

Classic Poetry Series

John Streeter Manifold

- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

John Streeter Manifold(21 April 1915 – 19 April 1985)

John Streeter Manifold was an Australian poet and critic, known also for his interest in Australian folksongs. He was born in Melbourne, into a well known Camperdown family. He was educated at Geelong Grammar School, and read modern languages at Jesus College, Cambridge. While in Cambridge he joined the Communist Party of Great Britain. He was involved in an attempt to create a successor (Poetry and the People) to Left Review, when the latter folded in 1938.

He then worked in Germany, in publishing. During World War II he served in intelligence in the British Army, in the Middle East, Africa and France. He was a published war poet; Trident, with Hubert Nicholson and David Martin, was published by Randall Swingler's Fore Publications in 1944.

In 1949 he returned to Australia, settling in Brisbane. He was a founder in 1950 of the Realist Writers Group. He then worked and published mostly on Australian songs and music, reciting ballads at arts festivals. He died in Brisbane.

Guess Who?

From billabong or pond
he serenades the moon
upon his small bassoon;
the moon does not respond
but in the hope she might
he keeps it up all night.

The meatworker in magpie suit
goes home and practices his flute
ten times on end he will begin
the Bridal March from Lohengrin,
or make the Kookaburra smile
by his attempts at Fairest Isle.

He needs both industry and skill
the satisfy his hunger
did he run up that monstrous bill
of his at the fishmonger?

In arrogance and outward show
but not in brains he's strong;
olive above and white below
with either eye a crimson glow
he's waiting here, for figs to grow
upon a currajong
in intellect no less than colour
the female bird is even duller.

1. Bull Frog
2. Butcher-Bird
3. Pelican
4. Fig Bird

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