

Lance Fallaw, ‘A Queensland House-Warming’: An Edition

Patrick Buckridge

Introduction

Lance Fallaw was born in Gateshead in the north of England in 1876. He graduated in Arts at the University of Durham, developing a deep love of English literature which he carried with him for the rest of his life as an itinerant literary journalist. In 1900, after working for a few years in Newcastle-on-Tyne, he took his leave of Britain forever, first going to South Africa, where he worked as a journalist, mainly in Durban, for about six years, thence to Rockhampton in 1906.

Fallaw had been writing verses for some years at this stage, and shortly after his arrival in Queensland a first book of poems was published, *Silver Leaf and Oak* (1906), many of them comparing his perceptions of the life and landscapes of South Africa with his memories of England. Three years later, he published his second volume, *An Ampler Sky* (1909), which focuses exclusively on his experience of life in tropical Queensland, an environment to which – as the critic H.A. Kellow noted in his book *The Queensland Poets* (1930) – Fallaw seems to have adapted himself with surprising ease and alacrity, and with never a nostalgic twinge (Kellow: 203). He later left Rockhampton to work on newspapers in Cairns, Charters Towers, Geelong and Sydney, and eventually – after many years – published his third and final book of poems, *Unending Ways* (1926).

What makes Fallaw such an interesting and unusual poet in the early Federation context is that he simply annihilates the familiar contradiction between, on the one hand, loving the European world he had left behind, with all its literary and artistic traditions, its old books, older libraries and ancient castles – in short, its ravishing antiquity – and, on the other hand, loving, enjoying and appreciating the new country and wanting to spend the rest of his life here. How did he do it? By bringing the Old World with him in his mind, transporting it safely in his imagination to the New World and allowing it to take root and flourish here. In his second book of poetry, *An Ampler Sky*, published by Macmillan in London just a century ago, Fallaw performs this act before our very eyes, first in the poem reprinted below, ‘A Queensland House-Warming’, and then in a sequence of

24 short poems entitled ‘The Library’, a book-lover’s rhapsody if ever there was one, in which he dwells passionately on the wisdom, good fellowship and pleasure to be found in his library:

Our lives are wedded to the books we love;
Our days of old between the leaves are bound,
Writ in the chapters, spoken in the sound
Of the sheet’s rustling ... (‘Love’s Alphabet’)

As that intensely material apprehension of books suggests, Fallaw’s passion is not just for the authors he admires – Shakespeare, Homer, Horace, Dante, Spenser, Milton, Cowper, Blake, Wordsworth, Lamb, Byron and many others – but also for the beauty of fine printing and binding:

Not only to the mind should books be dear,
But to the artist eye; the lamp that shines
Through the cramped dungeons of ignoble lines
And narrow margins, cannot sun the sphere.
Wherefore be welcome, ranged in royal tier,
Ye lords of Caxton’s kingdom, whether twines
The armorial of your state in quaint designs,
Or cut in classic mould with front austere.
Great Shakespeare should not pass in common guise,
But mantled like a prince, whose massy mail
Seems like a foil to grace the crown he won;
And humbler scribes are loftier to our eyes
If beauty decks the page, so the swift tale
Turns into gold its letters as they run (‘Print-Pictures’)

The nature and size of Fallaw’s actual library is unknown. Given his peripatetic career, it seems possible that the library described in these poems existed chiefly as memory or dream. But whether real or ideal, it clearly functioned as a powerful source of stability, self-sufficiency and happiness – a guarantee of the rich and abiding interiority that subtended all the changes of external circumstance he experienced in his life.

‘A Queensland House-Warming’ explores a slightly different phase in the process of imaginative transportation, that in which the well-stocked mind of the immigrant actively shapes the physical and cultural environment into companionable and pleasurable forms (‘echo or mirror seeking of itself’, as Coleridge put it)¹ according to the cultural paradigms already present to him. (By a striking irony, this process of imaginative recognition and reshaping, here experienced and expressed by Fallaw in such celebratory terms, is precisely the process so disparaged and despised by Australian nationalist critics of colonial art and literature, for whom it signified merely an inability to recognise what was unique and different about Australia.)



Figure 1: Lance Fallaw, 1876–1958

The poem begins as an invitation to unspecified English guests to visit him in his new Queensland house in Rockhampton:

There you will find us, housed in wooden walls
As happily as those whose daylight falls
Over the English orchards ... (ll. 37–39)

The mode of address is an imitation of one of Horace's most distinctive types of verse epistle, the invitation to his Sabine farm. Here the journey involved is rather longer than the sixteen miles from Rome to the Sabine Hills, and Fallaw begins with a lively account of the voyage itself – south to Gibraltar, east along the Mediterranean, down through Suez and the Red Sea to the Maldives, and south-east to Fremantle, then halfway around the continent to their final destination. His descriptions of the countryside around Rockhampton – the approach by the river route ('our fair Fitzroy') from Keppel Bay, the ride across the Berserker Range between Rockhampton and the sea, and the view of the islands inside the Barrier Reef – are all rendered with enough specificity to be recognisable (still) to those with local knowledge, but with enough generality to be interesting and attractive to the majority without such knowledge. The same is true of the promised recreations: the walk in the rainforest, the trip to the Capricorn Caves (with their 'pillars of the stalactitic mould') north of the town, and the ride to the ocean beach (either Emu Park to the north-east or Keppel Sands to the south-east). All are invested with a scenic beauty to rival Britain's, but importantly the relationship is not left in a state of rivalry. A series of literary observations and comparisons follows (ll. 85–122); this functions precisely to remove the barriers between the two environments, enabling them to merge in an almost mystical apprehension of unity:

There comes a rush of wonder to the heart
O'er what has been, and is, and yet may be,
Till all the ages seem a moving sea,
For ever blending, and for ever ours,
Even as our thought one moment overpowers
The sense of spaces measured by the sun,
And England – home – Australia, all are one! (ll. 124-130)

On that rhapsodic note, Lance Fallaw brings this unusual hundred-year-old poem to a close.

Note

- 1 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight', line 21.

'A Queensland House-Warming' (1909)

By Lance Fallaw

Yes, leave your island cradle when the Spring
Lifts the first feathers of her leafy wing;
Breathe of her balm but once, and then in haste,
Meeting the northward swallows, come to taste
Our cooler time, our winter, though you'll think 5
'Tis Spring prolonged, without one broken link,
So bright the air, so tremulous the blue,
Whose very frost is but like deeper dew.
Whether you sail where phantom galleons cope
With the lost spirits round the Cape of Hope, 10
Or pass through old-world Pillars, and the straits
Where Memphis couches by her broken gates,
And skirt the tropic islands, where the salt
Turns hissing into snow beneath a vault
Of jasper cliff'd on coral, or the wave 15
Sweeps under heaven as through one hollow cave,
Until your prow its mighty march annuls,
And cleaves it into spray, that breaks in gulls,
Led in their flight by some great albatross,
That mimics with his wings the Southern Cross, – 20
Some morning when the livid light outbreaks
From clouds, and fills the sea with floating lakes
Of shade and colour, and the mountain-tops
Unfold their misty mantle ere it drops,
You'll come by creek and islet to the bay 25
Where our calm river finds his seaward way,
Our fair Fitzroy, the noblest stream that fills
His quenchless sources in the Queensland hills.
Sweet be the morn that draws you with the tide
Up the long reaches, through the meadows wide 30
Where rise our domes and turrets, and the day
Blunts its first shafts against the gold and grey
Of the twin-towered minster, ere it shine
On the two bridges, and the wharves' black line,
Quaint gables, with their quiet garden-seats, 35
And fronded trees, that hedge the sun-swept streets.
There you will find us, housed in wooden walls
As happily as those whose daylight falls
Over the English orchards, or whose rooms

In rock seemed rooted like the very tombs. 40
 And sweeter falls the evening round our lamp
 Than if our panes were curtained from the damp
 Of Thames or Humber; while the broad moon throws
 Scarce fainter noon around our cottage-close,
 The queen of stars, leading a brighter train 45
 Than e'er since Bethlehem's eve enriched the plain.
 Such be our nights, and oft, as morning stirs,
 We'll rouse us with the early foresters,
 Riding at daybreak through the lowlands wet,
 Where dew lies like some grey sea's heavy fret, 50
 Printed with wild-fowl's foot, and by the creeks
 Where rushes stand in sheaves, and darker streaks
 Of swamp-ground break the meadows, till we pass
 Under the woods that buttress the great mass
 Of the sheer mountain, where the fig-trees cling 55
 To the deep gullies, and wild creepers fling
 Festoons from bough to bough, that serve to hold
 Perpetual twilight, as in forests old
 Of strange enchantment; and the traveller yearns
 To unroot the orchids and the antler-ferns, 60
 Save that the choice bewilders him: and so
 Perhaps at noon to the dim caves we'll go,
 And rest an hour for coolness, and behold
 The pillars of the stalactitic mould;
 Or by the stream again, to watch the light, 65
 Struck from its targe, go glancing up the height
 Of the gaunt gums, and touching every trunk
 When the pool quivers, as a stone had sunk
 Slow to its depths, though we may never see
 What presence troubles its tranquillity. 70
 And if, when rested, to the peaks we press,
 All mantled in their budded loveliness,
 There, bursting on our sight, we shall behold
 The great Pacific, with its sands of gold,
 Its studded isles, the headlands of its shore, 75
 And bays that murmur with the gentle roar
 Of never-ceasing surf, wherein to wet
 The limbs in dashing dalliance, and to set
 Our hands upon the shoulders of the sea
 Were worth a day's long march; and there we'll be 80
 Till evening gathers back into their fount
 The rivers of the sky, and then we'll mount
 And come at sunset to our home again,
 Rich with the sense of toil's delicious pain.
 Then be the taper lit, the feast prepared, 85
 The tale recounted, and the welcome shared.

Beneath our latticed eaves we'll rest at ease,
 And hear the wind sifting the pepper-trees,
 Or clashing, as when shield is met by sword,
 Cactus and palm, – though by our sheltered board 90
 Flows happy speech, and every flying hour
 Seems of the buried years the perfect flower.
 And there you'll find, all opening to the hand,
 Books, the first harvest of this later land;
 Whether through Gordon's page the tumult rings 95
 Of wild stock-riders and the 'sport of kings,'
 While all the time his aching passion swells
 Under the hoof-beats, and too clearly tells
 That climes of corn and gold may prove as hard
 As e'er was Grub Street garret to its bard: 100
 Or Kendall's sorrow, when in earth he laid
 The ashes of his Araluen maid,
 And tuned his notes, by sadness made more clear,
 To trace the stages of the Austral year:
 Or the fierce tale of wealth in frenzy won 105
 First by the spade, and snatched at point of gun:
 Or that keen Highland voice, a woman's word,
 The strangest chant that Maori isles have heard,
 That Celtic accent by a southern sea,
 'For Appin's Love,' and 'The Grey Company.' 110
 Or, to assert the triumph of the past,
 Some silent master-spirit holds us fast
 With an old spell, so that again we see
 Black Roderick with his plaided chivalry
 Sweep through the glen, or mark young Harry lift 115
 His beaver up to pierce the battle-drift.
 Seated 'neath Queensland figs, once more we tread
 The churchyard's grassy aisles where Nell lies dead.
 Hemmed by Australian streams, our eyes may note
 The Scholar-Gipsy and his moon-lit boat; 120
 And through the Australian echoes seems to ring
 The last great war of Lancelot and the King.
 Till, turning to the present with a start,
 There comes a rush of wonder to the heart
 O'er what has been, and is, and yet may be, 125
 Till all the ages seem a moving sea,
 For ever blending, and for ever ours,
 Even as our thought one moment overpowers
 The sense of spaces measured by the sun,
 And England – home – Australia, all are one! 130

Notes to ‘A Queensland House-Warming’

- 1–6 The poet invites his guests to sail from the British Isles in early Spring (March), the better to appreciate the mild continuity in climate in Queensland when they arrive in June (winter), after the usual twelve-week voyage.
- 9–20 Fallaw allows his guests the two alternative shipping routes: either south down the west coast of Africa, round the Cape of Good Hope, across the southern Indian Ocean to Fremantle, around the south of Australia, and up the east coast to Rockhampton; or east along the Mediterranean Sea, through the Suez Canal to Bombay or Colombo, and south-east across the Indian Ocean to Fremantle.
- 11 The Pillars of Hercules; Gibraltar.
- 12 The ruins of Memphis, the ancient capital of the Egyptian Old Kingdom, are 20 kilometres south of Cairo, on the west bank of the Nile.
- 13–16 Probably the Maldive Islands south of Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- 31–32 The ‘twin-towered minster’ appears to be a reference to St Paul’s Cathedral. The present church (the third on the site) was completed in 1879, and was the first building in Rockhampton to use the local sandstone quarried at the nearby Stanwell Quarry. This would explain the gold and grey colouring of the stone in the sunlight. The twin towers may refer to the tall crosses at each end of the roof ridge. For more on the history and restoration of St Paul’s, go to www.anglicanrockcathedral.org/History.html.
- 59–60 Fallaw’s impulses are not invariably environmentally sound!
- 74 The phrase ‘sands of gold’ perhaps suggests Keppel Sands as the destination, rather than Emu Park to the north. Both were reachable by ‘a long day’s march’ (on horseback) from the town (l. 80).
- 95 Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833–70). His *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* (1870), published the day before he committed suicide on Brighton beach, Melbourne, were immensely popular.
- 101–4 Henry Kendall (1839–82), Australian poet. The references are to Kendall’s poem ‘Araluen’ (the second poem of that name), which he wrote to commemorate his daughter Araluen, who died in infancy, and to ‘The Austral Months’.
- 105–6 The reference is to the novel *Robbery Under Arms* by ‘Rolf Boldrewood’ (Thomas Alexander Browne), which first appeared in book form in 1888.
- 107–10 Jessie Mackay (1864–1938), poet, journalist and political activist, was born in Rakaia Gorge, near Christchurch, New Zealand, of Scottish parentage. She had published three volumes of poetry by this time (the last *From the Maori Sea*, 1908, and went on to publish three more. The New Zealand scholar and critic MacDonald Jackson has called her ‘the first poet of any importance to be born in New Zealand’.

- Many of her poems were written in the Scottish dialect tradition of Robert Burns.
- 114 Roderick Dhu (Gaelic for 'Black Roderick') is the Chieftain of the legendary Clan Alpine in Sir Walter Scott's popular romantic epic, *The Lady of the Lake* (1810).
- 115–16 King Henry (formerly Prince Hal), in Shakespeare's play *Henry V* in the midst of the battle of Agincourt.
- 118 The tragic-sentimental character Little Nell (Nell Trent), in Charles Dickens' novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41).
- 120 The reference is to Matthew Arnold's poem, 'The Scholar Gipsy' (1853). Arnold's poem retells the story of a poor Oxford scholar who, unable to pay his fees, throws in his lot with a band of travelling Gypsies and learns their lore. One wonders if Fallaw saw an analogy between himself and Arnold's figure.
- 122 The reference may be either to Sir Thomas Malory's prose romance, *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485) or to Alfred Lord Tennyson's long cycle of Arthurian poems, *The Idylls of the King* (1856-85) – probably the latter.
- 127 Cf. John Keats' line, 'Forever panting, and forever young' in the great ode 'On a Grecian Urn', l. 27.

Works Cited

- Kellow, H.A. *The Queensland Poets*. London: Harrap, 1930.
- Fallaw, Lance. *An Ampler Sky*. London: Macmillan, 1909.
- Buckridge, Patrick and Belinda McKay, eds. *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006.
- Kendall, Henry. *Poetical Works*. Melbourne: Currey O'Neil, 1981.
- Green, H.M. *A History of Australian Literature, Vol. 1, 1789–1923*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961.
- Hornibrook, J.H. *Bibliography of Queensland verse, with biographical notes*. Brisbane: Government Printing Office, 1953.
- Hadgraft, Cecil H. *Queensland and Its Writers: 100 Years – 100 Authors*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1959