



Chester Eagle

Some thoughts about the values inherent in Alan Marshall's writing.

returned to me, "I knew that fellow couldn't ride; every time he got on a horse he did his hair."

Prince was always talking about going to Queensland. "There's money to be made up there," he used to say. "They're opening up the land."

"That's right," father agreed with him. "Kidman's opening up as much as he can get. He'll open up six foot of it for you after you've worked for him for forty years. Write and ask him for a job."

Arthur Robins, the bullocky, came from Queensland. Peter asked him why he left that State, he explained that his wife lives up there," an explanation that satisfied him. He asked him what Queensland was like and he said it was a hell of a place but you can't help thinkin' you'd like to live there."

He was a little man with stiff, wiry whiskers of which a large nose stood naked to the weather. He had an undefended nose, red and pitted, and father, who once told me that it must have tossed in the towel before he was ready.

"She doesn't like blood, either," he added.

It appeared that Mrs. Wilson, after being bitten by a mosquito one night had left a patch of blood "the size of a two-bob bit" on the pillow.

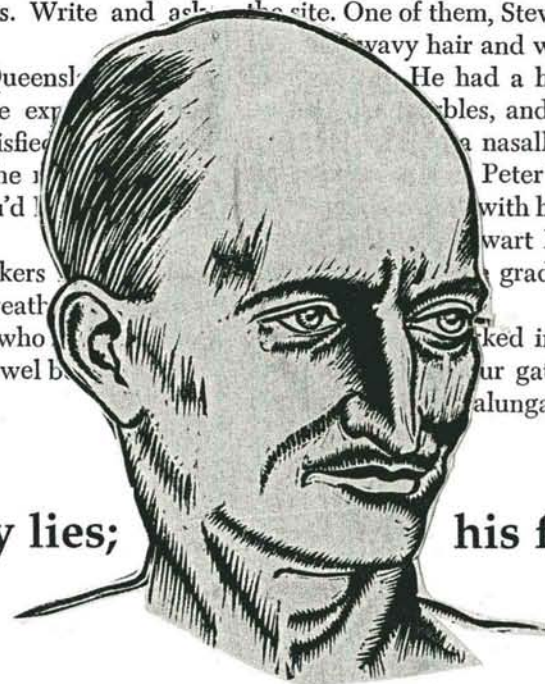
"The way she went on about it," reflected Peter, "you'd think a sheep had been killed in the room."

Ted Wilson worked with three other men who camped on the site. One of them, Stewart Prescott, a young man of twenty-four with wavy hair and wore snub-nosed ox-blood boots when he was out.

He had a huckaback waistcoat with round, red buttons, and he sang "Save My Mother's Picture" in a nasally voice. He accompanied himself on a guitar. Peter regarded him as a great singer, but not a great one with horses".

Stewart Prescott "The Prince" because of his name. He gradually became known as Prince Prescott.

He was seen in the bush below our home and had been seen at our gate on his way to a dance at Turalla. He came along with him one day and when father



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In *This is the Grass* there is a man called Gulliver (Marshall is not very good at inventing names) who plays the piano. He plays Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Bach and Beethoven. Marshall says of his own responses: 'The greater the composer the more he demands from the listener, and I did not yet possess what the greatest music demanded.' He is happier with folk songs and ballads.

I could never hear music or listen to singing without seeing people behind it. Ballads evoked the vision of a vast number of people singing their longings, their hopes, their despairs, their defiance, and stirred me to feelings of exaltation. The words might be sentimental, the music paltry, but I respected them and defended them hotly against the contempt of Mr Gulliver, to whom grand opera supplied all he needed in song.

He goes on:

I think I was really defending my father when I defended folk music and ballads against contempt. Not only my father, but all those simple men and women who had been uplifted and strengthened and comforted by the songs that sprang from the demand of countless hearts.

My father loved music though, in all his life, he had never

heard an orchestra nor seen an opera. Under its spell he did not become a man on a pinnacle of dreams but a man inspired to an unselfish giving of himself for the benefit of others.

Marshall takes the argument further by describing a piece of wood he's picked up in the outback, and given to his father, who carves it to become a stockwhip handle, then returns it to his son.

'It's a good handle,' I said to him, pleased at the feel of it in my hands.

'Not yet, it isn't,' he said. 'It won't be a good whip-handle for years. When you have handled it, and all your friends have handled it thousands of times and the sweat of all your hands has gone into it and it is worn smooth by people, then it will be a good whip-handle. It will mean something then; it doesn't now.'

Marshall elaborates on his father's theme:

The ballads and folk songs sung by the people were like that handle to him. After being sung by countless people over years they absorbed something of their aspirations. Crude and sentimental as many of them were, they inspired in him and in others emotions just as worthy and uplifting as those engendered in the minds of cultured people by arias from the grand opera.

I resolved that one day I would understand and appreciate the works of the great composers, but when I reached that stage I felt sure I would find behind the emotion and intellect

that guided the themes of the greatest compositions an embrace of the world's people.

'An embrace of the world's people': Marshall is setting his standard high. As we see if we follow him through his three autobiographies, he is constantly aspiring and constantly falling back. Here's another passage from *This is the Grass*:

My conversations with these local men gave me glimpses of lives distorted by deprivation. They were deprived of security, culture, purpose. I knew no answer to their conditions; I was like them.

I increasingly sought their company, our kindred problems forming a bond between us. They supplied part of my need even though I felt dissatisfied and restless when I left them. I liked them and often admired them, but they offered me no escape from my prison, no escape from their own prison.

I wanted conversation, enlightenment that in some way would reveal a road out of all this. Within me, compressed and bound and chained, were longings and hopes, poetry and stories, formless yet waiting the release of an understanding listener to crystallise them into words. I wanted to leap forth from my surroundings fully clad as a writer, armed by my experiences, not defeated by them.

As they say, it's a big ask, yet Marshall got there after a time, and when I ask myself what he did to make him the much-loved writer he became, I keep thinking of his father, the horse-breaker and store-keeper whose attitudes and sayings keep popping up in his son's pages. A horse-breaker needs to be patient, must be able to think his way into the mind of the animal he's training, and

has to respect, even admire, the qualities of the animal so that he can work with the horse, not against. A good trainer develops a horse rather than conquering it. Is *breaking* the wrong word, then? Yes and no: we speak of breaking an animal's or a person's will, and this is a frightening, perhaps totalitarian concept, but the idea of breaking *in* is another matter. Breaking *in* means giving the animal/person a new and superior set of abilities to those possessed before.

So Marshall wanted to be a writer, but a writer of a certain sort. From *This is the Grass* again:

To feel myself part of city life, not as one begging for alms in disdainful streets, but one contributing to the throb and power of it, gave me a feeling of elation. Now I was moving forward somewhere, wedged tightly in a mass of people with uplifted faces to a goal that the very nature of man was impelling them to seek – a better life.

A few pages later in the same book we find this:

My notes, I thought, were not only objective in content but delved into the minds of men and women. But when I sat down to write I felt empty as a sack. There was no great comprehension within me upon which I could draw ...

It was with impatience and resentment I realised that what I lacked was not so much experience, though this was limited, as the ability to see my experience in relation to the struggles of mankind as a whole.

The young Marshall attaches himself to a pie-cart somewhere near Flinders Street station, he's friendly with the man who runs

it and it gives him a vantage point for looking at, studying, the lives of all who come to it. They're a varied clientele, and he fills his notebook with observations, until a detective warns him to keep away from the cart. He's mixing with criminals and it will lead him into trouble. Sadly he accepts that he'd better do as he's been told.

... I experienced a great loneliness. The detective's advice was an order ... Standing in front of the pie-cart I had a sense of belonging. It was a point of contribution to a more embracing and greater life than I could fashion from my own experience – greater, since this life emerged from the experiences of all men.

This is the Grass is full of passages of this sort, where Marshall considers himself, and mankind as a whole, then of writing as the bridge that will join them. This raises the question of what it means to be a writer; someone like Frederic Manning, already discussed in these essays, wrote no more once he'd made his major statement. Before that, although he belonged to the literary world, he wouldn't, I think, have described himself as 'a writer'; he was simply one who wrote from time to time. The very notion of 'being a writer', common to both Marshall and Porter, is a social claim, and if the surrounding society doesn't recognise the writing person then s/he isn't 'a writer'. Porter, as we have seen and will see again, is an actor through and through; it's his way of controlling an audience and a way of placing himself both against, and in the regard of, his socially chosen audience. Marshall's desire is more broad-based, more political, in a loosely defined way, since he identifies himself as one of those who help mankind

to lift itself in its struggles. Not unnaturally, he was well regarded in his lifetime by the political left. Today, with socialism rapidly following communism into the past, and the old terms left and right no longer possessing any source of meaning, it's hard to see the quotations I've included here as anything but the rhetoric of a day that's vanished ... and yet the statements were strongly felt by Marshall when he made them. Some development, he knew, had to happen inside himself if writing was to be natural to him.

As we now know, this particular story had a happy ending. We can see it happening if we move to Marshall's third book of autobiography, *In Mine Own Heart*. It begins in much the same mood as its predecessor:

My ambition was to become a writer. To achieve this I had to play the game, not watch it from the grandstand.

Fifty pages later, Marshall is asked by a magazine editor to give him a story to go with an illustration he's bought and been unable to use.

... a black and white drawing of a woman in evening dress leaning nonchalantly against the pillar of an enormous ballroom talking to a young handsome man in an evening suit. She was holding a cocktail glass and was smiling up at him.

Not exactly a Marshall story! But off he goes again: 'I couldn't do it. I wanted to picture life as it was and by inference show it as it should be.' About the middle of the book, however, something changes. Marshall's autobiographies have many chapters. Some of these, to my mind, end a little stiltedly, as if he is looking for a line to let

himself out. But the change that takes place – develops – in *In Mine Own Heart* is that each chapter becomes a story in itself, and ends when the story ends. You realise that you could lift whole chapters out and publish them separately, and indeed a number of them are to be found in collections of Marshall's work. Those nagging thoughts about the writer, the reading public (en masse) and the nature of a story and its relation to 'real' life, have dropped away. The stories flow naturally now. Marshall can write them easily because he can no longer write anything else. He's found himself in that he's confident that anything that interests him will interest others. This means, if you think about it, that he no longer believes there's any difference between himself and those who surround him. Common humanity is no longer an article of political faith, it's a discovery of himself, or, perhaps more accurately, a realisation that the things that make him unique are less important than the things that make him common.

The discovery, then, is of a way to see himself. Now, before we look at some of Marshall's other books, let's run through some of the later chapters in *In Mine Own Heart*. Here they are, rolling out, one story after another. Dolly Trevis is perhaps the first of the people who are both 'characters' (in a story) and people selected from daily life. She loves – is dependent on – a man called Harry, who has other women. Dolly knows about them, and how long they are with Harry in his room. When Harry has nobody else, he comes back to Dolly, his regular. Then Harry is killed in a car accident, and there was another woman with him at the time. The news gets through to Dolly, and she weeps, keeping her face

hidden as she does so. Marshall manages to convey to us that she has finally faced the fact that her life is shameful and that nothing in her life is free of this shame because she's built her life – her lie, her denial – on it.

In the chapter that follows the theme is mateship. Curly and Blue are two men who've been brought together by the adversities of travelling the country by jumping onto trains, and off again, in the guise, and probably the self-deception, of looking for work. Curly got off one train and Blue, who was with him, and should have jumped on immediately after, didn't. Curly goes looking for him, talking about him to Marshall and others. Someone shows Curly a report in the local newspaper: a tall man with red hair has been found dead beside a railway line.

Curly's face as he read became white and emptied of life.
Only his eyes were alive and from these I turned away.

He dropped the paper, seized his swag and tucker bag and walked abruptly away. He walked in a straight line across the paddock, looking neither to the right nor the left.

With only another line or two Marshall completes his impression of a man who has lived out the role of the profoundly needy 'mate' – the man who is financially and perhaps emotionally unable to partner a woman but manages, at last and at least, to find a similarly placed soul, and to travel around with him, the two of them supporting each other by living with, and being possessed by, the same unbearable problem. Until, as in this case, the partnership, the mateship, is broken, and the pain has to be carried alone.

The strange thing, the wonderful thing, is that Marshall's chapter ends with the simple sentence, 'I never saw Curly again.' I hope the reader will forgive me pointing out that many thousands of readers have now seen, and thought about, Curly as he walks away from the fireside group of unemployed men to face his problem alone. Marshall has found a way to do one of the things he always wanted to do, and the weakness he felt so keenly is now a strength. Curly the individual is representative of the whole, suffering society, and Marshall, in presenting him, is the writer in touch with the thinking of the mass.

Marshall develops this combination/relationship in the chapters that follow, in which he shows himself moving around with sideshow people, entertainers, all of them, and frauds, some of them, moving about the country to put on their shows – boxing, fortune-telling – in one little township after another. Marshall feels a kinship with these people because, just as a writer needs technique, so too do these people need the tricks of their trade.

And they have them, as we see when Marshall enters the world of the boxing tent, with all its raucous rituals of challenge and brawling response, men knocked down, men pummelled many times a week, men who earn little putting on a show so that people of the little townships can have their few minutes of drama, with drums rolling, the referee-entrepreneur intervening, crowds screaming, and the rest of it. It's a world that's almost vanished now, except that it hasn't, the charlatanry has simply moved elsewhere in the society that no longer bothers much with

country shows but preoccupies itself with television, celebrities, rock musicians, et cetera.

In this respect, Marshall is a writer from a world that's vanished and was disappearing in his own lifetime. So, you may say, are we all. Change sweeps us all away, or makes our stories, our performance, irrelevant. It's part of the art of showmanship to stay up to date with, or a little ahead of, those who are to be entertained. Diverted. Amused. Given a workout of their emotions. Marshall, like a number of the other writers discussed in these essays, is both a realist and an optimist. That is, he tries to be realistic when identifying the forces, including people's own habits and dispositions, that hold them back, while at the same time maintaining a measured optimism about mankind's progress, and future. This is where the artistic and political sides of the 'progressive' artist encounter each other, and join. In the last chapter of *In Mine Own Heart* Marshall goes to Sydney to meet a man with the un-Sydney name of Colin Street (Collins Street). Travelling north 'in the truck of a haulier I knew', and searching the streets of Elizabeth Bay, Marshall faintly resembles Curly looking for Blue. Colin Street seems to think so too, though he's smart enough to recognise that Marshall knows a thing or two about ordinary people. Street tells Marshall he's uneducated, and is rather amused at Marshall's desire to be paid more than three pounds ten shillings for doing what the same paper pays Street fifteen pounds to do. There is an amusing – satirical, I think – passage in which Street tells Marshall about his own need for two Rolls Royces, which he justifies by comparing Madame

Melba with her charlady. Melba wouldn't have been able to sing without luxury, therefore she should have it, to which Marshall replies: 'You don't think I should be kept in luxury?' 'Certainly not,' replies Street, and tells Marshall that he would be unhappy living in the surroundings which he himself enjoys.

Your happiness lies in an identification with the upward struggle of Man, to use a hackneyed and ambiguous phrase I read in one of your articles. You find pleasure in commiserating with the poor. You could never commiserate from a position such as mine; it would be in bad taste. Any worthwhile contribution you make to life will be as a result of poverty. You must preserve poverty since from it you have developed talent.

As Marshall leaves, Colin Street concedes that he's probably worth more than three pounds ten shillings a week, and tells him to ask for seven pounds. Marshall does so, and his editor somewhat glumly gives him what he wants. This unusual and unexpected collusion of Street (formerly of Harley Street, London), Marshall (the uneducated analyst of people's feelings), and his editor, produces an ending to the book which is both consistent with Marshall's view of mankind's struggle and oddly contradictory of the optimistic humanism for which he was famous, and loved, in his lifetime.

As I sat there listening to him I had a feeling of unreality ... The juggling puppets we were bore no resemblance to the independent men we thought we were.

We were jugglers of pretence, each one the other's enemy, each one the victim of a history we were encouraging to

repeat itself. We could only rise by taking from the one something that reduced him.

I saw myself kneeling side by side with them scrabbling for money in a room beyond the door of which I could hear children crying.

I must get out of that dark room. Out ... Out ...

Thus Marshall's third autobiography ends on a note of struggle which I find surprising because it appears to contradict the growing confidence of the preceding chapters. Twenty pages earlier, Marshall offers what is for me the quintessential statement of his purpose in writing:

Fortune telling brought me face to face with people. They were presented for my observation under conditions that removed the façade concealing them.

In a fortune teller's tent life became literature, a book, the chapters of which I was asked to write.

'Life became literature': there it is, the statement Marshall, and I in writing about him, have been searching for. Let us now, and in conclusion, look at two more books by Marshall, *These Are My People* (1944) and *Hammers over the Anvil* (1975). They are, respectively, Marshall's first published book, and one of his last. The differences between them will tell us much about his development as man and writer over the decades that separate them.

These Are My People – an optimistic title, in keeping with much that I have said about the writer so far – is a wartime book, about an (allegedly) wartime activity. Marshall and his wife, Olive,

are journeying around Victoria in a horse-drawn van with 'A.I.F. (Australian Imperial Forces) News' on the side. The News is a weekly journal published in Cairo for Australian soldiers in the Middle East. Marshall writes humorous pieces for it and now he and his wife are collecting messages from the soldiers' friends and supporters. It's a morale-boosting exercise; the men will be heartened when they get a few words from back home. The journey, and eventually the book, are undertaken in an atmosphere of patriotic support for the nation's soldiers. The book takes it for granted that Marshall and Olive, and everyone they meet, are in an accord created by the circumstances of the time. (The fact that there is no mention of a threat from Australia's north suggests to me that the events it chronicles must have occurred before Japan's entry to the war, with publication coming somewhat later.) People in the settlements passed through (there's a map in the endpapers) give the Marshalls the messages they're looking for, but the book is mostly concerned with the events, modest enough, of their daily travel. From one point of view, it's all a rather useless indulgence; from another, it's a protracted journey of love. As the trip comes to its end, Marshall writes this:

Our last camp-fire greyed to a mound of ash. Home to-morrow. No more yarns; no more messages. A year had passed since we had left. Now it was over. It was time to close my notebook, that link between the diggers and me.

We had wandered over one little corner of the country for whose existence they were fighting. In it was something of the things that helped develop their character ...

... I felt these influences. I saw the things that developed their love of freedom, their hatred of hypocrisy, their courage – the countless little things that surrounded them when they were children. Those things that spelt for them Australia.

Because of this I felt a desire to add one more message to the many I had collected – a message inspired by the Australian soil; a message, not to one soldier but to them all:

Then he begins – and ends with - a passage I cannot imagine anyone but Alan Marshall writing.

Say, diggers, do you remember picking the ham and eggs, the chocolates, the everlastings, the early nancy, the spider orchids of the cool places?

The modern reader may not be aware that he's referring to the names of wildflowers?

Do you remember the plovers calling at nights as they winged over in the high dark, and the nesting magpies hurtling down, then lifting and banking against a sky as blue as a distant hill?

Marshall invokes Australian nature in a succession of questions; do the soldiers recall the birds, the animals, the flowers of their land?

*Do you remember these things, diggers?
These are the things that made you.*

To read this panegyric, a lifetime after it was written, is to be even more surprised than by the many encounters with rural people which fill the pages of *These Are My People*. The modern reader can't fail to observe that Marshall's people have either

disappeared or become unrecognisable in the years between his writing and our reading. In his Preface to *I Can Jump Puddles*, Marshall says, 'I wanted to give a picture of a period that has passed.' This can be done consciously, of course, or it can be done inadvertently, by a mind not aware that today's confident assertions may be unbelievable tomorrow. This is not so much the problem, as the nature, of *These Are My People*. To read it today is to become aware that our society's notions of itself are created in different ways and in different places from the society Marshall was describing. This might lead us to say that the book is dated, with little to say to a modern reader.

I don't think this is true. To read *These Are My People* today is to get a jolt; when people felt patriotic, felt a love of their country, then, how is it that the country that caused an emotion to surge in them like a temperature rising is so different from the one that surrounds us today? If Marshall and the people he wrote for, the people whose messages he collected and the soldiers who represented them in a vicious struggle elsewhere in the world, could merge with a sense of unity created by events of their time and the Australia-loving passions called up at the end of the book, who and what is/are controlling us today to feel similar passions for vastly different purposes? I offer no answer to these questions but a modern reading of *These Are My People* disturbs the lower layers of one's mind and beliefs; it would be simple to say that Marshall is simple, and the people of his time were simple: they were no doubt, but what about us? Today?

Lastly, I turn to *Hammers over the Anvil*, a collection of stories taking us back to Marshall's childhood, and his friendship with a boy called Joe, but with a depth, a moral atmosphere, that was not always present in his writing before. One senses this new dimension in Marshall's introductory lines, where he tells us that the people we are going to read about (his people?) thrived under conditions 'where everyone knew everyone else, where the struggles of one enlarged the life of the other, where an individual triumph was often a dagger twisted in the heart of a neighbour.' He goes on:

They were often suspect, often feared, sometimes loved. They were sources of rumour, distributors of dark tales, furtive discoverers of secrets, leaders of factions, denouncers of sins.

They were people of power and influence, people of no power and no influence. They had one common denominator: they made their presence felt. Everyone was aware of them. They were part of the township's air, they were the township's personality, they were the township's burden.

Marshall is no longer inviting us to consider the people he is going to tell us about as being part of the struggle to take an upward step into that better life which he once regarded as mankind's aim. Tragedy is as much a part of human life as aspiration. What is most remarkable, to me, about this alteration to his vision is that it is done by taking us back to the world of *I Can Jump Puddles*, the world of the young Alan and his mate Joe, forever getting about the district by day and by night, prying into birds' nests, trapping rabbits, and doing anything else that takes their fancy. This time

Alan has an extra dimension of awareness. Sexual secrets, and covert meetings, are part of this childhood revisited. Alan and Joe overhear things they don't entirely understand, but Marshall, in this book published when he was 73, offers them to the reader, confident that the reader will know, will share.

The most painful of the stories, though perhaps the best, is 'Miss McAlister'. There are actually two people with this name, two sisters – Maggie, and Grace.

That was the name of the pretty Miss McAlister – 'Grace'.
She had marvellous laughing eyes. She got Joe and me in.

Much of the story appears not to be about Grace at all, but a man called Peter McLeod and his Clydesdale stallion, Nero. Maggie McAlister wants Peter to have Nero serve one of her mares. Nero isn't interested, so deception has to be brought into play. Another mare is offered to the excited stallion, then pulled out of the way, and Maggie McAlister's mare is substituted as the rearing stallion comes down, penis at full stretch. Alan and Joe, who are helping to hold the horses, are both excited by and afraid of the force they perceive in the stallion.

Joe had led his mare to the fence where he tied her up with the halter, then came running over to me and said breathlessly, 'By hell, that's bloody dangerous, I'm tellin' ya. Nobody should be around when he's doing that. It's stupid ...

'I liked watching them', I said defensively.

'That was the bad coming out in ya', said Joe. 'You want to keep holt of yourself. It can get a holt of you. Father Guinness told us looking at carnal things poisons the mind.'

'Struth!' I exclaimed. 'What do ya know about that.' Then asked, 'What's "carnal"?''

'It's what Nero was doing to "Miss McAlister".'

I've ended the quote with Maggie McAlister's horse being identified by her name. This is Marshall's way of linking sexuality in all its force to the other Miss McAlister, Grace. The boys have seen Grace riding with a wool-classer who's visiting the district. He chases the laughing woman, they dismount, then enter a clump of wattle growing amongst high ferns. 'They stayed hidden for a while, then came out and rode away.' The outcome of this is revealed on the story's last page.

The next day the most terrible thing I've ever heard of happened. I heard about it outside the pub. A lot of blokes were talking about it. They said that Grace McAlister went into the gun room at Barji, took down her Dad's double barrel gun, and blew her head off.

Grace has become pregnant, and the man has gone away. Alan's village is full of sex in this late collection, full also of people who try to prevent it taking over their lives. In the story 'Miss Trengrove', we see that if sexuality doesn't satisfy itself in the body it takes over the mind. Miss Trengrove lives alone.

She moved through Turalla cloaked in religion, a cloak that shielded her from sin. Sin to Miss Trengrove was always associated with sex. She had never married; she was far too fastidious.

At the urging of Elsie, Alan's sister, Miss Trengrove takes a boarder, Evelyn Wilson, a young assistant teacher, twenty years

of age, with blonde hair coiled into a bun. Miss Wilson tells Miss Trengrove, after a time, that she would like to visit an old lady, Mrs Turner, on Tuesday and Friday nights. But Alan and Joe are out at night, rabbiting, and they are setting a trap, in the shade of a stone fence, when they hear voices. To their amazement, they realise that they are close to Miss Wilson the teacher and Tom Dixon, 'a good-looking bloke who walked like a stallion being led out to a mare.' The boys are alarmed for her safety, but Miss Wilson comes to school in the morning 'very happy for a girl who had just escaped having her throat cut the night before.'

The boys, Miss Wilson and Tom Dixon are not the only ones active at night. There is also a sixty year old Sunday School teacher called Miss Flinders, who plays the organ at her church. Marshall describes her as 'chock-a-block full of religion'.

She liked playing for God, but she also liked walking about at night. She was always looking for something, I don't know what.

She'd pass houses in the dark and the light from the windows would fall on her face for a moment. It was always looking at the windows and the windows were looking at it. They saw a sad face, I think.

Miss Flinders sends an anonymous letter to Miss Trengrove, accusing her of complicity in what's happening on Tuesday and Friday evenings. Miss Trengrove shows it to Alan's sister Elsie, who recognises the writing. Miss Trengrove posts it back to Miss Flinders and after that, the narrator tells us, Miss Flinders didn't walk at night any more. I presume we're told this in order to keep

the narrative simple, because the focus then moves back to Miss Wilson, the teacher, who first puts on weight, then leaves the town. Two days before her departure, Alan and Joe take a rabbit to Miss Trengrove's because, they believe, Miss Wilson likes to eat rabbit. Miss Trengrove thanks them, they leave, then Joe calls back:

'Hey Miss Trengrove, don't worry over that rabbit. It's been skinned and gutted; all the dirty work's been done!'

By this stage of *Hammers over the Anvil*, the reader is aware that dirty work, and the deeds of darkness, are never done, in the sense of finished; aware, too, that they are done all the time, because that is what the collection is about. Human beings can ruin each other, and they can ruin themselves; over-confidence is another portal for tragedy to enter. 'East Driscoll' shows us this, painfully enough.

East Driscoll is a horse-breaker, a flamboyant man, too sure of himself to get through life unscathed. He is what Marshall's father might have been, but wasn't. The young Marshall tells us about waking 'in the dead of night ... to the sound of horse's hooves pounding the roadway past our house.' This is East Driscoll riding home after a drinking session.

Some awakened husband would mutter to his wife, 'East Driscoll's on the booze again', then turn over and return to sleep. The wives remained awake staring into the dark while they remembered his provocative eyes, his grin, his lithe flexible body and his swagger. He had flashed messages past their husbands' heads to all of them at one time or another.

Alan goes on to quote his father, in a passage that can be added to 'Miss McAlister', a story already discussed.

'A good rider on a good horse takes from the horse the virility and the vigour of the animal and makes it his own. A man riding easily on a free-striding horse is a bigger man than when he is on the ground. Women think that he is all they have missed.'

The story tells us a good deal about East Driscoll's daring, and his skill with horses. But there is a weakness: father again:

'He sometimes rides for the gallery and never thinks of the horse. He's building up his reputation at the expense of the horse, but he's pretty to watch, isn't he?'

One afternoon he rides a half-broken colt through Turalla on his way to the pub, and father comments that it's 'a dangerous horse to go drinking on.' Driscoll is thrown as he gallops home, is dragged by his foot in the stirrup for hours on end, suffering terrible injuries. He lies unconscious in hospital for three weeks. Eventually he recovers, after a fashion.

... I saw him walking around his stockyard again; but he did not laugh or joke any more. He sometimes looked round vaguely as if striving to remember. There was no spring in his walk; though he continued riding horses he sat heavily upon them.

'East Driscoll is not the man he was,' said a farmer. 'Half the time, he's not there. A bloody shame isn't it?'

I think these examples will show how *Hammers over the Anvil* introduces a new appraisal of life into Marshall's writing. This

change, this development, largely undercuts the basis of his earlier optimism. Left-wing writing frequently, perhaps usually, blames the financial system for the world's woes and injustices. There may be truth in this but I think it's unlikely that a community will ever understand itself very well as long as it's prepared to locate blame on particular individuals or groups. Mankind, humanity, is deeply flawed, capable of reaching great heights of generosity and love, and equally capable of the most disgraceful deeds, and it seems to me that both individuals and whole societies must be on guard, every moment of every day, for the inevitable fluctuations in their behaviours from better to worse. It's my view that Marshall deserved the admiration he received in his lifetime – writers always slip out of sight when they die, unless they've generated a biography industry, as some do – but I think the acclaim he received in mid-life was a little too easily given, and was only fully deserved after he attained the more sombre view innate in his later stories, and he's greatly to be admired, I think, for being able to find the base for this fully-matured, fully-developed view in the experiences of his childhood. The life of the writer is fulfilled when those first experiences can form the basis of the matured artist's final thoughts.

The following books by Alan Marshall are referred to in the above essay.

This is the Grass, Australasian Book Society, Sydney, 1962

In Mine Own Heart, F.W.Cheshire, Melbourne, 1963

These Are My People, F.W.Cheshire, Melbourne, 1944

Hammers over the Anvil, Nelson, Melbourne, 1975

I Can Jump Puddles, F.W.Cheshire, Melbourne, 1955