

Denis Glover, 1912 – 1980

Sarah Shieff

Denis James Matthews Glover, renowned in his day as a wit, war hero, boxer, sailor and legendary drinker, remains one of New Zealand's best-loved and most anthologised poets. Yet he tended to deprecate his own efforts at verse, regarding his work on behalf of other writers – as a printer, typographer and publisher – as an altogether more significant achievement. The Caxton Press, founded by Glover in Christchurch in 1936, occupies a signal position in New Zealand literary history. In his fifteen years at Caxton, Glover directed a publishing programme of poetry, criticism and short fiction which did much to define 'New Zealand literature' both for its day, and for much of the rest of the century. From 1947, the Press also sustained *Landfall* magazine. Caxton publications were distinguished by their physical beauty, reflecting Glover's passionate commitment to excellence in typography, design and production. His friend and fellow-poet Allen Curnow later commented that at Caxton, Glover 'created and kept in being ... a centre which, under his care, did more than any other to help good writing in New Zealand and to raise publishing and book production standards.' (Curnow *Penguin* 320).

Denis Glover's parents met in Dunedin. His father came from a family of affluent Irish drapers and merchandisers who emigrated to Wellington in 1884; within a generation, however, the family fortune had dissipated through bad investments, wayward children, and alcohol. The Glovers were nonetheless able to support Henry (Harry) Lawrence (b. Belfast, 1879), the fourth of eight Glover sons, in his desire to become a dentist. Harry qualified in August 1901; on April 8 1903 he married the artistic, widely-read and lively Eliza (Lyla) Jeannie Matthews (b. Dunedin, 1878), the only child of the staunchly Presbyterian James and Isabella Matthews (nee Miller) of Dunedin. Harry and Lyla produced four children: Coreen (b 1905), Henry Lawrence (b 1907), Denis (b 1912), and Brian (b 1914). The Glover marriage was not, however, a happy one. Harry Glover moved out of the matrimonial home when Denis was about six; thereafter, his father was almost entirely absent from his life and Lyla fell back on her own family for material and physical support until her second marriage in 1927. Glover's memories of early childhood are dominated by the observance of cheerless Sabbaths in the home of his stern maternal grandmother Isabella Matthews. Isabella considered cards 'the de'il's book' (*Hot Water Sailor* 14) and forbade whistling

– except while picking gooseberries and blackberries – but did permit access to her library of theology and Scottish literature.

A bright and mischievous boy, Glover overcame ‘the boredom, the perfect horror’ (*HWS* 15) of Miss Lake’s Kindergarten by stealing the girls’ dolls and lighting fires in the empty section next door, and in 1918 started at Arthur Street School. On his first day he found himself promoted from Primer 4 to Standard 2: a fluent reader by the age of six, he had already declared a profound hatred for Robert Burns and fairy tales, preferring instead the Dickens, Walter Scott, Robert Browning, Swinburne and even the pious texts he found on his parents’ and grandparents’ bookshelves. Although he excelled academically, Glover did not fit the role of the delicate swot in which his family preferred to cast him. Early lessons about fighting were learned in the ritualised warfare between the boys from Arthur Street School, and their deadly enemies from the Christian Brothers’ school down the road. ‘We would lie and wait for one another in gangs. If our gang was stronger than the Christian Brothers’ gang, well and good. We would inform them that it was their duty to renounce the Pope. If they wouldn’t do this we would bag their caps as loot of war and hide them...’ (*HWS* 17). In later life, Glover never shied away from physical conflict: ‘all boys must learn to fight, for to fight is your first acceptance of the world and leads to your acceptance by the world’ (17).

In 1923, Lyla moved to New Plymouth with her youngest children Denis and Brian. Here Glover spent the ‘bow and arrow stage of [his] existence.’ (*HWS* 29) At New Plymouth Central School he earned a reputation for playground fisticuffs and academic prowess: his name appears on the school’s honours board as dux for 1925. After school activities included paddling unstable home-made corrugated iron canoes on Lake Pukekura, and affirming the love of mountain-climbing already established in Otago: he made his first ascent of the ‘so-called mountain’ (27) Taranaki at the age of about twelve. Glover’s biographer Gordon Ogilvie comments that even at primary school, Glover was establishing a distinctive style for himself: ‘a saucy amalgam of intellect, non-compliance, pluck, candour and bravado which was to distinguish him to the end of his days.’ (Ogilvie 1999, 28)

Glover spent 1926 at New Plymouth Boys’ High School. There he made his name eating spotted dog, and prunes: ‘I think I held the school record with forty-nine.’ (*HWS* 31) As a boy scout he furthered his love of the outdoors and developed the leadership qualities that would single him out during wartime. He also made a first foray into publishing, single-handedly writing, printing and

illustrating a magazine called *Signal Fire*, which he sold to his scout troop at a penny a copy. At school, compulsory cadet training brought his first encounter with real guns, military-style discipline, and military-style inefficiency. Only the army, it seemed, could deliver cut lunches twenty miles in the opposite direction from where the boys were expected to advance.

At the end of 1926 Lyla moved her family to Auckland. There Glover thrived in the expansive, rigorously academic environment of Auckland Grammar School. Although self-confessedly dismal at mathematics and science, he excelled in English, and had already begun writing short stories of his own, which he would read to his mother on their Sunday afternoon walks. At Grammar, Glover 'fell in among people of rare talent' (44), in particular his classmate Robert (Bob) Lowry (b 1912), with whom he produced an unofficial form magazine entitled *La Vérité*. Glover's friendship with Lowry – who would become almost as influential a figure in New Zealand printing and publishing as Glover himself – lasted until the latter's death in 1963.

Late in 1928 the family was on the move again, this time to Christchurch. Glover spent his 6th form year at Christ's College, where he witnessed organised bullying for the first time, was permitted to study Greek instead of the hated chemistry, and, despite his penchant for writing what he later described as 'a vast quantity of very bad verse' (55), earned the respect of his classmates for his swimming, cross-country running and boxing. In 1930, his last year at school, he was appointed a house prefect and won prizes in English, History and Latin. He also helped produce the school's *Harper House Chronicle*, which, for the second term issue of 1930, could proudly proclaim its use of real type.

The following year, Glover enrolled in English, French, Greek and Latin at Canterbury University College. He took an intense delight in the intellectual and personal freedom offered by university. Glover was elected secretary of the Canterbury College Boxing Club, where he encouraged members to compete at an amateur provincial level and in exhibition bouts with professionals. He himself met the New Zealand welterweight champion Eddie Fail in the ring three times – only to be defeated three times. Glover did however win a New Zealand University Blue, later noting that he 'got off very lightly' in injuries sustained during fights: 'nose, twice broken; ear, one, cauliflower; ribs, cracked, four – some of them twice; mallet fingers, five; dislocated thumb; one.' (HWS65) Glover also climbed with the Canterbury Mountaineering Club at a time when a burgeoning interest in alpinism saw first ascents of many South Island peaks. Weekends spent in Arthur's Pass

National Park, in the company mountaineers of the calibre of John Pascoe (1908-72) and Rodney Hewitt, both Glover's fellow students at Canterbury University College, provided inspiration for some of his finest poetry, including the 'Arawata Bill' sequence, and some of the 'Sings Harry' poems.

As a student, Glover supplemented his income by reporting on university life (mainly lectures and sporting activities) for the Christchurch *Press*. At the rate of a pound a column, he sometimes earned as much as £4 /10/- a week (*HWS* 76). Over the summer vacations he served as a reporter on *The Press's* permanent staff. Intending a career in journalism, Glover also contributed to the *Sun*, the *Free Lance*, the *Dominion*, *New Zealand Motor Owner*, and the Canterbury College *Review*. He also became involved in the production of the Canterbury University College Students' Association newspaper *Canta*, for which he interviewed George Bernard Shaw during the latter's visit to Christchurch in April 1934.

Ironically, it was to be Glover's involvement with student printing and publishing which put paid to his promising career in journalism. He had kept in touch with his old Auckland Grammar friend Bob Lowry, who had obtained a hand-platen printing press and some type, and had set up a press for the Auckland University College Students' Association. There, in March 1932, Lowry produced the first edition of the short-lived but influential student literary magazine *Phoenix*, edited by James Bertram. Bertram had modelled his magazine on John Middleton Murry's *New Adelphi*, and similarly sought to promote serious and progressive new writing. Over its four issues (March 1932-June 1933), *Phoenix* carried work by Bertram, Charles Brasch, D'Arcy Cresswell, Allen Curnow, A. R. D. Fairburn, Elsie Locke, R. A. K. Mason and Ian Milner, among others. Glover later described its list of contributors as 'the catalogue of ships out of the *Iliad*' (80). In April 1932 Glover visited Auckland for the universities' Easter Tournament and renewed acquaintances with his old friend Lowry. Full of envy of *Phoenix*, he thought it was time that Canterbury did something similar. Glover bought a Kelsey hand-platen press; Lowry sold him some second-hand type, and encouraged him to familiarize himself with the work of typographers Eric Gill, Stanley Morison and D. B. Updike. After a battle with the conservative Canterbury College bureaucracy and the Students' Association – who tried to claim right of veto over the content of any of the club's publications – the Caxton Club Printing Press was established in October 1932, in a basement under the law students' lecture room.

Glover had sold the idea of a Press to the university authorities on academic and pragmatic grounds: not only would it enable the study printing and typography, but it could also carry out most of the small printing jobs around the college. He even envisaged the expansion of the plant to the point where it might cope with all the university's printing work. Glover was also aware, however, that 'any young man with the means of disseminating opinion would be unworthy of his salt if he didn't try to print something that would practically reform the world overnight' (*HWS* 86). Glover and the nine other financial members of the Caxton Club decided to produce a magazine. The result was *Oriflamme*. Unlike James Bertram's more literary *Phoenix*, *Oriflamme* was a vehicle for independent comment on social and political affairs. The first and only issue (April 1933) included 'the usual undergraduate protests about everything' (87); Glover contributed an essay entitled 'Papology' which attacked blind adherence to all ideologies. Much more sensationally, however, an article by J.P.S. (Patrick) Robertson entitled 'Sex and the Undergraduate' recommended 'companionate marriage' as an interim arrangement for young adults before legal marriage. The issue sold out in two hours. In the furore which followed, *Oriflamme* was denounced from 'about seventeen pulpits' (86), suppressed by the College Council, and Glover's permission to use university premises was revoked. Glover appealed, and, following his apology to the College Council – 'the crawl-down after the kick-out' (89) – the Caxton Club was allowed to resume its activities on the condition that the title of its publication 'be not *Oriflamme*', that all its members should be genuinely students, and that its activities should 'not discredit the college in the eyes of the community.' (91). The *Oriflamme* scandal did however cost Glover his job at *The Press*.

Nothing daunted, Glover continued printing, publishing and writing. The independent, radical socialist weekly (later fortnightly) *Tomorrow*, edited by political cartoonist Kennaway Henderson (1879-1960), first appeared in July 1934. Glover was co-opted onto an editorial committee which included Henderson and Winston Rhodes, and remained a regular contributor of notes, verses, stories and satirical verses under his own name and various pseudonyms (including his favourite 'Peter Kettle') until the magazine's forced closure in May 1940. In July 1934 Glover produced the anthology *New Poems* at the Caxton Club Press. Contributors included Lawrence Baigent, Charles Brasch, Allen Curnow, R. A. K. Mason, Ian Milner, Glover himself, and Glover's new friend A. R. D. Fairburn. Glover and Fairburn had become acquainted the previous year when Fairburn had submitted a poem to *Sirocco*, the equally short-lived successor to *Oriflamme*. Their high-spirited friendship lasted until Fairburn's death in 1957.

Glover was becoming aware of the need for a career – in December 1934 he had become engaged to Mary Granville (1912-1976), a young Englishwoman he had met at a picnic in Christchurch earlier in the year – and decided to make another foray into professional journalism. Immediately after the announcement of their engagement, Glover moved to Wellington, where he had been offered a temporary contract as a junior reporter on the *Dominion*. The *Oriflamme* scandal, however, dogged his heels. His former employer at *The Press* made sure the *Dominion* knew of his reputation as a firebrand and Glover soon discovered that his Wellington appointment was not renewable. He returned to Christchurch to what he knew best: he and his partner John Drew, a friend from Christ's College days, raised £100, bought a motor-powered treadle platen press and two designs of type (Garamond and Gill Sans Serif), and established the Caxton Club Press on a commercial footing in disused stables at 152 Peterborough Street. 'It was all an adventure; first in learning how to print; second in getting what types we wanted, hitherto unknown in New Zealand; and third in publishing what we could of the work of New Zealand writers, while at the same time endeavouring to make some sort of living and still pay the rent' (*HWS* 110). By the end of 1935, the Caxton Club Press had produced *Another Argo* (with one poem each by Curnow, Glover and Fairburn, plus a frontispiece by graphic designer, printer and typographer Leo Bensemann, who later became a partner at Caxton), Curnow's *Three Poems* and *Poetry and Language*, and Glover's *Thistledown* and *A Short Reflection on the Present State of Literature in This Country*. From the first, however, the commercial printing of stationery, menu cards, dance tickets, wedding invitations and church newsletters, plus printing books for other publishers, helped to make ends meet.

Glover and Mary were married in January 1936 and that year Glover took up an assistant lectureship in English at Canterbury University College, in order to supplement his meagre publisher's income. (As the senior partner of the Caxton Club Press he initially drew 15/- a week; Drew, as junior partner, drew 10/-.) In 1936 the name was shortened to The Caxton Press and nine small books published, including R. A. K. Mason's *End of Day*, Glover's *Several Poems*, Ursula Bethell's *Time and Place*, and *Verse Alive*, a collection of satirical verses reprinted from *Tomorrow*. Allen Curnow's *Enemies: Poems 1934-1936* (1937) was the last book printed in Peterborough St: in 1937 the Press relocated to new premises at 129 Victoria Street. In 1938 Glover resigned his position at the university in order to devote himself more exclusively to the Caxton Press.

At the time, one of the main venues for locally-written verse was the annual *New Zealand Best Poems* (1932-1943) edited by Christchurch journalist C. A. Marris. Although Marris had published Glover's sonnet to Mary in the *Best Poems* of 1934, and also published the work of talented poets such as J. C. Beaglehole, Eileen Duggan, J. R. Hervey, Robin Hyde, Ian Milner, Gloria Rawlinson, Arnold Wall and others, Glover and his closest literary associates regarded *Best Poems* as the epitome of all that was bad in New Zealand poetry. The fey and sentimental verse which Marris tended to favour – and which A. R. D. Fairburn had memorably dubbed 'the Menstrual School of Poetry' (*Letters* 95) and Glover 'feminine-mimsy' (*HWS* 94) – owed its greatest debts of style to A. E. Housman, Walter de la Mare, John Masefield and John Drinkwater. This style of verse also found a home in the popular anthology *Kowhai Gold*, edited by Quentin Pope and printed in England in 1930. The title of this anthology lent its name to the whole genre. Dora Wilcox's epigram for *Kowhai Gold* shows the collection's orientation towards an English audience, and displays the cloying tone which found so much disfavour with Glover and his contemporaries:

And as your Summer slips away in Tears
Spring wakes our Lovely Lady of the Bush
The Kowhai; and she hastes to wrap herself
All in a mantle wrought of living gold.

Glover found several modes in which to express his antipathy towards '[translated] Georgians and their hothouse tradition' (*Tomorrow*, [30 Oct 1935]: 17). Glover the satirist found Marris's perceived stranglehold on literary taste an irresistible target. In 1937 Caxton published his 'The Arraignment of Paris', a lively 214-line lampoon in iambic pentameters:

– But who are these, beribboned and befrilled?
Oh can it be the ladies' sewing guild?
But no, they follow Paris – it is clear
these are his sheep, and he their pastor dear.
Our lady poets these: hermaphroditic
he is at once their guide, their friend, their critic.
And with them go a few who by their faces
should be in shoulder-straps instead of braces. (*Selected Poems*
7-8)

In his more serious verse, Glover expressed concerns a world removed from those of the authors of 'Autumn, and the Trees' or 'A Vision of Clouds' (*Best Poems* 1932). He and his contemporaries saw themselves as social commentators, who believed the vitality of their poetry lay directly in its ability

to engage with the present, in all its complex uncertainty. In this they 'shared their modernity', in Allen Curnow's phrase (*Penguin* xiv), with W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, C. Day Lewis and Stephen Spender, who had begun addressing the conditions of the immediate present, from the social upheaval of the Depression and the impending civil war in Spain, to the drudgery of domestic life in suburbia.

Like their English counterparts, they were well aware that social concern alone did not make good poetry. Glover in particular admired the controlled verse forms chosen by Auden and Day Lewis, and noted how Auden's half-rhymes and verse patterns approximated the stress of conversation, enabling 'a natural expression for his emotions.' (*Canterbury College Review* [1934]: 31) He also noted Day Lewis's restrained use of what became known as 'pylon' imagery, in combination with the imagery of nature. Day Lewis's interest in alliteration, internal assonance and repetition found an echo in what Glover called his own work, and the older poet's 'natural and unaffected poetic use of imagery drawn from the life around him' (*Cant Coll Rev* 29) also came to characterize Glover's poetic engagement with the physical world, particularly as it evolved through his later writing.

For Glover's generation, then, the paramount requirement for poetry was that it should be local and specific, reflecting the facts of social and physical life in New Zealand; given their general antipathy to what they regarded as the sway of the 'feminine' in contemporary verse, their own writing was characterised by a certain muscularity of language and a preference for unsentimental subject-matter. The first stanza of Glover's 'Landing Field' (1937) typifies the mood of this new poetic:

Sky voyagers find here their homing place.
 Among the machines sun-lustrous and shining
 or with blades that idle upon unhurried air,
 airmen lounge easily, careless of earth,
 whose daily wings search the invisible roof,
 whose shadow glides over white mountain sides,
 whose pitched propeller tunnels the cloud, loud engine
 echoing strong above the old earth's unheard song. (*Selected Poems* 17)

From the beginning, Caxton provided a venue for this poetry, which treated New Zealand's immediate social and political circumstances with a new tough-mindedness, and a vein of cynicism. Glover's 'Centennial' (1940), for example – while perhaps closer in tone to *The Arraignment of Paris* than to his

later poetry – offers a wry commentary on the unreflective nationalism and self-congratulatory bombast which accompanied the 1940 centennial of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, under whose terms Māori ceded sovereignty to the British Crown:

In the year of centennial splendour
 There were fireworks and decorated cars
 And pungas drooping from the verandahs
 – But no one remembered our failures.

The politicians like bubbles from a marsh
 Rose to a platform, hanging in every place
 Their comfortable platitudes like plush
 – Without one word of our failures. (*Selected Poems* 39)

Although its print runs were of necessity small, Caxton catalysed much of the literary activity in New Zealand in the years prior to World War Two, and immediately following the outbreak of war. A catalogue of Caxton publications from 1935 (the date of acquisition of the power-press) to February 1941 includes twenty volumes of poetry, five poetry miscellanies and six prose titles, among them Frank Sargeson's short story collection *A Man and His Wife* (1940) and Monte Holcroft's essay *The Deepening Stream: Cultural Influences in New Zealand* (1940). Eight publications under the heading of 'Art and Typography', which included Leo Bensemann's exquisite *Fantastica: Thirteen Drawings* (1937), brought the Press's output of local creative work to 39 volumes, apart from the commercial printing which kept the press in business.

Figuring largely in this literary foment was Glover's close friend Allen Curnow. Curnow, born in Timaru and educated in Christchurch, left the South Island in 1931 to study in at St John's Theological College in Auckland. The two first met in Christchurch at the end of that year while Curnow was visiting his family during the summer vacation. Curnow withdrew from his theological studies in 1934 and returned to Christchurch, having decided to make journalism his career. He and Glover renewed acquaintances, initiating a life-long friendship and one of the most fruitful collaborations in New Zealand literary history.

Glover's friendship with Curnow played a coincidental but crucial role the composition of Glover's most famous poem. One weekend late in 1941 Glover had driven up to visit the Curnow family at a holiday bach at Leithfield, north of Christchurch. On the way up, Curnow recalled, 'Glover... got out of his little

tin baby Austin in the middle of a wild nor'wester to have a pee by the roadside. There were magpies squawking everywhere. And when Denis arrived and came to the door of the bach he didn't say anything at all except "quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle" - just like that.' (Curnow in the *New Zealand Herald* 29 July 1987). Before Glover's arrival that day, Curnow had begun work on his own poem about the storm, prompted by the sound of a piece of roofing iron blowing in the wind. So as not to disturb him, Glover sat down to write. Curnow's short, brooding lyric 'Wild Iron' has achieved almost the same iconic status, and is almost as frequently anthologised, as Glover's 'The Magpies'. Both poems frequently find their way into anthologies for children – Curnow's for its Stevensonian evocation of a storm at night, Glover's for its ingenuous tone and simple rhyme scheme, and its apparently cheerful chorus:

When Tom and Elizabeth took the farm
The bracken made their bed,
And *Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle*
The magpies said. (*Selected Poems* 31)

Only superficially naïve, however, this 'cross between a ballad and a grim nursery rhyme' (MacD. P Jackson, *Oxford History* 438) laments the fate of small farmers in hard economic times - perhaps specifically the Depression of the 1930s, but also recalling the 1880s and 1920s, when oppressive financial conditions also made it difficult for farmers to stay on their land. Tom and Elizabeth begin their married life prepared to work hard under difficult conditions, but despite their best efforts, lending institutions – personified as an anonymous 'mortgage man' – have first claim on the farm's produce and ultimately the farm itself. The final stanza brings the poem into the present: Tom and Elizabeth are long dead, and the magpies, who have watched it all, are now the sole guardians of the abandoned farmstead. Their chorus is as cruel and impartial as nature itself:

The farm's still there. Mortgage corporations
Couldn't give it away.
And *Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle*
The magpies say.

Glover maintained that although the couple in 'The Magpies' had names, they were in fact 'generalised', representing all the small farmers whose suffering he had witnessed at first hand, on weekend visits to Mary at her older sister's market garden at Belfast north of Christchurch, and also on university holidays spent mustering on a high-country sheep station near Lake

Tekapo. 'The Magpies' first appeared in the Caxton anthology *Recent Poems* in 1941, along with ten other poems by Glover – including the first three poems of the 'Sings Harry' sequence – plus poems by Curnow, Fairburn and Mason.

Recent Poems was one of the last typographical works Glover completed at Caxton before leaving New Zealand on war service. Although as a student he had helped break workers' strikes during the Depression of the early 1930s, he quickly came to share the left-leaning politics of many other *Tomorrow* contributors and, despite his pacifism, could not stand by and watch Fascism roll over Europe. In the end, he would count himself fortunate to have been one of a generation for which there was no escape from war.

Glover had done some sailing in Auckland, but it was in the company of his friend Albion Wright, whose advertising company had brought much business Caxton's way, that his love of land-based sports gave way to a love of the sea. During boozy weekends spent sailing with the Banks Peninsular Cruising Club based at Lyttelton, first with Wright in his little cabin cruiser *Annabel Lee* and later with Torrie Turner in his motor-powered *Storm*, Glover learned much about the sea, met some colourful characters – including Mick Stimpson, a retired sailor living in Port Levy – and decided that if he had to go to war he would do so in the navy. But the navy didn't want him: the only vacancies were for cooks and radio technicians. Neither occupation held much appeal for the action-loving Glover, who, at 28, was a volunteer, and hence able to choose his branch of the service. After a wait of many months, a vacancy opened in 'Scheme B', a programme under which New Zealand naval recruits were sent to the United Kingdom to train. 'If they made the grade, they would be duly commissioned as temporary, acting, probationary, additional, not-to-join, sublieutenants on loan to the Royal Navy.' (HWS 113) Glover left Christchurch in September 1941, leaving the Caxton Press – 'by then the most distinguished printing and publishing firm New Zealand letters had known' (Thomson 22) – in the hands of fellow pacifists Lawrence Baigent, Leo Bensemman, Dennis Donovan and John Drew, who had appealed their conscriptions and had, for the time being, been exempted military service.

Following a brief naval induction in Auckland, Glover and twenty-five other trainee officers of the Royal New Zealand Navy Volunteer Reserve sailed for England and commenced their training – with 5000 British conscripts – at the naval barracks H.M.S. *Ganges* at Shotley Gate on the Suffolk coast. After more training near Plymouth, Glover found himself aboard the brand new destroyer H.M.S. *Onslaught*, whose first commission was on Artic convoys to

Murmansk. Later, after passing more examinations and completing a commando training course, Glover received his commission as sub-lieutenant and was promoted to commanding officer of a small commando raider based on the English Channel – ‘the most wicked stretch of water that any seaman could ever find himself confronted with’ (*HWS* 156). During the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944, fourteen of the ships in Glover’s thirty six ship flotilla were lost outright; on the night of D-Day there were only six ships left fully operational. Glover’s craft was one of the few left relatively unscathed after landing its crew of commandos, picking up wounded from the sea, landing infantrymen from damaged vessels, and dodging mines and enemy fire. For his bravery on D-Day he was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross. Glover recounts his Navy experiences in *Hot Water Sailor* (1962; reprinted 1981). In a style that shifts easily between understatement, humour, and the blackly matter-of-fact, he recounts the tedium and horror of war. The shorter prose pieces ‘Convoy Conversation’ (1943) and ‘D-Day’ (1944) also reflect his casual disregard of physical danger, and his deep respect for bravery in others, friend or enemy.

Glover made the most of his shore leaves in London. In May 1942, not long after his arrival in England, he introduced himself to publisher, editor and poet John Lehmann of the Hogarth Press. Lehmann immediately took Glover’s ‘Harry in the Windbreak’ for *The Tribune*, of which he was then literary editor. The poem later appeared in the 1943 edition of *More Poems from the Forces*. Lehmann also introduced Glover to Cecil Day Lewis and Stephen Spender, and to South African poet and novelist William Plomer, and in 1943 published ‘Convoy Conversation’ in *Penguin New Writing* 16. Glover, it seems, also made a strong physical impression on Lehmann, who later described him as ‘looking rather like Mr Punch in naval uniform, a man in a million, imperturbable and with a great sense of humour’ (Lehmann *I am my Brother* 211). Glover also made a point of meeting book designers and printers including Stanley Morison and Oliver Simon, and spent some time with Dr John Johnson, the printer at Oxford University Press.

There were also New Zealand friends in London during the war, chief amongst them D’Arcy Cresswell, with whom Glover often stayed, and Charles Brasch, who was in London on mysterious Foreign Office business. Walking on Hampstead Heath, Glover and Brasch laid plans for the foundation of *Landfall* magazine, ‘when and should the war end’ (*HWS* 173). The two had met in Christchurch before the war but in London they became firm friends; Brasch took Glover to chamber music recitals, and although they did not drink together – unlike Glover, Brasch was abstemious by nature – allowed him to

sleep off drinking binges in his flat. Brasch admired him deeply, and accepted him as he was: 'a surprising compound of poet, craftsman, wit and devil-may-care roisterer' (*Indirections* 384). Their dream of a quarterly literary review came to fruition in March 1947 with the appearance of the first *Landfall*, edited by Brasch and published by Glover at the Caxton Press.

While staying in Brasch's London flat, Glover met Brasch's neighbour Dvora Natasha Elkind, with whom he fell passionately in love. Glover's twelve-month affair with Elkind proved to be 'the most passionate, tempestuous and enduring relationship of his adult life' (Ogilvie 164). Mary remained ignorant of her husband's many wartime infidelities and kept up a stream of adoring letters; although Glover responded to these in suitably affectionate terms, Mary does not rate a mention in his autobiography. He does, however, devote a brief paragraph to Elkind – the 'very remarkable young woman' who found time to take him round, and who spoke the most extraordinary English he had ever heard (*HWS* 174).

Glover was finally granted home leave in August 1944. He engineered – and later bitterly regretted – a break-up with Elkind and by mid-October 1944 was reluctantly back in New Zealand. His poem 'Returning from Overseas' expresses the feelings of pointlessness and gloom shared by many returning servicemen: 'Somewhere home-coming elation/ Feels an old strangulation. Collect the levy book and look/ For familiar faces,/Go to reunion dinners/ And the races.'

Glover's month's leave extended to the end of 1944. In July 1945, still awaiting his discharge from the navy, he had a sea-chest made into which he could fit a small hand press in the event of being called back to sea. Before he could use his chest, however, his demobilization orders came through, and he was finally discharged on 23 September 1945, two months after the birth of his son Rupert (b 28 July 1945). Glover doted on the child, who had been named after his commanding officer in the Royal Navy, but by late 1950 Glover's marriage to Mary had deteriorated to the point where he moved out of the family home above Sumner at Clifton, and into 'Careless Cottage', nearby at Redcliffs. He was joined there by Khura Skelton (b 1912) who remained his partner in a sometimes tempestuous relationship until her death in 1969.

For the last two years of Glover's absence overseas, Leo Bensemman had been running the Caxton Press single-handed. He had managed to pay off the company's debts, but had undertaken little new publishing. On his return

to Christchurch, Glover threw himself into reorganising his printing and publishing activities, bringing insights he had gained while overseas. However the transition to civilian life was difficult and he found himself approaching his task with 'slightly weary taste' (*HWS* 178). Notwithstanding, these were amongst the Press's best years: highlights included James K. Baxter's *Beyond the Palisade* (1944), Allen Curnow's germinal *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45* and Glover's own *The Wind and The Sand: Poems 1934-44* (1945). Although almost all the poems in the latter collection had been published previously, Glover excluded much of the satirical work on which his early reputation had been based in order to demonstrate his new seriousness as a poet.

That seriousness, which would come to characterize some of Glover's best work, is perhaps most evident in the three 'Sings Harry' poems reprinted in *The Wind in the Sand*. The first of these poems introduces the persona of Harry, 'singing' to his old guitar. While in no way representing Glover himself, Harry acts as a kind of mask for the poet, allowing him to express an inner self he found it difficult or impossible to convey (without bathos) in his own voice. In 'Song One' Harry muses on the ephemerality of his own art; characteristically diffident, he likens himself to a fast-growing, shallow-rooted soft-wood:

These songs will not stand -
The wind and the sand will smother.

Not I but another
Will make songs worth the bother:
The rimu or kauri he,
I'm but the cabbage tree,
Sings Harry to an old guitar. (Selected Poems 57)

In the completed fourteen-poem *Sings Harry* sequence, published by Caxton in 1951, Glover finds a voice for some of the disillusionment and restlessness that marked his return to civilian life. Harry, like Glover's later creations Arawata Bill and Mick Stimpson, is a masculine, rugged loner. All three commune with the sea and the landscape, if not in active flight from human company then at least content without it. While Glover was never a loner, these characters share their creator's emotional reticence and, like him, place a high value on physical self-reliance. Harry – the only fictional character of the three – has left his home and family farm in his youth, and made his own way in a cold world. By turns morose, cynical, off-hand and regretful, Harry muses on his past, and on the transience of love, ambition

and possessions. Harry's lyrical insouciance finds characteristically poignant expression in 'Flowers of the Sea':

Once my strength was an avalanche
Now it follows the fold of the hill
 And my love was a flowering branch
Now withered and still.

Once it was all fighting and folly
And a girl who followed me;
 Who plucked at me plucked holly,
But I pluck the flowers of the sea,
 Sings Harry,

For the tide comes
And the tide goes
And the wind blows. (Selected Poems 64)

Reviewing *Sings Harry for Landfall*, M. K. Joseph described the poems as 'a landmark in New Zealand poetry. ... With Harry around, the map [of New Zealand] is no longer empty.' (*Landfall* 1952) The musical possibilities suggested by the 'Sings Harry' refrain appealed to Glover's friend, the composer Douglas Lilburn, who in 1953 set six of the *Sings Harry* poems for male voice and piano.

Sings Harry was one of Glover's last typographical works at Caxton. Although his feelings for the Press since his return from overseas had been ambivalent, he was in no mood to let the business slip through his fingers. Largely as a result of his own self-destructive tendencies, however, this was exactly what happened. Dennis Donovan had first joined the Caxton staff in 1937 as an office junior of independent means, with a love of printing and drinking to match Glover's. At Glover's request, Donovan returned to Caxton in 1949, after his own war service, bringing with him much needed capital. This enabled the Press to move to from its cramped premises to a large new building at 119 Victoria St, and to install a second fully automatic printing press. Glover's initial pleasure at these developments was soon overwhelmed by his cynicism and despondency; professionally, his worsening drink problem and consequent unreliability were causing his business partners Donovan and Leo Bensemman considerable alarm. Added to this, from 1947 when he first became a member of the Royal New Zealand Navy Volunteer Reserve to his dismissal from the RNZNVR in 1953, Glover was involved with training recruits, necessitating frequent and often prolonged absences from work. Donovan – by now manager of Caxton – made Glover an offer he couldn't

refuse: Caxton would pay off Glover's considerable debts in exchange for his few remaining shares in the company, and employ Glover on a salary. Donovan's conditions were generous: as long as Glover arrived sober by 9.00 and worked until 12.00 he could do what he wished for the remainder of the day. Even this proved impossible for Glover. He would still turn up for work late, and drunk, so Donovan put him on an hourly rate. By November 1951 Donovan's patience was at an end. He asked the secretary to make up Glover's pay packet with an extra week's wages, and dismissed him from the Caxton Press. *Sings Harry and Other Poems* – Glover's most popular and successful collection to that date – was completed after his departure from Caxton.

Despite these personal and professional upheavals, the later 40s and early 50s were the most productive of Glover's life as poet. Since 1949 he had been helping his friend Albion Wright at Wright's rival Pegasus Press; freed of the business responsibilities he had found so onerous at Caxton, Glover was once again relishing his work as a printer and typographer at Pegasus. Early in 1953, Glover's old climbing companion John Pascoe paid a visit to the Pegasus offices to tell Glover about his most recent transalpine climbing expedition. Their route from Lake Wanaka to the West Coast had taken them from the Matukituki Valley through the headwaters of the Arawata River, and on to Cascade River and Jackson's Bay. At one stage they had followed the trail of stone cairns left by the legendary gold fossicker Arawata Bill, and had found a shovel they believed must have belonged to the old explorer.

Glover at once saw the potential of Bill's story for extended lyric treatment. William O'Leary (1866-1947), the historical subject of Glover's twenty-poem sequence, took his nickname from the isolated Arawata River in South Westland, where he spent nearly half a century doggedly searching for gold. Arawata Bill was a silent and solitary loner who lived his life away from the company of fellow beings: his most important relationships were with his shovel, his rusted gold-pan and his trusty pack-horse. Not even sure what he would do with a fortune should he find one, Bill used the search for gold as a pretext for the isolated life he enjoyed. He died in Dunedin in 1947, cared for by the Little Sisters of the Poor.

There is no narrative linking the 'Arawata Bill' sequence, but Glover nevertheless makes clear the shape and detail of Bill's life. The first poem describes inhospitable alpine terrain; the second poem places Bill entirely at his ease there. The following poems suggest the way of life of the old prospector, who finally succumbed to a bed in town only when he was too ill

to look after himself. The sequence concludes with a brief moral: the elusive gold lay buried in Arawata Bill's own soul, where he was least aware of it. The poetry is strongest when the diction suggests Bill's own plain language and optimism; it is at these moments that Bill gains the symbolic stature with which Glover hoped to endow him. Writing to Pascoe about his project, Glover told him how he had hoped O'Leary would come to represent 'all the great unknown explorers, prospectors, even mountaineers, who have been looking for something intangible round the next bend' (Ogilvie 286). The sequence took only a few months to complete and was published by Pegasus in July 1953. Both the *Listener* (17.7.53) and the *New Zealand Herald* (18.7.53) wrote editorials on the significance of the new work. Many critics saw *Arawata Bill* as Glover's major achievement to date and the work became a poetic best-seller: the first edition, although it earned the author less than £18, sold out in less than a fortnight.

In the end, though, Glover's drinking and consequent unreliability caused a terminal rift in his association with Pegasus Press. Quite aware that he had 'made a mess of things at every point of the compass' (HWS 193) he decided to take up his friend Anton Vogt's suggestion of a fresh start in Wellington and in 1954 he and Khura moved north. As well as providing the couple with accommodation, Vogt – who had twice been published by Caxton – had arranged Denis a job as a copywriter for the advertising company Carlton Carruthers du Chateau and King. Although Glover came to admire his employers – he already held Lewis King in high regard, having known him in the navy – he despised his employment. After nine months he threw in the lucrative position having once again 'smelt printing ink' (HWS 200). This time the job offer came from Harry H. Tombs at his Wingfield Press, where, from Easter 1955 and for the following eight years, Glover worked as production manager and typographer. Although Tombs had already made a considerable commitment to the visual arts – in 1928 he had begun the influential journal *Art in New Zealand* – his taste in poetry was less certain: together with C. A. Marris, Tombs had been responsible for *New Zealand Best Poems*. Glover hoped to lift the standards of the Press's poetry publication and typography, but by the time of his arrival at Wingfield Harry Tombs was less interested in publishing than in commercial printing. Glover found he had to turn down promising literary work (including a collection of Maurice Duggan's short stories) in favour of commercial printing, advertising and magazine production.

Despite a degree of professional frustration at Wingfield, which led to his occasional involvement with Mervyn Taylor's ambitious but short-lived

Mermaid Press, Glover thrived in Wellington's vibrant literary scene, then gravitating around James K. Baxter and Louis Johnson. Glover already knew many of the Wellingtonians personally, and had published the work of several, including Baxter, Johnson, Vogt and Alistair Campbell, while at Caxton. He also made friends with Maurice Shadbolt, Maurice Gee and Kevin Ireland, became involved in PEN (the New Zealand Society of Authors), and served on the New Zealand State Literary Fund from 1955 to 1958. In the latter capacity, he was instrumental in awarding Janet Frame the State Literary Fund grant which enabled her to travel to Europe in 1956. Glover's involvement in Wellington's literary life continued throughout the '60s and '70s. In 1961 and 1962 he served as president of PEN, and in 1964 he was elected president of the Friends of the Turnbull Library. He held that position for two years at a time when the Turnbull Library's independence was threatened by amalgamation with the National Library of New Zealand. Notwithstanding some noisy opposition, the Turnbull Library was brought under the administrative yoke of the National Library in 1966. Glover remained actively involved with the Friends until the mid 1970s.

In 1956 Glover and Khura moved out of central Wellington to 'The Ranch', a small rented house on a rough hillside section at Raumati South on the coast 50 km north of Wellington. From there they commuted to Wellington where they both worked – Khura as a statistician in the Department of Agriculture – and took it in turns to pay the rent. After an altercation with their landlord which ended up in court, they moved to another rented property north of Wellington in 1959. Their small stucco beach house at Paekakariki gave Glover the sea view he craved, and, equally importantly, was only a ten minute walk from the Paekakariki pub. Although always refusing to admit he was anything more than a social drinker, Glover would often call at the pub before seven in the morning.

Since Then, Glover's first collection since *Arawata Bill*, appeared in 1957, published by Glover at the Mermaid Press and printed at Wingfield. Although the volume contains a few squibs and lighter pieces, the tone is generally darker than anything he had published previously, reflecting years of loss and personal defeat. 'Winterset', 'The Old Soldier' 'The Men of Old' imply that the best is over, triumph is short, and life is vainly lived in a world of paper and paste, while the oracular 'Flame' laments the nets society flings out to ensnare the spirit of youth. *Since Then* also contains 'The Air', a nine poem sequence commissioned but in the end not used by TEAL, the forerunner of Air New Zealand. This commission may have stemmed from the success of 'The Coaster' (1948), Glover's verse script for Cecil Holmes's National Film

Unit documentary about the coastal trader MV *Breeze*, in turn a homage to the W.H. Auden/ John Grierson collaboration 'Night Mail'(1936).

Since Then also contains 'Towards Banks Peninsula', an eight-poem version of Glover's long elegy to Mick Stimpson. The third of Glover's heroic loners, Henry Charles ('Mick') Stimpson had served in Queen Victoria's navy before retiring on a small pension. He came to New Zealand as a merchant seaman, deserted in Auckland and drifted south to Lyttleton, from where he operated a small fishing boat. By the 1930s he had 'swallowed the anchor' at Port Levy, at the head of a deep bay near Lyttleton Harbour. There he subsisted on hay-baling, gardening, fishing and beach-combing. 'Dirty Mick' would walk over to Sumner from Port Levy to visit the Glover family at Clifton, often bringing gifts of fresh flounder; in turn, Glover would visit Stimpson at home, listening to his sailors' tales. His death in 1947 was the occasion for Glover's four-line 'In Memoriam: H. C. Stimson' (Glover later corrected this to Stimpson, when he found it to be the correct spelling). This tiny elegy exemplifies many of the strongest features of the sequence, in which Stimpson becomes imaginatively inseparable from the sea and landscape in which he lived. Its unforced diction, subtle assonance and unobtrusive rhythm endow the old salt with something of the stature of Wordsworth's leech-gatherer:

You were these hills and the sea.
 In calm, or the winter wave and snow.
 Lie then peaceful among them,
 The hills iron, the quiet tides below. (*Selected Poems* 67)

In 'Towards Banks Peninsula', Glover puts much of his characteristic reticence behind him and pays homage to the 'old wrinkled warrior' he perhaps regarded as a kindred spirit. The completed sequence, finally fifteen poems long, forms the bulk of *Towards Banks Peninsula* (1979). This series of love-poems to the sea and those who acknowledge her as their mistress was to be Glover's last published collection.

The inevitable split with Harry H. Tombs occurred early in 1961. Glover had been off work for a few days with 'a touch of pneumonia and pleurisy' (*HWS* 227). On his return, he found that Tombs had discovered Glover's invoice books for the Mermaid Press, which included details of the publication of *Since Then*. Tombs accused Glover of trying to steal business, and Glover resigned in protest. He was out of work for a year, but enjoyed the respite: he

read, wrote, sailed at Paraparaumu beach, tended his vegetable garden and drank with Khura and friends in the Paekakariki pub.

In January 1962 Glover applied for a job as printing tutor at the Technical Correspondence School (later Institute) on the grounds that the best place to 'uplift the primitive face of New Zealand printing' was at the grass roots, with apprentices (*HWS* 236). His reputation as a printer outweighed his reputation for unreliability, and he was offered the position. It involved providing course material for 90 commercial hand typographers scattered throughout the country, and marking their work. He held the position until June 1968 when his erratic attendance and drunken behaviour precipitated his suspension, but he was reinstated in June of the following year and departed for good – on his own volition – in July 1973. It was his last permanent position.

Enter Without Knocking (1964; reprinted in an enlarged edition 1971) appeared early in his stint as a teacher. Virtually a collected works to that point, the volume contains little new work: the blurb proclaimed that its author 'enjoys talking, drinking and gesticulating' but disliked writing and rhubarb. The book won the Jessie Mackay Award for Poetry in 1965, but met a mixed critical reception: by now, a younger generation of Auckland-based writers were asserting themselves as the arbitrators of New Zealand letters. Kendrick Smithyman (1922-1995) had given *Since Then* an unfavourable review in *Landfall* (Sept 1957); Charles Brasch gave C. K. Stead (b 1932) the job of reviewing *Enter Without Knocking* for the same magazine. In the end Stead was unable to complete his review, commenting to Brasch that it had become too negative. Much later, parts of the review appeared in *In the Glass Case: Essays on New Zealand Literature* (1981). Although Stead found 'oozy (or boozy) patches of sentiment, whimsy, banality' in *Enter Without Knocking*, he also found 'some of the sharpest scenes and some of the purest songs in our poetry' (208-9).

Following Khura's death in 1969 – a death probably hastened by her own alcoholism – Glover himself started drinking even more heavily and was hospitalised with pneumonia and pleurisy. The house in Paekakariki, which Glover had bought in 1964, was sold and Glover briefly moved in with his son Rupert, then living in Worser Bay, before setting up on his own in Hataitai, Wellington. Having regained some of his former strength, he proceeded to lay siege to the affections of Janet Paul, the widow and business partner of his old friend Blackwood Paul (1908-65). Booksellers and publishers Blackwood and Janet Paul Ltd had, by the mid 1960s, overtaken Caxton as New Zealand's leading publishers of poetry, and in 1968 Janet had published

Glover's *Sharp Edge Up: Verses and Satires*. Although in the end Janet could not return his affection, the experience gave Glover the basis for a late departure in his writing. *To A Particular Woman* (1970) and *Diary to a Woman* (1971), love poems to the unnamed Paul, chart the course of a love-affair of late middle age. Reviewing *To A Particular Woman* for *Islands* magazine, James Bertram commented that the collection was remarkable for a number of reasons: 'it signals a fresh departure, a new impulse and a new tone of feeling in Glover's writing. For the first time, in any such context, the poet has sought no protective mask: these are frankly 'I-poems'... It seems clear that Denis Glover ... has moved into a new phase of late development that may alter the whole perspective of his work' (*Islands* 1972). The warm critical response to this new work encouraged Glover to make a second selection of love-poems. He published *Diary to a Woman* – which received equally favourable reviews – and several other volumes of his own and others' verse at the Catspaw Press, which he established in 1970 to augment his income, and to enable him to once more indulge his passion for fine printing.

Glover had held out against Khura's desire to marry, but prompted by his feelings for Janet, he now asked Mary for a divorce which she granted in 1970. (It would seem that Mary's affection for Glover never diminished, despite his feckless behaviour towards her.) Gently rebuffed by Paul, however, Glover turned his attention elsewhere. In 1971 he met Gladys Evelyn ('Lyn') Cameron at a poetry reading, and within a matter of weeks she had accepted his proposal of marriage. Although ten years older than Glover, Lyn's background as a teacher of speech and drama, and her own interest in writing, made her a fitting companion for Glover; of all his partners, she was the only one for whom Glover attempted to moderate his drinking. Lyn also fed her husband well, doing what she could to repair a body ravaged by years of dissipation. The stability she provided enabled a whole new outpouring of creativity.

Early in 1975 Glover made a long and successful poetry-reading tour of New Zealand with Hone Tuwhare, Sam Hunt and Alan Brunton. The same year he was awarded an honorary D. Litt by Victoria University of Wellington, made PEN's president of honour, and awarded the War Medal of the Soviet Union. In November 1975 he and Lyn travelled to the USSR as guests of the Soviet Writers' Union and the Novosti Press Agency. In his last five years, Glover produced seven volumes of new poetry including *Clutha: River Poems* and *Come High Water* (1977), *Or Hawk or Basilisk* (1978) and *For Whom the Cock Crows* (1978). *Men of God*, a short comic novel, also appeared in 1978; *To Friends in Russia* (poems written in the wake of his trip to the USSR) and

Towards Banks Peninsula appeared the following year. He also undertook radio work, poems and reviews for papers and periodicals – including a flow of contributions which he called 'funniosities' for *The Dominion*, and began revising his two-part autobiography *Hot Water Sailor and Landlubber Ho!* He completed a final *Selected Poems* a few weeks before his death, but it was left to his old friend Allen Curnow to prepare the manuscript for publication, and provide a memorial introduction.

On Thursday August 7 1980, moving house again, Glover tripped and fell down some steps and suffered internal injuries from which he did not recover. He was taken to Wellington Public Hospital along with some of his favourite books, and died there on 9 August. Some months later his ashes were scattered off Godley Head and Port Levy by his son Rupert and granddaughter Pia, in the company of some of Glover's friends from the Banks Peninsula Cruising Club.

Glover gave posterity the most engaging writing on the subject of himself. For *Denis Glover's Bedside Book* (1963) he made a selection of his occasional prose – 'things written at various stages of my headlong attempts to be alive.' (BB 7). His two-part autobiography *Hot Water Sailor* (1912-1962; first published 1962) and *Landlubber Ho!* (1963-1980) were published together in 1981. *Denis Glover: Selected Poems* also appeared in 1981; a further selection, edited by Bill Manhire, appeared in 1995. Poets James K. Baxter, Charles Brasch, Allen Curnow, Marilyn Duckworth, Rupert Glover, Kevin Ireland, Bruce Mason and H. Winston Rhodes paid tribute in verse to his life, work and friendship. Roger Hall's play *Mr. Punch: the Life and Poetry of Denis Glover* premiered at Dunedin's Fortune Theatre in 1989; Gary Henderson's play *Skin Tight* premiered in Wellington in 1994. J. E. P. Thomson's short but useful biography appeared in *New Zealand Writers and Their Work Series* (Wellington: Oxford, 1977); Gordon Ogilvie's *Denis Glover: His Life* (Auckland: Godwit, 1999) is the standard work of biographical reference.

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[New Zealand Book Council](#)

[New Zealand Literature File University of Auckland](#)

[Paper by Bill Manhire refers to 'The Magpies'](#)

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PAPERS

The main repository of letters and manuscripts – 170 folders of letters, manuscripts, diaries, etc. – are held as the Glover Papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, MS Papers 418. The University of Canterbury (Registry and Macmillan Brown Collection) holds student data and material pertaining to the Caxton Press and *Landfall*. The Hocken Library, Dunedin, holds some correspondence and manuscripts. Further collections of letters, papers, and photographs are held in private hands.