

Review Article

Amateur Poets in Australia

Presumably most poets have been amateurs once—Milton always excepted, Pope excused. An amateur poet, of course, is not one who fails to make a living from verses; on this count few in any age would not qualify. He may be thought of as a poet who scatters his poems before they have been made to fly by their own principles. He is an amateur not because his poems are short and few—modern practices and some ancient genres alike could bring poetry to this pass—but because his poems are not yet perfected. Amateurism in poetry is partly Apollo's unpredictableness but more an air of Minerva's neglect. An amateur poem is a thing of fits and starts—delightful fits, exultant starts perhaps, followed by whims and spasms, stopped before it is finished. Poetry of poor or unreliable quality is called amateurish because it seems hasty or undone. Amateur poetry has the quality of unsteadiness. Experimental verse is not by necessity amateur; the amateur, indeed, is often imitative, and he makes a guess in preference to a controlled inquiry. Again, amateur poetry need not be bad poetry—not wilful, persisting, anfractuous bad poetry; its badness is casual, disinterested, not yet perfected. On the other hand, if a poet writes rarely but always finely, the body of his poetry, particularly if fixed in enduring print, comes to suggest that he is not an amateur, because he has consistently given his poetry the attention it needed to be made as perfect as that of the masters, that is, to be constructed by its own laws. If we look only to his intermittent writing, we may still think of him as an amateur, though a skilled one. This is very irritating, especially for him, because consistent high quality demands faithfulness to the art even if the poet does not write two lines in a twelvemonth. The intermittent, skilled amateur may be a great poet, though I cannot think of an instance. He becomes a minor

**The Darkened Window*. By Nancy Cato. 1950. [Pp. 24]. *With Cypress Pine*. By Ray Mathew. 1951. [Pp. 22]. Sydney: The Lyre-Bird Writers.

The Two Suns Met. By John Blight. 1954. Pp. 39. *Song and Dance*. By Ray Mathew. 1956. [Pp. 38]. *Ploughman and Poet*. By David Rowbotham. 1954. Pp. 48. *The Other Meaning*. By Vivian Smith. 1956. [Pp. 34]. Sydney: The Lyre-Bird Writers and the Commonwealth Literary Fund.

poet, writing poetry that is finished but limited. The amateur poet has a tragic life: by seeking to improve he abolishes himself. Again, the established poet may be an amateur by quality, though his verses arrive in regular loads. We may deny that he is a master, major or minor. I am suggesting a qualitative glissando with variations, descending from major to minor, into amateur, down to bad. Amateur poetry is unready; minor poetry is narrow. Practically, amateurism serves as the poet's childhood, in which we hope he will develop to his minority or higher. The amateur poem is a game of play, the minor poem a work of art.

In Australia much poetry has been amateur. Poetry there has often seemed a game, rather like the cricket you play on a matting pitch, in your spare time, without pay. A swag of small books* of amateur poetry on the way to becoming minor poetry comes from the Sydney house of Edwards & Shaw. The book-bundling of this firm is of a higher order than is usual for poetry in Australia. At their best its volumes are quite handsome. Some of these books are stapled between paper covers; others are bound in cloth; all are well designed and printed. They are published by a group that calls itself the Lyre-Bird Writers, and are promoted by the Australian Commonwealth Literary Fund, which in some cases guarantees the firm against loss.

Sponsorship by continuing organizations is especially relevant to amateur poetry. Amateur products may have an ephemeral life. They are their makers' playthings, and are thrown down, forgotten, or lost when other interests, such as stern duty, re-establish the balance of the mind. Then a smiling wife or an old, loving dog is needed to bring the treasure back to the amateur master's hand. Sponsoring organizations hold the ladder up to literary life. Amateur publication of poetry is scarcely an acceptable pastime. Poetry that is published by the amateur author himself or is published for him by a house whose imprint is not considered a guarantee is likely to remain in print but not in circulation. A few Australian writers print, publish, and hawk their products from private mailbags and on Sydney street corners. The reputation of their books is as the life of man in the eye of Hobbes. It is luck if you locate the titles three years late in the *Annual Catalogue of Australian Publications* from Canberra, and the authors must have abandoned hope before entering the reviewers' columns in the quarterlies. Books of this destitute class that I have found and read (for the pity of it) sometimes contain the one poem, their best, that is no worse than the occasional poem, the worst, in the books that are admitted for review in this essay; on the whole, it seems probable that the amateur publications do normally enshrine a mistaken muse. If one of these shaky temples of print should happen to hold a legitimate goddess, her reputation would be slow to pass current. In practice, a poet is usually thought of as an amateur in status, whatever the quality of his work, until he has been published in recognized periodicals and by one or another of the recognized publishers of poetry. There are perhaps about eight of these last in Australia, some very inactive. The combination of the Lyre-Bird

Writers, the Commonwealth Literary Fund, and Edwards & Shaw is one to serve the poet who is readying himself but is not yet quite able or fortunate enough to command his own market and a professional imprint. It allows such a poet to appear with an auspicious priesthood and a professional house. Each of the poets reviewed here has worked a pen for years and published in Australian journals and annuals. One or another has previously had a book in print. Now some of his work appears in a discreetly small selection of about thirty poems, many of them old toys rescued and dusted off for the one-man show. In some ways it is an odd outcome of five, ten, or twenty years' activity. The amateur poet, no less than John Milton and Emily Dickinson, is constantly aware of an audience at the last. A Cambridge professor might phrase it: I do not meet a solipsist who tells me he is writing a poem on me. For a poet the way to an audience lies through print.

Subjects and styles differ from one of these volumes to another—a mercy that suggests the latitudinarianism of the literary priesthood and the vitality of recent Australian amateur poets. Each writer covers his own terrain and makes his own views. He is a distinct individual who has gone about his own business—often a practical occupation—and thought and written of what he knew. If his book is limited in range of subject and treatment, each offers something unique and of interest because it is his insight and his poem, whatever the tradition in which he writes. These Australians are rarely profound; their poems do not bring meaning to experience that they do not report. Yet in saving the limited individual insights of biography from lapsing into history, amateur poetry performs not the meanest of its services to culture.

Nancy Cato's *The Darkened Window* (1950) is a selection of brief poems of tiny experiences rather timidly felt and construed in reflection under the influence of disabled idealism. The world of the poetry is usually that of the countryside, with the wheatfields, or the hills, a river scene, and the magpies and parrots. Occasionally we get a purely descriptive poem like "Landscape, Hope Valley"; usually the sensory event or situation is the underlying circumstance from which discussion, often troubled, arises. This makes for typical amateur poems. Reasonably good first stanzas or images in their developments fall out of proportion and are spoiled. For example, "Independence" describes a scene in the first stanza, a swagman in the second. He prompts the explicit inquiry "Where did he come from, where could he be going?" whose grammar betrays to the reader of the poem that reflection has intervened. The third and last stanza states a meaning glimpsed in the swagman, states it rather than creates a total poem in which a meaning might present itself *in situ*; what is directly spoken about now is not the subject depicted in the first two stanzas but a biographical report of the mental experience of remembering and commenting:

But still the imagination glows, the blood
Stirs at the memory of that symbolic stranger

Glimpsed in a moment of vision and swiftly gone—
 Man and his independent spirit, alone
 On the vast plains, with night and rain coming on.

The amateur structure of this poem will not bear the comparison it invites with the masterly development of Judith Wright's "Bullocky" or with Nan McDonald's "The Lonely Fire"; it is even less neat, though it has more meat, than Ingamells' amoeba "The Bullocky." *The Darkened Window* has a disappointingly small number of quite cleaned panes, and some are broken.

The poetess is perplexed throughout by a problem of Time. This is one of the three or four most persistent themes of recent Australian poetry. The writer who shall say what the problem is and solve it will be a prophet to Australian life. Nancy Cato is not alone in failing to frame the terms of inquiry. Sometimes time is cutting down the past like a man in a patched waistcoat in the back paddock; sometimes it is that old philosophical howler the river; sometimes it is ages of geology, sometimes history, sometimes a draughty corridor of human generations. Always time is "the bitterest enemy." One seeks to escape from time, place, and self by mind, and from idealism by a vague sort of earth religion. Fundamentally, it appears that this world of time is the enemy because the poetess wishes to live in it by the standards of another world of eternity, the mind, the soul, which has an independent existence and commands the sacrifice of this world. Hence the retreat from experience in the images. The sacrifice is not a willing one. "Dark Infinity" is a black cat waiting to pounce on the soul, which in its body is a "frightened mouse" in its hole. The bright "world of everyday" will be pitiful to lose when one goes into the world of half-light. Nancy Cato laments the loss of this Australian world,

Where moves the strange reality of red kangaroos, hopping,
 Bouncing lightly over the hard gibber plains,
 Or among the spinifex-pincushions; where unsleeping
 The mirage quivers in indigo shapes, forms fours, and feigns

Water, hills or trees with the same dexterous deceit.
 And once passed forever into that grey world of dream
 How will I forget the scent of summer, the white
 Hot, dusty roads, the red roads, flowing like a stream. . . .

The world of eternity, far from being embraced or anticipated with rapture, is as tenuous as a "grey world of dreams." The essential and anachronous poetic milieu of this verse appears when we allow it to remind us of Pater's saying how hard it was to "endure the greyness of the ideal or spiritual world."

In 1957 Nancy Cato's *The Dancing Bough* was published by another firm. In this selection some advance has been made. Often the poems have been concentrated to fifty words or so with an improvement in integrity. Time remains a puzzler; it is the "soundproof glass" that conceals the music of that other world. The time of childhood

is past; death stalks the garden; in retrospect this life is good enough to be wished longer. The poetess is more concerned than formerly with the experiences she chooses to write of. "The dancing bough", she says, is "beyond the darkened window." The poems realize their subjects more wholly and are better wholes than the earlier ones. The thinker, the thinking, and the thought of time are conveyed within the imagined experience, and that is all the poem one knows or needs to know. Here, ungallantly disjointed, are the first and last of the five stanzas of "The Road":

I made the rising moon go back
Behind the shouldering hill,
I raced along the eastward track
Till time itself stood still.

And light and movement, sky and road
And life and time were one,
As through the night I raced, I sped,
I drove towards the sun.

The greater positiveness of the poems in this book seems to justify the publication of the former one. Sooner or later a writer must be allowed to read his own words in print if he is ever to get the feel of writing for an audience.

John Blight, born in South Australia in 1913, has spent most of his life in Queensland, where he has travelled widely and at the time of publishing was an accountant to a timber firm in Maryborough. Since 1939 his poems have been appearing in periodicals, and he produced a volume, *The Old Pianist*, in 1945. *The Two Suns Met* (1954) is a selection of the work of a practised amateur. These are poems of down-to-earth experience quietly enjoyed by a lively, practical observer. No roars here like those that come, in celebration of experience, from the middle-aged hearties of Sydney. We seem to read entries, often in the first person, in a circumstantial diary of interesting matters in a man's world of the countryside, the coastline, the sea. "Once weeding, when I pulled a skull/ Out of the earth . . ." "You could match flames for candles from this shrub . . ."

When I have heard nothing and seen nothing
After a day perishing in the grey bush
With my gun and my dog, is it proving
Existence matters or not, that makes me push
Tobacco into the bowl and, impersonal, watch
The tortured char of the match?

Doing and watching prove whether existence, matters. We live in the present moment of common action:

Past time and present touch
Alone at the instant. Now, and are parted. Much
Of doing, is what is done . . .

The style is part of this view. The imagination is concrete: fidelity in description

is its forte. The language is plain but not vulgar; the rhythm and diction of casual talk are caught up without pretence. Metre is controlled (but occasionally intrudes unnaturally).

Action is not violence, and Blight is sensitive to psychological moods as well as to "a bird with a red bill." The poems are often reflective in a matter-of-fact tone, and he likes an occasional speculation on the big issues. In the following (complete) poem "Dusk" he is at his full stretch poetically and intellectually. As a whole poem it is not quite typical of the others. They tend to terser movements and to less meditative subjects. I think it one of his best, and it illustrates several characteristic features of his work, notably (in all stanzas) the concrete and kinaesthetic imagery.

Before the night, at the last hour
Of gathering dusk when minutes, almost,
May be counted in the air
(No longer as points infinite and lost,
But grains of air, like the last sand
Falling in hour glasses) they
Have purport, seem more planned
Than during the bright rush of tidal day.

I, listening by the sea, have heard
The snipe, all piping sea-birds, calling
Across the calm of waters: as a whispered word
Heard in a room, as clear, as softly falling.
Whose is the voice that calls all life at night?
The flocks gather, the shadows crowd together,
There is a mingling of men around a light:
Communion that folk seek in stormy weather.

A gentleness one may expect of friends;
A comfort from the ring of faces walling
Out the eternal night when this life ends
And we hear across the spaces voices calling,
It is the spirit that calls each to each.
The annealing bond of sleep unites all kind
After that homing call. What need for speech?
This is the hour of dusk and peace of mind.

Blight's poems suggest an interesting contrast to those of the nationalistic Jindy-worobak poets. He has a sensibility that has been as much formed by the "earth" and is surely every bit as much Australian as any of theirs; but he does not find it needful to hail Australia Fair and take off for a Queensland aborigines' corroboree to find his identity or write good poetry. On the other hand, "Dusk" is a world away from the sophisticated agonies of Professor A. D. Hope's poems. Undoubtedly, Blight's sensibility could not absorb the problems of the merciless life with which Hope deals. The strength of the amateur like Blight is that his poems create a view of experiences and issues which, while it is his own, is common enough but lacks a rousing professional interpreter. It is a pity (though statisticians may not admit it) that not all of his poems are his best.

Another Queenslander is David Rowbotham, a native inhabitant of the Darling Downs. He has taught school, studied at universities, visited England, and returned to the Downs. *Ploughman and Poet* (1954) is a selection of what may be termed good Australian Georgian poetry. It draws nostalgic pictures of the outback town and agrarian scene; persons in the poems are somewhat static, rarely speaking or evolving. The attitude is one of acceptance; life goes on despite the difficulties of farming, and "we shall endure Time" with the generations of men. The pieces are descriptive or evocative, the atmosphere placid, the mood reflective, the poet chiefly an approving observer not strongly involved. The poetic diction is modest literary English, with a few distinct Australianisms, and only an occasional astringent phrase like "preposterous paddocks." Syntax is straightforward. The imagination is essentially reproductive rather than metaphorical. The stanzas are regular and rhymed, and the slow movement of the rhythms measures out the slow pulse of life which generations of farmers pass without disturbance in a trustworthy countryside. "Earthbound" is typical.

Old Peter spits at the dead crow slung on the fence.
 Surveys the weather, hopes for a clear tomorrow.
 Flicks the reins and sucks his pipe while the plough's
 Decisive steel slices the sullen furrow.

The farmhouse leans a little on the slope,
 Remembering a wilderness and men who gave
 Their labour, love, and hate to the warm-bosomed earth.
 At once their passionate mistress and traitor-slave.

To the earth, to the redolent earth, my days have bound me,
 Where laden sunlit fields dip low between
 The dark hills dreaming in purple skies around me:
 Where great gums crest the wind with their singing green.

And giant grasses wave and rustle in wild
 Melodic rhythms, and chattering birds alight
 On glinting winter leaves—where we may go on
 Undivided, the earth and I, beyond the night.

We must not be deceived if any other school of Australians should imply that this is not genuine Australian poetry because it reads like English Literature. It *is* living, contemporary Australian. The farmhouse has a corrugated iron roof. Rowbotham writes with conscious appeal to an English tradition because he is expressing one of the current British Australian views of life in Australia. This contemporary view, admittedly, is romantic, idealistic, and conservative. Literary critics must add that in poetry it is amateur. This verse, like Nancy Cato's, states rather than creates its intended meaning. Rowbotham states: "To the earth, to the redolent earth, my days have bound me." Poetry has not been worked at until the images of the Darling Downs can be a mode of conceiving and expressing that seems inherent in the poet when he writes of being bound to that earth. Contrast the countrywoman Judith Wright:

South of my days' circle, part of my blood's country
 rises that tableland, . . .
 and the old cottage lurches in for shelter.

This is what the Jindyworobaks rightly blunder towards. Rowbotham's poems do not set the Darling on poetic fire.

In a second volume published in 1958 by another house he wanders farther afield in the Queensland countryside and strays into lyricism, romanticism, love, philosophy, and theology. The work remains essentially Georgian, and the limitations of that mode of conception are revealed on the broader canvas. If he is making a bid for a professional role, his work may come to test whether the Georgian outlook on poetry can be sustained in Australia. That is one of the issues of contemporary Australian literary life.

In *The Other Meaning* (1956) Vivian Smith makes thirty-four short taut jagged stabs at fending a career of pain. In free verse or rhymed stanzas, the poems are tense with abrupt interjections and impactions of speech rhythms that provoke the movement to uncertainty and jolts. Some of the poems are allegorical, that is, a scene or situation is established and a moral is drawn; others pass back and forth between scene and moral, so that descriptive images work into symbolic meanings. Others are organized about a line of meaning that is the locus of symbols which are flung into the poem loaded with secret, discrete meanings that may perhaps be unravelled in another poem that one is not reading. The symbols are frequently of storm, wreckage, tearing, violence, agony. For the reader the locus is often zigzag or, for a space, hypothecated. The syntax is that of "extreme curt" style and extorts hard reading. The world of the poems is angular and jabbing.

In these tight, symbolist poems, at times wearing rags of Eliot, Smith attempts to hint or suggest significance in a "stubborn world of pain," "finding the world alive with pain, and without its other meaning." In summer the Australian symbolist finds "paddocks of delight" and "my easy birds shake off their fear." A late autumn dove may defy winter's despair as, seen in light, it "lives into life." More often, "winter's orchid dies again." The poem "Winter Foreshore" is typical of Smith's best in all respects.

The drilling wind, the whittling air
 these cruel tortured days
 could eat the feeling in the mind
 to the thought beneath despair:
 we are our elegies of praise;

our going through is all.
 These objects caught in light,
 discarded anchor, sodden bird,
 the wind-rhyming shell
 reveal the heart is desolate.

Worm-wood hull and ruined shore,
 the sharp thrust of splintered wood

scratch the mind with shapes of pain;
severed now, this one bird's claw
rejects the traitor tide.

Under the ravaging brittle wind
anchor, stone and driftwood lie:
dragged in a net of sentiment
they'll clutter up the mind—
till they become an elegy

or riveted to praise
endure the traffic of the heart.
Our winter shore is leashed to a tide
that covers all. But we must build:
build from the havoc of our days.

In "These Wrens, This Wattle Tree" Smith suggests that the heart should be where the mind finds "meaning", and this is in the song of poetry, perhaps in beauty, as in "Portuguese Laurel, Flowering":

Those branches laced with light
are rooted in our tragic world:
confusion breaks through in delight.

Style, meaning, and (what is often missing in other poets) a *raison d'être* of writing just this poetry are intimate. This is disciplined, serious, challenging poetry. It is sometimes over disciplined. It becomes forcing instead of forceful when powerful or extensive meanings are concentrated into one-word images and beat like hammerheads along compact sentences. When a poem begins "Drunk in a tenement she dies," the stance is one of bardic afflatus, but this is not sustained and (I take it) not intended in the succeeding "close-ups" of "abject life." In sum, in these poems it is as if a philosopher were saying ever and anon in a broken voice, "There is a problem of pain", but could not locate it in circumstantial examples or formulate the issue. Nevertheless, this poetry is a more original literary creation than the others so far reviewed here; it is a verbal construct of concepts that is new and self-sustaining.

Another poet employing near-contemporary English techniques is the younger amateur Ray Mathew. In *With Cypress Pine* (1951), at the (for him) advanced age of twenty-two, desperately literate, he was making poems of what many others get to know without getting to publish. He is Australian enough to make an opening bow (his final, one imagined) to the Jindyworobak myth. In the beginning all was green with cypress pine. Now things have changed. The pine is forbidden, though each must go to listen to it. The small outback town is deserted. He describes the town and outback with plain diction, simple syntax, an eye for people and an ear for talk, with an air of amused disinterest. His proper milieu is the modern city. It is there and for there that the poem must "affirm from the past . . . that life (being miracle) will last." This project to make poetry for present-day urban culture is an exciting feature of con-

temporary Australian literature. Mathew adopts free verse, affects familiar language and subjects, and hands out hard metaphors. Eliot's evening cat slinks about an Australian small town:

Our corrugated town with its peel-paint walls
 stares at the sunset, till stared-out the sun falls.
 Then it sinks into soft night as though it belonged,
 loses its shape to the dark like a fluid cat

To the young Australian, modern mechanized civilization is the problem, not the answer, for personal life.

Still, after the security of fast machines
 that do as we want what we do not want,
 after this creation without pause between scenes,
 this idiot cake-walk that we dare not stop,
 there comes a quiet more terrible from sound—
 we are so used to having them around.

In this quiet the lonely poet must find his moment. The machines deaden us; the world seems voiceless. He must look for the life in urban life. Mathew is for "dropping the pretence," whether it is convention or other people's "say so" or one's self-deception. In these poems self-conscious Australian youths are presented in a perspective that is at once a mental stance of rueful objectivity and a stylistic mode of irony. Tolerantly barracking the ladies' cricket match, they forget the game for the females; then they are "ashamed to have caught one another out." (The pun on the cricketering term of dismissal sharpens the point.) Mathew is a devastating expert on catching people (himself included) out. "I am suspicious of intellectual perfection"—and, it may be added, of motives.

The poem "Tourists" that follows is not his most vital, but it is characteristic.

We took The Long Walk; saw many trees.
 Six hundred varieties, the guide-book said.
 Shade-types and softwood, native and imported,
 They were very green, and to us they were trees.

The sun was our heavy and crushing haversack
 That made legs unsteady and not satisfactory.
 So that only in the deep, cool river of a tree
 Could we gaze up at the day with our hats back.

And we finished by climbing the Giant's Stairway.
 Breathless to count and using the heart-beat.
 But she was the life I yearned to in the heat.
 And her touch made stairway starway to the sun.

In the first two lines Mathew shows his ability to glance at the meaning of a poem in an initial image. As an amateur he controls structure with considerable skill. His retention here of images ("cool river", "starway") "from the past" and not from the urban

works of man's hand reflects his view that "The poems come easiest when . . . the deep earth and the dark sea find in you home."

After this wide-awake, self-dissatisfied book in 1951 it remained to be seen if Mathew would turn professional ("After such knowledge, what forgiveness?") and in particular if the natural source of life that he carried into the city would continue to satisfy when the going got sophisticated. On the whole it did not. In *Song and Dance* (1957) the earlier incipient girl and the love interest have developed into "the hue and cry after Cupid." Love is a many-splintered thing: "I love you, loathe you, need, despise." Struggling to tell all, and to find his identity in love, sophisticated Mathew has now adopted the metaphysical tradition with imitations of Donne and perhaps (in the rhymed stanzas, circling arguments, and *figurae verborum*) of Empson. The sky and sea now "make of our love a burning-glass to catch eternity." "On a Day" is characteristically contrived and developed.

On a day of extreme heat I laid my head,
Cool in her lap; in her soft hands I lay.
If it had chanced that I had raised my head,
I could have had the trembling air of day.

From the leaves, the tree-runners' water-sound
Of cool and cool was liquid green and green.
If it had chanced that I had made some sound,
She would have laid her lips where sound had been.

But to tell truth the languid heat of day,
The net-like cool of that bird cry and cry,
Held both of us within, without, the day
And we stayed still as the unmoving sky.

It seemed that I could see from place
Outside the glass that pupilled on my eyes,
And holding both of us, and three the place,
I seemed to hold the world at its true size.

It seemed that never had we ever loved,
And never had I moved within her breath
As I did then, for we two deeply loved
Although we stayed as still and separate as death.

Then somewhere, near the sun, an atom moved.
Sky-lark or angel, which one could it be?
And crying to her eyes I also moved,
And pointing upwards turned upon her knee.

That bird-thing sang as it approached its sun
And I too uttered more than I could say.
The bird and I approached a separate sun
Till I found love was deeper, was the day.

Mathew is an advancing student who can learn a new instrument. Yet cleverness has cost clarity and spontaneity in expression and conception, whether we read the meta-

physical poems on "the nowness of eternal world" for abstract patterns of philosophy or for concrete definitions of experience. In the country, the poet longs to get back to Sydney where he can "be miserable without pretence" and "be indifferent." In the second part of the booklet he captures the metropolis. It is a hard life, if you don't weaken: "Give me my own hurt, my own squalor, pain, and I will make it truth." These unmetaphysical poems sustain the mode of the earlier book, more artificially, more deliberately, but sometimes less successfully. In *Song and Dance* rue has turned to columbines. Mathew remains an amateur professional. He has some of the potential energy and the apparatus of Layton; he may make a big bang in Sydney, for one touch of Layton makes the world go round.

All these poets are unready. So was Shakespeare when his earliest plays were put on stages. In selections so long mellowed, one prepares for pungency. The poems are not all of the best vintage, but none is quite flat. Publication from slow distillation has produced a small amount of verse of good quality. This is an accomplishment for both poets and sponsors, and justifies the ladder. What is needed is more practice, more publication, and above all an informed, imaginative awareness of what has been done in poetry. To be conscious of where he stands in poetry, to divine what is to be done, are desirable but difficult insights, especially for the amateur in Australia, where society does not know what a poet does, and each beginning poet must find it out alone. The historical sense, says Eliot, is "nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year." With his customary relevance, Eliot has seen in *The Confidential Clerk* that the problem of the capable artist who is not in the front rank is disturbing in a modern highly-educated community. There is less and less room for what the Jacobean dramatist called "a little unbak'd Poetry, such as the Dabblers of our time contrive, that has no weight nor wheel to move the mind." With high wages and paper-back classics, the amateur must think himself seriously addressed by Ruskin:

With poetry second-rate in *quality* no one ought to be allowed to trouble mankind. There is quite enough of the best,—much more than we can ever read or enjoy in the length of life; and it is a literal wrong or sin in any person to encumber us with inferior work. I have no patience with apologies made by young pseudo-poets, "that they believe there is *some* good in what they have written: that they hope to do better in time," etc. *Some* good! If there is not *all* good, there is no good. If they hope to do better, why do they trouble us now? Let them rather courageously burn all they have done, and wait for better days.

A good part of the amateur's reply has been voiced by a professional contemporary of Ruskin's: "Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee: out with it, then. Up, up!" Alas, what appears when an amateur poet outs with what is in him had often better been strangled, and the Philistines must be shown the ass's jaw: "In poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true

and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because of the high destinies of poetry." In the end, the accomplishments of amateur poets must be allowed to justify or silence them. Nearly every one of the poets reviewed here offers a reader a few pieces that are finished structures and can reward him more than once and sometimes bring him the pleasure of having found a new insight that he knows he will keep aside. The poetry is almost ready. It is published at the moment of amateur poetry's apotheosis as minor poetry, when there is a work of art that for an audience springs perpetually to life in an organization of energies, an invention by which the amateur shows that he has the skill of the master and is worthy of the profession, its public, and its critics.

Dalhousie University

S. E. Spratt