The Poetry of Inglis Clark

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Dread shade of Dryden, back to earth again,
Come and depict the man whose deeds do stain
Australia's record through the dismal years,
In which, between alternate hopes and fears,
She waited for his downfall from the place
Where clothed in bold yet unctuous disgrace
Of broken faith — so cunningly devised
That none could safely say that he had lied,
Posed as a patriot by conscience driven
To bear the burden of the earthly heaven.
The first place in the Commonwealth provides
For one whose constant happiness abides
In floods of talk that simpletons believe
Contains the wisdom they cannot perceive.
Behold the man who at an early day,
In that Convention which prepared the way
For the new Commonwealth to rise and rule,
In sonorous phrases gathered from the school
Of rhetoricians who believe that words
Can serve for deeds and myth with facts accords,
In prospect did that Commonwealth define
'Strong as a fortress, sacred as a shrine'.

This untitled poem of Clark's is doubly untypical. Among surviving poems it is his only step into satire; as well, it far exceeds other poems in bitterness. It is, nevertheless, useful to take it as a point of departure in discussing Clark's verse. Most starkly, it expresses the personal and civically focussed passions underlying most of his surviving verse. Should one seek a title for Clark's savage outburst, intellectually controlled but emotionally unrestrained, one might do worse than 'The Cry of Despair of a Commonwealth Man Betrayed'. Who, then, was the alleged betrayer? When was the poem written? In what circumstances? Answers will be suggested near the end of this paper.

How Many Poems Survive?

Although Clark (1848-1907) has been described as a fairly frequent writer of poetry, until recently it seemed that only a small number of his poems survived. Seventeen poems are in two exercise books in the original deposit of Clark Family Papers in the University of Tasmania Archive.[1] Two of the exercise book poems, 'Hesper' and 'The Streamlet', are also in the 1874 *Quadrilateral*, and so, although there unsigned, can be said to be Clark's. Three unsigned poems in *Quadrilateral* not in the exercise books can also with fair confidence be attributed to Clark. The basis for this claim is that in one of the volumes of *Quadrilateral* held by the Crowther Library (which is part the State library of Tasmania) alterations have been made to these poems in Clark's handwriting.[2] The three are 'In memoriam T G G' (certainly T G Gregson, who in the view of many was one of the patriot heroes of the anti-transportation movement, and who died shortly before the poem appeared), 'In the Garden' and 'The Death Hymn of the Year'. That comes to nineteen poems, counting each poem with a variant as a single poem. There are other unsigned poems in the journal. There is no basis for attributing them to Clark.

The overall situation has changed. We now have more than twice as many Clark poems. Late in 1996 the University of Tasmania Library purchased, at Christie's auction, a notebook containing, written or interleaved, twenty-seven of Clark's poems, twenty-six of them new ('My Pilgrimage' appears again).[3] Among the twenty-six are two versions of 'America: An Ode', and three called 'At the Circus'. Two versions of 'At the Circus' (both unfinished) closely resembled each other, but the third differs so considerably that it probably should be regarded as a different poem. Poems actually in the notebook are in Clark's hand. Those which are interleaved, which include one of the versions of 'At the Circus', are in another hand, that of Clark's wife, Grace, but can confidently be attributed to Clark. A few pages of the newly acquired notebook takes us into the versifier's workshop, listing rhyming words, usually alphabetically. The longest list is 'bun, cun, dun,

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1 University of Tasmania Archives (UTA), Clark Papers, C4/H8 and H9. Or sixteen, if one counts as a single poem 'My Pilgrimage', which occurs in two versions.

2 The name of Carrel Inglis Clark, one of Andrew Inglis Clark's sons, is written inside the front cover. Directly or indirectly, this volume must have passed from father to son.

3 Now in UTA, Clark Papers, C4/H13.

fun, kun, lun, mun, none, pun, run, tun, won, zun'. So, counting the three called 'At the Circus' as two poems, forty-three survive.

The Poems as Biographical Evidence

How far do Clark's poems add to, or provide the basis for revising, our understanding of Clark in the various public and private roles he played? The answer to that question depends in part on the answer to another: Was poetry for Clark marginal to what he saw as life's serious tasks – or did some of it reflect, at least sometimes, heart-and-soul hopes? Those familiar with Clark's sometimes laboured prose may find it hard to see this as a serious question. Clark a poet? But in what seems a late poem, since its subject is his dreams of 'long ago', he implies that when young he felt a strong desire to become, as he put it in the poem, a singer with words.[4] The poem is called 'Boobyalla', an Aboriginal name for acacia or wattle. In north-east Tasmania there is a Boobyalla River, but since its location is remote, and the distribution of the species wide, there is no strong reason to locate the remembered events there. All we need to say is that Clark sat on a shingle-beach, beside or within a fringe of trees, facing the open sea, somewhere in Tasmania. The poem, resurrecting sight and sound, begins:

> A song of the boobyallas
> That cluster above the beach
> Where the surf rolls over the shingle
> With repeated rhythmic speech.

A little later in this poem he writes:

> I sat long years ago
> On the sand beneath their shade,
> And watched the ripple and glow
> The sea and the sunlight made.
>
> Then I dreamed that I should sing
> Before my youth had fled,
> A song whose words would ring
> With music fitly wed.

The twelve verses of the poem are rhythmically disciplined, as is most of Clark's poetry, although some imagery is bland and some rhyming laboured. The foundational rhythm or metre of this poem (as of most of

4 UTA, Clark papers, C4/H13.

Clark's poetry) is iambic, but with conventional variations. Iambic feet are sometimes displaced by anapaestic or trochaic feet, rhythm being varied to strengthen the emphasis and meaning aimed at.

The meaning of the last two sentences will not be clear to many readers today. They refer to what, in Clark's time, was often called the grammar of versification. That Clark was familiar with this can safely be inferred from frequent use of key terms in articles on poetry in *Quadrilateral*. Clarity requires interpolation of a few words on this 'grammar' — sufficient at any rate to analyse Clark's verse. Fortunately, Clark is not metrically ambitious. He rarely goes beyond iambs, trochees and anapaests.

Each line of English verse, according to the traditional 'Grammar', is made up of *rhythmic feet.* Each rhythmic foot consists of one accented syllable plus either one or two unaccented syllables. In Clark's verse the rhythmic feet are usually of three kinds: an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one (this is an *iambic* foot); an accented syllable followed by an unaccented one (this is a *trochaic* foot); and two unaccented syllables followed by an accented one (this is an *anapaestic* foot). A line of verse with three rhythmic feet is a trimeter; one with four is a tetrameter; and one with five is a pentameter, and so on.

To return to 'Boobyalla'. A later verse in this poem might be of special interest to a biographer — and it is metrically clever, too. The regular iambic feet of the verse's first line, the only rhythmically regular one, set the scene for the paradox stated in the next. The anapaestic feet in lines two, three and four (one in the second line, two in the third, and one in the fourth) have a double effect: first, to integrate the strong almost entirely mono-syllabic images in those lines; second, to sustain emphasis on the paradox expressed in the second line. I mark accented syllables by vertical superscript.

> Then fo'llowed ye'ars of to'il
> A re'spite from to'il to ga'in,
> And my li'fe was wo'und in a co'il
> Of stru'ggle and stri'fe and pa'in.

That Clark did not altogether forget the dream of being a singer with words is, of course, evidenced by exercise books packed with the poems of a lifetime. Arguably, they represent a recurring want or need; although frequent rewriting or retouching may carry a second message, of dissatisfaction with them. In only one other poem, apparently written overseas, does he refer to poetic exaltation in his boyhood. The verses are part of a larger poem, but can stand alone poetically. The declaratory effect of the basic trochaic structure is brought to closure by the softer

iambic measure of the third last and last lines. When his heart grew bolder, he writes, a string was touched, bringing back memory of

> Something of thy dawn lit raptures
> fading in the haze of time
> That had power to bear me upward
> on the beating wings of rhyme.
>
> Comrades of my dreamy boyhood and
> the visions that I knew
> Vainly do I seek to whisper words across
> the sea to you.[5]

The fourth line in the first verse lifts the poem, partly because 'rhyme' rhymes, but more because the pulsing words 'beating wings' are almost a natural symbol of verse rhythm.

Attesting to the dream of singing the songs of the Australian-nation-to-be are the articles about Henry Kendall and Adam Lindsay Gordon in the 1874 *Quadrilateral*. The articles are unsigned, and there is a question as to authorship. A typed note by J W Beattie, in the volume of the journal lodged in the National Library of Australia, states that J C Witton wrote most of the poetry, and if that is so, it is at least possible he wrote some or even all of the unsigned articles about poets. *Quadrilateral* contained one poem with Witton's initials. More to the poinr, Witton published poetry in Melbourne where he lived from 1882, and poetry was one of the many interests shared between Clark and Witton in extensive correspondence extending to 1905.[6] However, as noted, there are strong reasons for seeing Clark as composer of many of the unsigned poems in *Quadrilateral*. It is therefore safe to say that Clark probably wrote the following about Kendall, whose lyrics he admired but in whose other poems he found shortcomings:

> The grandeurs of the epic and the varied drama have not lent their energies to [Kendall]; nevertheless he has voiced for Australia with no unworthy inspiration, and will always maintain an honourable position among those who are the forerunners of him who is to sing the fuller-actioned, federated, and indissoluble Island-continent.[7]

That only Clark could have written this is a perfectly reasonable supposition.

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5 UTA, Clark Papers, C4/H13.
6 UTA, Clark Papers, C4/C316-379.
7 'Henry Kendall', p. 196.

Also of interest to a biographer, because they attest to an aspect of Clark's early inner life, are self-referring lines from the second and fuller version of 'My Pilgrimage', his account of his 1890 visit to Italy.[8] 'Long years', he says at the poem's start,

> I craved to see the distant land
> Made sacred by the toils and tears and blood
> Of men who bore engraved upon their hearts
> The name of Italy.

Especially, Clark's eager eyes sought,

> Some trace or record of the holy war
> Fought to expel the Austrian and the priest,
> Some sign or emblem of that task achieved.

This 'trace or record' he found shortly after the initial landing at Brindisi:

> The record of my youth with all its dreams,
> Unrolled before me as I lingered,[9]
> And in the rapture of that silent hour
> I found them all fulfilled.

In a third self-referring passage, Clark casts his mind's eye both back and forward:

> In that bright vision which my youth beheld
> Of crumbling creeds that have immured so long
> The souls of men and shut them from the light
> That penetrates the masks
>
> That falsehood wears, and shows the pathway where
> Truth beckons to the world to follow her.
> Attended by that vision I shall go
> In peace down to my tomb.

How Good a Poet was Clark?

Certainly he was a busy one, but so are many writers of poor poetry. So was Clark a good one? The question of the excellence or otherwise of his poetry, *as* poetry, is one I prefer to fudge. Clark was comfortably literate in conventional rules of versification, but so are some whose

8 UTA, Clark Papers, C4/H8.
9 At the monument to Mazzini.

poetry would generally be seen as bad. Such literacy might well be a necessary condition of good poetry in the nineteenth century sense, but it is nonsense to see it as sufficient. So I am content to replace the question of the goodness or otherwise of Clark's verse with another measure which is more manageable. How expressively apt are the poems *as verse*. The 'as verse' rider is in my view essential. Some prose is expressively powerful, but that does not make it good poetry. What is needed to make expressive writing powerful *as poetry* is metrical form; that, together with the ringing of variation in such form, creates expressive power. In my view, all of Clark's poems (lyrics, epics, etc) have some expressive power, as verse, and some have it to an impressive extent. Often, as in the Boobyalla poem, expressive power varies significantly.

A preliminary Classification

Sorting Clark's poems, if one wishes to be thorough, must be an exercise in multi-valent approximation. A twofold classification, however, is a useful starting point. Beyond it I shall not travel far. The majority of his poems are, on their face, personal and private, although a fairly small sub-set – the love poems – were probably meant for other eyes. The concept of the private or personal in such poems is stretched, not broken. A rather complex example is 'The Yellow Leaf', which contains the verse:

> Path of age is lonely now
> Rugged as my care-word brow
> And my life too soon shall bow
> Down to earth.

A solitary expression, one might think, until one sees the next line, which has perhaps unintended overtones of Tennyson's *Ulysses*:

> Yet though of much bereft,
> Can I grieve while thou art left,
> And so many joys are weft
> With thy smile.

This turns into a love poem. The mood of the intimate poems is melancholy. This pervades yet is mitigated, as in this love poem. Some poems lament the deaths of others; some, the prospect of Clark's own; others both.

Other poems imply either a group setting or shared perspective. While sometimes intimate, such intimacy is of shared experience and aspiration. This common experience is not necessarily that shared with members of the coterie which met regularly at Clark's home — which in more formal moments called itself the Minerva Club. Some poems in this category were clearly produced for a group occasion. Of others one can say they might have been shared, without knowing whether this happened.

There is, generally, a noticeable difference of mood and style between intimate poems and those for whom a group or set of readers or listeners may have been presupposed. As a prop for analysis, the distinction is obviously imperfect. A few poems fit as comfortably into one category as the other. A small number belong in neither.

Personal and Intimate Poems

Separation and loneliness are common themes. Clark was reputed to be a vivacious and lively companion, but rarely was that expressed in an intimate poem. One would not infer his public persona from these poems. The prospect of his own death, presumed not far distant, is a feature of nearly all. The possibility of personal survival after death, involving reincarnation, is toyed with in one poem, but I suspect not seriously. The possibility that dead spirits may commune with each other is entertained in another, but on my reading without optimism. Evidence of Clark's evolutionary and progressive beliefs appears, however, in his expressed hope that tomorrow's world would be better than today's.

One should take care in drawing inferences from the overall bleakness of Clark's personal and intimate poems, although without question they reveal *something* important about Clark's temperament or personality. Perhaps only in a limited range of circumstances (feeling certain kinds of gloom being one) did Clark feel a poem coming on. Any inference that Clark was *usually* melancholy is radically unsafe. What might plausibly be suggested is that episodic melancholia and relentless energy underlay a highly-strung personality. Clark's death on 14 November 1907 occasioned many detailed and fulsome tributes, but to my knowledge only one, from Alexander Hume, at the time editor the *Tasmanian News* and a close acquaintance of nearly forty years, could be called rounded in a deep sense. Hume was also Hobart correspondent of the Launceston *Daily Telegraph*, and it was in that paper on 15 November that Hume's 'personal Reminiscence' and an extended essay on Clark appeared. Here are pertinent extracts from the latter:

> Mr Justice Clark has joined the great majority. When one first knew him he was plain Andrew Clark, a student, a worker, and a real, right-down good fellow. When two men can claim an acquaintance of nearly forty years, as was the case with Mr Justice Clark and the writer, they know something about one another. ... Debating societies were strong in those days. The Scotch Church of St John's, Macquarie Street had one attached to it ... By nature impetuous and impulsive, Andrew Clark made his presence felt on the debating floor. He was so thorough in working up his subject that it was extremely difficult for a superficial speaker, no matter how brilliant he might be as regards oratory, to get under his defence.
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> ... One's own impression is that he made a mistake ever to touch politics. His nature was too impressionable and his temperament too finely strung to stand political ricks. One has seen him in his finest moments in the House work himself up to a pitch of excitement that would try the nerves of a much stronger man to stand the racket.[10] His strenuous work in reading for the law — he was touching thirty when he passed — must have told upon him. ... A short time ago one met him in the street, when he remarked that his health was anything but good. 'Why don't you stop flogging hard', remarked one. 'You have been doing it ever since I knew you. The string must crack some day.' 'I wish I could,' was the reply. 'Sometimes I try to go slow, because I think it is good for me, but there is always something coming along to upset me. Its no use, my temperament is different to yours.'

'In Captivity', the first example in this section, is a bleak poetic statement. The poem begins, 'I stood within a time-worn tower', and continues in fluent, elegiac, iambic. Two extracts capture the flavour of this poem:

> The monotone that filled my ears
> Became the rush of memory's wings
> Which took me back to perished years
> And placed me mid forgotten things.

Monotone' is a curious word. It is perhaps interesting because like 'rush' in the next line it is an aural quasi-metaphor. Unexplained allusions are common in Clark's poems. *He* knew what he meant, which for him may have been all that mattered. Adam Lindsay Gordon, whom Clark praised as Australia's finest poet, used 'monotone', in a poem Clark knew, to

10 Hume was well-placed to talk about Clark in parliament. He was *Tasmanian News* parliamentary reporter during much of the 1890s.

describe the sound of surf heard from a distance. This may be a clue as to Clark's meaning and the location of the tower.[11] Clark continues:

> Anon I woke out of my dreams
> And knew I had no part
> In all that made the earth once seem
> A gracious presence to my heart.[12]

A pessimistic estimate of prospects for the soul after death finds expression in the elegy 'God's Acre by the River'.

> At rest for evermore they seem to lie
> Whose bodies mingle with their kindred dust;
> No voice comes back to strengthen human trust,
> And faith bows down bereft of love's reply; –
> By silence thralled, in voiceless darkness thrust,
> Divided from our sense are those who die.
> Perchance that unknown calm
> May sweeten life in unimagined spheres;
> But never yet there fell, for prayer or psalm,
> An answer to our tears.
>
> We deem, whatever sev'rance there may be,
> That we whose spirits struggle with the flesh
> Are linked with those who drink from fountains fresh
> Yet lose not all their mortal sympathy.
> So deem we, but the mystic woven mesh
> Enfolds us that we neither hear nor see;
> And, fainting with a doubt,
> We look upon the unresponding skies,
> While dark and light mete time and season out,
> And life is born and dies.[13]

Perhaps those at rest were family members but Clark, as often, is light on circumstantial detail. His spirit, if around, might respond that he was not writing for outsiders. Competence as a versifier is evident. Rhyming is strict and imagery apt, though conventional. Most lines (all are strict

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11 I partly have in mind the article 'Adam Lindsay Gordon' in the *Quadrilateral*. The word 'monotone' is in Gordon's 'Song of the Surf' reprinted on p. 230 of that article. Probably the Gordon article is Clark's, too, but in any event the wreath of finest Australian poet is posthumously awarded to Gordon in the *Quadrilateral* article on Kendall. I suggest there is little doubt Clark wrote this.

12 UTA, Clark Papers, C4/H13.

13 UTA, Clark Papers, C4/H8.

iambic) are composed of five long syllables, but four are of three syllables. These three lines (lines seven and ten, and the fourth last and final lines) mark points of emphasis. Longfellow's 'God's Acre' may have been in Clark's mind. If so, the intention was perhaps ironic. Longfellow's poem was predicated on the calm and certain hope of the resurrection in orthodox Christian terms.

In another poem, the longest of three versions of 'At the Circus', Clark explores the theosophical/Buddhist idea of the eternal transmigration of souls. We know he sometimes found this attractive.[14]

...
I look upon the sea
Of children's faces upon every side,
And there came back to me
The days and scenes wherein the purple tide
Of joy was at the flood
In every vein through which my beating heart
Propelled the eager blood
That flushed my cheeks and set my lips apart,
As horse and rider sped
Within the charmèd ring that seemed to me
A truer heaven than that to which they said
Good children went to find their destiny.

But yet another joy I knew,
More constant in its magic power
To give the skies a deeper blue,
And every day the world renew
With glories of a dream and dower.

'Twas in my drum I found that joy,
Its rattle told a tale to me
That never since to man or boy
Was told again, nor could it be;
For each new soul that wanders down
To this sad earth from realms afar,
To find his fate as lord or clown,
Brings with him from his natal star
A memory that is all his own,
Of glories that for him alone,
The sight and sounds of earth recall.
Hence in the rattle of my drum
I heard sweet sounds that seemed to come
From that far home beyond the wall

14 'An Untrodden Path of Literature.' Clark Papers C4/F31.

That earth and sky built day [by] day
Around me as I learned to stray
Farther and farther from its light;
And when my soul shall take its flight
To find another place of birth,
I shall ask no more to make complete
The joy I knew when a child on earth,
If they give me a drum in that realm to beat.

The music has ceased, the lights are low,
The ring is empty, let us go.

As with the 'Boobyalla' poem, this one is rhythmically artful, but in my view more consistently so. Variation in the metrical pattern are not random and enhance meaning and force. The ballad rhythm of the first ten lines of the first stanza (alternating iambic pentametres and trimetres) has the effect of imitation, and evocation by imitation, of the pulsing of Clark's blood; while the general shift to regular iambic pentametres in the last three lines of this stanza marks and emphasises the sudden turn to wry inward reflection. The regular iambic tetrametres in the second and most of the third stanzas enable Clark smoothly to extend reflections on his childhood drum, as symbol and happy reminder of a 'far home beyond the wall that earth and sky built'. The sudden displacement of iambic by trochaic rhythm in the first foot ('Farther and farther from its light;') arrests and brings closure to the reflective build-up of the stanza; and the last five lines look not backwards but forwards, to renewal, beyond death of the joy glimpsed in childhood. The last five lines of the stanza are iambic, but lightened, given a joy-like spring, by the substitution of anapaests for iambs at the start of the third last line of the stanza, in the third foot of the second last line, and in the first three feet of the stanza's last line. The poem closes on a subdued note. The last stanza beats a solemn retreat, signalled by the substitution of an anapaest for an Iamb in the second foot of the first line. This has the effect of throwing emphasis on 'ceased' — from light to shade. The final couplet is otherwise regular iambic. Metrical rhythm distributes emphasis to point up the succession of key images and thereby strengthen expressive power. It would be interesting to know, although one cannot tell, whether this powerful poem preceded or followed 'God's Acre by the River'.

More cheerful personal statements are represented in the following two untitled poems:

Before mine eyes in death

Shall cease to find the light,
Bear me Urania[15] on thy wings
Beyond the eagle's flight

Then let my spirit see
Its constant dream fulfilled;
...[16]

And:

Send down, ye everlasting stars,
Your brightest rays from heaven tonight
...
And through the gloom that veils my soul,
Woven of shadows of the past,
Send down a message from your heights,
That love shall conquer all at last.[17]

'A Winter Sunset' is a love poem, of which I present the last three verses. Symbols (sunlight and chill wind) are deployed systematically and fairly effectively. Efforts to explain them are perhaps a little laboured. The metrical rhythm is consistently iambic, apart from the trochaic reversal in the third line of the top verse, which serves to place emphasis on 'deep' and 'heart'.

The sunshine and the chilling breeze
Betoken well the thoughts that lie
Deep in my heart as on the hills
I watch the shadows fade and die.

The sunshine is the memory
Of that bright day when, at my side,
My love looked on these fields and hills,
And watched with me this flowing tide.

Her absence is the chilling breeze
Which ever echoes back to me
The words that murmur on my lips
'Apart from thee, apart from thee'.[18]

15 In Greek mythology the muse of astronomy.
16 Clark Papers, C4/H8
17 Clark Papers, C4/H8.
18 Clark Papers, C4/H8.

I conclude this section with a fragment of intimate verse which has the distinction of being cheerful. That it *is* a fragment may be significant. Though short, it has a title: 'Corra Lynn', a then-fashionable beauty spot near Launceston.

> He who would her charm discover
> Must have sought her as a lover,
> Wooed her with a love unspoken,
> Or with words but faint and broken.[19]

The context and meaning are close to unfathomable. The last line is a bit limp. Perhaps the poem survives as a private verbal joke from the courting days of Andrew Clark and Grace Ross.

Poems for Possible Group Use

Other poems tend to be forward-looking, activist, hopeful of better times to come – although the degree of optimism varies considerably. These are personal, but not intimate — shareable in some contexts without embarrassment. Most, probably, were shared. Heroes bulk large in some poems, in an evolutionary struggle, sometimes of cosmic dimensions, between value and non-value. Such heroes may be civic or national or free-thinking or spiritual, or of course some combination of these. Reality's tendency is towards individuation, individuality and production of variety, but such progressive evolutions need, nonetheless, to be struggled for. Psychically and emotionally, many poems in this category are located within this struggle. Long-term prospects for national self-determination, and for liberty, equality and fraternity as principles of civic order, are implied to be, at least, not bad; although given that melancholy is something like the default mood of many intimate poems, it must at least be a question, although one hard to answer, how far it is also at work in his fighting poems.

It is worth noting that Clark often singles out heroes in his poems, especially in 'My Pilgrimage'. He nearly always indicts enemies of progress in general or wholesale terms ('a people too proud', 'the priest', 'monarchy and devildom'). There are two exceptions: first, a brief reference to 'sordid Monck's' role in betraying the English Commonwealth; second, the poem at the beginning of this paper, where, although the betrayer is not named, his identity can be inferred. One might mention in passing another named betrayer, Oliver Cromwell, although in that case ('The Commonwealth v. Cromwell', reproduced

19 Clark Papers, C4/H13.

elsewhere in the Home Page) the indictment is in essay form. What all three have in common is betrayal of the ideal of commonwealth.

Clark more than once tried his hand at poems which celebrate emergent Australian nationality. The genre is notoriously difficult. Because the vocabulary is widely shared, it must be a fairly small one. High diction is also called for, practically by definition. With a limited vocabulary, and this constraint on style, it is difficult to avoid the banal. In practice, given these problems, a good tune may be worth its weight in gold. That Clark, sometimes achieves freshness makes his verses in this genre more impressive than might at first appear.

> A vision of a people set free
> From the bonds and the toys of the past
> Never bending the head or the knee
> To the shadows of rank and caste.
>
> A people whose flag shall be void
> Of all traces of sceptre or crown
> The flag of a people too proud.
>
> Australia one and undivided
> Let that vision seen afar
> Mark with light the path provided
> By it as thy guiding star.

In another effort Clark refers to an Australian 'banner'. Given the reference to stars, as well, the subject is perhaps the Southern Cross but there are Yankee overtones:

> Its stars flash in the sun,
> Its ample folds proclaim,
> That thou art sovereign of thyself
> Sole guardian of thy fame.
> ...
> Australia, thou alone
> Our sovereign lord shall be.
> No other land shall own or claim
> Thy children's fealty.

The United States was of course the preferred model in the Clark picture of Australia's manifest destiny. In a poem from 1876 Clark declared:

> We the people of the vast South land –
> The forerunners, builders, pioneers –

We Australians knitting hand to hand
Hail the closing of thy hundred year.
...
We salute thee – we the younger race
Sprung from the giant hearted Isle
From whose breast thou, too, hast drawn the grace
Which no change shall weaken or defile
...
We thy kinsmen, round thine altars stand,
In a faith imperishable true.

References follow to Washington, Hamilton and Lincoln. Clark wrote several versions of a long poem: 'America: An Ode', in which he proclaims America's heroes, and the virtues of that republic.

Columbia! thy step elate
Treads, shod with peace, the fields of morn,
Thy sword to freedom dedicate,
Within its sheath is worn.

typifies its style and flavour. Clark had a kind of theory, here, which is set out in 'The Future of the Australian Commonwealth: A Province or a Nation?', and is prefigured by that essay's title: *Nations* may have heroes as 'sons and servants', but not provinces or colonies. If the Commonwealth is ever to contribute 'distinctive figures to the pantheon of humanity it must evolve them out of a distinctive national life'.

Italy was for Clark, as noted, a major arena of triumphs and disasters of the human spirit. Recent liberal triumphs in that nation had arisen from what he saw as half a millennium of struggles for civil and religious liberty against religious and imperial aggression.

England, too, supplied martyrs and exemplars in Clark's pantheon, but on the evidence of surviving poems these were less plentiful.[20] A Clark poem honours the 'regicide' (as he is described in the *Dictionary of National Biography*) Sir Henry Marten. Marten had been a signatory of the death warrant of Charles I. Perhaps Clark had visited the tower in Chepstow Castle in which Marten was imprisoned after the Restoration. Perhaps the poem was occasioned, rather, by the photograph or painting of the tower which, according to the recollection of his son, Carrel, hung in his father's study and library. In response to one, or other, or perhaps both, Clark wrote 'Henry Martyn's Tower':

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20 But in an essay of Ca 1902-3, 'The Future of the Australian Commonwealth: A Province or a Nation', the list of heroes is longer. See below chapter 12.

The solid tower by ivy overgrown
Where Martyn was inured for half his life
Remains today a fitting monument
Of faithfulness to death in him whose name
It bears. When sordid Monck betrayed the cause
That he had sworn forever to protect,
And brought back monarchy and devildom
To smirch the name of England with their crimes.[21]

In a sonnet composed to be read at some kind of reunion of friends, a complex contrast is developed between sadness at friends absent, dead or overseas, and joy over those present. The combination threatens emotional contradiction but this is transcended, in the last two lines. The poem, which exists in slightly different versions, cannot be early but is hard to date because one cannot, confidently, identify the reunion. Perhaps it was the Minerva circle, whose pleasures cannot all have been cerebral, and the mention of past days when his 'heart with hope beat high' is certainly Minerva-like. But the references to 'consecrated ground', and to making day and night 'resound with mirthful echoes of exulting song', could hardly be to the library at 'Rosebank'. It points more readily to some other fraternal or social context. A possible candidate is the old Hobart High School (founded in 1848 and closed in 1885) and attended by Clark. This was housed in a fine post-Gothic building which later became the principal home of the university. Perhaps Clark addressed something like a High School Old Scholars group. Another possibility is another kind of nursery — one of the Hobart debating societies — but 'consecrated ground' becomes hard to interpret if this was the case.

Once more upon the consecrated ground
Where in past days my heart with hope beat high,
Mid many changes, as I gaze around,
Familiar spots attract the tearful eye;
And those who then made day and night resound
With mirthful echoes of exulting song
Are here to greet me as a lost one found.
Alas! not all; else would these tears do wrong
To their true love who still make joy abound;
For some, whose voices once were heard among
Those that remain, are now beyond the sun;
Others the moaning waves from us divide;
Hence these moist eyes, as memory one by one

21 'Henry Martyn's Tower', Clark Papers, C4/H9.

Makes them return and brings them to my side.

The shift from the solemn iambic pattern of the first ten lines to the abrupt trochaic rhythm of lines eleven and twelve compresses, and adds power to, the contrast between friends present and absent, and sets the scene for the solemn but triumphant resolution of tension in the last two lines.

Miscellaneous Poetry Fragments

A few short poems or poetry fragments do not fit comfortably into either of the above categories and are conveniently grouped separately.

Clark lamented what he saw as the repetitiveness, the unamenability to poetic sensibility, of Australian life. The poem below, reflecting but not solving the problem he saw as posed by the lack of days before 'yesterday', sinks into banality in the last line. Kendall and Gordon were poetic explorers rather than founding fathers. That Clark left the poem unfinished may itself carry meaning, given that he once dreamed of becoming the singer of a new song in a new land:

What can a poet find to sing
In this new land of yesterday.
The daily joys and woes that bring
Laughter and weeping day by day
Have all been sung in notes so sweet.[22]

The Betrayer

I return to the bitterly satiric poem with which this essay began. It was Drydenesque, in both form and imagery, and was probably modelled on John Dryden's satirical attack on the Earl of Shaftesbury in his two-part poem of 1681 and 1682, 'Absolom and Achitophel'.[23]

Who was the claimed betrayer, debaser of the federal spirit? It took me a long time to find out. The words in the last line of the poem come from a major speech by Alfred Deakin to the 1891 Federal Convention in Melbourne[24] — a speech by 'Affable Alfred' as some called him, perhaps

22 Clark Papers, C4/H13.

23 Achitophel represented Shaftesbury.

24 Deakin looked to creation of a 'constitutional edifice' 'which shall stand strong as a fortress and be held sacred as a shrine', *Official Reports of the National Australasian Convention Debates*, Sydney, 1891, p. 86.

hinting at shallowness.[25] This discovery surprised me, since Clark and Deakin corresponded fairly often, seemingly on cordial terms. When Deakin campaigned in Hobart in the 1903 federal election, the *Mercury* reported that he was to be guest of his friend, Mr Justice Clark.

There is little doubt as to the poem's context. In 1903 the Barton government, moving to create a High Court, at first planned that five justices be appointed. Deakin, then federal Attorney-General, inquired of Clark whether, should a seat on the proposed bench be offered to him, he would accept. Clark said he would be pleased to. Moved, apparently, by concern over the cost of the new judicial establishment the federal government then reduced appointments to the Bench from five to three. The chosen three were two members of the federal government, Edmund Barton and Richard O'Connor, with, as chief, Samuel Griffith, who had been Chief Justice of Queensland. A disappointed Clark accepted non-appointment gracefully as he was bound to do. The issue of expanding the Bench to five was not, however, closed. Clark had argued for a Bench of five in a 1902 paper which he had forwarded to Deakin, an important paper reproduced elsewhere in this volume, and Clark was far from alone in this view. Deakin, himself, agreed with him. Michael Roe in his Introduction to that paper, traces the sequel to the appointment of the first Bench, with particular reference to activities and views of Clark, who remained hopeful of appointment should the Bench be expanded to five. Roe draws attention to a letter from Clark to an old friend, who was now a member of the Federal parliament: 'It was always a dream of mine to be a member of the Court'.[26] If there are natural progressions in life, this would have been one of them. In 1906 the Court was expanded to five. This took place in Deakin's second Prime Ministership. Clark, anxiously reading the political auspices, did not abandon hope. Nor, as Roe makes clear, did he cease to urge his claims through friends in Deakin's government; but he had, for what turned out to be good reason, grown pessimistic about his prospects. Writing to a friend, Thomas Bavin, shortly after the new Judiciary Bill passed the House of Representatives, Clark stated:

> At one time I would have believed that the enactment of such a law with Deakin for Prime Minister of the Commonwealth meant the representation of Tasmania in the composition of the enlarged Court. But I have an

25 Unfairly, since Deakin's inner life is shown by his private notebooks and manuscript prayers to have been as complex and rich as Clark's. See Al Gabay, *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin*, Melbourne, 1992. However, what Clark saw in Deakin at the time the poem was written was not shallowness, but hypocrisy and betrayal of the substance of the ideal of Commonwealth.

26 Clark to G B Edwards, 10 September 1906. MS 1768, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

> impression now that all federal positions have become the subject of political bargaining between the several parties and sections represented in the Federal parliament. I am very sorry to come to this conclusion, but I must confess that I have become disillusioned about the higher and more patriotic level of political life and conduct which I expected to see under federation.[27]

The distance from that letter to the bitterness over betrayal of the federal cause expressed in the poem is not great. Around that time Clark suffered something like a nervous breakdown,[28] and took extended leave. Disentangling cause and effect might now be difficult if not impossible.

Reflections on Clark's Poetry

In many of the unpublished essays in the Clark Papers which read as if meant for the ears or eyes of close friends – for members of the Minerva Club, perhaps – Clark appears strongly as egalitarian, as a liberal democrat, as a republican, as an Australian nationalist, and as a deep admirer of the United States as path-blazer in defining civil and religious liberty. He strongly affirmed 'the inherent dignity and preciousness of human nature' and fiercely opposed any kind of civic privileging of priestly power. In any 'genuine democracy', he declared, three factors must be found. First, an elected legislature representative of all opinions; second, recognition that the composition of all majorities be transitory; and third, that fundamental laws protect the natural rights of the individual from the majority of the hour. In the poems which read as if intended to be shared with friends, a closely similar set of values is expressed.

In what I call the intimate poems, those which read as deeply personal expressions, Clark shows aspects of his thoughts and feelings little in evidence elsewhere among the Clark Papers. For those seeking to study his life, that is their chief value. Such students might regret that he kept no personal diary. That he did not is almost certain.[29] Had he done so allusions to it must have popped up *somewhere*. If an indignant biographer's shade ever confronted Clark about this, Clark might have

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27 Clark to Thomas Bavin, 26 July 1906, Bavin papers, MS 560, National Library of Australia.

28 *The Examiner* (Launceston) stated in a 21 November 1907 obituary article that an illness Clark suffered, about a year earlier, had been a 'nervous one'.

29 He did keep a combined scrapbook-commonplace book, now in possession of Professor Alex C McLaren, but while this shows something of Clark's interests, it discloses next-to-nothing of his intimate side.

laughed — and said: 'Why should I have done that? I had my exercise books.'