"Hey, Dave, isn’t this Manfred, that old black fella we flushed outta here the other night?” The second constable looked down into the wizened face of the dead man.

“I think you’re right. Poor old bugger.” He took the other end of the stretcher and straightened up.

A flutter over the policemen’s heads caught their attention and they were just in time to wonder at the incongruity of a dashing eagle and a sleek and mighty kitehawk flying into the dawn over the Story Bridge.

CHRIS LENNINGS

THE RECLINING BUDDHA

I

You should visit early in the morning (ignore the glossy brochures advertising “comfortable afternoon coach trips and a slice of authentic Asian life” that take you past the spitting hawkers who sell all manner of goods and daughters by their temple’s footsteps).

In the morning the monks are praying their bare feet gliding on dust and discarded wrappings murmuring over the various names of God and igniting the spicy braziers that drive away the mosquitoes and other demons: when early morning the air is still cool and not yet be lumbered with the hot fetid smells of today’s smoked duck, fish, rotten port and dried seaweed.

The gold glitters on the Gautama. He reclines, one hand raised as if plucking a rose
from the air, but gently, oh so gently
so that not even the half-life soul of a rose
need fear the bruising of curiosity,
The Gold One, lying on a bed of dust and granite
has dispensed with teaching for the moment
and now listens to the murmurings
of the devotees and curious alike
and smiles that thin smile of knowledge and grace
that is incongruous in such a mammoth body
one hundred and fifty feet long.

II

The morning is soon disturbed by the roar of tri-seaters
their malignant fumes eat into stone, gold and lungs alike
a few monks cough but do not interrupt
the mumblings that are the salvation of their soul.
They know that to end the interminable wheel of responsibility
they must starve their soul of desire
(the root of all sin)
so that, like a dessicated leaf, one touch of divine flame
and they are instantly consumed — never to be reborn.
The people live dangerously, play at insurrection
as deliciously as they abandon road rules
they know that no matter how many deaths they suffer
until they accept this final, golden inertia
there will always be another life.

III

Some monks write books
and have them published in the West —
it is a form of vanity that does not touch the Lord Buddha.
It was, after an Englishman who wrote
"Vanity, vanity . . . all is vanity".
and I, too vain to refrain
from that one last magnificent shot
of the Guatama’s face
juxtaposed above a golden jutting toe:
a Daliesque impression if ever there was one.

To clamber over the rails
and nestle against the smooth cold touch of His shoulder
comes as a shock: one is walking upon a God
but then to have a God so compliant and accessible
renders the sacrilege unimportant
and a perfect momento to spirituality
is framed.

IV

Outside the tour guide does not meet our eyes
but later that night, merry on cheap whisky
explains that the Lord Buddha is all things
to all people
and cannot be desecrated
unless one desecrates and shames one’s own soul
and we, impressed by such mysticism
agree, and drink on.

CORNELIS VLEESKENS

WOOD SCULPTURE: the Bali letters

Hello Mr David, how are you to day? aren’t you verry well isn’t it? I hope you are get the lucky always and safe of the God. I am in Bali good health condition also.

I herewith Congratulation for your Merry Christmas and happy new year 1st january 1987. My God — bless you.