

**Cyril Hopkins. *Marcus Clarke* edited by Laurie Hergenhan, Ken Stewart, and Michael Wilding (Australian Scholarly Publishing in association with State Library of Victoria, 2009).**

Marcus Clarke went to school with two Hopkins brothers. One, Gerard Manley, became, like Clarke himself, famous as a writer, although long after Clarke had achieved fame and indeed, after his own death in 1889 and Clarke's in 1881; the other, Cyril, had a successful career in finance and acted as British Vice-Consul for Hawaii for several years. Late in his life he wrote a life of Clarke, composing at least part of it in 1906 and returning to revise it in 1924. Scholars have known about Hopkins's account of Clarke's for a long time; Brian Elliott, for example made use of it in his *Marcus Clarke* of 1958, still the only full length biography of Clarke, apart, of course, from Hopkins's. But it has never been made available in printed form until now with its appearance in this edition.

Clarke was reticent about his early life in his published writing, at best approaching it obliquely in his writing. As a source of information about this part of Clarke's life Hopkins had the unique advantage of knowing Clarke intimately when he was in his teens and of receiving many letters from him after his departure for Melbourne, including some about his earliest experiences in Victoria. Nevertheless, because substantial use has been made of Hopkins's biography by various scholars working from the manuscript, accessible in the Mitchell Library since 1928, not a lot of new information about Clarke's life is made public through this edition. However, Hopkins is well worth reading even for those who have read previous work drawing on him. One great advantage of knowing Clarke is that Hopkins was able to quote at length from the letters Clarke sent to him. There is no substitute for reading in full the passages quoted in the biography: these extracts are unfortunately all that survives since the originals are no longer extant. Possibly, the editors speculate, they were destroyed by Hopkins because they contained material he considered unfavourable to Clarke. The extracts Hopkins selected from Clarke's letters to him provide a vivid picture of his first impressions of Melbourne and the initial excitement and later monotony of his life working on a sheep station. One whole chapter of the book, in fact, consists of 'A Day in Melbourne', a long letter written in the form of an article which Clarke sent to Hopkins soon after his arrival. A second advantage of knowing Clarke is that Hopkins places Clarke's work in a quite different literary context to the one that we are accustomed to consider since he compares Clarke with the writing which had been popular in his own lifetime, including works which had appeared after Clarke's death. Hopkins clearly had a strong interest in literature (although largely unaware of his brother's writing) and read widely, not confining himself to British literature but reading amongst other things a good amount of Australian writing. As the editors point out, this gives him a different approach to other and later critics. For instance, in a note on how Clarke, in 'Human Repetends' and 'La Béguine', 'is typically drawing on literature as well as life', they remark that

Elliott points to the context of French literature which Clarke got to know early, while Hopkins finds a source closer to home in the romance novelist James Payn. This is an example where Cyril's English background and

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contemporaneity with Clarke enables him to recuperate aspects of the latter's reading hitherto lost or overlooked by later critics in Australia. (261)

The letters from Australia provided Hopkins with further information about Clarke's reading and, when he passes this on, it provides a salutary reminder that what people read of the literature of their own time is not necessarily what those of a later time will read. Hopkins quotes a letter from Clarke: 'I have read *On the Heights*, to which you refer (a translation of Auerbach's well known novel *Auf der Höhe*), it is good and true, which is better than good ... . What do you think of Reade and Boucicault? Read *Griffith Gaunt* – the best of Reade's books I think, very powerful and clever' (172; the bracketed explanation is Hopkins's). He then goes on to comment on Swinburne (a familiar enough name) and Edmund Yates (a very unfamiliar name). Hopkins and Clarke shared an interest in Yates because he had attended the same school as them. Similarly a list of 'some of the books mentioned casually from time to time in [Clarke's] letters from Swinton and Ledcourt' contains works by Tennyson, Dickens, Hugo and George Sand as well as a number of now forgotten novels in English and French (136).

Hopkins's own wide and varied reading leads him to some interesting and unfamiliar comparisons. Robert Louis Stevenson seems to be a particular favourite of Hopkins, as we might expect of a man who lived until 1932 and, furthermore, had connections with the Pacific islands. Hopkins, as the notes to this edition point out, 'draws on a letter of Stevenson's from Samoa in Ch. 6, and frequently cites him in discussing Clarke' (253). Stevenson is not, at first sight, the most obvious writer to compare with Clarke but the comparison is nevertheless suggestive. Thus Hopkins compares Clarke and Stevenson as 'earnest students of their country's literature in youth' and 'single minded and devoted aspirants for literary fame' (200), as writers of light-hearted mock epitaphs on themselves (33-4), as describers of the natural world (52-4), and for their 'so-called Bohemianism', 'conscientious thoroughness of [their] work' and 'the artistic finish of [their] style' (249). Elsewhere Hopkins offers a detailed comparison of Clarke's life and work with that of Lermontov (133-5) which brings Clarke well within the great European tradition. Even a rather trite comparison of Clarke's expression of homesickness with Browning's 'Home Thoughts from Abroad' reminds us that both were for part of their lives literary exiles.

Balancing the advantages of having known Clarke in his formative years in England, Hopkins, who never visited Australia (although he did meet Clarke's wife and some of his children when they came to London), has clear limitations in writing about Clarke's Australian experience. Nevertheless he does his best to make up for this by reading widely in fiction and non-fiction about Australia. Fully aware that Clarke could be exaggerating things for the audience back home he attempts to verify Clarke's experience, for example by quoting Rosa Praed on Australian horsemanship to support Clarke's account of his own skills which he concludes by asserting, 'You may fancy that I am boasting of my horsemanship. These things are considered nothing here' (120). In a further effort at verification he even moves well beyond the scenes in which Clarke operated, comparing Melbourne after the gold rush with Perth 'in similar circumstances of recent years' (83-4), and drawing parallels between Clarke's account of a new chum in Melbourne and comments by a 'writer on life at Johannesburg in the earlier years of the Rand' and 'the experiences of a young friend

of the writer's in Argentina' (61), thus placing Clarke's life within the broader field of imperial expansion.

Hopkins's biography of Clarke is thus well worth reading and this edition places it in the best possible context. As we might expect from this particular team of editors, this is an edition of the highest quality, with a well-edited text, informative introduction, comprehensive and illuminating notes, and (something too often omitted) a detailed index. Though it has taken a long time for Hopkins's work to become freely available in printed form, it could hardly be better presented than in this excellent edition.

**Graham Tulloch**