

A knowledge of the source of the italicised insertions in these poems does help to alert the reader to an awareness of a sense of continuity gained through a juxtaposition of a past time with present modern scientific methodology. The use of an unstated source, however, does bring one back to a problem encountered in Dobson's early work. The question arising is to what degree is general, or, in this case, literary knowledge, required to understand the poems.

Dobson, to some extent, does circumvent this problem as the first poem of the group, "Drowned Person" (p.19), requires only a passing acquaintance with the well-known plays to realize that this poem refers to Shakespeare's Ophelia. This does give a clue to the insertions in the poems following, however, it is also evident that knowledge of the Shakespearean allusions is not entirely necessary to an understanding of the poems; they merely give an enhanced level of meaning.

What Dobson appears to be doing in these poems is to impart a sense of wonder at the large mass of historical facts that can be deduced by scientific methods, while, concomitantly reminding one that an imaginative reconstruction of this data is required to get the human side of the story. Thus in "Drowned Person" the poet states:

<sup>4</sup>Paraphrase of statements made by Rosemary Dobson in a lecture given at the University of Tasmania, October 4, 1979.

These bones, with pollen analysis  
of their strata, provide a limited history:  
for carbon-dating, deduction and analogy

do not reveal the dark side of the mind  
nor betray the heart's deviousness,  
the body's wilfulness.

An example of overcoming this limitation is given in  
the final stanzas, when a method of scientific analysis is  
permeated with a slight interjection of hypothesis, in the lines:

The following is deduced from existing data

and froth flotation of the surrounding  
clay-bed: She was a young woman, gracile,  
delicate. Died by water. Was vulnerable

and wounded - by love (but that's hypothesis)-  
and carried with her to death such *weedy trophies*  
as willow, nettles, crow-flowers and daisies.

Hypothesis can lead to a number of possibilities, and  
in "The Dissidents" (p.23), Dobson takes a humorous look at,

the absolutely overriding significance  
of biological circumstances in the study of  
human society.

"The Dissidents" is written in free verse, in quatrains, with  
a shortened fourth line, a form Dobson previously uses in "Mrs  
Potts". The effect is to emphasize the statement of the fourth  
line, which, in turn, leads onto the following stanza. The  
overall effect is to create a highly structured poem without  
the use of a formal pattern.

In the final poem of this section, "Piltown Man" (p.24),  
Dobson reverts to rhyming couplets, which emulate in rhythm  
the blues folk-song, "Frankie and Johnny". An occasional  
phrase taken from this song reinforces the rhythmic pattern.  
The poem is an amusing lament on scientific zeal, while again



emphasizing the human element that must be accounted for in all scientific analysis.

One final comment on this group of poems is that Dobson is again using O'Connor's "Evolutionary Myth." This can be noted in her extension of scientific data juxtaposed with human emotions, as a means towards gaining a comprehensive vision of evolutionary history.

The second half of the volume, "Poems from Pausanias," includes a poem, "Lost Water-spring" (p.29), in which Dobson claims there are "three things that draw me on." The three things mentioned are love, poetry and oblivion. There is a predominance of poems in "Poems for Pausanias" which refer to the writing of poetry, the inspiration for poetry and the concerns of the poet. However, one of the most successful poems in the section, "Selemnos" (p.41), is concerned with the importance of love. In the first half of this poem Dobson explicitly expresses what it is in Pausanias' records that she finds relevant to her own life. The many and varied anecdotes, legends and myths that are interspered between the architectural and archaeological descriptions in Pausanias' work provide Dobson with stories that complement or compare with various human needs and moods of our present time. In the first stanza of "Selemnos" Pausanias is praised:

Pausanias, my friend, you do me more good than  
those whom I walk with daily under the columns.  
I ask you where is lightness of heart to be looked for  
and you tell me.

Sometimes it is "diversion" or "learning" or "a narrative thread" that the poet is looking for, and these too she finds in

Pausanias. The second half of the poem proceeds to tell of the story of the river Selemnos. As a shepherd Selemnos fell in love with the ocean nymph, Argyra, who returned his love until he lost his beauty. As the grieving shepherd died he was changed into a river, but even as water he still retained his love for Argyra. Aphrodite, taking pity on him, gave to him "the grace and the favour of forgetting." Dobson's gently ironic comment in her final stanza very clearly shows how she regards the loss of such an experience:

Master or mistress - would you forget your passion?  
 You will cure the wounds of love if you bathe in that river.  
 Pausanias says so. Shouldn't we all start saving  
 the fare for the journey?

To forget such experiences is to be one step closer to death, and, paradoxically, one step closer to oblivion.

In the meantime, there is much that is remembered and much forgotten, and one of the epigrammatic poems in "Greek Coins," entitled "The Dark and the Clear" (p.42), reminds us of this human fallibility. The remainder of the four-lined poems from "Greek Coins" present a varied selection of images and experiences that serve to remind one of the diversity of life, and the experience gleaned from legends and myths expands this diversity to infer the richness of human potential.

However, it is the human attributes that re-occur over centuries that Dobson finds the most interesting, and thus I will comment briefly on three poems that touch on this theme. In "At Tainaron" (p.30), ostensibly a poem on the water-spring at Tainaron which mirrored the past and future until polluted by a woman washing her linen in it, the main statement is about the

enduring quality of lamentations for the past. Thus Pausanias, two-thousand years ago laments that "There were no miracles for him to see " and in the seventeenth-century John Aubrey comments, "the live were not as lively as the dead," to which our present-day poet adds:

I too remark  
that dirty linen fouls up many a spring.  
And where are all the witty and the wise?

Repetition of a different kind is seen in "Theseus" (p.38), when the legend of Theseus' arrival in Athens is given topicality through the ribaldry of the builder's workmen. As the poet points out, the words used may not have been the same, but the moral of the story remains relevant. In the third poem, "The Flute Player" (p.39), Pausanias' comments on Pronomos' captivation of his audience appear to the poet to,

have  
a ring, a sound, of ever new  
as though one read them instantly  
in some theatrical review.

Pausanias also claims that,

whole audiences were utterly  
charmed by his presence and the way  
he moved his body on the stage,

which leads the poet to consider the possibility that Pronomos was the sex-symbol of his age.

The final poem in the volume, "The Message in the Bottle" (p.46), moves from Pausanias to a traveller in 1795 and on to the Russian poet, Mandelstam, to present the concept of poetry continuing as a force that will link the past with the present, and thus enhance the lives of future generations.

Throughout this volume the essence of human experience remains as a "still centre" in a changing world.

Following the publication of *Over the Frontier*, and nearly forty years after Dobson was uneasily grouped with the internationalist school of poets, Jennifer Strauss comments that, "Dobson offers a personal and lyrical version of the cultural European consciousness."<sup>5</sup> If nothing else the definition shows how inept was the original classification. Dobson's poetry, both then and now, cannot be classified with such ease.

Throughout her work Dobson appears to be primarily concerned with the essence of experience. To Dobson experience comes from many sources, both directly and indirectly, and the major thrust of her work is to emphasize the legitimacy of all experiences. Thus a work of art, legend or myth all have an inner essence born of experience which contributes to the complexity of human endeavour in much the same way as activities such as child bearing, or writing a poem. Naturally, the degree of intensity at the crux of experience differs greatly, and Dobson's interpretation of these varying degrees is noted in her handling of manner and technique.

From the start her themes remain basically the same for they are themes fundamental to human activity, being concerned with our place in space and Time. Over the years, however, they are considerably enriched with the poet's deepening of vision and personal awareness, which is reflected in her poetry in increasing compassion and humour.

<sup>5</sup>Jennifer Strauss, "The Poetry of Dobson, Harwood & Wright: 'Within the Bounds of Feminine Sensibility'?" *Meanjin* 38, No.3 (September 1979), 344.

Initially Dobson's style is traditional with added interest obtained by a diverse use of metrical variation. The major change in her style is an increased economy with language which at the present time not only gives direction and clarity to her work, but also allows her to use free verse with a tautness that keeps it from ever degenerating into lines of prose.

One major criticism of Dobson's work has been the lack of verbal fireworks, and the gracefulness of many of the poems has led to the accusation that her poems lack emotion. It should be evident from this thesis that such criticism is not justified. Thus in my final point of summation I offer an alternative view.

Dobson's poetry does not lend itself to easy classification or analysis, for it is poetry that is informed by an individual and intelligent mind. During her years of writing poetry Dobson has continually maintained a stance of attempting to understand the inner meaning of all that she has encountered. Social concerns and anxiety have frequently surfaced in Dobson's work in the form of condemnation, but as a poet concerned with truth she has, like most of us, no absolute answers to these problems. Instead she offers in her poetry a close examination of values from the past to the present that have contributed in a positive and often repetitive manner to the quality of life.

At times it requires a little more reflection on behalf of the reader to get to the inner essence of a poem. This is not because of obscurity, but is basically because the gracefulness

and expert craftsmanship in her later poems presents no obstruction to surface reading.

To the astute reader Dobson offers an assured body of work that remains out of the mainstream of contemporary poetry, yet it is firmly poetry of, and relevant to, our time.

## 5.2 David Campbell, *Words with a Black Orpington*: Human fragility.

David Campbell's *Words with a Black Orpington*, published in 1978, is mainly a consolidation of his major themes and techniques. The volume is unified, however, by his use of the travel motif which emphasizes the poet's movement through places, Time and his now considerable thematic range. In this volume Campbell again writes poems about the countryside, a variety of love poems, and social and family pieces that look at Australian history and development. By way of contrast he includes in the book two sequences of poems written while travelling through Europe, and an interpretative version of fragments from early Greek poets, Alcman and Sappho.

One influence slightly evident in *Words with a Black Orpington* is that of English poet, Ted Hughes. Campbell, in his interview with Kevin Hart, mentions that he found Hughes to be "an extraordinarily exciting poet,"<sup>6</sup> and in *Deaths and Pretty Cousins* Campbell uses lines from Hughes' poem, "Sugar Loaf" as an epigraph for a poem with the same title. While Campbell claims that Hughes influenced him technically in his move away from strict rhyme schemes, in the early part of *Words with a Black Orpington*, Campbell writes a sequence of three poems

<sup>6</sup>Kevin Hart, "Interview with David Campbell," *Makar* 11, No.1 (June 1975), 7. Comments on technical influence are also from page 7 of this interview.

under the title, "River Music,"<sup>7</sup> which demonstrate some affinities, but which mainly emphasize the gulf between the poetry of Campbell and Hughes.

The first poem of the three, "1. Stones" (p.3), is purely Campbell in its compression and evocation of visual and physical images. In "2. Frogs" (p.3), Campbell, like Hughes, in his precise use of language effortlessly embodies the ideas of the poem, and, at the same time, invokes the movement the ideas make manifest. Although having similarities to Hughes' use of symbolism, the poem is a culmination of Campbell's development of this technique. What is of more importance, however, is Campbell's positive attitude compared to the very bleak vision of Hughes.<sup>8</sup> Thus the lines in the final two stanzas of "Frogs" remain undeniably Campbell's:

... Stars  
Pulse in creek water  
Float like bell-frogs,  
On each brow a gold cross.

Blink. Bonk. Like  
Crowned toads  
Stars speak. Night  
Is infinitely deep

*And like an angel sings.*

In the four poems following "River Music" Campbell does look at a theme common to Hughes, that is the fragility of life under the forces of unthinking violence. These poems are a more

<sup>7</sup>Unless otherwise states all poems in this section are from David Campbell, *Words with a Black Orpington* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1978). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

<sup>8</sup>For a brief introduction to Hughes' work, see Keith Sagar, *Ted Hughes, Writers & their Work Series* (London: Longman, 1972).

oblique comment on environmental issues which Campbell looked at in *Deaths and Pretty Cousins*. They are concerned not so much with the obvious destruction noted in the earlier poems, but with the more insidious problem of extinction through lack of knowledge and forethought. However, to Campbell, the human world remains paramount, and in "Caladenia Orchids" (p.9), the concrete evidence of experience embodied in the "weathered shoes" that were picked up six months after the incident of the lost child, conveys far more to the persona than the folklore associated with the orchids.

Self-imposed human limitations and the problems they engender have been constant themes throughout Campbell's poetry, and in the title poem of the volume (p.11), Campbell presents a very witty but convoluted re-creation of the problem. The first stanza of "Words with a Black Orpington," through the discontinuity of broken syntax following the initial statement, "The dark-haired girl said in the next / Life she would choose to be a chook," conveys the inanity and atmosphere of much of the conversation at parties. In the following two stanzas a comparison is made between limited vision and pragmatic vision. Campbell's ability to employ strikingly fresh and apt images is epitomised in his opening lines of stanza two, where he writes:

A film slid over her bright  
Brown convex eye, And click!

The image not only conveys that of glazed vision, but also links with the "chook" whose vision is even more limited. And, of course, the "Brown convex eye" relates to the Brownie box camera which takes a "still" image. By contrast, in stanza three, the image is anything



but still as the "one tender thought" goes "Nodding around the production curve." Stanza four conveys the indignation of the individual in having one's dream questioned. The final line of the poem, "And she buried her beak, once, in my neck," is a reminder of the problem, and even dangers, of proffering a rational view as an alternative to the self-delusionary views held by those who do not want to look beyond themselves.

This is a very basic reading of "Words with a Black Orpington," for it would appear that taken in the context of the overall book there is a great deal of sexual undertone which is concerned with the problems of human relationships.

In a series of sonnets Campbell looks at both the destructive and positive effects of human love. In "From Anabase" (After Saint-John Perse) (p.24), Campbell uses the obscurity of the French lyric poet's masterpiece to write a poem of equal imaginative force, also somewhat obscure, in which he satirizes the Artemis archetype. In a similar poem, "Canberra Incident" (p.26), mythic feminine power is placed in a present day setting. The love/hate dichotomy is noted in "Old Flames, Old Letters" (p.25), while "Encounter" (For R.D.) (p.27), is a humorous satire on the romantic tales surrounding the theme of love. Two sonnets that follow express the colloquial presentation of love. In "A Letter" (For Dor) (p.28), the romantic theme of the love story with a sad ending is depicted, and "In Search of Summer: Botanical Gardens, Sydney" (p.29) is both a dedication to Slessor's poetry and to a friendship.

In a later sequence, "Portrait of a Lady" (pp.36-40),

Campbell in eighteen brief epigrammatic poems delineates visions of love from the time of Aphrodite until the time when the persona's "bones will be bright / Like a nest of eggs."

Concomitantly, the poem dwells on the complexity of a relationship going from youth to old age.

If, as Campbell claims, Ted Hughes' poetry influenced him to move away from strict rhyme schemes, then "Portrait of a Lady" is the culmination of Campbell's success in this move. Written in free verse, the sequence of poems is held tightly together by the breadth of vision which moves from one image to another evoking an equally wide range of moods. Leonie Kramer, in a comment on Campbell's earlier love poems, pointed out that his range went "from the most gay and lighthearted, through passion and tenderness to worldly cynicism."<sup>9</sup> In "Portrait of a Lady" the range is extended to include erotic imagery, sensitivity, and a new depth of maturity.

In commenting on the fragments from Sappho, Campbell in his notes at the end of *Words with a Black Orpington* (p.62), states that as he rendered the fragments of Sappho's poetry into mosaics he "became bolder, plundering longer passages and the few complete poems" in order to convey Sappho's "passionate complexity." The sequence on Sappho, "Fragments From Marble" (pp.32-35), is in five sections. Campbell writes some of his poems using a complete fragment as translated in the *Lyca Graeca*,

<sup>9</sup>Leonie Kramer, "David Campbell and the Natural Tongue," *Quadrant* 13, No.3 (May/June 1969), 16.

Vol. 1, while others combine a number of fragments into the one image. A successful example of combined fragments can be found in Section III, "To Atthis," No.4 (p.33), where the restlessness noted frequently in Sappho's work is conveyed in the lines:

Never before have I found peace more boring . . .  
Twine anise in your hair . . .  
For I crave delicate things, and glamour and beauty  
Are the same need as my passion for sunlight.

In Section IV, "Love and Marriage," No. 1 (p.33), Campbell's version of a complete fragment conveys all the physicality that Sappho expressed in her fragments on the effects of love:

I see you, and my tongue's sense breaks, a fine fire runs  
Over my skin, eyes blur,  
Ears sing; I shake and sweat, and turn as green  
And pale as the grass, as if my grave was near.

"Fragments From Marble" does build up a cohesive picture of the "passionate complexity" burning through the very incomplete fragments that remain of Sappho's poetry. At the same time this group of poems adds to Campbell's vision of the continuity and diversity found in the complex nature of all human relationships.

Any love story, however, must have moments of peace and harmony, and in "Soundings" (pp.46-47), Campbell synthesizes a deeply felt love into the tranquillity and peace conveyed through the harmony of man and nature. Campbell's search for and interpretation of harmony, through his use of natural symbols, are found in his early poems and continue throughout his work.

Campbell also continues to develop his use of syllabic forms. The poem, "In a Japanese Garden" (p.30), as would be expected, is a sequence of Haiku verses which reflect the wisdom

of old customs. There is another group of Haiku in the initial sequence of Campbell's travel poems, "Mottoes on Sundials" (pp.16-22). This sequence starts with a sonnet and finishes with variations of the Welsh Englyn. It is immediately followed by four poems under the title, "Women and Ladies" (p.23), which again use the Englyn form.

In "Mottoes on Sundials" Campbell uses the syllabic form to follow up his metaphor in the initial sonnet, "Canberra Swallows" (p.16), of the swallows as travellers. Thus in the Haiku group on "Paris" (pp.16-19), the poet alights on motifs such as Braque's paintings and blackbirds singing, and combines them to form an image of the present moment. Campbell also incorporates poetical devices such as repetition and refrains, and, in "Pont Neuf" (p.19), a kaleidoscope from past to present is contained in the three stanzas:

Two geese flew over  
The Pont Neuf swiftly as we  
Crossed the green river.

Ceasar, Charlemagne,  
And others paused here beside  
The west-flowing Seine.

Two geese flew over  
The Pont Neuf swiftly as we  
Crossed the green river.

In "Women and Ladies," four poems taking as their starting point the female subjects of four well-known paintings, Campbell moves back into the use of rhyme in his deployment of the complex pattern of linked, cross and light rhyme that the Englyn form demands. This is exemplified in the first poem, "St George and the Dragon by Uccello":

The lady was out walking with her dragon  
 On a blue leash. St George  
 Pricking on the plain, the chauvinist,  
 Ran the beast through, expecting gratitude.

Section IV of "Mottoes on Sundials" is placed later in the volume, and is under the sub-title, "Grand Tour". This sequence creates a complex historical mosaic ranging in place, time and form. Thus in "Bayeaux Tapestry" (p.48), the syllabic displacement juxtaposed with the refrain, "And with his donkey / A farmer ploughs his field," which changes in the second stanza to "The farmer ploughs the field," conveys both the immense complexity of the tapestry and its line of continuity, but also points out the problem of increasing impersonality as the population grows.

In another series of poems on rock engravings and cave paintings, "Enigmas in Cave and Stone" (pp.14-15), Campbell turns again to the history of his own country. In this sequence Campbell concentrates on the enigmatic aspects of the carvings such as the hornless bulls in "Bull Cave," the reason for the dance in "Sugarloaf," and the mind teasing question of identity and time stirred by the semi-literate message in faint charcoal, "My frend was murded by blacks." Campbell also looks at the destruction of the original carvings and paintings by time and "progress". It is this aspect of the poems that is of prime importance. Over the decade Campbell, starting with the "Ku-Ring-Gai rock carving" poem in *The Branch of Dodona*, has recorded the subject matter of a wide range of carvings and paintings which contributes to the literature on Aboriginal mythology. It is now the poet's vision that attempts to keep the mythology of the dead.

tribes alive.

Methods of recording the initial white settlement of Australia are related in "The Watling Collection" (p.54). In the first of two sonnets, Campbell narrates the story of the early convict artist, Tom Watling. The impact Watling's drawings must have had on the English public is cleverly expressed in the image of the impact of the drawings on the poet as an Australian, when he writes:

In the British Museum, thumbing through the Watling  
Collection,  
A "warratta" and coloured birds fly out  
Screeching of home in hanging bloody London.

The second sonnet describes the unscrupulous methods used by the administrators in obtaining records of the new land.

In the following poem, "Two Views" (p.55), the sonnet is divided into octave and sestet to contrast the idyllic view portrayed by French artist, Lesueur, with Augustus Earle's picture of the dissolution of the Aborigines thirty years later.

Campbell's ability to compress is evident in the final sequence in *Words with a Black Orpington*. "Visions of Life and Death" (pp.57-60) is a sequence of seven sonnets in which the poet quietly tells the story of the rise and fall of a pastoral dynasty. There are no verbal fireworks in this sequence, instead a careful interweaving of words and images maintains the complex atmosphere, and renders the tale into a dramatised version of Australian history.

The final poem in the volume, "Trawlers" (p.61), is again

full of images of death and human failings. However, in a contrasting combination of the more positive elements of natural and Christian imagery, Campbell once more reiterates his view of life as a "blessing."

### 5.3 David Campbell, *The Man in the Honeysuckle*: "Walking Naked."

Leonie Kramer, in 1969, concluded a review of Campbell's poetry by stating, "It displays discipline and strength of mind, delicacy of feeling, humour, and a Yeatsian respect for 'walking naked'."<sup>10</sup> Kramer's statement is equally applicable to Campbell's final volume, *The Man in the Honeysuckle*, which was published shortly after his death in 1979.

Many of the poems in *The Man in the Honeysuckle* were written during Campbell's final illness, and, as would be expected, contain recurring images of death. However, the qualities mentioned above persist to the extent that although at times the poems are quite devastating, they contain no trace of self-pity or complaint.

The volume is divided into five sections which are unified by the consistency of Campbell's personal philosophy which has persisted throughout his work, and can still best be described in A.D.Hope's words, "as a man looking out from the place inside where thinking and feeling goes on and celebrating what he sees."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Kramer, *Quadrant* 13, 17.

<sup>11</sup>See previous reference to Hope's statement, Chapter One, pp. 2-3 of this thesis.

Hope's definition of a poet remains basically applicable to Campbell, but Campbell's "thinking and feeling" has been shaped, as can be seen in the development of his poetry, by an inquiring intelligence and a great deal of sensitivity to everything that makes up both the human and natural environment. What results is what Andrew Taylor classifies as the resonance of good poetry in which "the poet communicates his grasp of something so shared by us, so representative, as to be felt in the unreasoning centre of our being as *mythic*."<sup>12</sup>

Nothing could be more representative of contemporary life than Campbell's concept of matter releasing energy and thought. Thus in "Lizard and Stone" (p.3),<sup>13</sup> the first poem in *The Man in the Honeysuckle*, the "outward stillness" of the lizard and stone is preserved, but their stillness is a prelude to the explosion of the inanimate into the animate. Geoff Page, in his review of this volume, feels that in this poem Campbell "seems to emphasise the interdependence . . . of the animate and the inanimate," and that this is "a relationship which makes death (as a crossing from one to the other) more bearable."<sup>14</sup> To some extent this feeling does arise, Campbell was obviously

<sup>12</sup>Andrew Taylor, "Irrationality Individuality Drug Poetry Romanticism - Where We Are Today," *Meanjin* 31, No.4 (Dec 1972), 379.

<sup>13</sup>Unless otherwise stated all poems in this section are from David Campbell, *The Man in the Honeysuckle* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1979). Page numbers only will be used when referring to poems from this volume.

<sup>14</sup>Geoff Page, "The Inspiration of David Campbell," Rev. of *The Man in the Honeysuckle*, *The National Times*, Week ending Jan 12, 1980, p.29.



coming to terms with his approaching death. However, the emphasis in the early part of the book is unequivocally a celebration of life, for the first poems in this volume are carefully arranged so as to make the definite statement that the poet is still very much alive and "singing." Thus "Lizard and Stone" can be seen as a metaphor for the release of song. This poem is followed by "Cicadas" (pp.4-5), in which, despite an obvious brush with death, the poet remains sitting "among the cauls / . . . Still gripping a pencil stub."

Rosemary Dobson in her tribute to Campbell concluded with the sentence, "And the poetry, as he so often said, is what matters."<sup>15</sup> "Blue Wren" (p.6), reiterates this thought with both delight and self-mockery when it finishes with the lines:

The one living thing,  
The wren on its violin  
Frets out a song:

And the sun, that great oaf,  
Like Jehovah cries from a cloud:  
My son, my son!

And in "A Lark" (p.9), song comes with:

Each song perfect and each song the same  
As full of light as on the day it came

Unbidden in an unguarded hour.

In "Scribbly Gums" (p.13), the first two sequences look at the enigmatic and problematic aspects of writing poetry, while the final sequence recalls the poet's steps through the world of his "own creation." Interspersed through this first

<sup>15</sup>Rosemary Dobson, "A rare poet of his time," *The Age*, Aug. 4, 1979, p.24.

section of the volume are poems giving various views of this world. The most complete is found in "A Yellow Rose" (p.7), where the slow unfolding of light and love, and colour and song, contributes to a sharply-etched visual clarity juxtaposed with a surrealistic opaqueness.

The final three poems in Section one do contain, as Geoff Page pointed out, "the recurring implication that death, while unacceptable enough personally, is but a small and not necessarily negative part of something far larger."<sup>16</sup> The "something far larger" appears to Campbell to be the placing of death in the cyclic ritual of life. Having built up a very definite presence in the earlier part of this section, Campbell in "The Silence of Trees" (p.14), uses two of his favourite symbols, the tree and the bird. The analogy is drawn between the human and nature, and the inference remains in that the tree will regenerate despite the lopped limb, and songs will again be sung. Thus in the title poem, "The Man in the Honeysuckle" (p.15), the interpenetration of man and nature is depicted in the ritualistic burning, symbolising both destruction and regeneration. The regenerative powers of both the natural and human world are further emphasized in the final poem, "To My Mother: On Her Ninety-first Birthday," (p.16).

In the second and third sections of *The Man in the Honeysuckle* Campbell ranges in and out of the past to the

<sup>16</sup>Page, *The National Times*, p.29.

present looking at frequently used images from a new vantage point. As noted throughout his work Campbell's willingness to examine all viewpoints leads to an examination of new forms, and in these poems lines are strongly separated, and punctuation, for the most part, is eliminated.

Music and colour had long been Campbell's trademark, but in Section Two Campbell turns specifically to the instruments in a sequence entitled, "Musical Instruments" (pp.29-30). In these poems each instrument delineates an aspect of nature with the music it resembles. Such a combination can result in some surprising revelations, an example being in "Drums" (p.30), where the poet states:

I did not know before  
That drum music  
Is many coloured.

Many of the poems in Section Three, entitled "With a Blue Dog," remind one of Campbell's Monaro background and, in "Wind in Casuarinas" (p.43), the voice of the farmer is evident in the description of:

Life butting into the world  
With five wants and a howl  
And shambles out with a blue dog.

The countryman's eye is also evident in "The Wimmera" (p.50), where,

. . . the sky fits  
The walls of the horizon  
Like a silver lid.

Section IV, "Yellow Lines," is again concerned with the lines and colour of poetry as a means of capturing the diverse, complex rhythm of life. This is fully expressed in the first

poem in this section which is simply entitled, "Poems" (p.57), and which I will quote in full:

Move in like sharks  
 A little sail-boat  
 That awful proud flesh white  
 --At this point  
 Rhett smiles at Scarlett  
 And bullets converge  
 In slow motion on blindfold men --  
 The shark rolls  
 And the black rose Rambler  
 By the doorjamb  
 Unfolds its velvet red  
 Passion -- poems  
 Can move as slow as  
 Blood from a wound or  
 The rose pruned at your door.

Most of the poems in this section are a blend of surrealistic obliqueness and humour which emphasizes the incongruity and paradoxical nature of much of human activity. The poems build up in pace, starting with the second poem giving an example of the poet's imaginative vision of delight in "The Sunday Dress" (p.58), and move onto the more complex title poem, "Yellow Lines" (p.59), where the poet's delight is emphasized in the colour of his song, even though it must be sung, "From the cage of my yellow Ford." The poems continue with increasing intensity and complexity until in "The Quarrel" (p.66), the poet turns to a very humane depiction of anger which is symbolized in the "Horned Toad / *Ceratophrys varia*."

In the final three poems of Section IV, the thoughts contained in "The Red Telephone Box" (p.67), appear to be an introduction to the final poem, "Two Ways of Going" (pp.69-70).

Although communication is seen to be coming to an end in

"The Red Telephone Box," Campbell's humour remains and, in the first part of "Two Ways of Going" (p.69), the reference to his funeral finishes with the rather wry statement, "I didn't feel a bit like singing." In the second part of "Two Ways" the song, however, remains as:

Over glass and hill  
The snail draws its carriage  
Leaving a silver trail.

Philip Martin makes the observation in his review of *The Man in the Honeysuckle* that "written though it was in illness, it shows no slackening of poetic energy but rather one more advance."<sup>17</sup> Although Martin also felt that the fifth section, "Secret Lives (Poems and Imitations)," lessened the unity of the book, it does appear to be a logical extension of Campbell's complete assimilation of European poetry, and especially the poetry of Vasco Popa. Both Martin and Geoff Page drew attention to stylistic developments that could be attributed to Popa. Page classifies this more precisely when he cites Popa as "a poet who seems to have encouraged Campbell to risk a certain opaqueness if he were to break through to the almost microscopic mysteries of his own particular physical world."<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the earlier sections of *The Man in the Honeysuckle* Campbell's advance in this direction has resulted in him depicting

<sup>17</sup>Philip Martin, "A Brave farewell," Review of *The Man in the Honeysuckle* by David Campbell, *Australian Book Review* 20, (April 1980), 15.

<sup>18</sup>Geoff Page, "David Campbell: the last ten years," *Australian Book Review* 15, (October 1979), 21.

diverse and often intangible views of what is a familiar, ritualistic, but very complex world. Having looked very completely into his own immediate world, and also having spent a number of years working on the translation of Russian poets, it would appear that the final task for the poet would be to relate both the similarities and disparities of what is to most people, an unfamiliar world.

As noted in his earlier work, Campbell's vision was informed by a search for harmony between nature and man. In the first poem of Section V, "The Secret Life of a Leader" (pp.73-74), vision is informed by an entirely different system of initiation which results in a nightmare world. In "Three Looks at Lenin" (pp.75-76), however, the use of natural symbolism to depict clarity of vision relates to the essential essence of humanity. In the final poem in this sequence, the fact that a humane vision has not fully emerged is noted in the rather wistful statement of the last two lines:

"Everything will be understood.  
Everything."

However a regime such as Stalin's is not easy to understand, and in the title of the poem on Stalin, "A Nest of Gentlefolk" (p.77), Campbell's implied analogy portrays the deadliness of Stalin's era.

In his final group of five poems entitled, "Imitations of Osip Mandelstam," poems that Campbell wrote from translations, the intensity and complexity that Campbell built up in the poems that led to his poems on his own death, are repeated in his

arrangement of Mandelstam's poems. The contrast is achieved in that Mandelstam's world is coloured by fear and physical deprivation.

In the last poem (p.80), which recalls Rembrandt's paintings, the end word "twilight" refers both to Mandelstam and to Campbell. Campbell thus finishes his last volume with the implication that his vision of "shade and light" will remain after his death, as has Rembrandt's and Mandelstam's.

*The Man in the Honeysuckle* can be seen as a fitting conclusion to Campbell's career as a poet, for in 1980 it gained recognition for Campbell, posthumously, in winning two awards, the Christopher Brennan Award and the Premier's Literary Award.

There has not been enough lapse of time since his final volume to fully assess Campbell's place in Australian poetry. Certainly his last ten years' writing contributed largely to his complete oeuvre. Yet one can make a tentative evaluation based on his development during this period.

One persistent strand throughout Campbell's work is his clear vision of his environment, with his ability to relate this in new and arresting images juxtaposed with his continuing concern for the place of man within this environment. If his images started off with the "bushmen" of the past, they are, in the end, not entirely divorced from the European figures of his final poems. The fear and loneliness of "Old Tom" resurfaces in Campbell's versions of Mandelstam's final poems. Both figures

are part of humanity. It is, however, his poems concerned with the more positive side of mankind that will be remembered as the hall-mark of Campbell's work, for his celebration of life remained until the very end.

Technically Campbell moved from the "bushman plus" image of the ballad form to contemporary surrealism. His openness to new technique kept open new ways of looking at things, and it is this awareness that more than anything brought Campbell's work fully into the contemporary period.

Kinross Smith claimed, "the Monaro may remain the signature of Campbell's poetry,"<sup>19</sup> but the full story rests on the man in the landscape.

#### 5.4 Conclusion.

As one surveys the poetry of Dobson and Campbell their different approaches and styles become quite evident. There are, however, many similarities which relate mainly to the cultural changes during the forty years under review. Both poets started writing in the forties when Australian poets emerged with new vitality, albeit tempered by conservatism. Both continued writing during the conservative years of the fifties and early sixties; the astringency and questioning of the late sixties; the optimistic and experimental period of the early seventies, and the intellectual assessment seen in the late seventies.

<sup>19</sup>Graeme Kinross Smith, "David Campbell - a Profile," *Westerly* No.3 (September 1973), p.38.



Initially, both were restricted in output by other commitments. Dobson directly expresses the problems involved through her poetry, whereas Campbell demonstrates these restrictions with an outburst of creativity when he was able to become a full-time poet. Perhaps because of the stress of not having sufficient time to write, both arrived early at a concept of turning inwards to find a still centre that could be used as a source of peace and strength, and subsequent creativity. This strain continued throughout their work, and is especially evident in Dobson's later work where she emphasizes the still centre as a source of constancy and inner strength, while retaining the mental flexibility required to explore the many variables and changes that are encountered in all lives.

Throughout their work Campbell and Dobson have both been concerned with a search for enduring and positive values, concurrent with a desire to point out the relevancy of these values to the time in which they were writing. The concerns they have in common do point up, however, a major difference in their stylistic development. Dobson started off uncertain of her view of society, but her development as a poet can be traced through her craftsmanship and use of material. As she became more confident of her craftsmanship she was able to experiment with style, and thus able to express her views on society with an assurance that was not always evident in her early work. Possibly it is this steady, continuous development that has been one of the reasons for neglect of Dobson's work. A detailed comparison

of a number of her early poems with later ones readily shows the very high standard Dobson has obtained in both craftsmanship and her ability to convey an honest and discerning view of life. It is a view, however, that enables her to see beyond the ordinary, and thus retain the "wonder" that is evident throughout her work.

Campbell, on the other hand, started off in a world with which he was very much in tune. It is when the traditions and environment of his familiar world are threatened that Campbell's need to express these changes results, in his work of the late sixties, in a restless searching for new styles. What keeps Campbell's work from disintegrating at this point does appear to be his "countryman's eye." Campbell's use of colour is evident throughout his work. In his early work this use was primarily descriptive, with his images reflecting a purity in colour that can only be seen in a wide vista.

As Campbell's work opened into an exploration of the world beyond his immediate environment, his consistency was retained in his increasing use of colour imagery. It would appear that Campbell's vividly coloured world remains as the "still centre" of poetry that encompasses the many variables of a changing world. When moving into his surrealistic poetry, one could state that Campbell even dreamt in colour. It is perhaps recognition of the ordering of dream and colour that refers one back to the fact that Campbell's sense of traditional craftsmanship is evident throughout all of his work, even in poems of a surrealistic nature.

Thus it can be concluded that both Campbell and Dobson remained orthodox poets concerned with the language and craft of poetry. Although maintaining this conservative background, they both remained open to new forms engendered through a sensitivity to cultural change. Of the two, Campbell is the more eclectic poet being influenced by a greater number of sources than Dobson. Primarily those sources were European, and later, American, in origin. Dobson, on the other hand, in her early work was more influenced by her immediate contemporaries, and it is only in her later work that outside influences are evident.

As has been noted there is very little in the subject matter of Dobson's poetry that relates directly to Australia. From the start, being Australian was incidental to her poetry. However, her assimilation of her environmental and literary background appears with surprising frequency in a completely unobtrusive use of Australian expressions and images.

As Campbell in his early work was writing poems concerned with his immediate environment, and Dobson's subject matter was primarily European in origin, these combinations of influence and subject matter quickly negated the labels of Nationalism and Internationalism.

Consequently, neither poet suffered from the "cultural cringe" (or the contrary assertion, the "cultural strut"), and it is this rejection of such classifications that allowed both Dobson and Campbell to develop their range and techniques as they moved from the Modern to Contemporary period. A survey of their work as two poets unassociated with "groups," and

both strongly individual in style and thought, not only conveys a sense of the development of two individual poets, but also is indicative of the freer development of poetry in Australia over the past forty years.

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