

‘Weird Melancholy’: Inner and Outer Landscapes in Marcus Clarke’s Stories

When Hamilton Mackinnon collected Clarke’s stories in *The Austral Edition of the Selected Works of Marcus Clarke* (1890),¹ he placed as the first item of the ‘Australian Tales and Sketches’ section two pages entitled ‘Australian Scenery’. This justly famous passage, originally part of the text accompanying reproductions of two paintings, Louis Buvelot’s ‘Waterpool Near Coleraine’ and Nicholas Chevalier’s ‘The Buffalo Ranges’ in *Photographs of the Pictures in the National Gallery, Melbourne* (1874), had been incorporated into Clarke’s preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon’s poems in 1876 and frequently reprinted.² It was certainly not a tale, even if arguably a sketch. But its inclusion set a tone for Clarke’s stories that followed, even if it was not the tone that Clarke set. The expected feature of Australian stories by the 1890s was clearly up-country description. Yet when we turn to Clarke’s stories, such landscape descriptions are generally marginal. Mackinnon’s incorporation of the passage into ‘Australian Tales and Sketches’ suggests an attempt to supplement the comparative lack of scenic settings in the stories themselves.

As the passage demonstrates, the relative absence of landscape writing in the stories was not a result of any inability in Clarke. Rather, the mode had already been perceived as ended. The passage was a verbal

1 Hamilton Mackinnon, ed., *The Austral Edition of the Selected Works of Marcus Clarke*, Melbourne, 1890. The stories were grouped in two parts, ‘Australian Tales and Sketches’ and ‘Stories—Imaginative and Fanciful’. These two parts are reprinted in facsimile, repaginated, as *Stories by Marcus Clarke*, Sydney, 1983. All quotations are from this edition. Mackinnon retitled many of Clarke’s stories. I give Clarke’s title first and Mackinnon’s in parenthesis. Clarke was born 1846, died 1881.

2 See L. T. Hergenhan, ‘Marcus Clarke and the Colonial Landscape’, *Quadrant* 13 (1969): 31–51.

equivalent for paintings already there in photograph. Reproduced in black and white, Clarke brought to them verbal colour. But the text is moribund, if not superfluous. Written to illuminate the mechanically reproduced art, the obsolescence of the mode is apparent to the most cursory inquiry. Clarke looked into the technological future often enough—in ‘Arcades Ambo’ (‘Squatters Past and Present’) with its concluding vision of ‘squatting on scientific principles’, in Dr Cannabis’ proposals for mankind’s future chemical life and conversion by hypodermic syringe in the ‘Noah’s Ark’ column;³ and in the monograph *The Future Australian Race* (1877). Technical developments were superseding the verbal landscapist’s tradition. Colour photography and cheap colour printing were not far away.

It is only in ‘Pretty Dick’ (1869) that we are conscious of sustained passages of natural description. And to dwell on them in this story of a child’s death in the bush is something that seems hardly proper to do. The theme is so harrowing that the reader—this reader, anyway—shies away. The foregrounding of landscape here serves to delay dealing with the painful human experience. The landscape is dwelt on to avoid the suffering, and that avoidance, of course, serves only to underline the suffering, to enforce the full pathos of the situation. It is a technique Clarke was to use with similar effect in *His Natural Life* (1874).⁴

Francis Adams half recognizes the technique in his dismissal of the story:

He sat down, deliberately and of malice prepense, to make a special ‘study’ of the bush scenery.

Unhappily, he also made it a special ‘study’ of the pseudo-pathos of Dickens.⁵

The “‘study” of the bush scenery’ is the acceptable subject that displaces the unacceptable death of the child: and the focus on the

3 *Australasian* (12 July 1873), reprinted in L. T. Hergenhan, ed., *A Colonial City: High and Low Life. Selected Journalism of Marcus Clarke*, St Lucia, 1972, pp.275–81.

4 See Michael Wilding, *Marcus Clarke*, (Australian Writers & Their Work), Melbourne, 1977, p.22.

5 Francis Adams, ‘Two Australian Writers’, *Fortnightly Review* 309 (1 September 1892), reprinted in Adams, *The Australians*, London, 1893, p.110.

scenery develops the powerful suspense, the delay of the inevitable closure. For with the closure of the story we know will come the child's death. The long drawing out of the story is the emotional refusal of closure, the more scenic description the later the inevitable facing of the end. And the longer the scenic description, the longer the process of dying, the longer the suffering.

We are very conscious of the English 'literary' tone of 'Pretty Dick';⁶ as H. G. Turner characterized it 'the artistically graphic finish of his picture of a hot day on the plains and in the ranges is a model of lucid word-painting'.⁷ But Clarke was always a very 'literary' writer, no less so when he evolved a more translucent, economical style. His work was saturated with literary reference, allusion and memory. Though his stories have tended to be disregarded as belonging to the 'colonial' period, he was not at all a raw, colonial writer. Yet in this literariness he was perhaps characteristically colonial, asserting membership of that social club of literary acceptability which in other ways—leaving England for Australia, not taking up the offer to return to write for the London *Daily Telegraph*—he rejected. The literary references are properly resituated as strategic trappings by which to gain that acceptance in order to infiltrate alien material into his fictions: Australian social reality, and his increasingly radical vision. It didn't work. The literariness helped to alienate him from Australian nationalists, who perhaps saw his international literary culture as a threat, the insignia of that social club of literary acceptance from which they felt, and were, excluded. But Clarke was no less excluded. Only one story found publication outside Australia in his lifetime, 'A Mining Township' ('Grumbler's Gully' he retitled it in *Holiday Peak*), which, having appeared in *The Australasian*, 5 November 1870, was reprinted in London in *Household Words*, 22 February 1873. Not insignificantly it is, after 'Pretty Dick', a story that has one of his most sustained set pieces of landscape description.

The first impression of Grumbler's Gully is, I confess, not a cheering one. I think it was Mr Caxton who replied when asked

6 See Michael Wilding, 'The Short Stories of Marcus Clarke', in Leon Cantrell, ed., *Bards, Bohemians and Bookmen*, St Lucia, 1977, p.83.

7 H. G. Turner, 'Marcus Clarke', *Melbourne Review* 7 xxv (January 1882): 5.

what he thought of his new-born infant, 'It is very red, ma'am'. The same remark would apply to Grumber's Gully. It is very red. Long before you get to it you are covered with dust that looks and feels like finely-powdered bricks. The haggard gum-trees by the roadside—if you can rightly call it a roadside—are covered with this red powder. The white near leader seems stained with bloody sweat, and the slices of bark that, as you approach the town, fringe the track, look as though they were lumps of red putty, drying and crumbling in the sun. On turning the corner, Grumber's Gully is below as a long, straggling street, under a red hill that overlooks a red expanse of mud flecked with pools of red water, and bristling with mounds, shaftsheds, and wooden engine-houses. The sun is sinking behind yonder mighty range, under whose brow stretches that belt of scrub, and marsh, and crag that meets the mallee wilderness, and minor mountains rise up all around us. Grumber's Gully is shaped like a shoe with a lump in the middle of it, or rather, perhaps, like one of those cock-boats children make with folded paper. It is a ridge of quartz rising in the midst of a long valley surrounded by mountains. (52–53)

From the literary allusion Clarke moves into the realistic description, that vivid, so true picture of the red dust. The expected elegancies of literary landscape—'the sun is sinking behind yonder mighty range'—come in as pastiche only to be strikingly particularized with the specifically Australian 'mallee wilderness', and to be placed as somehow old fashioned, old world, passé. And the sketch is resituated in the now carefully not high art image of 'a shoe with a lump in the middle of it'. The cultural expectations of landscape writing from Scott to Hardy are there in outline; the new unmystified reality is stridently pasted over them. The vivid, harsh, above all modern poster colours are superimposed on the faded chiaroscuro of the old world imaginings.

And likewise with social manners as with topography:

The place is underlined with 'sinkings', and the inhabitants burrow like moles beneath the surface of the earth. It is no disgrace—quite the reverse—in Grumber's-Gully to wear moleskin trousers stained with the everlasting red clay. There

is, indeed, a story afloat there to the effect that a leading townsman presided at a public dinner in those garments, and was not a whit less respectable than usual. (53)

Here is a new world, a new civilization, requiring a new literature to express it.

The peculiarity of Main Street is its incongruous newness. Around are solemn, purple hills, with their hidden mysteries of swamp and wilderness; and here, on the backbone of this quartz ridge, in the midst of a dirty, dusty, unsightly mud-patch, punched with holes, and disfigured with staring, yellow mounds, are fifty or sixty straggling wooden, iron and brick buildings, in which live people of all ranks of society, of all nations, of all opinions, but every one surrounded with his or her particular aureole of civilisation, and playing the latest music, drinking the most fashionable brand of brandy, reading the latest novels, and taking the most lively interest in the election for president, and the Duke of Edinburgh, the Spanish question, the Prussian war, and the appalling fact that oysters in London are positively three shillings a dozen! (56)

We can see in the case of Clarke the recurrent contradiction of the colonial expatriated writer wanting, but failing to achieve, metropolitan acceptance. The London market would accept the exotic, the strange landscape, the remote settings: while the expatriated writer was concerned with the human situations, the social realities of the new world. Literary London was not interested in social realities other than its own: while for the colonial writer, landscape in itself was something of only limited usability. The hidden mysteries of the solemn, purple hills remain hidden. Landscape is generally a perfunctory presence in these stories. It is not that Clarke was not interested in art and visual representation; he certainly was. In 'Cannabis Indica' ('A Haschich Trance') works of John Martin, Birket Foster, Cattermole, Holbein and Gustav Doré (on whom he wrote an essay) adorn the room. Nor is it the case that the mechanical reproduction of paintings was already dominant, though photography and new printing technologies were well advanced. But the genre of landscape writing had in its own

superabundance exhausted the effect of those set pieces. At the point that print descriptions had already saturated themselves, had become purple passages and clichés, print and photography were there to take over.

But discovering Australian social realities was not a way to find literary acceptance in London. For new models Clarke soon turned to the new world. Reviewing Bret Harte's *The Luck of Roaring Camp* (1870) he wrote

The notion that, because a thing is common it is unclean, and the ordinary daily life of our colony contains no poetry and no pathos, is, of all notions, the most foolish. In no condition of human society can poetry and pathos be wanting; for, to eliminate them from a record of human struggles, it would be necessary to annihilate human feeling. But in a new country, where the breaking down of social barriers, and the uprooting of social prejudices, tend to cultivate that incongruity which is, in reality, the very soul of pathos, there are opportunities for fresh and vigorous delineation of human character which the settled society of the old world does not offer. It is true that there is not in Australia a lettered and leisured class who can afford to pay for purely imaginative literature. It is true, also, that those extremes of vice and virtue, poverty and wealth, which form so large a portion of the novelist's material are happily wanting. But Australia has strange and marked features in her young civilization, which have never yet been touched upon by the writers of fiction.⁸

The stress is on human society, human character, not on landscape: on how society is different in a new world, not on how the scenery is different.

We can see how Bret Harte's stories provided a model for 'Poor Jo' ('Poor Joe'). Clarke reviewed *The Luck of Roaring Camp* in the *Australian Journal* for March 1871. 'Poor Jo' appeared in the *Australasian* in the middle of the following month, April 15. But to assume from this that Harte was the inspiration for Clarke in writing

8 In Michael Wilding, ed., *Marcus Clarke* (Portable Australian Authors) St Lucia, 1976, p.637.

about Australian manners is not correct. His review had begun: 'We have always urged upon Australian writers of fiction the importance of delineating the Australian manners which they see around them every day, instead of dishing up the English customs which are current 20,000 miles away.'⁹ He had been urging this for some time. 'An Up Country Township' ('Bullocktown') had appeared seven months earlier. We cannot be sure dates of publication necessarily relate closely to dates of composition; but when there is no reason not to assume it, it makes sense to assume that Clarke's initial forays into the Bullocktown milieu were written in the order in which they were published: 'An Up Country Township', 6 August 1870; 'How the Circus Came to Bullocktown', August and September 1870; and 'A Mining Township', 5 November 1870. Clarke's journalistic practice was to write for deadlines, rather than to store up and lay by. He had begun his project of representing the Australian outback and mining life already. Harte came to hand as one possibility, and 'Poor Jo' is written in a Harte mode. We need not assume plagiarism or furtive imitation—Clarke has proclaimed his enthusiasm for Harte in the review. 'Poor Jo' is best seen as a conscious exercise in a literary mode, in a particular new style of emotion. The following month (6 May 1871) 'Hunted Down' ('The Author Haunted by his own Creations') was published; and here there is a remarkable sophistication of literary awareness, of self-awareness, of the very fictionality of fiction; here the creations of fiction return on their author to torment him, to rebel against the oppression of his narratives. To read this only as a whimsical, facetious, cosy essayist's piece is to be confused by the Victorian ambience; we associate that with the coy, the insinuating, those awful mutton-chopped compères on television music halls. But forget the whiskers and resituate 'Hunted Down' (its very title catches the resonance of the writer's paranoia, well attested in literary biography) in a world of modernist collage, in which the unlikely collocation—Jean Harlow meets Billy the Kid in Michael McClure's *The Beard* (1965)—are part of avant-garde experiment, a sign of the sophistication of the presented art: then we can see Clarke as a self-conscious, self-aware literary creator, as adept with the images and clichés and archetypes of fiction as any post-modern collagist.

The splice of unlikely bedfellows, the intercutting of disparate sources

9 *Ibid.*, p.637.

can similarly be found in 'Poor Jo', which draws not only on the Bret Harte formula of divine devotion in the deformed, dumb, earthly form, but also on Victor Hugo's portrait of Quasimodo, the hunchback in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831). The allusion is explicit for those who recognize it, unobtrusive for those who don't; invoked, acknowledged, not purloined:

His utmost mirth never went beyond an ape-like chuckle, that irradiated his pain-stricken face, as a stray gleam of sunshine lights up the hideousness of the gargyle on some old cathedral tower.
(22)

'A Night with Horace' ('"Horace" in the Bush') is nothing if not literary play: a reincarnated Roman poet emerging from the Australian outback. There might seem no cause to have set it in Bullocktown. Indeed, what setting there is, is nakedly perfunctory: just an opening identification:

The coach had broken down at Bullocktown, and we five—that is to say, O'Donoghue, Marston, Tom Didbin, McTaggart and myself—were partaking of eggs, bacon and whisky at Coppinger's. (116)

Do we see here a blasé disregard of the expectations of setting, of landscape? The ensuing discussion could just as readily have been set in Melbourne, Paris, Florence. Or could it? Is Clarke's point perhaps not merely to exploit a successful series of stories by putting into that accepted setting an idea for a story he had in other contexts? Perhaps we could consider it more positively, and see that his project to delineate Bullocktown and its environs was a project to establish a totality, to create a literary world in which Wallaby Dick and Quintus Horatius Flaccus could readily co-exist. This was the discourse he was attempting to establish. We can see the story reductively as Clarke's making use of the English classical education he had received at Highgate; but we can also see it as an heroic attempt at integration, a precursor of that later attempt in the 1920s by Norman Lindsay and the *Vision* group to re-establish the Mediterranean muses in Australia, to resettle the classical spirit. Though to write 'classical' is to seem to put the muses and their voices back in time; the point for both Clarke and the Lindsays was

that the values of that literature and mythology were immortal, eternal, recurrent.

'A Night with Horace' appeared in the *Australasian*, 22 July 1871, and was followed within a month by 'King Billy's Breeches' ('King Billy's Troubles'), 12 August 1871. This is in part a story in letter; it is not totally an epistolary narrative like those great eighteenth-century novels by Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–8). But it incorporates letters, and incorporates them with all the file numbers and bureaucratic presentation of addresses and formalities in the way that avant-garde modernism reproduced photographic film with the spool notches and identification codes and lettering along the edge. This visual illusion of the documentary, this presentation of the letter as illustrative object, set out and separated from the narrative rather than paraphrased and absorbed into the authorial narrative flow, enacts Clarke's theme. Here flow is disrupted by the cited evidence, by documentary letters not even shorn or peeled of all their irrelevant verbiage; for in that irrelevant verbiage and file numbering, Clarke reads the true meaning. These governmental institutions are indeed concerned with the irrelevant verbiage, file numbers, trappings; the marginal has taken over the centre, to prevent anything from getting done. The bureaucratic style is the substance, the bureaucratic medium is the message, a self-justifying, bland political bureaucracy designed to obstruct public access.

The project of representing Bullocktown, up country Australia, is not one reduced to merely realistic or naturalistic modes; it is not merely a matter of landscape. Clarke is engaged in a project of literary exploration, of trying to find the appropriate forms, new forms for a new world, new social experiences, new social relationships.

Clarke had established his reputation in Melbourne with a newspaper column, 'The Peripatetic Philosopher', in the *Argus*. As a columnist he was establishing a character, a recognizable personality, a cross between a brand name and a commodity. It was pseudonymous, signed Q: the brand of the Swinton and Ledcourt stations near Glenorchy where he had spend 1865–67 and where the Bullocktown stories are set. The letter from up country comes in as his letter to urban literary success. But though pseudonymous, maybe even more because of this

pseudonymity, a marketable character, a personality of attitudes and values, a stance had to be established.

Clarke was already marketing the autobiographical in his column before writing these *Bullocktown*, and other, fictions in which the autobiographical traces appear. When the traces do appear, we would better see them not as the marginal to be excised for annotation in the biography, but rather as the displaced centre, the real interest, that the commercial plots, the expected scenic descriptions which purport to be the centre of interest, are in fact carrying, are the excuse for.

'In A Bark Hut' ('Learning "Colonial Experience"') is directly autobiographical in manner; this is the narration of lived experience, the writer actually going out there and doing this, like Jack London or Jack Kerouac. Clarke never went back to station work. It isn't clear for how long he did live like this up country. But the value of the story presents itself as residing in his having experienced what is described. And within the memoir of the bark hut days there is a further brief memoir of the narrator's earlier boyhood and young manhood in England:

I had been a sickly brat in my infancy, and having unfettered access to the library of a man who owned few prejudices for moral fig-leaves, had, with the avidity for recondite knowledge which sickly brats always evince, read many strange books. (9)

This note recurs and is developed in a number of stories. It is there in 'Human Repetends' ('A Mysterious Coincidence'):

The only son of a rich widower, who lived but for the gratification of a literary and political ambition, I was thrown, when still a boy, into the society of men thrice my age, and was tolerated as a clever impertinent in all those witty and wicked circles in which virtuous women are conspicuous by their absence.... (203)

It is there in 'La Béguine', a story not collected by Mackinnon, though included by Clarke in his *Four Stories High* (Melbourne, 1877):

My holidays, passed in my father's widowed house, were enlivened by the coming and going of cousin Tom from Woolwich,

of cousin Dick from Addiscombe, of cousin Harry from Colchester or Knightsbridge. With Tom, Dick, and Harry came a host of friends—for, as long as he was undisturbed, the head of the house rather liked to see his rooms occupied by the relatives of people with whom he was intimate.... So, a wild-eyed and eager schoolboy, I strayed into Bohemia, and acquired in that strange land an assurance and experience ill suited to my age and temperament.¹⁰

And it is there, reversed on Mount Might-ha-been, in 'Holiday Peak':

'You *might have* wasted your youth in such places, and got into no end of mischief, had not your father kept such a strict and friendly eye upon you.' (109)

Time after time Clarke establishes his Australian settings only to introduce autobiographical recollections of the old world.

One aspect of the newspaper column is that it puts the writer at the centre, rather than the artefact. It is the columnist's personality that unites the items. But is this foregrounded writer the poet-prophet of Milton, Blake and Whitman, or is it the writer as entertainer, commodity producer? Indeed, can we make such clear-cut oppositions? Clarke is writing in a particular market situation; he has to provide the product for the newspapers. In order to be accepted by the papers, he has to write in certain formulae, formulae much more ruthlessly determining than any classic literary models that might be thought to have determined Milton's production. This sort of magazine writing was to prove the destruction of F. Scott Fitzgerald.¹¹ Yet even in those 'uncollected' stories of Fitzgerald's, something of the personality comes through, deformed and maimed, slick and formulaic and tired as those stories are. Rather than seeing Clarke's stories as irredeemably 'sensational tales' (the title under which Mackinnon collected some of them), we might more profitably see Clarke as taking the opportunities available and still leaving his own signature, conveying his own vision.

Clarke had written stories independently of his column, notably

10 Wilding, ed., *Marcus Clarke*, 1976, pp.610–611.

11 See Mathew J. Bruccoli, ed., *The Price Was High: The Last Uncollected Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, New York, 1979.

'Cannabis Indica', 'The Doppelgänger' ('The Dual Existence') and 'Pretty Dick'. But the distinction between story and column item was to become blurred. 'Arcades Ambo' was originally one of 'The Peripatetic Philosopher' columns. But its legitimacy as a 'tale' is established by Clarke's republishing it in *Holiday Peak and Other Tales* (1873). 'An Up Country Township' was first published in the *Australasian* with the by-line 'by Marcus Clarke (The Peripatetic Philosopher)'. And the 'Noah's Ark' column in the *Australasian* (18 May 1872–13 September 1873) included as well as traditional column pieces, dialogues and poems, a number of stories, 'Human Repetends' and 'Holiday Peak' amongst them. How do we interpret this relationship of the story, or tale, or sketch to the column? The column, of course, is a way of getting regular space; the writer requires the space, the outlet, the situation. The column allowed stories, sketches, poems, dialogues. It was a slot to be filled. But we can also see a subversion of genre occurring. 'Arcades Ambo' is the Addisonian essay, re-presented as a tale. 'An Up Country Township' and 'A Mining Township' are sketches—no plots, no narrative, but nonetheless a vivid recreation of a milieu, an ambience. And we have traditional plot in 'Keturah' ('Gentleman George's Bride') or 'The Romance of Lively Creek'. Clarke is not restricting himself to one specific mode for expression; his project of Bullocktown incorporates these various discrete, discrepant even, modes. For the laconic realism of the sketches is discrepant with the surreality of 'Holiday Peak' or 'A Night with Horace'. Yet their shared Bullocktown setting insists on a shared role in some other reality, the reality where fact and fiction co-exist as equal thought-forms, where characters from fiction consort with the novelists who created them—a nightmare in its comic way in 'Hunted Down', and recurring again as a fantasy situation in 'Holiday Peak', where Dickens, Thackeray, the Count of Monte Cristo, Dr Lydgate, Casaubon and Clarke's childhood friend Gerard Manley Hopkins all co-exist. This surrealism, this warp in fictionalizing, in which the fiction re-enters as an autonomous reality within a larger framing fiction is recurrent in Clarke's stories. So fiction both extends and redefines itself by incorporating essay and sketch, and also redefines itself into another dimension by incorporating itself as legitimate fictionalizable material. The author writes about his own characters resisting his authority, postulating their autonomy. We can find this subversion of the genres in other aspects of Clarke's work.

There is the way, for instance, he used the account of a horse race in his first novel *Long Odds* (1869) for a report of the Melbourne Cup in 1873. But this incident of fiction becoming journalism (not quite the same as the earlier story of his report of a concert that never took place) is complemented by the massive incorporation of journalism and documentary report into the fictional *His Natural Life* (1874) and *Chidiock Tichbourne* (1874–75)—wholesale incorporations, not mere ‘source materials’. Clarke simply transcribed and cut them in.¹² The separations between what is presented as fiction and as fact, between story and journalism, novel and documentary, tale and sketch, are dissolved by Clarke. The writing takes him across the arbitrary critical constructs of genre boundaries that bear so little relation to the actualities of literary creation.

We can hardly fail to notice the recurrence of unhappy marriage, frustrated marriage and fulfilment denied in the stories published from the middle of 1872 through the middle of 1873. The theme is dominant in ‘Keturah’ in June 1872, ‘Human Repetends’ in September, ‘A Watch on Christmas Eve’ (‘A Sad Christmas Eve Retrospect’) in December, ‘The Schoolmaster’s Wife’ (‘Romance of Bullocktown’) in April 1873, and ‘The Romance of Lively Creek’ in August. Do we collapse these into the autobiographical and say, we know that Clarke’s marriage was unhappy at this time?¹³ We know that he was in love with his wife’s sister and they talked of disappearing together. Or do we say, these are stories of normative social experience, many marriages are unhappy, much love blighted? We can situate this in a larger social critique—the alienating conditions of modern life preclude the possibility of sustaining marital and romantic relationships. There is enough in Clarke’s generally critical perspective of nineteenth-century social norms—from the convict system through to the 1870s—to support such a position. We might dwell on the concluding lines of ‘Keturah’, echoing his review of Bret Harte: ‘Ah! there is a great deal of poetry in the lives of some very unpoetical-looking people, isn’t there?’ (46). And we can relate

12 See Michael Wilding, ‘Marcus Clarke’s *Chidiock Tichbourne*’, *Australian Literary Studies* 6 (1974): 381–93.

13 See Brian Elliott, *Marcus Clarke*, Oxford, 1958, pp.187–98.

'Poor Jo' of a year earlier to this group of unfulfilled love—with the gypsy Esmeralda beloved of Quasimodo aryanized into the blonde Miss Jane for this white man's frontier.

'The Curious Experience of Anthony Venn' ('The Mind Reader's Curse') appeared in the *Australasian*, September to November 1873, following on from 'The Romance of Lively Creek'. Mackinnon collected it in *Sensational Tales* (1886) and in the 'Stories—Imaginative and Fanciful' section of *The Austral Edition*. But the themes of unhappy marriage and unfulfilled love run as much through these categories as through the 'Australian tales'. The forbidden love—'*Eleanor was the daughter of the doctor's wife, and his natural sister.*' (182)—suggests another formulation of Clarke's forbidden love for his wife's sister. This incest taboo preventing the fulfilment of Anthony's love for Eleanor serves the function of Captain Sporboy's mysterious information that prevents the fulfilment of Harry Beaufort's love for Pauline Christoval in 'The Romance of Lively Creek'. Different fears and taboos are recreated that structurally fulfil the same role: the prevention of fulfilment in love. And the theme is multiplied in 'The Gypsies of the Sea or The Island of Gold' ('A Modern Eldorado'). Here we are in the realm of the literature of bachelors, the all male adventure. Just the empty shoe of the lady, the trace, is there to suggest the absent feminine might ultimately be forthcoming.

We rushed forward in the direction of the sound, and found ourselves in what had been a magnificent boudoir, furnished with every luxury that fancy could suggest. The vases were broken, the flowers scattered, torn music and mangled books littered the carpet, and on the floor by the open window lay the only sign of the late occupant—an Indian scarf and a tiny gold embroidered slipper. This, then, was the mystery of Borlase's seclusion. (155)

And the woman turns out not to be someone like Mr Kurtz's exotic African mistress in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) but Lady Venetia. And Lady Venetia is beloved by more than one of these male companions.

From the nation gathered below went up a yell like that which might have greeted the second fall of Satan—a yell of hate, and

blood, and fury. The torches tossed wildly. The fleet swayed and shook. A torrent of pistol and matchlock balls spent themselves in vain against the mid-masonry of the *tocali*. Hugh Borlase raised the fainting woman in his arms and bore her furiously to the stairs. Her blue eyes uplifted to heaven, her golden hair streaming, her naked arms upraised in despair, she was borne past me, and I recognized Venetia.

‘So then,’ I cried, furious even in that desperate peril, ‘it was for *this* you stole my love and wrecked her life!’

‘Silence!’ said Allan Forbes, savagely, ‘I loved her, also; let us save her.’ In vain!

From out the door we quitted poured the guards of the god....
(159–60)

The sexual psychodrama with its multiple male jealousies dominates over the ‘swarming hosts’ of ‘the guards of the god’. The extreme external drama, like some *Boy’s Own Paper* extravaganza, becomes the background for sexual frissons—naked arms, betrayal, rivalry. Discovered, Lady Venetia represents just the same set of sexual anxieties to the males as by her absence, that image of the ransacked room with its broken vases, fallen flowers, torn music and such like images of defloration and defilement. And then there is the amazing climax:

Suddenly Venetia rose erect, and flinging her arms round the neck of her lover, hid her burning face on his bosom for one passionate instant.

‘You have given up too much for me, Hugh, too much. I would not wish to live, having seen what I have seen to-night. Forgive me! Farewell!’

She sprang from his arms, leapt into the huge coping from the Tower, and then, like a white flash, disappeared headlong.

A horrible shout of joy went up from the city, and then all was silence. (161)

This is the ultimate in male fantasy. The soiled woman—beloved one, once beloved, wife—resolves the problem of the males by just throwing herself out of the way.

To see analogies with Clarke’s own marital situation is not to collapse

the fictions into the life, but to reinsert the life experience into what might too readily be taken as the empty formulae of magazine fiction. This was the medium Clarke was working in. This was what was expected in commercial media, and he was writing for the commercial media. Financial needs. Dire necessity. So we can see the archetypes enlivening the fictional formulae. We might notice also the perfunctoriness of the formulae. This allowed a freedom that a rigidly realist mode might prevent or inhibit; there were creative advantages in using these forms. And we can see the lived experience informing the formulae. The formulaic adventures become acts of theatre, different sorts of conjured illusion: now I will show you an opium dream, now I will show you a mesmeric trance, now I will show you a hashish trance. They are all reveries, unrealities using the unrealities of formulae to explore real issues of life situations and experiences. The debased clichés of commercial fiction, commodity production, are reinvested with specific signification. As with dreams, the reading involves a series of metamorphoses, resituating. The every day problem or situation is represented in a defamiliarized way. And the unrealities of dream or trance transitions, the arbitrariness for metaphoric purposes other than the naturalistic, are brought in to redefine the unreal and arbitrary transitions of the formulae of commercial fiction. The perfunctory transitions of 'The Curious Experience of Anthony Venn' are later revealed to be transitions occurring in a dream or trance. So the 'story', it turns out, is in the other reality of dream experiences, a heightened rhetoric, a dream ordering of incidents in the (also fictionally postulated) ordinary reality to which Venn awakes. The heavily symbolic action of the flood and the boat and the girl, bringing in all the over-allegoric and over-symbolic resonances of Victorian fiction—the flood in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), the river of Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65)—is revealed as the excess of dream, not clumsy formulae fiction. We reframe the story with the concluding revelation that the narrative has been a mesmeric trance; it now requires re-reading, the incidents now demand interpretation, the interpretation of dreams. We have turned from outer to inner landscapes.

The inner landscapes were always there for Clarke. This was not a development over time from external to internal. Their *locus classicus*

is that early experiment, 'Cannabis Indica' (February 1868), and they were reasserted in 'Holiday Peak' (January 1873) which he privileged as the title story of his first collection of stories in the same year.

The assumed model for English drug writing is Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), and Clarke cites him in 'Cannabis Indica'. But Clarke draws little directly from De Quincey. Possibly the biographical parallels of the father's death and the expected inheritance's dissolving allowed some measure of identification. And De Quincey's involvement with the young prostitute Ann has possible echos in 'La Béguine', and in Jenny in 'Holiday Peak'. Clarke recalls

Her face brought back to me a strange dream of boy-and-girl folly,
of a merry, thoughtless flight by train and boat, made dishes,
French wines, babble, kisses, tears, and no pocket-money. (112)

De Quincey's 1819 opium dream of Ann has its analogies with 'Holiday Peak':

And not a bow-shot from me, upon a stone, and shaded by Judean palms, there sat a woman: and I looked: and it was—Ann!...
and now I gazed upon her with some awe, but suddenly her countenance grew dim, and, turning to the mountains I perceived vapours rolling between us; in a moment all had vanished; thick darkness came on; and, in the twinkling of an eye, I was far away from mountains, and by lamp-light in Oxford-street, walking again with Ann—just as we walked seventeen years before, when we were both children.¹⁴

Opium was readily available. Charles Bright recalled Clarke drinking absinthe in the Café de Paris in Melbourne and remarking:

They say it'll drive a fellow mad in a month and I want to find out if that's a fact. I've tried opium-smoking and rather like that.¹⁵

14 Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, ed. Alethea Hayter, Harmondsworth, 1982, p.112. All quotations from this edition.

15 Charles Bright, 'Marcus Clarke', *Cosmos Magazine* (30 April 1895): 418.

Opium features in Clarke's 'Lower Bohemia' articles on Melbourne's Chinese community.¹⁶ But in this one piece in which he is explicit about its drug origins, 'Cannabis Indica', the drug is cannabis, specifically hashish in tablet form, taken in sufficient amount to produce psychedelic, hallucinatory effects. And hashish had its own specific literary traditions. The great promoter of hashish was the French doctor Jacques-Joseph Moreau (1804–84), a psychiatrist at the hospital of Bicêtre in Paris, whose *Autobiographie* Clarke cites.¹⁷ It was Moreau who introduced hashish to the Parisian literary community, giving it in the form of dawamesc, an Algerian sweetmeat, to Théophile Gautier, and including Gautier's account of using the drug in his study *Du Haschisch et l'alienation mentale* (1845).¹⁸ From this encounter developed the famous 'Club des Haschischins' at the Hotel Pimodan on the Isle of St Louis.

Amongst those who came to sample the drug, some only once, some often, were Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, Baudelaire, Balzac, Alexandre Dumas the elder and Victor Hugo.¹⁹ The accounts by Gautier and Baudelaire of their hallucinations and reveries find few echoes in 'Cannabis Indica';²⁰ they had been concerned to describe the experience of hashish, and Clarke had no wish to repeat what had been adequately done. He was doing something that as far as was known had not been done before: writing a story while under the influence of hashish. In his prefatory notes he follows Gautier's practice in his account of the Club des Haschischins in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (February, 1846) of describing the external setting in some detail. He explains

16 *Argus* (9 March 1868), reprinted in Hergenhan, *A Colonial City*, pp.119–22.

17 Wilding, ed., *Marcus Clarke*, p.554, n.2. Mackinnon omitted the first two footnotes of the *Colonial Monthly* text of 'Cannabis Indica'.

18 Gautier's account appeared in *La Presse* (19 July 1843).

19 Derek Stanford, Introduction to Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire, *Hashish, Wine, Opium*, London, 1972, p.9. Andrew C. Kimmens, ed., *Tales of Hashish*, New York, 1977, pp.40–112. Ernest L. Abel, *Marihuana*, New York, 1980, p.154.

20 It is not known whether Clarke read their accounts of hashish, or acquired his information from a secondary source; a likely secondary source is the article 'Confessions of a French Haschisch Eater' in the journal *Once a Week* 1, 3rd Series (April 18, 1868): 349–51. Charles Reade's novel *Foul Play*, which Clarke adapted for the stage in 1868, was serialized in *Once a Week* and there was an episode in the issue that included the Haschisch Eater article.

I have spoken of the effect that external objects have upon the faculties of the dreamer, and it is beyond question that many of the incidents related in the narrative which follows were unconsciously suggested by the pictures, books, and ornaments in the chamber. (212)

There is a parallel with Moreau's experience in the way Clarke's 'man naked and bronzed' (220) metamorphoses into 'a beautiful woman' with 'golden hair' (221) and yet again into 'a lean, withered old woman'. (222)

Sometimes the face of a friend is multiplied, or an object of no striking character is converted into a beautiful figure or is metamorphosed in a thousand different forms: thus an old servant of seventy-one years of age, in spite of wrinkles and gray hair, appeared before Dr Moreau in the form of a lovely girl adorned with a thousand graces.²⁰

And there is a parallel with Gérard de Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* (1847) with its 'Histoire du Calife Hakem': 'Each of the main characters in the story lives a multiple reality caused in part by his use of hashish'.²¹ The sense of a dual existence, captured in fiction by Nerval, was recognized as a characteristic of the hashish experience. Comparing the effects of hashish and opium, the Scots traveller David Urquhart wrote in 1850 'opium does not give the double identity'.²² This 'phenomenon of dual existence' is a recurrent theme of the American Fitz Hugh Ludlow's *The Hasheesh Eater* (1857): 'One part of me awoke, while the other continued in perfect hallucination'.²³ Clarke refers to the experience in 'Cannabis Indica':

20 'The Hashish', *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 256 (25 November 1848): 343.

21 Emmanuel J. Mickel, Jr, *The Artificial Paradises in French Literature*, Chapel Hill, 1969, p.115.

22 David Urquhart, *The Pillars of Hercules: A Narrative of Travels in Spain and Morocco*, London, 1850, vol. 2, p.135.

23 Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Hasheesh Eater, Being Passages from the Life of a Pythagorean*, New York, 1857; facsimile, San Francisco, 1979, p.58. All quotations are from this facsimile. The concept of the dual existence recurs on pp.xxiii, 23, 106, 163-4.

I remember that my voice sounded like that of another person, and that I listened to my own story with interest, as if I did not know what would come next. I seemed to be two persons in one. My ordinary self was listening to some new-found self, of which I had been hitherto ignorant. (214n)

There is a classic out-of-body experience described in 'Pretty Dick':

Pretty Dick was up in the pure cool sky, looking down upon a little figure that lay on an open space among the heather. Presently, slowly at first, and then more quickly, he found out this little figure was himself. (20)

The child is still alive at this point, and returns to his body of pain. Fitz Hugh Ludlow's description of the experience under hashish is closely parallel: 'From the air in which I hovered I looked down upon my former receptacle'. (74) Possibly Mackinnon's retitling 'The Doppelgänger' as 'The Dual Existence' is a key to the sub-text of that story of crime and detection, a coded borrowing of Ludlow's phrase for the initiate to recognize. Clarke's use of the word assassin in it (194, 197) encourages this speculation. Assassin had been in European literary usage for many years; we find it used by the troubadors, by Dante and by Sir Thomas Browne. But in a paper to the Institute of France in 1809 the eminent orientalist Sylvestre de Sacy explored the etymology of assassin and derived it from hashish.²⁵ 'The Doppelgänger' was published July–August 1866, 'Cannabis Indica' February 1868, 'Pretty Dick' April 1869. Mackinnon, Clarke's literary executor, had been a fellow member of the Yorick Club with Clarke in 1868: it has been speculated that the members drank laudanum from the skull passed round, and Clarke's denial that they smoked 'green tea' introduces in its very denial the idea of some cannabis usage.²⁶

Landscapes were particularly accessible for Ludlow with hashish.

The whole East, from Greece to farthest China, lay within the

²⁵ *Le Moniteur* 41 (29 July 1809).

²⁶ 'A Quiet Club', in 'Q' (Marcus Clarke), *The Peripatetic Philosopher*, Melbourne, 1869, pp.48–9.

compass of a township; no outlay was necessary for the journey. For the humble sum of six cents I might purchase an excursion ticket over all the earth; ships and dromedaries, tents and hospices were all contained in a box of Tilden's extract. Hasheesh I called the 'drug of travel', and I had only to direct my thoughts strongly toward a particular part of the world previously to swallowing my bolus to make my whole fantasia in the strongest possible degree topographical. (64)

Landscapes generated by the mind and hashish. Ludlow's account of the first experience of 'those sufferings which are generated by a dose of hasheesh taken to prolong the effects of a preceding one' has its similarities with the vision of 'Holiday Peak'. He writes

Up mystic pathways, on a mountain of evergreens, the priests of some nameless religion flocked, mitrecrowned, and passed into the temple of the sun over the threshold of the horizon. (132)

But after a further five grains on top of the initial fifteen the experience became anguished.

Over many a mountain range, over plains and rivers, I heard wafted the cry of my household, who wept for me with a distinct lamentation as if they were close at hand. Above all the rest, a sister mourned bitterly for a brother who was about to descend into hell!

Far in the distance rolled the serpentine fires of an infinite furnace ... (137)

These fires, mountain visions, and priests—or one priest—surge through 'Holiday Peak'. Clarke writes

Again the skin drums resounded, again floated up to the full moon the wild chant of the women, again the furious fires blazed high, again the people in the valley of the peaks shouted to their savage divinity, again the painted and naked priest reared high the thirsty knife and flung himself—blood-red in the fire-glow—upon the panting victim. (104)

And the astounding transitions from setting to setting, landscape to landscape, have all the characteristics of drug induced reverie, hashish trance, opium dream, psychedelic trip.

There are clues enough in 'Holiday Peak' that this landscape is a drug induced landscape of the mind. Ah Yung is there with his opium pipe (107) and the introduction of characters from Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844) has its significance for the initiate. Chapters 31 and 32 of Dumas' novel contain one of the classic western accounts of the hashish experience. 'Monte Cristo in the South' is the title of chapter two of 'The Gypsies of the Sea', the chapter in which we are told 'It was a dream from the Thousand and One Tales. It was the vision of an opium eater'. (148) There are further references to opium and the *Tales of the Thousand and One Nights* in 'The Gypsies of the Sea' (147, 152), and the *Thousand and One Nights* are there again in 'In a Bark Hut'.

I boiled down my recollections for M'Alister, and constituted myself a sort of Scherezade for his peculiar benefit. He would smoke, and I would fix my eyes on a long strip of bark which hung serpentwise from the ridge pole, and relate. (9)

The *Thousand and One Nights* are of course redolent of hashish, opium and other narcotics—notably 'The Tale of Hashish' (Night 141–2), 'The Tale of Two Hashish Eaters' (Night 797–8) and 'The Tale of the Second Captain of Police' (Night 939–40).²⁷ Not that the experience of drugs is the only reason for reading or referring to the tales, or for referring to Dumas or De Quincey. And yet, in this established context of opium and hashish illusion, it is hard not to speculate about further drug reference when Clarke cites 'the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry—Weird Melancholy' as 'the dominant note of Australian Scenery' (3) in his classic landscape passage. As Alethea Hayter remarks, 'Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales* are steeped in De Quincey's influence', and Baudelaire saw hashish imagery in 'The Fall of the House of Usher'.²⁸

27 *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights*, translated by Powys Mathers, 4 volumes, second edition, London, 1964.

28 Introduction to De Quincey, *Confessions*, p.21. See also Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*, London, 1968. Poe's 'Fall of the House of Usher' appeared in his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840).

Poe's 'Loss of Breath' refers to hashish in its original version. Poe's detective story experiments are an undoubted influence on 'The Doppelgänger', that account of 'the dual existence' which we have speculated might allude to a hashish experience. The extraordinary and exotic landscapes of 'Holiday Peak' and 'The Gypsies of the Sea', no less than those of 'Cannabis Indica', may owe their origin in part to Clarke's well-attested experiments with hashish. Our conceptual distinctions between inner and outer landscapes begin to dissolve. Is Clarke's classic description of the Australian landscape that has been reprinted time and time again in his preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's poems yet another drug induced perception, and the 'weird melancholy' something perceived, if not indeed produced, with the aid of hashish? In his 'Noah's Ark' column in the *Australasian*, 7 December 1872, Clarke has Marston remark, 'I sometimes experiment upon myself, and after one has eaten hashish a depression of spirit follows'.²⁹ Weird melancholy indeed.

29 Hergenhan, *A Colonial City*, p.269.