

Introduction

Some freeing up takes place as we grow older. Artists may begin with a feeling that they owe a duty of responsibility to the world but if they live long enough they notice that the world doesn't act responsibly towards its inhabitants; one effect of this on artists is that it lets loose some of the wondrous, indefinable forces of which they have become aware. In my case, I can mention an early belief that spirituality required a departure from things of this world; in particular, a belief that spirituality and sexuality were opposites. I got this idea from many sources – it was all around me in the Christian teachings I absorbed at school and university – but as I grow older my thinking is moving in the opposite direction. It seems that I now see spirituality around me almost everywhere, and it further seems that any description of the doings of this world which omits the spiritual dimension is deficient.

Statements like these are easily made but embodying what they represent in one's writing isn't easy. If the society one belongs to has a traditional and all-encompassing religion then the problem may appear not to exist, but if one is not a believer in an established faith then it re-presents itself, as it does for me. By way of supporting my situation I think back to the time when Europeans were first taking control of my continent. It was commonly said of the original inhabitants that they had no place of worship; this showed that they were irreligious and therefore inferior. God had revealed himself to the world in Christ and Christian ways were the only true ways. Et cetera. I think most Australians now realise

that for our aboriginal people there were sacred things all over the place, even, sometimes, everywhere. These thoughts bring to mind another. It was once commonly held that monotheism was a higher state of human development than its 'predecessors'. Monotheism was contrasted, to its favour, with belief in water sprites, tree gods, or any other form of here-and-there divinity. I might have swallowed this idea when I was nineteen but not any more. Conservationism will be our path back, I think, from stripping the divine from the world to concentrate it in one being, sorry, Being. (If I was god I wouldn't want to be a participle!)

The librettos in this, my fifth collection, all rest on such development of the above ideas as I could find. Some of the librettos are immediate, coming directly from my own life; others are generalised from a lifetime's reflection. Some of them would seem far from spiritual, but that's a challenge they, the librettos, have presented me and which I, in turn, pass on. Do what you can with them, dear reader. They're full of an old man's ideas of reverence, which he hopes to share.

C.A.E.