

Text, letter

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**THE HERDING OF THE SNAIL**

an adaption in verse by Gus Ferguson

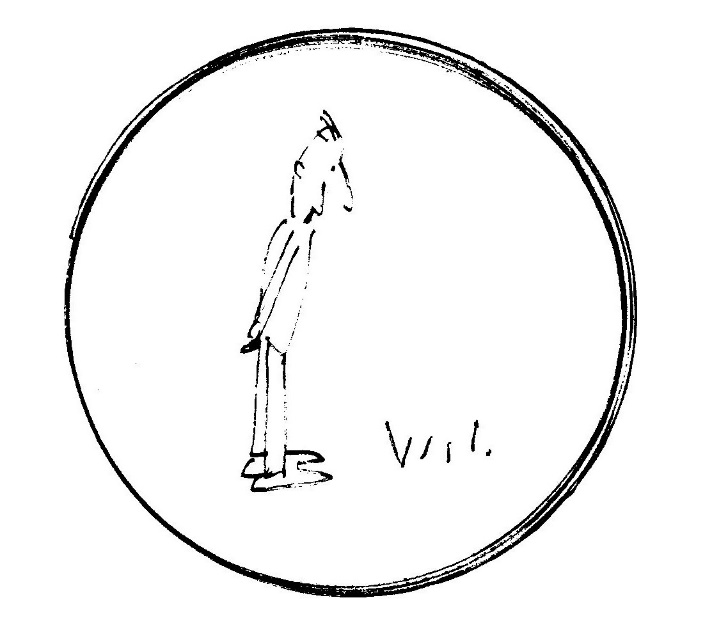
This poem is loosely based on “Bulls” by the 12th century Chinese Zen Master, Kakuan.

lt was written for MOLLLISC MANIA which was performed at the Space Theatre in Cape Town by

Jenny Pichanick and Raphael Gamaroff in June 1978.

lt is dedicated to the memory of Geronimo, the world’s longest known snail.

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THE SEARCH FOR THE SNAIL

I search and seek to no avail

The shy, elusive garden snail

From dawn to dusk disdaining rest.

(The starlings mock my earnest quest.)



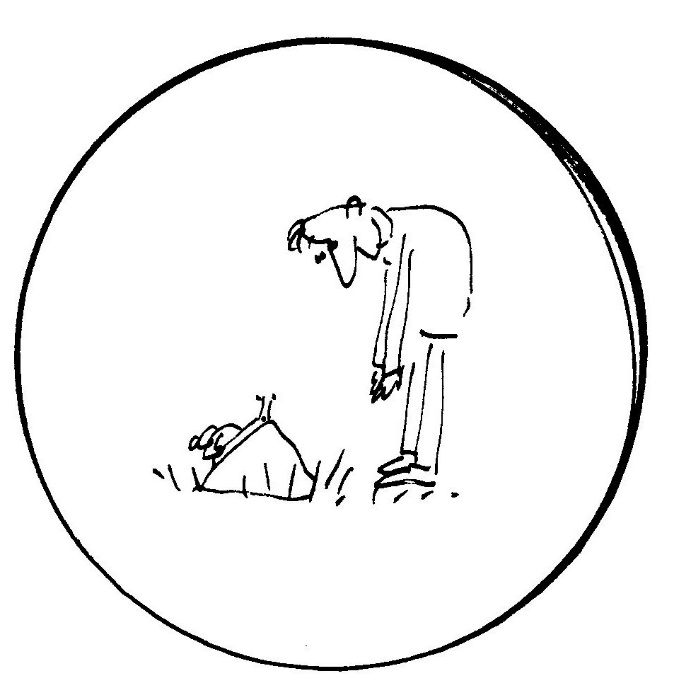
DISCOVERING THE FOOTPRINT

Beside the path the grass is streaked,

As if a tube of Bostik leaked,

l’ve found a spoor, a certain trail

That will disclose the occult snail.



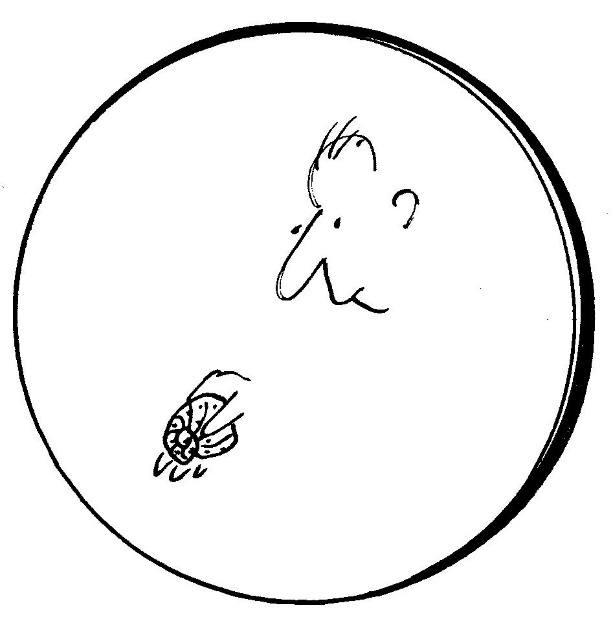
PERCEIVING THE SNAIL

The starlings warble in the eaves

The grass has grown translucent leaves

The snail is seen! A zephyr sighs,

That gorgeous shell, those stalked eyes!



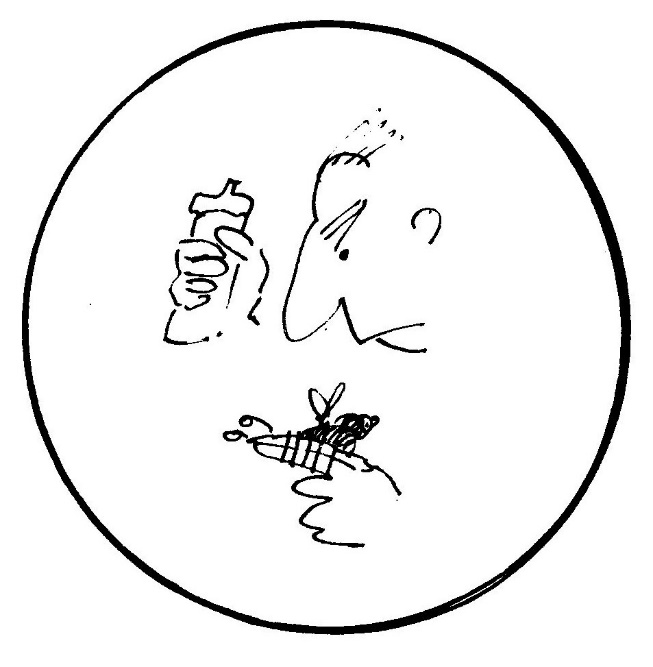
CATCHING THE SNAIL

With trembling finger, nervous thumb,

My heart is thudding like a drum,

In awkward grip l hold him fast,

He can’t escape, he’s caught at last.



TAMING THE SNAIL

At first a thread and salt l need

To teach my captive Snail to heed

My will, but when l’ve tamed him well

He’ll be constrained just by his shell.



BRINGING THE SNAIL HOME

At night he sits upon my knee

My ﬂute I play in harmony

With sounds around: The wall clock’s chime,

The kitchen cricket chirps in time.



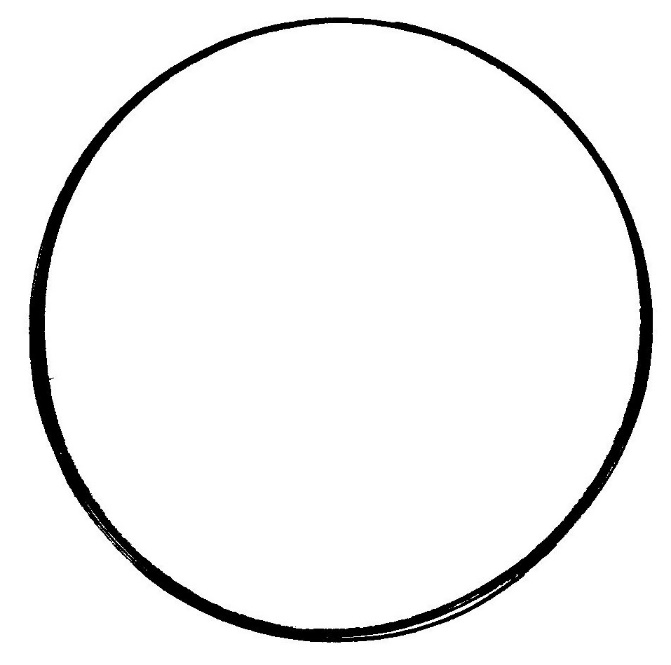
THE SNAIL TRANSCENDED

My loved one tamed, l set him free

No longer needing company

l am serene. Released from pride

l cast the thread and salt aside.



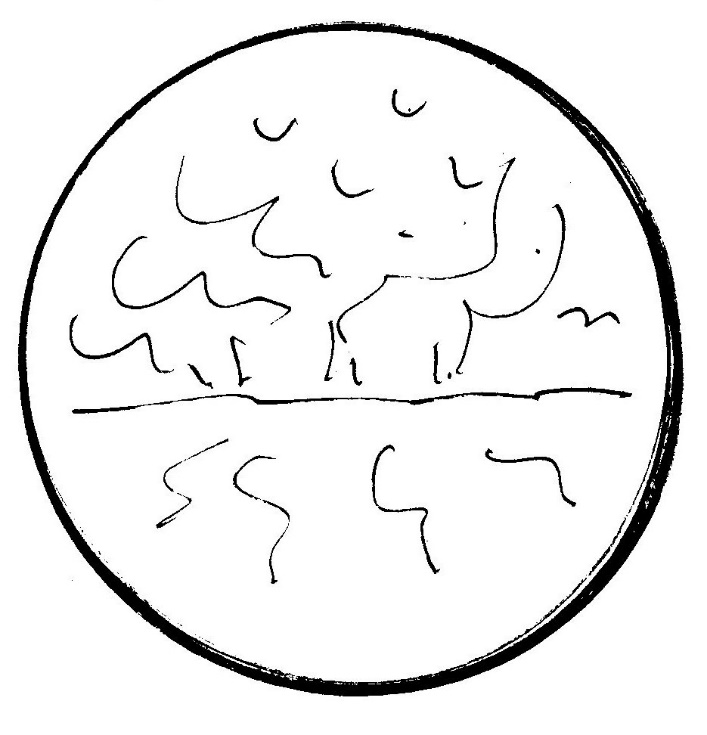
BOTH SNAIL AND SELF TRANSCENDED

The salt and snail and self and string

All merge as One, become No—Thing,

Infinite, clear and heavenly blue.

Desires or needs can’t cloud the view.



REACHING THE SOURCE

So many steps to reach the Source

A devious, exhausting course.

I should have stopped quite still instead

Where rivers ﬂow and flowers are red.



IN THE WORLD

l rise and mingle, simply dressed

Amongst the world where all are blessed

I use no magic, never strive,

Before me trees become alive.