

Valedictory to John Arlott (1980)

Fare thee well, the honourable Arlott,
Grass and leather will still be cut,
but English summer has lost its wise yet youthful magic.
Gone are the moments at the Oval or Edgbaston,
Lords or Trent Bridge,
when, no matter what the efforts on the square,
your mellow tones,
dropped straightway to perfect line and length.
Your timing never hurried,
yet quicker phrase let go between pregnant pause
kept listener and colleague alike
watchful and alert.

You master craftsman,
your Hampshire burr ripening in the sun,
yet never rusting in the shower,
made of sterner stuff than mild steel,
though supple as the well-oiled willow,
comforting as a fine old wine.

In cricket's story,
words are ephemeral, statistics permanent.
Yet you contrived to reverse the order.
Scores and figures may lose their meaning,
certainly their life,
without your measured and artistic breath.
You egrets in your commentators nest
take note, and be on your guard.
The eagle of the airwaves has declared.
Follow on, if you can.
The standard has been set.

{Written on the morning of the final day of the Centenary test
match between England and Australia at Lords, September 2nd.,
1980. Match drawn and a fiasco, not a fitting tribute to the great
man, except that the finish was Lillee bowling at Boycott.
Last verse printed in the Guardian, Frank Keeting's column, 10th. Sept. 1980}