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A FORGOTTEN NOVEL OF NORTH QUEENSLAND: MARIE BJELKE-PETERSEN'S 'JUNGLE NIGHT' (1937)

Looking for novels relevant to a bibliography of North Queensland writing, I recently stumbled upon this one by chance. Its author was Marie Bjelke-Petersen. Whether she was related to our previous State Premier I do not know. He came from the small township of Dannevirke in the North Island of New Zealand, whereas she was a Tasmanian. The only biographical details I have so far been able to discover are supplied by Miller and Macartney in their bibliography *Australian Literature* (p. 64), and by the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (p. 89). Marie Bjelke-Petersen was born in Denmark in 1874, and received her early education in Copenhagen. Her father then took her to London for a finishing course. In 1891 the family migrated to Tasmania, where they settled at Lindisfarne, across the river Derwent from Hobart. Marie died in 1969. Her brother Hans established in Hobart the Bjelke-Petersen Physical Culture School. Marie became an instructor there and also taught physical culture in the Hobart schools. Forced to abandon that career because of illness, she turned to writing. She contributed freely to Australian newspapers and magazines, but for all this journalism she is no more remembered than she is for her spate of novels. Yet in 1935 she was awarded the King's Jubilee Medal for literature, the King being George V. Her novels were much more popular in England and America, than they were in Australia, and several were translated into foreign languages, including one in Arabic.

Her first separate publications were three religious sketches, which appeared in 1913 and 1914. They are titled *The Mysterious Stranger*, *Before an Eastern Court*, and *Muffled Drums*, and they were all published in Hobart. Her first novel, *The Captive Singer*, was published in London by Hodder and Stoughton in 1917. Then between 1921 and 1937 Hutchinson in London published all her other novels. These are: *Dusk* (1921), *Jewelled Nights* (1924), *The Immortal Flame* (1926; already published by Harper in New York in 1917), *The Moon Minstrel* (1927), *Monsoon Music* (1930), *The Rainbow Lute* (1932), *The Silver Knight* (1934), and *Jungle Night* (1937). It is only with the last of these novels, *Jungle Night*, that I wish to deal.

Since the author was clearly trying to write a conventional romantic novel, I shall examine it in the usual way, beginning with its plot or action or story-line, and proceeding to a study of its characterization, themes, setting, language, structure, and so on.

The plot is not only "sentimental" but also sensationally melodramatic. It concerns a certain Mr Tony Valmont, who is a "rich timber magnate" with logging rights in the rainforest on the Atherton Tableland. He lives in a dazzling white mansion named Marble Hall. His manager is named Lockhart, who has an eighteen-year-old daughter named Robin. Two other timber loggers named Brood and Rudder steal a valuable tree from Valmont's estate. Lockhart places the matter in the hands of the police, but the culprits engage "the smartest lawyer from Townsville, . . . the best criminal lawyer on the coast" (a man named Holman) (90) and they win the case. A certain Mrs Lola Clair sets her sights on Valmont, but he does not reciprocate. Instead, he rescues Robin from some ghostly monster which emerges from Lake Eacham by night. (There is an Aboriginal legend which tells that such places are haunted by debbil-debbils, but no Aboriginals are mentioned in the book.)

When Brood and Rudder steal a second tree, Valmont and Lockhart agree that there is no point in going to court about it. But the third time Lockhart catches Rudder red-handed, and Rudder spends some time "locked up behind iron bars" (Chapter 25). In his prison cell he meditates revenge against Brood.

Meanwhile Brood has been plotting revenge against Lockhart. First he secretes a "deadly poisonous" trapdoor spider in Lockhart's bed. When this scheme fails, he persuades a youth named Tom Long to add boiled ironwood juice to Lockhart's billy of tea as a joke, assuring him that the effects are merely those of staggering drunkenness and are only temporary. But when Lockhart fails to arrive home that evening for dinner as usual, Robin persuades Valmont to institute a search. At this point God enters the story, for Robin suddenly decides to pray for her father's safety. She does so in the Cathedral Tree. Valmont then finds Lockhart moaning in a hollow tree-trunk, but Robin also thanks young Tom for *his* special effort in the search.

Back in Cairns, Mrs Clair consults an Oriental named Cassen, whose mystical cards foretell that her path to Marble Hall is blocked by a girl-cum-boy. She therefore plots with Brood to eliminate Robin, and he suggests pushing the girl over the edge of the Herberton crater. Somewhat hesitantly she agrees to this nefarious scheme, which Brood then reveals to Rudder. Robin's death will also take revenge on Tom, who has obviously fallen in love with her. He has therefore confessed to her that it was he who poisoned her father's tea, but they are soon reconciled. Rudder warns Valmont about the plot to murder Robin, and so Valmont is able to rescue her in the very nick of time. He then forbids her to have anything further to do with Mrs Clair.

A new character now enters the story. She arrives in Cairns on the Sunshine Express, the steam ancestor of the diesel Sunlander. She is dressed all in black, and is very beautiful. A taxi-driver takes her up the Gillies Highway to the hotel at Yungaburra. That night, however, Robin sees her about to embrace Valmont, and realizes she herself must cease to dress and act like a tomboy, and become more attractive as a girl. She catches the Sunshine Express back to Brisbane. Valmont pursues her, and sets her mind at rest about the lady in black. She is his alleged "wife". The marriage certificate, however, is a fake, because she had slipped him a Micky Finn and then later told him they were married while he was unconscious! Valmont is thus free to love and marry Robin, and she insists that the wedding take place in the presence of God in the Cathedral Tree. This final Christian happiness is specifically that of the Salvation Army.

This happiness, however, follows upon what is probably the most sensationally horrific episode in the whole book. On the pretext of inspecting the spot before murdering Tom Long there, Rudder lures Brood to the brink of the Devil's Pool at the foot of the Barron Falls. Here he pushes Brood in, and watches in triumph while the villain is taken by a white crocodile. Rudder's guilty conscience, however, so haunts him that he presently goes mad. Thus the moral outlook of the book is one of poetic justice: the evil are condemned or destroyed, the good are all rewarded. As Miss Prism reminds us, "That is what fiction means."

As far as narrative action goes, the best episodes are those of the search and the chase. The search is for Lockhart, and is perhaps to be seen as a variation on the standard Australian bush theme of "Little girl or boy lost". It occupies chapters 27-29. The chase is Valmont's urgent rescue of Robin from the machinations of Mrs Clair, in Chapter 36. Otherwise the action plods along at the author's whim, just fast enough to keep the reader turning the pages. There are also some loose ends: both Tom Long and Mrs Clair simply fade out of the story, and we never learn the fate of Valmont's alleged wife. Nor do we learn the identity of the beautiful woman in the framed photograph in Valmont's private suite, or the identity of the gurgling creature which terrifies Robin at Lake Eacham by night. And the boomerang in the legend that Mrs Clair discusses with Valmont in Chapter 18 (126) never comes back.

The *characterization* amounts to nothing more than the provision of a set of pasteboard stereotypes. The romantic hero is obviously Valmont. His name is apparently intended to suggest the vaguest of connexions with some noble family of aristocrats. I suppose its further suggestion of valleys and mountains is appropriate to the rainforest area of the northern coastlands and their hinterland. The romantic heroine is

less obviously Robin. Her name, being common to both sexes, is appropriate for a tomboy. But she is aged 18 (Lipson, 13), whereas Valmont "must be pushing on towards thirty-five," as Lipson calculates on page 10. Her father, Lockhart, must be older still, but Valmont and he treat each other as equals. We are brought somewhat obliquely to realize that Robin must pass for the romantic heroine when she is carefully contrasted with Mrs Clair as a vamp (141) and with Valmont's self-styled "wife", who doesn't even rate a name at all. Presumably Mrs Clair is also to be condemned because she smokes cigarettes (92).

The all-black villain is obviously Brood. His partner in crime, Rudder, is more circumspectly hesitant and reluctant. After being allowed to take the rap for Brood with a spell in prison, he becomes actively vengeful.

The method of characterization is the conventional one of external and internal description. The physical exterior may or may not be intended to indicate the temperament within. Here, for example, is a description from the novel's first page: "Cobbs, (Lipson's) companion, was tall, had a large, heavy frame, big feet, a forest of sandy-coloured hair, a florid complexion, and large flat features. But though he was a pompous-looking individual, his long, narrow, grey eyes held a twinkle which showed he possessed a sense of humour and could always enjoy a joke. Now he gave a big rumbling laugh . . . " (9). The reader rather gathers the impression that Cobbs in either a large man or a big man, and hearty into the bargain.

Especially prominent in such descriptions are the characters' eyes. We are repeatedly told, for example, that Lipson, a quite minor character, has "small bright monkey-eyes" (9). The heroine's eyes shimmer "like great blue-black jewels" (19). The hero has "fine dark eyes" (21). Mrs Clair has yellow or golden eyes that burn "with smouldering fire" (27) — the colour suggests her worldly materialism. Brood, the villain of the piece, has "small brown eyes", and his henchman Rudder has "filmy and protruding blue eyes (which) were so pale that in certain lights they looked blind" (35). And so on. I end with this much later description of the heroine's eyes: "Her blue eyes sparkled and shone, suggesting a warm tropic sky at night full of big, scintillating stars" (215).

The *dialogue* in the novel is often stilted, occasionally twee, sometimes convincing. The most successful is the gossiping of Cobbs and Lipson in Chapter 1. There is also an obvious endeavour to show the reader that the author has kept up with the latest popular slang. There is also a noticeable amount of the kind of dialogue that might appear in whatever the feminine equivalent of the *Boy's Own* paper may have been. Thus Lockhart consistently addresses his daughter as "childie",

and Valmont consistently calls her "Imp" (with a capital I). The same daughter is told that she is "plucky", and that she generally has "plenty of grit" (108, 111, 174). She tells the romantic hero: "You are so awfully nice" (49); but later, when he accuses her of being utterly spoilt, she replies, "Oh, how horrid of you to say that, Mr Valmont" (215). And to her father she says: "Oh, Daddy darling, you are just the sweetest thing ever invented!" (215). Rudder, the villain's partner in crime, is capable of saying "Golly" (256), while Brood himself is guilty of perpetrating such implausible exclamations as "gosh no!" (156) and "By gad no!" (169). Brood's unwitting tool in the poisoning of Robin's father, too, young Tom Long, comes to tell her: "I just toddled along to see how — your Dad was?" (202). There seems to be no attempt to give the characters distinctive kinds of language.

Slang enters the novel in its first two sentences. Concerning a deceased local named Flinders, Lipson tells Cobbs: "His head-piece went out of gear years ago, don't you remember? It wore clean out and they had to take him to the giggle-house." Still on the book's first page, Lipson tells Cobbs that Flinders "pegged out while you were away" (9). Between them they characterize Mrs Clair as "a hard-boiled egg", "a hot number", "a high-flier", and "a handsome piece of furniture", who "lives in gloves and preposterous heels" (12). "You can bet your false teeth", continues Lipson, that she wants to marry again, but "the bloke she sets her cap at will have to be something out of the box". Cobbs's reply is that "whoever marries her had better take a course in nettle-grasping" (12). At the other end of the book, in Chapter 45, Cobbs says to Lipson: "Now don't get into a miff, old chunk; I wasn't meaning any harm" (300).

The author's diction runs from such simple, familiar chatter to the pretentious purple-patching so beloved of an earlier period. Here, for example, is the beginning of Chapter 2 (15): "A larkspur-blue sky spread its star-spangled pinions over a black-furred sea of jungle — a swarthy, sinister ocean of trees" — and so on for all of two pages. The novel is not called *Jungle night* without reason. Here is the opening of Chapter 38:

> All signs of the threatening storm had cleared and the tropic night was full of stars and silken beauty. In the starlight and against the background of dark, furred jungle, Marble Hall gleamed a dusky white. The flowers in the garden were asleep and dreamt soft fragrant dreams of dawn and dew and glittering butterflies. The palms too were aslumber, and into their dreams came the vision of turquoise seas and long golden beaches shimmering in the noontide sunlight. (253)

Again, in Chapter 6 we read this: "The sunset was pale as arctic gold and the trees in the jungle lisped strange wild love-songs to depart-

ing day". (45) Such extravagant animism was apparently popular at the time.

The author also has an irritating mannerism when describing her characters' way of speaking. The mannerism is represented in the following examples:

(1) "It has been a lovely evening," she said presently on a drowsy little note. (Robin to Valmont, 163)

(2) "Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed on a quick little note of gratitude. (Robin to Valmont, 174)

(3) She spoke on a low, warm note. (Mrs Clair to Valmont, 127)

and

(4) "Yes, I know," she replied, on a low, warm little note. (Robin to her father, 216)

The *setting* of the novel is ostensibly Cairns and the Atherton Tableland, and briefly towards the end, Brisbane. The locale is established in the first chapter. Cobbs has been travelling in the Orient; his friend Lipson asks him: "Are you glad to be back in old Queensland?" With a "bright gleam" in his eyes Cobbs replies: "You bet! Never was so pleased in my life as when I set foot on the wharf at Brisbane again" (14). Valmont, the hero, is also a Queenslander. But though "he was born in this district" (i.e. on the Atherton Tableland), "the family went to Brisbane while he was a youngster and he was educated there." "His father was the big noise in the timber world . . . ; made money by the basketful"; and after the family moved, "his dad owned the biggest timber mill down South" (10).

Other actual places which are mentioned in the book are Gordonvale, the Gillies highway, Atherton, the Crater of Mount Hypipamee, the Barron Falls and gorge, Lake Eacham, and Bourburra (which is clearly Yungaburra with its celebrated holiday hotel). The Cathedral Tree is surely The Curtain Fig Tree, "that big hollow fig tree what's a little out of Bourburra", as Lipson reminds Cobbs (301). Marble Hall may well be an idealized version of Joe Paronella's Spanish extravaganza at Mena Creek Falls outside Innisfail. *The Cairns Post* daily newspaper is mentioned twice, as being read by Mrs Clair (93) and by Valmont (173). The only other thing that these two characters have in common is the status symbol of their wealth: they each drive a "smart little single-seater car" (hers is specifically a Riley) (Chapters 15-16, pp. 107, 113). The Sunshine Express, which brings Valmont's alleged "wife" to Cairns, and which takes Robin to Brisbane (Chapters 39 and 41), was an actual train. Nor is the aeroplane overlooked: Valmont speaks of flying down to Sydney (281), and for their honeymoon the newly-weds are to

fly to the romantic little island of Tasmania (301). Other dabs of local colour are provided by mentioning, for example, a cassowary and an umbrella tree, frangipani bushes and the stinging-tree, a python and a crocodile.

The basic problem of the book, however, is whether it can be classed as a genuinely "regional" novel, or whether the careful tropical details were gleaned from a travel leaflet, a holiday visit, correspondence with a friend, or sheer imaginative exuberance. The authentic names are there, but how close to the author's actual personal experience they are cannot be determined from the book itself. All I can say at this stage is that the book appears to include an attempt to evoke the atmosphere of tropical North Queensland, especially at night in the rainforest or jungle. This exotic setting may go far towards explaining why the novel was so much more popular in England and America than it was in Australia. But as a serious and perceptive study of what it is like to live and work in tropical North Queensland the book comes nowhere.

Today it is easy to make fun of the author's nonsensicalities, her over-writing, and her factitiously manipulated happenings and characterizations. Over against this ridicule, however, we can set her positive achievements as an amateur novelist. For one thing, her implausible tale may be full of sensational melodrama and tremulous romance, but in outline it is clear and it is sequential: there are no side issues and there are no flashbacks: the narrative marches straight forward. The same can be said for her characters: they may be mere two-dimensional puppets, but it is impossible to confuse any one of them with any other: the stereotypes are clear-cut and successfully differentiated.

There are also a number of recurring motifs which help to give the book some sense of structural unity. One of these motifs is that of pushing people over precipices. This motif first appears in Chapter 2, where Robin has clambered to the top of a lofty knoll in the midst of the jungle. There, "planting himself on the very brink of the precipice, (he) stood looking down into the black ravine" (18). Much later the motif reappears in Chapter 36, when Mrs Clair tempts Robin to repeat this feat at the Crater: "I wonder," she asks Robin, "if you have nerve enough to stand on the very brink without feeling you are going — to fall in?" Robin replies, "Of course!", and "proceed(s) to demonstrate her statements by moving to the margin of the fearful drop." Mrs Clair then asks, "What does the rock look like right underneath you?" And we are told: "Her companion bent over the fearful vacancy and tried to see the rocky wall below" (245). Then the motif appears for the third time in Chapter 43, where Rudder entices Brood to his death: near the base of the Barron Falls, we read, Brood "stepped closer to the brink of the ridge and at the same time bent over the rock"; then "with a sudden push

(Rudder) sent the other man tumbling headlong into the deep pool below", to be taken by the waiting "croc" (286). We might notice further that these three episodes form a series of mounting criminality. The first is not criminal at all, for it brings about the first meeting between the hero and the heroine. The second has criminal intent, but the crime is foiled. The third depicts the actual crime of murder.

Taking this subject of criminality further, we may notice that another structural motif is that of Mrs Clair as a successful murderess, guilty of killing her husband. Lipson adverts to it in the book's opening chapter: "Some say he drank himself to death," he tells Cobbs; "others, that he got sort of home-sick for the grave, and that she, in the kindness of her heart, helped him get there. A little dope here and there; all quite gradual like —" (12). The theme is then taken up by Mrs Clair's cockatoo. It has picked up some of the husband's repeated accusations, and enjoys repeating them: "Lola, you haven't played fair — oh, Lola, you've ruined my life — . . . You liar! Lola, you wanton! . . . To hell with you, Lola — to hell! . . . Heartless flirt, . . . you've fooled me!" (94, 96). Finally, in Chapter 35, Rudder doesn't believe that Mrs Clair will push Robin into the Crater, but Brood reminds him: "Haven't you heard the gossip about her doing for her husband?" (238).

A related motif is obviously that of poisoning. In Chapter 27 young Tom Long reproaches Brood for persuading him to give Lockhart his allegedly "little dose of dope" (177). Much later, in Chapter 44, Valmont confesses to Robin how his alleged marriage with the lady in black came about. "She played a terrible trick on me," he says, "and one day when we were having a drink together, . . . she slipped some powder into my wine" (293).

Embraces, or at least anticipated embraces, are another means of linking the three women in Valmont's life. In Chapter 21 he has to persuade a jealous Robin that he has neither kissed nor proposed to Mrs Clair (143). Robin declares that "Dad says a man shouldn't kiss a woman till he has proposed to her". In Chapter 41 Robin runs away from the prospect of Valmont embracing the lady in black who is his alleged "wife" (272-3). But when, in Chapter 44, Robin finally accepts him herself, "Then with profound tenderness he took her into his arms, and the caress which followed was the purest, the holiest thing which had ever come into his life" (299).

A certain inner kind of structure exists also in the transformation of Robin herself from tomboy to attractive girl. As late as Chapter 32 Robin tells her father: "Mr Valmont likes me best as a boy" (215). But in Chapter 41 she comes to realize the difference between being merely *liked* and being *loved*. And it is all her own fault. "She had always

insisted on being a boy. Had dressed like one and demanded to be treated like one." The lady in the lovely black gown looks wonderful, but Robin is still wearing her crude, boyish riding-suit. The pretence at being a boy and always living like one has been a terrible mistake, for she should instead have worn "pretty girlish things" (274-75). "And she was not really a boy at heart, as she had imagined all those years. She was a girl, and in her was all a girl's longing to be admired and loved" (275). Valmont has already implied this fact in Chapter 10. There Robin is upset because her father has been angry at her release of some valuable caged birds; Valmont reminds her that "*boys* don't cry" (87). So the book's social ideology is conventional: it presents the distinctive role-playing traditionally allotted to males and females.

The Sunshine Express is used in another way. It brings Valmont's alleged "wife" to Marble Hall; it takes Robin from it, but she soon becomes Valmont's true and genuine bride. The link between the two women is thus the train journeys to and from Cairns which determine their marital futures. A similar device, which links for Robin her love for her father and her love for Valmont, is the Cathedral Tree. Here she prays for the safety of the one and seeks her own safety with the other — both in the presence of the Christian God. Yet all these linkages may be merely fortuitous on the author's part, and fanciful on mine.

There is one such device, however, that appears to have been deliberate. It is the most comprehensive means of holding the story together. This device is the structural framework provided by the gossiping of Cobbs and Lipson in the opening and closing chapters. These two characters fulfil the functions of both prologue and epilogue, providing both the exposition and the conclusion. Yet Cobbs and Lipson merely mull over the local gossip: they initiate none of the action and take no part in it. They are simply detached intelligencers, not personally involved with any of the other characters. And they are clearly differentiated from two other pairs of male characters. One of these pairs is obviously the villains Brood and Rudder. The other pair are Merrifield and Watson. Mrs Clair meets them in Chapter 9, when a bus driver takes her to see Valmont's estate. As she then walks through the jungle she hears a man singing. The words of his song are these:

> "Little Willie in frills and sashes,
> Fell in the fire and was burnt to ashes;
> After a while the room grew chilly,
> But no one cared to poke poor Willie." (65)

We are not surprised to learn that the singer is a hearty jokester named Merrifield, who is always grinning or laughing. He has a "big, powerful-looking mate" named Watson, who is the good-natured butt

of much of his chiacking. Their light-hearted relationship as timber loggers indicates that they are honest and honourable employees of the book's romantic hero. Yet there is a link between them and the criminal pair on Brood's estate. A milling accident suffered by Watson allows the introduction of young Tom Long to both Brood and Robin. It is also interesting that Merrifield's riddle about the crocodile (115) foreshadows the manner of Brood's death.

The only other singer in the book is Mrs Clair, but her motives are entirely worldly. She wangles an evening visit to Marble Hall. There she sings Valmont a song from William Vincent Wallace's opera *Maritana*, accompanying herself on the fashionable ukulele. The song begins, "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls". Why should she sing this particular song from this particular opera? One answer is obvious, viz. that in order to live in materialist luxury, she wishes to become mistress of Valmont's home. But the other answer is more personal for the author. Wallace began his opera not in the London of the early 1840's, where it was finished and first produced, but years before in Tasmania. Wallace was a much-travelled Irishman who led a life of high adventure in many parts of the world.

A final word about the book's moral and spiritual quality. It is a chaste novel, adhering strictly to the conventional morality of male and female chastity before marriage. This matter is dealt with most directly in Chapters 24 and 27. In the first situation, Robin must spend the evening alone with Valmont when her father is "obliged to go on business to one of the coastal towns, and . . . he could not return till late" (159). Were Valmont other than an ingrained gentleman, Robin might have suffered the fate that is worse than death. But he merely reads a book and keeps watch over her while she sleeps on his settee (163-4). The reader may, in fact, wonder whether the title of the novel may contain a pun: perhaps Valmont's gentlemanly chivalry is meant to earn him the title of "Jungle Knight". Three chapters later, when Robin is again left alone with Valmont because her father is missing, she is upset when Valmont insists on taking her to spend the night with the Whelans in Bourburra. The idea of her spending the night alone with himself, he explains, is one of "those sort of things (that) can't be done", because "there are conventions to be considered" (184).

The spiritual element in the book, however, is expressed in the characterization of Robin. We are two-thirds of the way through the story when she "quite suddenly" decides to pray to God for help in finding her father (192). The inside of the great fig tree is described as a dark and "enormous cavity", yet there is enough light filtering in "for the girl to see the huge dome-like ceiling arching above her." Even more extraordinary is the fact that certain thick branches had formed "a great

cross" which "gleamed oddly white in the dimness." So she kneels and begins to pray (193). When Valmont has found her father, she tells him that "I used to think God was too absorbed in all His own big affairs to take any notice of us, that He was too cold and proud to bother with us; but now I find he's *most charming* and so interested in everybody! . . . He is so awfully friendly and nice to you! . . . if there is anything you want you just ask Him for it and He'll give it to you straight away." God has thus become both socially and sociably acceptable (201).

In the hollow tree-trunk in which he took refuge Lockhart has had a kind of vision in which his dead wife "looked so beautiful and happy!" But "then such a troubled look came into her eyes and she just spoke your name, then vanished" (216). He goes on to explain that Robin's "very lovely mother" was "a very good woman" who "always went to church" (217). Therefore "She was distressed because I had brought you up such a pagan." Now, however, "your old Daddy wants to make amends". So he shyly says: "Childie, you and I must try and get to know — God." Robin replies that she often runs into her room and talks to Him already, and she assures her father than "even if you're in a hurry He doesn't mind." Her assurances finally lead her father to say: "you'll have to teach your old Daddy the way" (217). Finally on this theme Lipson asks Cobbs: "Did you know that since the poisoning Lockhart has become quite religious and goes to church at Bourburra every Sunday as regular as clockwork?" (303). It seems to me, however, that this convenient, sentimental, and self-centred religiosity is far from being an ardent Christian faith. And the lead given in this matter by the womenfolk seems another example of their traditional gender role as upholders of social morality and Christian spirituality.

My own general conclusion, therefore, is that this forgotten novel should be re-consigned to the oblivion in which it has languished for the past half century. Or is it ultimately, perhaps, an archetypal fairy-tale, in which the chivalrous knight in his shining castle rescues the heroine's dog from a dragon (python), and herself from the water-monster (?bunyip) and the evil machinations of the wicked witch (Mrs Clair); her father from the clutches of the ogre (Brood); and himself from the poisoned drink administered by the vile enchantress (the lady in black)?

(A paper read at a staff seminar at James Cook University, 23 October 1987)