

**Harold Stewart's *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* as a Foundational Australian
Transnational Poem**

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Abstract

The transnational turn in 21st century Australian literary scholarship continues to emphasise and foreground the importance of Australian writers who have lived for extended periods in foreign countries, thereby gaining deeper cultural connections and historical insights through their dual or multinational status. While there are many 21st century authors who fit the transnational model, the relative lack of 20th century authors who may be considered a transnational author has led to the neglect of some early exemplars of Australian transnational writing.

Harold Stewart (1916 - 1995) is one such exemplar for his transnational epic poem *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* (1981), which resulted from his permanent move to Kyoto in 1966. This thesis argues that Stewart's personal and local interactions with the old city of Kyoto as it faced the pressures of post-war industrialisation directly facilitated an unprecedented major work of Australian-Japanese transnational poetry which is crucial to understanding the cross-cultural history of Australian literature.

Acknowledgements

Michael Ackland directed me to read the personal papers of Harold Stewart. As I read these papers at the National Library I discovered a subject I could pursue in my post-graduate studies. I thank Michael for his initial guidance. Mark White, one of my Japanese-speaking friends in Kyoto, was able to find Stewart's former lover and arrange an interview. For that, and for his boundless enthusiasm, I owe Mark a heartfelt thank you. Lastly, and with warm gratitude, I would also like to thank my supervisor Tody Davidson, who was able to identify my strengths and weaknesses and shape the direction of my MRes accordingly.

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Introduction

Harold Stewart's *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* (1981) is an epic narrative poem which consists of twelve individual poems that span over four thousand lines. Written from the poet's own personal point of view, it is unlike his earlier poetry, which strived for a detached objectivity. In 1966, in the middle of his career, Stewart moved to Japan and shortly thereafter began *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*. Stewart's role in the poem is as a tour guide: "In the following chapters the reader will be transported to Kyoto and will accompany the author on a personally conducted tour in words around twelve places, most of them notable but some not."¹ The twelve poems represent his spiritual autobiography which trace his pilgrimage from a belief in the self-power of Zen to announcing faith in the Other Power of Pure Land Buddhism.

In the introduction to *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, Stewart states that his journey will be a practical one as an understanding of Buddhism cannot be achieved by only theoretical methods.² The sequence of poems records his attempt to shed his modern Western limitations and prejudices in the hope of achieving enlightenment. The inclusion of prose commentaries, which, as he points out, is a tradition he adopts from Buddhism, treat a wide range of subjects including Japanese music, literature, history, visual arts and crafts, sculpture, painting, architecture, gardens, pottery, the tea ceremony and ikebana. He also engages with Taoist metaphysics, iconography, myth and ritual as well as the festivals and legends of Shinto. *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* is a practical, artistic and intellectual engagement with Asian cultural, philosophical and spiritual history. A.D. Hope, as Michael

¹ Harold Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, p. xv.

² Stewart, p. xvi.

Ackland notes, “was scarcely exaggerating when he said Stewart had written the greatest poem in English this century.”³

One of Stewart’s major goals is to ensure the sequence of poems integrated well. He sought:

To give the sequence of apparently separate poems a greater reciprocal consonance and to harmonize them into a single whole, a “symphonic” style of composition had been adopted, borrowing three devices from music, a cyclic form; polyphonic interweaving of themes and counter themes; and the employment of the leitmotiv.”⁴

The poem begins in late spring at a local festival and then follows the course of the four seasons, ending in the early spring of the next year. Within the annual cycle there are two points of climax, determined by the positive cosmic forces of Yang, and the negative cosmic force of Yin. The first climax is reached in third poem the second in the eleventh poem when Stewart suffers from angina.

The main themes of Shin and Zen are announced and contrasted in the first poem. In the second poem the Zen theme receives more detailed treatment. These themes alternated throughout the poem until in the last poem the themes are once again juxtaposed to conclude the series of poems. The poems are interlaced by a network of corresponding images, such as the leitmotifs in music, which recur in the same form, or variations, throughout the series. Some motifs are both positive and negative such as the image of the wall. In its negative aspect the wall represents material obstruction and also symbolises the emotional barriers the poet has to overcome. In its positive aspect it marks off the sacred enclosure as the site for the beneficial divine powers.

³ Michael Ackland, *Damaged Men*, pp. 249 - 250.

⁴ Stewart, p. xviii.

Despite the longevity of his career, his precursory, original and dense engagement with Asian cultures and the success of his two haiku volumes, which were both reprinted for two decades, Stewart's work provided little interest for Australian critics until *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* was published in 1981. A.A. Phillips recognised his early promise: "Of the younger known writers James McAuley and Harold Stewart remain the most interesting; each appears to have set himself to a healthy process of disciplining, which should ultimately strengthen his work but renders it for the moment a little dry."⁵ H.M. Green was one of the first critics to acknowledge Stewart's early promise just after the release of *Phoenix Wings* (1948), his first volume of poetry:

And Harold Stewart is perhaps the most talented and certainly most painstaking and elaborate verbal artist among the most painstaking poets of today. The luminous atmosphere of his subtle and delicate poems has something about it of the feeling of Chinese painting upon silk.⁶

The silky texture and sensuous qualities of Stewart's poetry resonated H.M. Green but other critics were less impressed and concentrated more on its shortcomings than its luminosity and Stewart gradually faded from critical view until the publication of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*.

Dorothy Green was the first critic to provide a comprehensive review of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* in 1977, prior to its publication four years later. Ronald Dunlop's critical review followed in 1983. Both reviews concentrate on Stewart's ability to describe local scenes in exquisite pictorial detail. As a resident of Kyoto for nearly three decades, Stewart gained an intimate knowledge of the city that went beyond the time-bound schedule of a tourist to provide a localised and personal response to Japan's ancient capital, one of the cities to have been spared during World War II. However, as Stewart laments, Kyoto might have been saved from the destruction of war but that did not stop the ugly advance of post-

⁵ A.A. Phillips, untitled review of *Australian Poetry 1949-50*, Meanjin, No. 44 Vol. X, 1951, p.71.

⁶ H.M. Green, *Australian Literature 1900-1950*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1951, p. 17.

war industrialisation. He laments: “Old Kyoto is being demolished daily to make room for modern improvements that are all for the worse, and by the end of this century it will have irrevocably vanished.”⁷ Stewart’s goal is to preserve in poetry, prose and wood-block prints the historical richness that remained.

In this century, critics have sought to understand Stewart’s contribution by applying critical frameworks which do not rely on comparative critiques with other Western writers. Alex Minchinton applies a spiritual framework to contextualise Stewart’s contribution. Christopher Mooney is the first Australian scholar to apply the critical lens and conceptual framework of transnationalism to better contextualise Stewart’s contribution to Australian literature, notably in his unpublished final epic poem *Autumn Landscape Roll*.

During 1998 and 1999 I lived in Kyoto and interviewed the people most acquainted with Stewart. Professor Emeritus Hisao Inagaki of Ryukoku University in Kyoto collaborated with Stewart to complete *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (1994) just before Stewart passed away in 1995. Stewart collected Buddhist art and owned a rare example of the three mandalas representing the Larger, Smaller and Contemplation Sutras. His interest in Buddhist antiquities provided Stewart with his business relationship with Gentaro Nakajima, a local antique dealer. Stewart’s primary role in the business relationship was to direct Western clients to Nakajima’s shop. I also interviewed Patricia Yamada, Stewart’s closet friend and Ueshima Masaaki, the person who motivated him to return to Kyoto in 1966, and spoke at length with two of most celebrated poets to have been inspired by Kyoto: Edith Shiffert and Cid Corman. Each person provided a unique insight into the personal attachment Stewart had with Kyoto.

⁷ Stewart, p. xv.

Chapter 1: From Tourist to Transnational Poet

“My heart accepts its karma.”

Poem One: Climbing at Arashiyama in Late Spring

By the Old Walls of Kyoto

There is a pivotal moment in the first poem of *By Old Walls of Kyoto* which marks the point when Harold Stewart transitions from a tourist to a transnational poet. The poem is set against the precipitous backdrop of Arashiyama during the Three Boats Festival. Stewart begins his epic with a panoramic view of the mountain: “Dense leafage in the later springtime screens / Arashiyama, rich in mingled greens / That rise abruptly up the mountain-side.”¹ At the foothills of the mountain local and international tourists mingle as they view the festival procession depart from a nearby Shinto shrine while decorated boats, festooned with ribbons, float across the River Oi towards the gorge, recreating a traditional Heian holiday scene.

Stewart describes the local colour and movement of the festival in sumptuous detail:

Arriving from a nearby Shinto shrine,
The festival procession moves in line
Across Togetsu-kyo “the bridge so long
Its end would reach the moon”. A curious throng
Follows the carriage that a young black bull
Harnessed with ropes of scarlet silk must pull,
For Ladies dressed in Heian costume ride
Hidden by blinds of split bamboo inside,
While after them the court attendants stride
Bearing a parasol of iris-flowers,
Fringed with wisteria that drips in showers.²

As the procession finishes near where the boats moor, people gather to listen to haiku poets, drink tea and soak up the nostalgia of a bygone era.

¹ Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, p. 3.

² Stewart, p. 4.

Instead of joining the festivities, as might be expected of a tourist eager for local colour and movement, Stewart wanders off and begins to stroll along the nearer bank, climbing the rocky steps to Kameyama Park. At this moment in the narrative, when he turns his back on the tourist festival, his journey goes beyond the perspective of a tourist and is transformed by the poet's desire for a more personal experience of the local culture and people as he begins his journey through the streets and byways which will transverse the city and countryside of Kyoto. He will walk up mountains, through deserted streets at dawn, across cultivated fields as farmers return home for the evening and visit ancient temples as he searches for a personal connection with the local culture and people.

By the Old Walls of Kyoto was written during the late 1960s and early 1970s after Stewart had permanently settled in Kyoto. It is a personal account, written in the first person, of his journey from novice to Pure Land Buddhist practitioner. His earlier poetry did not employ a subjective point of view, technically well constructed but artifice without personal context and was criticised for lacking emotional warmth. Evan Jones, two years before Stewart departed to Kyoto, described his poetry as "delicate if rather stiff and frigid artifice."³ The emotional tenor of his poetry becomes less frigid and more personal during his time in Kyoto.

Edith Shiffert (1916 - 2017), the celebrated American poet who lived in Kyoto for over five decades from 1963, described the book as heart-felt and by far his best poem.⁴ Cid Corman (1924 - 2004), also a celebrated American poet and long-time resident of Kyoto, was less complementary, finding the narrative frustratingly diffusive but still acknowledged the

³ Evan Jones, 'Australian Poetry Since 1920,' in *The Literature of Australia*, ed. Geoffrey Dutton, p. 117.

⁴ Edith Shiffert in an interview with Barry Leckenby on 5 July, 1999. Shiffert, along with Cid Corman, Gary Snyder and Stewart, are poets who have used Kyoto as a rich source of inspiration for their writing.

warmness and genuine emotion of *By the Olds Walls of Kyoto*.⁵ It is undoubtedly his best work and a transnational epic, though the lack of scholarship about his journey has meant that there is little known about the circumstances around his transformation from tourist to transnational poet. How did Stewart become one of the foundational writers in the Australian transnational canon? Christopher Mooney introduces the idea of multiple canons when he argues that Stewart's final unpublished epic poem *Autumn Landscape-Roll* "has itself vanished from the canons of Australian poetry."⁶ Adam Aitken, Brian Castro, Kim Cheng Boey, Ouyang Yu, Andy Quan and Michelle Cahill are examples of writers who deserve to be considered as part of the Australian transnational canon. This chapter describes Stewart's journey from a cramped bookshop in Melbourne in 1952, to the foothills of Arashiyama during a sultry spring afternoon in the late 1960s when he confirms the transnational focus of his poetry as he wanders away from the celebrations of a tourist festival to deepen his personal connection with Japan.

To follow the thread of his journey from tourist to transnational poet it is necessary to go back to 1952 when Stewart was living in Melbourne. After the World War II, Stewart settled in Melbourne and started working at the Norman Robb bookshop in Little Collins Street. It has long since closed, but during the 1950s it was one of the premier bookshops in Melbourne, importing many rare books, prints and scrolls from Asia. His life-long friend, Peter Kelly, who attended most of the meetings Stewart held every Friday night at the bookshop to discuss Eastern metaphysics describes the setting: "It was quite small: It seemed no bigger than a suburban living-room but crammed in an extraordinary number of books."⁷

⁵ Cid Corman, in an interview with Barry Leckenby, 8 April, 1999.

⁶ Mooney, *Asian Expatriate Immersion in the Later Works of Harold Stewart*, p. 19.

⁷ Peter Kelly, *Buddha in a Bookshop*, p. 45.

The meetings on Friday night, however, lacked a practical focus as Kelly remembers the meetings were earnest, occasionally intense, but concerned largely with theoretical issues.⁸

Stewart became the bookshop's chief buyer and would read many of the books he imported. In an interview with Richard Kelly Tipping, Stewart outlines his expectations when he first started at the bookshop: "This was to have been a gentlemanly job were one had discussions about literature and Oriental philosophy with one's friends who dropped in."⁹ In the end he was a victim of his own success: "I expanded the oriental book section and the prints and oriental scrolls and paintings and it grew and prospered until soon there was no time to read the books that I was buying with all my spare cash."¹⁰

Before working in the bookshop Stewart had lived an impecunious existence that lacked direction and purpose. He drifted along after dropping out of university in 1936, unemployed for most of the time before spending much of the war convalescing from various undiagnosable ailments and then, at the close of the war, fighting the claim that he and James McAuley had brought Australian poetry into disrepute by concocting the 1944 Ern Malley hoax. As Susan McKernan notes, the reputational damage suffered by Australian literature as a result of the Ern Malley hoax meant that after World War II, poets "face considerable argument about their achievement and their role in Australian society."¹¹

At the bookshop he had a regular pay check, was making new friends and enjoyed reading the oriental books he was importing. Alan Watts, Christmas Humphreys and D.T. Sukuizi were fairly new and exotic during the 1950s and these writers nurtured his interest in Buddhism. He also began reading the Traditionalists, which included its principal proponents

⁸ Kelly, p. 50.

⁹ Stewart with Richard Kelly Tipping, *Westerly*, No. 4, 1987, p. 28.

¹⁰ Stewart with Richard Kelly Tipping, *Westerly*, No. 4, 1987, p. 28.

¹¹ Susan McKernan, *A Question of Commitment: Australian Literature in the Twenty Years After the War*, p. 2.

Rene Guenon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon and Marco Pallis. During the late 1950s Stewart corresponded with Pallis as he tried to establish contact with the Japanese leaders of the Pure Land sect through the contacts that Pallis and Carmen Blacker had established.¹² Blacker was a Cambridge University scholar of Japanese language who became a life-long friend of Stewart's and after his death published *The Ascension of the Feng Huang* (1998). These two European scholars facilitated Stewart's first trip to Japan but they did not alter the course of his poetic career as much as a French scholar, though he has not received any recognition for his influence and remains forgotten by contemporary scholars. The book Stewart read was *The Buddhist Sects of Japan: Their History, Philosophical Doctrines and Sanctuaries* (1938) by Emile Steinilber-Oberlin.

Prior to reading this book, there was very little indication that he had any interest in Japan. As a seventeen-year old student at Fort Street High, he wrote only a handful of Japanese style poems.¹³ After dropping out of Sydney University he showed more interest in China than he did in Japan. As his notebooks reveal, the late 1930s was when he began researching Chinese poetry and metaphysics.¹⁴ He describes his research during this period: "At first I was most interested in Taoism, and in my twenties I was also studying Chinese. Later on I became interested in Zen Buddhism which is a fusion of the "dark learning" or esoteric teachings of Taoism, and Buddhism."¹⁵

During the 1940s Stewart wrote most of the poems he published in his first volume of poetry *Phoenix Wings* (1948). This volume has a mix of Western and Chinese influenced poems, which is not unusual for a writer attempting to domesticate contrasting influences into

¹² Kelly, p. 65.

¹³ Harold Stewart, *Stewart Papers*, National Library, MS8973/13/1.

¹⁴ Harold Stewart, *Stewart Papers*, National Library, MS8973/16/27 - 30.

¹⁵ Stewart with Richard Kelly Tipping, in *Westerly*, No. 4, 1987, p. 29.

their poetry. 'The Annunciation,' the first long poem of the volume, is representative of his poetic thought during this period. First published in *Southerly* in 1940, he borrows Jung's theories of the unconscious and Greco-Roman myths to shape the narrative. Another two years would pass before Eastern subject matter became the main focus of his poetry, though it would be exclusively Chinese subject matter that he borrowed to create 'The Ascension of Feng.' Between 1940 and 1942 he transitioned to Eastern subject matter and even though these two poems have different influences: 'The Annunciation' with Jung and 'The Ascension of Feng' which details the Chinese theory of Yang and Yin in the argument which prefaces the poem, both poems explore the concept of transcendence by way of an examination of enlightenment.

In the late 1940s, he began writing his second volume of poetry *Orpheus and other poems* (1956). The other poems referred to in the title have a Chinese influence, but the main long narrative poem relies solely on Western subject matter. In reviewing *Orpheus and other poems*, Brian Elliot describes Stewart's poetry as an illustration of "the kind of frustration which may overtake a poet when there is a breakdown in the harmonious relationship between his imagination and his landscape."¹⁶ In trying to display a sophisticated detachment Stewart produced poetry of little warmth, which would be in stark contrast to the emotional tenor of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*. Not all critics agreed with Elliot's assessment of Stewart's work. H.M. Green describes 'Orpheus' as an elaborate psychological allegory on modern lines.¹⁷ Michael Ackland sums up the critical divide when he observes that *Orpheus and other poems* "still reads like the work of a man in quest of a life-purpose and encompassing vision."¹⁸ It was during this period when Stewart was searching for a life

¹⁶ Brian Elliot, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry*, p. 315.

¹⁷ H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature*, Vol. II, p. 1054.

¹⁸ Michael Ackland, 'Harold Stewart: A Tribute,' *Quadrant*, November 1995, p. 31.

purpose and encompassing vision that he began reading Emile Steinilber-Oberlin's book. It would change the course of his poetic career, though Stewart does not refer to it in the prose commentaries which accompany *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*. Stewart preferred to hide his tracks as he acknowledged in a letter to Dorothy Green in 1986: "While in hospital I have been destroying everything that I do not wish to fall into the hands of the biographical ghouls, psychological beachcombers and editorial illiterates."¹⁹

The Buddhist Sects of Japan was originally written in French and was translated into English by Marc Loge. Steinilber-Oberlin had written the book in collaboration with Kuninosuke Matsuo and it was published by George Allen & Unwin in 1938.²⁰ It is truly a transnational text: a history of Japanese Buddhism written by a Frenchman, with the help of his Japanese colleague, and translated into English and published in London. The copy this author retrieved from a second-hand book sale in Kyoto in 1999 has parts of the text very neatly underlined with red pen. Underlining text is a common study technique so, at first, it seemed unremarkable but the book also contained a small card. There was Japanese calligraphy on the front of the card and on the back of the card was the inscription: "Harold Stewart – Kyoto 1968" in Stewart's own meticulous handwriting. This fibrous postcard size piece of paper, made from traditional Japanese paper called washi, must have once belonged to Stewart. Further proof was confirmed by a Norman Robb bookshop sticker on the inside cover. This sticker proved, beyond a reasonable doubt, it was Stewart's book as nobody else could have brought this book, with this sticker attached, to Kyoto. Steinilber-Oberlin's book must have provided Stewart with his initial entry into Japanese Buddhism, as it outlines the

¹⁹ Letter to Dorothy Green, *The Oxford Book of Australian Letters*, pp. 289 - 291.

²⁰ Kuninosuke Matsuo and Emile Steinilber-Oberlin collaborated on numerous French translations of Japanese literature and these books were subsequently retranslated into several other languages such as Italian and Hungarian. Matsuo was the Yomiuri correspondent in Paris during the 1930s.

various Japanese sects. When Stewart left for Japan in 1966 he must have taken this book, along with many others, with him.

The text is written in a warm personal style. Steinilber-Oberlin describes his method of investigation:

This investigation which I undertook in the land of pink cherry trees and red maples, amongst “pure-hearted people,” was the occasion of innumerable delights. I have lived in the monasteries the life of Buddhist monks, and I have practised with those dear and gentle comrades, whom I shall never forget, the spiritual exercises and meditations prescribed by a common discipline. On the road leading to the sanctuaries I intended to visit, I have shared my bowl of rice with other pilgrims, humble folk: like them I donned the *Kasa*—the large reed hat—and on wet days I slipped on the picturesque straw raincoat. Together we purified ourselves in the basin of lustral water placed at the entrance of the temples, and tasted the ineffable joy, of which I will speak at length later, of feeling one’s soul renewed.²¹

The idea of a pilgrimage, and in particular pursuing a practical instead of theoretical engagement with other cultures, was an idea that the Traditionalists had also promoted. The idea was first proposed by Frithjof Schuon in the late 1950s.²² Stewart was reading the Traditionalists during the 1950s, so it could be the case that Stewart accepted the idea of a pilgrimage gradually rather than by sudden revelation in the early 1950s after reading Steinilber-Oberlin’s book, though it was this book that initially provided the idea of a pilgrimage to Japan he adopted and not Schuon’s articles. The idea of a pilgrimage is the coordinating premise of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* and the first indication that Stewart had decided to pursue this idea was around 1956 in an undated letter to James McAuley, written while he was living in East Melbourne. Stewart describes the moment when the concept of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* was first conceived: “And yet this is, I hope, merely a preliminary flutter for the most ambitious venture I have ever conceived. The prevision of this hit me like a thunderbolt, a blinding flash so intense that walking down the street at the time, I was

²¹ E. Steinilber-Oberlin, *The Buddhist Sects of Japan*, p. 13.

²² Kelly, p. 125.

compelled to lean against the wall for support.”²³ Stewart acknowledges, for the very first time in his letter to McAuley, that he had formed the idea for his next epic poem but it was not until he had visited Japan that the idea fully crystallised and the finer details of the transnational narrative were settled.

The most striking and instructive aspect of Stewart’s underlining was the first sentence, on page twelve, he underlines. The sentence begins: “I soon understood that there was only one effective way of going about my work, and that was,” Stewart then underlines the remaining part of the sentence: “to frequent in all confidence, and if I may express myself thus, in all simplicity of heart, Buddhist bonzes, monks and pilgrims.” Stewart’s underlining was an acknowledgement that to truly understand another culture and go beyond the theory of mere book learning, which he had done for nearly two decades in Australia, then he would have to experience a foreign culture in practice, not just theory, and spend time amongst the bonzes, monks and pilgrims of Japan. Steinilber-Oberlin’s book represents, with Stewart’s underlining, the moment in which Stewart takes his first step, his initial transnational turn, towards Japan as it promotes the idea that local and personal contact is required if a true understanding of a their culture is to be gained.

Yet, initially, there was little indication that Stewart was having a rethink about the direction of his career. For his wider audience, the first indication that Stewart had made a decisive turn to Japan came later with the publishing of his first haiku volume of poetry *A Net of Fireflies* (1960). In the essay which accompanies the poetry, Stewart sets out the case for immersing oneself in a foreign culture as a means to promote true insight into its cultural values. In a fashion which parallels Steinilber-Oberlin’s advice he writes:

He [the poet] must have infused into his re-creation a vision and a vitality approaching that of its creator if the poetry is to survive transplantation. And he

²³ Stewart, *Stewart Papers*, National Library, MS8973/2/2.

can only do this if he has stepped outside his limitations and prejudices of his own culture, and placed himself within the framework of the Oriental one, stepping himself with intuitive understanding in its wisdom and faithfully practicing its methods, until this new spiritual outlook is no longer exotic, but natural as his own.²⁴

With eight years of research and a volume of haiku to his credit, which contained a mix of translations and his own haikus, Stewart appeared ready to accept Steinilber-Oberlin's advice and make the transition from theoretical investigation to tourist and travel to Japan.²⁵ As Peter Kelly notes: "The haiku translations represent a transition between Harold's early verse and his newly developed style as represented in *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*."²⁶

The final and most tumultuous stage of Stewart's transformation from theoretical reading to tourist to transnational poet occurred between 1961 and 1966 and has been well documented by Michael Ackland in *Damaged Men* (2001) and Peter Kelly in *Buddha in a Bookshop* (2007). Stewart also provided a first-hand account of this period in an interview with Richard Kelly Tipping which was published in *Westerly* (1987).

At noon on Friday 7 July 1961 Stewart sailed from Melbourne aboard a Dutch oceanliner and arrived at Nagoya harbour on 26 July. His first impression was one of bitter disappointment and repulsion. After a decade of reading about the beauty and simplicity of Japanese aesthetics, the prefabricated buildings and industrial infrastructure erected after World War II did not tally up with his expectations of grand wooden temples and superbly manicured gardens. The gulf between book learning and practical reality was so acutely felt that he nearly collapsed in Yokohama before returning to the ship.²⁷ In his travel diaries he

²⁴ Stewart, *A Net of Fireflies*, p. 150.

²⁵ For an analysis of Stewart's haiku volumes see Greg McLaren in *Translation under the trees: Australian poets' integration of Buddhist ideas and images*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sydney, 2005 and McLaren "Some presence inevitable shows through": Harold Stewart's Haiku Versions' in *ALS*, October, 2006.

²⁶ Kelly, p. 111.

²⁷ Ackland, *Damaged Men*, p. 170.

describes Nagoya harbour as a “stinking mess of foul muddy water, endless docks and wharves, and the shipping of every nation amid a tangle of gantries, cranes, electricity pylons, and smoke and smell.”²⁸

His six week tour included a visit to Kyoto where he was especially moved by a chant emanating from the Chion-in. He recounted the moment when he heard the chant in the interview with Richard Kelly Tipping:

So here was a form of Buddhism which I had not studied and was not interested in, until one day I was coming down the mountain from Higashiyama, the Eastern Mountains in Kyoto and hear this invocation Namu Amida Butsu being chanted in the Chion-in, one of the main temples of the Jodo-Shu, or Pure Land sect, founded by the great medieval saint, Honen Shonin. It struck in my mind, though I didn’t know what it meant or anything about it: but it started to repeat itself in my mind and, on the way home on the ship, it kept on coming back. So when I arrived in Australia, I thought I had better find out something about this, and so I acquired and read the Life of Honen, by Shunjo. I decided that a second trip to Japan was needed to investigate it more fully and this is was when I began studying the subject seriously with Professor Bando.²⁹

The calling of the Name, Namu Amida Butsu, a fundamental practice of Pure Land Buddhism, embedded in Stewart’s memory and motivated him to learn more about the sect. In *A Net of Fireflies* Stewart mentions Pure Land Buddhist only once, and only then in a cursory fashion, so he was familiar with it, having first learnt of its basic tenets from Steinilber-Oberlin’s book, but claims that he had taken little interest in it before actually hearing the mesmerising chant of the monks.³⁰

In 1963 a second trip was organised, which lasted six months, and Stewart met with Professor Bando, one of Pallis’s contacts, and continued his research into the Pure Land sect and this is “what really prompted me to begin writing a book, which would tell not just what I’d read in books about it theoretically, but would express my own

²⁸ Travel diary, *Stewart Papers*, National Library, MS 8973/5/1.

²⁹ Stewart with Richard Kelly Tipping, *Westerly*, No. 4, 1987, p. 31.

³⁰ Stewart, *A Net of Fireflies*, p. 128.

personal experience of it in poetry.”³¹ Stewart’s earlier vision on the streets of Melbourne, where his dream of a new epic had been so profound that he had to grip a wall to alleviate giddiness, had acquired a personal context. His personal journey of discovery, which culminates with his adoption of Pure Land Buddhism, would be used to shape the transnational narrative of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*.

The dream of his next epic poem could now become a reality, though on his second trip there was to be one unexpected twist, epic in its repercussions, which would nearly destroy his dream of writing his next epic poem. One of the main reasons Stewart travelled to Japan for a second time was to become one of the first Australians to be ordained as a Pure Land priest, but at the last minute, just before the ceremony was to take place, he inexplicably declined to go through with the ordination. The reason provided by Kelly and Ackland is somewhat vainglorious, in that he did not want to have his hair shaven and left the ceremony. Stewart never really considered himself an attractive man, but, nonetheless prided himself on what he thought was his best physical feature – his thick mane of hair. After leaving Tokyo, he travelled south to Kyoto and wandered the streets with the realisation that after a decade of book learning his plan to become a priest was in tatters. Stewart faced another period in the wilderness, the likes of which he had not experienced since dropping out of university in 1936, but, as if it was all meant to be, he was saved by a chance meeting at a museum and this meeting, as had reading Steinilber-Oberlin’s book, changed the direction of his career.

Stewart began a conversation with a young Japanese man at Kyoto Museum. This conversation would lead to a lasting friendship, an occasionally intimate

³¹ Stewart with Richard Kelly Tipping, *Westerly*, No. 4, 1987, p. 31.

relationship, and convinced Stewart to return to Kyoto in 1966. It was not his reading, nor his tourist experience, that saved him from another period in the wilderness, but it was a question to a young Japanese man about art that marked the moment that his journey evolved from enthusiast to tourist to transnational poet. Love was the pivotal reason that Stewart returned to Kyoto and was able to compose *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* with a transnational focus. Ackland describes the moment they met: “Harold’s meeting with Masaaki was banal but momentous. According to Ueshima Masaaki, it took place in 1963 at the Kyoto Museum, when Stewart asked him a question. At the time Masaaki was employed as a house boy at a budget-priced guest house in Kyoto, Hotel Shirakuso.”³² In 1966, during his third trip to Japan, Stewart lived at Hotel Shirakuso, which was arranged by Masaaki. Stewart resided there until 1991. In an interview in 1999, Masaaki described the hotel as having two faces: by day professors from Kyoto University would visit and by night prostitutes would ply their trade.³³ Ackland makes the point in *Damaged Men* that Stewart’s desire to keep his homosexuality a secret forced him to live a compartmentalised and schizophrenic existence.³⁴ Living at the hotel, with its light and dark aspects, might have appealed to Stewart’s compartmentalised outlook, though with Masaaki, Stewart was able to form a solid and enduring friendship. Stewart’s affection for Masaaki never diminished.³⁵

The intention of Stewart’s second trip to Kyoto was to be ordained as a Pure Land priest but it was his fledgling love affair, a largely uneven love between a young charismatic artist and an older Western poet, which would be the final step that

³² Ackland, *Damaged Men*, p. 180 -181.

³³ Ueshima Masaaki, in an interview with Barry Leckenby, 22 February 1999.

³⁴ Ackland, *Damaged Men*, p. 181.

³⁵ Ackland, *Damaged Men*, p. 181 -182.

transformed Stewart's journey from tourist to transnational poet. The real nature of their relationship, and the lack of reciprocation Masaaki had for Stewart, was confirmed by Masaaki in 1999.³⁶ Stewart's relationship with Masaaki is an important consideration in terms of establishing the transnational basis of his relationship with Japan. As Leigh Boucher and Robert Reynolds argue: "If transnational historians seek to excavate the exchanges and connections across political borders that national historiographies have tended to obscure, the history of sexual encounters throws up a body of examples (and examples of bodies) that make potent transnational connections."³⁷

Australian critics have failed to identify Steinilber-Oberlin as one of the key literary influences which provided Stewart with idea of employing the subjective perspective of a pilgrim as the coordinating premise of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, though this is not surprising as Stewart never referred to this book in his letters or prose. Critics have also failed to identify Masaaki as the primary reason he returned to Kyoto in 1966 and, as a result, have not been in a position to conclude that love was the pivotal reason that *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* is a foundational poem in the Australian transnational canon. Masaaki's love was not forth coming but despite this rejection Stewart decided to cement his transnational relationship with Japan by permanently settling in the ancient capital in 1966.

Stewart had two other significant relationships with local residents during this time in Kyoto, one on an academic level and the other on a business level, which further strengthened his local connections and confirms the transnational status of his engagement

³⁶ Ueshima Masaaki, in an interview with Barry Leckenby, 8 March, 1999.

³⁷ Leigh Boucher and Robert Reynolds, 'Thinking Transnationally About Sexuality: Homosexuality in Australia or Australian Homosexualities?', in *Transnationalism, Nationalism and Australian History*, Anna Clark, Anne Rees and Alecia Simmonds (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2017, Loc. 3180 - 3576.

with Asia. Professor Emeritus Hisao Inagaki of Ryukoku University in Kyoto collaborated with Stewart to complete *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (1994) just before Stewart passed away. It provides a definitive symbolic and iconographical study of the mandalas which were chosen by Honen, the priest who initiated Pure Land Buddhism, as the most important for that sect. Stewart collected Buddhist art and owned a rare example of the three mandalas representing the Larger, Smaller and Contemplation Sutras. His interest in Buddhist antiquities also provided Stewart with his business relationship with Gentaro Nakajima, a local antique dealer. Stewart's primary role in the business relationship was to direct Western clients to Nakajima's shop. Warwick Fairfax was the most high-profile client that Stewart arranged to visit Nakajima's shop.³⁸ For his troubles Stewart was paid a commission on the sales. The intermediary role Stewart played between wealthy Westerners and a local Kyoto antique dealer demonstrates the multifaceted nature of Stewart's transnational engagement with Asia. He was a translator, entrepreneur, poet, scholar and tourist guide with a personal, poetic, philosophical and economic connection with his adopted country. His decision to relocate permanently to Japan was not solely aimed at gaining a better understanding of his Buddhist subject matter. His transnational engagement was multifaceted and defined by his poetic, academic, philosophical and economic connection with the local culture and people, but, above all else it was personal, motivated by the love of his life.

³⁸ Gentaro Nakajima, in an interview with Barry Leckenby, 6 May 1999.

Chapter 2: An Unprecedented, Localised Masterwork

“Some, roughly cleft and stark, protrude on end
Out of the ground; others in part submerged,
Flat-topped and massive, near the farther verge;
But all, accepting what the seasons send
And seeking neither better state nor worse,
Affirm their oneness with the universe.”

Poem Two: Meditating on the Stone Garden of Ryoan-Ji
By the Old Walls of Kyoto

The inclusion of Harold Stewart in the Australian transnational canon is predicated on the argument that *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* is a transnational epic. As this thesis argues, it is a localised masterwork that more than warrants Stewart’s inclusion. One example of the manner in which he captures the pictorial and musical details of a local scene is provided at the beginning of the second poem where he describes the fifteen stones within the sanded court of the Stone Garden at Ryoan-Ji. He begins with a wide panoramic view of the shrine and senses a solemn monastic silence:

The deep tranquillity of wooded hills
That rise behind the temple has been brought
Into this walled enclosure, which instils
Monastic quietude, an atmosphere
Filled with mysterious emptiness; for here
The open secrecy of Zen is taught
By fifteen stones within a sanded court:
A dry koan, which haunts and teases though
With bare insistence that it cannot seize,
Like these cicada shaking, faintly sere,
Their silver sistrums in the cedar trees.¹

By the Old Walls of Kyoto barely registered with Australian critics when it was published in 1981. While this critical neglect has been subsequently addressed by Michael Ackland, Peter Kelly, Christopher Mooney, Alex Minchinton and Greg McLaren, this chapter outlines the reason for its muted critical reception during the 1980s. This chapter will also

¹ Stewart, p. 8.

examine the two critics who did engage with his localised masterwork and argues that they did not fully appreciate its transnational significance, though only because they lacked the necessary critical lens and conceptual framework of transnationalism by which to critique his work in the appropriate context. It would take another two decades after *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* was published before Australian scholarship began applying transnationalism to writers with dual or multinational status. If Stewart had published *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* in this century then it would have received a more informed reception by scholars and critics, as has subsequently occurred. Recent critics, for the most part, have applied the appropriate critical lens and conceptual framework by which to properly assess the transnational significance of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*.

Disappointed by the muted response of Australian critics, Stewart bemoaned the fact that his work was never fully appreciated by Australian scholars and critics. As he remarked to Kelly:

Having successfully ignored my life and dismissed my works unread for the past 60 years, the hackademics looking for some subject for a thesis not already done to death, have been scraping the bottom of the barrel and finally dredged up my name as perhaps being of some interest as the hind legs of Ern Malley!²

In a letter to Dorothy Green he admonished the preoccupation that ‘Woz kulcha’ had with Ern Malley: “Ern Malley represents the level above which Woz kulcha seems unable to rise, along with Ned Kelly and Phar Lap.”³ It could be argued that the lingering resentment over Ern Malley was the primary reason for the lack of critical engagement with Stewart’s work. While this might be the case, it seems unlikely as thirty-six years, the period between Ern Malley and the publishing of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, is an inordinately long period of

² Stewart in Peter Kelly’s obituary, ‘From Ern Malley to Dante by way of the Romantics,’ *The Australian*, 18 August 1995.

³ Stewart, *The Oxford Book of Australian Letters*, edited by Brenda Niall and John Thompson, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 289 - 291.

time to hold a grudge and it assumes that the apparent animosity towards Stewart was passed down from one generation of Australian critics to the next. This chapter will argue that a more plausible reason for the lack of critical engagement was that critics lacked the necessary critical lens and conceptual framework by which to assess the transnational significance of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*.

Stewart was a trailblazer in terms of the inclusion of Eastern subject matter in his poetry, yet he was not the first Australian writer to engage with Asia. This engagement begun in 1842 with broadsheet or music-hall style ballads.⁴ Australia's preeminent colonial poet, Charles Harpur, also uses Eastern allusions in 'A Flight of Wild Ducks,' which prefigured Stewart's imagery in 'A Flight of Wild Geese.' From 1885 *The Bulletin* published poems with Asian subject matter, the majority of which were not credited to a particular author but rather authorship was indicated by pseudonyms or initials.⁵ Before Stewart's engagement with Asia, the majority of Australia's literary engagement with Asia can be described as tangential, decorative and, in many cases, contemptuous of the Chinese by way of racial stereotyping. Stewart was the first Australian poet to use Taoist and Zen subject matter, some twenty years before the Beat poets and Randolph Stow introduced this type of subject matter to their respective audiences. It should also be noted that Max Dunn (1895? - 1963) was using Zen imagery in his poetry around the same time as Stewart. There are also several excellent examples of Australian writers, contemporaries of Stewart, who engaged with Asian subject matter, the most prominent include Judith Wright, David Campbell, Rosemary Dobson, Randolph Snow, Judith Beveridge, Robert Gray, Bruce Dawe and

⁴ Christopher Mooney, *Asian Expatriate Immersion in the Later Works of Harold Stewart*, PhD dissertation, Monash University, 2015, p. 6.

⁵ Robin Gerster, 'Representations of Asia,' *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, edited by Peter Pierce, Victoria, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Michael Dransfield.⁶ Stewart was not the first, nor was he the only writer to engage with Asia, but his work is unique and distinctive as it provides a model of transnational engagement with Japan by addressing practical, artistic and intellectual aspects of Pure Land Buddhism within a localised and personal context.

Dorothy Green published the first review of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* in 1977, four years before it was published.⁷ Stewart had completed the final draft of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* in 1973 and spent the next eight years finding a publisher and then battling that publisher, Tex Weatherhill, over the finer details of its presentation. In a letter to Stewart, Weatherhill describes Stewart as the most difficult author he had ever worked with.⁸ Green's review is titled 'Ern Malley's Other Half: Harold Stewart's *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*.' Her reference to Ern Malley acknowledged that Ern Malley was the most familiar reference critics had used to contextualise Stewart, not his Eastern influenced poetry, into Australia literature, as he begrudgingly admitted to Kelly.⁹ It was also necessary as the Australian audience had long forgotten about Stewart. His comment about being the hind legs of Ern Malley also alludes to the fact that critics had diminished his role in the hoax, even though his contribution was as an equal partner in collaboration with McAuley.

In the decades after the hoax McAuley's reputation grew as Stewart's reputation diminished. Evan Jones confirms Stewart's relegation: "McAuley has generally, and I think

⁶ For more recent examples of transnational poets see Christopher Mooney, *Asian Expatriate Immersion in the Later Works of Harold Stewart*, Ph.D. dissertation, Monash University, 2015, pp. 8 - 12. Most of the poets Mooney lists are anthologised in *Windchimes: Asia in Australia Poetry*, Noel Rowe and Vivian Smith (eds.), Pandanus Books, Canberra, 2006. *Windchimes* includes Stewart's most anthologised poem 'The Leaf-Maker,' pp. 81 - 82. Also for contemporary Asian Australian poets refer to *Contemporary Asian Australian Poets*, Adam Aiken, Kim Cheng Boey and Michelle Cahill (eds.), Puncher and Wattmann, Glebe, 2013.

⁷ Green also published, 'A Candle in the Sunrise,' in *Eastern Buddhist*, Autumn, 1981, though this cannot be considered a separate article as, for the most part, she covers the same material from the earlier *Quadrant* article.

⁸ Tex Weatherhill in a letter to Stewart, *Stewart Papers*, National Library, MS 8973/2/3-5.

⁹ Stewart in Peter Kelly's obituary, 'From Ern Malley to Dante by way of the Romantics,' *The Australian*, 18 August 1995.

properly, been a more highly regarded poet than Stewart.”¹⁰ As Michael Heyward observes: “His audience was tiny, and to most he was known dimly as the co-creator of Ern Malley. His literary identity in Australia progressively diminished, and his influence on other writers nil.”¹¹ In 1995, Richard McGregor, just before the transnational turn in Australian scholarship, writes: “For all his work in Kyoto, in Australia, Harold Stewart is still doggedly associated with Ern Malley.”¹²

Stewart always maintained serious reservations about the lack of support his poetry received from Australian critics and in a letter to Heyward he outlined his feelings.

How would you feel if a life time’s serious work in poetry and prose, based on scholarship and experience of a profound Tradition, were almost totally ignored, while an afternoon’s *jen d’esprit* by two bored young soldier poets amusing themselves by satirising the fashionable literary kitsch of the period is inflated into an event of national cultural importance?¹³

His defensive tone highlights the distant relationship he had with his home country and confirms the disregard he harboured for those Australian critics who supported the view that the Ern Malley poems did not qualify as satire and were actually better than his Buddhist poetry. Yet despite the apparent lingering resentment and the lack of a transnational critical lens and conceptual framework by which to assess Stewart’s work, there were several critics who recognised that it deserved further scrutiny. Heyward described his poetry as “gorgeous, adjectival, multi-faceted like cut jewels, sculpted into tableaux and set pieces.”¹⁴ Edgar Holt, the literary editor of *The Daily Telegraph* and last editor of the tabloid *Smith’s Weekly*, employed the same artisan metaphor when reviewing his poetry. He writes, “There is no

¹⁰ Jones, ‘Australian Poetry Since 1920,’ p. 117.

¹¹ Michael Heyward, *The Ern Malley Affair*, p. 220.

¹² Richard McGregor, ‘Zen & the art of poetry,’ *The Age Weekend Review*, March 11-12 1995, p. 5.

¹³ Letter to Michael Heyward, October 20, 1988, *Heyward Papers*, LaTrobe Library, MSPA96/159/6.

¹⁴ Heyward, p. 52.

argument about Harold Stewart's craftsmanship. He calls to mind the patience and skill of the jeweller as, word by word, each tasted and tested, he builds up to a severe yet brilliantly polished classical pattern."¹⁵ H.M. Green described Stewart as an accomplished verbal artist and an innovator in rhythm.¹⁶ In relation to *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, Dorothy Green writes: "... the verse rises to a solemn incantatory splendour quite unparalleled in verse written by an Australian."¹⁷

During the 1980s critics failed to contextualise *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* into Australian literature as a transnational epic, confused by his unconventional, though not unprecedented, coupling of Asian subject matter with a lyrical narrative structure borrowed from Western poetry. Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879) demonstrates a similar confluence of subject matter and narrative structure. Stewart retained a copy of Arnold's famous book in his personal library.¹⁸ The opportunity to apply an intertextual methodology to compare both epics was never taken up by the critics.

The Light of Asia presents the life of the Buddha and his philosophy in a series of narrative poems. Stewart adopts a similar narrative approach in *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* in his attempt to popularise Pure Land Buddhism, which, at the time in the West, was barely known and largely overshadowed by Zen philosophy. At the time when Arnold published *The Light of Asia* there was very little known of any Buddhist sect outside Asia and Arnold's book was the first attempt to popularise Buddhism for a Western readership. It subsequently became part of popular culture when, in 1945, the screen adaption of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, had the main character receive a copy of *The Light of Asia* from a

¹⁵ Edgar Holt, *Southerly*, Vol.17, No. 3, 1956, p. 170.

¹⁶ H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature* (Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1961), Vol. II, pp. 967-969.

¹⁷ Dorothy Green, 'Ern Malley's Other Half,' *Quadrant*, August, 1977, p. 38.

¹⁸ I purchased Stewart's personal copy of *The Light of Asia* by Edwin Arnold from a bookshop in Canberra after his nephew sold his library on consignment.

friend who was trying to turn him from a life of depravity. Arnold's book was not an esoteric text that only oriental scholars read but a famous book which critics should have cited and would have provided, at the very least, some historical contextualisation for Stewart's work. The opportunity to provide intertextual criticism, which was made possible by *The Light of Asia*, was never realised by Australian critics.

Stewart's adoption of Arnold's coupling of Buddhist subject matter with the Western narrative structure and the use of Arnold's idea of a first person narrator with a distinctly Oriental outlook provided Stewart with a structural model for his epic and an example of a poetic voice which was localised and personal. This poetic voice was more suited to his purpose than his previous poetic voice which was impersonal and lacked emotional warmth. Arnold states his reasons for adopting a first person narrator with a distinctly Oriental outlook in the introduction to *The Light of Asia*. He writes: "I have put my poem into a Buddhist's mouth, because, to appreciate the spirit of Asiatic thoughts, they should be regarded from the Oriental point of view."¹⁹ Long before the introduction of transnational scholarship in American academia during the 1990s, Arnold appreciated the need for a localised and personal context.

From the very first review of Stewart's poetry it was recognised that his coupling of Asian subject matter with a lyrical structure borrowed from Western poetry was a unique and distinctive feature of his poetry. A.D. Hope was the first critic to acknowledge Stewart's skill in marrying Eastern philosophies with a Western narrative structure. He writes:

This is not chinoiserie; it is not English poetry in Chinese fancy dress. It is English poetry which has enlarged its resources by an intellectual penetration of and an artistic comprehension of another culture . . . I am struck by the mastery, the justice and the originality of movement.²⁰

¹⁹ Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, p. 11.

²⁰ A.D. Hope, 'Phoenix Wings: Poems 1940-6,' *Meanjin*, Volume 7, Number 4, Summer 1948, p. 269.

Similarly, Kelvin Lancaster, in 1949, argues that even though Stewart appears derivative, excoriating him for adopting the “irresponsible style of Rimbaud,” his poetry still provides an original and distinct contribution to Australian poetry:

As it is, his brilliant style and versatile direction are a distinct contribution toward brightening the too often pallid and anaemic style of Australian poetry. With an originality of thought equal to his powers of expression, Mr Stewart could become the major Australian poet of the younger generation.²¹

Stewart’s original and distinctive style reached its zenith in *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* and even though critical appreciation of Stewart’s early work indicated that it was unique and he was a trailblazer, critics could not adequately grasp or appreciate its transnational scope.

Between the period of Hope’s first critical review of Stewart’s poetry in 1948 and the publishing of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* in 1981, Green provided the most comprehensive critical insight into Stewart’s work. She also provided the most plausible reason for the lack of engagement with Stewart’s poetry by Australian critics. She writes:

Perhaps Stewart made the mistake, early in his poetic career in this country, of taking Australia’s geographical situation seriously. To him, the isolation of a British colony in a Pacific region was a fact to be faced, not to be ignored and resisted. The ambition of Australia to become “a New Britannia in another world” appeared to him slightly comic, and possible in the end disastrous.²²

From the very beginning of his career, Stewart appreciated the transnational context of Australia’s position in the Pacific, though rather than be acknowledged as a transnational trailblazer, his choice of subject matter, as Green notes, destroyed his career in Australia. Apart from ‘Orpheus,’ with its Greek mythology, Stewart’s early poetry lacked Australian and European motifs. The old country, gumtrees, kangaroos and white people were not the main focus of his early poetry. His subject matter was deemed to be insufficiently Australian for it to be judged by critics as Australian poetry and therefore it was ignored. As McKernan

²¹ Kelvin Lancaster, ‘Style and Content in Poetry,’ *Southerly*, Volume 10, Number 3, 1949, pp. 147-149.

²² Green, p. 33.

argues: “In the early postwar years many writers were committed to Australian nationalism and the hope that the future Australia would put into practice the longstanding nationalist claim for a true egalitarianism.”²³ As a teenager Stewart witnessed the rise of dictatorships during the 1930s, and with their rise “there has been a corresponding regression to narrow nationalism.”²⁴ His earlier experience precluded him from accepting any form of nationalism, which, unfortunately for him, put him on the wrong side of the debate about what constituted Australian poetry during the 1950s.

The long running battle for control of the definition of Australian literature that began in the early issues of *Southerly* was a forerunner to a larger battle about the selection criteria for the Australian canon, which began in earnest during the 1980s with John Docker’s *In a Critical Condition* (1984).²⁵ The selection criteria for the Australian canon began to diversify during the 1980s and these boundaries were further broadened by Australian transnational scholars in this century, though this revision did little to help Stewart during the course of his career. Graham Huggan in *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (2007) and Nicholas Birns in *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World not Yet Dead* (2015) are the most recent examples of transnational scholars who continue to argue for the diversification of the selection criteria for entry into the Australian canon, though, as this thesis argues, the idea of just one canon is obsolete. As Huggan writes: “The last decade or so has witnessed the rapid development of a comparative cross-disciplinary scholarship on whiteness that has proved instrumental in building argument against white supremacy, bigotry and racethinking at both local and, *increasingly*, transnational and global levels.”²⁶ However, this development assumes that international

²³ McKernan, p. 5.

²⁴ Harold Stewart, ““Modern” “Australian” “Art,”” *ARNA*, University of Sydney Arts Student Society, 1941, n.p.

²⁵ McKernan, p. 6.

²⁶ Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism*, p. 71.

trade and immigration will continue to shift people from one country to another and entrench transnationalism and globalisation as the most significant social, economic, cultural and political forces of the early part of this century. If the global exchange of cultures, ideas and people continues unabated, then the pressure to establish a diverse range of selection criteria for multiple canons will only increase in the future. Huggan confirms that this pressure has been building since Docker's *In a Critical Condition* Docker's: "By the 1980's, however, the emphasis had shifted from preserving the canon to diversifying or even dismantling it."²⁷ Robert Dixon designates 1981, with the publication of *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*, edited by Leonie Kramer, as the pivotal moment for change as it represents a "radical break from the past – a generational change."²⁸

The composition of the Australian canon continues to come under pressure from the forces of transnationalism and globalisation, as does the need for the definition of Australian literature to be reimagined without recourse to the type of nationalistic notions Stewart resisted during the 1950s. The tyranny of distance has collapsed and brings with it a new set of imperatives. As Bill Ashcroft writes:

But it raises the fact that in a national literature, a very different set of imperatives than nationality may be driving the writers. The myth of national identity, the myth of the imagined community, is fundamental to the survival of the nation, but to operate, that myth must displace the exorbitant proliferations of actual subject positions within the state. This proliferation constitutes what I call the *transnation*, a word that constitutes the nation as an endlessly mobile cultural phenomenon, a horizontal reality – distinct from the vertical, hierarchical authority of the state.²⁹

Green is the only critic to make a correlation between Stewart's early and later work:

"There is a clear line of thought and mood and aspiration from his exquisite early poem

²⁷ Huggan, p. 41.

²⁸ Robert Dixon, 'Deregulating the Critical Economy: Theory and Australian Literary Criticism in the 1980s,' in Alison Bartlett, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee (eds.), *Australian Literature and the Public Sphere*, Canberra, ASAL, 1998, p. 194.

²⁹ Bill Ashcroft, 'Beyond the Nation: Australian Literature as World Literature, *Scenes of Reading*, p. 36.

“Annunciation” in 1940 to the poem that forms the penultimate section of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, the far more exquisite “Waiting for Sunrise at the Silver Pavilion under Snow.”³⁰ The atmospheric beauty and sensitive pictorial rendering of the Silver Pavilion and its surroundings are exquisite, as Green notes, and could only have been achieved through years of patient observation. It is unlikely that a tourist would have had the local insight to appreciate the rare sight of snow falling on the Silver Pavilion, though Stewart, as a foundational member of Australia’s transnational canon, accomplishes this task with poetic eloquence.³¹ Stewart describes the surroundings of the temple as he is about to enter the grounds of the Silver Pavilion or Ginkaku-ji:

The last few flakes were falling as I strolled
Nearer the village huddled up with cold
Against Daimonji’s foot, where in a fold
Dwellings with wooden frames were weathered black
But roofed with sheets of white, stepped up the lane
That climbs between their shuttered shops to gain
Ginkaku-ji’s front gate.³²

Green takes the opportunity to compare *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* with another Australian poem and argues that it is the most important long poem composed by an Australian since Robert FitzGerald’s *Between Two Tides* (1952), though she concludes that the two poems have nothing in common, except their massive integrity.³³ While her assessment about the integrity of the two poems is beyond question, she fails to broaden her comparison to include Arnold’s poem. If a transnational perspective had been available during the 1970s then she might have also taken the opportunity to apply its critical lens and

³⁰ Green, p. 34.

³¹ I was very fortunate to have photographed this scene in 1999. Locals told me that snow had not fallen in Kyoto for thirty years. These photos are published on *nembutsu.info*.

³² Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, p. 107.

³³ Green, p. 34.

conceptual framework and could have argued that the reason these two poems had little in common was due to Stewart's transnational poetic voice, which is defined by his practical application, artistic comprehension and intellectual penetration of a foreign culture within a localised and personal context. These three attributes, along with his application of a localised and personal context, confirms the status of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* as a transnational epic. During the 1970s the concept of transnationalism was not part of the critical lexicon and, at the time, Green lacked the necessary critical lens and conceptual framework to assess Stewart's work in a broader transnational context.

The strength of Stewart's transnational engagement is achieved by his practical application, artistic comprehension and intellectual penetration of Pure Land Buddhism within a localised and personal context. Galen Amstutz acknowledges Stewart's unique position as the first Westerner to bring felicity to the teachings of the Pure Land Buddhism. He writes: "While Zen exercised a considerable influence on modern Western creative writers ranging from Jack Kerouac to Peter Mathiessen, the independent uptake of the Shin religious perspective has remained almost nil; an exception is Harold Stewart's little known *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*.³⁴ While it might not be the case that Stewart's uptake was entirely independent, as it was facilitated by Pallis, Blacker, Schuon and the friends who joined him in the Friday night meetings at the Norman Robb bookshop, Amstutz's point about his precursory role in the uptake of Shin Buddhist is still valid.

It was not only creative writers that lacked a discerning perspective on the Pure Land or Shin religions, but also preeminent critics, as Green acknowledges with her criticism of Edward Conze, an Anglo-German scholar who was a pioneer in the translation of Buddhist text. She describes Conze as suffering from intellectual thinness when he engaged with Pure

³⁴ Galen Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida: History and Orientalism in the Study of Pure Land Buddhism*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1997, p. 86.

Land Buddhism.³⁵ Critics, in general, lacked a transnational perspective with which to assess Stewart's work in this context, but also, more alarmingly, the most prominent of these critics lacked a proper intellectual penetration of Stewart's subject matter. The paucity of scholarly insight explains Stewart's neglect but also underscores the astuteness of A.D. Hope when he acknowledged that Stewart's poetry provided a comprehensive example, if not the first example in Australian poetry, of a writer who provided a complete intellectual penetration of and an artistic comprehension of another culture. The only aspect A.D. Hope failed to mention, which is fundamental to the transnational perspective, was Stewart's practical application. Stewart's practical application of Pure Land Buddhism prevents critics describing *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* in terms provided by Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, in that his engagement avoided distortion, exaggeration and patronisation. A.D. Hope was referring to Stewart's early Chinese influenced poetry when he made this remark and this makes *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, with its practical application, artistic comprehension and intellectual penetration of Pure Land Buddhism, even more remarkable, as he poetically portrayed, with symbolic and iconographical felicity, not one but two Asian cultures. This is an unprecedented achievement in Australian literature, even more remarkable when considering that he achieved this with parsimonious support from critics and scholars.

The only other critic to review *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* during the period when it was published was an old school friend of Stewart's, Ronald Dunlop in *Southerly*. Dunlop describes *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* as "a carefully integrated book."³⁶ Dunlop's review concentrates on the structural and technical aspects of the poem, which is the type of critical

³⁵ Green, p. 34.

³⁶ Ronald Dunlop, 'Pilgrims Progress in Japan: Discovering Harold Stewart,' *Southerly*, June 1983, p. 169.

framework he had applied in an earlier review of Stewart's poetry published in *Southerly* in 1963.³⁷ In this earlier review Dunlop writes:

Stewart's adherence to the traditional myths, his failure, so far, to evolve his own, together with his ascetic rejection of sensuality, his avoidance of "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart", leave him vulnerable to the charge of over-detachment from the hurly-burly of his own times.³⁸

Dunlop's comment reflects the most common criticism of Stewart's early poetry, with its avoidance of the foul rag-and bone shop of the heart, in that it lacked emotional warmth.

In the 1983 review, Dunlop describes *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* as "a peripatetic poem in the Eighteenth Century tradition."³⁹ In the absence of the critical lens and conceptual framework of transnationalism, Dunlop looks backwards to the 18th century to contextualise Stewart's work within the Western tradition. Dunlop then proceeds to describe the philosophical aspects of the first poem at the Three Boats Festival, outlining the Pure Land belief in the superiority of the other power of Amida over self power or individual will, but failed to grasp the significance of Stewart's transnational moment when he turns his back on the tourist festival. A common feature of the criticism provided by Green and Dunlop is their focus on the poem's pictorial qualities, no doubt one of its key strengths, but both failed to appreciate its significance as a transnational epic. This is not so much a criticism of the reviewers but more an observation that the necessary critical lens and conceptual framework had yet to be developed by which to assess Stewart's epic within a transnational context.

Dunlop's reliance on Western literary history to understand Stewart's poetry is made most apparent when he describes a beggar woman on the Shijo Bridge as a figure "who might

³⁷ Ronald Dunlop, 'Some Aspects of the Poetry of Harold Stewart,' *Southerly*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1963, pp. 222 - 234.

³⁸ Dunlop, 'Some Aspects of the Poetry of Harold Stewart,' p. 234.

³⁹ Dunlop, 'Pilgrims Progress in Japan: Discovering Harold Stewart,' p. 170.

have come straight from the pages of Wordsworth.⁴⁰ An appreciation of the beggar woman's personal circumstances and local context is missing. The poem Dunlop refers to is 'Enjoying the Evening Cool on Old Shijo Bridge.' Stewart is strolling across the bridge when:

Along the other side I would have strayed,
But in the path of my return I meet,
A bent old woman whom the crowds evade;
Who all day long has knelt, begging in vain
Amid the steamy stupefying heat.⁴¹

Unnoticed by compassion or disdain, Stewart slips the woman some loose change but to his surprise she unflinchingly continues to bow as if nothing had happened. The poet, taken aback by her apparent lack of appreciation, had expected some sign of gratitude, but she treats him like any other person passing on the hot and humid summer afternoon. Her simple dignity prompts him to ask: "Yet in what inward riches must she dwell, / Who only has her poverty to sell?"⁴² Ken Rodgers, the former managing editor of the *Kyoto Journal* and long-time resident, recalled that the beggar woman had been a fixture on the bridge for many years and was a local icon.⁴³ Ken's local knowledge demonstrates the way in which Dunlop's comparison with Wordsworth lacks two key features of transnational criticism. Dunlop failed to appreciate the way in which Stewart provided a localised and personal context.

The closest Dunlop gets to understanding the transnational scope of Stewart's epic is in his commentary on Poem Eight when he observes the emotional connection between Stewart and Kenreimonin. For thirty years, in lonely exile as the last Heike survivor of the great naval battle of Dan-no-ura fought against the victorious Minamoto warriors, Kenreimonin spends the rest of her life imprisoned at the Jakko-in. He writes: The

⁴⁰ Dunlop, 'p.174.

⁴¹ Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, p. 36.

⁴² Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, p. 36.

⁴³ Ken Rodgers, in an interview with Barry Leckenby, 8 November 16, 1998.

interweaving of Kenreimonin's story with the poet's is skilfully done, and the imagery that carries the poem along gives poignant intensity to the experience of the two people far apart in time but identified in place and suffering.⁴⁴ The comparison between the poet and the empress-consort is poignant as both would spend thirty years in exile, even though Stewart's exile was not at the hands of blood thirsty warriors, that is if you are willing to concede that Australian critics were not blood thirsty warriors, which, of course, Stewart was not prepared to countenance. The poignancy Dunlop refers to reaches its climax at the conclusion of the poem:

No visitor would reach this holy cell,
Buried in hills, where she was doomed to dwell
Through all those years of loneliness in store;
Until her voice, invoking Buddha's Name
To save the Heike dead from Hell, became
The cuckoo-call that haunts the hollow dell,
And with its farthest echo bids the world farewell.⁴⁵

Dunlop rejects the criticism that the chief merit of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* is its technical refinement and argues that Stewart's most outstanding attribute is his ability to probe the human condition, which is confirmed by the emotional warmth of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*. At the conclusion of the review Dunlop compares Stewart's transnational epic to John Bunyan's 17th century classic *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).⁴⁶ Dunlop fails to mention Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, the most relevant comparable text, but, once again, looks backward and uses a Christian's tale of spiritual development from the 17th century to assess Stewart's masterpiece. Lancaster had also looked backwards to Rimbaud to contextualise Stewart's early work. It would take another two decades before the Australian critical

⁴⁴ Dunlop, 'Pilgrims Progress in Japan: Discovering Harold Stewart,' p. 177.

⁴⁵ Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, p. 71.

⁴⁶ Dunlop, 'Pilgrims Progress in Japan: Discovering Harold Stewart,' p. 181.

response to Stewart's work stopped looking backwards and embraced transnationalism. Green, the more astute critic, at least recognised the reason for Stewart's critical neglect was that he took Australia's position in the Asian Pacific region seriously. In her conclusion, Green notes that there is nothing in Australian poetry with which Stewart's achievement can be compared.⁴⁷ Putting aside the fact that she had already compared Stewart's transnational epic with FitzGerald's *Between Two Tides*, as she was probably referring to Stewart's larger body of work in general, she still failed to draw a comparison with *The Light of Asia*.

The rear-vision view of Australian literary critics in the 1980s, with their focus on European or Australian examples as a means to contextualise Stewart's work into Australian literature, failed to appreciate the transnational significance of his work, in that their criticism did not recognise Stewart's transnational perspective and the way in which he achieved a practical application, artistic comprehension and intellectual penetration of Pure Land Buddhism within a localised and personal context. The rear-vision view of Australian critics was not an unfamiliar bearing for Australian literature in the 20th century. Vance Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties* (1944), A. A. Philips's *The Australian Tradition* (1958) and Russell Ward's *The Australian Tradition* (1958), all looked backward as a means to establish a historical footing for Australian literature. Although, as this chapter has outlined, the two critics who reviewed *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* did get tantalisingly close to pivoting towards the future and appreciating Stewart's transnational significance. The most recent critics of Stewart's work, as the next chapter will outline, get even closer.

⁴⁷ Green, p. 39.

Chapter 3: A Foundational Author of the Australian Transnational Canon

“My Heart, dried up and dead so many years,
It felt no more of gladness than of grief,
Accepts this precious gift of healing tears
That overflow, spontaneous in excess,
As Heaven’s compassion sprinkles its relief
And Earth receives the rain with thankfulness.”

Poem Eight: Sheltering at the Jakko-In From Morning Rain in Early Autumn
By the Old Walls of Kyoto

Three key influences were decisive in shaping the transnational narrative of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*. Firstly, Steinilber-Oberlin provided Stewart with the idea of a pilgrimage to Japan as a means of achieving cultural insight through practical means. Secondly, Arnold provided Stewart with an example of a narrative structure which combined Eastern subject and a Western poetic form, as well as providing an example of a poetic voice with a distinctly Oriental outlook. Thirdly, the love Stewart had for Masaaki motivated him to return to Kyoto in 1966, which extended his view from that of a tourist and provided the poem with a localised and personal context. The previous two chapters have provided an analysis of the manner in which these key influences shaped the transnational narrative of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* and also reviewed the Australian scholarly and critical treatment of Stewart’s epic poem prior to the transnational turn in Australian literary criticism. This chapter will review the most recent critical engagement with the purpose of delineating the influences identified as having the most significance in shaping Stewart’s transnational epic.

In 2010 Alex Minchinton published ‘The Exiled Immortal: Reconsidering Harold Stewart.’ Minchinton’s primary purpose is to argue that Stewart’s poetry deserves to be reconsidered in light of his spirituality acuity and, in particular, for his support of the Traditionalist. Minchinton argues that “few, if any, have placed his life journey within a

spiritual framework.”¹ Alluding to the transnational significance of Stewart’s work, he suggests that Stewart’s work was published with an international, not Australian, audience in mind, but this observation, apart from one other example, is the closest Minchinton will get in his critical analysis of the poem’s transnational scope as his approach relies more on the application of a spiritual framework than it does on the critical lens and conceptual framework of transnationalism.²

In an approach which reflects that of Green and Dunlop, Minchinton begins by identifying four reasons for Stewart’s critical neglect, though he describes this neglect more as prejudice towards Stewart.³ He speculates the reasons for this so called prejudice were that Stewart had mocked the modernist movement by concocting the Ern Malley hoax; adopted a wartime enemy as his homeland; took on an unknown foreign religion and “to top it all off, Stewart was gay.”⁴ The contention that Australian critics had passed down animosity towards Stewart from one generation to the next has already been assessed as unlikely, if not implausible, as Stewart’s co-conspirator James McAuley was not treated in a similar fashion. The racist, religiously intolerant and homophobic prejudices against Stewart, as Minchinton argues, resulted in Stewart becoming an unforgivable villain, though this characterisation seems unnecessarily dramatic, if not comically vaudevillian.⁵

In his overview of Stewart’s time at the Norman Robb bookshop Minchinton concentrates on Stewart’s engagement with the Traditionalist and identifies Schuon, Pallis, and Blacker, as the main facilitators of Stewart’s interest in Pure Land Buddhism. Without

¹ Alex Minchinton, ‘The Exiled Immortal: Reconsidering Harold Stewart, in *Crossing Religious Frontiers: Studies in Comparative Religion* (ed.), Harry Oldmeadow, World Wisdom, 2010, p. 183.

² Minchinton, p. 184.

³ Minchinton, p. 184.

⁴ Minchinton, p. 185.

⁵ Minchinton, p. 185.

knowledge of Steinilber-Oberlin's book, Minchinton designates 1957 as the turning point in his transnational engagement with Japan. Kelly also argues that it was during 1957 or 1958, after Schuon published several articles on Pure Land Buddhism, that Stewart made a decisive transnational turn to Japan, but, the seed of Stewart's engagement was first planted in the early 1950s when he read Steinilber-Oberlin's book.⁶

Minchinton provides an account of Stewart's second trip to Japan when he should have been ordained as a Pure Land Buddhist priest and declares that the reason for Stewart's last minute withdrawal remains a mystery.⁷ He rightfully acknowledges that Stewart was at a crossroads after his aborted attempt at ordination and then states that he spent the remaining months with his Japanese partner, even though they were never actually partners, at least as far as Masaaki was concerned. Minchinton favours a spiritual framework over a transnational perspective to understand Stewart's evolution as a poet and, as a result, does not appreciate the crucial role his love for Masaaki played in cementing Stewart's transnational relationship with Japan.

Minchinton does not deal with *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* in any substantive fashion, but does assess Stewart's dense imagery as having symbolic integration with Japan's cultural history. This reflects Hope's assessment of Stewart as having achieved an intellectual penetration of and an artistic comprehension of another culture and also parallels Green's and Dunlop's assessments that the twelve poems of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* achieved integration. He also regards the use of the old walls of Kyoto as a brilliant metaphor for beauty, truth and harmony, though he is seemingly unaware that this metaphor was initiated in Melbourne as a vertiginous Stewart gripped a wall after conceiving of the idea for his next epic around the time of the 1956 Olympic Games.

⁶ Kelly, p. 65.

⁷ Minchinton, p. 187.

Minchinton concludes: “No doubt, Guenon would have approved of his deep engagement with Eastern traditions; his numerous penetrating essays on symbolism and his full commitment to seek the “Light from the East.””⁸ It is tantalisingly close to Arnold’s *The Light of Asia*, yet he does not cite the most relevant comparable text from a Westerner writer. Dunlop refers to Wordsworth and Bunyan to contextualise Stewart’s poetry into the Western tradition, but also fails to refer to *The Light of Asia*. Minchinton also borrows another Western writer for the purpose of contextualisation. In the epigram which prefaces Minchinton’s article Thomas Merton is quoted. Merton was a Trappist monk of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, which is a Catholic religious order. The application of an institutional spiritual framework, whether that is provided by Catholicism or the Traditionalist, deflects from the true purpose of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, which is to provide guidance, not for collective salvation, but for individual salvation. As Stewart states in the introduction of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, salvation cannot be achieved en masse by following any particular religious order or doctrine but “in truth the spiritual quest must be pursued, and can only be achieved, by each of us alone.”⁹ Perhaps this is the real reason that Stewart declined to go ahead with his ordination, as he believed that eschatology judgment, if there is to be one, can only be achieved alone and, even though it might be of great comfort, the reassuring company of priests and acolytes will not guarantee the swift passage to a paradisiacal afterlife.

Minchinton’s argument for the reconsideration of Stewart’s work is founded on the belief that Stewart’s poetry provides spiritual guidance. He describes Stewart’s life as nothing “that does not properly conform to an authentic, if not heroic, attempt at spiritual

⁸ Minchinton, p. 192.

⁹ Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, p. xvi.

salvation.”¹⁰ His final words demand that there be a timely reassessment of the man who “thought himself, rightly or wrongly, “The Exiled Immortal.”¹¹ While this reassessment is long overdue, Minchinton fails to suggest a critical lens or conceptual framework, apart from a spiritual or religious one, that scholars could use to provide this reassessment.

The other recent scholarly response to *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* is provided by Christopher Mooney in his Ph.D. dissertation *Asian Expatriate Immersion in the Later Works of Harold Stewart* (2015). The aim of Mooney’s dissertation is to locate Stewart as the historical precursor to three decades of recent Australian poetic responses to Asia, which confirms Stewart as one of the foundational members of the Australian transnational canon.¹² In support of this view Mooney argues that Stewart’s engagement with Pure Land Buddhism was not superficial as it goes beyond the perspective of a tourist and, as such, should not be considered as an example of Orientalism. Mooney writes: “The art of meaningful engagement with Asia without repeating patterns of casual acquisitiveness, post-colonial condescension, or fanciful Orientalism is the defining issue addressed through this study of Stewart’s formalist poetic works.”¹³ By contextualising Stewart’s work within the Australian transnational canon and defining it as an immersive and experiential engagement, Mooney shifts the critical debate from the rear-vision view of previous critics to apply the critical lens and conceptual framework of transnationalism. Mooney argues that Stewart’s exploration of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, examined in forensic detail, provides one model for the kind of immersive learning that is required if Australian poets and Australia are to accept and be accepted as part of Asia. The idea of immersive learning, an important feature of

¹⁰ Minchinton, p. 193.

¹¹ Minchinton, p. 193.

¹² Christopher Mooney, *Asian Expatriate Immersion in the Later Works of Harold Stewart*, Ph.D. dissertation, Monash University, 2015, p. 5.

¹³ Mooney, p. 5.

transnationalism, was initiated by Stewart before any other Australian poet. This supports the view that Stewart was not just a foundational member of the Australian transnational canon but should be considered as its first member. The only argument against this claim is provided by Paul Croucher when he notes that Stewart became the first Australian poet to incorporate Buddhist motifs since Bernard O'Dowd (1866 - 1953), though O'Dowd did not live in Asia and should be excluded from the Australian transnational canon on that basis.¹⁴ Max Dunn could also be considered but should be excluded for the same reason as O'Dowd. Croucher is also the only critic to compare Stewart with Arnold, though not for the similarity of their narrative structure and poetic voice, but rather their penchant for capitals.¹⁵

An example of Mooney's redoubtable examination of the symbolic and iconographical significance of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* is provided in his analysis of first poem which describes the Three Boats Festival, which is when Stewart makes his decisive transnational turn to Japan, though Mooney does not make this observation but rather highlights the moment when the poet hears the sound of "a bamboo flute, from others more remote."¹⁶ Stewart's personal tone resonates with Mooney. This line introduces the pilgrim's voice which, with its warm personal tone, provides much of the beauty, truth and harmony which Minchinton highlights in the poem.

Stewart's integration of both Japanese and Chinese cultures is highlighted in Mooney's assessment of the second poem 'Meditating on the Stone Garden of Ryoan-Ji.' After detailing the multi-layered interpretations of this unique shrine, a Japanese tradition borrowed from Zen monasteries, Mooney highlights the personal nature of Stewart's poetic voice, which confirms the transnational criticism Mooney provides as it concentrates on

¹⁴ Paul Croucher, *Buddhism in Australia 1848 - 1988*, p. 30.

¹⁵ Croucher, p.30.

¹⁶ Mooney, p.52.

Stewart's ability to provide a personal context within a localised environment. Stewart achieves a practical application, artistic comprehension and intellectual penetration of two cultures and provides a localised and personal poetic voice to produce poetry of emotional warmth. Mooney explains:

The personal aspect of the poem only commences halfway through this reflective work on the temple and garden, realised by walking around it and sitting. It integrates all six levels at once, while the essay expounds separately the hierarchies of meaning in discursive fashion. Both demonstrate Stewart's metatextual practice of presenting experiential cognitive knowledge followed by expository discussion, integrating it on all levels. However, experience and analysis always aim for final unity.¹⁷

Mooney, for the first time in the Australian scholarly and critical response to *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*, appreciates the transnational scope of Stewart's epic as it integrates the cultural heritage of Asia in an immersive and experiential fashion that provides a localised and personal context.¹⁸ Mooney writes: "Stewart's commitment to pursue Shin Buddhism experientially in its natural setting at a time for its own sake, when such teachings were not available in Australia was a pioneering decision."¹⁹ Although this 'pioneering decision' should not be compared in any way to the pioneering decisions of the 18th colonial explorers as he did not use violence against the native population. Stewart integrated his subject matter experientially with sympathy and compassion, and without any hint of exploitation, which is vital if it is to be considered as a transnational epic.

Mooney describes Stewart's engagement with Asia as a hybrid model where Asian strains are grafted to existing stock. Huggan argues that the negative term miscegenation, with its connotation of crossing breeding, has long since been replaced by the term

¹⁷ Mooney, p. 54.

¹⁸ Mooney, p. 48.

¹⁹ Mooney, p. 61.

hybridisation, its more positive equivalence.²⁰ While both terms are tied to the racial violence and exploitation of colonial appropriation, hybridisation has been rescued from its earlier race-tainted connotation and, as Huggan argues, with the assistance of Robert Young, is more likely to prompt questions about how contemporary thinking has broken from the radicalised formulations of the past.²¹ As to the extent that Australian contemporary thinking has broken from the past radicalised formulations of hybridity and miscegenation is probably still an ongoing process as Brian Castro suggests: “But hybridity – or its shadow, miscegenation – has always been viewed here [Australia] with a kind of embarrassment or puzzlement.”²² Huggan also questions the magnitude of this break: “The break is perhaps not as absolute as several postcolonial theorists, notably Robert Young, like to imagine.”²³

If Stewart’s model of engagement with Asia is to be characterised as a hybrid model, where Asian strains are grafted to existing stock, then this existing stock should be identified, though the fact is that this existing stock did not exist when Stewart began borrowing Eastern subject matter during the late 1930s, with the exception of O’Dowd and Dunn. As the first member of the transnational canon it should be recognised that when Stewart began borrowing Eastern influenced subject matter there were no other Australian writers who were doing it in a fashion which could be defined in the terms of a transnational engagement. While it is not entirely apparent whether Mooney is referring to Australian poets in general or to a particular group of poets when he uses the term existing stock, it seems most likely that he is referring to Stewart’s contemporaries who engaged with Asian subject matter, including Judith Wright, David Campbell, Rosemary Dobson, Randolph Snow, Judith Beveridge,

²⁰ Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism*, p. 90.

²¹ Huggan, p. 90.

²² Brian Castro, ‘Writing Asia,’ *Looking for Estrellita*, p. 150.

²³ Huggan, p. 90.

Bruce Dawe and Michael Dransfield. Mooney does not mention O'Dowd or Dunn. Yet none of these writers spent three decades living in Asia.

The only writer who lived in Asia was Robert Gray as writer-in-residence at Meiji University in Tokyo in 1985. Gray could be compared to Stewart in terms of their dense use of Eastern imagery, but Gray overlays Zen minimalism to reimagine the Australian landscape, which is the type of appropriation defined as Orientalism, though to describe Gray's poetry as an example of Orientalism is probably unwarranted.²⁴ Yet the fact remains that none of Stewart's likeminded contemporaries could claim to have had an immersive or experiential engagement with Asia in the same way as Stewart and, as such, could be described as applying a tourist's perspective as they lacked a localised and personal context.

Mooney's central argument is flawed as Stewart did not graft on to existing stock as he claims, but his method of construction, which the word graft denotes, depended primarily on the ideas he borrowed from Steinilber-Oberlin and Arnold. It should also be noted that Steinilber-Oberlin and Arnold spent extensive periods living in Japan. Arnold had a Japanese wife when he lived in Japan. Most tellingly, Mooney does not include Arnold or Steinilber-Oberlin in his bibliography, which weakens Mooney's thesis as he fails to identify the two key literary influences that shaped the transnational narrative of *By the Old Walls of Kyoto*. His thesis, with its contention that Stewart achieves hybridity, should have clearly defined the manner in which grafting on to existing stock was achieved. One avenue of investigation could have been to explore the shared practical, artistic and intellectual space Stewart negotiates in the liminal zone of a hybridised diasporic subjectivity and the manner in which this subjectivity sponsored a sense of belonging.

²⁴ Mooney, p. 8.

Windchimes: Asia in Australian Poetry (2006) is the first anthology which documents the sense of belonging, or of not quite belonging, to an adopted culture that Asian Australian poets have experienced in recent times. Mooney writes: If *Windchimes* keeps the Oriental trope alive as part of the travel kit of first-timers jetting to Asian cultures, the diasporic waves of migration from Asian countries deliver more pragmatic versions of contemporary Asian experience, while applying internal pressure for acceptance as part of a hybridising Australian future.²⁵ Even though the term hybridisation, as Huggan argues, has recently shed its negative connotation, Mooney's reference to internal pressure suggests that the shared space of hybridity is subject to resistance in Australia as force is required if Asian Australian poets are to be accepted as part of the Australian experience. Hybridisation, in the terms of reference provided by Mooney, is tainted by the implication of force and as such is reduced to a state of fused artificiality. This is not to suggest that Mooney dismisses *By the Old Walls of Kyoto* as a poem that lacks integration or is artificial in any way, but rather highlights his dubious terminology, in that hybridisation, under his terms of reference, suggests a manipulated or forced artificiality which meets with resistance. This observation is not so much a criticism of Mooney but is probably more a reflection on the current state of Australian transnational criticism.

It appears that transnational criticism has not evolved to such an extent that it can appreciate Stewart's natural assimilation with Asian cultures which did not require the application of force to achieve this assimilation. Adam Aitken alludes to these forced assimilative tendencies when he argues that the term Asian Australian "may sound exotic or merely ironic and self-deprecating."²⁶ It is though it is necessary for Asian Australian poets to be apologetic by adopting a self-deprecating manner if they are to gain wider acceptance, or,

²⁵ Mooney, p. 12.

²⁶ Adam Aitken, *Contemporary Asian Australian Poets*, p. 15.

at very least, hope for less resistance in the reception of their poetry. The terminology currently applied to the transnational literary experience, the hyphenated Australian-Asian or Asian-Australian writer, reflects the current academic debate, but this terminology will have to evolve if it is to avoid the reductiveness it implies. Aitken's Ph.D. dissertation *Writing the hybrid: Asian Imaginaries in Australian Literature* (2006) is a good starting point in this academic debate as he explores "how Asian subjects repudiate their own ethnicity in an effort to fit into Anglo culture."²⁷ Additionally, Brian Castro's work should not be ignored.

In the case of Stewart, as A.D. Hope argued in 1948, Stewart's poetry was not some sort of reductive fancy dress but it was an intellectual penetration of and an artistic comprehension of another culture. Stewart's work was not grafted on to existing stock or hyphenated by tacking Eastern and Western subject matter together in an artificial manner. The corollary of this is that Stewart's immersive and experiential work within the shared space of hybridity is that of a truly transnational poet.

The issue of acceptance, which is the theme of the epigraphs that frame each chapter of this thesis, demonstrates Stewart's journey from novice to Pure Land Buddhism practitioner, often plagued by setbacks and disappointments, was one where he intuitively accepted that his experience was made richer by being informed by Asian spirituality and cultural history. However, a question mark still hangs over the notion that Australians have intuitively accepted their geographical reality. As two of Fitzgerald's contributions to his debate indicate by posing questions: *Is Australia an Asian County?* and *Ethical Dimensions of Australia's Engagement with Asian Countries: Are There Any?* Fitzgerald published these works over twenty years ago so the pertinent question is: How much progress has been made in accepting Australia's geographical reality in this century?

²⁷ Adam Aitken, *Writing the hybrid: Asian Imaginaries in Australian Literature*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Technology, Sydney, p. 1.

Mooney's dissertation provides an answer to this question by listing the most contemporary examples of Australian poets who have had a transnational engagement with Asia. The diasporic travel experience attracted Adam Aitken, S.K. Kelen, Chris Kelen, Pam Brown and Jill Jones to observe first-hand, often sardonically, the impact of tourism and globalisation had on modern Asia. Mooney assesses Aitken, of Australian-Thai parentage, as the poet who stands out as a consistent chronicler of 'Asian-Australian experience.'²⁸ Mooney's review of the most recent anthologies of Asian Australian poets seems to indicate that progress has been made, at least in terms of the raw numbers represented in the most recent anthology *Contemporary Asian-Australian Poetry* (2013). He writes:

Windchimes contains 82 poets of 'Australian-Asian' focus with only five poets of Asian, or mixed Asian parentage – Ee Tiang Hong, Ouyang Yu, Adam Aitken, Miriam Wei Wei Lo and Shen. These are also represented in the later anthology, *Contemporary Asian-Australian Poetry* (2013), which has collected 37 first and second generation voices whose work ranges from examples of nostalgia for lost heritage, to post-modern negation of Asian-Australian identity politics.²⁹

Mooney argues that reconsidering Stewart's place and historical importance within the canon of transnational poets contextualises the growing literary response to Asia and its significance for the future Australian poetry.³⁰ As Mooney notes: "Stewart's contribution is especially relevant in the light of massive recent Asian migration and the popularity of Eastern religions in Australia."³¹ While the revision of Stewart's contribution is appropriate in the context of the study of Australian literature, especially in terms of selecting poems for the Australian transnational canon, there is also a broader ethical issue at play which Stewart's poetry can address.

²⁸ Mooney, p. 8.

²⁹ Mooney, p. 9.

³⁰ Mooney, p. 14.

³¹ Mooney, p 14.

Mooney argues that Stewart's work can be seen as a force for the development of civilisation and that Stewart brings Australia and Asia a step closer together.³² While this argument is valid, Fitzgerald provides a compelling reason for accepting the reality of Australia's geographical position. He writes: "Asia can teach Western culture about 'the good' – the search for meaning and truth in a moral and ethical framework."³³ Stewart's use of Buddhist values as a compass to navigate the materialist values of the West provides an ethical framework that can be applied to create a sustainable ideology which goes beyond the type of unrestrained greed that displays indifference to the suffering of those who have not been fortunate enough to share in the promised economic benefits of globalisation. Stewart's immersive and experiential engagement with Buddhism provides an alternative perspective to that of a superficial tourist and the trickle-down economic theories dominated by profit and self-interest. His example demonstrates that learning can take place in the shared hybrid space of transnationalism and this learning can be beneficial for all parties. Nor does this learning have to suffer from the distortions of Orientalism or display forced assimilative tendencies.

Reciprocity will always be one of the key considerations to judge the success of any shared relationship. With the continuing collapse in trust suffered by a number of prominent Australian institutions, which includes the Catholic Church, Australian political parties and major banking and financial institutions, Stewart's engagement with Buddhist values shines a light in the dark asymmetrical world of avarice by providing an ethical framework that supports the view that the economic, political and social benefits of globalism can be shared democratically. Stewart did not follow the popular poetic fashion of the day to gain a greater audience, even though, as Dorothy Green noted, his trailblazing engagement with Asia

³² Mooney, p. 12.

³³ Stephen Fitzgerald, *Is Australia an Asian Country?*, p. 96.

actually destroyed his career in Australia, though his true legacy, with the critical lens and conceptual framework of transnationalism, can now be restored.

Conclusion

Robert Dixon identifies a crucial issue for contemporary Australian poets, which is if they are to be accepted as representing the transnational experience of Australia in this century, then they must find a way in which to speak in a globalised deregulated critical economy.”¹ This thesis has argued that Harold Stewart provides an example of a way to speak in the global deregulated world of neoliberalism, to borrow a term Nicholas Birns has recently explored in *Contemporary Australian Literature*. Stewart provides a precursory transnational poetic voice, decades before academia had embraced transnationalism, and, as such, should be considered the first member of the Australian transnational canon. Living in Japan for nearly three decades provided him with a transnational perspective which only now can be fully appreciated by Australian scholars and critics. This appreciation has been largely driven by transnational scholars in recognising the need to diversify the criteria for selection in the Australian canon, which is a concept that has come under increasing pressure for its lack of inclusiveness.

This thesis has also argued that Stewart’s poetry deserves a wider audience, though this appeal seems like history repeating itself if Max Dunn, one of Stewart’s contemporaries who wrote Zen inspired poetry, is taken into consideration. R. A. Simpson, at the time of Max Dunn’s death, mused: “Here we have Max Dunn’s real triumph – a triumph over the self, unreality and the world . . . Max Dunn’s achievement was not a small one. His poetry certainly deserves a wider audience than it has had in the past.”² The name Max Dunn could be substituted with the name Harold Stewart and Simpson’s assessment would still ring true. Stewart’s contribution to Australian literature warrants rigorous academic scrutiny, which critics have been calling for since the late 1940s, but it is only now, with the critical lens and

¹ Dixon, p. 196.

² R. A. Simpson, ‘Max Dunn – A Man and His Poetry,’ *Quadrant*, Oct- Nov 1964, Vol. VIII, pp. 48 - 53.

conceptual framework of transnationalism in place, that Stewart's broader contribution to Australian literature can align with its late 20th century shift towards its diverse, hybridised, globalised future.

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