

Louis Esson: The Last of the Colonial Playwrights

By

John Senczuk

*Thesis
Submitted to Flinders University
for the degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy
College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
14 November 2024

for Pete

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It was to study the visual arts that took Thomas Louis Buvelot Esson (1878-1943)—the nephew of Scottish born Australian landscape painter John Ford Paterson (1851-1912)—to Europe in 1904. It was on this trip, by chance, that he also connected with the leading figures of the Irish National Theatre Movement—WB Yeats (1865-1939), JM Synge (1871-1909), and Isabella Augusta, Lady Gregory (1852-1932)—and attended the inaugural performance at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. On his returned to Australia, inspired by his stay in Paris with childhood friend and artist Max Meldrum (1875-1955), Esson was attracted to the literary Bohemians who gathered regularly at Fasoli's café in Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. He was a founding member of the Victorian Socialist Party and began a creative career contributing verse, short stories and articles to *The Bulletin*, *The Lone Hand*, *The Weekly Times* and *The Socialist* from 1906.

Esson later identified himself as 'a journalist,' and was held in high esteem by a select and influential cohort of editors during the thirty years post Federation. He was also a recognised poet—known amongst his peers as 'the poet of the slums.' It was through the encouragement of critic William Moore (1868-1937) that Esson turned his attention to writing plays. In the latter role, from 1912, he advocated for a National Theatre and was a co-founder—with Vance Palmer (1885-1959) and Dr Stewart Macky (1890-1946)—of the provincial theatre enterprise The Pioneer Players in 1922.

Despite Esson's prolific portfolio of verse and prose writing, it is his theatrical canon and his advocacy for local drama that has gained most scholarly attention, notwithstanding his relatively small repertoire of produced plays.

In the currently accepted foundation story of the Australian drama, a mythology has evolved concerning both Esson's contribution to the National Drama movement, and his legacy. He was certainly a major contributor during his life to the push for a provincial theatre through his published commentary and the production of nine of his plays (most with 'mixed' critical response). Further, the obituaries following his death in 1943 positioned Esson as a 'pioneer dramatist,' 'Australia's foremost playwright,' and 'the father of Australian repertory theatre.' In his seminal work, *Towards An Australian Drama*¹, historian Leslie Rees's codified this reputation in his chapter titled 'The Legend of Louis Esson.' Dennis Carroll perpetuated this mythology—in *Australian Contemporary Drama 1909-1982*²—by stating that 'the birth of modern Australian drama arguably occurred with the first one act plays of Louis Esson ... the first playwright to weld the emergent conventions of modern European drama to palpably Australian material.'

My thesis challenges the accepted mythology built around Esson's legacy and canon [his nineteen extant plays provided in a Scholarly Edition, Appendix A; three of which I contend Esson should share authorship with his half-brother Frank P Brown (1887-1928)].

There has also been a tandem historic tendency to constrict the importance of the commercial theatre enterprise in the colonial era as being self-serving, and to see the sector as antagonistic to an evolution of the Australian culture and identity. Into the new century, Esson led the polemic that those associated with the commercial sector demeaned the art form and inhibited the development of a true National Theatre. This paper argues the contrary: that throughout the colonial area—which extends from the first productions presented to Barnett Levey to the advent of the Great Depression

¹ With its significantly expanded companion *The Making of Australian Drama: A Historical and Critical Survey from the 1830s to the 1970s*, both published by Angus and Robertson in 1953 and 1973 respectively.

² Originally published in 1985, and revised a decade later (1996), by Currency Press.

(1832 to 1929)—the commercial theatre was not only the most important form of entertainment for Australian audiences, but also flourished as an industry that actively promoted a drama that was ‘by Australians for Australians.’ I also survey how the commercial theatre evolved compatibly with the fledgling film industry (sharing creative talent and entrepreneurial initiative) to further the development of a perceived national culture.

The dissertation posits that Esson (represented by his extant plays and as a contributor to both the fledgling repertory and provincial theatre movement, along with his public commentary) sits not as the beginning of a modernist movement, but at the last bastion of the colonial dramaturgy; Esson as the last of the Colonial playwrights

I conclude by surveying a range of neglected playwrights, contemporaries of Louis Esson—many of them women—whose valuable contributions have been neglected or diminished. If we are to build a new and better foundation narrative, two of these women, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Mary Maclean (aka Betty Roland)—with their plays *Brumby Innes* and *The Touch of Silk* respectively—should be seen as the matriarchs whose dramaturgy heralds the beginning of the Twentieth Century Australian modernist drama.

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— Declaration —

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

JOHN SENCZUK

Date:

Declaration I believe that this thesis is properly presented, conforms to the specifications for the thesis and is of sufficient standard to be, prima facie, worthy of examination.

PROFESSOR ROBERT PHIDDIAN

Date:

— Acknowledgements —

Philip Parsons was an enormous influence on both my theatrical career and my scholarly appreciation of the value of dramaturgy, it was his gift of two first editions of Louis Esson's *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* that began my quest; Katharine Brisbane too, was always supportive of my work, and I continue to enjoy our intense conversations on Australian drama; I am grateful to them both with love. I also owe critic and colleague John McCallum a debt for the many 'long lunches' discussing similar topics (but mostly gossiping about the theatre), and we shared a common interest in 'dear old Louis Esson.' John's insight into the Australian dramatic canon is staggering, his reviews always perceptive, always inclusive of the collaborative nature of what he experienced from the bleachers! My friends Penny Nelson, Peter Cousens, Carolyn Lowry and Peter Carroll were generous and encouraging sounding boards. Lastly, I acknowledge the sensible and practical advice provided by my supervisor Professor Robert Phiddian, his patience (and resilience) are appreciated and valued.

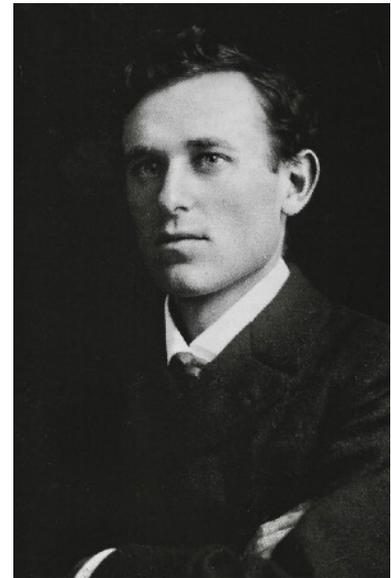
— INTRODUCTION —
The Legend of Louis Esson

Louis Esson (1878-1943)

Dear Louis Esson, in his shining blue serge suit ... a slight wan figure, with haggard cheek and sinking jawline, his voice had become rough and his vowels sour, but his smile was always at the ready, breaking into a laugh.

Leslie Rees³

Thomas Louis Buvelot Esson was born in the early hours of Saturday 10 August 1878 at the port city of Leith, Scotland. He was the only child of Thomas Clarence Esson, boilermaker, and his wife Mary Jane, *née* Paterson (then a milliner). After his father died at sea, Esson and his mother travelled to Australia to be close to her siblings (who had emigrated to Melbourne some years earlier). When Mary Jane remarried in 1887—to gentleman-farmer and storekeeper George Brown—and moved to Berwick, Esson was left in the care of his uncles and spinster aunts in Carlton. He was nine years old and attended nearby Carlton Grammar School. Esson's half-brother Francis (Frank) Paterson Brown was born the following year.



Louis Esson (1901)—T Humphrey & Co
(National Library of Australia)

Esson became interested in art and painting, often joining his uncle artist John Ford Paterson⁴ on regular excursions into Gippsland. It was his uncles James and Hugh (especially), however, who introduced him to the theatre.⁵

Esson enrolled in an Arts degree at the University of Melbourne in 1896 but performed poorly and chose to defer his undergraduate studies, taking a job at the State Library of Victoria.

³ Rees, Leslie, *Hold Fast to Dreams: 20 years in Theatre, Radio, TV and Books*, Apcol (1982) p.151

⁴ Esson was named after John Ford's friend and mentor the Swiss landscape painter Louis Buvelot (1814-1888), a significant influencer on the Heidelberg School of impressionist artists.

⁵ The decorating firm, The Paterson Brothers, began operation in 1873. Hugh was a colleague of Scottish born Australian scenographer and scenic artist George Gordon (1839-1999). Hugh gained some notoriety in 1890 as the costume designer for the production of Robert Planquette's *Paul Jones* given by the Nellie Stewart Opera Company [the scenic artists were Alexander Habbe and John Hennings]; later Hugh became well know for decorating theatre interiors (including the newly erected Victoria Theatre Newcastle (1891)).

After the death of her second husband in 1896, Mary Jane didn't remain a widow for long and married pastoralist James Gibb.

Following his 20th birthday, Esson reappeared at the University as a second year student, at which time he met and befriended 17 year old Leon Herbert Spencer Brodzky (1883-1973)⁶. Seemingly kindred spirits, Esson and Brodzky enthusiastically discussed politics, literature and the debate around Federation. In his final year at the University, Esson passed in four subjects, but he left without completing a degree. Brodzky—the son of magazine proprietor Maurice Brodzky (1847-1919)—enthused Esson to the world of journalism, and his first article 'The National Gallery' appeared in *The Age* (Melbourne) in July 1901; writing under the by-line 'LBE', his debut article in *The Bulletin* appeared on 14 January 1904.⁷

Soon after, Esson travelled abroad to Italy, France and England. In London (as arranged by Brodzky), Esson met members of the Irish Literary Society—including Lady Gregory (1852-1932), WB Yeats (1865-1939) and JM Synge (1871-1909)—and attended their performances at the Royalty Theatre.⁸ He subsequently accepted an invitation to attend the opening of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (27 December 1904).

Returning to Australia he began to provide both creative prose and, later, verse to *The Bulletin* and *The Lone Hand* and, as a founding member of the Victorian Socialist Party, contributed to *The Socialist*. He was appointed the football commentator for Melbourne *Punch* (writing under the byline 'Centre'). During this time he frequented Vincenzo Fasoli's bohemian café in Lonsdale Street, where he developed relationships that included comrades EJ Brady (1869-1922), poet Bernard O'Dowd (1866-1953), theatre and art critic William Moore (1868-1937), publisher Thomas Lothian (1880-1974) and his future wife Madeline Tracey (and her sister Beatrix)..

Esson was 28 in January 1906 when, according to family folklore, he was cajoled into marriage with the fiercely independent Maddy Tracey; Leon Brodzky was his best man. Notwithstanding the birth of their son James Paterson Esson in November the following year, Maddy's domestic restlessness wasn't conducive to a happy coupling.

The editor of *The Lone Hand*, Frank Fox (1874-1960), then commissioned Esson to undertake an investigation into 'the race problems in Asia' and, accompanied by his mother and step-brother

⁶ Leon's father Maurice Brodzky (1847-1919) was the founding editor of the journal *Table Talk*.

⁷ Louis B Esson 'writes on a political subject with an air of positivism and radical "uppishness" that is in a measure refreshing' wrote the editor James Edmond 1859 – 1933) introducing the article 'A "Young Australia" Party', 14 January 1904 p.9

⁸ Leon Brodzky had planned to be with Louis at this time, but was delayed by his father's bankruptcy. I suspect that the invitation from Lady Gregory was arranged in earlier correspondence; Leon was aware of Yeats and interested in the Irish National Theatre Movement having already written on the subject (Cf. 'Yeats Celtic Twilight', *Table Talk*, 11 September 1902).

Frank, he spent six months travelling in Sri Lanka, India, China and Japan. Soon after his return, Esson was offered the editor's chair of *The National Advocate* in Bathurst, but relinquished the position six months later and was back in Melbourne at the end of 1909. His relationship with Maddy deteriorated, and he filed for divorce (based on her adultery) in March 1910. His first book of poems, *Bells and Bees*, was published by Lothian in the same year.

Meanwhile, Esson was coerced by William Moore to contribute a sketch to his second Australian Drama Night; *The Woman Tamer: An Episode of Black Eagle Lane* marked his debut as a playwright when it premiered on 5 October 1910. His first full length work, the political farce *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* was produced by Moore, in association with Gregan McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Theatre (in July 1912). This play was also published by Lothian.

Esson's second marriage, on 15 December 1913, to medical graduate Hilda Wager Bull⁹ proved to be a better match. After he was rejected for military service on medical grounds, Esson, Hilda and their son left Australia for New York in early 1918. A second child, Thomas Hugh, was born soon after they arrived. The city overwhelmed them, and American culture struck them as vulgar, commercial and pushy. Their attitude softened a little, but not before they had left Manhattan for London, a city they found more congenial and where they encountered old friends, familiar cultural associations and, crucially, Esson reconnected with Yeats. While Esson had not written anything dramatic for a number of years, he found the atmosphere propitious and drafted a number of new plays. Yeats was very complimentary after reading Henderson's (London) publication of *Dead Timber; and Other Plays*—that appeared just before Christmas in 1920—and enthused Esson to return home and attempt to create a national theatre in Australia.

In July 1921 the Essons arrived back in Melbourne, where they renewed their friendship with Vance and Nettie Palmer, and together with Dr Stewart Macky, they established The Pioneer Players, an amateur organization dedicated to performing Australian plays. Louis's bush comedy *The Battler* (presented at The Playhouse, 18 May 1922) inaugurated the venture. With varying degrees of success over the next four years, The Players produced work by a number of writers—mostly colleagues (poets and novelists). While they had high aspirations, the experiment failed to meet expectations (of audiences and critical approval) and The Pioneer Players folded following the single performance of Esson's slum-town drama *The Bride of Gospel Place* (on 9 June 1926). Meanwhile, Esson was appointed the Melbourne drama critic for *The Triad* (later *The New Triad*).

⁹ Hilda Bull was born in the Sydney suburb of Waverley on 2 July 1886. The family moved to Melbourne where her father left his vocation as a gentleman to become a herbalist. She was educated at Presbyterian Ladies' College, matriculated in March 1906 and completed a medical degree with distinction at the University of Melbourne in 1913. She was a foundation member of the Melbourne University Dramatic Society. After interrupted work as a medical practitioner, in 1927 Hilda Bull became assistant to Dr John Dale, health officer to the City of Melbourne; she married him in March 1951 after his divorce. She died in Melbourne on 29 June 1953.

Esson wrote little over the following decade: he produced two short sketches; tinkered with two substantial chronicle plays (*The Southern Cross* and *The Quest*), a gothic bush tragedy (*Shipwreck*) and, his last (albeit incomplete) play, an Ibsenesque drama referencing his time in New York (*Lachryma Christi*). These plays remained un-produced. While there are a number of extant articles in manuscript, Esson published neither verse nor prose after 1932.

Esson was encouraged to make the move to a small flat in Darlinghurst, Sydney in 1939, ostensibly for his health. He'd just turned 61 and had suffered from neuritis for a decade, and the weather in the Harbour city was considered more agreeable. Soon after his arrival he delivered a lecture with the title 'Irish Memories and Australian Hopes' to the Australian English Association (AEA).¹⁰ Following this lecture, teacher and playwright Dymphna Cusack (1902-1981), who lived close-by in Kings Cross, became a good and constant companion; she introduced Louis to the literary community of Sydney as 'Celtic Twilight.'¹¹

Australia entered the War on 3 September 1939. Over the next few years, Louis's health began to seriously deteriorate and he contracted pneumonia. His son Hugh was with Hilda in his Macleay Street flat in Kings Cross when Louis Esson died in the early hours of Saturday morning, 27 November 1943. He was 64.

The Myth of Louis Esson

... the myth of Louis Esson ... has always been fascinating.

Peter Fitzpatrick¹²

Louis Esson achieved some notoriety over the course of his early career. *The Socialist*—for which he'd been a major contributor—championed Esson from the outset as one of its own: on the release of *Dead Lumber and Other Plays* [sic] he was 'Australia's foremost playwright.'¹³ Author

¹⁰ Louis Esson, 'Irish Memories and Australian Hopes', *The Australian Quarterly*, 2 June, 1939 (Based on his lecture given to the Australian English Association at Sydney, 14 Nov 1938). The Australian English Association, Sydney, was a branch of the English Association (founded in 1906). The first general committee meeting was held 20 August 1923 at the Royal Society's House in Sydney. *Southerly*, the magazine of the Australian English Association, was first published in 1939.

¹¹ *My Sydney Year: A Literary Diary*, 5 January 1939. Cf. *The Australasian*, 15 April 1939: 'Up in Sydney, Frank Dalby Davison has christened Louis Esson "the Little Bit of Celtic Twilight," which is a first rate description.'

¹² Fitzpatrick, Peter, *Pioneer Players: The lives of Louis and Hilda Esson*, Cambridge University Press (1995) pg.xi

¹³ *The Socialist*, 21 February 1921

and academic E Morris Miller (1881-1964) described him as ‘the first Australian playwright to achieve literary distinction for dramas in an Australian setting and characterisation.’¹⁴

In death, moreover, the obituaries paid homage, and subsequent commentary in many ways gently enhanced Esson’s literary reputation and success in the theatre. *The Weekly Times* (Melbourne) referred to Esson as the ‘well-known Australian dramatist, poet and critic.’¹⁵ ‘Dramatist, Dead,’ headlined *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane): ‘Mr Louis Esson, who died at his home in Sydney on Saturday, was a pioneer of Australian drama, as well as achieving distinction as poet and critic.’¹⁶ *The Sydney Morning Herald* concurred; it spoke of his career as a journalist in Australia, England and the United States of America, and his work as ‘dramatic critic for Frank Harris and *Pearson’s Magazine*,’ and made much of his association with WB Yeats and JM Synge—‘it was they who urged him to write for Australia.’ ‘All his life,’ reported *The Argus*, ‘Mr Esson was devoted to the idea of creating a national theatre in Australia.’¹⁷ *The Daily Mercury* (Mackay) took a more extravagant line: ‘In one sense,’ it reported,

the Australian literature, in Louis Esson, has lost its Shakespeare, since his 1920 volume [*Dead Timber, and Other Plays*] was described (by competent a critic as Nettie Palmer) as ‘by far the most important dramatic work published in Australia.’ ... without achieving—or seeking—any outstanding place in Australia’s hall of fame, Esson was nevertheless a figure of considerable literary importance.¹⁸

Journalist WE (Bill) FitzHenry (1903-1957), a young colleague of Esson’s at *The Bulletin* wrote:

... those who knew him will remember him most for the three characteristics revealed in Nettie Palmer’s dedication [*Australian Story Book*]. His devotion to the cause of Australian literature was long and constant, his kindness to his contemporaries was proverbial, and there was no critic more severe to his own writings than himself. ... With the exception of [poet and short story writer] Dowell O’Reilly, no other Australian writer of note published so little. Louis wrote prodigiously in his earlier years, but, like O’Reilly, withheld most of his writings from publication.¹⁹

¹⁴ Miller, Morris, *Australian literature from its beginnings to 1935* (Vol.1), Sydney University Press (1940/1973) p.56. When Miller worked at Melbourne Public Library as a Library attendant in August 1900, his first colleague—on a temporary basis—was Louis Esson.

¹⁵ 1 December 1943

¹⁶ My italics. 29 November 1943

¹⁷ 29 November 1943

¹⁸ 11 December 1943

¹⁹ *The Bulletin*, 8 December 1943

The hyperbole continued in the obituaries: ‘the father of Australian repertory theatre;’ the author ‘of the most important dramatic work published in Australia.’ Subsequent generations reinvested in the mythology. Esson’s wife Hilda was amongst the first, and in her introduction to the publication of *The Southern Cross, and Other Plays*²⁰ she revealed that the volume was her ‘effort to rescue [Esson’s] work from the verdict *Oblivioni Sacrum* [‘everlasting oblivion’] which is the frustration that was the inevitable lot of so many Australian writers of his period, he was often quite willing to accept.’ An advertisement in *The Argus* for the book, referred to ‘the late Louis Esson’ as ‘Australia’s greatest dramatist ... students of Drama and of Australian Literature will want this outstanding work by one of our most significant authors.’²¹ Gregory Parable’s full page article in *The Advocate* (Melbourne), was headed ‘Louis Esson, Australia’s Pioneer Dramatist.’ Further, *The Catholic Weekly* believed that Esson ‘ranks with [Rolf] Boldrewood, Marcus Clarke, [Charles] Harpur and [Henry] Lawson among the pioneers of Australian literature.’²²

In his two volume history of Australian Literature, published in 1961, HM Green posits Louis Esson as ‘the founder of the Australian drama.’²³ This foundation story of the twentieth century Australian drama was subsequently made concrete, however, by historian Leslie Rees (1905-2000)²⁴ with his seminal work *Towards An Australian Drama*.²⁵ In his chapter ‘Rallying Calls for an Indigenous Australian Drama’, Rees specifically recognised the paucity of pre-Federation (or, what he called ‘colonial’) playwrights; Margaret Williams more aptly refers to them as writers for ‘the popular theatre.’²⁶ Rees nonetheless devotes his early chapters to dismissing the writers of Australian melodramas and adaptors of Australian fiction who contributed to the ‘popular nineteenth-century theatre:’ these writers included David Burn, Walter Cooper, Francis RC Hopkins, George Darrell, Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch, amongst others. Rees, unlike Williams, set a trend that appraised the ‘commercial theatre’ in pejorative terms. Rees summarises

²⁰ Robertson & Mullens, 1936; Dedicated to his two sons, Jim and Hugh, Hilda edited three of Esson’s previously unpublished plays: *The Southern Cross, The Bride of Gospel Place and Mother and Son*.

²¹ *The Argus*, 18 May 1946

²² *The Catholic Weekly*, 16 January 1947

²³ HM Green, *A History of Australian Literature: Pure and Applied* (1961) p.15

²⁴ From 1936 the Federal Drama Editor to the Australian Broadcasting Commission, founding chair of the Playwrights’ Advisory Board (1938).

²⁵ With its significantly expanded companion *The Making of Australian Drama: A Historical and Critical Survey from the 1830s to the 1970s*, both published by Angus and Robertson in 1953 and 1973 respectively.

²⁶ *Australia on the Popular Stage 1829-1929* OUP (1983). Margaret Williams suggests that ‘Esson pioneered a realistic national drama in the early years ... he had little patience with the Australian plays that were being staged in the commercial theatres.’ But, she argues, ‘for eighty years before Esson, the theatre had been discovering its own Australia in the popular forms of comedy, pantomime and melodrama.’—Preface vii

the post-Federation calls for ‘an Indigenous [literary] Australian Drama’ by championing Arthur H Adams, Bert Bailey and CJ Dennis (ironically all writers who at one time or another wrote for the commercial stage), and is amongst the first to blame ‘the non-emergence of a prolific Australian drama’ at the door of the commercial managers. Rees was no doubt aware of entrepreneur JC Williamson’s views; in his *Memoirs* JCW was extremely pessimistic about an indigenous Australian school of drama:

While I have fond hopes that some day Australia will develop a real play author, I am certain the time is a long way distant. And much as I want to encourage honest effort in this direction, I have read too many hundred of impossible manuscripts by inexperienced aspirants in Australia to be led into the further error of hoping to see anything worth while written in my lifetime.²⁷

The indigenous drama, it appeared, would need to come from the emerging, and reactionary, pro-am repertory theatre or from the amateur little (literary) theatre movements. In order to secure an appropriate birthing story, Rees settled on Louis Esson as the benchmark. In a grandiloquent overreach, Rees titles his introductory chapter ‘The Legend of Louis Esson.’

*Australian Contemporary Drama 1909-1982*²⁸ by Dennis Carroll (1940-2001) surfaced 30 years later and reinforced the mythology.²⁹ Carroll didn’t mince words and opened his history with a more specific attribution: ‘The birth of modern Australian drama arguably occurred,’ he asserted, ‘with the first one act plays of Louis Esson ... the first playwright to weld the emergent conventions of modern European drama to palpably Australian material.’ He began his foundation narrative in 1910 when William Moore presented Esson’s first dramatic sketch *The Woman Tamer* at his second annual Australian Drama Night, as part of a triple bill, on 5 October (for one night only).

Carroll, following Rees, declared, that the professional commercial theatre after Federation ‘prevented the development of less commercial forms of it which could have nurtured Australian modern drama’ and further, that ‘a nineteenth century “Australianist” ethos became tarnished and eroded in the years following Federation.’³⁰ He also saw the concurrent development of a repertory movement in Melbourne—heralded by actor/director Gregan McMahon—as a ‘literary theatre’ or a

²⁷ J. C. Williamson's *Life-Story Told in His Own Words*, AG Stephens ed. Newbooks Company (1913), p.22

²⁸ Originally published in 1985, and revised a decade later (1995), by Currency Press.

²⁹ It was considered by academic and critic John McCallum to be ‘the best available general critical history of twentieth century Australian drama.’ Makeham, Paul B, [review], *Australasian Drama Studies* (29), pp. 240-243

³⁰ Carroll, Dennis, *Contemporary Australian Theatre*, Currency Press, 1995 pp. 3-4

‘theatre of ideas,’ linked extricably with the middle class.³¹ Carroll argued consequently that the repertory movement inhibited a ‘genuine development of modern Australian drama’ because the middle class didn’t engage idiomatically; suggesting that the sensibilities remained British.

Concurrently, there were a number of commentators who supported Rees, Green and Carroll’s primacy of Louis Esson in the foundation narrative. Both Katharine Brisbane and Eunice Hanger³² contributed short, positive appraisals consistent with the prevailing historical approach; as did Graeme Kinroos-Smith and Peter Holloway.³³ But it’s important to note that others, like JD Hainsworth³⁴ contributed a number of dissenting voices to the discourse, raising doubts about Esson’s dramaturgy. Hainsworth was one of the very few who availed themselves of the range of manuscripts—collected by Campbell Howard (for his unique collection in the Dixon Library at the University of New England—that gave a full overview of Esson’s dramatic canon. A decade later, Leonard Radic, setting the scene for his thesis on ‘the revolution’ in the Australian Theatre since the sixties, provided an alternative, nuanced perspective:

Esson is important in the history of Australian drama, not so much for the particular plays that he wrote as for the pioneering spirit which he embodied.³⁵

There have been two significant post-millennial retrospectives focused on the history of Australian drama: John McCallum's *Belonging: Australian Playwriting in the 20th Century*³⁶ and Peter Fitzpatrick’s chapter ‘Australian Drama 1850-1950’ in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*.³⁷

John McCallum, in *Belonging*, begins his chronicle with a focus on industrial issues impacting on the commercial managements at the turn of the century—he mentions the influence of JC Williamson, George Musgrove, and later the Tait Brothers—highlighting that ‘the old forms, particularly melodrama’ had begun to disappear by 1915. He cites the Commonwealth Government Entertainment Tax, introduced in 1916, as significant.

³¹ McMahon’s repertoire preferred the European modernists Oscar Wilde, John Galsworthy, Henrik Ibsen, Arthur Pinero, Anton Chekhov and Bernard Shaw. McMahon presented the Australian premiere of a number of Shaw’s plays. Of his friend, Shaw once said: ‘I know of only two worthwhile products of Australia—sheep and Gregan McMahon!’ (As quoted in Threadgold, Cheryl, *Amatory: The History and Culture of Amateur Theatre in Victoria*, Swinburne University of Technology—2019)

³² Dutton, Geoffrey (ed), *The Literature of Australia* in editions published by Pelican in 1962 and 1976 respectively.

³³ *Australia's Writers*, Nelson, 1980 p. 137; *Contemporary Australian Drama*, Currency Press (1981) p. 13, 21, 115, 568;

³⁴ *Southerly*, September Vol. 43. No. 3 (1983) p 347

³⁵ Radic, Leonard, *The State of Play: The Revolution in the Australian Theatre since the 1960s*, Penguin (1991) p.13

³⁶ McCallum, John, *Belonging: Australian Playwriting in the 20th Century*, Currency Press (2009)

³⁷ Pierce, Peter (ed), *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, CUP (2011)

For McCallum, the origin narrative begins with the repertory theatre enterprise—again his focus is purely 20th century—with the amateur Adelaide Repertory Theatre, founded by composer and academic Bryceson Treharne (1879-1948), inaugurated with a production of Yeats’s *The Land of Heart’s Desire* on 24 September 1908. Treharne’s repertoire included the European modernists George Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy and Arthur Schnitzler, but also New Zealand Australian writer Arthur H Adams’ domestic tragedy *The Wasters* (1910)³⁸.

McCallum brooks no suggestion of priority (nor paternity), rather placing Esson in a mosaic of theatre writers of influence in the first thirty years of the new century. He chooses to discuss Esson in comparison to the contribution and successes of contemporaries framed by Arthur Hoey Davis (Steele Rudd; Edmund Duggan and Bert Bailey³⁹) active just before the First World War, and Betty Roland⁴⁰ (writing in the late 1920s), but all in contrast to the neglect of Australian drama by the commercial theatre. Strategically, McCallum places Esson alongside Adams, and mounts a distinctive argument about the commercial versus the repertory theatre enterprise, and the industrial issues surrounding writing for the stage. Esson, he notes, was ‘a particularly outspoken enemy of the commercial theatre, and he [Esson] came to identify Adams with it.’ McCallum’s major contribution to the debate around the rejection of the commercial melodrama—notwithstanding its ‘bush legend’ ‘Australian-ness’—was the greater interest by audiences in the modernist dramaturgy, particularly ‘realism’, and the inability of scenography to supply the appropriate—‘authentic’—spectacle to the degree expected and of course the ability of commercial producers to resource the trend.

His preoccupation, however, is the twentieth century and McCallum notes that ‘the first three decades ... may be loosely divided into three categories.’

In drastically decreasing order of size these are the commercial theatre ...; the repertory theatre movement, which dealt mostly with the ‘serious’ contemporary repertoire from overseas; and the nationalist theatre [or little theatre], which focussed on local drama.⁴¹

³⁸ The *Adelaide Advertiser*—29 August 1910—referred to the production of *The Wasters* at the Unley Town Hall on Saturday night [27 August] by the Adelaide Literary Theatre as ‘the first Australian play to be represented in Adelaide. *The Daily Herald* used the term ‘legitimate Australian drama’ to describe the play ‘produced under the direction of Mr Bryceson Treharne.’

³⁹ Bert Bailey’s stage adaptation *On Our Selection* premiered in Sydney at the Palace Theatre in 1912.

⁴⁰ Betty Roland’s *The Touch of Silk* premiered was given its premiere production by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre Company at the Playhouse (Melbourne) on 3 November 1928; according to Penelope Hanley [*Creative lives: personal papers of Australian writers and artists*, NLA—2009] *The Touch of Silk* was ‘the first [Australian] play written by a real dramatist.’

⁴¹ McCallum, *Belonging*, Op. cit. p.4

Further, he makes the distinction—ignored by previous commentators—that ‘the three were intimately interconnected with writers, actors and producers constantly moving between them.’⁴² McCallum ultimately refers to Esson as a ‘patriotic purist,’ and glosses over his earlier plays, preferring to concentrate on his achievements with (and the ultimate failure of) his ‘little theatre’ enterprise, *The Pioneer Players*.

Peter Fitzpatrick, in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*⁴³, suggested that Esson ‘certainly liked to see himself as that kind of pioneer, and that ‘it suited the myth to see the writer as an intrepid explorer in a barren land, and to adapt the powerful Australian iconography of a continent empty and unknown at its heart.’

Fitzpatrick was Esson’s biographer⁴⁴ and it is not surprising that Esson is employed as both a narrative signpost and a device in his foundation narrative that, more appropriately, begins over half a century earlier. Fitzpatrick endorses historian Richard Fotheringham’s observation that ‘For just under one hundred years—from 1832 until 1930—live theatre flourished as a commercial industry in Australia.’⁴⁵ The popularity of the commercial enterprise, Fotheringham makes clear, ‘is to be understood not merely in terms of a desire for diversion but as part of a complex and defining set of evolutionary rituals by which a colonial society compensated for being a long way from “home.”’ Fitzpatrick makes the point that ‘these signs of colonial communities vigorously seeking entertainment and cultivation’ seemed ‘at odds with the unsympathetic *terra nullius* through which Esson saw the Australian playwright attempting to forge a path.’ Fitzpatrick chose to define his narrative, not by contrasting the three levels of ‘theatre’—the mechanism for performance—but by being inclusive of the platforms that produced the ‘Australian drama’: ‘stage plays by, for and usually about Australians.’

Fitzpatrick cites ‘the distinction that mattered for Esson’ was that between ‘commercial and literary theatre’ (as detailed by McCallum) as ‘when he wrote about the pioneering playwright’s need to find images of cultural distinctiveness and to bring them to the stage.’ To this end, Fitzpatrick frames his history of Australian drama by comparing and contrasting Esson’s thematic concerns across his canon: ‘Esson sought an alternative source for what might be unique about this

⁴² This latter ‘little theatre’ movement, however, was rhetorically encouraged, as mentioned earlier, by Leon Brodzky, in the first instance, but later actioned by William Moore, then by the much neglected Euphemia Coulson Davidson during the First World War, and ultimately Louis Esson and his *Pioneer Players* from 1922.

⁴³ State Library of NSW ([Digital Resource](#))

⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick, Peter, *Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson*, Cambridge University Press (1995)

⁴⁵ Richard Fotheringham (ed.), ‘General Introduction’, *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage, 1834-1899*, UAP (2006) p.1; Fitzpatrick p.180

country in the larrikin subculture of the city’ as opposed to the myth of ‘the typical Australian’ as a practical man as characterised by Russel Ward’s concept of ‘the Australian Legend’ in retrospect.⁴⁶ Esson became a preoccupation as ‘a particularly instructive case-study’

for the definition of what an Australian play and an Australian playwright might be, for the preconceptions surrounding the idea of a national drama, for an analysis of the intersection of notions of the serious and the popular, the authentic and the imaginary, the derivative and the new.

What is crucial to Fitzpatrick’s narrative, however, is that while he champions the centrality of Esson to the foundation narrative—with reference to both the early plays, including *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, and those produced by the Pioneer Players—he acknowledges that Esson ‘was not precisely representative of Australian playwrights of his time.’ Rather, ‘he articulated ... a version of the nationalist aesthetic in its most extreme, but also its most coherent form.’ Fitzpatrick appropriately saw George Darrell and Alfred Dampier as ‘the giants of the popular theatre,’ and *The Sunny South* (1883) finds ‘its subject precisely in the conflicting claims of national and cultural affiliation that Esson experienced, but refused to admit, in either his polemics or his plays.’⁴⁷

In the last decade, Julian Meyrick took up the narrative and continued to perpetuate the mythology of Esson, but as he makes clear in his 2014 Platform Paper (‘The Retreat of Our National Drama’), that he shifts his emphasis to a broader discussion about the need for ‘a national theatre.’

Not a building or a company but a co-commissioning, co-production house to address, seriously, the growth of our own classic repertoire.⁴⁸

Meyrick reinforces his position when he uses Esson’s first full length work, the political comedy *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, as the primary text for consideration in his *Australia in 50 Plays*⁴⁹. However, in his recently published *Theatre and Australia* he appears to return to the rhetoric of Leslie Rees:

The Firm had little interest in local plays, and the ones it did occasionally stage were mediocre. As a result, a crop of non-commercial companies appeared, sometimes

⁴⁶ Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, OUP (1958), p.1; Fitzpatrick, p. 182

⁴⁷ Fitzpatrick, Op. cit pp. 183-84

⁴⁸ Julian Meyrick, ‘The Retreat of Our National Drama’, *Platform Paper No 39*, Currency House (May 2014)

⁴⁹ Julian Meyrick, *Australian in 50 Plays*, Currency Press (2022)

called the Little Theatres, to take up the challenge. The first was South Australia's Adelaide Repertory Theatre, founded in 1908, and over the following decade companies with similar commitments sprang up in the other states. Two are worth special mention: the Melbourne Repertory Company (MRC), run by the director Gregan McMahon (1874–1941) in the years before and after the First World War; and the Pioneer Players, a group of playwrights that included Louis Esson (1878–1943), Hilda Bull (1886–1953) [sic]⁵⁰ and Vance Palmer (1885–1959), operating in the 1920s. It is true to say that the MRC had good production skills but did not know how to develop Australian drama, while the Pioneer Players were talented Australian writers with little experience of staging plays.⁵¹

This approach succinctly, albeit unfortunately, reinforces a number of errors in the prevailing narrative. Firstly, that the commercial theatre was antithetical to the production of Australian plays.⁵² Secondly, that he conflates the agenda of the so-called amateur 'little theatre' and the development of the Repertory Movement⁵³. Finally, Meyrick gives no credence to the quite separate evolution of a provincial—in his terms, 'national theatre'—imperative, failing to mention the fledgling work of William Moore, and the important pioneering work of Euphemia Coulson Davidson's Miniature Theatre during the War, both initiatives in advance of Esson's Pioneer Players.

Dissertation

... the playwright—the intellectual medium who should go between nature and the theatre—is anxiously awaited. Plots and characters there are aplenty in the so-called Australian dramas; but in purpose and dialogue the playwright is all at fault.

Table Talk, 4 July 1907

According to a general consensus of twentieth century Australian theatre historians, Louis Esson appeared on the theatrical landscape almost miraculously to be that 'intellectual medium.' The time was ripe for a titular hero who could not only write the plays, but also, through his journalism and

⁵⁰ Esson's wife, Hilda Bull, was a medical doctor by profession; her interest in amateur dramatics began at the University of Melbourne during her student years, and she appeared in a number of productions for the Pioneer Players as well as assisting on the production and administrative side. She was not a playwright.

⁵¹ Julian Meyrick, *Theatre & Australia*, Methuen (2024) p.14

⁵² The enormous success of the locally written grand Christmas pantomime, *Djin Djin* (1896)—*devised* by Williamson, with music by Leon Caron—and considered 'Australia's most famous piece of music theatre of the late 19th century' is one example to contest this assertion.

⁵³ Gregan McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Theatre not only premiered Esson's *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, but also championed the work of local writers including Mary Wilkinson, Arthur Adams and Isabel J Handley; he was a huge supporter of both Betty Roland and Katharine Susannah Prichard.

the discourse with his highly influential literary circle, articulate both the dramaturgical imperatives of a provincial drama, but also a national theatre. His immediate link to Yeats, Synge and the Irish Abbey Theatre gave Esson the credentials. He sits in the history as the patriarch, ‘the father of Australian Repertory drama,’ ‘pioneer dramatist’ and, according to T Inglis Moore,

No writer—except Henry Lawson in his short stories—has captured the very spirit of the outback life as completely as Louis Esson has done ... he does it quietly, all pervasively, with restraint, and by suggestion. It has the bush flavour of a pannikin of billy tea.⁵⁴

This reputation and legacy is supposedly based collectively on Esson’s plays, his attempts as a producer, and his commentary on the theatre. We have access to nineteen extant play scripts; seventeen intended for performance: two dramatic sketches (*Terra Australis*, *The Disadvantage of Sanity*); five one-act sketches (*The Woman Tamer*, *Dead Timber*, *The Sacred Place*, *Australia Felix*, *Vagabond Camp*); one short play for radio (*Lola, the Lorelai*); and seven full-length plays (*The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*, *Diggers’ Rest* [*The Battler*], *Mother and Son*, *The Bride of Gospel Place*, *The Quest*, *The Southern Cross*, *Lachryma Christi* [*Isabel*])—the latter two unfinished). Two further one-act plays (*The Drovers* and *Andeganora*) attributed to Esson, should, I contend, share joint authorship with his step-brother Frank Brown; there is evidence too, that *Mates*, attributed to Brown at its premiere by The Pioneer Players, should also carry joint authorship.

In the attached *Appendix A: A Scholarly Edition of the plays of Louis Esson*, I provide Esson’s entire dramatic canon; fully annotated; with appropriate apparatus. Meanwhile, throughout the dissertation, I supplement my argument with a background to the writing of each of the plays in order to establish the intention and methodology used (especially against the criteria established by ‘the myth makers’). Rather than offering a new dramatic voice, or begin a provincial movement, Esson’s ‘authorial intention’ consciously appeared to test both the traditions of 19th century melodrama, as well as to appropriate the international modernist dramaturgical trends into the Australian setting (in McCallum’s words, he ‘imported’ his nationalism⁵⁵). His plays, on the whole—while some more than competent dramaturgically—were fundamentally nostalgia pieces, and are derivative; his dramatic writing, compared to his prose writing and journalism, was ‘academic’ and comprised only a small percentage of his overall creative literary output. Esson’s work as a dramatist, a producer and a polemicist more appropriately signals the conclusion to the colonial

⁵⁴ Moore, T Inglis, ‘Introduction’, *Best Australian One Act Plays*, Angus & Robertson (1937) p.xi

⁵⁵ McCallum John, “‘Something with a Cow in It’: Louis Esson’s Imported Nationalism”, *Overland*, September 1987, pp.6-13

dramaturgy; as far as the national drama was concerned, Louis Esson, in appropriating prevailing modernist dramaturgical trends (albeit in an Australian setting), was the last of the Colonial playwrights.

A revised narrative of Australian drama needs to be considered: a fundamental re-evaluation of both the theatre sector and the drama; a chronicle that both removes the erroneously perceived estrangement of the Commercial, Repertory and Provincial Theatre enterprises and the arbitrary marker of Federation (that had negligible impact on the theatre nor the drama). While there have been a number of commentators since the 1990s who have recognised and championed a small number of the neglected female writers working concurrently with Esson⁵⁶, there has been no attempt to refute Esson's patriarchy nor suggest an alternative more accurate foundation narrative to our aspirations to a national drama. When the currently neglected (or omitted) creatives (fundamental also to the development of a national theatre) are embraced⁵⁷ and their contributions made more available—especially as the vast majority are women—a more culturally vital, richer and compelling story unfolds in terms of the foundation of our cultural identity.

Summary

It is considered Imperial or, at any rate, unprovincial, to import our inspirations, whether in the nature of Paris gowns, Glasgow cruisers or London mummers. But it seems to me a poor tribute to our taste or culture that whatever good things we display, if they are good, have come from the other end of the world. Lacking in Imperial vision, I prefer home-made good, or bad, to foreign models.

Louis Esson, 'Melbourne Theatre', *The Triad*, 1 December 1925 p.74

Esson had an early career objective to follow in his uncle John Ford Paterson's footsteps and be a visual artist; this aspiration recurs throughout his life. He lost interest in his academic studies at university, and was introduced to journalism by Leon Brodzky, almost by default. While in Ireland in 1904, Esson admitted that he'd come to Europe to study painting. He approached his meetings with the members of the Irish National Theatre (certainly arranged in advance by Brodzky) from a

⁵⁶ While Susan Pfisterer and Carolyn Pickett, *Playing with Ideas: Australian Women Playwrights from the Suffragettes to the Sixties*, Currency Press (1998) and Michelle Arrow, *Upstaged: Australian Women Dramatists in the Limelight at Last*, Currency Press (2002) provide some recent insight, their preoccupation is female play writing from the late 1920s, Katharine Susannah Prichard being the common thread.

⁵⁷ Including, but not limited to George Darrell and Alfred Dampier—both men established an Australian Dramatic Company, the former in 1878—Katherine Russell (Mrs Alfred Dampier), FRC Hopkins, Kate Howarde, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Euphemia Coulson Davidson, Mary Wilkinson, Rosa Campbell Praed, Sumner Locke, Lotte Lyell, The MacDonagh Sisters, Dulcie Deamer, Millicent Armstrong, and Carrie Tennant.

journalist's perspective; that he waited another five years to be persuaded to write anything theatrical is telling. It appears Esson was obliged into writing for the stage by William Moore; it wasn't a process that came naturally nor from any perceptible passion (unlike his commitment to writing verse or short fiction or commentating the football).

In the opening Chapter, I survey Esson's early published writing and, in doing so, explore a number of his 'cultural' themes concerning the 'new continent' of Australia and Australian identity—as opposed to 'the old world' of Britain and Europe, and Asia—typical of post-Federation discourse in *The Bulletin* and other literary journals—that formed the basis for his journalistic discourse over the next twenty years from 1908. It was his University colleague, Leon Brodzky who first raised the issue of a National Drama following Federation, but it was William Moore, Esson's mentor at the Melbourne *Herald*, who established the first company in the twentieth century devoted to a purely Australian repertoire. I find the historical reference to this approach as 'the Little Theatre Movement' problematic, especially given the term's American antecedent, and certainly in Australia, to the concurrent emergence of a Repertory Theatre Movement. I clarify nomenclature, suggesting that the better term is to refer to the movement that gained some traction in the late 19th century by George Darrell and Alfred Dampier, and continued by William Moore (subsequently by Euphemia Coulson Davidson, and then Esson himself with The Pioneer Players) as the Australian 'Provincial Theatre.'

In the Chapter Two I survey William Moore's short lived attempt at a Provincial Theatre enterprise, noting (cynically) that it was more self-aggrandising than altruistic in terms of building a national drama. None the less, across his four seasons, he provided the first opportunity for Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969), Kathleen Watson, Blamire Young (1862-1935), Alfred Buchanan and Louis Esson to write for the stage. In Esson's case, I scrutinise his first attempts at dramaturgy—initially, two short sketches—based on his foray in the slum world as a journalist and poet (a literary subject already exploited by Charles Dickens in London; and, in Melbourne, by both Marcus Clarke and Fergus Hume).

Chapter Three focuses on Esson's brief engagement with the amateur Repertory movement, first flagged by Leon Brodzky following Federation, but introduced in earnest by Bryceson Treharne (in Adelaide) and actor and producer Gregan McMahon (1874-1941) (in Melbourne). It was for the latter's initiative that Esson wrote his first full length play, the political comedy *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*. In contrast to the preoccupations of the provincial theatre, whose primary concern was the development of the Australian drama and a 'national theatre,' the Repertory movement actively embraced the modernist drama and production techniques then *en vogue* in England, Europe and the

United States of America. Using the more intimate experience of bijou spaces, professional and experienced directors like McMahon both educated actors to a new, ‘naturalistic’ performance style, but also local audiences to a more voyeuristic, issue-based and intimate theatrical experience; a concerted contrast to the bombast and spectacle offered by the Commercial producers (presenting imported musical comedy, burlesque, pantomime and melodrama from London and New York).

Following the publication of his first book of poetry, *Bells and Bees*, Esson consciously adjusted his focus from his more Bohemian, urban subject matter, to pursue a literary response to the Australian landscape. The aesthetic of ‘the bush’—or ‘the never-never’—had been part of *The Bulletin* ethos for over a decade, but Esson’s agenda was more a sympathetic response to discussions he had with WB Yeats and JM Synge in London and Dublin some years before. He attempted to follow Synge’s provocation of ‘plenty of material in ... all those outback stations,’ applying his own journalistic gaze to ‘the wild poetry of natural scenes and simple people.’ I background this somewhat flawed approach in Chapter Four.

When Esson returned to Australia from his travels in the United States of America and England (1917—1921), where he had an impressionable reunion with WB Yeats, he was enthused to establish his own Provincial Theatre, a collaboration with with colleagues Vance Palmer and Dr Stewart Macky and others. Esson’s philosophy was firmly that ‘an authentic Australian play ... should have a real atmosphere—some space and sunshine, wild nature or primitive characters; something with a cow in it.’ In Chapter Five, I document the evolution of The Pioneer Players, their repertoire and Esson’s diminishing enthusiasm for writing drama. The real difficulty for Esson, as he himself no doubt realised, in the first instance, was that, unlike his half brother Frank Brown, he had minimal experience of the authentic Australian outback nor its people to commit to the drama; rarely did he venture beyond the Victorian border. Esson could readily ‘intellectualise’ the concept of ‘the bush’ but there was a disconnect when it came to intimately dramatising the Australian landscape and, importantly, presenting the authentic characters who populated the interior. That he attempted to exercise this manifesto on his repertoire choices for The Pioneer Players also tested the Melbourne audience’s appetite for quaint and nostalgic bush tales, when the alternative, the Repertory Theatre movement and the Commercial theatre enterprise, was enjoying a revival with contemporary and relevant theatrical experiences, and all alongside the community fascination with the emerging new medium of film. Seemingly bereft of new ideas (and again in haste) Esson returned (full-circle) to his ‘slumlord’ theme as the subject for his last performed play, *The Bride of Gospel Place*, a production that finally saw the demise of The Pioneer Players (yet another failed experiment in the early Provincial Theatre movement).

There has been an historic tendency to constrict the importance of both the Commercial enterprise in the Colonial era as being self-serving, and to see the sector as antagonistic to an evolution of the Australian culture and identity. Into the new century, Esson, more than anyone (especially after his experience on *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*), believed that those associated with the Commercial sector were demeaning the art form. In Chapter Six, I argue the contrary: that throughout the Colonial area—from 1832-1929, as articulated by academic Margaret Williams in her monograph *Australian on the Popular Stage*—the Commercial theatre was not only the most important form of entertainment for Australian audiences, but also flourished as an industry that actively promoted a drama that was ‘by Australians for Australians.’ I also survey how the Commercial theatre seamlessly merged with the fledgling film industry (sharing creative talent and entrepreneurial initiative) to further the development of a perceived national culture.

Esson’s biographer, Peter Fitzpatrick, observed that ‘Of all Louis’s works [*The Drovers*] is perhaps the best known, probably the most confidently admired, and certainly the most anthologised.’⁵⁸ My research has unearthed a series of facts that call into question Esson’s sole authorship of both *The Drovers* and *Andeganora*; the same speculation occurs with the playlet *Mates* performed by The Pioneer Players but credited to Frank Brown. It is my contention that all three short plays were collaborations, the source material and intimate knowledge deriving from Esson’s step brother Frank and his personal live experiences in the Northern Territory; Esson provided his dramaturgical experience to finesse the drafts for performance. With Chapter Seven, in the absence of any dedicated existent information on Frank Brown, I supply a basic biography to lay out his credentials and detail the development of the collaboration on the three disputed plays.

In the final chapter, I challenge the accepted and prevailing hagiography imposed on Louis Esson’s canon and reassess his role and function in the origin narrative of our provincial drama. While his contribution as playwright, producer and pundit on the emerging National theatre is significant, in the mosaic of the evolution of the National *drama*, Esson more appropriately represents the final phase of the Colonial dramaturgy; his polemic referenced and championed the last hurrah of the ‘imported nationalism’ of the Irish patrioteers WB Yeats, JM Synge and Lady Augusta Gregory. Louis Esson was the last of the Colonialists.

If the emphasis is adjusted, the plays and significance of number of Esson’s contemporaries can be reassessed and, again, question his patriarchal mantle. Works by Arthur H Adams (1872-1936), Leon Brodzky (1883-1973), Vance Palmer (1885-1959) and Harrison Owen (1890-1966) gained

⁵⁸ *Pioneer Players*, Op. cit. p.152

international recognition in the first two decades of the twentieth century; but in terms of the ‘by Australians for Australians’ provincial theatre there is a cohort of women writers that are conspicuously neglected and demand a more consequential inclusion in the narrative bridge between the Colonial and modernist dramaturgy in Australian: Kate Howarde (1864-1939), Helena Sumner Locke (1881-1917), Millicent Armstrong (1888-1973) and Euphemia Coulson Davidson (1874-1936) (who, at her death in 1936 was regarded as ‘one of the pioneers of the National Theatre Movement’⁵⁹). I make the final summation that, in building this revision, two playwrights—Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969) and Mary Maclean (later known as Betty Roland (1903-1996)) with their plays *Brumby Innes* and *The Touch of Silk* respectively—provide a more appropriate (matriarchal) beginning of a new 20th century modernist progression towards the National drama.

⁵⁹ *The Argus*, 21 October 1936 p.15

— CHAPTER ONE —
‘By Australians for Australians’

Preamble

No one shall work for money,
And no one shall work for fame,
But each for the love of the working.

Rudyard Kipling, ‘When Earth’s Last Picture is Painted’

Stage Whispers is an Australian theatre magazine¹ that provides a directory, reviews and news on current productions; its major focus, however, is ‘community theatre’ or, alternatively, that plethora of ‘amateur’ drama and musical theatre societies that operate successfully throughout the country. ‘Community’ is more convivial than the pejorative ‘amateur’ nomenclature, notwithstanding that the term was used in our theatre history from colonisation (when all theatre was amateur, established by non-professionals who fulfilled ‘the desire for self expression’ and existed to ‘reflect the needs of the community’). From 1851, well organised amateur companies popped up across the gold-fields and elsewhere: The Sandhurst Amateur Dramatic Club (Bendigo), for example, and the Amateur Comedy Company (South Australia), provided ‘respectable and rational entertainment.’

Post Federation, the Repertory movement in Australia, evolved this amateur tradition, maintained its diverse imported repertoire, but the crucial difference was that ‘professionals’ assumed leadership.

The term ‘Repertory Theatre’ in the United States of American was often used synonymously with ‘little theatre.’ The American Little Theatre Movement was founded on the demands of European modernist dramaturgy, especially the exigency of realism on both the production values and acting through the emerging role of ‘the director’; utilising smaller venues more suitable to the intimate, voyeuristic plays of the realist drama. The movement gained some currency following the establishment of a number of ventures in the state of Illinois: beginning with the Aldis Playhouse² (Lake Forest) in 1910; The Hull House (an immigration settlement house in Chicago)³; and Chicago

¹ <https://www.stagewhispers.com.au/>

² Established by playwright Mary Aldis (1872–1949) with her husband lawyer and arts patron Arthur T Aldis.

³ The Theatre Group in the Hull House adult education centre facilitated by Laura Dainty Pelham. Pelham is credited as the ‘founder of the American Little Theatre Movement’ having produced the premiers of plays by Galsworthy, Ibsen and Bernard Shaw.

Little Theatre⁴ in 1912. The movement expanded to include the Toy Theatre in Boston⁵ (1912), the Little Theatre, New York⁶ (1912) and the Washington Square Players (1915). All were considered ‘art’ theatres, all philosophically opposed to the prevailing commercial theatre imperatives (as represented by Broadway) and playing in modest experimental spaces. All these companies were professionally managed, but drew on amateur actors to support their productions. When he arrived in New York in 1917, Louis Esson recognised that the antipathy was reciprocated:

Mr David Belasco sees a grave menace to the true art of the stage. In the *New York Herald*, the defender of the faith of Broadway against these ‘desecrators of its best traditions’ has denounced the various repertory theatres, the little theatres of freedom and experiment, as ‘vicious, vulgar, and degrading.’⁷

The term ‘Little Theatre’ gained some currency in Australia when, in 1913, *The Sunday Times* (Sydney) announced the opening of a new venture:

Little Theatres Limited ... aims to afford the Sydney public every opportunity of seeing theatrical successes from England, America and the Continent. Playgoers are promised an excellent combination of artists and an extensive repertoire of the cream of the world’s comedies. ... It might also fairly consider the possibility of producing some of the better class plays of Australian life, written by authors who dwell amongst us.⁸

However, The Little Theatre, along with Gregan McMahon’s Melbourne Repertory Theatre and Alfred Hill and Downs Johnstone’s Sydney Repertory Theatre Society (founded in 1913)—with their repertoire drawn from modernist European and English drama—while considered an annex of the American Little Theatre agenda (with their prevailing industrial prejudices)—provide the launch for the burgeoning, and uniquely antipodean, Repertory Movement in the newly Federated Australia. .

In terms of the following discussion, however, I believe it is necessary to refine the nomenclature and re-classify the trend in the development of an Australian drama. The movement was flagged by

⁴ Inspired by an American tour of the Irish Players of the Abbey Theatre (led by Lady Gregory), founded by husband and wife Maurice Brown (1881-1955) and Ellen Van Volkenburg (1882-1978).

⁵ The inaugural executive committee of the Toy Theatre consisted of ‘Mrs LW Gale, Miss Amy Lowell and William C Willson ... the list of actors includes many of the most capable and serious amateurs in and about Boston.’ *The Boston Globe*, 2 November 1922 p.8

⁶ Both the building (at 240 West 44th Street) and the management dedicated to ‘putting on experimental dramas and give an opportunity to new playwrights’ was provided by entrepreneur, director and playwright Winthrop Ames (1870-1937).

⁷ ‘Some Distinguished Playwright—and Belasco’ published in *Pearsons*, April, 1917

⁸ 16 February 1913

Leon Brodzky, but inaugurated by William Moore with his first Australian Drama Night in Melbourne in 1909). I nominate the ‘Provincial Theatre Movement’ (to replace both ‘the little theatre’ and the confusing ‘National Theatre’ movements) to encompass the evolution of both the writing and production of Australian plays.⁹ Indeed, suggested by Louis Esson, I use ‘Provincial’ specifically in terms of its connotation of occurring in the province—or colony—of the Empire, with its focus on an anti-imperialist agenda. The movement is best represented by *The Bulletin* marketing mantra ‘By Australians for Australians.’ First used with respect to the establishment of a Federal Court of Appeal in Australia (as opposed to appeals to the Privy Council in London) in 1869, the statement was soon adopted as currency by patriotic businesses and other local enterprises, including the theatre in advertising collateral from the 1870s.

The Emerging Dramatist

Louis Esson’s first fiction, appeared in *Punch* in 1905: *Our Magpie*¹⁰ was a straight first person narrative, minimal dialogue; its structure was on journalistic lines, the tale of his Aunt’s pet bird moving from the general to the particular in its theme. The following year, then steeped in his fascination with Melbourne’s slum-town sub-culture, stories like ‘Smithy the Toff’¹¹ and ‘Down the Red Lock Lane’ revealed a keen ear for idiom and an inquisitive, incisive journalist eye for a deft description; he takes his reader into the world of his subjects, yet there is still the distance of the voyeuristic journalist, economical with language, Esson’s concise impressions were also a value judgement:

Through the narrow window in Clara’s room the moon looked down on the coffin and on the white faces of the watchers. Painted women were in tears when Jugger rose to respond on behalf of the deceased—to respond to her ‘health’ so ably proposed by the boss of all the thieves, the old and honoured ‘Shandy’ Brown.

‘Dearly beloved Clara’—he began.

A ‘Buck’s’ whistle rang through the room. Women shrieked; men looked startled; Jugger turned pale.

‘Chinny the Crow,’ they muttered.

‘Good luck! he’s out!’ said old Shandy.

They went down and unbarred the door. Chinny the Crow came in.

⁹ I canvas the difficulties in current usage of the terms ‘National Theatre’ and ‘National Drama’ in the Australian context in Chapter Four.

¹⁰ *Punch*, 5 December 1905

¹¹ *Punch*, 24 May 1906

Chinny was a man about thirty, clean-shaven, and with the gaol crop. Dressed in a smart grey suit, he looked fine and fit. He was a medium-sized, broad-shouldered man. He had blue, shifty eyes, but well-cut features, and a massive, decisive jaw.

Chinny looked at the coffin. Then he looked at Jagger.

‘Hush! ‘Ave a bit respect. Poor Clara.’ —Jagger gasped.¹²

Invited to contribute to the inaugural volume of William Mitchell’s *Heart of the Rose*¹³ Esson chose to provide ‘a conversation,’ his first pure attempt at dialogue in a sketch form: ‘Terra Australis’.¹⁴ The setting is ‘the hut, Lazy Creek ... the blue night sky is charming’; the ‘summer night is decidedly fanciful’ against the ‘gum trees’ that appear to ‘lose their gloom’ on such an evening. The situation is typical of the familiar nationalist stories favoured by *The Bulletin* (by Henry Lawson and others), but also, in its specific snapshot of nature it reveals Esson’s painterly impressionist eye.¹⁵ What is ironic, however, is how Esson names the location as ‘Lazy’ creek; overlaying, perhaps, ‘indolence’ as a prevailing national trait and promising a shiftless consequence to the discussion that follows between three men, each aptronymically named in the romantic pastoral setting: The Host, The Stranger and The Mystic. The bushman Host spends much of the post-meal ‘yarn’ politely defending the observation by the imperialist guest that Australia ‘has been born too late in the world’s history ever to become a beautiful country,’ arguing Carducci’s dictum that ‘All beauty ... dwells in the past.’ The Host laconically counters that ‘the Old and the New, the Past and the Future’ are interchangeable dichotomies. The Mystic, who emerges unannounced from the shadows, contributes the observation—with more than a nod to Bernard O’Dowd’s ‘Morgana’—that Australia’s ‘isolation’ provides a landscape that is ‘suggestive, and that the idea of ‘*Terra Australis* beckons at the slip-rails of the imagination, promising but to the rebels a fresh perception of beauty, an unbiased track to truth.’ The Mystic agrees with O’Dowd that the Australia is not a country ... it’s a symbol’ and its future is ‘very rich’: ‘Australia feels the life-giving sun in her blood.’ Esson gives The Host the final word where he emphasises two significant ideas: in seeking the new thing, it is ‘the rebel’—in the quest for the unknown (the symbol of *Terra Australis*)—who becomes ‘the originator, the man who stamps character, personality’; this would then suggest that all great writers and artists—‘all the old masters’—were ‘all very patriotic

¹² ‘Down the Red Lock Lane’, *The Bulletin*, 1 November 1906

¹³ Published by Lothian in December 1907; William Mitchell was well known by his colleagues at Fasoli’s as ‘The Mystic.’

¹⁴ Esson would have been aware of Plato’s (428/427 or 424/423 BC) *Dialogues* that defined the literary genre; not intended for performance.

¹⁵ It wouldn’t have been lost on Esson that Synge’s ‘lonely hut in the bush’ could also be found in his uncle John Ford Paterson’s response to the Gippsland landscape (in paintings such as ‘Bush Cottage’ (nd)).

Australians' obsessed by 'the Australianity of all things.' The Stranger acquiesces to the argument but accepts a blanket from The Host and the suggestion that he might like to sleep outside where 'one thinks better ... under the trees.'

The greater irony is that the theme of the journal was Mitchell's attempt to reject the melancholy of 'the bush nationalist tradition.' His agenda was to encourage a new, vitalistic vision for provincial literature. Referencing Verlaine and the French Symbolists, however, resulted in a significant incongruity appears to have been overlooked.

Esson references two playwrights in the sketch: the Belgian symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949)¹⁶; and the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906)¹⁷ the so called 'father of Realism.' He recognises both as 'old masters,' but in the spirit of the publication's preoccupation with symbolism, Maeterlinck is the more apposite. Esson would not have experienced a staged production (in Australian nor England), but Maeterlinck's plays were in translation from 1897¹⁸. Esson would have relied on the commentary rather than first-hand experience, but recognised Maeterlinck's preoccupation with 'poetic dialogue'—where the dialogue is 'suggestive' rather than, for example, relying on the 'subtext' of Ibsen. He also showed preference for the five-act structure (based, in part, on Gustav Freytag's plot pyramid and the early development of 'the well-made play') dramaturgically at odds with the four-act structure *en vogue* with realist writers such as Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw. Maeterlinck had been influential in the writing of WB Yeats and JM Synge.

While it was never intended for performance, as Esson's first attempt at the dramatic form, *Terra Australis* provides a number of dramaturgical elements that become idiosyncratic in later, lengthier works (the rhetorical journalistic five-beat structure, for example; and the triangular antagonist, protagonist and 'modifier' character set up). The theme established something of a personal manifesto: he states it more succinctly in his short sketch *Australia Felix* (1928) where, in a very similar setting and through his alter ego, a young painter Stuart Graham, he states 'In my opinion, Australia hasn't been discovered yet. That's a job in store for our writers and artists. Captain Cook discovered only the outline.'

¹⁶ Maeterlinck's reputation rests on his early symbolist plays (published between 1889 and 1894) which created a new style of dialogue, extremely lean and spare, where what is suggested is more important than what is said. His plays—such as *Intruder* (1890), *The Blind* (1890) and *Pelléas and Mélisande* (1892)—are characterised by fatalism and mysticism. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1911 for his outstanding works of the Symbolist theatre. The premiere of a Maeterlinck play occurred in 1912, with JC Williamson importing Frederick Harrison's Haymarket Theatre (London) production of *The Blue Bird*.

¹⁷ In Ibsen's final drama, *When We Dead Awaken*, through his principal character, Rubek, he describes the life of an artist that in many ways reflected on his own: 'I am an artist, Irene, and I take no shame to myself for the frailties that perhaps cling to me. For I was born to be an artist, you see—And, do what I may, I shall never be anything else.' Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* was given a revival by the Sydney Stage Society at the Palace Theatre in October, 1908. Ibsen is regularly invoked in Esson's commentary on the drama.

¹⁸ English dramatist Alfred Sutro (1863-1933) lived in Paris and befriended Maeterlinck; Sutro's translation *The Treasure of the Humble* (1897), *Wisdom and Destiny* (1989) and *The Life of the Bee* (1901) introduced the work to English audiences.

A second, more straightforward ‘conversation,’ ‘The Disadvantage of Sanity,’ was published in *The Bulletin*, three years later.¹⁹ In 1910, *The Bulletin* published a review of John Masefield’s novel *Multitude and Solitude* by critic and novelist JHM Abbott (1874–1953) under the heading ‘The Future of Australian Literature’. It caused a fracas that resulted in a tennis-volley of correspondence: Abbott used the opportunity to reflect on his own ideas for an Australian literature:

What literature’s future is to be in Australia no man can certainly predict. There is such a lot of future. But this much the writer would humbly beg to offer as his own unworthy and somewhat broad prediction. It will be wholesome, it will be optimistic—above all, it will be essentially sane.

Esson chose to respond the following month (‘The Menace of Sanity in Literature’²⁰) initially arguing that Abbott had misinterpreted Masefield and in reality, the point raised is that ‘there is more possibility of a distinctive Australian literature arising in the lonely mysterious country back o’ beyond than in the cities’ than in any imperialist replicas. Esson makes the further distinction ‘that a fresh vision of life, a new development of literature, may come from “those fellows just going mad” the shepherds and settlers and sundowners who have fallen body and soul ... under the magic spell of the Bush.’ For this latter argument he alluded to advice he had received personally from JM Synge. Furnley Maurice [aka Frank Wilmot] then ‘stirred the pot,’ and condemned Synge as ‘a sort of effeminate ogre gorging himself with human misery for his own amusement’ and rejected Esson as the champion of ‘the cult of the “aesthetic” force.’ ‘Patriotism, religion and the pursuit of material comfort’ rather ‘come before art in the estimation of the most estimable citizen,’ he went on, ‘and if there were no such society there would be none to listen to the cries of the broken-hearted ‘cult,’ and the aesthetes would not exist if there were nothing to weep about.’ In the ‘sketch,’ subtitled ‘Louis Esson re-states his case with a difference’, Esson chose to provide a duologue.

Esson spent the first few months of 1910 in Sydney with his wife Maddy attempting—unsuccessfully as it turned out—to rescue their marriage. Abbott’s review in March—the beginning of the exchange that leads to ‘The Disadvantage of Sanity’—was read by Esson in the Harbour city. He published nothing during this time apart from two poems that appeared in *The Bulletin*: ‘The Imperial Ode [submitted under his pen-name, ‘Ganesha’] and the very personal ‘The Valley of Jehoshaphat’ [symbolically, ‘the valley of decision’].

¹⁹ *The Bulletin*, (Red Page) 19 May 1910; [see APPENDIX A p. 21]

²⁰ *The Bulletin*, 14 April, 1910

A Sydney café, therefore, overlooking the Harbour, with a glass of wine in hand, is both a convenient and a convivial setting for a discussion about art, literature and Sydney/Melbourne rivalry; it's not 'Lazy Creek', but the same languid atmosphere pervades the sketch. Again, the duologue was never intended for performance but provides dramaturgical development and insight.

Esson's un-named characters in this instance are a Journalist and a Painter; the Journalist (the protagonist) is a local [The Host]; the Painter (the antagonist) is a 'Stranger' (or at least an expatriate just arrived back home). Most readers would have attributed the Journalist voice to the author. As in the previous sketch, the discussion arises from the vista of the Harbour and its provocation: 'Sydney incites one ... to paint.' The Journalist argues the contrary: 'Why do we need painting? Why should we pay for a copy of something in a gilt Frame when we can get the original for nothing?'

There is no dramatic 'modifier' supplied *in* the sketch about life and art, it is implied that the reader is seated in that referee's chair. There is no dramatic conflict either; but there is thesis and antithesis: Australia is 'a young country,' it 'is beautiful and interesting,' but it is otherwise 'too English'; 'The Prometheus of the Australian Imagination is fettered to the mountain of British Fact.' Esson is reliant, again, on Bernard O'Dowd for support, particularly *Poetry Militant*—'Does Australia have a soul?'—counteracting with William Morris's *Utopia*—'it is only by some creative effort that man touches reality.' The Journalist is eventually painted into a corner and we get a momentary vision of what John Masefield had actually said to Esson at his rooms in Westminster: of the

young Australian journalist, of the crude and vigorous kind nurtured by *The Bulletin* who made the observation that 'Australian literature was the product of home-sick Englishmen; but that a true Australian literature would begin among those [shepherds and settlers who went made in the loneliness of the clearings at the back of beyond.]²¹

What is fascinating, nonetheless, is Esson's life-long affinity with Art and the figure of the Artist. (It is significant that for the sake of his argument, Esson chose to use the somewhat disparaging term 'Painter', perhaps leaning into William Morris's 'Everybody ... works at some Art'). During his stay in Dublin in 1904, Esson's letter to the Editor of the *Irish Times*—in support of the Dublin National Gallery acquiring a collection of French impressionist paintings—introduced himself as 'an Australian visitor, who came to Europe to study Art,' and distinguished himself with a deep

²¹ John Masefield, *Multitude and Solitude*, Grant Richards (1909) [Project Gutenberg]

knowledge about both the artists and the industry. Esson was much impressed by his stay in Paris, associating with Abbey Alston (1866-1948) and an old school friend Max Meldrum (1875-1955)—both on National Gallery of Victoria Travelling Scholarships. Esson loved ‘the cafes, the cabarets, the theatres and restaurants, the violent arguments, the brilliant scenes, the late walks down the hill from Montmartre’²². Esson was named in honour of an artist, belonged to a family of artists (and house painters and decorators) and grew up acquainted with the many artists who visited the studio of his uncle, John Ford Paterson²³. While still a student at the university, his first published article concerned ‘The National Gallery’, with other significant articles on ‘Nationality in Art’ and ‘The Legend of Australian Art’. Further, in 1924, while spending a few months under canvas at EJ Brady’s camp at Mallacoota Inlet, Esson planned a novel. He suggested to Vance Palmer that it had ‘developed itself.’

[The hero] is a mixture of [Max] Meldrum and myself. It will be an account of the actions and reactions of an artist in a new country. ... One of the ideas is that Australia is still an undiscovered country. The early republican and radical movement has failed. Do we deserve the country? or is there such a thing as the spirit of a country independent of the spirit of man? ²⁴

The novel—‘it is subjective, psychological, with a background of politics’—was never complete. In the character of ‘the Painter’ in the duologue, we can also see an ‘alternative Louis Esson’ (a mixture of ‘Meldrum and myself’), and in the expressionist spirit of Gerhardt Hauptmann, perhaps, the sketch explores Esson’s own political dilemma—his own conflicting points of view characterised physically, dramatically in opposition—responding to both Abbott and Wilmot’s provocations; that said, there is much of Wilmot’s argument in The Painter’s often lengthy reasoning.

Esson’s next attempt at dramatic writing came twelve months later: a request from playwright and journalist William Moore (1867-1937), but this time the work would be staged as part of the inauguration of an Australian drama movement.

²² ‘Nationality in Art’, *The Bulletin*, 1 February, 1923

²³ Arthur Ernest Streeton (1867–1943) was amongst them. Streeton was a leading member of the Heidelberg School (also known as Australian Impressionism). Hewas a great admirer of the Swiss landscape artist Abram-Louis Buvelot (1814-1888) and regarded his *Summer afternoon near Templestowe* (1866) as ‘the first fine landscape painted in Victoria.’ (*Argus*, 16 October, 1934) Buvelot himself was a good friend of artist John Ford Paterson and a family anecdote suggests that Louis was named in honour of Buvelot.

²⁴ To Vance Palmer, 15 March 1924; Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Georgian House (1948) p.58

The Provincial Theatre Movement (A National Drama)

The first to articulate the neglect of the Australian play, and advocate for, ‘a national or municipal theatre’²⁵ was Esson’s university colleague Leon Brodzky. Brodzky contributed his first articles on dramaturgy (*The Bulletin*) and Irish nationalist poet and playwright WB Yeats (*Table Talk*)²⁶ when he was only 19. The following year, while still at university, he wrote a clarion call for ‘the local dramatist’ in a major article in *The Critic*:

Australia is a young country with its resources still undeveloped and hardly any distance beyond the pioneering stage. Yet the arts of music, painting and literature have been established amongst us, and, though patrons are few, receive some sort of encouragements but the art of drama, the art which has been called the acme of all art, does not exist in Australia, and of local dramatists writing for the local stage there is not one. We have no Australian Ibsen, or Maeterlinck, not even an Australian Pinero, HA Jones, or GR Sims.

The Australian stage is held by plays that are written everywhere and anywhere but in Australia. ... The only Australian playwright whose name has appeared on the local play bills during the last year or so is GW Elton, whose, *Oh! Mr Pennilove* was a distinctly original bit of work, which got away from the motive of nocturnal debauchery, which seems to be the only one that ever occurs to the European farce-writer.²⁷

William Hawtrey’s Comedy Company presented actor GW Elton’s²⁸ farce *Oh! Mr Pennilove* at the Bijou Theatre (Melbourne) from 18 October, 1902. *Table Talk* responded positively stating that ‘a play by an Australian author produced in an Australian theatre, is a somewhat rare occurrence ... an event of more than passing interest.’ ‘He has written a farce in the school of *The Magistrate*, *A Night Out*, *What Happened to Jones*, *Facing the Music* and *The Lady of Ostend*,’²⁹ the reviewer offered, ‘a farce of bewildering complications and “screaming” situations. And it is a real good farce, too!’ Further, and perhaps provocatively in terms of Brodzky’s comments, the article went on

²⁵ While the term ‘municipal theatre’ is quoted here by Brodzky, he uses it as a synonym for ‘national’. For clarity, I apply the term ‘Municipal Theatre’ to what we understand to be Government supported—or ‘subsidised’—theatre that began with the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (‘supporting the Arts in Australia by Australians and for Australians’ since 1954) and later the Australia Council for the Arts.

²⁶ ‘Leon Brodzky on the drama’, *The Bulletin*, 16 August 1902; ‘Yeats’ Celtic Twilight’, *Table Talk*, 11 September 1902

²⁷ 12 December 1903

²⁸ Actor GW Elton, the son of comedian Billy Elton, had appeared for JC Williamson in musical comedy; by 1906 Elton was working with Marie Tempest at the Criterion Theatre in London.

²⁹ *The Magistrate* by Arthur Wing Pinero (1885), *A Night Out (L’Hôtel du Libre-Échange)* by Georges Feydeau (1894), *What Happened to Jones* by George Broadhurst (1897), *Facing the Music* by JH Darnley (1904) and *Number Nine; or The Lady of Ostend* by Blumenthal and Kadelburg (1897).

to suggest that ‘In Australia there has never yet been any demand for Australian plays or even plays by Australian writers; consequently there is no Australia drama.’ AG Stephens, quoted in the same article dismissed any notion of an Australian drama. *The Bulletin*³⁰ found problems with the ‘amateurish acting’—Gregan MacMahon, who played the man-servant, was one of the few actors positively reviewed—but the reviewer had to ‘admit that *Oh! Mr Pennilove* has genuine pretensions to newness, originality, and go. ... Elton *films* has written something of a comedy in which there is promise of future success from the author.’

Brodzky concluded his essay with a survey of the conditions that actively prevented the local dramatic writer from having his work staged in Australia, and proposed a range of solutions, including advocating for a national theatre. But his ultimate conclusion otherwise—an albeit erroneous conclusion—was that we have ‘to face the fact, in all honesty, of there being no dramatic art that can be claimed as Australian either from the fact of it dealing with Australian life, or from the fact of it being written by local dramatists amongst us.’



Leon Brodzky—Find a Grave, 1909

What did Brodzky mean by ‘a national theatre’? The subject had been topical for a number of years in Australia. A letter reproduced in *The Age* by Scottish actor Walter Bentley (1849-1927) might best summarise the aspiration as it applied in London:

The politician of today would do well to turn his thoughts to some scheme for the establishment of a national home for dramatic art—such, for instance, as exists in France. ... Special education and certification would consolidate and strengthen the influence of the artist and the stage. The playwright would be encouraged to give his supreme efforts; the interpretation would be as perfect as possible; no mercenary restraint would hamper the trained performer in producing the best work, selected without fear or favour, and a standard of incalculable value to dramatic art would be established. ...

What I maintain is that the day has come when ... some kind of official recognition and encouragement must be given to the stage. Social barriers have long since been broken down, and rapidly growing influence of the institution demands its inclusion within the realms of practical politics. ³¹

³⁰ 25 October 1902

³¹ The Age, 4 January 1902

The writer concludes by advocating for a ‘national home of dramatic art, where physical fitness, culture and mental capacity should be requisites for admission, and where stage craft would be taught by competent professors.’

In Australia, ‘National Theatre movement’ and ‘National Drama’ were used interchangeably, but we need to be clear that ultimately Brodzky’s primary concern was Australian writers and ‘local content,’ as contrasted with the physical structure of a centralised cultural training and production facility for the nation.

Brodzky, meanwhile, also alludes to the paucity of influence on local writing by the European modernist writers then experimenting with both nationalistic themes and new ‘forms’ or ‘styles’ (specifically realism, symbolism, and expressionism). Norwegian Henrik Ibsen had been seen in Australia but as a ‘star vehicle’ for the English actress Janet Achurch (1864-1916) (in *A Doll’s House* and *Hedda Gabler* for Williamson, Garner & Musgrove (1889-91)) and the American tragedienne Nance O’Neil (1874-1965) (in *Hedda Gabler* and *Lady Inger of Ostrat* for commercial producer JC Williamson (1900-1901)), but none of the plays of Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg, Gerhart Hauptmann, Maurice Maeterlinck, nor WB Yeats had yet been performed locally.

Six months later, Brodzky joined the Australian Literature Society with the intention (in the following year, 1904) to organise an off-shoot Theatre Society. His twofold objective was to produce some of the more important plays of the time, and also ‘any Australian plays that seemed to be of sufficient merit.’ ‘For our actors it was intended to rely on amateurs, tutored by some professional. For a time there was much enthusiasm. People who had read Ibsen, Maeterlinck, WB Yeats and Bernard Shaw,’ he recalled in 1908, ‘began joining the Society, and we commenced operations with an inaugural lecture by Blamire Young on “The Drama as a Fine Art”.’

Within weeks, however, Brodzky left Melbourne to join Louis Esson in Paris and London, and consequently resigned the secretaryship. After he had gone, the Society, calling itself The Playgoers’ Club, subordinated the strategic aim of producing plays. As Brodzky explained, The Playgoers’ Club ‘held some interesting meetings, at which plays by Bernard Shaw and, I believe Maeterlinck were read. Then, somehow, the Club went to pieces, and when I returned, six months later, it had ceased to exist.’ The organisation morphed into the Melbourne Stage Society.

In the meantime, Brodzky returned to England where he was sub-editor of *The British Australasian*. His passion for the development of the Australian national theatre emerged again in 1908 when he penned another provocation—‘Towards an Australian Drama’—from London, published in *The Lone Hand*:

Many of us are almost in despair when we see how little relation the theatre in Australia has to the national life of the country. There is no Australian dramatist earning his livelihood by writing for the Australian stage. No one, for that matter, can name any Australian play that has ever had any pretension to being considered seriously as drama. We hear of a great many people writing plays, and after futile efforts to get them produced, throwing them into a drawer. In the June number of *The Lone Hand* a writer, signing himself 'Stargazer', relates experiences which must have befallen many others.

But the case is not so hopeless, after all. If we cannot get our Australian drama in one way, we must try another; and the purpose of this article is to throw out a few practical suggestions. We must begin by making up our minds that nothing can be done through the business men who own and control our theatres. Their business is to make money by importing plays. Often, too, they import the players and the scenery and other requisites for a theatrical performance. These theatre managers are not concerned with art, or national aspirations, or local talent, though, of course, they all pretend to be intensely patriotic. Let us ignore them.³²

What is strange is that Brodzky appears to give no credence to any of the nineteenth century Australian Colonial repertoire. Brodzky's dedicated intention was to produce modernist nationalist plays, like the Stage Society in London, the Irish Theatre in Dublin or the Théâtre Libre company of André Antoine. But until he got to the Continent, he had only second hand knowledge of these institutions. Locally, however, his 'method' suggested an early form of dramaturgy:

... a number of those writers who have already written plays, and who believe they have the faculty of depicting life in terms of drama, should come together and determine to produce one or more plays. They would enlist the sympathy and aid of a number of men and women of good education and with a taste for acting. There would be a Reading Committee to select plays, and a good actor to coach the company. Perhaps (and this is not at all improbable) when the directors of the company came to consider a play, it would be found unsuitable. Here, then, would be one of the first benefits of the society. The defects of the play would be discussed and dealt with until it was made suitable; and a writer would have the opportunity of working on a play in contact with the players.

When at last all was ready, the play would be produced in some hall, and the performance made an event of artistic importance, not a pretext for getting money out of the charitable for some local 'deserving object.'

... Briefly, then, the first step towards an Australian drama should be the establishment in the more likely centres of some kind of organisation for the purpose of producing, as well as possible, short plays depicting phases of Australian life. When once this has been proved successful, the way should be open to more ambitious work.

³² 'Towards an Australian Drama', *The Lone Hand*, 1 June 1908

While Esson was absent from Melbourne at the time, he corresponded regularly with Brodzky and would have been aware of this article—and another that appeared in *The Lone Hand* a month earlier detailing the Irish National Theatre, Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory³³—it is worth noting that Esson himself published nothing on Brodzky’s National Theatre provocation at this time (nor for the next two years).

The failure of his Australian Literature Society Playgoers’ Club appeared to suggest ‘the impossibility of any movement towards creating an Australia drama,’ and importantly, a production house of an appropriate scale to present new locally written plays. Brodzky despaired that ‘the undeniable result of the movement was the conviction that in Melbourne—and the same thing must surely apply in Sydney and some other leading cities—that there were not quite enough people to support and make a success of any organisation such as I have in mind.’

One of the committee members of the Australian Theatre Society, however, was William Moore, who, in 1904, had just returned to Melbourne after time abroad pursuing a theatre career as an actor. He was prompted to come home to Australia to take up the position of art and drama critic at the Melbourne *Herald*. He also wrote, initially under the byline ‘WM’, a series of observations of ‘the Queen City, from a Threepenny Doss to a society dialogue at the Princess’s Theatre,’ published in collections in 1905 (*City Sketches*) and 1906 (*Studio Sketches*); ‘the young author,’ wrote one critic ‘is strongly imbued with the artistic temperament, and is a keen and appreciative observer of human nature.’³⁴ Moore began performing his own monologues at meetings of the Australian Literature Society (established in Melbourne in July 1899) from 1907: *The Ideal Type* (in August) and *A False Alarm* at the annual Christmas concert (December).³⁵



William Moore, caricature by Hal Gye
The Bulletin 27 October 1910

³³ Leon Brodzky, ‘The Irish National Theatre’, *The Lone Hand*, 1 May 1908

³⁴ *Herald* (Melbourne), 30 November 1906

³⁵ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 13 December 1907

William Moore's First Australian Drama Night

In early 1909, Moore hired Oddfellows Hall (Latrobe Street, Melbourne) to present four of his own plays 'with local backgrounds.' Moore's idea, according to *The Argus* 'was to try them on a stage in his own country before putting them on the London market,' but otherwise he provided no manifesto for his undertaking, letting his 'trifles' speak for themselves.³⁶

The playlets, promised to be of 'Elizabethan simplicity,' comprised *The Only Game* (a short three-hander, with Moore appearing as 'a lionised painter' hunting for happiness); *England v. Australia* (an English Johnnie arrives in Australia); *Acting a la Mode; or, Histrionics Made Easy* (a comedy concerning the vagaries of the modern stage-manager when confronted by an aspiring ingenue); and *The Last Edition; A Journalist Episode in One Shock* (a monologue). The *Leader* suggested that the presentation 'should provide an enjoyable evening's entertainment for the many friends of the author.' That the program was such a novelty is curious, especially in terms of local drama. Moore's own paper, *The Herald*, framed the season in terms of the 'theatre-goers who care for something other than conventionalism on the stage, and find pleasure in "local colour".'³⁷ The 'conventionalism,' presumably, was represented on the commercial stages by the dramatisation of Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life* concurrently enjoying a successful run at Melbourne's King's Theatre: 'Altogether, the production is a highly creditable dramatic presentation of a story which will always possess a romantic, if weird, interest for the Australian people.' Albert Edmund's new Australian Drama *The Man From Outback*—'the big sensations in the drama are now practically perfection'—would replace it at Easter, presented by William Anderson.

Of the Australian Drama Night, 'It is a long time since a pleasanter and brighter evening's entertainment has been given in this city,' wrote *The Herald*. *The Argus* noted that it was 'an indulgent audience' that filled the Oddfellows' Hall [on Tuesday 30 March], 'also commenting that the cast, apart from Moore, with 'well known amateurs' Ruby Moore and Maude Joliffe [Mrs Frank Luxton]³⁸, Arthur Clements, and TH Etheridge, were 'the weakest points.' Of the sketches themselves, *Table Talk* offered that Moore was 'a humourist and satirist, thoroughly conversant with the faults and foibles of human nature.'

³⁶ *The Argus*, 31 March 1909

³⁷ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 30 March 1909

³⁸ Ruby Moore and Maude Joliffe had achieved a popular success in September 1908 when they appeared in the premiere of Sumner Locke's *The Vicissitudes of Vivienne* at Her Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne.

His sarcasm is biting, his philosophy refreshing and his dialogue crisp and witty. ...
As a sentimental writer Mr Moore is decidedly good.³⁹

This was the first of what became known as Moore's Annual Australian Drama Nights (there were four). Esson was in Bathurst, in the editor's chair of *The National Advocate*, and did not attend. *The Argus* critic, chose to offer the actor-producer some advice:

If Mr Moore would but part company entirely with all he has seen and read, and with his forced Bohemianism, and seek inspiration in the living material lying in profusion at his hand, there is more probability of his success as a playwright in the particular groove he has chosen than there is in following and recasting even the very best of curtain raisers.⁴⁰

Moore's enterprise might be considered self-aggrandising, but it provided a crucial bridge—in the narrative of the evolving Australian theatre foundation narrative—between 19th century provincial theatre foundations and post-federation aspirations for a national drama, and practical performance outcomes.

A decade into the new century, Louis Esson, the playwright, is yet to enter the provincial theatre narrative.

³⁹ *Table Talk*, 15 April 1909

⁴⁰ *The Argus*, 31 March 1909

— CHAPTER TWO —
The Provincial Theatre

‘Poet of the Slums’

... the call of the slums is as that of the sea and the bush.

—Louis Esson, ‘Round the Corner’⁴¹

*The Bacchic harp of nature thrums
Of corn and wine and gladness,
Of sun and space, and birds and gums –
But broken creatures of the slums
Hear naught but notes of sadness.*

—Louis Esson, ‘Our Street’⁴²

When Louis Esson arrived in Australia in 1880—a little under two years of age—he and his mother Mary Jane joined his uncles John Ford, Charles and James, and his maiden aunts Esther and Elizabeth in inner-city Carlton. The Paterson family occupied adjoining terraces-houses 67 and 69 Queensberry Street (near the corner of Lygon Street). It was his home for twenty years.

Esson was educated at Carlton Grammar School (a few blocks east on Queensbury Street, near Exhibition), prior to study at the University of Melbourne (a fifteen minute walk north-west, along Queensbury and Swanston Streets, across Lincoln Square). On a break from his studies, he worked at the State Library of Victoria (a ten minute walk south, down Lygon Street to La Trobe Street). His uncles Charles and James, meanwhile, had also established a successful family business—CS Paterson Brothers, House Painters, with a prestigious city address at 33 Collins Street—that specialised in designing and decorating the interiors of public buildings; uncle Hugh Paterson specialised in theatre interiors but also designed stage productions.

The landscape of Esson’s youth was comfortably middle-class, but on the immediate periphery of his domestic footprint there existed another contrasting squalid, illicit and dangerous world. Carlton had its slum pockets—as did Fitzroy, Richmond and South Melbourne—and Esson was aware of enclaves like Somerset Place and Little Barkly Street a few blocks from Queensberry Street, and those he passed on his route to the University. Whether working at the State Library, or enjoying the Bohemian company at Fasoli’s trattoria—108 Lonsdale Street—he was always on the

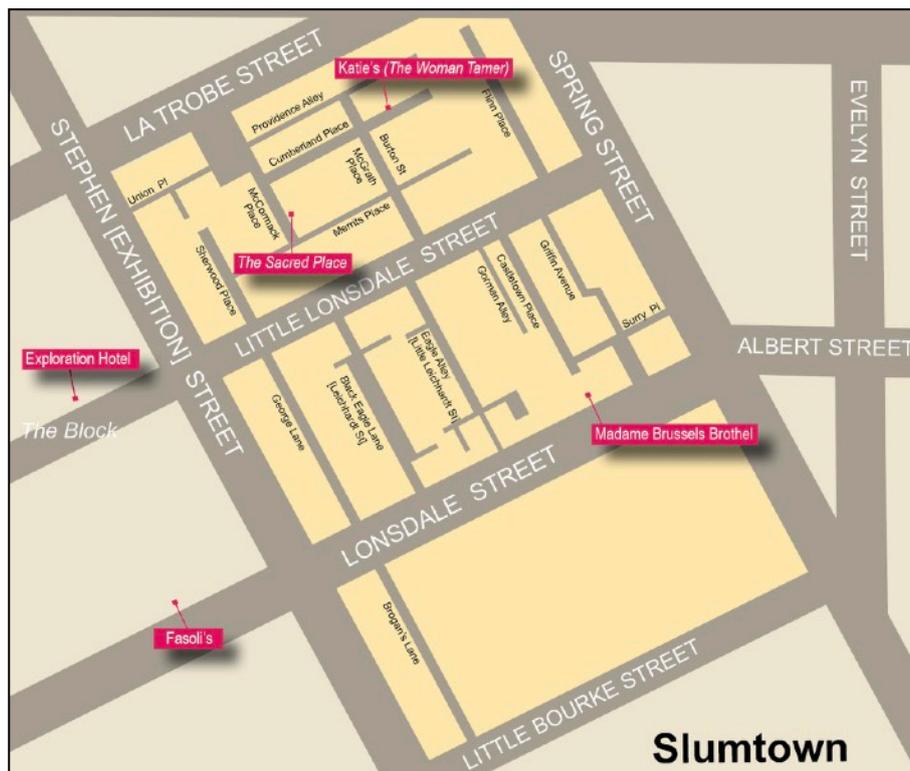
⁴¹ *Lone Hand*, 1 December 1908

⁴² *The International Socialist*, 9 July 1910

tantalising fringe of the Melbourne slum epicentre, Little Lon—or in Esson’s words: ‘the crack in the city.’ For a fledgling journalist who read Hauptmann and Gorki, it was enticing material:

Round the corner there, from Russell to Exhibition streets, runs Little Lon., the main artery of the slums, the Mecca of all outcasts of society. Herein gather, drawn as by some magnet, the strange denizens of Slumtown. At a corner hotel, a gramophone blaring popular airs, attracts a motley crowd; thieves and spielers come in from the suburbs to their favourite pub with religious regularity. It is a summer’s night, and people laze around. The moon makes pictures out of squalid material—tumble-down hovels, narrow lanes, windows, lamp-posts, chimneys. Bedraggled women squat on doorsteps, blowing cigarettes; shadows sneak up and down dim-lighted lanes; a turbaned Hindu passes; then a swaggie, who seems ‘bushed’; a Dutch seaman. Through the crowd shuffles a smug Celestial; ‘bucks’ muster at the corners ...⁴³

The Slumtown quarter was roughly bounded by Lonsdale Street, Spring Street, Stephen Street (later renamed Exhibition Street) and La Trobe Street. Little Lonsdale Street itself ran through the block, and the area was further divided by numerous narrow laneways.



⁴³‘Round the Corner’, *The Lone Hand*, December 1908

While serialising his *City Sketches* [with illustrations by Alek Sass, Percy Benison, WA Somerset Shum and Hal Waugh]⁴⁴ William Moore became fascinated by the seedier parts of Melbourne and recalled a night in late 1905 that he and Esson spent ‘in the slums in the neighbourhood of Little Lonsdale Street East.’

I had arranged to go round with two Constables [Dower and Richards] on night duty, and invited my friend [Louis] to come along. It was a grim locality. An odd building or two was thrown into relief by a solitary incandescent [light], the rest being shrouded in darkness. At all hours of the night you could see sullen gleams of light at the curtained windows, and now and again a muffled figure appeared in one of the narrow streets and then vanished in the dim abyss of some ghostly lane where ancient rookeries cast their deep shadows not the stone flags. The police told us some strange stories bout the denizens in this quarter. Esson listened intently, and learnt more about the place on later visits.⁴⁵

Esson befriended one of the policeman, Constable Robert Dower (known as ‘the tallest member’ of the Victorian Force—standing at 6ft3in—and a bearer of the South African ribbon), and returned to Slumtown with him a number of times to gather more material. ‘Last night in company with men who know,’ Esson wrote some months later,

I watched a certain house. From 1 till 3am the door would suddenly open and folk pass to and fro. They were mostly notorious thieves. That place was a two-up school, a sly-grog shop, a place for receiving stolen property, or the lot.⁴⁶

Indicative of the danger involved in Esson’s endeavour was Dower being the victim of an attack by three men throwing stones in Little Lonsdale on Melbourne Cup night⁴⁷ and being shot at ‘with intent to murder.’⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the sojourn into Little Lon resulted in a dozen poems (earning him the accolade ‘Poet of the Slums’ by his colleagues at Fasoli’s), some short fiction, and a slim portfolio of journalism for publications that included *The Waddy*, *The Bulletin*, the Melbourne *Herald*, *Punch* and *Lone Hand*.

⁴⁴ Previously published by *The Herald* (Melbourne), the collection was published by Fitchett Brothers.

⁴⁵ *Sydney Mail*, 25 November 1931

⁴⁶ A ‘Stiff for the Crust’, *The Bulletin*, 13 September 1906

⁴⁷ Dower had to draw ‘his revolver and baton,’ as reported in *The Argus*, 7 November 1906

⁴⁸ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 September 1906

‘Smithy the Toff’—sub-headed ‘A Thief’s Night out’—was Esson’s first successful submission using a ‘slum narrative,’ published in Melbourne *Punch* in May.⁴⁹ It is a character sketch of an Antipodean Arsène Lupin, thirty-five year old ‘clean-shaven’ Smithy, a gentleman thief with ‘close-cropped hair’ who looked ‘fit to fight for a kingdom.’ He’d just got out of Pentridge—‘the Farm’—assuring everybody he was ‘dead innocent’ but ‘something went wrong with the works at his last job.’ Esson was absorbed into the daily routine of his subject as an intimate observer, and quickly became adept at negotiating both the jargon and the idiom in recording dialogue.⁵⁰ Esson also provided vivid vignettes, disparate threads in the tapestry of ‘Kirt’s Lane, Brogan’s Land, Black Eagle Lane and ... Little Lon, the main artery of Melbourne’s Alsatia.’

Esson followed up with an opinion piece in *The Bulletin* on the issue of vagrancy—‘A “Stiff for the Crust”’⁵¹—a few months later. *The Bulletin* also accepted three poems that had their genesis in ‘Smithy the Toff’: ‘The Farm’, ‘The Ballad of a Bruiser’ and ‘Brogan’s Lane’⁵². He concluded the year with a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ account of ‘Clara Cooney’s wake’ in ‘Down the Red Lock Lane’⁵³. ‘Back to Little Lon’⁵⁴ was his only contribution to the subject matter in 1907 (he was away most of year travelling in Asia), but just before he relocated to Bathurst, Esson provided a poem—‘Digo Tommy’s Wife: A Push Melody’—and the prose character sketches ‘Smithy the Liar’s Yarn’ and ‘Delia’s Philosophy’.⁵⁵ The celebratory release from Pentridge gaol of Smithy the Toff’s cobbler ‘Jugger’⁵⁶ was published for Christmas 1910.

Structurally, Esson occasionally assumed the character of one of his subjects; in a number of instances he is present in the situation as an objective voyeur (as in ‘Round the Corner’⁵⁷, an extended ‘eye-witness’ exposé for *The Lone Hand*, with illustrations by Will Dyson) providing a verbatim response to the situation; but more often he places himself either in the immediate vicinity, his perspective somewhat remote. It is perhaps an early indication of Esson’s practice throughout

⁴⁹ *Punch* (Melbourne), 24 May 1906

⁵⁰ Three years older than Esson, poet CJ Dennis (co-founder and editor of *The Gadfly*) contributed to the argot with poems submitted to *The Bulletin* under his pen-name ‘Den’; much of the material published by Angus & Robertson in *Backblock Ballads and Other Verses* (1913) and his celebrated *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915).

⁵¹ 13 September 1906

⁵² *The Bulletin*, 5 July 1906; 2 August 1906; 20 September 1906

⁵³ *The Bulletin*, 1 November 1906

⁵⁴ *The Bulletin*, 14 February 1907

⁵⁵ *The Bulletin*, 6 February 1908; 16 January 1908; unpublished manuscript, Campbell Howard Collection, UNE. Esson’s racial slurs and derogatory remarks were the unfortunate pandering to *The Bulletin*’s White Australia Policy push—‘Australia for the White Man’—under editor James Edmond (who replaced Archibald in 1902).

⁵⁶ *The Bulletin*, 29 December 1910

⁵⁷ *The Lone Hand*, 1 December 1908

his career, that he always remained the journalistic ‘on-looker’ on the periphery of the action—whether it be the urban milieu, the bush or ‘the never never’—he was detached, and never truly immersed in the world of his characters.

Esson delivers a remarkable cast list, nonetheless, that ranges from prostitutes (Clara Cooney, Delia, Fat Alice, Dido, Jenny ‘down from the country,’ Fishy Liz, Fish Kate, Flossie, Renie, Rhinoceros Liz, Sal, and the matriarch Mother Shingles); assorted criminal types (Chinny the Crow, ‘Chook’ Barrett, Carlo Verdi, ‘Daddy’, ‘Flash Fred,’ Flash Ned, Jugger, Lee Wing, Long Bob, Cockie O’Malley, Renie’s husband Bill, Dick Richardson, Smithy the Toff, and the boss of all thieves ‘the old and honoured’ Shandy Brow); and assorted hawkers and ‘entrepreneurs’ (Ah Louey Nee, Digo Tommy, Slimy Jonah and Jalal). Esson marvels at their exploits and treats them with a curious affection, yet sanitises the cruelty, pain and violence that obviously existed. Actual crimes experienced by Constable Dower and reported in the press paint a much more vivid and dangerous reality:

Female Viragoes—In the hands of a determined and half intoxicated woman, the hat pin becomes quite a formidable weapon, and this can be testified by the police, whose duties have brought them into conflict with the amazons of the slums. Constable Dower ... told in the City Court today how a dissipated-looking young woman named Maud Gunter drew her hat pin and tried to jab him in the face with it.⁵⁸

On another occasion, Dower arrested one Henry Gorman who had chased his wife, and ‘when she threatened to give him in charge he punched her in the face three times. [Dower] arrested Gorman, and had great difficulty in getting him to the watch house, owing to the action of a mob in throwing stones at him.’⁵⁹ This despicable brutality was omitted from Esson’s creative responses and he did not take a moral stand nor advocate—like Charles Dickens—for social activism; his approach is not the stark naturalism of Zola, nor the redolent literary ‘impressionism’ of Stephen Crane; in Australia both Marcus Clarke and Fergus Hume were far more aggressive in detailing the crime and squalor in their journalism and fiction; like William Moore, Esson was more picturesque than candid.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Geelong Advertiser*, 14 May 1908

⁵⁹ *The Age*, 8 November 1906

⁶⁰ Marcus Clark (aka ‘The Peripatetic Philosopher’) wrote vividly of the ‘low life’ of Melbourne’s slums for both *The Argus* and *The Australasian*; Fergus Hume sets much of his novel *The Mystery of the Handsome Cab* in the slums a few blocks from the Princess Theatre. The topic was still *en vogue* in 1909: Katharine Susannah Prichard wrote a series of articles for *The Herald* while in London, one of which diarised her visit to the Salvation Army night shelter in Petticoat Lane—Cf. ‘A night in Slumdom, London’s Doss-houses, Salvation Army Shelters, Feeding the Embankment Crowd’—*The Herald* (Melbourne), 26 March 1909.

William Moore's Second Australian Drama Night

Esson's tenure as editor at the Bathurst *National Advocate* was short-lived, and he returned to Victoria with his wife and son to make a home in rural Warrandyte in September. By Christmas he had discovered Maddy's infidelity and they separated. Esson filed for divorce, and he was back in Melbourne by July 1910.

William Moore's intention to mount a Second 'Australian Drama Night' the following October was already in place when he suggested to Esson (perhaps to avoid more accusations of self-aggrandisement) that he might like to contribute a sketch to make up an evening. Esson agreed and—presumably following Mark Twain's famous dictum 'Write what you know'—hastily developed a comedy of the slums: a theatrical sketch using his already published material, with locations, characters and incidents already familiar to his Fasoli comrades and his growing readership.

Moore made a similar invitation to another *Herald* colleague, Katharine Susannah Prichard (known to her readers on the Women's Page as 'Pomona'), who contributed an intriguing feminist/socialist comedy *The Burglar*. Moore's wistful comedy *The Tea-Room Girl*⁶¹ completed the program. A commentator in *Punch* suggested that you could tell who wrote what play by the titles!

It was reported in *The Worker* by late August that 'four short plays ... with local backgrounds'—a less hackneyed synonym for 'Australian play' perhaps!—was already in rehearsal 'for a one-night show in Melbourne early in October.'⁶² Having utilised the Oddfellow's Hall for his first Drama Night the previous year, on this occasion Moore hired the Melbourne Deutscher Turn Verein (The German Club) Hall at 115 Victoria Parade; it provided an elevated end-on stage with a seating capacity of 600.

The One Act Play

... like [English poet and essayist Charles] Lamb (to mention my betters) I find I have little interest in events. I like the lyric and dramatic, a vivid impression, a twist of thought, a scene, a crisis, a glimpse of beauty.

Louis Esson⁶³

⁶¹ A successful journalist returns to Melbourne in search of 'a lost love' who he discovers working as a waitress in a Collins Street Tea Shop. In order to buy time with her, he 'shouts' the entire room at a pound a minute. 'I'm yours,' the tea-room girl ultimately sobs hysterically.

⁶² *The Worker*, 25 August 1910; *Acting a la Mode*, however, was removed from the line-up prior to the performance.

⁶³ Esson, Louis, *My Sydney Year: a Literary Diary* (1939), Campbell Howard Collection

Given Esson's personal life and frame of mind, the fundamental scenario of the dysfunctional and violent relationship between Clara Cooney, Jugger and 'Chinny the Crow'—as detailed in his short story 'Down the Red Lock Lane'—was clearly his source material for *The Woman Tamer: An Episode of Black Eagle Lane*. But Esson's only experience in dramatic writing was the somewhat stilted 'prose dialogue' in the slum stories, and the two classically inspired 'dialogues' *Terra Australis* and *The Disadvantage of Sanity*.

Esson was familiar with the one act form, however, and very aware of the literary trend from the Abbey Nationalist writers: he had read WB Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *The Hourglass* (1903); *The Pot of Broth* (1904), and he'd certainly seen both *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), and *On Baile's Strand* (1904) when he attended at the launch of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1904; he marvelled at the intense atmospheric realism of JM Synge's 'little masterpiece' *Riders to the Sea*, and the dark comedy of *In the Shadow of the Glen*. Given his interest in modernist drama, he'd read the short plays of George Bernard Shaw (who he describes a 'a good man fallen among Fabians,' but dismissed as 'didactic') and even Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, but he referenced neither in his writing at this stage. It was only much later that he became aware of Chekhov's short 'vaudevilles'.⁶⁴

In terms of Esson's interest in the vernacular and idiom, his attempt to create a vivid realistic 'impression,' along with his political and nationalist philosophy, the more relevant model to Esson's first slum playlets was 'gentle and retiring' Augusta, Lady Gregory (1852-1932) who he knew from his time in both London and Dublin. Of all the plays he saw at the Abbey, he was impressed by Lady Gregory's 'amusing farce' of misunderstanding, *Spreading the News* (1904), where 'she carefully reproduces the colloquial style and lower-class dialect of the workers on her estate' in order to both represent their culture, but also to provide commanding comic stereotypes. It is also a poignant satire about class and power within a 'theatrical' yet potent realist style.⁶⁵ In her more overtly political play, *The Rising of the Moon* (1907)—that explores Anglo-Irish relations and activism, with the interaction between the balladeer (a disguised revolutionary hero) and a loyal English soldier—Esson perhaps saw his own aspirations with themes of rebellion and nationalism.

⁶⁴ While it's tempting to see some similarity between Katie and Chopsey (in *The Woman Tamer*) and Elena Ivanovna Popova taming her neighbour Grigory Smirnov in *The Bear* (1888), its English language premiere did not take place until 1911.

⁶⁵ At the opening of the Abbey Esson saw 'the first production of Lady Gregory's amusing farce *Spreading the News* with Sara Allgood marvellously comic as the deaf old apple-woman. The scenery and settings were simple; but the acting, though mainly amateur, was of a high standard.' Cf. 'Irish Memories and Australian Hopes', Lecture, Australian English Association, 14 November 1938 [manuscript Campbell Howard Collection, UNE]

What he didn't absorb from Lady Gregory's dramaturgy, however, was her subtle and poetic symbolism; Esson's plays—as far as their literary 'realist' quality—are fundamentally superficial; rarely do we find imagery, allusion nor subtext.

During his career, in addition to two one act Slumland plays *The Woman Tamer* and *The Sacred Place*, Esson wrote three other short sketches that were drawn directly from his lived experience in the Gippsland bush—*Dead Timber* (1911) and *Australia Felix* (1928))—and the floodplains of the Goulburn River in northern Victoria—*Vagabond Camp* (1928).

In the brevity required in the one act play, normally the set up, or exposition, would be curtailed in favour of taking up the action immediate. Across each of Esson's five one act plays, however, he chooses to linger on the situation and the character sketch—as one might structure a journalistic *exposé*—before introducing major exposition; he then employs a beat of cause-and-effect dramaturgy based on the arrival or departure of a character; this leads to the denouement or 'twist ending' (in journalistic terms, the 'tag'); Esson favoured the ironic conceit of 'reversal of expectation' (made popular by the American writer O Henry in his short story 'The Gift of the Magi' (1905)). While each of these 'vivid impressions' may be considered accomplished, they do not, however, rise to 'the lyric,' nor, despite 'a twist of thought' in the denouement, are they elevated to 'the dramatic.'

— The Woman Tamer (1910) —

Esson made his debut as a playwright with *The Woman Tamer*, at William Moore's second Australian Drama Night at the Turn Verein Hall, Melbourne, on Wednesday, 5 October, 1910. It was produced by William Moore, with his cohort of amateur actors.

Katharine Susannah Prichard's *The Burglar* opened the evening; *The Woman Tamer* was given second in the program; Moore again appeared in his own play *The Tea-Room Girl* to conclude the evening. Peter Quince in *Punch* reported that there were 'interludes of coffee, talk and cigarettes, likewise song and story. ... No seats will be reserved, no tickets sold at the doors, and evening dress will be strictly tabooed.'⁶⁶ The curtain entertainment included 'the latest song composed by Marion Alsop' by Mr AE Wotherspoon; poems of Hugh McCrae and Mary Gilmore were read by Uni Russell and Stella Nathan respectively. 'The program was wholly Australian.' Indicative of the

⁶⁶ Peter Quince, *Punch* (Melbourne), 29 September 1910; Ronalds' *Central Florists* [the Vice-Regal florists] were located in 99 Swanston Street.

perceived interest in the performance of the fledgling Australian drama, it was reported two days before opening in *The Herald* that

The Tea Room Girl, the first of a series of local plays to be published by Mr Thomas C Lothian was issued today. The publishers only received the Ms on Thursday afternoon, so the play has been turned out in record time.⁶⁷

Most commentary noted William Moore's ability to draw a crowd to 'the highly anticipated event in Bohemian circles.' The *Herald* reported that

there was a large audience in the Turn Verein hall ... Many of those present went with much good will and friendliness, but they realised that the merit of the productions was sufficient of itself to command appreciation. Some went, perhaps out of curiosity or compliment to the persons concerned, prepared to beguile the time indifferently, but found much surprise and interest.⁶⁸

The Bulletin reported 'a gathering of artists, writers, and musicians rarely seen under one roof at one time ... there was a remarkable number of pretty girls ...' 'An Australian evening with Australian plays by Australian writers, played by Australians about Australians,' the *Punch* critic wryly observed. 'It seems quite in harmony with the fitness of things that it should be left for a German national society to thus encourage the Australian stage.'⁶⁹ Of the evening, the *Labour Call* couldn't help itself, cynically asking: 'By the way, who is the dramatic critic on the *Herald*? What?' That master of self-promotion William Moore was the *Herald*'s drama critic.

Esson was responsible for *staging his production*. His cast, secured by Moore, included Tom Skewes⁷⁰ (known as 'a humorous reciter of great ability') as Chopsey, A Douglas Hart (Smithy the Liar), Herbert Moroney (Constable Jones) and MS MacNaughton (Bongo) with Maisie Maxwell⁷¹ as Katie. The 'ten minute' interval following *The Burglar* would have provided little time for anything other than furniture to be rearranged as far as the scenery was concerned.

⁶⁷ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 3 October 1910

⁶⁸ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 6 October 1910

⁶⁹ *Punch* (Melbourne). 13 October 1910

⁷⁰ Forty year old Tom Skewes was a teacher; a member of the Victorian Railways Musical Society; Douglas Hart was an elocutionist, accountant and entrepreneur; MS MacNaughton, a shipping agent, was a member of the Waverley Literary Society; hatter and mercer Herbert Moroney was a member of the St Kilda Amateur Ministrels.

⁷¹ Maisie Maxwell was a professional actress; a longtime member of the William Anderson Dramatic Company, she was recently seen on stage in *The Miner's Trust* (Palace Theatre, Sydney, 1908)

According to *The Herald*, Esson ‘simply lifted three men and a woman from one quarter, the social underworld, bringing the very atmosphere they lived in with them, and placed them before a foreign company.’ Chopsey Ryan, a thief and busker boasts to his pal, Smithy the Liar, that he can tame a woman and be master in his ‘own’ house. Katie, ‘his girl,’ checks him with the plain truth that he ‘could not tame a white mouse,’ and proceeds to prepare a welcome home meal of crayfish for ‘Bongo’—just released from Pentridge—who will replace him.

The Women Tamer, if you are to adhere to the established dramaturgical conventions, is not a play at all: there is no dramatic action, there is no significant conflict. What Esson provides, nonetheless, is an entertaining extended comedy-of-reversal character sketch (an *episode*): it concerns the fate of ‘Chopsey’ Ryan, an excessively chatty braggart and ‘pessimist philosopher’—as his nickname suggests—a ‘fat and lazy’ petty thief who busks ‘outside ther pubs over ther organ.’ His nemesis is Katie, the woman with whom he shares a cottage in Black Eagle Lane in Melbourne’s slum quarter.

Esson knew his classic drama, however: Chopsey is a theatrical descendent of ‘the braggart soldier’ from Plautus and the *comedia dell’arte*; from Shakespeare’s Falstaff and Ben Jonson’s Captain Bobadil; and more recently Bernard Shaw’s Sirius⁷². The result is somewhat more intellectual than inspired.

The Herald, while commending Esson’s ‘daring composition,’ closed its review by noting that ‘the general opinion was that *The Woman Tamer* would prove an excellent curtain raiser.’⁷³ *Labour Call* championed Esson’s potential: ‘*The Woman Tamer* is a playlet by a man of ability. How much ability? Brother, he is yet a mere youth. Ask in ten years’ time.’⁷⁴

While interest in representing accents and idiom became a central component of Esson’s dramaturgy, it was *The Bulletin* writers Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson and Esson’s contemporary CJ Dennis⁷⁵—‘the laureate of the larrikin’—who more effectively popularised the Australian vernacular.



Louis Esson by Hal Gye, *The Bulletin* 27 October, 1910

⁷² Shaw’s *Arms and the Man* had enjoyed a successful revival in Sydney by the Julius Knight Company.

⁷³ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 6 October 1910

⁷⁴ *Labor Call*, 13 October 1910

⁷⁵ Dennis’s first poems appeared in *The Bulletin* from 1903 [he wrote under ‘Urry’ or ‘Den’]. He worked as a journalist in Melbourne from 1907. Dennis was a close friend of Esson’s half-brother Frank Brown.

Surprisingly, Katherine Prichard's 'comedy thriller' *The Burglar*—as with Esson, her first attempt at drama—received only scant attention, but it is her three-hander that is the most provocative play of the evening. On face value, the situation is simple, the house of a wealthy spinster is burgled in the night, the thief carries a gun. He makes the mistake, however, of confronting the spinster's niece, Sally Morrow, a 'modern,' who perplexes his efforts to steal valuable diamonds by brazenly handing them to him, along with a strong 'Socialist' berating. The startling aspect of the production is that the young man confronts the young woman in her boudoir! *The Age* conceded that the play 'was cleverly constructed, and the sentiments uttered excellent in their way.'⁷⁶ The same critic, on the other hand, praised Esson's *The Woman Tamer* as breaking 'new ground, in as much as it depicted a faithful picture of "bludger" life in the slums.' In retrospect, Prichard's was a far more sophisticated and dramaturgically pioneering debut.

Notwithstanding his relative success, Esson did still not appear to fully embrace the concept of himself as a dramatist, but he took up the rhetoric. His first major article on the Australian Drama, 'The Australian Play', appeared in *The Bulletin* a few weeks after the performance:

Australia is perhaps the only country in the world that has no drama. In every other form of art something has been achieved. Conder and Bunny have pictures in the Luxembourg, Lawson has been translated into French as a classic; but in drama we are as we were at the beginning. . . . Drama is the most popular of the arts, and Australians are a theatre-going people. But Australia has not yet taken the theatre seriously. At the time of writing all Melbourne flocks to see two melodramas, a comic opera, a farce, and a variety show.

In speaking specifically about Australian writers, he made reference only to Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan. 'The Australian play has not yet been written or at least produced,' he continued,

and until it stands the test of production it has no real existence. A play upon paper, says Goethe, is nought. Though no notable play has yet been produced, we know that certain writers have displayed sufficient dramatic capacity to earn a hearing. [Randolph] Bedford, for example, put good material into a melodrama, and spoilt the melodrama. Given an opportunity, I feel sure he could write a play that would be as good as *The Squaw Man*⁷⁷ . . .

⁷⁶ 6 October 1910

⁷⁷ Edwin Milton Royle's hugely popular melodrama *The Squaw Man* premiered in Melbourne on 22 September 1906 at Her Majesty's Theatre under the management of JC Williamson.

Randolph Bedford (1868-1941) was a journalist (for *The Age*, in Melbourne) and a published novelist by this time. William Anderson had just presented Bedford's 'invasion narrative' *White Australia; or, The Empty North* (starring Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan) at the King's Theatre (Melbourne) in June 1909. *White Australia* was a 'contemporary melodrama' set in the Northern Territory and centred around the Pearse family and their attempts to save Australia from a Japanese attack on 'white man's land.' Contrary to Esson's expectations, 'the play was full of stirring episodes and dramatic action,' according to *Table Talk*, 'the whole was superbly mounted. ... a distinct and pronounced success.'⁷⁸

William Moore's Third Australian Drama Night

In 1910, Lothian published Esson's first collection of verse, *Bells and Bees*, and the following year, Fraser and Jenkinson provided the slim volume, *Three Short Plays* (to coincide with the production of *Dead Timber*, Esson's first 'bush play' at William Moore's Third Australian Drama Night in December. Both monographs received a positive critical response. Otherwise Esson was prolific, devoting much of the next twelve months to articles (commentary, short prose and theatre criticism) to (primarily) *The Socialist*, but he also maintained his steady flow of verse to *The Bulletin* (more often than not using the pseudonym 'Ganesha').

There was no explanation given, but November 1911, Gregan McMahon chose, in addition to his Repertory season of works by Henrik Ibsen (*Rosmersholm*) and Elizabeth Baker (*Chains*), to present 'a series of short four one act plays by Australian authors.'⁷⁹ The plays advertised for the last two evenings of the season were by William Moore, Alfred Buchanan, Blamire Young and Louis Esson. Interestingly, there was some indication (in September) that this slot was intended to be occupied by the premiere of Esson's 'comedy of Australian politics' *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, with short plays by Young, Buchanan, Moore and Edward Dyson 'kept on the ice for future production.'⁸⁰

What transpired however, was that Moore's *The Only Game*, Young's 'extravaganza' *The Children's Bread*, Buchanan's *The Sacred Flame* and Esson's *Dead Timber* [discussed in Chapter Four] were presented on 13 and 14 December 1911 at St Patrick's Hall (Bourke Street). This, ostensibly, was Moore's Third Australian Drama Night but under the Melbourne Repertory banner

⁷⁸ *Table Talk*, 1 July 1909

⁷⁹ *Table Talk*, 30 November 1911

⁸⁰ *Labor Call*, 21 September 1911

and in collaboration with Gregan McMahon who brought some professionalism to the enterprise, directing each of the new works with his own more experienced company of actors.

William Moore's Fourth Australian Drama Night

In April 1912, William Moore announced that he intended to travel abroad for 12 months; he would 'have a holiday, do a little journalist work ... and negotiate for the production of some of his own short plays' in London. *Table Talk* made the announcement and credited Moore with 'igniting the movement which led to the formation of the Repertory Theatre in Melbourne.'⁸¹

It was Leslie Rees, in his obituary following Moore's death in 1938, who also suggested that Moore's Annual Drama Night initiative was 'the birth of the repertory idea in this country.' Moore's second wife, Dora Wilcox, however, wrote to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* to set him and his readers straight:

May I ... point out, as my husband's literary executrix, that William Moore, most scrupulous and most modest of men, never claimed that his Drama Nights heralded—to use Mr Rees's words—'the birth of the repertory idea in this country.' That idea was already born, and WM was careful to state in his own preface to *Best Australian One Act Plays*, that the Adelaide repertory movement began so early as 1908. His own claim was that he was the first to produce Australian plays 'with a literary as well as a dramatic quality' in the land of their origin. The crusade began by him, and continued by others, such as the late Mrs E Coulson Davidson, in Melbourne, and Carrie Tennant in Sydney, may seem 'forlorn' at the present moment. But the end is not yet, and it may be that in time to come Australia will have a flourishing drama of its own—whether produced over the air, or in a national theatre, is beside the mark.⁸²

We need to set aside that both Wilcox and Rees also confuse the use of the term 'repertory theatre.' What Leon Brodzky had originally detailed was a blueprint for a National Theatre based on international models, but in doing so he also advocated for the local production of work derived from those European companies; Brodzky outlined a Repertory Theatre model with *some* Australian content. Moore was more parochial, his objective was an enterprise with *all* local content (albeit using his own material in the first instance) and his Australian Drama Nights should be considered the first steps in the twentieth century's uniquely Provincial theatre aspirations that would lead to

⁸¹ *Table Talk*, 4 April 1912

⁸² *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 1938

Government funded companies (such as the Griffin Theatre Company (Sydney) sixty years later) who maintain strict local content guidelines.

A ‘farewell’ Fourth Annual Australian Drama Night—now more generally known as ‘Australian Drama Night’—was scheduled for May and reverted to William Moore’s sole jurisdiction and returned to the Turn Verein Hall. ‘The evening,’ reported *Table Talk*, would also be ‘the occasion of a public farewell to Mr William Moore ... who leaves shortly to win fame and fortune in London.’⁸³

On what was a wet and miserable Wednesday night in Melbourne (15 May 1912), Esson’s second slum-play, *The Sacred Place*, was the curtain raiser for the evening. The remainder of the lineup introduced Moore’s play *The Mysterious Moonlight* (set outside the entrance of a seaside hotel, it featured Donald Alsop as a dramatist staying with his wife [played by Isabel Handley] in order to escape the attentions of a former lover, an actress [Maud Joliffe], anxious to reconcile with him). A revival of Moore’s *Acting a La Mode*—‘capably played by Moore, Donald Alsop and Ruby Moore’—was given as an encore. Musical items were contributed by Miss Cora Terry, Miss Stella Nathan and others, and ‘with coffee and other refreshments a pleasant evening was spent.’ Esson wrote a poem—‘Epilogue’—published on the back of the program to mark the occasion of Moore’s leaving; it was illustrated by his cousin Esther Paterson.

Welsh born Kathleen Watson (Mrs William Decarden) (1870–1926) came to Australia as a young woman. Her first novel *The Gaiety of Fatma* was published in 1906; it was followed by *The House of Broken Dreams* in 1908; and *Litanies of Life* just re-released in 1912 (by Thomas C Lothian). The premiere of *If Youth But Knew* (a reference to the well known proverb) was also the playwright’s debut. Set in the morning room of a house in London, it is ‘a racy story of smart set society,’ that riffed the well-worn problem of mismatched temperaments; a youthful couple gradually drifting apart, until in the end they become reunited through the mediation of a ‘match-maker.’ ‘Miss Watson has a poetic pen, and plenty of stage sense,’ *The Bulletin* reported, ‘but not a ready sense of the relationship between tragedy and absurdity.’⁸⁴

⁸³ *Table Talk*, 23 May 1912. *The Melbourne Herald* reported (17 May 1912): ‘Mr William Moore, who leaves for London early next month, will be entertained at a smoke social at Sargent’s ... tomorrow evening. A number of toasts will be honoured. Mr Bernard O’Dowd will respond for literature, and Mr Louis Esson for local drama.’

⁸⁴ 23 May 1912

— *The Sacred Place* (1911) —

The Sacred Place is situated in a hawkers' hovel in Slumtown and deals with the conflict over a payment for goods between two Muslims: a merchant seeking resolution in the British courts; the hawker preferring a more culturally appropriate outcome.

The cast for *The Sacred Place* were, as usual, amateur with some having more experience than others: Tom Skewes (Said Shah Sherif), now a regular with the William Moore Drama Nights, had also appeared alongside GB Kirk (Munshi Goolam Muhamed) in McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Theatre's production of Shaw's *Candida*; AW Foster (Ram Chandra) was a lawyer, linked to Esson through the Socialist Party; and L Arnold (Rev. Herbert Jordon [a character excised in the play's second publication]), a gifted athlete, was at Melbourne University at the same time as Esson; Louis McCubbin (Mahmud) had a reputation as a fine visual artist; while Lelsie Wilkie (Abdulla) was an advertising illustrator (both shared a recent exhibition with Blamire Young, John Ford Paterson and Ester Paterson). Stewart Macky (Constable Matthews)—who would play an enormous part in the Pioneer Players a decade later—was still enrolled as a student of medicine at Melbourne University; he was an avid sportsman's (he played forward in the University Rugby Union Team). Coincidentally, Esson's future wife, Hilda Bull, was a fellow student of Macky's, a year ahead at Melbourne University.

Esson was familiar with his subject matter on two accounts. Australia attracted many Indian immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who found employment as labourers or itinerant hawkers. Hawkers, or vendors, travelled through rural areas in covered wagons offering a diverse range of merchandise: 'they hawked Brummagem jewellery, scented soap, gaudy silks, knick-knacks—all kinds of unnecessary things for which the female heart longeth.'

In his article 'Slumtown', in the Melbourne *Herald* in December 1906, William Moore, reported on the range of nationalities that existed in the vicinity of 'Little Lon', including 'the Hindu' and the 'Mahommedan'⁸⁵ population.

The Hindu, whose religion is bound up in the words of the *Vedas*, is quite distinct from his brother, who follows the teachings of the *Koran*. The former would no more think of dining with a Mahommedan than of flying. ... [In Slumtown] three classes of Indians live in crowded quarters here, in rooms almost bare of furniture, and they pick up a living as itinerant hawkers.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Today, the term 'Muslim' is preferred to refer to a follower of Islamic prophet Muhammed.

⁸⁶ *The Herald*, 28 December 1906

Esson accompanied Moore on this reconnaissance and his own response to the Mahommedan community as he experienced it was his short story 'The Sacred Place' published by *The Lone Hand* a few months after Moore's piece. Esson built his 1,000 word sketch around an anecdote concerning

the Hindu who took the oath on his son's body. A sovereign had been picked up outside his door, and he claimed that it belonged to him. His word was doubted; but he boldly took the oath on his son's body, and was handed the coin. That very night his little boy died.

Apparently, this had actually happened 'in the next street' and signified 'what was the faith of a Hindu to a Mussulman's?' Exploring his theme of religious faith and the secular law, Esson sets the tale in 'a bare dingy room ... in Rafferty-place, off Discovery Alley, in the midst of a quaint network of lanes at the back of Little Lonsdale Street.' Some eight or nine 'strict Mahommedans ... mostly hawkers' occupy the hovel and prepare to eat together after the fast of Ramadan.'

Ala mir Deen and Najaf Khan are business partners; 'they bought goods in common, hawked different beats, and scrupulously divided the profits.' But, crucially, 'they had no books, no rules' as they administered their dealings under an honour system. Fascinated by the British Legal system, Najaf arranged for a 'big policeman' to serve a summons—Najaf 'liked the sound of [the word "summons"]'—to Ala mir Deen claiming that he owed him money. Najaf wanted the British Court to decide on the truth of the matter, but Ala mir Deen preferred that 'Allah ... decide.' He opened the Sacred Place—'a little mosque ... boarded up carefully, heavily curtained, and secured with a Yale lock'—to reveal the *Koran*. He took coins from his purse and lay the alleged outstanding 17s 6d on the sacred book. Ala mir Deen confronted Najaf:

'Go, if the money is yours, take it; Allah will approve. Take it, but if I don't owe it, son of a dog, you will be struck dead. You know it. Go! Let Allah decide between us.'

Najaf Khan trembled. The door was open; there was the money, waiting to be picked up. No one would hinder him. But it lay on the Sacred Book, in the Sacred Place ...

He would be struck dead. ...

'Go,' said Ala. 'Take what is owing to you.'

Najaf Khan trembled violently. He whitened, gasped—and sunk back into the house.

'Mahomet is the Prophet of God,' observed Ala mir Deen.

'La ilaha Illallah!' chanted the Faithful.

Ala took up his money, and locked the door of the mosque.⁸⁷

The following year, 1908, Esson was able to secure a more immediate and informed view of the Indian culture during an extended tour in the country itself—with his mother and step-brother—on assignment for *The Lone Hand*. His travelogue observations, published monthly under the title ‘From the Oldest World’, detailed a range of topics including politics, religion, geography and the arts. His views on the subject were clearly more informed on his return to Melbourne in ‘Round the Corner’:

... The Mahomedan, who follows the teachings of the *Koran*, despises the Hindu, whose creed, however quaintly symbolised by the images of incomprehensible gods and goddesses, is based on the *Vedic* hymns and the elaborate metaphysic of the Brahmins. The few Hindus in Melbourne are usually of low caste. A third body represented in the alleys are the warlike Sikhs, who neither smoke nor cut their hair. Though the ramifications of creed and caste are followed less minutely in Australia than in India, holy wards are not infrequent among the conflicting sects.

In McCormack Place the Mussulmans have built themselves a little mosque.⁸⁸

Esson’s usual attention to detail, however, let him down in his rendering of the sketch he provided to Moore. The origin of the word ‘Shereef’ (or ‘Sherif’), for example, means ‘noble’ or ‘highborn’, a traditional Arabic designation; ‘Said Shah’ is a typical name from Kashmir (what is now Pakistan); Esson suggests he is from Delhi, and provides some of his dialogue in Hindi (eg ‘*Darwaza kohl!*’ [‘*daravaaza kohl!*’], ‘open the door!’), but his transliterations of the Hindi are often incorrect.⁸⁹ Also from Pakistan is the name ‘Munshi Ghulam Muhammad’—‘Munshi’ is a title, suggesting ‘Educated Person,’ in this case a person acting as an Imam—and Esson appears to have based him on a real character.⁹⁰ Of the other three hawkers: ‘Akbar Almad’ [possibly should read ‘Akbar Ahmad’], who ‘speaks no English,’ is a northern Indian—Uttar Pradesh—where Hindi is the most widely spoken language, along with Urdu; interestingly, ‘Abdulla’, from the Arabic, is a

⁸⁷ ‘The Sacred Place’, *Lone Hand*, 1 May 1907

⁸⁸ ‘Round the Corner’ [GANESHA], *The Lone Hand*, 1 December 1908

⁸⁹ A great many names used by Muslims in Australia were fabricated as many had jumped ship. Most only had one name, such as Khan, Deen, Ali, Abdulla, Ahmed. Some of these names were brother’s or father’s names as usually the Muslims were known, for example, as Ali son of Akbar son of Deen etc. They made up names for officials requiring surnames for tickets for passage on ships and to complete forms for the Certificate of Exemption to the Dictation Test and other official papers in Australia. Many name spellings were altered during this process and also by ignorant journalists in news reports, so one man may have his name recorded with variant spellings.

⁹⁰ Munshi Goolam Mahomed was the name of an Imam in Bendigo; he would have stayed in one of the boarding houses that had a Prayer Room. Cf. *Bendigo Advertiser*, 17 February 1905; *Victorian Police Gazette*, 26 May 1908.

theophoric name meaning ‘servant of god’ and Esson has him come from Kashmir and speak Hindustani. ‘Ram Chandra’ is also problematic: in his script, Esson gives his birth place as ‘Bambai’ [Bombay], but the name Ram [Ramsamy] Chandra is a Hindu name; derivative of Calcutta, East Bengal. It is inexplicable that a Hindu would be staying in a Muslim Prayer house and Esson have him say ‘I go Mecca next year’ makes no sense. There were very few Hindus in Australia at this time as they were reluctant to travel over water on religious grounds, and most Indians identifying as Hindus were in fact Sikhs and Muslims, and others were referred to as Afghans.

While we need to take into account the prevailing ‘White Australia’ racist standards—propagated in the literary world by *The Bulletin* agenda—Esson’s unfortunate transcription of crucial foreign words need to be noted: for example, he uses the Hindi expression *Pak jagah!* (to refer to ‘The Sacred Place’), the literal translation of which is ‘culinary place’ or kitchen. The accepted and more commonly used expression is *Paak Jaga*: *Paak* meaning ‘pure/clean’; *Jaga* meaning ‘place.’ A Mosque in which people gather for pray or a ‘prayer room’ is a pure place or a sacred place; the pray room would be *Paak Jaga*. The cities and regions mentioned were all visited by Esson on his Indian trip.

On paper, Esson’s stage directions paint a vivid picture of the hawkers’ hovel:

Whitewashed walls, stained and dilapidated. Floor devoid of any covering. A fireplace, rather dirty, with oven. On the floor a bed made of some rugs, two or three chairs, a gin case etc. Lying on floor, a big hawker’s bundle, tied up at the corners.

But, as there is no direct reference to the setting in the newspaper responses to the performance, it is unlikely that the design was fully realised on the makeshift stage at the Turn Verein. There was no mention either of the spectacle—if it was plotted into the live action on stage—of Akbar Ahmad cooking chapattis at the oven near the fireplace as the curtain rises; the aroma of the flatbread on the griddle, accompanied by the smoke of the narghiles enjoyed by Ram Chandra and Abdulla reclining on their beds could have been theatrically alluring if exploited.

Esson also presents his Indian characters—an unconventional and provocative spectacle in itself—dressed in ‘shabby and shoddy’ European clothes, the only obvious reference to their culture is that they all wear turbans (red, white and pink; there is no green turban, as none of the men have yet travelled to Mecca we are told) except for Said Shah Shereef who sports a fez, an indication of his high caste status. Notwithstanding an occasional Arabic, Hindi, Urdu or Hindustani interjection,

Esson makes no real attempt to portray an Indian dialect or idiom in the dialogue (apart from Abdulla's slight grammatical issue with 'articles'), and an obvious formality in the language and interaction.

There were few literary responses to the published version of *The Sacred Place*. The Melbourne *Leader*, on one hand, thought it 'a humorous representation of the squabbles of Indian hawkers.'⁹¹ Bernard O'Dowd, however, provided the first extended analysis in his review in *The Socialist*, and thought it 'the best of the three [published] plays from the purely dramatic point of view,' but suspected that he had been influenced because he had seen performances of the other two and it had 'not as yet stood that crucial test for this class of work.'

... The scene is laid in the little Asia in the slums of Melbourne, and the revelation of a law within a law ... All the characters, except the interesting but not absolutely necessary slum clergyman, and the well-drawn constable, are Mohammedans. The Sacred Place is a mosque, with the *Koran* on the altar in a locked room off the hawker's living room. The procedure is strangely reminiscent of the old European trials by ordeal, and the author follows his practice in the other plays of using practically no word or phrase that has not been taken actually from the lips of our local Indian hawkers and merchants. The sincerity of the belief of all, even that of the guilty creditor-merchant in the truth of their religion, and the sacredness of the place of judgment, is singularly impressive ...

O'Dowd found the play's 'indirect criticism of both the genuineness and the effectiveness of Christian beliefs in Australians, as compared with that of Mohammedanism,' particularly impressive but was critical of some of Esson's dialogue in 'Hindoo or something' remained untranslated. Otherwise, he suggested to his *Socialist* readers, that based on the play, they 'might do worse than get in touch with the finer types of Asiatic sojourners in Australia ... with a view both to getting more of them into our movement, and to ultimate correspondence and friendly cooperation with advanced bodies of political and economic thinkers in their countries.'⁹²

The Sacred Place, 'a single scene by Mr Esson was interesting if slight,' was the reaction of Moore's own newspaper *The Herald* to the staged performance:

If Mr Esson had reversed the closing incident—if he had made the cheating merchant brazenly take the money and leave the poor pious Afghan with his faith in

⁹¹ 17 February 1912

⁹² *The Socialist*, 12 January 1912

vain, it would have really been a dramatic close. As it was it was an interesting trifle, carefully played by the amateurs who took part.⁹³

The adjective ‘slight’ recurred in the reviews; ‘there was no evidence of intense culture in dramatic art, but the producers had put honest work into their patches’⁹⁴; and there were complaints about the amateurish production with an ‘excessive amount of very obvious prompting.’ While *The Weekly Times* thought that Esson was ‘undoubtedly one of the most promising of Australian dramatists’ their critic found *The Sacred Place* ‘not by any means his best work.’

It is but an incident—not a very dramatic or even very interesting incident—and the author relies too much upon creating an atmosphere, a task which requires not only careful craftsmanship, but better staging and acting than is possible. As a rule, in an amateur production.⁹⁵

The Sacred Place was ‘most original in its subject matter,’ wrote *Punch*, ‘if perhaps a little weak in dialogue. It is a short little sketch rather than a play, its theme being the reverence shown by even the most depraved rogue of Mohammedan faith for the holy *Koran*.’⁹⁶ The play was virtually dismissed by *The Age*: ‘*The Sacred Place* hardly showed [Louis Esson] at his best, though individual passages were not without merit.’⁹⁷ *The Bulletin* noted that it was an adaptation of his *Lone Hand* story but could only muster that it was ‘fairly effective ... in its amateurish presentation.’⁹⁸ *The Argus* responded to the theme of ‘righteousness and dishonesty on the part of two Indian hawkers in conflict,’ and appeared to enjoy the ‘dash of Oriental colour ... given to the scene by turbans of the faithful.’ They also noted that the author was called and cheered for his work’ at the curtain.⁹⁹

There was no other production of the play staged during Esson’s lifetime (nor since), but *The Sacred Place* was broadcast on ABC radio on 7 April 1938; it was produced by Lawrence H Cecil (a senior producer for the ABC).

⁹³ *The Melbourne Herald*, 16 May 1912

⁹⁴ *The Bulletin*, 23 May 1912

⁹⁵ *The Weekly Times*, 25 May 1912

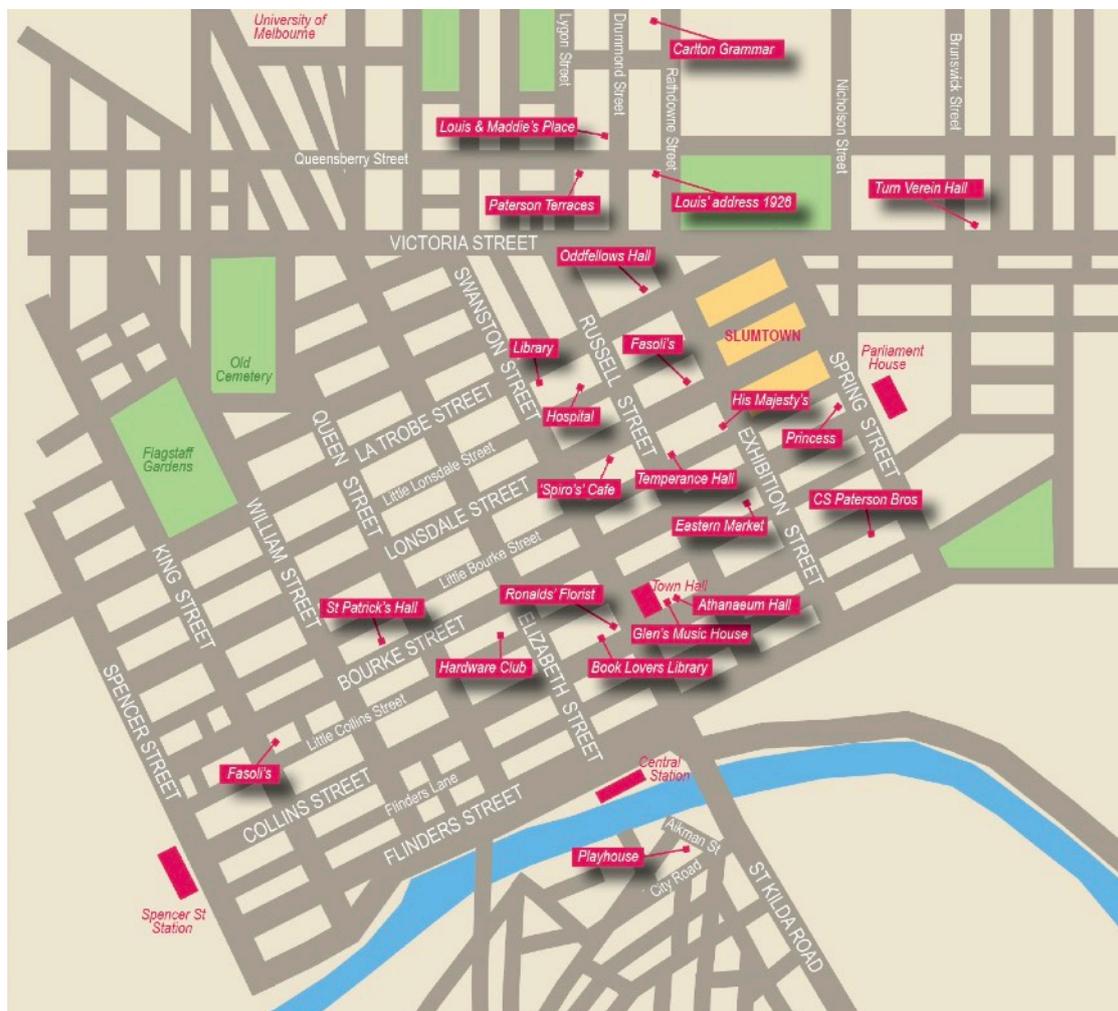
⁹⁶ *Punch*, 23 May 1912

⁹⁷ *The Age*, 16 May, 1912

⁹⁸ *The Bulletin*, 23 May 1912

⁹⁹ *The Argus*, 16 May, 1912

Following the opening performance, Moore announced his departure for London and ‘in the presence of an audience—[including the Prime Minister Mr Fisher]—that almost completely filled the building,’ he expressed his ‘gratitude for the support given to this enterprise.’



Locations in Melbourne pertinent to Louis Esson's life and career.

A farewell ‘smoke social’ to Moore was held at Sargent’s Elizabeth Street cafe on Saturday 18 May; Bernard O’Dowd responded to the toast of Moore’s contribution to Literature and Louis Esson to that of Local Drama.

With Moore’s departure, Esson also appeared to relinquish the Slumtown subject matter following the production of *The Sacred Place* (apart from a single poem ‘Cut-Throat Alley’ published in *The Bulletin* in 1914) preferring to concentrate on either the urban world of politics (*The Time is Not Yet Ripe*), or ‘the Australian bush’ that he introduced in *Dead Timber* (his second production with Bill Moore).

Inexplicably, however, Esson returned to Slumtown twenty-five years later with his four act play *The Bride of Gospel Place*. It would be his Swanson, at his last ‘Australian Drama Night,’ the subject matter a coincidental bookend to his career as a playwright.

— CHAPTER THREE —

The Repertory Theatre

The object of the Repertory movement was to bring back art, or if that were impossible, at least honesty into the modern theatre.

Louis Esson, 'Something with a Cow in it', *The Bulletin*, 5 November 1914

While the Provincial movement failed to gain traction with Moore's initiative, audiences in Australia were instead increasingly intrigued by the new European Modernist drama and sought an alternative theatrical experience outside the boulevard theatre dominated by musical comedy and the latest 'crowd pleaser' from London's West End or Broadway—the warehouse for local commercial producers like JC Williamson. Annie Horniman's (1860-1937) Repertory Theatre model—exercised at both the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and her own Gaiety Theatre in Manchester—accompanied by the 'national municipal theatre' discourse in London, began to appeal to a few key players in Australia interested to provide a more intimate, politically aware and verist style of theatrical entertainment.

The Repertory Theatre

The repertory theatre system—where a company of actors (usually shareholders) presents a performance-ready repertoire of plays in rotation (on alternative days)—has existed since Renaissance-era London. It was usual for an Elizabethan company, for example, to perform in their own venue; William Shakespeare's company The King's Men [formerly the Lord Chamberlain's Men] performed at the Globe Theatre. The system was in vogue in England until the theatres closed in 1642. The repertory structure migrated to the United States in the early 19th century, and the term 'stock company' was used to distinguish the permanent groups¹—established in New York, Philadelphia and Boston—from the touring companies. By the end of the century, these metropolitan companies diminished in favour of the larger commercial producer (who toured nationally).²

¹ 'Stock Company' in US usage was 'a company whose ownership is divided into shares [stock] that can be bought and sold.'

² For a detailed account of the movement in England see Sheila Goodie, *Annie Horseman: A Pioneer in the Theatre* Amazon (2013); Alasdair F Cameron, *The Repertory Theatre Movement, 1907-1917*, University of Warwick (1983); G Rowell & Tony Jackson, *The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain*, Cambridge University Press (1984). A comprehensive history may be found in Frances H Jewett, *The Repertory Theatre Idea*, Legare Street Press (2023)

Australia first heard of the attempt to try and revive what was now referred to as ‘the repertory theatre’ in 1901 when it was reported that both the United States of America and England were reviving the concept.

The theoretical merits of a repertoire theatre cannot be successfully gainsaid. Once its practicability is understood it will be established, if not in Chicago, in New York; if not in New York, in London; if not by endowment, by some far-sighted and hard-headed manager. It will not drive out actor-managers in England or box office worshipping managers in America. It will not even end the long run.³

The ‘hard-headed manager’ that took up the provocation in London appeared to be Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905) the sole lessee of the Lyceum Theatre (concurrently he was Rede Lecturer at the University of Cambridge). Following a performance of *Coriolanus* (in 1901) Irving stepped before the curtain and addressed his audience:

In addition to *Coriolanus* we have presented some eight or nine plays which have won your favour in past years, and your acclamations have tempted me to believe that hoary age has not settled upon any of them yet. Certainly you have give no sign of satiety, and I venture to think that, for some weeks at least, the Lyceum has approximated to that ideal which is called the repertory theatre. Next April, when we look forward to the honour of appearing before you again, I intend to produce another play from our repertory which enjoyed no little fortune on this stage, and a play which I hope will be welcome again—the play of *Faust*.⁴

Soon Irving’s musings became enmeshed with concept of a Municipal Theatre, along the lines of actor Charles Carrington’s ‘aspiration’ that England ‘may one day possess a theatre, not entirely conducted upon mercenary principles.’

In Germany ... the provision of amusement and recreation for all is regarded as one of the obvious duties of a municipality, and the theatre is the best method of supporting them.⁵

³ The *Chicago Tribune*, quoted in *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 10 August 1901

⁴ *Evening Journal* (Adelaide), 7 September 1901

⁵ *The Age*, 4 October 1902

The discussion was galvanised in 1903 with the establishment of the Stage Society in London, (formed on the lines of the Théâtre-Libre⁶ in Paris). The Society's agenda was 'to devote itself to the production of high-class literary plays, either British or foreign, which, by their peculiar construction or lack of dramatic convention, do not recommend themselves for performance in an ordinary repertory theatre.'⁷ This venture was quickly followed by playwright Jerome K Jerome's announcement that he planned to open a repertory theatre in the Tottenham Court Road. As referenced in Sydney's *Referee*:

As art does not appeal to the general public, [Jerome] thinks that a stock company bound together by enthusiasm might revive the drama without competing with the actor who has a motor car and a wife whom duchesses want to visit. ... Theatres, in [Jerome's] opinion, are kept open to make money by following the public whim, and—as a business—no broker can suggest a better enterprise.⁸

The discourse was complicated further, when the idea of a 'National Theatre'—a larger scale 'Municipal [or subsidised] Theatre'—began to gain traction in England and was supported by 'most of the leading dramatists,' including JM Barrie (who expressed 'strong views on the matter'). The English Government issued a statement which stated that 'in every capital in Europe, some form of provision or subsidy is made for the drama, has not been without effect.' The argument devolved into a discussion about a National Theatre *building*. Barrie responded: 'The poor, little over-dressed doll of the stage is very unwell, and in a miserable way, and it may be necessary to give the order for the coffin.' But he went on to say that he had 'a passionate belief in a repertory theatre, and did not believe that anything (dramatically) would be done in England, until it was established.'⁹

The argument was still raging two years later, following the death of Henry Irving (the previous year). There was a proposal put forward by the West End theatre producers committee—chaired by John Hare of the Garrick Theatre—that a statue be erected in the late actor's honour. The London authorities offered the choice of the best sites in London (and £3,000 to cover the costs). 'Nothing could be nobler,' Hare went on the offensive, 'than to found a National Theatre in memory of Henry

⁶ Théâtre-Libre was a private theatre founded by André Antoine in 1887; its focus was theatrical realism, anecdotally much influencing novelist Émile Zola's naturalism,

⁷ *The West Australian*, 6 June 1903

⁸ *Referee*, 10 February 1904

⁹ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 20 April 1904

Irving; but it is impracticable, because it would require half a million of money. The public would not support or subscribe to it.’¹⁰

Meanwhile, through her friend, actress and producer Florence Farr, English theatre patron Annie Horniman came into the orbit of Irish playwright WB Yeats.¹¹ In 1903 he convinced her to join him in Dublin to support his Irish National Theatre Society. She was instrumental in the foundation of the Abbey Theatre. Esson missed an introduction to Horniman as she had already returned to England when he arrived for the opening of the Irish repertory theatre in December 1904. While she continued to support the Abbey financially for some years, in 1908 she purchased and renovated a theatre in Manchester, The Gaiety Theatre, that was launched—as Britain’s first regional repertory theatre—with Charles McEvoy’s *When the Devil Was Ill* on 7 September the same year. Horniman’s was not a stock repertory system; instead of multiple rotations of repertoire, a variety of plays were introduced with each presented over successive days (this came to be known as ‘weekly repertory’ or ‘weekly rep’). The enterprise, nonetheless, earned Horniman the accolade of ‘the founder of the modern repertory theatre.’

Repertory Theatre in Australia

I hold that the theatre is a public need; that its status is of vital concern to the community; and that in Australia at present it is not fulfilling its functions.

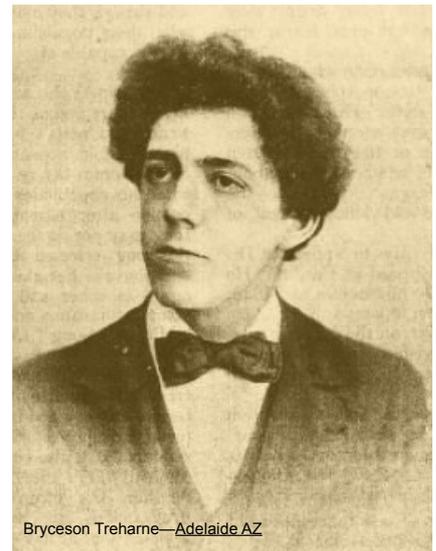
Bryceson Treherne (*BookFellow*, 1 February 1912)

Welsh composer Bryceson Treharne (1879-1948) was a graduate of London’s Royal College of Music (1899) (where his class mates included Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams). He taught piano at University College of Wales (Aberystwyth) for a short period before taking up a similar posting at Elder Conservatorium of Music, University of Adelaide, South Australia from 1901. Once established in the academy, as part of his instrumental program, Treharne—who was in his late twenties—instituted a student group that met regularly to discuss contemporary European drama. After a few months it was decided to stage two one-act plays: WB Yeats’s ‘theatrical lament

¹⁰ *The People*, 23 December 1906 p.6

¹¹ Self-described as ‘a middle-aged, middle-class, suburban, dissenting spinster,’ Horniman worked as secretary for WB Yeats and, a great champion of his work, funded a repertory season at London’s Avenue Theatre in 1894. Supporting Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, she was instrumental in re-fitting an old Mechanics Institute (and the adjacent City Morgue) in Dublin that opened as the Abbey Theatre on 27 December 1904. In 1908, Horniman purchased and refurbished The Gaiety Theatre, a former music hall in her hometown of Manchester, England, and turned it into England’s first repertory theatre. Horniman had financially back Farr’s season at the Avenue Theatre, London that presented Yeats’s *The Land of Heart’s Desire* and the première of Bernard Shaw’s *Arms and the Man* (1894).

on age and thwarted aspirations,' *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894)¹², and George Bernard Shaw's *The Man of Destiny* (1897). Treharne railed against the prevailing trends in melodrama, insisting that 'Ibsen and Shaw would clean the air of ignorance.' The selection also recalled Florence Farr's preoccupations a decade earlier in England.



Simply known as 'Bryceson Treharne's Class' at this time, both plays were presented with a student cast—under Treharne's direction—on Thursday 24 September, 1908 in the North Hall at 'The Con.' The experiment was repeated again the following year when JM Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* and Yeats's verse play *Deirdre* played at the Lyric Club in Pirie Street, Adelaide on 17 August, 1909. Treharne composed music for *Deirdre* and, according to the *Adelaide Advertiser*¹³, 'all the performers acquitted themselves creditably.' By December it was proposed that in the following year—with 'keen support from the community inspired [to see Treharne's Class] stage more ambitious plays'—'the movement shall be merged into an organisation to be known as "The Adelaide Literary Theatre".'

In a circular note which Mr Treharne has issued he mentions that the object of [The Adelaide Literary Theatre] is to make the public acquainted with various plays which in the ordinary course of events they have little opportunity of seeing or hearing—poetic and symbolic dramas, plays bearing directly on the actual problems and conditions of life, plays of national significance, and 'plays by Australian writers, whom we hope to encourage in their dramatic efforts by bringing their works before the public.'¹⁴

True to his word, Treharne's Adelaide Literary Theatre—with 500 subscribers—staged 'the first Australian play to be presented in Adelaide' [sic] the following year.¹⁵ *The Wasters*, a domestic drama by New Zealand born Australian playwright Arthur H Adams (1872-1936) was presented—on a double bill with Strindberg's *The Stronger Woman*—at Unley Town Hall on 26 August 1910. With nods to Bernard Shaw and Pinero, *The Wasters* concerns a big Sydney shopkeeper, John

¹² 'The Land of Hearts Desire', [The Project Gutenberg](#) 2005

¹³ 18 August 1909

¹⁴ *The Adelaide Advertiser*, 6 December 1909

¹⁵ This was clearly an advertising pitch, and should have been amended to 'the first post-Federation—or twentieth century—play to be presented in Adelaide.' George Darrell's adaptation of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, for example, played at the Theatre Royal in Adelaide in October 1888.

Dangar, whose son, forced unwillingly into the business, embezzles £200. The accountant, Clibborn, discovers this and demands a partnership as the price for his silence. Dangar refuses to be blackmailed. Then Dangar's wife desperately involves herself to save her son (in reality—curtesy of 'an indiscretion' twenty years ago—Clibborn's own). 'That is all the play,' *The Bulletin*¹⁶ reported, 'It might end in a half a dozen ways. It really finishes with a discourse by ... a Cayley-Drummle-like¹⁷ friend of the family. He talks much worldly good sense, and convinces Dangar that, failing the best—wife or anything else—it is well to stick to the second best.' The reviewer thought 'the dialogue was strong, but needs cutting,' and reported that Arthur Adams (who 'made a flying visit to see the play produced') was 'fortunate in his interpreters for the most part.'¹⁸ Overall however, while acknowledging that 'a scene in the trying-on room for underskirts in the Dangar emporium' would 'make it popular,' they thought the play's 'gloomy theme is against it.'¹⁹

When Treharne returned to England in 1911 *The Bulletin* hailed him as 'the one vital force in the theatrical world of Australia—not unworthy of being bracketed with Granville Barker, and Miss Horniman.' The Red Page article noted that 'since the inception of the movement, Treharne had produced 73 plays, not more than half a dozen of which have been seen on any other stage in Australia. And,' they emphasised, 'without financial loss. He has demonstrated that the repertory idea, if properly managed, does and will flourish in this continent.' When pressed on the production of Australian authors, Treharne remarked:

The section devoted to plays by Australian authors has not been represented as well as I would have liked, but we have succeeded in giving a hearing to a certain number of works which, but for our efforts would perhaps still be lying on the shelves of their respective authors. These attempts at the creation of an Australian national drama will, I hope, be the precursors of many more from the same pens, and from

¹⁶ 8 September 1910

¹⁷ Kayley Drummle is a character in Arthur Wing Pinero's play *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*.

¹⁸ Adams was a journalist, poet and playwright who began his career in his native New Zealand but lived his life in Australia. Having abandoned the law he arrived in Sydney in 1898 and took up a position as private secretary to entrepreneur JC Williamson. He was then a foreign correspondent (in China) for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and, returning to Australia in 1906, replaced AG Stephens as editor of *The Bulletin* 'Red Page' until 1909, at which time he succeeded Frank Fox as editor of *The Lone Hand*, later rejoining *The Bulletin*. Adams's publishing history to this time included *Maoriland, and Other Verses* (1899); prose pieces *The Nazarene: A study of Man* (1902), *Tussock Land* (1904) and *London Streets* (1906); the plays *Galahad Jones* and *The Tame Cat* (both in 1910); his Maori opera, *Tapu* (music by Alfred Hill) was supported and staged by JC Williamson Ltd in 1904. His most successful play *Mrs Pretty and the Premier* was staged by Gregan McMahon in Melbourne (1914) and the following year received its international premiere in Manchester in a production by theatre manager Arthur Bouchier (1863–1927); it was 'well received' when presented at His Majesty's Theatre in London's Haymarket in February 1916.

¹⁹ Treharne returned to Europe (Berlin) in 1912, where he reputedly worked with the modernist director and scenographer Edward Gordon Craig. During the War he was detained at Lindau and Ruhleben prison camps. After the War he went to America and later Canada. He died in Long Island in 1948, survived by his wife Maud and a son. In 1915, Treharne's Adelaide Literary Theatre changed its name to Adelaide Repertory Theatre.

the pens of other writers who may be encouraged to adopt the dramatic form as an outlet for their literary inspirations.²⁰

Fortunately, Treherne was able to pass the baton of his antipodean concept of a repertory movement onto someone who would consolidate his—and Leon Brodzky’s—aspirations.

Early in 1911, 'the popular young actor' Gregan McMahon (1874-1941) returned to Melbourne to play in the Allan Hamilton Comedy Company²¹ revival of of Richard Ganthony's comedy *A Message from Mars* (it opens at the Princess's Theatre on 29 March). McMahon had been playing the leading role of Horace Parker on and off since its Australian premiere in 1902 (originally with the Hawtrey Comedy Company). The season closed on Friday 3 February and, in a surprise move for an actor seemingly at the top of his game—less than a decade into his commercial performance career—he made the decision to establish a repertory company. On 15 April 1911 the following par appeared in *The Argus*:

Gregan McMahon notifies by advertisement that rooms have been secured for the work of students and associates of the Melbourne Repertory Theatre at Oxford Chambers, Bourke Street. It is intended to produce plays of high class literary merit.²²

McMahon was born and educated in Sydney. He achieve first-class honours in classics at his matriculation exams and attended the University of Sydney (gaining a reputation as an amateur actor), and graduated with a BA in 1896. His subsequent career in the law was short-lived, and in May 1900 he was invited by Robert Brough to join his Comedy Company. His debut performance was as the waiter in Arthur Henry Jones's *The Liars* at the Opera House in Brisbane on 5 June 1900. He toured India and China in 1901, before returning to Australia to play in *A Message from Mars* and *Oh! Mr Pennilove* for the Hawtrey Company in 1902. McMahon played over 700



Gregan McMahon—06NLA

²⁰ *The Bulletin* (Red Page), 28 December 1911

²¹ After a number of years as lessee of the Corinthian Theatre, Calcutta, India, Allan Hamilton arrived in Australia in 1886 just as Robert Brough and Dion G Boucicault were starting their partnership as lessees of the Criterion Theatre (Sydney) and Bijou Theatre (Melbourne). He accepted the position of general manger, and, after the departure of Boucicault in 1896, remained as business manager for Brough until his death in 1906. Subsequently he became business manager for the popular combination of actors Herbert Flemming and Beatrice Day. After Flemming's death in 1908, Hamilton became lessee and manager of the Palace Theatre (Sydney) and formed the Hamilton Dramatic Company. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July 1926)

²² *The Argus*, 15 April 1911

performances of *A Message from Mars* over the next ten years. What may be significant to McMahon's choice to move into producing was a twelve month engagement with JC Williamson's Dramatic Company in Major W P Drury and Leo Trevor's drama *The Flag Lieutenant*; he played the small but noteworthy role of the telegraph officer. While he recognised that Williamson remained unconvinced about the 'new intellectual drama' and the 'growing awareness of the theatre's potential as an instrument of public enlightenment and social reform,' McMahon admired Williamson's commercial and entrepreneurial acumen. 'Well,' Williamson told AG Stephens²³, 'I don't mind telling you as an old actor, that I like heart plays. I like human interest ... I'm not a great admirer of Ibsen ... I'm with the public: I believe in the drama of emotion rather than the drama of ideas.' Williamson was in constant conflict with George Bernard Shaw, but still saw the commercial opportunities in his work; he also bickered with Henry Arthur Jones that he 'had fallen into the same error of disregarding the public taste.' Williamson did admire John Galsworthy and had secured the Australian rights to *Strife* in 1909, but a production failed to materialise in his lifetime (it was Gregan McMahon who gave its local premiere five years later).

McMahon, however, did see value in 'the drama of ideas' and, inspired by both the JE Vedrenne and Harley Granville-Barker seasons at the Royal Court in London, and the growing English repertory movement (especially Annie Horniman's Repertory Theatre Company in Manchester) he founded his Melbourne Repertory Theatre Company to give European modernist plays a suitable airing 'down under.' His intention was to offer the literary—or 'art'—theatre of Shaw, Chekhov, John Galsworthy, Granville-Barker and Ibsen as an alternative to the melodrama, pantomime, burlesque and musical comedy favoured by Williamson and the commercial managements. Here at last was a proactive and considered response to Leon Brodsky's clarion call.

To McMahon, however, his repertory proposal—The Melbourne Repertory Theatre Company (MRTC)—was more than an 'anti-commercial theatre' enterprise.

A Repertory Theatre ... is a theatre with a list, a program, a repertoire of plays—revivals or experiments—as distinguished from the theatre which endeavours to get a succession of long-run pieces, and only changes the bill when compelled by the box-office or other commercial circumstances. The Comédie Française is virtually a Repertory theatre. It does not object to making the necessary money, but it exists characteristically to create art.

High standards mean short runs and changed programs. Changed programs—since excellent new plays are not always obtainable; or since excellent old plays are still attractive—mean a list, a repertoire, reliance on the classics of drama. Smaller

²³ *The Argus*, 18 December 1909

theatres in Paris, such as the Théâtre Antoine—or, in England, such as the [Manchester] Repertory—have taken deliberately the road of intelligent novelty. Gradually they build a repertoire of one-night or one-week plays about the theatre and the company.²⁴

It was McMahon's intention to present three seasons annually, staging at least two new plays and a revival every season. Audience development would be a major focus for his manager Leo D'Chateau [Leo Castle].²⁵

The MRTC launched on Monday 26 June 1911 with RB Sheridan's *The Critic* (Act Two) and St John Hankin's middle-class comedy *The Two Mr Wetherbys* (a revival); followed on Thursday 29 June by the Australian premiere of Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*; the program repeated the following week. The four nights at the Turn Verein Hall quickly sold out and the response to McMahon's initiative was very positive, despite some physical production issues:

The restricted and box-like formation of the Turn Verein stage militated against free movement and distinct hearing and the lighting was not of sufficient power to give dramatic performances their full value. But notwithstanding all these disadvantages the success of the first season may be set down as quite remarkable.

McMahon built a stable of actors from the amateur ranks; he found some, but not all, amongst the cohort of Moore's Australian Drama Nights. He also, wisely, kept the casts for each play discrete during his first season (in later seasons some took on multiple roles). *The Bulletin* (6 July 1911) praised 'the bright performances' in *The Critic*, and singled out McMahon (in the part of Richard Wetherby), GH Crosby and Mary Hungerford for acting honours in Hankin's 'amiable essay in domestic comedy' *The Two Mr Wetherbys*. '*Borkman* is poignantly interesting,' *The Bulletin* went on,

and [Dr Frank] Norris played the character with strength and force. Ella Rentheim received sympathetic treatment from Miss Maud Joliffe and Miss René Tanswell gave good expression to the cold egomania of Mrs Borkman. J Fowler was oddly attractive as Vilhelm Foldal; and, concerning Miss Moore as Mrs Wilton, it is a sort

²⁴ AG Stephens, 'The Repertory Theatre in Australis: an interview with Gregan McMahon', *Home: an Australian quarterly*, 21 June 1923

²⁵ Little biographical detail is known of 'D'Chateau' [a stage name; (*French*) 'castle']. He was a 'comedian and character actor,' working with both William Anderson's Company—a colleague of Edmund Duggan—and The Gill Company. In 1909 he established a School of Acting 'for elocution and dramatic study' in Wellington, New Zealand. By 1910 he moved into management, representing Clarke and Meynell's Company. Concurrently D'Chateau managed The Dandies (for Edward Branscombe).

of compliment to say that the difference between her reading of the part and the part itself was possibly all the difference between a lady and a female.

McMahon felt sufficiently buoyed by this response to announce his second MRTC season for September.

The future seems full of hope. About September, the management promises another season, with a selection made from Bernard Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*, Miss Barker's *Chairs*. Mr Galsworthy's *Justice*, Mr Granville Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance*, Coleman's *The Poor Gentleman* and Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*.²⁶

Young *Bulletin* poet and journalist (later playwright) Harrison Owen (1890-1966)²⁷, seemingly 'in the know,' also flagged (in August) both McMahon's intention to run 'an Australian Night' in December [suggesting that he might already have been in discussion with William Moore about a joint season] and that he was also looking for Australian plays.

Gregan McMahon intends running an Australian Night, in connection with his Repertory Theatre, in December. A couple of brain-children, whose parentage is blushful acknowledged by Louis Esson and Blamire Young, will crave attention, and one of Billy Moore's pieces may be revived. McMahon is anxiously awaiting the arrival of a first class Australian drama, but so far he has not heard the thud in his letter-box.²⁸

By September, McMahon had changed his mind on repertoire and the Second MRTC season, again at the Turn Verein Hall, opened on 25 September with George Bernard Shaw's *Candida* and, as a curtain raiser, *Makeshifts* by Gertrude Robins. In what must have been a demanding and logistically challenging season, the following week he also staged *The Revolt* [*La Révolte*] by the French symbolist Villiers de l'Isle Adam, and George Calderon's *The Fountain*; and the week after that Harley Granville-Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance*; each production given two performances.

Makeshifts is 'a lower middle class comedy' that was distinguished by a performance by McMahon himself, who gave 'one of his distinctive, clear-cut character sketches' as Smythe 'the selfish, underbred, vulgar bounder' who flirts with two hapless young 'working girls.' Gertrude

²⁶ *The Argus*, 7 July 1911

²⁷ Owen replaced William Moore as the drama critic of the Melbourne *Herald* (under the editor-in chief JE Davidson). In 1915, Owen, with Vance Palmer, EJ Brady and Louis Esson, was instrumental in founding the short-lived Australian Authors' and Writers' Guild, an 'earnest group of literary trade unionists,' which sought to limit the influx of syndicated stories and articles from overseas. ('Harrison Owen', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*—adb.anu.edu.au/biography/owen-albert-john-harrison-7935)

²⁸ Harrison O[wen]., *The Bulletin*, 3 August 1911

Louisa Robins (aka Mrs Charles Dawson) (1880-1917) was an English actress and dramatist. She acted in Wilson Barrett's repertory company, amongst others, and her early plays were produced by Annie Horniman (who presented *Makeshifts* on tour in the United States of America). *Table Talk*²⁹ thought the play 'very well acted by Miss Robina A Ward and Miss Isabel Handley [as Caroline and Dolly Parker] ... Mr Kenneth Cross [as the nervous, shy chemist's assistant, Mr Thompson]' along with McMahon.

Bernard Shaw's comedy *Candida* was written in 1894 and first published in 1898, as part of his *Plays Pleasant*. It concerns a Christian socialist preacher, the Reverend Morell. When an impressionable young poet, Eugene Marchbanks, is invited into the household by his wife, Candida, a romantic triangle ensues (a parody of courtly love). *Table Talk* worried that it was

a very big thing for amateurs—nay, even for the ordinary actor and actress—to attempt to interpret, for it is nothing if not subtle and suggestive. It must have been particularly difficult to cast the piece, too, as the interpretation of each character in it calls for special and matured qualities; therefore, it was not surprising that the portrayal on Monday left something to be desired—the wonder it is that it was as good as it was. It did not fail so much on the technical side as in subtlety.³⁰

The production featured Maud Grantham, who played the eponymous role; Lyall Christian gave a 'continuously lachrymose and childish' Eugene; with much interest paid to the appearance of poet (and long-term literary critic for *The Herald*) Archibald T Strong as the clergyman (who 'looked the part ... admirably'). Filling out the cast was Dorothy Hiscock, George Kirk and Tom Skewes as Mr Burges (who 'gave quite a clever piece of character work'). *The Herald*³¹ concluded that 'the interpretation ... provided an enjoyable evening's entertainment.'

Following McMahon's production of *Candida*, he and Shaw became regular correspondents. Shaw often publicly thanked McMahon for the production of his plays in Australia. When a London journalist asked Shaw in 1925 for his impressions of Australia he responded 'I have never heard of anyone in Australia except Gregan McMahon. My impressions of Australia are Gregan McMahon and sheep.'³²

²⁹ [28 September 1911](#)

³⁰ [28 September 1911](#)

³¹ [26 September 1911](#)

³² *The Herald (Melbourne)*, [11 Jan 1936](#)

The next program provided two literary plays that were provocative both in form and content. August Villiers de l'Isle-Adam—a close friend of Stéphane Mallarmé—was influenced by the romantic theatre of Victor Hugo and Goethe. His one act 'bourgeois drama' *The Revolt* (a 'sombre curtain-raiser') explores the relationship of banker Félix—preoccupied by balance sheets and investments—and his wife Élisabeth who inexplicably announces her intention to leave the marriage. *The Age*³³ thought Rene Tanswell 'acted the Ibsenish heroine with a great deal of spirit and made a clear cut figure of her,' but as Félix, JH Mitchell, 'though his conception of the part was sound, might have spoken his lines more clearly.'

A Russophile, George Leslie Calderon (1868–1915) was an English writer, the first person to translate and successfully direct Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in English (Glasgow, 1909). From 1908 he had also worked with the leaders of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League—whose aims were to oppose women being granted the parliamentary franchise! His three-act comedy *The Fountain* was considered a 'curiosity' by *The Herald*. 'It has the bare thread of a plot, and yet it is alive with action from the start.'³⁴ Maud Joliffe played an impetuous philanthropist who fails in her attempt to reform the denizens of the East End; Donald Alsop played her husband; Isabel Handley the Clergyman's wife, and a large supporting cast (including JB Cussen, Jack Fowler, Betty Landon, Ilma Barnes and Rubina Ward) 'contributed clever sketches of slum types.'

Harley Granville-Barker's five-act 'sociological' comedy *The Voyage Inheritance*, 'presented with earnestness and sincerity,' was a huge undertaking but it was the 'hit' of the season. The theme of embezzlement, financial fraud and family had be explored in Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*, but full houses and glowing reviews justified its inclusion in the season. The large cast also showcased the 'ensemble' of (still mostly amateur) actors gathered around McMahon and clearly improving their skills through their engagement.

The cast is a long and capable one. Firstly, there is the sophisticated old Voyagey, excellently played by Mr Ernest J Brown; and the same may be said of Mr Frank Bertram's Edward Voyagey. Then there is George Booth Voyagey's life-long crony, whose money he has also embezzled; and of him Mr Gregan McMahon made a lifelike study. Other members of the family are Major Booth Voyagey (Mr AH Wrixon), rather a foolish soldier, who shouts at all his brothers and sisters as if they were on parade; deaf, imperturbable Mrs Voyagey (Miss Hold); Honour Voyagey, the household drudge; the spoilt younger daughter Ethel (Miss Kathleen Graham), Peacey (Mr J H Mitchell), confidential clerk who knows the Voyagey's secret and has

³³ 3 October 1911

³⁴ 3 October 1911

to be sweeter with yearly hush money; and other interesting personages enacted by Mr Kenneth Cross, J Fowler, Miss M Ward, Miss Lea Halinbourg, Miss Leonore Cross, Miss Montague, Miss McDonald, Mr JB Cussen, and Mr LJ Lewin.³⁵

One of the few dissenting voices, however, came from Harrison Owen, he did not criticise the production nor the enterprise, but in a neat dramaturgical assessment in *The Bulletin*³⁶ set out what he regarded as a fundamental concern of the new ‘modernist’ drama he’d experienced during the season.

[Barker] shows not the slightest consideration for either audience or actors. He has written five acts of talk. [*The Voysey Inheritance*] is almost destitute of action and the occasional flashes of cleverness in the dialogue do not compensate for its general dullness. Shaw would have packed the tale with clever paradoxes. Pinero would have made the plot intensely dramatic. Barker does neither. When a bloke sets out to write a play or a poem, there are certain fixed rules which, unless he is a transcendent genius, he cannot afford to ignore. ... Granville Barker has mistaken his thin jet of talent for genius and thinks that he can, in consequence, over-look the rules of the game. He may be a lot of the things his admirers claim for him, but, judged on *The Voysey Inheritance*, he is not a playwright.

McMahon then announced that his third MRTC season would consist of Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm* (three nights); *Chains* by Elizabeth Baker (three nights); and two nights of a quadruple bill of Australian short plays. ‘Having put in its infancy at the out-of-the-way Turn Verein building’ the MRTC ‘hopes to enjoy a vigorous youth-hood’ at St Patrick’s Hall, Bourke Street (opposite Oxford Chambers, and within lounging distance of the Menzies Hotel). The change of site marked by a new ‘Social Distinction’: their Excellencies the Governor General and Lady Denman would be present on of the second performance of each program (5, 9 and 14 December).

*The Bulletin*³⁷ was intrigued by Ibsen’s dramaturgy in *Rosmersholm*, opining that ‘the story of the fall of the house of Rosmer is no less gloomy that Poe’s narrative, *The Fall of the House of Usher*.’ ‘Ibsen, a surgeon skilled in the diseases of the soul and mind,’ the review continued, ‘lays his characters upon the dissecting table, and turns the X-rays of his mind upon them, and publishes their innards in a reasonable number of acts.’ It thought *Rosmersholm* a fine example of Ibsen’s

³⁵ *The Argus*, 10 October 1911

³⁶ 26 October 1911

³⁷ 21 December 1911

craftsmanship and his use of a non-linear narrative (that they referred to as ‘the retrospective method’).

[Ibsen] begins the story, not at the beginning, or even the middle, but just before the end, and the narrative wanders backwards, and perishes beautiful just previous to the commencement, amid a blaze of human vitals and burnt souls. The acting was not up to the standard of the previous Ibsen production, *John Gabriel Borkman*, nevertheless, several good character sketches were provided—notably McMahon’s Ulric Brendel.

‘Encouragement’ was also reserved for Rene Tanswell (as Rebecca West), Lawrence Harding (Rosmer) and Herbert Leigh (Pastor Kroll.)

The next play in the program was a first play by English author Elizabeth Baker (1876-1962). *Chains* is a domestic drama that concerns Charley Wilson (a city clerk) and his wife Lily who take on a lodger in their modest suburban home. The action turns on the boarder’s sudden decision to up-stumps and move to Australia to work on a cattle station. Inexplicably, Charley decides to go with him. *Chains* had premiered only eight months earlier, presented by the Play Actors Subscription Society at the Court Theatre (on Sloane Square, London). *Chains* was considered ‘a vivid picture of lower-middle-class suburban life and evokes the seething discontent under the buoyant surface of Edwardian society. The chains of the title are those of work and marriage.’³⁸ ‘The play, which is very interesting in its realism,’ reported *Table Talk*, ‘is very well written and well suited to amateurs, for so clearly are the various types and personalities drawn that then the role fits the performer, he or she has only to be natural and the play acts itself by its development, which is so true to life.’³⁹ The cast featured Don Alsop (as Charley Wilson), Maud Joliffe (his wife Lily) and Tom Skewes (as Massey), with other roles assumed by Rubina Ward (who took over from Hilda Leon at short notice), Isabel Handley, JB Cussen, Kathleen Graham, Mattison Dellroy, Leonard Egerton and Kenneth Cross. ‘The third act ... appealed so strongly that at its conclusion the curtain had to be raised many times in response to the applause.’

There is no doubt that McMahon—building on Treharne’s legacy—had changed the theatrical landscape in Melbourne, but also by general report, nationally. There was now a new sensibility in terms of dramaturgy exercised not by the professional commercial enterprise, but by an amateur movement interested to exploit the new ‘realism’ that had been sweeping through Europe since the

³⁸ Michael Billington, *Chains*—www.theguardian.com/stage/2007/nov/19/theatre1

³⁹ 14 December 1911

1870s. Australian theatre historians⁴⁰ suggest that local playwrights had to make a choice: the new modernist dramaturgy or the old and outdated melodrama. Both forms, however, were popular and equally as entertaining; local playwrights—including Esson—rather, were offered a greater variety of dramaturgical choice: should the playwright choose, form could be selected to reflect content. Esson, on the whole, however, appeared disinclined to pursue either contemporary themes nor the modernist style himself, apart from his first full length play, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, and, twenty-five years later, his final play *Lacryma Christie*.

Practically, it also can't be overlooked that this new drama exposed local actors to a very different acting technique, exercised through the playing under the guidance of the intuitive and resourceful actor/director Gregan McMahon. When Esson reviewed McMahon's third season—for *The Socialist*—while he felt the results were satisfactory, he also made the obvious point that

under Mr McMahon's direction the players have made rapid progress ... and have added to their reputation. ... Next year the acting will probably be much better. At present the tendency of the average mime is towards conventionality of method, modelled on that of some not over-brilliant professional who has visited these shores. Amateurs seldom dream of going to nature for suggestions; they go to the theatre.⁴¹

While *The Herald* obliquely referred to 'the third annual drama night devoted to the production of local plays,' there was no other media commentary that William Moore and Gregan McMahon had actually entered into a collaborative arrangement as co-producers; the MRTC appears to have simply enveloped the concept into its own programming without fanfare. As in previous Australian Drama Nights, the proceedings included a new work by William Moore, but this time all the plays were 'produced under the direction of Gregan McMahon.'

It was reported that over the previous twelve months the MRTC has 'been successful in affording the public the opportunity of studying some of the better international work of the stage, which at present there is no opportunity of seeing at the commercial theatre.' They confirmed a significant initiative:

in order to carry on the venture it is proposed to form a company, with a capital of £400⁴² in £1 shares, for the purpose of relieving Mr McMahon of some of his

⁴⁰ Notably Leslie Rees, Dennis Holloway and Julian Meyrick.

⁴¹ 22 December 1911

⁴² The equivalent of approximately \$56,000 today.

responsibility, a very heavy one when superimposed on the exacting work of acting in and producing, and it is trusted that a successful flotation will ensue.⁴³

So, moving into the new year—and buoyed by a subscription of around 400 and a reasonable cash flow—McMahon planned his 1912 season with some degree of confidence. The first season was scheduled for March at the Athenaeum Hall and included Arnold Bennett's *What the Public Wants*, and Gerhard Hauptmann's *Lonely Lives*.

British playwright, critic and novelist Arnold Bennett (1867–1931) was twenty-one when he established his literary career as a journalist and editor of periodicals in London. He was influenced by the French realists Gustave Flaubert and Honoré de Balzac. His first novel, *A Man from the North* (1898), referenced his early life in Hanley—the Staffordshire Potteries—called ‘Five Towns’ in his fiction, and used as the setting for nearly all his major novels⁴⁴. Bennett's first attempt at theatrical writing was *Cupid and Commonsense* (1908), but box-office success and acclaim came with his next, *What the Public Wants*, when produced by The Stage Society before transferring to the West End in 1909.

What the Public Wants opened in Melbourne on 16 March 1912 to ‘a crowded house, which included the vice regal party.’ The key character presented is a driven media tycoon who ‘seeks to entertain the many and influence the mighty.’⁴⁵ ‘That success was achieved,’ *The Age*⁴⁶ commented, ‘was almost entirely due to Mr McMahon himself. He took the part of Sir Charles Worgan [the tycoon] and by his well balanced acting made the character so plausible that even Sir Charles's nonchalant and businesslike proposal to his old playmate Emily Vernon—a part engagingly presented by Miss Maud Joliffe—seemed a quite natural performance.’⁴⁷

On Tuesday 19 March, MRTC gave *Lonely Lives* by Gerhardt Hauptmann (1862-1946). German playwright, poet, and novelist, Hauptmann settled in Berlin after his marriage in 1885. He took acting lessons and associated with a group of avant-garde writers who were interested in socialist ideas. He began writing for the theatre after reading Émile Zola and Ivan Turgenev. His first play, *Before Sunrise* (1889) inaugurated the naturalistic movement in modern German literature [he is now considered ‘the father of German naturalism’] and caused one of the largest scandals in

⁴³ *The Argus*, 15 December 1911

⁴⁴ *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), *Clayhanger* (1910), and *The Card* (1911)

⁴⁵ Mint Theatre Company publicity material—minttheater.org/production/what-the-public-wants

⁴⁶ 18 March 1912

⁴⁷ A week earlier, Bennett's new play *Milestones* (written with Edward Knoblauch, the author of *Kismet*), opened at the Royalty Theatre in London. It would have an astonishing run of 612 performances.

German theatre history: ‘the bourgeois audience was shocked by the frank depictions of alcoholism and sexuality.’⁴⁸

Lonely People (*Einsame Menschen*) was written in 1891 and first translated from the German into English by Mary Morrison (titled *Lonely Lives*) in 1898. The chief character Dr Vockerat is a clever and original thinker, who, in spite of a kindly feeling and certain type of love towards his wife and parents, becomes totally absorbed in his scientific work. He ultimately reaches a frenzied, morose state of mind and becomes completely estranged from all of them, at which time he grows fatally attracted to a colleague, Anna Mahr. This relationship leads to his suicide. FK Norris ‘gave an intense rendering of the unbalanced thinker ... his acting gave evidence of deep study and strong dramatic instance.’ Dorothy Hiscock gave ‘a carefully studied reading’ as Kitty Vockerat, but (according to *Table Talk*) Leah Halinbourg, as Anna Mahr, ‘was rather over-weighted [and] probably owing to nervousness her enunciation was difficult to follow. ... She had scarcely realised the possibility nor the subtlety of the part.’⁴⁹ In what appeared now to be the MRTC ensemble, Rose Seaton, Lyle Christian, T Skewes, Lenore Cross, Bertha Collins, Connie Price, Kathleen Graham and Jack Fowler filled out the cast.⁵⁰

Once the MRTC was established, however, it became clear that the quality of the locally written ‘playlets’ and sketches presented by Moore paled against the provocative themes and innovative dramaturgy of the imported modernist repertoire; the contrasts became obvious:

The latest Melbourne crop of Australian playlets which William Moore introduced at his send off were quite satisfactory ... there was no evidence of intense culture in dramatic art, but the producers had put honest work into their patches.⁵¹

The irony would not have been lost on Louis Esson who not only faced the pressure and public scrutiny of the premiere of his first full-length ‘comedy of Australian politics’ (as it was advertised), *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, scheduled for the MRTC’s fifth season, but he would also face the obvious dramaturgical comparison of being pitted against a revival of Arthur Bennett’s ‘brilliant comedy’ *What the Public Wants* (back by public demand, with McMahon again in the role of ‘the King of Yellow Journalism’) and the Australian premiere of Anton Chekhov’s *The Seagull* (in George Calderon’s translation).

⁴⁸ Olaru-Poşiar, Simona, ‘Gerhart Hauptmann’, *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*, Editura Arhipelag XX—2016 p.310

⁴⁹ 28 March 1912

⁵⁰ Hauptmann received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1912.

⁵¹ *The Bulletin*, 23 May 1912

The MRTC season opened at the Athenaeum Hall on Thursday 18 July, 1912 with ‘an excellent performance’ of *What the Public Wants*.

The Audience turned up its collective collar, forgot the prevailing (atmospheric) frost, and devoted itself to enjoyment. ... The audience was so large that it overflowed into the balcony. As regards the frocking, the fact is worth mentioning that Mr Donald Alsop changed his socks five times in the interest of Art.⁵²

The Seagull was anticipated as ‘a distinct novelty,’ and *The Bulletin* couldn’t help itself and reviewed the audience as well as the production:

The Repertory Theatre production of *The Seagull* drew a big house to the Athenaeum on Saturday night. Motors deposited heaps of expensively dressed women at the foot of the grey steps, and intellectuals, perched on eminences, remarked complacently that Melbourne is making serious efforts to improve its mind. The mummies dressed themselves in mode, everyday garb. It was rather disappointing to those who had looked forward to seeing Blamire Young’s crinoline setting.

This was the first specific mention, in any press article, of the MRTC’s production values, revealing that visual artists like Blamire Young had been enlisted to ‘design’ the settings and costumes. But it was the play itself, the dramaturgy and ‘the writer’s outlook on life,’ that drew attention when it premiered on Saturday 20 July.

The glimpse afforded by the production of *The Seagull* was striking and impressive. For many of those in the Athenaeum Hall it must have opened a new world of thought—a world that their own playwrights have rarely the discernment or the courage to tread. ... In presenting the work the MRTC scored an artistic achievement.⁵³

The Age reviewer quibbled about ‘an unevenness of characterisation’ and ‘occasionally words were slurred a little and made indistinct’ but, it concluded that ‘the general treatment of the characters was on a high level, both of intelligence and of dramatic ability,’ and the performances were ‘highly creditable all round.’ The cast included Stella Nathan (Nina), Maude Joliffe (Irene), Gerald Carr (Trigorin), Mr K Watkins (Masha), HJ Book (Constantine) with Norman Carter and Lyle Christian.

⁵² *The Bulletin*, 25 July 1912

⁵³ *The Age*, 22 July 1912

All were ‘enthusiastically recalled when the last curtain fell.’ What was a novelty in the review was the fascination with Chekhov’s dramaturgy:

It has been said of Chekhov that he cares nothing for ordinary rules of drama. And in a sense this is true. He appears to take a page of life at random, and to throw it on the stage. He is not concerned about such things as climax, or suspense, or the working up of theatrical situations. He seems to ignore everything in the way of studied effect. It is only when the curtain has fallen on the scene or incident, whatever it is, that the audience realises how convincing and cameo like the picture has been.⁵⁴

News reached Esson in Melbourne at this time that Leon Brodzky, now resident in England, had his play *The Humour of It* staged at the Court Theatre, London, on 11 March, 1912. Described as ‘a fantastic comedy,’ the action takes place on a summer morning in the front garden of a suburban villa, ‘a poet, intent on worshipping under the window of his unknown beloved,’ is mistaken for both a burglar and a lunatic. The cast featured Irene Clark Malrence and WG (Willie) Fay—known to Esson from his visit at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Despite its ‘slender theme’ the play and the production were ‘favourably reviewed.’

Brodsky’s article in *The Critic* in 1903 had kick-started the movement that brings us to this point a decade later. In his article ‘Towards an Australian Drama’ he impressed upon the reader that

the first rule of the Australian playwright of this new and yet unfounded school is

—
No imitation of Shoreditch melodrama or Parisian farce,

No rehash of cloak and sword plays,

No aping Pinero, or Jones or Bernard Shaw.

Having thus decided to take a ‘slice of life’ as material for a play, we would do well, as beginners, to take the advice of the Irish writers and at first write nothing but plays in one act.⁵⁵

It appears, surprisingly, that Brodzky didn’t taken his own advice! But Esson’s time was now. He’d carried the influence of the Irish Abbey Theatre Movement for nearly a decade, and over the past three years had been inducted, largely by William Moore, into a new creative field; and while gaining some success offered no clear dramaturgical methodology in his three produced (and

⁵⁴ *The Age*, 22 July 1912

⁵⁵ *The Lone Hand*, 1 June 1908

published) ‘sketches.’ One thing is patently obvious, these achievements could not be construed as Esson pioneering local drama, nor igniting a movement.

McMahon, however, now gave Esson an opportunity in his Repertory system. Was *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* to be the play ‘of conventional length,’ that the *Lone Hand* had forecast the previous year, ‘to firmly establish his reputation as a playwright, and supply live interpretation of Australian character which are now looked for in vain’? One can only speculate as to what was going through Esson’s mind as he sat in the Athenaeum Hall watching *The Seagull*, four days before his own opening night, listening to Konstantin Treplev argue for the play that he has written and directed (in Calderon’s translation):

TREPLEV. [My mother] loves the stage; she thinks that she is advancing the cause of humanity and her sacred art; but I regard the stage of today as mere routine and prejudice. When the curtain goes up and the gifted beings, the high priests of the sacred art, appear by electric light, in a room with three sides to it, representing how people eat, drink, love, walk and wear their jackets; when they strive to squeeze out a moral from the flat, vulgar pictures and the flat, vulgar phrases, a little tiny moral, easy to comprehend and handy for home consumption, when in a thousand variations they offer me always the same thing over and over and over again—then I take to my heels and run, as Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower, which crushed his brain by its overwhelming vulgarity. ... We must have new formulae. That’s what we want. And if there are none, then it’s better to have nothing at all. (*Looks at his watch.*)⁵⁶

The Four Act Play

‘When I first started to write a little play,’ Esson wrote in *The Socialist*, ‘Mr Moore gave me some practical advice.’ He said:

‘Avoid the soliloquy, the aside, and the rhetorical speech; these devices are no longer allowed in modern drama.’ May I add on this advice to my confrères? In a poetical play a soliloquy is justifiable, when it is a revelation of soul; but to use the soliloquy for the purpose of conveying facts to the audience was always bad, and disappeared, except in Australia, a century ago. ... Everybody knows that a play is not a photographic reproduction of life, but it is unwise for a writer to violate the first technical requirements, or conventions maybe, of his craft. ‘It is by working within limits,’ Goethe tells us, ‘that the artist reveals himself.’

⁵⁶ Calderon, George (translator), *Two Plays by Tchekhof [The Seagull, The Cherry Orchard]*, Grand Richards (1912)

When he came to write his first full-length play, Esson adopted the currently popular four-act structure that he had seen in the seasons presented by Gregan McMahon's Repertory Theatre: Ibsen, Shaw, Elizabeth Baker and Chekhov. The four act structure was an innovative strategy popularised by Henrik Ibsen⁵⁷, and subsequently championed and then exploited by George Bernard Shaw. The four (shorter) acts provided a focused and streamlined action (concentrating on plot), allowing little opportunity for character development nor a substantial subplot (but this brevity did contribute to the evolving realist psychological dependent dramaturgy of 'subtext').

Shaw defined Ibsen's dramaturgy as 'a vehicle for social change'—he thought of him as a Socialist—and found that the use (structurally) of Act Three to provide a situation where the themes of the play could be discussed or debated—'argument' as opposed to 'action' driving the dynamic momentum of the play—a very useful dramatic tool. Esson, for example, had just seen the format in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*: Act Three opens with Trigorin eating lunch, surrounded by luggage, on the verge of departure; he engages in a long conversation with Marsha that pulls into focus the existential themes of the play (he signs her book, 'For Masha, who doesn't know where she came from or why she goes on living'). Further set pieces—what I call, borrowing a balletic term, 'divertissement'—follow: Nina plays a game with her Sisyphean pebble and speculates about her future; they are interrupted by Arkadina, who then argues with her brother Sorin about his health, the estate and Treplev, and he is reluctantly convinced to give up his ambition to return to Moscow; Sorin collapses; Treplev and Medvedenko join; and the act concludes with more accusations, regrets and revelations; eventually Arkadina persuades Trigorin to leave with her and forget his feelings for Nina. In the final moments Trigorin and Nina secretively make plans to meet in Moscow and seal the promise with a long passionate kiss [the 'incendiary incident']. Similar 'fun and games' erupt in the great Act Three party scene in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*.

By necessity, this structure—'cause and effect' linear narrative—relies on strong binary opposition to sustain the dynamic action: protagonist and antagonist need to be clearly defined, with auxiliary characters providing the 'modifier' supporting function (as Esson explored earlier in *Terra Australis*). Esson himself credits Shaw as the influence for his 'Comedy in Four Acts,' and certainly Shaw's satirical social commentary, his politics and his didacticism can be seen in varying degrees as influencing the dramaturgy of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, but there are, however, a range of other sources of inspiration.

⁵⁷ While Ibsen's early plays *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881) are three acts, the plays Esson had the opportunity to see in Melbourne—*Rosmersholm* (1886), *Hedda Gabler* (1890), *The Master Builder* (1892) and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896)—were all four-acts.

— The Time Is Not Yet Ripe (1912) —

In their review for his first one act play *The Woman Tamer* in November 1910, *Table Talk* was aware of Esson's intention to write a longer work.

While Mr Esson's friends are hoping much of him in their sphere, he has actually been engaged on a drama which may fulfil their highest expectations. The scope of the work is wide. It is to be a drama in four acts, dealing with our political life. This is a phase of [Australia life] that has long long sought a literary interpreter.⁵⁸

According to Harrison Owen, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*—Louis Esson's first full length play—was scheduled for performance in Gregan McMahon's third MRTC season in December 1911. Owen seemed to have some first hand knowledge when he reported that it was Esson's 'most ambitious dramatic effort ... a comedy of Australian politics.'

Esson, while editing a news rag at Bathurst, came in contact with several typical 'Liberal' politicians, who, recognising that procrastination is the thief of progress, were always certain that the time for reform was not 'opportune.' The chief character in Esson's play is a prime minister, sketched on Spruce Myth lines, who alleges that he is simply bursting to reform things—when the time is 'ripe.'⁵⁹

When the box-plan for the season opened on 27 November, however, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* was not included. The season consisted of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, Elizabeth Baker's *Chains* and 'a series of four short Australian plays' (one of which was Esson's *Dead Timber*). Esson would have to wait another six months to secure the premiere. Owen followed up in November.

Louis Esson, who is fastidious in regard to his own work, wishes to further polish his political comedy, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, so an artistically grim Esson drama, *Dead Timber*, will take the place of the lighter effort.⁶⁰

In a letter to AG Stephens in January 1912, Esson wrote that he had 'just finished a political comedy,' but added that it seemed 'five years old in style' and

⁵⁸ *Table Talk*, 30 November 1911

⁵⁹ *The Bulletin*, 21 September 1911; 'Spruce Myth' was a nickname given to 'die-hard Tory' politician and lawyer, the federal member for Parkes Arthur Bruce Smith (1851-1937) for 'his brilliant record for non attendance.' *Westralian Worker*, 11 July 1913

⁶⁰ *The Bulletin*, 16 November 1911

it will be a fearsome blow if I find I am only a sentimental old-fashioned romanticist like Shaw ... instead of a symbolist realist like Euripides. I am beginning to find a style—that is all—but often I slip back into old methods.⁶¹

At this time too, there was also a popular interest in Bert Bailey's new Dramatic Company's production of 'a drama founded on Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection*' at the Palace Theatre (Sydney) that opened on 4 May. '*On Our Selection* is not farce or comedy,' *The Worker* suggested, 'it is a chapter from real life, appealing to all the emotions. But there is not a dull moment from rise to fall of curtain.'⁶² The production, mounted as a commercial entertainment, was an immediate success, touring nationally until 1917, with Bert Bailey himself starring as Dad Rudd. The difficulty for Esson was that *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* would suffer in comparison not only with the European modernist writers championed by McMahon, but now another idiosyncratic and idiomatically Australian comedy—albeit a deliberate pastiche melodrama.

Esson's approach to his subject matter—in what Philip Parsons referred to as 'a fecklessly commercial ... society play ... and political comedy'⁶³—is more robust than Shaw, almost Wildean farce, in the hectic comings and goings of his large cast of broadly drawn characters. Fundamentally his generic structure is a Shakespearean romantic comedy trope: as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It*, Esson's core plot follows the plight of two young lovers—Doris Quiverton and Sydney Barrett—whose relationship is censured by an older, parental figure (Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Quiverton); their world is subsequently thrown into chaos; but, ultimately, they are reunited at the end and equilibrium restored. For comic effect, Esson further exploits his keen ear and skill at dialogue mode by supplying a Wildean, aphorism-laden clipped speech for his Antipodean Liberal upper-class, and a more idiomatic vernacular for his Socialists (with a range of nationalities and accents) and his working-class crowd. Esson's two year stint as a football commentator on Melbourne *Punch* was excellent schooling for his pithy turns of phrase.

Perhaps due to its proximity in McMahon's Repertory season, much of the contemporary commentary saw Doris as yet another candidate in a string of 'emancipated' women—seen in Shaw's 'charming and motherly' Candida Morell in his romantic comedy *Candida* (1898). Peter Fitzpatrick agreed, and found Doris to be 'the great invention of the play.'

⁶¹ Louis to AG Stephens, 26 January 1912—AG Stephens *Papers*, NLA MS75

⁶² *The Worker (Wagga Wagga)*, 16 May 1912

⁶³ Esson, Louis, *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*, Parsons, Philip (ed) Currency Press (1973), Introduction p.xiii

She has a lot in common with Shaw's *Candida*, in the way she charmingly deflects all attempts at male assertion and defines all political ideas as rather tiresome games for children who are to be humoured, kept in their place, and never taken seriously.⁶⁴

Candida's is a moral not a political choice, however, between her respectable (Christian Socialist) husband, Reverend James Morell, and her persistent admirer, the eighteen-year-old poet Eugene Marchbanks. But Esson was also aware of Ibsen's archetypal 'enlightened sisters' in 'free-thinking radical' Rebecca West (in *Rosemersholm*), and feisty Lona Hessel (in *Pillars of Society*).

Yet, the most compelling influence on Esson appears to be Jerome K Jerome's *The Master of Mrs Chilvers: an improbably comedy*⁶⁵ that premiered in London at the Royalty Theatre on 26 April, 1911.⁶⁶ English writer and humourist, Jerome Klapka Jerome (1859–1927) was best known for his comic travelogue *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) but also for his strong advocacy for a repertory theatre in London at the turn of the century. I can find no reference to either Jerome nor his play amongst Esson's papers, but there is a persuasive (and alarming) similarity between Jerome's script and Esson's political comedy, the dramaturgy of which both concern familial relationships that are put under pressure by ideological differences.⁶⁷

The Time is Not Yet Ripe shares Jerome's fundamental premise—intimate partners contesting the same election—as well as its *mis en scene* (the list of location settings almost identical) and time frame. We can also find antecedents of Lord and Lady Pillsbury, Bertie Wainwright and Violet Falkner, Miss Perkins and Harry Hopkins respectively in Jerome's *Dorian St Herbert* and *Lady Mogton*, *Jawbones and Ginger*, *Janet Baker* and *Slingsby*; as well as 'the crowd ('The Cranks' in Jerome) performing similar functions in both plays.

The lead-up to the performance became somewhat of a family affair when Esson's cousin Esther Paterson (Hugh's daughter) created 'considerable interest' by providing the artwork for the 'particularly striking and artistic' poster used to advertise *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*:

⁶⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Pioneer Players*, Op. cit. p.104

⁶⁵ The play was published soon after by T Fisher Unwin, London (c1911); Esson's contemporary, playwright Alfred Buchanan, was also published by T Fisher Unwin.

⁶⁶ Under the management of Messrs Vedrenne & Eadie; in which the protagonist Annys Chilvers was played by Lena Ashwell.

⁶⁷ The reviewer from *The Lone Hand*, 2 September 1912 concurred: 'Here is a situation similar to that in [Jerome K] Jerome's [*The Master of Mrs Chilvers*], and Esson gets some good fun out of the electioneering. Unfortunately the principal characters do not impress the reader as real.'

In the city shops are a number of attractive posters illustrating Louis Esson's play ... Miss Paterson aspires to be a portrait painter, but indulges in poster and caricature work for light recreation.⁶⁸

Gregan McMahon, as director of the MRTC, was responsible for the logistics of the season—with his 'enterprising' business manager H Faulkner Smith⁶⁹—and over the course of June and July he was fully engaged with the Company: he performed a major role in the revival of *What the Public Wants*, supervised the staging of *The Seagull*, and was credited as 'producer' on *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* (but it's clear that Esson was actively involved in the development of the staging⁷⁰). In addition to the normal tensions around rehearsals, Esson was distressed when—three weeks before opening night—his uncle John Ford Paterson died suddenly on 1 July.⁷¹

Esson was supported throughout the rehearsal period by a number of familiar (amateur) actors from William Moore's stable (some of whom had worked on his short plays): his leads, Donald Alsop⁷² (Sydney Barrett) and Isabel Handley (Doris); Thomas Skewes (Sir Joseph Quiverton, the Prime Minister); Dorothy Hiscock (Miss Perkins); and George Kirk (Bertie). MRTC members Rose Seaton (Lady Pillsbury), Leonard Egerton (Sir Henry Pillsbury), Jack Beresford Folwer (Harry Hopkins), Clifton Newell (Otto), Anthony Book (Butler), Les Halinbourg (Violet Faulkner) and Thomas Cletus (Fat Man) had made appearances in previous McMahon productions. The others—AS Haybittel (a member of the Maldon Pierrot's, played John K Hill), and R Withers (Peter Jensen)—were new to the organisation, and Esson also called in a few favours from comrades at the Victorian Socialist Party who filled out the ensemble as 'Electors, citizens etc.'

With *The Seagull* performance on Saturday 20 July, there was only three days to 'bump-in' and prepare *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* for its premiere on Tuesday 23 July 1912. It's important to remember that that it was a 'found space' and not a traditional proscenium arch boulevard theatre;

⁶⁸ *The Weekly Times*, 20 July 1912; sadly, no copy of the poster can be found.

⁶⁹ Faulkner Smith worked with the music warehouse WH Glen and Co for 16 years prior to taking up the position of manager of the sheet music department at The Pianola Company, Collins Street in April 1910. Concurrently, he produced recitals and concerts for a number of singers and musicians. He joined McMahon's MRT in March 1912.

⁷⁰ We know that Blamire Young was responsible for what scenographic aspects were provided for *The Seagull*; while there is no evidence, it's reasonable to assume that he also may have contributed to the visual of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*.

⁷¹ Two days earlier, at his home in Queensberry Street, John Ford Paterson was dressing to go out when he complained of giddiness and took to his bed after which he slowly lapsed into unconsciousness; he was sixty-two. John Ford Paterson had been a surrogate father and mentor to Esson his entire life.

⁷² Donald Alsop was employed as secretary to the Greater JD Williams' Amusement Company; he held the rank of Lieutenant during the War; while on leave in London in October 1917, he married actress Ruby Moore [no relation to William Moore].

the stage was end-on⁷³ with the un-tiered seating, the audience looking up at a platform stage. At this time the Repertory Club had over 400 members so the Atheneum Hall⁷⁴ at 188 Collins Street was capacity, ‘a full house.’

Controversially, Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher was in attendance at the opening (possibly at the invitation of Esson’s uncle Hugh Paterson, who was a friend of Fisher’s and served as Chairman of the Federal Art Advisory Board). As reported by *The Age*

... on Tuesday [23 July] the scheme for the redistribution of seats in Queensland was rejected on a rather unusual division. In a sense it was purely party; that is to say, the majority consisted of members of the Labor party, who objected to the proposed boundaries of electorates, which Mr [Frederick] Bamford denounced as grossly unfair. But as there was a ministerial motion for the adoption of the scheme, the six Ministers who were in the Chamber voted with the Opposition.⁷⁵

The Age denounced the taking of the division in ‘a thin House as a dodge, and declared the business had been readied up in caucus.’ It also called attention to the absence of the Prime Minister—whose constituency like Bamford’s was changed—who ‘happened to be at the performance of a political play, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* in which the young Australian playwright makes merciless fun of a “Liberal and progressive” Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, Sir Joseph Quiverton.’ Interestingly, *The Age* also speculated on Esson’s inspiration for Sir Joseph as ‘a clever caricature of a certain bulky knight, who was once Premier of a State.’⁷⁶ Also giving the evening some kudos was Lady Fuller, wife of the Governor Sir John Fuller.

Doris Quiverton, daughter of a Conservative Prime Minister, is our protagonist in *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*⁷⁷; she is cajoled into her role as the ‘Good Woman candidate’ for the general election, and her auxiliary supporters are both her father—there is a strangely absent mother—(with his

⁷³ End on staging, while similar to the proscenium stage where the audience is seated as a block facing directly onto the stage, doesn’t have the physical architecture of a proscenium arch separating audience from stage action nor an fly tower.

⁷⁴ The building, originally the Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute, dates from 1842, was renamed the Melbourne Athenaeum in 1872 (its focal point was a circulating library). It was structurally modified by architects Smith and Johnston as a three-storey brick building with a classical stuccoed façade (featuring pilasters, label moulds, a bracketed cornice and a parapet in the centre of which is the niche containing the statue of Athena) and opened in 1886. The awning featured a decorative pressed metal underside. The upper hall was converted into an Art Gallery in 1910.

⁷⁵ ‘Redistribution of Seat’, *Daily Post* (Hobart), 1 August 1912

⁷⁶ The corpulent Thomas Bent, KCMG was a conservative, the twenty second Premier of Victoria from 1904; he was forced to resign in January 1909 and died nine months later.

⁷⁷ Esson had used the term in his poem ‘The Coming Comet’, *The Bulletin*, 21 April 1910:

... We have statesmen still debating
Things long dead. I hear them pipe
Of things Great and Urgent, stating
That the time is not yet ripe.

political allies, Sir Henry, Attorney General, and Lady Pillsbury) and her Committee (led by Miss Perkins). Doris's fiancée, Sydney Barrett, the 'Bad Man candidate' and antagonist, relies on his Socialist Club colleagues to provide the thematic opposition as his 'modifiers.' Esson also provides an 'outsider' ('the [philosophical] Mystic') and a broader 'modifier' functionary: the Chicago drummer John K Hill, who offers an American/international perspective on internal Australian politics and behaviour; the Butler (unnamed) also gives the Imperialist point of view; and the 'Crowd' provides a raucous and brutal commentary of the antipodean ruling class.

Esson's use of the four act structure follows Chekhov's strategy. The first and second act offer exposition and inciting incident, setting up both the relationship dilemma as well as the political divide. Apart from the economy in character development, this structure relies heavily on 'cause and effect' incident for its dynamic development (in Esson's case, this is usually the arrival or departure of a character). His third act sees the characters on election eve, literally and figuratively at 'a crossroads'—situated on a 'vacant square, at street corner.' The placement of this strategy in the third act is contingent on a 'reversal'—of opinion or a decision—that emerges from the 'divertissement,' and necessitates a protracted showdown in the final act. But the consequence of this—in the 'modernist' realist drama—is that the denouement is 'diffused' and instead of a focussed climax and solution to the problem posed by the inciting incident in Act One—where 'good' is rewarded and 'bad' is punished—the situation for both the protagonist and antagonist remains unresolved (as in Chekhov and Ibsen): Doris wins, but she is diminished; Sydney loses, but 'the Cause goes on' ... 'the time is not yet ripe.'

The production was 'heartily received' with the press sympathetic to Esson's play, effusive in their praise. 'On Tuesday evening,' *Punch's* theatre critic ('Peter Quince') wrote,

the inclemency of the weather scarcely militated against the attendance, for there was a good and appreciative audience, attracted by a desire to witness the first production of a drama of Australian politics ... Mr Esson handles the subject of advanced social politics with skills and gets off so much that is good on both sides that it is difficult at times to decide whether he is a Socialist or an anti Socialist. The dialogue is light throughout, and the situations capably thought out. The various sly hits at Australian politicians and parties were keenly enjoyed, the presence of the Prime Minister in the audience adding zest to the many home thrusts.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ *Punch* (Melbourne), 25 July 1912

He concluded that it was ‘a pity that so smart a comedy could not be seen in the perfection of the professional stage.’ ‘Our clever young dramatist Louis Esson has made good with his play,’ offered a second opinion in *Punch* a week later:

The piece is well constructed, and the smartness of its satire does not destroy the frankness of its statement as a political tract. Moreover, the author deals out punishment impartially to both sides of political opinion, and generally conceals his own views with some success.⁷⁹

What the writer found most interesting was that ‘Occasionally ... there is a hint of the real Esson talking, and one suspects the presence of a restless aesthete, who is aching to brighten out lives with open air cafes and red umbrellas. Apart from such ideas, which after all, uplift one above such mundane things as dunnys and drains, the play has an easy unconventionality that should recommend it for another revival at least.’

Table Talk found the production ‘marked not only by witty dialogue above the average, but by distinct atmosphere and strong and well-contrasted personality in the characters of the play. It is just in these points, as a rule, young dramatic writers fail, but they are characteristically the marked feature of this author’s works, and make his plays always interesting.’ Further,

The Time is Not yet Ripe quite lacks the morbid or sordid tone which has characterised previous plays from his pen, for this is frankly an amusing satirical comedy. It represents the extremists of various political views fighting a campaign and airing their opinions in private and at meetings. No side is taken, for Mr Esson has steered the laugh first against one then the other quite impartially. There are all kinds of views aired, from the pompous self-satisfied, well-worn sentiments of Sir Joseph Quiverton, the rampant Liberal of Miss Perkins, the placid of Doris and Sir Henry Pillsbury, and the various degrees of socialist and communist from the moderate to the anarchist.⁸⁰

‘Nothing seems easier of accomplishment to the practised hand than the writing of a political satirical comedy,’ noted the *Argus*. ‘The scaffolding is up on all sides, and material is so abundant that little apparently is left to do but to put it into a concrete form, that should go easily, and tell really well on the stage, even with an amateur cast.’

⁷⁹ *Punch* (Melbourne), 1 August, 1912

⁸⁰ *Table Talk*, 1 August 1912

Mr Louis Esson, who came before the public last night at the Atheneum Hall with *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, certainly has not fallen into the error of holding a brief for any political party. Impartially he distributes his satire, and only a purblind partisan could accuse him of ‘leanings.’ Fair all round, he ‘deals it out,’ and very often is keenly humorous in the way he touches with red-hot needles the follies, extravagances, foibles, and absurdities of those engaged in the government of the country, and those who in turn are engaged in governing. If his comedy teaches anything it is that the time is quite ripe, and was never more so, and that the fruit is ready for those who understand and are eager to gather it.⁸¹

Notwithstanding its ‘slight plot’, the Melbourne *Herald* confirmed that ‘it really is what the bill called it, “a brilliant four-act comedy.”’

Thought farcical as regards the love and quarrels of Doris Quiverton and Sydney Barrett, it is realistic as regards the ponderous political platitude of Sir Joseph Quiverton, ‘Liberal and Progressive’ Prime Minister and his inane friends. It is as realistic in its portrayal of Harry Hopkins, the revolutionary-while-you-wait type of Socialist and Arthur Gray, his dreamy club mate. As to the street meeting addressed by Sir Joseph and by Lady Pillsbury, it might, as regards the pranks of the crowd, have been a reproduction of happenings in Brunswick Street at the last election, and of other happenings in the Hawthorn Town Hall, when a well known lady talker was admonished by the larrikin as to the discharge of her domestic duties.⁸²

‘This combination of the fantastic with the actual is noteworthy,’ the review concluded, ‘it gives individuality to Mr Esson’s play, and with the sparkle of its dialogue should make it a success even with audiences which haunt that dread place, “the theatre of commerce”.’

The Age opinion put the production into the perspective of the national theatre. ‘The special interest attached to the staging of a play by an Australian writer,’ they reported, ‘attracted a large audience, and a sympathetic reception was accorded to the production. ... At the final curtain the audience was generous to the author in its prolonged applause.’

If Mr Esson thought fit to jest at any time, the audience laughed; and indeed, Mr Esson had thought fit to jest in every fourth or fifth line of his comedy. If he had copied the originals of his characters a little more closely he might have been termed an unkindly satirist. So he put amusing speeches into their mouths instead, and, if they did not add to the accuracy of the portraiture, they at any rate rendered the characters more entertaining to the audience.⁸³

⁸¹ *The Argus*, 24 July 1912

⁸² *The Herald* (Melbourne), 24 July 1912

⁸³ *The Age*, 24 July 1912

While *The Weekly Times* offered that ‘Mr Louis Esson’s long awaited Australian play ... proved a cleverly conceived and smartly written farce,’ it quibbled that ‘on the program it is described as a “comedy,” but its claim to the title is exceedingly doubtful.’

Australian politics, are dealt with by Mr Esson; and both sides are satirised, and often burlesqued, with pleasing impartiality. Most of the characters are true to type, but are often exaggerated to what seems an unnecessary extent.

But they did commend the cast, repeating generalised comments about the quality of the performances given my most critics:

On the whole the acting was of a high order. The best sustained parts were those of Doris Quiverton, charmingly portrayed by Miss Isabel Handley; the English butler, played with effective unctuousness by Mr Anthony Book, and Lady Pillsbury, amusingly sketched by Miss Rose Seaton. Good character acting was furnished by Miss Dorothy Hiscock, as Miss Perkins, and Mr AS Haybittel, as the gentleman from Chicago. Mr T Skewes, but for a somewhat monotonous delivery and a tendency to drop his voice at the end of his lines, was good as the Prime Minister; but a faulty enunciation did no assist Mr Donal Alsop in rendering the part of the Socialist leader convincing. Considering the small stage the play was exceedingly well presented; the life-like behaviour of the election crowd in the third act reflecting great credit both upon the performers and their tutor, Mr Gregan McMahon.⁸⁴

Of the few dissenting voices, the Melbourne *Herald* was concerned that ‘the chief defect of the play is that Mr Esson seems to have adhered a little too closely to the exact language of everyday life, with the result that his repartee, especially in the election scenes, occasionally misses fire. ... The last act, too, hangs a little.’ But ultimately, ‘the play is an interesting and cleverly worked out study in Australian political conditions, with plenty of critical ideas underlying its divertingly satirical surface.’⁸⁵

‘The author of this piece, Mr Louis Esson is known to readers of *The Socialist*,’ began the deliberately supercilious review of the published version of his play *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* that appeared some weeks later⁸⁶, ‘as the writer of articles on Socialism which have been condemned as

⁸⁴ *The Weekly Times*, 3 August 1912

⁸⁵ *Herald* (Melbourne), 8 August 1912

⁸⁶ Fraser & Jenkinson, 1912

heretical by some of our leading suburban authorities, but this is not his only claim to distinction.
...’

In his spare time, Mr Esson has followed the eccentric occupation of writing plays which are not merely echoes of the theatre, but studies of life. His eccentricity has found an abettor in the person of Mr Gregan McMahon another eccentric who goes to the trouble of actually staging plays which are so good that nobody wants them. The result is that at times we seem to be within an ace of establishing in Melbourne a real theatre for performance of real plays: all that is lacking is the presence of a few more eccentrics like Mr Esson and Mr McMahon.

Much of the commentary in response to the printed play focused on the politics as the subject matter being ripe for ‘a good farce’: ‘the politician is essentially the man who is enthusiastic about trifles, and indifferent to everything vital. Trifles obsess him till he becomes himself the most trivial thing in nature.’

But Mr Esson is not so cynical as to fill his play with politics. In the character of Sidney Barrett, he give us a man who takes life seriously. Naturally, such a man is out of place in which is aptly called ‘the political arena’ (or circus) and naturally he is rejected by the great majority of the electors as impossible. A candidate for parliament who proposes the suppression of all daily papers, thereby disqualifies himself, for his proposal shows that he is interested in the well being of his country. He has passed out of the region of politics into the region of life—an alien territory.

FS [Frederick Sinclair]—a great supporter of the playwright—commended Esson’s ‘satirical’ play for depicting ‘the conflict between politics and life, and the triumph of politics. It is a farce to make the judicious grieve,’ he wrote. That said, he wasn’t satisfied. He thought that the dramaturgy ‘falls short’ and wanted the playwright to provide a drama with ‘a larger sweep. ... All that he has hitherto done is marked by freshness and sincerity. Only the concentration of all his powers on a congenial theme is required for the achievement of great work.’⁸⁷

The Bulletin headed their review ‘The Time that Isn’t.’ They believed that the play as published was ‘an interesting experiment in a purely Australian political comedy ... but the author ... fails to last the distance of four acts.’ They praised the ‘brilliance in the dialogue’ but that ‘the plot, action and characterisation fatally handicap the comedy.’ There was some recognition that in the portraits of ‘the red hot Socialists’ and ‘the energetic woman secretary of the Woman’s Liberal League’ Esson had ‘gone to the life class,’ but that the rest of his characters were ‘merely mouthpieces for clever

⁸⁷ ‘FS’, *The Socialist*, 18 October, 1912

fooling.’ Ultimately their verdict was that ‘as a one act play, the election meeting would make an effective and humorous farce ...’

But *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, brilliant and cheeky as it is, is not a comedy, not even a farce. Its characters and its plot are machine made. As a satire on Australian politics it lacks the one necessary touch—that we should be able to believe that its characters are alive. All credit, however, to Esson, for a first attempt. ⁸⁸

The Sydney *Sun* offered similar criticism, suggesting that while Esson had ‘produced a whimsical and amusing drama ... thoroughly worth reading,’ they predicted that ‘it will never probably be acted by professionals.’⁸⁹ In other words, not good enough for the commercial theatre.

The Time is Not Yet Ripe did languish as predicted, the wished-for revival by some didn't eventuate, nor did any other production in Esson's life time. In a sense it became an albatross: his seemingly most successful play was a work that he grew dissatisfied with and it frustrated him enormously; he attempted to rewrite it at least twice but abandoned each attempt. In a letter some years later to George Mackaness (1882-1968), a lecturer in the department of English at Sydney Teachers' College and major figure in literary circles, Esson responded to a request for copies of his plays:

... I haven't seen even a copy of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*; but I am pleased with that. I never want to see it again and I hope no one else does. It is cheap and trivial, a tenth rate imitation of Shaw at his best. I have no interest in plays of so called ‘ideas’ or opinions about things.⁹⁰

Vance Palmer confirms that the play was regarded by Esson (pejoratively) as ‘a virtuoso piece, a technical exercise, politically insipid and lacking dramaturgical inspiration,’ and that he was not interested in having it revived.⁹¹ Hilda Esson—Esson's second wife—confirmed this opinion in a letter to Leslie Rees, following a reading of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* given by the Fellowship of Australian Writers in 1940⁹²:

⁸⁸ *The Bulletin* (Red Page), 8 August, 1912

⁸⁹ *The Sun* (Sydney), 4 August 1912

⁹⁰ 17 June, 1930—EJ Brady *Papers*, NLA MS206

⁹¹ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Georgian House (1948) p.3

⁹² 'A dramatic recital of Louis Esson's play, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, directed by Roma Payne, will be given at the Henry George Club, Taking House, near Central Railway Station, on Monday [8 April] night, beginning at 7.30.' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 1940

[Louis] missed the reading at the Fellowship of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, through illness, and it seems to have had an amazing success. Neither he nor I ever thought much of it—not as an enduring work, I mean; but Frank Davison said that a comedy that could keep an audience in continuous laughter after thirty years, must be a damn good comedy.⁹³

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When McMahon relinquished his Melbourne Repertory Theatre in 1916 and moved to Sydney to work for JC Williamsons', he persuaded J and N Tait (now in charge of 'The Firm') to support the establishment of a Sydney Repertory Theatre Society (SRTS) (on the same principals as his Melbourne Society). SRTS opened with a production of St John Hankin's comedy *The Two Mr Wetherbys*, directed by McMahon, on 20 November 1920 at the Repertory Theatre (Grosvenor Street), followed by Bernard Shaw's *Getting Married* two nights later.

McMahon, as did his colleagues across the sector, continued to rely on world drama for his repertoire, and now more readily incorporating European theories of acting and performance (including those of Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and Max Reinhardt). There was also a growing imperative to foster local playwrights and their work. That notwithstanding, *The Daily Telegraph* noted that the old rivalries continued:

Though it would be too much to expect the professional theatre to present an Australian play in Sydney, it will be seen that several repertory groups have taken a fairly active part in advancing the cause of the local dramatist. It does seem that this long-neglected and despised individual may have a rather happier future.

Other noteworthy amateur repertory companies that emerged over the same period in Sydney (albeit short lived) included Duncan MacDougall's Playbox Society (1923); Don Finley's The Turret Theatre (in the old Town Hall in North Sydney, 1928); and Carrie Tenant's Community Playhouse (1929).

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Esson's experience of the Repertory movement and his opinion of his own play *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* are inextricably linked as unfortunate. He stated his position on the Repertory movement

⁹³ Hilda Esson to Leslie Rees, 28 February 1940—Leslie Rees *Papers*, NLNSW

soon after his return to Australia from London in 1921. While planning his own Provincial company, The Pioneer Players, he wrote to Vance Palmer:

I would have nothing to do with any Repertory society. There should be societies to play Shaw, Galsworthy, Ibsen etc—I would go to their performances—but I want something absolutely national and original. I would rather have a bad [Sydney] Tomholt than a good Bennett. I feel that we can do the work, and I fancy too that we could get as much support as would be good for us. ...⁹⁴

His opinion was undoubtedly exercised on the subject when he became theatre critic for *The Triad* (later *The New Triad*) where he regularly reviewed the reincarnation of Gregan McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Theatre Society ('the successor of the Mermaid Society') in 1925. He noted in his review for *A Bill of Divorcement* at the Playhouse that ...

there are moving scenes in the play, the performances at the Playhouse by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre Society proved theatrically effective. This Society is doing a good work by producing a number of plays, representative examples if not masterpieces, of contemporary English drama, that otherwise we should have no opportunity of ever seeing in Melbourne.⁹⁵

By the end of the year he was sufficiently persuaded by the work that he was able to sum up the season with modified praise as 'a successful, if not ambitious season ... The chief value of this company is that it puts on plays that otherwise would not be seen in Melbourne.'⁹⁶

*

Already impacted by the realities of the depression from 1929, the new sensation of 'the talkies' from 1931 severely threatened the viability of the commercial theatre in Australia. Making slow but steady progress since Treherne and McMahon established the Repertory Theatre Movement before the First World War, community amateur theatre clubs and societies proliferated nationally, and filled a theatrical vacuum during the 1920s, but became a major forces during 1930s.

⁹⁴ Esson to Palmer, 20 June 1921, Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.cit. p.41

⁹⁵ 'Melbourne Theatre', *The Triad*, 1 August 1925

⁹⁶ 'Melbourne Theatre', *The Triad*, 1 December 1925

An initiative of Esson's friend Leslie Rees, then at the ABC, the not-for-profit Playwrights' Advisory Board (PAB) was formed in Sydney in November 1938⁹⁷ with stated aims 'to assist and advise Australian dramatists.' Australia had its first dramaturgical service! The Board invited submission of stage plays, 'undertook to read them ...'

and distribute suitable works among repertory groups all over Australia, collecting a royalty and acting as agent for the author. It is hoped that by this means many good plays which may have had an airing in only one Australian city or perhaps in not at all, will in future have a proper opportunity through the country.⁹⁸

The 14 members were all prominent members of the Repertory Theatre community in Sydney (producers, actors, playwrights, directors etc) and the Board—made up of mostly 'theatrical' types—acted in an honorary capacity: Leslie Rees (Chair), Rex Rienits (Vice-chair), Betty Ward (treasurer), Doris Fitton (secretary), with May Hollinworth, Sydney Tomholt, Beatrice Tildesley and businessman OD Bisset. The organisation worked out of the Independent Club Rooms (then situated at 175 Pitt Street). The patron of PAB, affixing some kudos, was Lady Halse Rogers (wife of Supreme Court Judge, Sir Percival Halse Rogers). Before a play was sponsored, eight of the 14 members must give a favourable verdict.

It was announced in March 1939 that 'An Australian Drama Month' would be held in May, when each of the leading amateur societies affiliated with the League would produced a play by an Australian author; the PAB would find suitable plays for production. The event was sponsored by the British Drama League.

The Independent Theatre⁹⁹ presented the premiere of Sumner Locke-Elliott's *Interval* (at the Club Rooms, 2 May); The Teachers' Federation Dramatic Society¹⁰⁰ gave Dymphna Cusack's *Red Sky at Morning* (5 and 6 May) [it had already been recorded for broadcast on ABC nationally]; Sydney University Dramatic Society (SUDS)¹⁰¹ staged Mary Lucy's *By Wire* at their club rooms

⁹⁷ Announced in *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 November 1938. In the first instance, playwrights were invited to submit manuscripts of full-length or one-act plays. Reading fees of 2/6 and 1/ were charged; and annual surplus revenue would be 'devoted to furthering the cause of Australian drama.' Scripts were returned with 'criticism' but manuscripts considered worthy of production would be submitted to repertory groups.

⁹⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 January 1939

⁹⁹ Founded by actress Doris Fitton—a protege of Gregan McMahon—in May 1930.

¹⁰⁰ Established at the Teachers' College (Assembly Hall) in November 1936 (producers Rosalie Collins and JB Moss).

¹⁰¹ While SUDS had been active on campus since 1889, the group gained notoriety after May Hollinworth (1895-1968) began directing shows from 1927; they were very active during the 1930s. Hollinworth founded the Metropolitan Theatre in 1943.

(700 Georg Street; 2, 14 & 21 May); The Australian Repertory Theatre Players¹⁰² presented JW Heming and Frederic Holt's operetta *Better Things of Life* at the Independent Club Rooms (2 May); *Heatwave in the West* by Dr Macredi Luker was given by the Players' Club¹⁰³ at St James' Hall (13, 15 & 16 May); The New Theatre League¹⁰⁴ remounted Betty Roland's 'much discussed' *Are you Ready Comrade?* at their rooms, 36 Pitt Street (23 May); Beryl Bryant [Bryant's Playhouse¹⁰⁵] scheduled Betty Roland's *Touch of Silk* and Katherine Shephard's *Daybreak* at the Forbes Street Playhouse (27 May); two one-act plays by C Hansby Read, *Impasse* and *Winners*, were staged by the Talatah Players¹⁰⁶ at the Little Theatre, Phillip Street (327 and 29 May); and, in the same theatre, five one-actors by R McCaughren and Sydney Tomholt were produced by the Elizabeth Jacobs Group. Bryant's Players, Independent, and SUDS combined at the Independent Clubrooms at the end of the month to present four one-actors. Nineteen plays in total were presented over the five weeks; *Red Sky at Morning* and *Wives have Their Uses* were presented by arrangement with the PAB. Playwrights received 10% of the gross takings.

In August, PAB sponsored five of Sydney's repertory groups to present a series of Australian one act plays at the Independent Theatre Club rooms. The program included *Shallow Cups* (Dymphna Cusack) produced by SUDS [considered by *The Sydney Morning Herald* as 'certainly the best material in the program']; *Morning* (Betty Roland) by New Theatre League; *That's Murder* (Lionel Shave) by the Sydney Players' Club; *Leading Lady* (Sydney Tomholt) by Independent Theatre; and *The Woman Tamer* (Louis Esson) directed by Doris Fitton for Bryant's Playhouse. Proceeds went to PAB. The *Sun* observed that the season of five plays was

Striking proof of the modern Australian dramatist's passion for the gloomy and sordid. Of the five, only one was a comedy. ...¹⁰⁷

The pro/am Repertory movement continued to expand nationally—incorporating a robust community theatre enterprise—throughout the Second World War and immediately after. It was the

¹⁰² The Australian Repertory Theatre Players, affiliated with the Composers and Writers' Association, presented their first production 'the local comedy-melodrama *Devil's Blood*' by JW Heming in January 1935 at their theatre at 305 Pitt Street.

¹⁰³ The Players' Club (later The Players' Dramatic Club) was established by Philip Lytton in 1902 'to give monthly representations of refined plays in aid of any charitable institution.' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 1902 p. 9 The Club continued irregular performances during the War; but found more consistency when they regrouped and took residence at St James' Hall, Phillip Street, from 1923.

¹⁰⁴ The Workers' Art Club established a drama component in 1932 (its slogan was 'art is a weapon'). It formally became the New Theatre League in 1936 (their inaugural production was Clifford Odets *Waiting for Lefty*).

¹⁰⁵ Bryant's Playhouse was established to provide opportunities for Beryl Bryant's students.

¹⁰⁶ The usual venue for the Talatah Players (established in 1937) was their studio at 29 Jamieson Street.

¹⁰⁷ 20 August 1939.

establishment of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in September 1954 to commemorate the visit of Queen Elizabeth II that was the game-changer for the sector. Founded by HC Coombs (governor of the Commonwealth Bank), John Douglas Pringle and Sir Charles Moses (general Manager of the ABC), the arts organisation provided discretionary funding (part public donation matched by a Commonwealth Government allocation) to significant performing arts companies. This was the beginning of Australia's Municipal theatre development, culminating in the establishment of the Australia Council for the Arts in 1968.

— CHAPTER FOUR —

Bush Impressions

And the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush—the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird, and of much that is different from things in other lands.

Henry Lawson, ‘The Bush Undertaker’ (Short Stories in Prose and Verse)

‘A City Bushman’

‘In an authentic Australian play,’ Esson wrote in 1914,

there should be a real atmosphere—some space and sunshine, wild nature or primitive characters; something with a cow in it would [be] much better; closer to the earth and reality.¹

Esson appeared to endorse the advice he was given by John Masefield when he met the Irish poet and writer in London a decade earlier. ‘Originality,’ Masefield suggested, ‘is that not the chief charm of literature?’

It is better to write about the bush than about ballet-girls. You have man and nature—try to find the right relationship between them! Every country has material for literature.²

Esson received similar guidance when he met WB Yeats in Dublin some months later: ‘Almost the first words [Yeats] said to me,’ Esson remembered, ‘were: “Keep within your own borders!”’

This was by no means the advice I wished to hear at that time. I had a vague love of the bush, but I had no idea that cattlemen and bullock-drivers were suitable subjects for literature. I belonged to the decadent school, sighing for the studios of the *Quartier Latin*, where some of my friends were studying painting, and the cabarets and *cafes de nuit* of Montmartre. But I knew instinctively that Mr Yeats was right. He believed in national art, national drama. ‘If you want to do anything,’ he said, ‘you must regard your own country as the centre of the universe.’³

¹ ‘The Australian Play’, *The Bulletin* (Red Page), 5 November 1914

² ‘JM Synge: A Personal Note’, *Fellowship*, April, 1921 p.138

³ ‘WB Yeats on National Drama’, *Fellowship*, August, 1921 p.15



Esson's admission that he had only 'a vague' personal interest in the 'Great Australian Emptiness' (as Patrick White later referred to the Australian 'bush'⁴), while not surprising, does challenge much of the mythology built around his reputation as a pioneer playwright of the Australian Bush.

In reality, Esson's experience of the 'outback' was limited to regional Victoria. Of his short sketches with bush backgrounds, *Dead Timber* is set in Warburton, East Gippsland (75km from Melbourne) where he travelled with his uncle John Ford Paterson on painting expeditions; EJ Brady's property at Mallacoota in remote East Gippsland is the setting for *Australia Felix*; and *Vagabond Camp*, takes place on a river bank near Shepparton in the farming district in the north of the state. Esson's three full length 'bush plays,' are all gently nostalgic, the landscape romanticised: his Gothic tragedy *Shipwreck* utilises the rocky cliffs and bushland near Mallacoota; *The Battler* takes place in the abandoned goldfields around Diggers Rest; and *Mother and Son* is located in the Wimmera in Western Victoria, near Horsham.

Esson had also visited the goldfields area in his university days, while holidaying with his friend Leon Brodzky, and passed through the Wimmera during his honeymoon trip to Sydney with his first wife Madeleine Tracey, but it is telling that both these plays were written remotely, while Esson was in London in 1920. They both represent a remembered, imaginary 'bush' infused with old, now dated *Bulletin* imperatives.

⁴ Patrick White, 'The Prodigal Son', *Australian Letters* (1958)

In a literary-dramatic sense, Esson's limited relationship with the Australian landscape may be classified as either 'painterly'—he favoured the literary 'impression'—or intellectual (journalistic), rather than intrinsically empathetic. Unlike his adventurous brother Frank P Brown, Esson was fundamentally a creature of the Melbourne streets; his occasional expeditions into the regions were all short lived, hankering always to return to his 'suburban home.' 'We are tired now of isolation,' Esson wrote to Vance Palmer from Gippsland (after only a few months 'under canvas'), 'and hanker after the gay life of the city.'

I'm delighted to have had this experience of the primitive life, but the magic is beginning to fade. We have an ache for companionship. It would be exciting to walk down a street and see the people and the shops.⁵

Esson had an early ambition to be a visual artist. He confirmed in his letter to *The Irish Times* in 1905 that he was 'a visitor [to Dublin] who came to Europe to study art.'⁶ One of his 'friends studying painting' in Paris was Max Meldrum (who shared a large studio with Abbey Alston). After studying the great Masters in the Louvre, Meldrum's evolving theories of art were based on the conclusion that 'great art' had always been 'impersonal' and concerned essentially with 'the objective depiction of appearance.' 'The artist's aim,' he impressed on Esson, 'was to transfer to his canvas an exact illusion within the limitations of painting of the objects present in the act of painting.' For Meldrum, what was important was 'the exact recording of tonal—not chromatic (in dramaturgical terms this may be seen as the contrast between 'plot' and 'story')—relationships; he argued that 'tone alone would produce the sensation of planes, hold the subject matter within the picture plane, and create a unified sensation of light, atmosphere, space and distance.' Meldrum's canvas played with strong contrasts of shadow and light, paring back the painting process to a rapid application of broken areas of restricted tone. Paring of form and recessive space became key features to his work. Meldrum later linked this theory of painting with social criticism, he taught his students not so much 'how to paint, but rather how to *see* things objectively and to observe the subtlety of the Australian landscape.'

For Esson, Meldrum's 'tonalism' was both logical and enlightening. The approach was certainly a significant philosophical base from which he absorbed the dramaturgical advice from Masfield, Yeats and Synge in that significant year of 1904. Later, we would see 'meaning' enhanced by

⁵ 1 July 1924—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. pg. 62

⁶ *The Irish Times*, 5 January 1905

contrast—in the lack of any ‘subtext’—in the dramaturgy of *The Woman Tamer* and *The Sacred Place* (Bongo and Chopsey; and the strict Muslim Said Shah Shereef and the shop-keeper Munshi Goolam Muhammed respectively) as diametrical opposites; more subtly in *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* with the character development in both the Socialist bar and Doris’s Committee room.

Esson’s uncle, John Ford Patterson, however, was the greater influence on Esson’s ‘romantic temperament.’ Back in Australia, Esson’s concept of ‘the bush’ was otherwise still inextricably linked with an emerging concept of the ‘nationalism’ that was initially primed by his association with the *plein air* landscape painters active in his youth, when he met many of the Heidelberg group of artists (such as Charles Conder, Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton and, the visionary Tom Roberts) at his uncle’s studio in Carlton. The painters of the Heidelberg School—many the students of Louis Buvelot—were the first Australian painters to attempt to capture a ‘momentary effect’ in the Australian landscape with a ‘general impression of colour’ and to create ‘a distinctively Australian art.’⁷ They represented the transition from the Colonial to the modernist ‘gaze’ on landscape painting. While Meldrum was a ‘modernist,’ Esson’s artistic mentor, John Ford Paterson was a ‘romantic’ impressionist in mood, and his sense of colour was a mystical response to the bush. Paterson often claimed that the Australian landscape had

a new sensation to offer, a new beauty to explain. ... Whiles I think airt is a kind o’ suggestiveness, a hint, a kind o’ promise, something evanescent. ’Tis a kind of spirituality o’ things I’m after. A dream picture that’s real, an yet ye canna put your han’ to it.⁸

It was, however, through poetry, that Esson felt more comfortable exploring the mythology established by colonial poets Charles Harpur, Henry Kendal, but especially Adam Lindsay Gordon (whose work went some way to educate Esson to the bushman’s life and the evolving Australian vernacular). When Esson came to publish his first verse in 1905 he chose, however, to attach himself to the school of writers encouraged by JF Archibald and WH Traill’s ‘By Australians for Australians’ nationalist agenda in *The Bulletin*: highlighting ‘bush values,’ egalitarianism (mateship) and a brash larrikinism. The two writers that epitomised the school prior to Federation were balladeers Henry Lawson and Andrew Barton ‘Banjo’ Paterson—both of whom Esson knew and admired. Esson, however, might be considered to have the greater connection to Paterson, who

⁷ Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting 1788-1990*, OUP (1992)

⁸ As quoted in Tipping, Marjorie J, ‘John Ford Paterson’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, abd.anu.edu.au

Lawson notoriously dubbed a ‘City Bushman’ in the infamous ‘*Bulletin* Debate.’ In poems like ‘Up the Country’, Lawson maintained his position as a critical observer of the harsh Australian outback:

Bush! Where there is no horizon! Where the buried bushman sees
Nothing—Nothing! But the sameness of the ragged, stunted trees!
Lonely hut where drought’s eternal, suffocating atmosphere
Where the God-forgotten hatter dreams of city life and beer.⁹

He denounced those poets, like Paterson, who wanted to romanticise ‘bush life.’ Paterson took umbrage and responded with ‘In Defence of the Bush’ casting Lawson’s perspective as ‘full of doom and gloom.’ Lawson fired back in sarcastic vein with ‘The City Bushman.’

It was pleasant up the country, City Bushman, where you went,
For you sought the greener patches and you travelled like a gent;
And you curse the trams and buses and the turmoil and the push,
Though you know the squalid city needn't keep you from the bush;
But we lately heard you singing of the ‘plains where shade is not’,
And you mentioned it was dusty — ‘all was dry and all was hot’.¹⁰

But into the new century, it was the third generation of local verse-makers—encouraged by AG Stephens (1865-1933), who had edited *The Bulletin* Red Page since 1894—who were seen as more academic, and a lyrical alternative to the perceived lived-experience of Lawson, Paterson and Will Ogilvie. These post-Federation writers, contemporaries of Esson, were scholarly writers like fellow-Scots Christopher Brennan and Victor Daley; or his Fasoli’s comrade EJ Brady (and Brady’s lifelong friend, Roderic Quinn). But the greatest philosophical influence on Esson’s early career was lawyer and economist Bernard O’Dowd.

Esson and O’Dowd connected initially through their shared enthusiasm for the Socialist movement, but Esson was also swayed by O’Dowd’s qualities as ‘a mystic’ and an aesthete (he compared O’Dowd to William Blake, Walt Whitman and George Moore—‘the Mystic’ ‘AE’ he had met in Dublin). Esson provides a pen portrait, and quotes a summation of O’Dowd’s perspective, in *Terra Australis* published in *Heart of the Rose* in 1907.

THE MYSTIC. Yes, but Australia is not, Bernard O’Dowd tells us, restricted by geographical boundaries. She is everywhere, in America, India, Italy, ancient Persia, in

⁹ *Truth*, 11 November 1900, p.1

¹⁰ *The Bulletin*, 6 August 1892

modern Ireland, too ... *Terra Australis* beckons at the slip-rails of the Imagination,
promising but to the rebels a fresh perception of beauty, an un-blazed track to truth.

In his own words, O'Dowd's 'Australia' is fantastically antithetical to any concept of landscape offered by *The Bulletin* bush balladeers:

Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
In halcyon calm rebuilds here fatal rest?
Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race
Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?¹¹

O'Dowd's more specific long poem *The Bush* (1912), overtly makes the case for a modern 'utopian' vision of landscape, in contrast to *The Bulletin's* lingering putative colonial romantic and nationalistic brand.

Forgetful Change in one 'antiquity'
Boreal gleams shall drown, and southern glows;
Out of some singing woman's heart-break plea
Australia's dawn shall flush with Sappho's rose:
Strong Shirlow's hand shall trace Mantegna's line,
And Soma foam from Victor Daley's wine:
Scholars to be our prehistoric drama
From Esson's 'Woman Tamer' shall restore,
Or find in Gilbert's 'Lotus Stream and Lamia'
An Austral Nile and Buddhas we adore.¹²

Here was an—albeit bathetic—clarion call for a new poetic form. Encouraged by the Bohemian atmosphere at Fasoli's cafe, Esson appeared intellectually to absorb both the political and the classical provocations that O'Dowd offered, but inexplicably embraced the 'ideal' move towards 'realism' (that he could never quite realise); Esson's inclinations towards romanticism remained obstinate.

¹¹ 'Australia', *The Bulletin*, 12 May 1900

¹² T. C. Lothian (1912)

Bells and Bees, Esson's first collection of verse, published by Thomas C Lothian in 1910, exemplifies this paradox. The collection was divided into 'Fantasies' and 'Bush Impressions', highlighting his shared preoccupations with his Fasoli Bohemian comrades, and his inclination to embrace diverse, albeit generalised, aspects of 'the bush' in poems such as 'Magpies', 'Whalin' Up the Lachlan: A Landowner's Song', 'A Camel Driver' and 'Wild Bees'. The best of the collection in this area—'The Mother', 'Spring Cattle' and 'The Old Black Bill an' Me'—concentrate primarily on 'characters' engaging *against* the landscape, the vista merely a backdrop and rarely intrinsic to the 'impression.'

Bells and Bees, had mixed reviews. While *The Advertiser* recorded that 'the various pieces have the note of originality,' they took pains to note, that 'the author has evidently studied style in the best schools.'¹³ More telling—certainly in terms of an insight into Esson's future dramaturgy—was the observations made by the *Wagga Wagga Worker*:

It is a book of pleasant rhymes easily read, but [it] seldom has the conveyance of intense feeling that makes for poetry, or the individuality of mood and expression which is needed to that end. It may be said that the verses are not put forward as poetry; but they often seem to be trying to reach its heights.¹⁴

In the years leading up to World War One, Esson deliberately attempted to embrace 'the outback' for his lyrical inspiration, but it was stilted and often gauche. Esson's second volume of poems, *Red Gums, and other Verses* (published by Fraser & Jenkins in 1912) included 'The Burnt Gully', 'The Never-Never' and 'Swinging Douglas: A Splitter's Song' in which he provides a character list of bullock-drivers, splitters, swagmen, shearers, and young pioneer couples (with young babies) forging lives in the virgin bush; there are idyllic gullies and the romantic scenes of the Gippsland bush and Mallacoota lakes, and cattle; he writes elegiacally of summer and autumn and the dawn. But they are generally laboured in rhyme and metre and with weak endings (especially compared to his quick-witted, spontaneous style he developed for his 'political pars' and 'topicalities' for *The Bulletin*, at this time contributed under his pseudonym 'Ganesha'). The difficulty for Esson was that he didn't 'know' these characters personally and didn't live their experiences as Lawson (or even Banjo Paterson) did.

It was only much later in life that he was perhaps more able to reconcile his conflicting influences and bring the two disparate visions together. In 'Bush Magic', for example:

¹³ *The Advertiser*, 7 January 1911

¹⁴ *The Worker* (Wagga), 15 December 1910

The bush has neither tale of Troy to tell,
Nor saga lay to sing;
But ever there recurs this miracle,
A forest blossoming.

Through secret tangled scrub great gums delight
To toss their heads and throw
Into the air their honey-scented white
Blossoms of summer snow;

While, light and frail above, a few clouds gleam,
As rising mist enshrouds
Deep gullies and the pale blue hills that seem
More fragile than the clouds.

In glimmering forest depths the creek runs by,
Through jungle, fern and vine,
Primeval bush—only wild earth and sky;
Of man there is no sign.

In other lands he writes his history,
His tale of change and strife;
But here broods nature's ancient mystery,
Older than human life.

There is a charm in any storied spot
That man has made his own;
But stranger beauty dwells where man is not,
With magic spell unknown.

The bush remains, aloof from human fate,
Creek, gully, rock and tree,
Enchanted with her beauty desolate,
Her brooding mystery.¹⁵

¹⁵ *The Bulletin*, 24 April 1924

The Bush Plays

Based on Esson's bush plays, it's difficult to discern the basis for Kathrine Brisbane's observation that

Esson was the first consciously to define the hardening effect upon the Australian character of the stubborn land ... he remains in a literary-dramatic sense, the most important dramatist Australia produced in its first one hundred and fifty years of settlement.¹⁶

Brisbane's commentary might best be applied to the persuasive prose fiction of Barbara Baynton (1857-1929) not to Esson's 'tragedy' *Dead Timber*, his first attempt at a bush play. Amid a plethora of 'bush-inspired' fiction at the turn of the century, it was Baynton's short stories that provided a startling alternative perspective (even compared to Lawson). Baynton's first marriage, to selector Alexander Frater, lasted a decade and ended in divorce in 1890; within 24 hours she remarried, to retired surgeon Thomas Baynton, and moved to Sydney where she became a protégé of AG Stephens. Her first story, *The Tramp*, was published in *The Bulletin* in 1896¹⁷ and immediately established a unique, albeit grotesque style, the realism was immediately contrasted with the established romantic mythology of bush life prose. But it was a collection 'of striking short stories,' *Bush Studies*, published by Duckworth and Co (London) in 1902, that set a new standard for an appreciation of 'the Australian bush in some of its saddest phases.' 'There is a grim earnestness about some of these studies,' wrote *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 'which appeals to the imagination forcibly.'¹⁸ Indeed, of the six stories, the most graphic concerns 'Squeaker's Mate'—his wife—who, after years of toil and devotion to her husband, is struck by a fallen tree and suffers an 'injoory to the spine'[sic] that condemns her to 'useless idleness.' Straightaway the 'Squeaker' secures another 'mate,' 'the heart of the forsaken woman is steeled to murder.' In Baynton's prose the landscape is malevolent in its realism; hers is a visceral response to landscape, Baynton eschews any form of sentimentality.

For Esson 'the bush' was never seen as an antagonist, there is little emotional depth nor dependence; he just couldn't make that psychological nor creative leap. It was somewhat of an epiphany a few years later when he found it 'a surprising thing that an English poet and novelist like

¹⁶ Brisbane, Katharine, 'Australian Drama', Dutton, Geoffrey [ed.], *The Literature of Australia*, Penguin (1976) p. 257

¹⁷ 12 December 1896 p.32

¹⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January 1903 p.4

DH Lawrence [“a writer of genius”] ... could have spent only a comparatively short time in Australia, should have felt so deeply and suggested so subtly the essential spirit of the bush.’

The outlook of Lawrence, a great English writer of the modern school, is entirely different [to historian Freud and novelist Trollope]. He entered and left the country quietly. ... But Lawrence had no desire to see anybody. He preferred to go his own way in perfect freedom and say whatever he wanted to say. When he wrote *Kangaroo* he had no thought of his Australian sales—or his English sales, for that matter—but he produced one of the finest and most significant books yet inspired by Australia.

No Australian has ever fallen more deeply under the spell of the bush. To Lawrence Australia is the most magical and glamorous country in the world, and different from any other country, stranger, more mysterious and more difficult of comprehension than even Egypt or India or Sicily. His English hero, Somers—a self-portrait of the author, perhaps—has to escape in the end from Australia because he has come to love it too well. It was the country, not the people that fascinated him.¹⁹

Esson observed a similar intrinsic and symbiotic relationship between writer and landscape in Katharine Susannah Prichard, who, he noted

may be described as the most modern of Australian writers. She has discarded a great deal of useless literary baggage, preferring to travel freely and make direct contact with life. Nothing matters except this sense of life, and we feel that her best novels have been drawn from vital sources. They are always real and intensely alive in every page. ... This is the modern attitude; and in her outlook on life, as well as in her technical method, the author of *Black Opal* and *Working Bullocks* belongs to the twentieth century. ...

Black Opal [is] a beautifully-written book full of the shimmer of the opal fields, and with delicate impressions of the bush landscapes that are suggestive of certain wonderful passages in Lawrence, though written before that great seer had visited Australia. *Black Opal* is an original and unusual book, with more power and beauty in it than in a score of more popular Australian novels.²⁰

Academically, Esson acknowledged that the nationalist drama of the Abbey Theatre in Ireland, and to some extent, the American school led by Eugene O’Neill, was rooted in landscape and an expression of the culture. In contrast, ‘Scotland hasn’t got any drama yet,’ he wrote to Vance.

¹⁹ ‘Lawrence and Australia’, *The Bulletin*, 27 March, 1924

²⁰ ‘Katharine Susannah Prichard’, *The Bulletin*, 31 March 1927

Long ago [Robert] Burns wanted a national theatre. In a prologue he wrote in verse he wanted to know what was all this talk about London? He said Scotland had good material, fools and rogues of its own for comedy as well as romantic characters for tragedy. We have admirable material for all kinds of plays, even historical and fantastic. We would give the critics some real work to do.²¹

The dilemma for Esson was that Yeats had also insisted that ‘most important of all, a dramatist should keep within his own borders.’ Vance Palmer later wrote, that

this advice was not at first very welcome. By temperament he was romantic, interested in what was picturesque and even exotic. Yet he was gradually convinced that the natural place for a writer to look for his material was the world he knew.²²

As far as a national drama was concerned, Yeats’s suggestion to Esson at that same meeting in 1904 in Dublin,

that some little comedies of country life should be written first, one-act plays in prose. Verse plays could follow later. He even referred to the native legends. ‘There might be material there for poetic drama,’ he said, but soon added, ‘perhaps not. It is a different race.’ Finally he harmonised these ideas. ‘At least they could be used as a decorative background.’²³

This sentiment echoed the advice from JM Synge: ‘You ought to have plenty of material for drama in Australia. All those outback stations with shepherds going mad in lonely huts.’²⁴ Esson’s own reflection was that ‘What [Synge] was seeking in his plays was the wild poetry of natural scenes and simple people.’ But Esson’s choice in the evolution of the short sketch for his bleak ‘bush tragedy,’ completely disregarded O’Dowd, unashamedly importing the nationalism of Yeats and Synge, but utilising the already dated vision of the Australian bush offered by *The Bulletin* School; the content and characters of *Dead Timber* owe much, ironically, to the tradition of bush types

²¹ Esson to Palmer, 20 June, 1921(Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p.42); Burns, in fact, did not write any drama, although I suspect what Esson was referring to was Burns’ cantata *The Jolly Beggar*.

²² Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p.4

²³ ‘WB Yeats on National Drama’, *Fellowship*, August, 1921 p.15

²⁴ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 3

established by the serialised stories of selection life by Steele Rudd (aka Arthur Hoey Davis (1868-1935))²⁵; the setting and atmosphere, however, embraces the dolefulness of Lawson.

Frustratingly, Katharine Brisbane, with other commentators (such as John McCallum and Julian Meyrick), also appear to overlook that immediately prior to the production of *Dead Timber*, there were a number of lavishly staged productions of commercial plays that challenged Esson's primacy in his depiction of the 'outback' and 'bush realism.' In 1906, for example, even Esson would have been aware of the enormously popular adaptation of *Thunderbolt*, the 'Great Australian Drama of Real Bush Life,' that opened at the Theatre Royal (Melbourne), 1 September. The play was 'realistically staged' by producer William Anderson's Company. The structure of the play—as arranged by Abrose Pratt and AS Josephs—includes scenes at Kurrajong Station; 'In the Bush'; including 'Poison Gap'; 'Squatter Mason's Station'; and, 'the River Bank, Jurrajong.' 'This is a good, honest and thoroughly workmanlike melodrama on more or less conventional lines,' wrote *The Age*,

In which a sentimental interest is handled judiciously and the sensational element plays a smaller part. ... There are several admirably planned situations and tableaux, a story that runs evenly and plausibly, a really humorous comic relief, and above all things an application of local colour to the scenes and a local idiom to the dialogue which make a direct and immediate appeal to an Australian audience.²⁶

The cast was distinguished by George Cross (as Thunderbolt), Eugenie Duggan and Bert Bailey (giving a 'laughable study as the English aristocrat'). The setting was provided by scenic artist Rege Robins. *The Age* complimented him 'upon a succession of artistic settings in which the Australian atmosphere has been most adequately reproduced.'

The first scene was a triumph of stage landscapes, with real wallabies, magpies and cockatoos scattered about in lightly timbered country, a native bear playing the part of a lone fisherman [a reference to the burlesque *Evangeline* by EE Rice] upon a stump in the foreground, and the warm southern sunlight radiating through it all. Other settings were no less picturesque, and the Australian surroundings were everywhere emphasised, even to the length of a wood chopping contest in front of a

²⁵ The son of a Welsh blacksmith (who arrived in Australia and settled in Drayton, Queensland in 1847), Davis was a stockman and drover; he published his first sketch, based on his father's life, in August 1895 in *The Bulletin*. His whimsical, 'realistic' yet farcically tragic—albeit nostalgic—yarns were enthusiastically encouraged by Archibald, and his series of stories were published in the omnibus collection *On Our Selection* in 1899; *Our New Selection* followed, contributing to the already established huge success and popularity. The work entrenched Dad and Mum Rudd, and their children as national icons.

²⁶ *The Age*, 3 September 1906 p.8

bush shanty. The scenery indeed is a markedly attractive feature of the production, and received, as it deserved sincere and cordial recognition from the house.

The following year, productions with similar depictions of the Australian landscape (as spectacle) enjoyed enormous popular success: *The Squatter's Daughter; or, the Land of the Wattle* by Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan [aka Albert Edmunds]; and William Anderson's production of both Darrell's *The Land of Gold* ('a tale of adventure, realism and romance') and *The Southern Cross*. Rege Robins, who was Anderson's 'brilliant' staff artist between 1899-1916, was responsible for the scenic art in all three productions.

What remains perplexing is why historians chose to ignore this legitimate contribution to the development of cultural identity merely because it existed in the commercial 'popular' theatre sector?

*

Estranged from his wife Madeleine, Esson was back living with his uncle and aunts in Queensberry Street, Carlton in 1911 and distracted himself from the vicissitudes of his personal life with an intense period of writing and engagement with politics. Robert Ross²⁷, who had been the influential editor of *The Socialist* since 1908, resigned early in 1911 and was replaced by the co-editorship of VSP stalwart, poet and journalist Marie Pitt (1869-1948)²⁸ and the Unitarian minister and social critic Frederick Sinclair (1881-1954) (who had just resigned his ministry). Esson was familiar with Sinclair's 'unorthodox' Shavian inspired sermons in Eastern Hill.

Following Esson's journalistic response to the recent strikes in the coal mining industry in Newcastle and Maitland—specifically 'Mr Hyett's ... lucid and scientific statement of the strikers' position' in his *Socialist* article 'The Right to Strike'²⁹, the new co-editors commissioned Esson to write a series of articles on Australian 'institutions.' The first of six—'The Newspaper'—was published on 24 March, then weekly until 12 May: his topics included 'Parliament', 'The Factory', 'The Suburban Home', 'Eight Hours Day,' and 'The Church'; they are keenly observed, socially conscious, and satirically witty.

Esson's divorce from Madeleine was officially granted on 17 June 1911. As a diversion, John Ford Paterson encouraged Esson to join him on a painting expedition into the Gippsland bush (the

²⁷ Esson celebrates Ross's contribution to both the VSP and *The Socialist* in his article 'The Return of RS Ross: Louis Esson on the Party and the Movement', *The Socialist*, 2 May 1912

²⁸ Following the death of her husband in 1912, Marie Pitt began an enduring personal relationship with Bernard O'Dowd.

²⁹ *The International Socialist*, 25 March 1911

Paterson sisters would look after Esson's son James). Uncle and nephew pitched their tent by Lake Catani in the Victorian High Country—Mt Buffalo in the distance—and were away for a couple of months. According to Esson's second wife Hilda, 'Ford Paterson brought back a sketch of ghostly silver trees shining in a misty morning light, and Louis his short play *Dead Timber*.' While the idea is tantalising, given Esson's argument for a national theatre to offer 'a good bush play,' the story appears improbable, primarily due to the landscape he depicts in his drama is at odds with the environment in which he was camping, but, as it had been reported in *The Australasian* in September, Esson was otherwise preoccupied, already planning a full-length 'Australian political drama' that was 'under consideration for early production' by Gregan McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Theatre Company and scheduled for December.

By September however, McMahon issued his prospectus and, unexpectedly, announced his intention to run 'a short Australian season ... in December [co-ordinated by William Moore], when *little* plays by Edward Dyson³⁰, Alfred Buchanan, Blamire Young, William Moore and Louis Esson' would be performed. Interestingly, Esson offered Moore a choice of two plays: another slum-play or a play set on a Gippsland dairy farm. Given the other urban plays already chosen, Moore included the latter for contrast. 'This will be,' *Punch* mis-informed its readers, 'the most serious attempt to deal with Australian drama yet made in Melbourne.'³¹

— Dead Timber (1911) —

In mid-November 1911 it was announced—without fanfare in *The Age*³²—that William Moore had joined with Gregan McMahon and would present his Annual Australian Drama Night as part of the Melbourne Repertory Theatre's third season³³ that would begin at St Patrick's Hall, Bourke Street on Monday 4 December. The season opened with Ibsen's tragedy, *Rosmersholm*; then Elizabeth Baker's *Chains*³⁴. *The Age* revealed a week in advance that the Australian plays were Louis Esson's *Dead Timber*, Blamire Young's *Art for Art's Sake*, Alfred Buchanan's *The Secret*

³⁰ Edward Dyson (1865-1931) was better known as a writer of short stories. His melodrama *The Breaking of the Drought* (a local adaptation of a British play) was staged by Bland Hold in 1901. Dyson did not provide a play for McMahon's season in 1911, however his play *The Climax* was given by MRT at the Athenaeum Hall on 15 April 1913 as a curtain raiser to Charles McEvoy's *David Ballard*.

³¹ *Punch* (Melbourne), 7 September 1911 p.25

³² 18 November 1911

³³ This arrangement was not mentioned in the printed program for the season.

³⁴ See detailed description in Chapter Three.

Flame and William Moore's *The Only Game*. McMahon brazenly announced he would stage 'for the first time in local history, four one-act plays by Australian writers. 'The Australian play,' he said, 'is not unknown, but so far it has been mainly on the bush and mining camp order.' His perspective was apparently informed by his own modernist leanings, but seemingly oblivious to what was playing at other theatre is the city:

The [Australian] pieces ... will be new, inasmuch as they aim at presenting life from the Australian viewpoint, without the glaring local colour which has hitherto rather obscured the horizon.³⁵

The season took place at St Patrick's Hall (opposite the Menzies Hotel) newly fitted with modified staging, electric lighting plant 'and many other improvements ... to ensure successful productions and the comfort of patrons.'³⁶ The Australian Drama Night opened on Wednesday 13 December, 1911.

Moore curated the season. His own contribution was a revival of *The Only Game*, himself appearing as the lionised Painter (along with Lea Halinbour giving 'an excellent stage portrait of a society girl'). As he had done in the past, Moore built the program by provoking colleagues to supply the play scripts. Blamire Young (1862–1935) was an English born Australian watercolorist and illustrator (he studied under Hubert von Herkomer). He was a member of the Victorian Artists' Society and exhibited regularly; he also contributed illustrations to EJ Brady's *The Native Companion*. At this time he was the art critic at the Melbourne *Herald*.³⁷ *Table Talk* thought *The Children's Bread*³⁸ 'an effective variation of the old dream theme. ... This is a really excellent one act sketch for a good character actor and two clever children.'³⁹ Herbert Woodhouse played the father, to Miss A Jacobs and Miss Patricia McMahon [McMahon's daughter] as the children.

The third new work for the evening was from another author and journalist—one time drama critic of the Melbourne *Age*—Alfred Buchanan (1874-1941). Born in England, he immigrated to New Zealand and moved to Australia after gaining his Master of Arts to take up journalism. He published his first book *The Real Australia* in 1907 and his most recent was *Where Day Begins*

³⁵ *The Age*, 29 November 1911 p.10

³⁶ *Table Talk*, 16 November 1911

³⁷ Always looking for a marketing angle, in selecting Young's Strindberg-inspired dream play 'extravaganza' *The Children's Bread* ('a satire on Art for Art's sake'), Moore was more than aware that only recently had the Australia Postmaster-General selected the Victorian Artists' Association to nominate an artist for the design of Australia's first stamp; Young was commissioned to perform the task.

³⁸ *Art for Art's Sake* was renamed *The Children's Bread* for its premiere.

³⁹ 21 December 1911

(July 1911). *The Sacred Flame*⁴⁰ marked his debut as a playwright. Dealing with ‘a modern girl with aspirations, and the complications they lead to,’ *Table Talk* thought the play ‘an amusing little sketch,’⁴¹ while his own paper, *The Age*⁴² praised the dialogue as ‘bright and pointed,’ and that ‘the piece was well presented by Miss Dorothy Hiscock, Miss Bertha Collins and Mr Lyle Christian.’

In obvious haste, using one of his own shorts stories, ‘The Full Moon’⁴³, as the basis Esson drafted another *little* play that went into rehearsal as *Dead Timber* and was presented as the fourth item on the Program.

‘The Full Moon’ tells a frivolous story of a selector and his wife, with their two sons and a new baby eking out an existence in their slab-hut, set against

a ridge of clear timber. The family work hard and have put in a long day cuttin’ scrub, shiftin’ logs, burnin’ rubbish, fencin’, trappin’, and chasin’ off lories that were playin’ Old Harry with what they called the ‘cultivation’ paddock; and now, after milkin’, they were all dog-tired, hungry and irritable.

The full moon, however, reminds the put-upon wife and mother that it’s haircut time for the boys! For inclusion in *Bells and Bees*, Esson had significantly revised two poems previously published by *The Bulletin*⁴⁴ that also provide relevant source material: the unnamed ‘Wife’ in *Dead Timber* carries the drudgery and loneliness of ‘The Shearer’s Wife:

Blurred runs the track whereon he comes,
And tired am I with labour sore;
Tired o’ the bush, an’ cows, an’ gums,
Tired—an’ I want to think no more.

What tales he tells!

The young unmarried mother (the distraught figure in ‘The Mother’) on the other hand gives a image laden description of the consequences of a liaison between a young girl (like Mary, the Selector’s daughter, ‘sweet-‘earting down ther gully’) and an itinerant horse-breaker:

⁴⁰ Not to be confused with William Somerset Maugham’s play *The Sacred Flame* (1928).

⁴¹ 21 December 1911

⁴² 14 December 1911

⁴³ *The Bulletin*, 7 February 1907

⁴⁴ *The Bulletin*, 18 July 1907

The season's ripe. And rain and sun
Like wedded wife and husband came.
The fruit hangs heavy on the tree,
And rich increase the creature's claim.
But baby, baby, at my breast
Your birth alone brings sin and shame.

Given the subject matter, as far as the dramaturgy was concerned, Esson recalled the advice given by WB Yeats and JM Synge. He was impressed by Yeats's intellect and politics; but it was Synge—only 7 years his senior—whose 'unaffected' personality and 'indescribable charm' that Esson found 'alluring.' At that first meeting with Synge, in John Masefield's pleasant study in London in the summer of 1904, Esson discovered that Synge

was not uninterested in what I could tell him of Australia. When I mentioned our boundary-riders, shepherds, or swaggies, who sometimes went mad, or half-mad, from the loneliness of their surroundings, he observed that it was the same in Ireland, where there was more insanity in the glens than in the villages. 'But when they are going mad, are they not interesting then?' ...⁴⁵

Esson's *Dead Timber* was directed by Gregan McMahon, with a cast that included JH Mitchell (as the old Selector) with Fannie Fowler (his durable and enduring wife); the boys played by Bruce Henderson and F Le Leu, and Dorothy Hiscock played Mary.

On first viewing, the play received generally positive reviews—although like much of Esson's work, it is more effective when read—unlike the other plays on the program, however, that responded to the contemporary world, *Dead Timber* was a genre nostalgia piece. As summarised by *Table Talk*, *Dead Timber* was 'a tense, cruel little bit of real life ...'

A selector has become crazed and soured by his hard struggle against fate and continued disaster. He is irritable, morose, fault-finding and despondent. He is worrying about his daughter being seen with a man he disapproves of, and is ready to believe the worst, and anticipates disgrace. There is his patient wife optimistic in spite of all her struggles, the wayward daughter, the elder son, and the pert younger brother.⁴⁶

'*Dead Timber* sought to give a true picture of the terrible uphill fight which the pioneer settler in Australia had to wage,' wrote *The Age*. 'It was a whole drama crowded into the space of one short

⁴⁵ 'JM Synge: A Personal Note', *Fellowship*, 1921 p.138

⁴⁶ *Table Talk*, 21 December 1911 p.12

act.⁴⁷ The *Herald* critic thought Esson, temperamentally suited as a dramatist, though perhaps too pessimistic to visualise ‘the sunny phases of life in this as yet new world. ... that he has the Ibsen touch and outlook was manifest in *Dead Timber*.’ He also speculated that

Mr Esson may some day write an Australian drama of conventional length, which will firmly establish his reputation as a playwright, and supply live interpretations of Australian character which are now looked for in vain.⁴⁸

Of the four sketches, however, the *Argus* thought Blamire Young’s play showed ‘most sense of theatre and was blessed with the saving grace of humour.’ Nonetheless, the general consensus was that Esson’s *Dead Timber* short ‘bush tragedy’ was ‘the success of the evening.’ Indeed, it was this production that appeared to cement Esson’s reputation for later critics; the majority suggesting that ‘the new wave’ began at this point.

If *The Woman Tamer* was ‘a tabloid’ comedy of slum life; *Dead Timber* was its contrasting companion piece: ‘a tabloid’ sensational drama of the relentless drudgery of bush life. The playlet was marketed as ‘a bush tragedy,’ but its central character, the Selector, carries none of the characteristics of the Aristotelian tragic hero. Generically, Esson’s dramaturgy is pure melodrama (the style ‘vivid realism’), where an accumulation of calamitous ‘incident,’ crammed into a short twenty minutes stage time, results in the farmer’s suicide. The atmosphere is relentlessly dour and pessimistic; the mood melancholic.

The setting of the Gippsland dairy farm—somewhat difficult to achieve with any verisimilitude under the circumstances at its premiere—would have been familiar to anyone who had read *The Bulletin* (the short stories of Henry Lawson or the ‘Starting the selection’ series of sketches published from 1895 by Arthur Honey Davis): ‘outside a slab hut in the middle of a half-cleared selection.’ Esson’s painterly eye provides both the topography and the accrument of the selector’s life in the stage directions; the distant vista of ‘a steep hillside, covered with dead trees’ in winter is the main focus of Esson’s poetic imagery (on the page).

The situation is straightforward. A selector rearing cattle in Gippsland becomes increasingly agitated and despondent, life is tough, and fate appears to be conspiring against him:

FARMER. ... Everythin’ goin’ agen me. Ain’t I a right to be angry when me own children
turn agen me! Everythin’s goin’ wrong on me.

⁴⁷ *The Age*, 14 December 1911 p.8

⁴⁸ *The Herald (Melbourne)*, 14 December 1911 p.5

In the first instances, his two sons are a disappointment, seemingly immune to ‘the joyless drudgery,’ they’re unwilling to engage: the youngest, ginger-headed Joe (11) is lazy and recalcitrant (‘You can’t expect a man to be like er traction ingine.’); the eldest, Abe (24), is ‘half-witted’ and even more unmanageable, deliberately defying his father (‘I ain’t goin’ to take them steers inter the markit ter-day.’). But it is his daughter, Mary—who, he’s heard at the markets, has ‘bin sneakin’ down to Myrtle Gully ... sweet-eartin’ with young Andy Wilson, ‘the horse-breaker,’—who disappoints and enflames him the most; she was ‘out agin last night.’

As ‘a god-fearing man’, the farmer’s children (including those they lost, ‘Tom and little Sarah’) ironically named for the biblical allusion—he’s susceptible to the savage intervention of Nature and fate:

FARMER. The rain poured. There was thunder an’ lightning. The ranges were all lit up. I looked out, and there I seen er big tree struck by the lightnin’. It was er judgement o’ God. Mary’ll be struck dead.

Of more immediate practical concern is that the storm has flooded the creek and the road’s bogged; the steers consequently won’t get to market; the ‘seed’ll be washed away’; there are cows lost in the scrub; the dingoes were howling after the lambs; and there’ll be ‘more rain per-day.’ ‘Everythin’ goin’ agen me,’ the Farmer laments at wits’ end.

Cutting across the cold, damp gloom, Esson introduces the Farmer’s Wife—also unnamed (rendered as ‘the bush every[wo]man’)—who he describes as ‘careworn, but resigned.’ She’s nurturing and resilient, worried about the sick cow and the lambs; jumps immediately to the defence of her daughter when confronted with the accusations against her. ‘She was only seein’ after the sick cow,’ she reassures her husband, but also reminds him that ‘girls must have a peep o’ pleasure’—but ‘pleasure is sin’ as far as he’s concerned and he makes his position clear:

FARMER. I’ll wait for them to-night. I’ll follow Mary down the back paddock. I’ll take me gun. If Andy Wilson comes up I’ll shoot him—as God is my judge—and I’ll shoot myself after.

Mary (20) appears, contrary to her father’s belief, has been out of bed sufficient time to have dutifully prepared breakfast for the family. She tired, she responds, when accused of being lazy, but ‘Tired of the cows. ... tired of the bush.’ She’s her mother’s daughter, headstrong, determined; her education, her father insists, ‘spoilt’ her, but she’s self-aware enough to know that she’s ‘not well off living in the bush.’ In yet another symbolic premonition, building the tension in an otherwise

situation devoid of dramatic action, Abe informs us of the fate of the sick cow ‘lying under the she-oaks by the creek’:

ABE. It’s dead. It was all swelled up.

It the discussion between Mary and her mother that follows—while engaged churning butter—we learn that she has indeed been seeing Andy Wilson; she wants ‘a change—away from the cows and the muck of the yards.’

MARY. Yes. It's always raining here. The mud's a foot deep when you tramp through it. I hate the dripping trees and the black ranges. Oh, I hate the winter. It's all mud and slush and gloom and misery.

She is impressed, on the other hand, by the places Andy’s seen, and his work ‘in New South Wales, and Queensland on the big stations, breaking horses for the rich squatters,’ and that ‘he also goes to the city.’ ‘We must take what we get and be satisfied,’ her mother stoically, and predictably, responds.

MARY. But it's so lonely here and melancholy, with the bush all round, and the dreary scrub and the dead timber. We're too far from the township.

WIFE. I’ve got used to the loneliness, Mary. Dad says it's a free life in the bush.

MARY. What freedom do I ever get! Dad expects me to work day and night, and never go anywhere, or talk to anybody. I can't go on for ever like this. I'm not free. I can't breathe.

While Mary is sympathetic to her family’s predicament—‘The world isn’t all misery like this, is it, Mother?’—it is soon revealed that Mary is suffering morning sickness, and—while it is not stated overtly—it’s clear that she is pregnant.

The *situation* up to this point has all taken place in the pre-dawn darkness, lit only by the ‘lighted lantern’ brought on by the selector. Mary complains consistently that it’s cold and she wishes ‘the sun would come up.’ The final confrontation between father and daughter occurs just as the sun rises; Mary defiantly stands up to her father by confirming the reality and revealing the truth.

MARY. He’s my man. He loves me. Now you know.

Cursing her from bringing such shame to the family—‘You’ll be struck dead. You’ll burn in Hell fire.’—he casts her out. While her mother attempts to placate the situation, Mary is resolute:

MARY. ... I can't stay here. I'll have to go. I'm not afraid. I'm a woman now. He'll take me
away.

Mary leaves willingly and this resolves what can be seen as ‘the conflict’ in the sketch; all revealed by reportage the major device in Esson’s evolving dramaturgical style; it is journalistic in its voyeurist scrutiny. The sketch has no significant dramatic action; what holds our attention, nonetheless, is the cumulative string of duologues that build a mosaic that represents this struggling family against a brutal landscape.

In what is an extremely bleak picture of bush life, the episode continues to exploit Esson’s fascination with the idiom of the working class, but his bush vernacular and that of the city slums appears interchangeable, the slang only occasionally localising the exchanges. What humour there is comes at the expense of characterisation (Abe’s catch phrases; or Joe’s witty retorts). There is an issue, too, with the contraction of time, the scenario is packed with offstage incident and yet much of what takes place could never occur within the allocated stage time. Coupled with the numerous exits and entrances, along with the litany of calamity, the realism quickly turns to farce.

Otherwise, Esson does provide a strong and resilient character in the wife and mother: her apologia, remonstrating with her daughter, is succinct yet poignant (reminiscent of both Sonia’s curtain speech in Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*, but also Lawson’s ‘Drovers’ Wife’):

WIFE. ... When do I ever get a change? I haven't had a spell for eleven years. What with
milking and churning, and washing and scrubbing—keeping the place in order—yes,
and cutting scrub and burning off when it's wanted, and patching and darning for you all
—I'm butcher and baker and tailor -

MARY. Yes, Mother, I know. I'm sorry for you. And I'm sorry for Dad. I'm sorry for
everybody living in the bush.

WIFE. But what's the use of fretting?

Esson provides a startling, and sensational, coda to his story however that is gratuitous and doesn’t earn its place in the dramaturgy. His daughter gone, sitting ‘dazed on a log’ the farmer and his wife exchange words: she is reassuring, he distracted by reminisce their early life as well as work still to be done.

FARMER. I'm beat, Mum. The bush 'as beat me.

WIFE. Mary'll come back. (*Goes to gate and calls 'Mary, come back.'*) ...

(*Trying to rouse him*). ... You remember the big bush-fire five years ago, when everything was burnt out—fencing, grass-seed, all but the house? We had to put blankets on the roof to save it.

FARMER. I remember. ...

WIFE. We started again, Dad.

FARMER. I cleared that there hill three times.

WIFE. Don't give in now. Everything will come right.

He is suddenly stirred to action. He rises suddenly, anxious for his daughter, angry and defiant:

FARMER. She's gone; me favourite daughter; to burn in Hell fire, an' her child o' sin. I done me best. What am I workin' for? Ther bush 'as broken me up, an' me own family's turned agen me. We won't git much for them steers. I'll track him out an' shoot him. I can't bear disgrace. They're all agen me. I'll git me gun; yes, I'll shoot him.

Our expectation at the curtain, is that the Farmer will come rushing out of the slab hut and confront Andy Wilson at Myrtle Gully. Instead, the soundscape—typified by cowbells and cattle calls thus far—is shattered by the sound of a gun shot inside the house.

WIFE. What can we do? God help us all.

(*Enter ABE with bucket.*)

ABE. Where's Dad gorn?

JOE. Shut up, yer balmy idiot, don't yer know the old man's shot hisself?

(*JOE enters house.*)

WIFE. We're left alone. Mary's gone away. And poor Dad's shot himself. Oh, Abe! shot himself thro' the head.

Esson undermines the resolution melodramatically; the final image of the wife rushing to her husband's side (her husband selfishly leaving her to deal with an already desperate situation) and the lazy, half-witted son, Abe, walking 'slowly towards the shed' presumably now the presumptive head of the family. As the sun illuminates the landscape we are left with the final image of the dead timber of the title, Esson's desolate symbol of the hopeless outlook of the Gippsland farmer.

The Australian play nights (two) for the MRTC attracted capacity audiences and ‘the program could easily have been given a third time.’ *The Argus*⁴⁹ also noted that ‘of the four Australian plays it is curious ... that two of them dealt with art, one with the highest, and the other with it on a lower plane, suffering, indeed, from the nightmare, as art often does.’

Fraser & Jenkinson published Louis Esson’s *Three Short Plays*—‘gratefully inscribed to J Ford Paterson’—in late December. The volume includes *Dead Timber*, along with *The Woman Tamer* and *The Sacred Place*. As Robert Henderson Croll’s copy—held in the NLV Moir Collection—is personally autographed by Esson, and dated 15 December 1911, it’s clear that publication was in process prior to the premiere of *Dead Timber* (two days earlier) but scheduled to be released to coincide with the production. The first review of the publication appeared in the Melbourne *Herald* on 28 December. We have to assume that the published text represents the rehearsal text.

Meanwhile, whatever distraction the project provided Esson, its opening night was somewhat soured by the news that on 6 December, two years to the day since Maddy confessed her infidelity, she married advertising agent William Mitchell.

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Apart from two collaborations with his half-brother Frank Brown and a heavy reliance on the one-act form throughout the Pioneer Players seasons, Esson did not write another short play for twenty years. While the American playwright Eugene O’Neill achieved great success with his critically acclaimed one act expressionist play *The Emperor Jones* (1920), the short sketch form found its home in the emerging musical revue and vaudeville companies outside what was referred to as the ‘legitimate’ commercial, repertory and provincial theatres. The film industry (silent in Australia until 1931) also provided an alternative to the short form of entertainment, where the running time was usually about 15 minutes.

*

When, over two decades later, Esson did attempt the short sketch format again—both with bush settings—with *Australian Felix* (1928) and *Vagabond Camp* (1929), they were spontaneously creative rather than commissioned and he returned to his concept of ‘bush realism.’ What is

⁴⁹ 15 December 1911

intriguing, however, is that his published views on ‘the old bush school’ had devolved into a cynical rant. In his review of Kate Howarde’s ‘new Australian comedy’ *Gum-Tree Gully* in 1927 he notes:

Gone the simple rustic charm of the Primitives, the homely pathos of *The Squatter’s Daughter*; the emotional somersaults of Cranky Jack in *On Our Selection*. The old bush school has gone, and the Waybacks are interested now only in motor-cars and the movies. Naturally, the bush idiom has changed. ... The naive snobbery, so characteristic of the great Australian Bush, is well exemplified in this amazing young person [the heroine] who is universally looked up to as a ‘lady’ because she appears to have stepped out of a Palais de Danse.

Esson dismisses the genre as dated; ‘The acting was worthy of the play,’ he concluded. ‘There were only nine characters, but some of them were unnecessary, probably about nine. I doubt if *Gum-Tree Gully* will be likely to win the Nobel prize.’⁵⁰ What Esson failed to realise is that Howarde (and indeed Bert Bailey) understood that following the War Australian cultural values had changed and the old *Bulletin* tropes had evolved. Howarde caricatured bush life but with an informed and authentic voice; she provoked audiences to laugh *with* her characters and their situation, not *at* them. Further, in the advertising Howarde suggested that ‘*Possum Paddock* is the spot where the real Digger humour was bread and born,’ and encouraged Sydney audiences to ‘Buy only Australian-made goods,’ and to ‘see this real Australian Play.’ Howarde had cast Jack Kirby, late of the AIF in the role of Billy McQuade. *Possum Paddock*, also, was no mere ‘decorative background’ but intrinsic to both the story (the progress of the train line in norther NSW) and the plot (the pocket of land owned by Dad McQuade was coveted by his unscrupulous neighbour Dan Martin).

— *Australia Felix* (1928) —

Disrupting the chronology of Esson’s life to draw the thematic line of his short bush sketches, we move to the early months of 1927, following the demise of the Pioneer Players, Esson and Hilda Esson—with their young (Esson’s second) son Hugh—felt compelled to escape the disappointment and, on an invitation from EJ Brady, fled Melbourne for an extended stay in remote East Gippsland. In a reflective mood, Esson wrote to Vance Palmer that he and Hilda were

⁵⁰ ‘Melbourne Theatre’, *The New Triad*, 8 April 1927 p.7

sorry the Pioneers had to go bung. I didn't expect them to go on, but I thought there might have been a kind of forlorn hope that Stewart [Macky] might have seen his way to do something. I don't blame anybody for the failure. It isn't easy to push through something nobody wants, especially without money, resources, or faith.⁵¹

The Essons had made a similar trip a decade early, in February 1916, when they were first married, at which time they planned to stay for some months.

So enamoured is Mr Louis Esson of the Australian bush that he has decided to make a home in the timber country at Mallacoota. He has secured a cottage there, and with Mrs Esson, will leave shortly to set the house in order. He will have a congenial neighbour in Mr EJ Brady, the Australian writer, who has a permanent camp at Mallacoota.⁵²

But there was no cottage available for them this time: 'We are settling down at last under canvas,' Esson wrote to Vance Palmer from EJ Brady's camp in West Mallacoota when they arrived in late summer 1924.

The tent looks rather pretty, and the boys [Brady's sons Tony and Ted] have built us a humpy with a home-made chimney, bag walls and an ant-bed floor. Our oven is an oil drum, in the best navvy's style. We get a good deal of game, fish, oysters and fruit. The whole country from Orbost to Eden is full of interest. The coast is magnificent, and the bush at the back is the wildest I've seen. There is plenty of material for literature, the beauty of nature, ocean, lake, river; mountain and forest, and the interest of the characters, stockmen, hunters, fishers, road-men, many of them primitive and some lawless and a few dotty. It is one of the richest places I have ever been in. We are all in good health. I have done a months work, and I believe I'll have a good year. ... The whole trip is wonderful.⁵³

Esson must have been pleased to be out of Melbourne and able to engage with his confidante and mentor (only ten years his senior). Brady's biographer, John B Webb, noted that whenever they met,

Esson and Brady argued about literature, often to the disgust of their wives, and frequently into the small hours of the morning. Brady recalled Esson, always with affection, as a tolerant, sympathetic and gentle man.⁵⁴

⁵¹ 9 February 1924—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 54

⁵² *The Herald* (Melbourne), 11 January 1916

⁵³ 20 January 1924—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 54

⁵⁴ Webb, JB, *A Critical Biography of Edwin James Brady* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney, 1973) p.180

While Esson continued to write occasional pieces for *The Bulletin*⁵⁵, *The Weekly Times*⁵⁶ and *Smith's Weekly*⁵⁷ his creative interests turned to prose not drama, as he explained in his letter to Palmer on 24 March:

About a month ago I had the idea of writing a novel; and I've been at it every day since. I've roughed in about a dozen chapters, about half, and written over 20,000 words. It has developed itself. I won't do this type of novel again; it is subjective, psychological, with a background of politics. My hero [is a mixture] of [Max] Meldrum and myself. It will be an account of the actions and reactions of an artist in a new country. There are a few London chapters, with an account of the Australian colony in Chelsea.

One of the ideas is that Australia is still an undiscovered country. The early republican and radical movement has failed. Do we deserve the country? Or is there such a thing as a spirit of a country independent of the spirit of man?⁵⁸

A month later (April), Esson reported to Palmer that he'd 'knocked up about 16 or 17 chapters, some fairly complete and others in outline. I can see a certain distance ahead yet, but there's still a vacant space to be filled up. I think I am working in proper narrative form.' Despite the enjoyment of 'the fishing season' and 'going out with the boats' to net snapper, the enthusiasm for their meagre accommodation and remote lifestyle waned and they were eager to return to the city.

The novel was never complete and there is no extant copy; the six months in Mallacoota did however stimulate his theatrical imagination. In a letter to Palmer (15 March), he noted that he 'also planned a savage four-act play [*Shipwreck*] but I haven't written a line of it. I'll have to leave it at present.'⁵⁹

Returning to Melbourne in August 1924, the Essons took a house at 73 Rathdown Street, Carlton (two houses away from his uncle's in Queensberry Street) and Esson took up the position of drama critic for *Triad* (later *New Triad*, a position he held until 1927).⁶⁰ Apart from his theatre reviews and commentary, Esson produced little creative work over the following twelve months: two short

55 Esson's contributions to *The Bulletin* included: 'The White Crane' and 'Mother Hogan's' (14 February); 'Andy's Jimmy' (6 March); 'The Cutter' (20 March); 'Lawrence and Australia' (27 March); 'Bush Magic' and a major piece on Padraic Colum (8 May)

56 'A Man of Property' (24 May)

57 'A Child's Tent' (28 June)

58 Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 54

59 Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 58

60 While he did not attend, Esson's play *Dead Timber* was given a reading in Sydney by the Playreading Circle of the Sydney Repertory Theatre Society (on 5 July 1924 at Beale's Salon in George Street); it was subsequently broadcast on radio station 2FC.

stories for *The Sydney Mail*—‘A Bushman’s Legacy’ (5 November 1924) and ‘Beginning Young’ (15 April 1925)—and a poetic narrative, ‘Henry Lawson’s Camp’—based on information gleaned from discussions with Brady at Mallacoota—that appeared in *The Christmas Aussie* in November (1925).

It was the Australian Federal Election—held on 14 November 1925—that provoked Esson to contemplate another ‘political play’ (his first since *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*). The incumbent Nationalist-Country coalition, led by Prime Minister Stanley Bruce, won in a landslide—the coalition’s fourth consecutive victory—against the Matthew Carlton led Labor Party. Bruce, the Nationalist leader, fought his campaign primarily as a supporter of the White Australia Policy.

Esson was unhappy with the result, writing to Palmer a week after the election: ‘I suppose conditions in Australia must be so generally tolerable,’ he argued, ‘that people have no desire to risk a change.’⁶¹ Esson had gone to Trades Hall in Melbourne and saw the first results posted.

It impressed me as a scene, and I’m having a go at a political play. I started it last week and I should finish before the New Year if I finish it at all. I don’t know if it will be any good. It will simply be an attempt at an interpretation of the country. The danger is the satirical note which would be better out. But I don’t know how to avoid it altogether. To make some of the characters speak at all looks like wild satire, though I only use parts of their actual speeches.

There is no extant manuscript nor notes for this play, but a political play of sorts did emerge at the same time in his short verbatim sketch *Australia Felix*. Instead of Trades Hall, Esson chose to set his play at Mallacoota, the political discourse unfolding in the familiar surroundings of the camp on Brady’s property on ‘a lonely but picturesque spot in far Eastern Gippsland, overlooking the Southern Ocean’ in summer. Brady’s presence in Melbourne was perhaps the provocation to combine past and present events.

I saw [*Herald* journalist] Monty Grover last night and he wants to see Brady, who is down from Mallacoota, in regard to the tariff. He thinks it is possible a duty may be imposed on imported books, serials etc. It would make a considerable practical difference, and it ought to be done. Monty thinks every time the tariff is brought up, an effort should be made by the combined writers. Even if they are turned down a few times they would ultimately succeed if they kept up the fight.⁶²

⁶¹ 23 November 1925—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 39

⁶² 23 November 1925—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 17

Brady, who was 55 years old in 1924, is succinctly represented in the play as Michael Gavan, who ‘thirty years ago’ was one of ‘the number wild young men’ who met ‘in back rooms and at street corners,’ and who ‘had our great plans for the future.’ Brady’s son Hugh (21) easily recognisable in Willie Gavan. The artist Stuart Graham—the mixture of Max Meldrum and Esson himself—clearly lifted from the unfinished novel and certainly self-reflective; and Graham’s wife Helen a cheeky but affectionate pen portrait of Hilda. Dick, a ‘bushman’ completes the cast.

The date of composition is secured by two internal allusions. ‘The murders in Melbourne’ refers back to the shootings at the Melbourne Botanical Gardens in January 1924—when 30 year old Norman Alfred List opened fire with a .44 repeating rifle, shooting five people, killing three and injuring two—the inclusion of a reference to ‘the last [cricket] Tests’ suggests the 5th Cricket Test when England toured to Australia in February and March 1925. Otherwise, the election coverage provided on the wireless dominate the scenario, and incites the discussion about ‘an interpretation of the country.’ Interestingly, however, the re-election of Harding—not withstanding the discussion on the White Australia Policy in the National’s platform—is more a throwback (politically) to Billy Hughes than Stanley Bruce (who replaced him): ‘a proletarian who rose from the ranks, rabbit-trapper to Prime Minister.’⁶³

Esson’s sketch is built on his now familiar five beat structure, with content fundamentally drawn from his 1907 ‘Fragments of a Conversation’. The subtle adjustment in perspective indicated in the shift from *Terra Australis* [Incognita]—‘The Unknown South Land’—to *Australia Felix*—‘Fortunate Australia,’ a land of enormous resources of mines, agriculture, and commerce ... a land destined to an even grander and more brilliant future.’⁶⁴

What action there is takes place on election night and centres on a post-meal discussion outside a tent in writer Gavan’s permanent camp. In this iteration, Helen fulfils the function of The Stranger (‘I’m extraordinarily ignorant of Australian history.’); Stuart, her husband the artist, is The Mystic (‘Stuart fancies himself as a bushman.’); and writer, editor and one-time politician Michael Gavin, The Host. It is Gavin who outlines the thesis for the major discussion that ensues:

GAVIN. ... we put our faith and hope in the bush. There would be a great movement throughout the bush. It might come any day. We just lived for it. Those big brown lanky men, shearers and drovers, silent, slow, stoical, akin to the bush that bred them, with its

⁶³ There was a Federal Election held on December 1919 at which Billy Hughes’ Nationalist Party won re-election. Esson was still in London at this time; other references in the play suggest 1924 or 1925 as the date of composition.

⁶⁴ *The Register* (Adelaide), 26 January 1925 p. 8; Interestingly, Thomas Mitchell attributed the name ‘Australia Felix’ to the lush pastures of western Victoria, not Gippsland; by 1925, however, the term fell into general usage to define the development of the nation.

dry sunlight and limitless spaces, they were the real Australians, we thought. And now most of them are little cockies with motor-cars, thinking they're big cockies. But in those days we felt they would surprise the world. That was Henry Lawson's creed. And there was the old *Bulletin*, with poems, stories, cartoons, articles and everything Australian in outlook. We were all striving, you see, to create a national sentiment. Does that seem old-fashioned nonsense to you? Here we were with a new country, a rich and beautiful country and boundless possibilities, a fresh sheet, an untouched canvas, a block of marble waiting for the hand of the sculptor. *Australia Felix!* A whole continent, fresh and unspoiled without history, its soul unstained with blood, surely to God we could do something with it.

The discourse then devolves into xenophobic politics and familiar O'Dowd-inspired rhetoric that 'Australia hasn't been discovered yet.' 'That's a job,' Stuart suggests (perhaps a little behind the times), 'in store for our writers and artists. Captain Cook discovered only the outline.' A gunshot from nearby Swanny Lake, where Gavin's son Willie and bushman Dick are shooting ducks, brings the conversation to an abrupt halt and there is no resolution. After Gavin retreats to the tent, a rather mawkish riff on the state of Stuart and Helen's marriage follows and occupies the apex of the dramaturgy.

When the boys return from the shoot with their spoils, Willie tunes in the wireless and we learn that Gavin's old colleague and sparring partner 'little Harding' and his 'great Liberal Party has succeeded in restoring responsible government on the broad platform of progress and reform.' Nothing has changed; the time politically, even now it seems, is still not ripe; *Australia Felix*.

With its detailed stage directions—particularly Esson's attention to clothing—the playlet reads as intellectual discourse rather than drama.

The play received its professional premiere in 1991 in a program presented at the Stables Theatre by the Griffin Theatre Company, Sydney. It was directed by Ken Boucher. The review in *The Sydney Morning Herald* referred to 'the very brief, hardly dramatic fragment ... by our first naturalist playwright.'⁶⁵

— *Vagabond Camp* (1929) —

'I had a good fortnight in the country,' Esson wrote to Vance Palmer in January 1928, 'and came back with a one-act play.'

It is called *Vagabond Camp*, rough and raw and slightly ribald, but treated with broad humour, a sort of Jolly Beggars thing. I got the story as I was wandering along

⁶⁵ Pamela Payne, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 January 1991 pg. 14

the river. It was done to get myself into form. I feel more like work now than I have for years. I went very flat and stale for a bit. Any kind of change and shake-up sometimes works wonders ...⁶⁶

Fellow Scot Robert Burns' cantata 'Love and Liberty' (1785)⁶⁷ was known as *The Jolly Beggars*. Burns, apparently, with two companions spent a night in a tavern 'witnessing much jollity' amongst a group of men who by day pretended to be 'miserable beggars.' Burns was particularly taken by the behaviour of 'an old maimed soldier.' At the time of its publication it was considered 'revolutionary' and 'anarchic.'

Esson's 'fortnight in the country' was to Shepparton in northern Victoria (the river was the Goulburn), to visit both his mother Mary Jane—who had moved to the town following the death of her husband James Gibb in 1919—and his son James (Jimmie). Jimmie was Esson's eldest son, from his first marriage to Madeleine Tracey. He was a fledgling journalist and, supported by his uncle Frank Brown—Esson's half-brother Frank Brown acquired a large estate at Moneo (60km south of Shepparton)—and the not insubstantial influence of his grandmother, 21 year old Jimmie got a job on a Shepparton paper [*The Shepparton Advertiser*] in 1927. The district was familiar: Esson and Hilda attended his cousin young John Ford Paterson's wedding as far back as 1914 (Hugh's only son, then living in Shepparton).

Esson was somewhat self-reflective in his poem 'Vagabond', published in *Red Gums, and Other Verses* (1912). But he waited another decade, with more frequent visits to his mother in Shepparton, to detail the phenomenon that plagued the district in a prose piece for the Melbourne *Herald*, 'Vagabond Camp Living the Simple Life Amongst the Swagmen'.⁶⁸

By the banks of a river in Northern Victoria, a number of nomads, tired of wandering, have fixed a permanent camp.

In every society there are outcasts, people who can never fit into the general scheme. In Gorki's stories you find them trampling all over Russia, and in English they have their [hobo] poets in WH Davies and [American] Vachell Lindsay.

Australia has its share of these social failures, drawn from all classes, and from town and country. They have given up the struggle for success, and are content to live as they best can.

Such are the people who make up Vagabond Camp. ... It is a picturesque spot they have chosen for their Vagabond Camp. There is a fine bend to the river; and their

⁶⁶ 20 January 1928—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 93

⁶⁷ *Robert Burns: Complete Works*—<https://www.robertburns.org/works/79.shtml>

⁶⁸ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 10 April 1923

quaint little huts are sheltered by great high trees. The camp contains a number of interesting characters, old swaggies who have been everywhere, bushmen who were once shearers or drovers, a few nondescripts, and strange women of the roads.

This he summarised for *The Bulletin* in 'Vagabond Camp':

In ragged tents or huts, as when
The gipsies find abodes,
We've fixed our camp, a welcome den
For wondering women, vagrom men,
And children of the roads. ...⁶⁹

It took Esson another five years before he formulated these impressions into a suitable dramatic situation—'Katharine [Susannah Prichard] goaded me into doing it,' he wrote to Palmer⁷⁰—the draft of which was complete by January 1928. He was back in Shepparton later in the year: 'Please excuse,' he writes to Vance's wife Nettie Palmer, 'I've been an awful crock lately, but I'm much better now, and in any case it isn't an interesting subject.'

Don't encourage me to talk about ailments which, after all, are not serious and usually exaggerated. I went up to Shepparton to recover form and mother managed to fracture two ribs in a buggy accident.⁷¹

Set on 'a warm, blue, sunny' Christmas Eve, the sketch concerns the plight a young bush couple. Dick (gassed during the War) and Bess, who share a 'dilapidated tent' on a tree-lined river bank. Arriving home from the pub in the township, Dick, who is slightly drunk, is accosted by two grifters—Alf (tall and thin) and Bert (small, but strong and active)—who attack him and steal his bottle of beer, cigarettes and 'a few bob.' In a situation that recalls Esson's and Frank Brown's short sketch *Mates* (for the Pioneer Players), Alf and Bert both vie for the affections of Sarah, 'a woman of the roads,' who they met a couple of weeks earlier. While she exploits their infatuations (and their stolen beer), Sarah soon tires of their games and goes off on her own. Bess, meanwhile, confronts the 'two crooks' Alf and Bert, who she suspects of ambushing her husband, threatening them with the police. Sarah subsequently advises the two grifters to hide. This allows Sarah to

⁶⁹ 'Vagabond Camp', *The Bulletin*, 15 November 1923

⁷⁰ 1937— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 109

⁷¹ Esson to Nettie Palmer, October 1928— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 102

reunite with gullible Dick, who she met at the tavern. She eventually seduces him (when it's discovered that he has 'a fiver') and arranges to meet him later. Bess confronts Dick, but he's already decided that he and Sarah are going to 'clear off' together. Dick packs his swag, shares two pound with his 'wife' and leaves to join Sarah. Resigned, Bess packs her own few things and, giving up the tent, reveals to Old Bob, a mystical old fisherman who has witnessed it all, that she's hoarded ten pounds 'for a rainy day.'

BESS. I'll treat myself to a good time. It don't matter much where I go. Men are all fools
over women.

And she too 'clears off.' Meanwhile, Dick returns, 'distractedly, with clothes torn and splattered with mud;' he's been done over again by Alf, Bert and Sarah: 'It was a trap. I was rooked—rooked.' 'Fishin' ain't what it used to be,' Old Bob ruefully observes, fixing his fishing line and singing to himself.

OLD BOB. Sometimes I never get a bloomin' bit, but it's better than runnin' after women. I
tell you I haven't had a women for thirty years, and I won't want one for another thirty.
I'll try me luck in the river. ... Here goes.
(*Exit OLD BOB, with his lines.*)

While the situation and the gulling plot are derivative, Esson's scenario rings true as a keenly observed impression of 'riverite' types. Despite the lack of any lyrical descriptions of the river-bank vagabond camp, the characters and the idiom are redolent, but again there is little direct causal link in the dramatic development between the environment and action; the interaction could have easily been relocated to the backstreets of Slumland of inner Melbourne.

The play received no production in Esson's lifetime, nor since.

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An unresolved issue in Esson's dramaturgy, especially in these short 'bush plays' (as highlighted by both *Australia Felix* and *Vagabond Camp*) was his reliance (or otherwise) on scenography to elaborate on his themes, provide a picturesque image, and pursue his impressionist style. The action, however, played out *in front of the bush backdrop* rather than being intrinsic to the action; the demands of the 'realistic' scenic requirements well beyond any repertory company at the time.

Esson knew and worked with Don Finley (1902-1982), the young Australian designer and a member of the Pioneer Players. Finley, however, had been much influenced by the revolutionary Modern European experimenters, especially the theories of Edward Gordon Craig. By 1927, however, he had quit Melbourne in favour of establishing his own theatre, the Turret Theatre, in Alfred Street, North Sydney. Over the next few years Finley experienced with what he termed 'plastic setting' that 'give the impression of decorative architectural units ... [where] by the addition of extra properties, changes in lighting, and occasional painted "profiles" an almost unbelievable variety can be obtained.'⁷²

Esson, as the theatre critic for *The Triad* (subsequently *The New Triad*)⁷³, was also aware of the developing technologies associated with scenic design: the new realism presented in the cinema, along with the move away from traditional two-dimensional *trompe l'oeil* of the 19th century scenic artist in the theatre. He reviewed Gregan McMahon's 'bold' production of Luigi Pirandello's 'masterpiece' *Six Characters In Search of an Author*, for example, given by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre Society (in August 1927) totally cognisant of its meta-theatrical demands. 'Difficult as the play may be,' Esson wrote, 'Pirandello's art is so sure and his technical resources so masterly, that it could never fail to exercise an extraordinary fascination on any competent audience.'⁷⁴

The question becomes how did Esson actually envisage the 'outdoor' settings for both *Australia Felix*—

GAVAN's permanent camp, a lonely but picturesque spot in far Eastern Gippsland, overlooking the Southern Ocean. It is a big, well-fitted up tent, opening on to a long verandah. ... It is a warm, calm and beautiful summer's evening.

or the more demanding *Vagabond Camp*—

The scene represents the bank of a river. ... Part of DICK's tent is shown, an old and dilapidated tent, made of superphosphate bags and covered with a kerosene tin roof. Trees may be seen lining the opposite bank of the river. There are stumps, branches and bushes about, and the ground is littered with yellow leaves.

⁷² 'Mr Don Finley's Inexpensive Designs,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1927 pg.28

⁷³ Esson's Sydney counterpart was Dora Wilcox, Mrs William Moore.

⁷⁴ *The New Triad*, 1 September 1927 p.48

especially given that both were one act sketches, logically intended for inclusion in an evening of similar plays of short duration?

Other playwrights of the decade, alerted to the issue of attempting realistic outdoor scenes with only the ‘plastic’ scenery of flatage, wings and borders beyond an ornate picture-frame proscenium arch of a Victorian or Edwardian theatre, chose to solve their problems in arresting ways.

Millicent Armstrong, for example, in her four-act play *Fire*, serialised in *The Daily Telegraph* in 1923, uses contrasting rural interiors: the sitting room of a homestead, ‘blinds drawn against the summer heat;’ morning room ‘door opening on to the verandah;’ and a bush shanty. While her dialogue goes a long way to spark our imaginations

ETTA (*After a long pause, speaking not sentimentally but searchingly*). Last night, after we left Crystal’s room do you remember when we stood at the window while the moon rose, and watched the light spread across the still plains and silver the upper clouds?

GLEN (*Responding without moving or looking at her*). Its white, unearthly radiance seemed to make silence visible and eternity all that was real.

It is the brilliant device of ‘framing’ the landscape—windows and doors provided as another ‘proscenium arch’—beyond the realistic interiors that add value to their outback settings. For its time, Armstrong’s final scene is a, masterstroke of scenographic dramaturgy where her stage direction for the setting for Glen’s shanty in the fourth and final act reads:

A rough room, built of logs, lighted by a kerosene lamp with a tin reflector, fastened to the wall, and a hurricane lamp. A window and door at the back of the stage are wide open, and through them, ending the blackness of distant trees, may be seen an horizon, crimson with the glow of the bush fire. The strange illumination of the sky seems to accentuate the gloom of the hut. The night is now very still.

Esson, while he recorded his ‘impression’ of the landscape in his stage directions appeared to give very little consideration to their practical realisation on the stage, especially in the limited parameters of the amateur Provincial theatre environment.

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In August 1920, Alfred Buchanan—journalist, barrister, and the author of *The Sacred Flame*—attracted a large audience when he delivered a lecture at the Australian Literature Society’s monthly

meeting on the subject 'The Australian Drama'. In his lecture, as recorded by *The Age*, he argued that

The drama of today ... was of an ephemeral purpose. Dramatists supplied what the public wanted—cheap and gaudy reviews and dramas that had no deep purpose. They wrote for financial success.

He believed that 'dramatic thought' was largely influenced by Shaw and particularly Ibsen. 'Ibsen's work,' he stated, 'conveyed a deep lesson, and he hoped Australian dramatists would follow him as a model.' His major observation, however, was that

Australian drama might be divided into three types. The first type was particularly racey of the soil; in this respect Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection* had provided a success, though he regarded it as a 'freakish' type. 'Steele Rudd,' however, had done Australia a service in the dramatic world. The second type of drama was of the romantic theme. [Edward A] Vidler's *The Rose of Ravenna* was of this kind, and though it might not be regarded from a successful standpoint for the commercial stage, it was a distinctive and artistic work. The third type of play might be termed the social kind—the drama that was the play of humanity ... dealing with life courageously and deeply; the drama that should have a purpose and a lesson, though not altogether obvious.⁷⁵

Buchanan recognised AH Adams, Randolph Bedford⁷⁶, Jo Smith⁷⁷ and Louis Esson in this latter category. One can construe Buchanan's delineation also in terms of dramaturgical imperatives of the commercial, repertory and little theatre (or provincial) movements in Australia.

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As suggested by John McCallum, 'The greatest irony of Esson's career ... was that it was precisely his awareness of international dramatic trends that led him to turn inwards to the dead

⁷⁵ *The Age*, 16 August 1920 p.8; Australian journalist (Editor of *Tatler*) and playwright Edward Vidler's play *The Rose of Ravenna* was published by George Robertson & Co in 1913.

⁷⁶ A member of the Dawn and Dusk Club, Randolph Bedford (1868-1941) was a novelist and journalist—well known for his travel sketches—and, in 1923, elected as a Labor member of the Queensland Legislative Council. His plays include *White Australia; or, The Empty North* (1909), *The Lady of the Pluckup; or, The Days of Eighty-four* (1911), *The Unseen Eye* (1912) and *The Boss Cockie* (1920), all produced commercially. 'The excellence of [the latter] comedy had placed Mr Randolph Bedford in the forefront of the Australian dramatists, and its favourable reception should encourage him to persevere in his efforts to give theatregoers relief from a surfeit of American plays.' *The Weekly Times*, 13 November 1920 p.67

⁷⁷ Playwright; author of *A Miner's Trust*, (1908), *The Bush Woman* (1909), *The Girl of the Never Never* (1912), *Before the Dawn* (1916), *The Reveille* (1917)

heart of Australian popular culture.⁷⁸ The huge success that Bert Bailey achieved with his bush parody⁷⁹ melodrama *On Our Selection* and later Kate Howarde's *Possum Paddock*, highlights that Australian audience had moved on as well.

Esson however, inexplicably, felt compelled to follow both the advice given by Synge and Yeats and his own instincts and pursue—as Francis Adams also explored in *The Australians: A Social Sketch*⁸⁰—‘the sharp line drawn between two distinctive types, the coastal dwellers and the people of the interior.’ Having exploited the squalid urban environment of the slums in Melbourne, it was inevitable that Esson would turn his attention to the bush interior—albeit in his limited exposure—for inspiration yet ignored the passage of time and shift in Australian cultural values following the First World War..

⁷⁸ John McCallum, 'Something with a cow in it': Louis Esson's imported nationalism, *Overland*, 108, (September), 1987, pp.6-13

⁷⁹ Contrary to Meyrick's analysis of *On Our Selection*, Bailey and Howarde were engaged in a nostalgic exploitation of Steele Rudd's stories for purely comedic and commercial outcomes.

⁸⁰ T Fisher Unwin (1893); See 'Impressions', *Fellowship*, October 1920

— CHAPTER FIVE —

The Pioneer Players

Short and slightly-built with thin features that emphasise the frailness of his physique, Louis Esson does not look in the least like a pioneer. And yet a pioneer he undoubtedly is, for after five years abroad, he has returned to his native land for the express purpose of helping to build up a national school of Australian drama.

GC Dixon, *The Herald* (Melbourne), 18 May 1922 p.5

SYDNEY BARRETT. I believe in bread and the circus, especially the circus. That is why I advocate a National Theatre for the production of unpopular plays. But I don't suppose you are interested in my views. (*The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*)

The Pioneer Players I

The Pioneer Players from the first had a cash-box that rattled a melancholy solo anthem. They could take no huge financial risks.

MGS [Mervyn Skipper]—*The Bulletin*, 17 March 1927

While in New York in 1917 Louis Esson was intrigued by the work of The Washington Square Players. In an article published by *Fellowship* (July 1920), he argued in defence on an attack on the burgeoning repertory and 'little theatre' moments in the United States of America by commercial playwright David Belasco—the reigning Prince of Broadway—who 'had nothing but scorn for those upstart dramatic organisations that were trying so hard to encroach upon the "legitimate" theatre.'

Esson met with Edward Goodman, the director of the Washington Square Players, who recalled the early struggles of the company:

how a group of young writers, actors, and artists working together with a conscious aim, made a beginning in one of the big barn studios on Washington Square, and then by giving a few performances in a Broadway Theatre, suddenly awoke to find themselves famous. ... 'The emphasis of our interest,' [Goodman recalled], 'has been placed on the American playwright because we felt that no American theatre can be really successful until it develops a native drama to present and interpret those emotions, ideas, characters, and conditions with which we, as Americans, are primarily concerned.'

Goodman acknowledged the influence of the Dublin Abbey Theatre (who had toured the United States in 1915) and that having 'overcome most of the initial difficulties,' The Washington Square

Players were now ‘in a fair way to be regarded as a national institution.’ He advised Esson to focus attention on the one-act play, ‘which gives a young writer a chance of acquiring some power over his instrument before he attempts a fully-length play.’ The absurd and mistaken assumption here was that there were no playwrights of experience in Australia at this time. Crucially, for Esson’s evolving ideas to establish such a company in Melbourne, he recognised that it was only when the group were sufficiently developed could they incorporate ‘a dramatic school giving practical training for the stage’ and develop a true national theatre.

Esson wrote to Vance Palmer that The Washington Square Players was a repertory company

that might serve as a model for Australia. It gives a program of four short plays at a time, and keeps going most of the year. Its intention is to develop American drama, and there are usually two local plays in every bill. The other plays are taken from anywhere—Maeterlinck, Schnitzler, Shaw, German, Dutch, French or Japanese.¹

This was Leon Brodzky’s thinking fifteen years earlier. The idea progressed the following year when Esson reunited with William Moore in London; Vance Palmer was also in England (having enlisted in March 1918; his battalion landed in France three days after the armistice). It was Moore who suggested that they re-create the Australian Drama Night, perhaps through Edith Craig’s Pioneer Players Society at London’s Arts Theatre, known for presenting foreign plays in English.² Palmer, however, returned to Australia and the idea lapsed, although the exercise did provoke Esson to write *The Drovers* (a collaboration with his half-brother Frank P Brown, also in London, having served in France, and on his way home).

Back in Melbourne, Palmer met and befriended a young New Zealand medico Dr Stewart Macky who, with his wife Annie, had established a People’s Conservatorium the previous year. The aim was to give a broad education on artistic lines, where trade unionists and children of unionists would be specially catered for, and ‘to make the people realise that Art is a part of life and not merely a pastime.’³ According to Palmer, he ‘found ... Macky running a small amateur company with the idea of training a group of actors who might form the basis of a national movement.’ In December, 1919 Macky presented Palmer’s play *The Prisoner*, in a program that also included

¹ 16 February 1917— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 7

² Actress Edith Craig (1869-1947)—the daughter of Ellen Terry; her younger brother was scenographer Edward Gordon Craig—established The Pioneer Players Society in 1911 ‘for the betterment of the English-speaking stage.’ The Australian actor Fred Reade—pioneering drag artist, an original member of the Tivoli Follies—was an active member of the Society before returning home after the War in 1919.

³ *The Australian Worker*, 4 April 1918 p.16

Henry Tate's piano cycle 'The Australian' (performed by Annie Macky), and other compositions played by the People's Conservatorium Orchestra. Macky played the lead role of the bushman, Steve Fallon in Palmer's sketch. *The Herald* found that the 'play shows a nice restraint in the use of local colour.'⁴

The Triad then reported in May 1920 that

a new Repertory movement, apparently sponsored by the People's Conservatorium of Music [Stewart Macky], made its debut at the Guildhall ... The program comprised *A Florentine Tragedy* by Oscar Wilde, *Overruled* by Bernard Shaw, and *The Twelve Pound Look* by JM Barrie, the trio combining just enough literature with popularity to annoy the intellectual and keep the rest of the populace pleasantly perturbed.⁵

This remarkable, albeit brief, initiative by Macky and his wife has also regrettably been excluded from the foundation narrative of the development of a national theatre.

Esson's recently widowed mother Mary Jane, meanwhile, spent the early months of 1920 in London with Louis, Hilda and her two grandsons; Esson devoting much of his time to re-editing his early one-act plays for publication by Henderson's (due out in October). Hilda Esson found work with the War Office on a travelling medical board (her duties required her to examine women recruits for the various departments of the army service). Esson wrote to Vance Palmer (14 August 1920):

Henderson publishes a few queer plays at times, but this is his first Australian effort. I wonder could you let any Queensland booksellers know. Henderson has excellent distribution methods for Britain and America, but he doesn't know Australia. I want to help him all I can. ... If any bookseller wrote direct he would have copies for Christmas. I am asking [Frederick] Sinclair to see [Lloyd] Ross and the Socialists. Also, an advance agent, could you shove a par in any of the journals?⁶

⁴ *The Herald*, 19 December 1919 p.7

⁵ 20 May 1920 p.45. Interestingly, many of the actors included in this program were to be central to the Melbourne Pioneer Players' company.

⁶ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 23

In November, journalist and poet Patrick O’Leary devoted a full page in the Melbourne *Advocate* to ‘The need for a National Theatre.’⁷ He championed ‘the repertory work of the artistic Mermaid Play Society,’ as an organisation ‘to be applauded on their whole-hearted attempt to serve the needs of the theatregoer starved in an artistic sense. The successes they have done ... are well merited,’ and argues, consequently, ‘the desirableness of a national Australian theatre.’ O’Leary encourages Melbourne audience’s to support

the ‘establishment of a permanent theatre of professionals’ moved by the spirit of the best traditions of the drama to accord support to the excellent work being done by the [Alan] Wilkie combination. There, if fostered ... is the germ of what might well develop into a national Australian professional service of high-class dramatic performances.

He is at pains to also argue that ‘our public authorities, either State or Federal’ are to build on the groundwork laid down by actor manager Allan Wilkie and The Mermaid Society⁸ (a commercial and a repertory society, respectively, both presenting Shakespeare).

William Moore, having returned to Australia early in 1921, delivered a lecture to the Australian Literature Society as well, in April. ‘The attitude of the London public toward Australian literature is friendly,’ he said, ‘but it does not know much about Australian contemporary writers.’

Two Australian writers who had a vogue ... were GB Lancaster [aka New Zealander Edith Lyttleton (1873-1945)] and AH Adams, while Miss K Prichard had a third novel accepted by a London publisher. ... Oscar Asche, who is an Australian, and achieved remarkable success with his plays, and Louis Esson’s book of plays had attracted much attention.⁹

Still in England, Esson was reacquainted with WB Yeats (travelling to meet with him at Oxford in November). He wrote a long missive to Vance Palmer, firstly to share Yeats’s opinion of his published plays: ‘I must get my boasting over, though it is necessary to state it. Yeats asked me up to see him and put me up for the night.’

⁷ 4 November 1920 p.3; O’Leary references The Abbey Theatre, The Washington Square Players, The Greenwich Village Theatre, and The American ‘Little Theatre’ movement as models.

⁸ The Mermaid Society was an amateur undergraduate organisation founded by students—including the remarkable Rose Quong (1879-1972)—at the University of Melbourne in 1903.

⁹ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 9 April 1921 p.20; Edith Lyttleton was a novelist, but a number of her stories were adapted for screen; Edith also provided original screenplays for director John Ford (*Rider of the Law* (1919)). Australian actor-manager Oscar Asche (1871-1936) made his London debut in *Man and Woman* in 1893; he brought a Shakespeare company to Australia in 1909, touring for 18 months. His major achievement, amongst many, was writing book and lyrics for the musical comedy *Chu Chin Chow* (1916).

At dinner he told good stories. ... Next morning he took me into his study, and he was very sympathetic. ... He thought more of my little plays than I could possibly have dared to hope. He thought the dialogue excellent, the 'atmosphere' as suggestive as could be. I told him I didn't think much of myself as a 'plotter,' but he said the four little plots were perfect. ... He said he thought the element of surprise was necessary in comedy, but not in tragedy. (He doesn't mean 'surprise' in the American magazine-editor's sense.) On the whole, he thought, I might do my best things in tragedy.¹⁰

Yeats inspired him to take seriously a national theatre in Australia; many of his ideas running in tandem with Buchanan.

Plays on really national themes, he said—not 'popular plays,' in the ordinary sense—and this is the important principle—help to build a nation in the spiritual sense; while the other type of play, so-called intellectual drama, abstract and cosmopolitan—Galsworthy, Bennett etc, and the husband, wife, lover triangle (not moral, but artistic grounds) will 'shatter a nation.' That is what our scholars fail to realise.¹¹

'If you want to do anything,' Yeats instructed, 'you must regard your own country as the centre of the universe.' Yeats offered the additional suggestion if he was interested in establishing a national theatre, like the Abbey enterprise, Esson should

take a small hall in Melbourne, find some enthusiastic amateurs for actors, with an old Shakespearian professional for a producer, and make a beginning as soon as possible. He suggested that some little comedies of country life should be written first, one-act plays in prose. Verse plays could follow later. He even referred to the native legends. 'There might be material there for poetic drama,' he said, but soon added, 'perhaps not. It is a different race.'¹²

Leaving aside Yeats's misplaced allusion to the appropriation of indigenous 'legends' into the scheme of a national drama¹³, Esson found his proposal 'simple, and perfectly suited to our conditions.' And yet, given the circumstances in Australian at the time, it was a retrograde step from the outset.

¹⁰ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 26

¹¹ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 27

¹² 'Yeats on a National Drama', *Fellowship*, August 1921 p.15

¹³ Esson, in collaboration with his half-brother Frank Brown, would later incorporate indigenous characters and situations in their jointly-written plays *The Drovers* and *Andeganora*.

Esson was swept up in what was by now a well sustained passionate vision—his own personal concept of an ‘antipodean’ cultural revival to parallel the Celtic Revival adopted by the Abbey Theatre—but he failed to realise that the fundamental basis of Yeats’s cultural obsession was an imperialist imposition and had no place in Australian at this time, and that his dramaturgical revivalist blueprint already existed, and had done since at least 1880. Nonetheless, Esson blindly abandoned the Washington Square Players in favour of Yeats’s Abbey Theatre model as the inspiration for a proposed new theatre enterprise in Melbourne. It’s important to reiterate, however, that Esson’s contribution to the Provincial movement wasn’t the first such undertaking.

[Yeats] thought we ought to get the theatre going, no matter how small. A good 50 enthusiasts are better than 500 indifferents. ... The plays we give should all be national. Academics will say we haven’t got them. Well, we’ve got to get them: they’ll never get them or anything else.

He also weighed in on the deficiencies of the repertory movement.

At the beginning of the Abbey Theatre, Miss [Annie] Horniman wanted to do, [along] with the local plays, the European masterpieces. That is what our repertory theatre have tried to do. Yeats said he wavered, but that ‘inquiring man’ Mr Synge, objected, and Irish drama was saved. ‘A theatre like that,’ said Synge, ‘never creates anything.’ Isn’t that true? What did McMahon create? What did Hilda’s University [Mermaid] Society that did Shaw, Galsworthy etc create? They should have discovered me for a start, but they didn’t! What has Adelaide [Repertory Society] ever done, with all its list of plays?¹⁴

‘I have some good ammunition in the locker now,’ Esson signed off, acknowledging the generally good press for the volume he’d received in London as well. He was sufficiently enthused to plan his return to Melbourne, and by June confirmed that they’d be home ‘before the end of the year.’ His thinking on the theatre company, involving both Vance Palmer and Stewart Macky, had advanced.

I don’t see why we shouldn’t do something. I propose simply to do what might have been done years ago. It was a great loss that you were away. I had no moral support whatever. Mrs C[oulson Davidson], for instance, thought I was devoured by jealousy. ...

I would have nothing to do with any Repertory Society. There should be societies to play Shaw, Galsworthy, Ibsen etc—I would go to their performances—but I want

¹⁴ November 1920— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 27; Yeats’ views on *Dead Timber, and other Plays* is also revealed in *The Herald*, 10 March 1921 p.3; Heiress Annie Horseman was a British arts patron and theatre manager who pioneered the British repertory movement; influential in establishing the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

something absolutely national and original. I would rather have a bad [Sydney] Tomholt than a good [Arnold] Bennett. ...

You might consult Stewart [Macky] about a suitable hall; cheapness would be a merit. The cheaper we can run a show, the freer we would be. You might try if possible to find a few promising mummers, about half-a-dozen, who would be willing to do something for the Cause. We need the nucleus of a capable company. If we got going, we ought to be able to give, say, three seasons a year; McMahon used to give four. ...

You might think of a name. 'National' or 'Australian' is too grandiose, but we want something with The —— Theatre or The —— Players.¹⁵

The Essons returned to Australia on the steamer *Demosthenes* in August.¹⁶ Esson took his family to live in Emerald, in rural Victoria, where they found a cottage, 'close enough to Melbourne for most purposes, and we must get the theatre going'¹⁷ While son James, 14, attended school in Melbourne (looked after by the Patterson aunts), Louis, Hilda and Hugh settled in a house with the Palmers as neighbours. Nettie Palmer remarked in her diary (1 September) that Esson 'now possessed the inspiration, the encouragement and the help needed to form The Pioneer Players.' The *Weekly Times* made his intentions public:

Mr Louis Esson said that he hoped to established a small theatre for purely Australian plays—a national [provincial] rather than a repertory theatre.¹⁸

Vance Palmer elaborated in an open letter to the *Advocate*:

I am trying to get some publicity for a dramatic movement that is being started on something like Abbey Theatre lines. ... The idea is to give three or four short seasons every year, producing drama that is distinctively Australian and gradually creating a school of actors that will be able to portray Australian types without caricature.¹⁹

Palmer explained that they would welcome all genres of plays, but 'it is probable that at the beginning most attention will be paid to country comedies with marked Australian types.

¹⁵ 20 June, 1921— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 41

¹⁶ Katharine Susanah Prichard (by this time Mrs Ric Throssell) made the journey from Perth to meet the boat when it berthed in Albany.

¹⁷ 15 September 1921— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 45

¹⁸ *The Weekly Times*, 17 September 1921; coincidentally, the *Sunday Times* (9 October 1921) later noted that J and N Tate would present the Sydney Repertory Theatre Society in an Australian play (directed by Gregan McMahon who 'has previously produced fourteen plays by Australian authors').

¹⁹ *The Advocate*, 27 April 1922 p.3

Esson referred elsewhere to ‘a kind of Folk-Theatre’ and believed there were ‘a few people who would probably be interested in it.’ There were various models from his experience he could now draw on at first hand for the proposed organisation. Esson provided a list:

The Birmingham Theatre was run on a large scale; it played all the year; but it was in the unfashionable quarter of the town. The Washington Square Players began modestly enough. We would gain in strength by having a definite aim. The Glasgow Repertory Theatre failed because it was not Scottish. I believe it was very good, but everything about it was English, plays, actors, management. Scotland hasn’t got any drama yet. . . . We have admirable material for all kinds of plays, even historical and fantastic. We would give the critics some real work to do. What they have to say about Bennett or Galsworthy is of no importance to anybody; but they could be right or wrong about us.

He was confident that the triumvirate—himself, Palmer and Macky—‘could put up a good show, with a blazing manifesto, and we’d soon get others round us.’ ‘I’m a thin reed myself,’ Esson concluded his pitch, ‘and I can do nothing without some support. But I’d be quite a bold boy if there were two or three others with me. If Vance and you think the time is ripe . . .’²⁰

Meanwhile, in the months leading up to Christmas, Esson divided his time, liaising with Palmer and Macky about the logistics of producing the season; networking old contacts—actors and other volunteers—to commit to a season for 1922; and, to sourcing plays.

In the first instance, however, Esson needed to lay the philosophical foundation for the movement and planned two articles on both his recent meetings and affirmation by Yeats, and also, the early provocations and advice given sixteen years previously by Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory; he thought that Frederick Sinclair’s *Fellowship* might oblige with publication. His larger objective was, as Synge had argued for the Abbey, to establish ‘a definite aim as essential’ and to galvanise a group of similarly minded ‘literary talent in Australia.’

Esson envisaged three seasons a year (McMahon gave four; the Washington Square Players gave five), with two programs a season—one of short plays, and one long play (two performances of each on alternate nights). This meant finding three full length and twelve one-act plays of sufficient merit that would meet the brief. The plays Esson was interested in ‘should be lively, simple, with plenty of colour, non-intellectual, without “middle-class” sentiment and drawing room ethics.’ His dramaturgical ideal was for ‘bolder out-lines, more passionate characters.’ His stable of local writers

²⁰ Esson to Dr Stewart Macky, 8 June 1921; Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 42. In this letter to Macky, Esson states: ‘I refused to be played one season, in a cellar, while Bennett was being done, seriously, in the theatre.’ This may refer to a proposed production by Gregan McMahon of Louis’s ‘unnamed play’ in 1913 at Athenaeum Hall; in May 1913 Arnold Bennett’s *Milestones* was presented by JC Williamson’s, Julius Knight & Irene Browne Companies at the Theatre Royal.

would include Macky, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Sydney Tomholt and John Le Gay Breerton²¹; he also had plans to adapt Price Warung, Henry Lawson and Rolf Boldrewood.²²

Esson didn't think 'the finance would be formidable' with everything 'done as cheaply as possible.' 'You might consult Stewart about a suitable hall;' Esson wrote to Palmer, 'cheapness would be a merit.'

The cheaper we can run a show, the freer we would be. You might try if possible to find a few promising mummies [in the sense of philanthropic backer rather than the usual sense of 'actors'], about half-a-dozen, who would be willing to do something for the Cause.²³

Despite being in South Australia, Macky was one such 'mummer' underwriting the venture to a great extent—in the first instance as 'a silent partner.' Nettie Palmer was also proactive, establishing a Pioneer Club. The Club was formed by supporters of the Pioneer Players, who declared 'to assist them in their endeavour to provide a permanent theatre for the Australian Drama.'²⁴ But the issue of providing quality of performance, especially physical production values (that Esson admired in the Washington Square Players productions), without a strong business plan was to be an ongoing problem and, in many ways, the project's Achilles' heel.

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Esson did not return to a theatrical vacuum in Melbourne. Since the departure of William Moore over a decade earlier, the interest in a national drama continued. Notwithstanding Esson's disdain for the commercial theatre—more to do with his Socialist politics than a theatrical contrariness, I suspect—local audiences continued to be entertained by large scale productions 'by Australians for Australians' (usually bush melodramas or dramatic adaptations) up until just after the War by, amongst others, The Bohemian Dramatic Company, Hugh Anderson's Dramatic Company and, of course, Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan (including Sumner Locke's *Mum Dawson, Boss* that

²¹ Writer and literary scholar (Elizabethan drama) John Le Gay Breerton (1871-1933) was a librarian at the University of Sydney, publishing his first book of verse, *Sea and Sky* in 1907. He was appointed professor of English literature in 1921. His performed plays include *Tomorrow* (1912) and *A Mask* (1913).

²² Esson 'found a great incident in Boldrewood—it has little connection with his novel, *The Miner's*, and seems to me to be true to life. I could do that, I think, if I had permission.' This play never eventuated.

²³ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 42

²⁴ *The Australasian*, 4 August 1923 p.38

premiered in January 1917 directed by Bert Bailey, and advertised as ‘the first work from the pen of a woman to be produced by a commercial theatrical management²⁵). William Anderson, of the Tivoli Theatre, stated in *The Mail* that ‘he had produced and presented more Australian dramas than any other management have done during the last 15 years.’²⁶ Kate Howarde’s Australian comedy-drama *Possum Paddock* achieved ‘a large and appreciative audience’ nationally and internationally in 1919-20.

The sensational bush genre of many of the plays presented (such as *The Squatter’s Daughter*, *On Our Selection*, *The Girl From the Outback*) was also represented on a new platform. The medium of film arrested the attention of local audiences throughout the decade with silent movies that employed Australian playwrights and novelists as source material; Bert Bailey, Philip Lytton, William Lee, WJ Lincoln, Ambrose Pratt and Clement Pratt were adapted successfully (often by the director).

While the repertory societies in both Sydney and Melbourne continued to offer a diet of imported drama on stage there was the inclusion of an occasional local playwright: AH Adams scored a huge success with *Mrs Pretty and the Premier*, produced by Gregan McMahon, in a season that also included *The Image Breaker* by Alfred Buchanan, *John Brandon*, *Scientist* by Celia Manning and *Quo Vadimus Femina* by Mary E Wilkinson; in Sydney the Repertory Society of NSW presented *Mary Martin* by ‘anonymous’, both in 1914.²⁷ Hugh Buckler’s Little Theatre in Sydney offered a rare local premiere with *The Master of Angerstroon* by the Australian playwright Bernard Espinasse in the same year. The Australian Literature Society also held an annual drama night bringing focus to local playwrights through readings. The Institute of Arts and Literature additionally gave ‘very special attention to the production of Australian plays’ during the War years.

The most significant contributor to the Provincial Theatre enterprise, however, during this time, was actor, playwright and influencer Euphemia Coulson Davidson (*née* Kidd) (1874-1936). A daughter of Scottish parents, Euphemia began her association with the theatre as a child when she acted with the Robert Brough Company. After her marriage in 1906 she retained her interest in the theatre and founded the Theatre Lovers’ Club (which later changed its name to the Playlovers’ Club) to encourage the writing and production of Australian plays.

²⁵ *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 1917 p. 10

²⁶ *The Mail* (Adelaide), 11 November 1916 p.6

²⁷ Although by 1918, after Gregan McMahon accepted a contract with JC Williamsons (then managed by the Tait brothers) in Sydney, his Melbourne Repertory Theatre was defunct.

With her husband, lawyer John A Davidson, she established The National Theatre Company in Melbourne in 1915 and together they built a private bijou theatre (to seat 100 patrons) in their home ‘Niagaroon’, Warrigal Road in Oakleigh (14 km south east of Melbourne). ‘The object of its erection,’ reported *Punch*, ‘is the encouragement of Australian national drama, and giving authors an opportunity of seeing their works performed.’²⁸ Further, the enterprise would ‘run on Repertory Theatre lines’ and in due course ‘Australian authors [were] invited to send along their work for production.’ If the theatre progressed

a Board of Readers will be formed who will judge the various plays submitted and award first and second prizes annually. ... The nucleus for the prize fund and incidental expenses will be derived from subscriptions, and regular patrons will have the privilege of witnessing the first performance of any play.²⁹

In the rhetoric of the day Euphemia was considered ‘one of the pioneers of the National Theatre Movement,’ cementing her place in history with the inauguration of her own venue with the premiere of George Byfield’s four act tragedy *The Fight*.³⁰ BJO, *The Weekly Times*’ critic, attended the second performance on Saturday 28 August.

Any serious attempt to establish a national drama in this country is worthy of encouragement, and Mr and Mrs Davidson are to be congratulated on the enterprise they have shown; but any play put forward as a worthy contribution to Australian dramatic literature must be judged on its merits, and the merits of *The Fight* do not entitle it to much in the way of serious consideration.³¹

On the other hand, the *Leader* critic thought that ‘within its limitations [it] was strikingly successful.’³² Other plays staged by The National Theatre Company at ‘Niagaroon’ included *The Gathering of the Gold* by ‘Karts’; plays by poet ‘Furnley Maurice’ [Frank Wilmot]; and other plays by EC Davidson, including *The Moon Child* (1916). Throughout the War years the proceeds from these performances were distributed among the Red Cross and other societies. The venture was intermittent following the War, but Euphemia continued her passion for Australian drama through the Playlovers’ Club, of which she was always a committee member. ‘The intention of The

²⁸ *Punch*, 2 September 1915 p.41

²⁹ *Table Talk*, 2 September 1915 p.12

³⁰ *The Argus*, 21 October 1936 p.15; ‘George Byfield’ [her brother-in law’s name] was the *nom de plume* of EC Davidson

³¹ *The Weekly Times*, 4 September 1915 p.8

³² *The Leader*, 4 September 1915 p.35

Playlovers' Club,' reported its chairman in 1919 (Mr W Mitchell), was 'to encourage Australian writers in the best interests of the drama' by devoting their 'credit balance' to 'the printing and publishing of original plays by Australian authors.' At their meeting in June 1920, there was a move by members to consider a revival of the National Theatre Company movement [two years before The Pioneer Players]. With the support of J and N Tait, they proposed that 'they should stage four plays in each year or season ... and that there should be 500 subscribers, and that each subscriber should guarantee to take one ticket at 5/ for each of the plays.' The motion was 'moved by Mr RA Broinowski and seconded by Mrs EC Davidson,' and agreed to unanimously. Nettie Palmer was an active member of The Playlovers' Club; she read a paper on 'The Playlovers' Outlook' to members in November 1918.

The Pioneer Players II

We don't expect to make any money out of the new venture. In fact, this year there will possibly be a loss. But we are building for the future, and whether it takes ten years or twenty, we are prepared.³³

The triumvirate of Louis Esson, Vance Palmer and Stewart Macky (who placed his medical career in Adelaide on hold to return to Melbourne) agreed that the Pioneer Players would definitely present four seasons in 1922. In the absence of anything else concrete, Esson's own play *The Battler* would launch the enterprise in May. While the intention was to use amateur actors—in the tradition of 'the little theatre movement'—Esson talked Tom Skewes (who had played Chopsey in *The Woman Tamer*; and a versatile and 'sympathetic' contributor to 'the cause') into joining the group, and he was fortunate also to have George Dawe—in the name part [as Ogilvie, 'the battler']—on which to build the remainder of the cast. Dawe was an elocutionist of the old school, 'little bothered,' according to Palmer, by the 'demands for a natural type of acting that subordinated the personalities of the individual characters to the general intentions of the play.' A regular winner in the Austral competitions, his amateur stage career began with Tom Skewes and Ruby Moore in Sumner Locke's *The Vicissitudes of Vivienne* in 1908.

'The formation of the Pioneer Players in Melbourne,' announced 'Deadhead' in *The Bulletin* a month before the intended launch, 'is a spirited attempt to form a purely Australian repertory company.'

³³ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 18 May 1922 p.5

They are to kick off at the Playhouse on May 18 and 20 with Louis Esson's *The Battler*—a three act comedy, set on an abandoned goldfield—and will follow on later in the year with two other full length plays. The idea is to give three or four short seasons annually, producing drama that is as distinctively Australian as that of the Abbey Theatre is Irish. Rather ambitious, but the Pioneers say they already have enough good plays to prove that Australian drama can be national and characteristic without losing itself in whiskers and caricature. And some first class actors, repertory and professional, have rallied to their standard with enthusiasm.³⁴

'The ideal,' reported *The Herald*, was 'to encourage a school of drama and acting that will be free from convention, but sincere and distinctive.'³⁵ As Esson made clear in terms of the agenda of the Pioneer Players: 'We want a good bush play, something large and primitive—a play that will be as vital and original as a ballad by Brady or a story by Lawson. We have the audience; we have the actors. We have the raw material, man and nature. All we lack is the play.'³⁶ Unfortunately it was 'fake news.' In fact, the Pioneers had no stockpile of 'good plays' at all. A situation that would dog the enterprise for its duration.

The Pioneer Players' company logo was designed by Esson's cousin Esther Paterson. The emblem is an intriguing silhouette, not a contemporary image, but a nostalgic throwback, an image of a 'swaggie' or 'sundowner' as might be described by Henry Lawson; beyond the idea of a bush 'pioneer,' however it is the pick that gives the vignette the connotation of 'a fossicker,' a gold digger. As Esther had provided the poster for Esson's production of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, I'd suggest that this was a marketing image was her response to his play *The Battler*, used subsequently as the emblem of their aspirations.



It was a bad omen when, on a Sunday in early March, it was reported in *The Herald*, that the Esson's cottage at Emerald had burnt to the ground while the family were seeing some visitors off at the railway station. The loss was traumatic:

Having literary and artistic leanings, they had many precious possessions. The household goods that went up in smoke included pictures by [Charles] Conder, [Arthur] Streeton and the late John Ford Paterson; rare books, a hand printing press

³⁴ *The Bulletin*, 20 April 1922

³⁵ 19 May 1922 p.8

³⁶ 'The Australian Play,' *The Bulletin* (Red Page), 27 October 1910

brought recently from Italy, and all Mr Esson's manuscripts [including all the rehearsal copies of *The Battler*].³⁷

Nettie Palmer recalled that Esson made the glib joke that it had also 'happened to Sheridan.'³⁸ The family subsequently returned to the Paterson terrace in Carlton, and, according to *The Bulletin*, 'as rehearsals were due, Esson set to work and restored [*The Battler*] within a week.'³⁹

About the same time, with the opening night looming, Esson wrote to Richard Long (22 May) 'to see if something might be done about a set.' Long was a poet and carpenter/cabinet maker, he and his sister Minnie were fellow members of the Victorian Socialist Party.

— *The Battler [Diggers' Rest]*—

The success of *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* for Gregan McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Company in July 1912 enhanced expectations of Esson's early-career reputation as a dramatist, and it was anticipated that he would produce a follow up play imminently. It was duly announced in *The Bulletin* in March 1913, by Harrison Owen, that Esson had 'a new four act Australian drama on the stocks.'⁴⁰ In the Empire Day review on Australian Drama in the London *Times* two months later Esson was nominated somewhat condescendingly (and erroneously) as 'the first amongst the native playwrights.' He was given credit for his 'diverting' satire *The Time is Not Yet* and his 'stronger work in two of his one act plays that deal with Australian slum life.' The article also referred to 'his drama, *The Road of Improvement*'—presumably the 'four act' play mentioned by Owen—

A highly remarkable satire on the encroachment of progress and discontent upon the primeval felicity of society in a bush township. This play is shortly to be produced at the Melbourne Repertory Theatre.⁴¹

The Advocate quoted the same Empire Review, and reported that Esson's 'three plays—*Dead Timber*, *The Road of Improvement* and *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*—are unquestionably the most

³⁷ *The Herald (Melbourne)*, 10 March 1922

³⁸ Anecdotally, in February 1809, Irish playwright RB Sheridan witnessed the fire that razed his Drury Lane Theatre. Sheridan was reportedly seen drinking a glass of wine while watching the inferno at which time he famously quipped 'A man may surely be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fireside.'

³⁹ *The Bulletin*, 20 April 1922

⁴⁰ *The Bulletin*, 13 March 1913

⁴¹ As reported in *The Leader* 12 July 1913

satisfactory experiments in the Australian drama up to date.’⁴² The *Bathurst Times* thought to make the distinction that ‘in short story writing none are equal to Henry Lawson, while Louis Esson is first amongst the native playwrights,’ qualifying that ‘Steele Rudd is the master humorist of Australia.’ *The Telegraph* continued:

Mr Esson ... without forfeiting originality ... has quite caught the spirit of the European repertory play. There is a distinct resemblance between his technique and that of Tchekhov. He would be the last person to claim that the somewhat sordid pictures which he has abstracted from the bush are a fair presentation of its general spirit.⁴³

It was unclear which of Esson’s plays *The Telegraph* was actually comparing to Chekhov?

Gregan McMahon subsequently announced, in January 1914, that a number of ‘local plays’ would to be produced by his Melbourne Repertory Company during the year, including ‘a play, as yet unnamed by Louis Esson.’ McMahon produced two plays by Bernard Shaw that year, and the Arthur Adams’ comedy, but no play by Esson. Again in 1916, McMahon ‘reported considerable activity in the Australian play industry,’ mentioning Howard Ashton’s *The Firstborn* and also that

the industrious and painstaking Louis Esson has another [play] ready and a couple more approaching completion. It is said that Esson so polished and polished the first mentioned that the title is now the only bond between the first script and the last.⁴⁴

There is no extant manuscript for a play called *The Road of Improvement* by Louis Esson, however it is highly likely that Esson would have supplied any new manuscript to William Moore, his ‘agent’ in London, which is how that draft could have reached the notice of *The Times*. From their *précis*, however, it is possible to discern that this was probably the working title of a play referred to in 1916 by Katharine Susannah Prichard as *The Fossicker*; based on Esson’s own short story (1912).

The Time is Not Yet Ripe is not usually considered as satisfactory as the earlier work, but *The Fossicker*, Mr Esson’s latest, is his finest dramatic work. The simple, well-knit story of an old man, once a fossicker always a fossicker, the crises of his fortunes, and a pleasant picturing of life on spent gold-fields which have a second

⁴² As reported in *The Advocate* (Melbourne), 5 July 1913

⁴³ *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 21 July 1913

⁴⁴ *The Bulletin*, 3 August 1916 p.9

Trail o'er this golden past.

Esson returned to the subject matter in late 1912, when he published an extended prose piece called 'The Fossicker' in *The Weekly Times*.⁴⁹ Diggers' Flat (or Rhymney Reef) is here the village of Golden Gulley—270km north east of Ararat, on the road to Shepparton—'one of the places that have never gone ahead, but on this very account has a character and interest of its own.' Esson's poem 'Golden Gulley' appeared in *Bells and Bees* (1910):

Holes lie agape; and far and wide
Old mates are blown like chaff;
While perched on rotting poppet-head
The kookaburras laugh.

In the surrounding district, Esson details, there are 'a few farmers, a few orchardists, but the chief characters are the fossickers, who are a race apart.'

Nothing very thrilling ever happens in the township nowadays. The Golden Era is at an end, and there is little agriculture in the district. Few young men are to be found; there are some children and more old men. But the life is quiet and peaceful; the bush is beautiful; and in many ways Golden Gully is a more desirable place than many a bustling township with its Progress Association, and smoky factories, picture theatres, billiard saloons, and other institutions of advanced civilisation.

He introduces us to Tommy Jones—The 'Oldest Inhabitant', a confirmed pessimist—and Terrible Mick; and, to Watty (in this iteration, the publican) who reckons that 'there's still gold—over in that range—but it's too close to Melbourne. The sharp companies that run things think it can't be no good, but I know better. I'd put £500 into a company tomorrow if it was conducted properly.' But now, Tommy Jones explains, 'The district's dead ... It's been dead nigh on forty years.'

Esson brings these characters, and other details, into his play with the working title, *The Fossicker*; presumably still destined for production by Gregan McMahon. The First World War however, interrupted any intense development of the draft and, with the lack of production opportunities, the manuscript appears to languish. Esson maintained his interest in the subject matter nonetheless and his poem 'The Old Fossicker's Lament' appeared in *The Bulletin* in early 1915.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ 28 December 1912

⁵⁰ 20 May 1915

I see that clear—it's goin' fast,
The old bush life I like the best,
Wi' glories o' the golden past,
The nuggets, an' the rest.
The life has changed. But well I mind
How pockets once were stuff't wi' gold. ...

A few months earlier, Esson published his essay 'The Australian Play.'⁵¹ Embedded in his discussion was a reference to Yeats and Synge and 'the greatest plays written in English since Webster'; he included Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, *The Well of the Saints* and (later relevant to the dramaturgical development of *The Fossicker*) *The Playboy of the Western World*.

Esson published little over the next two years, after which time—in December 1916—he and his second wife Hilda (*née* Bull) (with their infant son Hugh) travelled to New York. Here Esson was able to reconnect with Irish nationalist playwright and poet Padraic Colum (whom he'd met in London in 1904 at a reception given by Lady Gregory; a few months later when visiting Ireland for the opening of the Abbey Theatre, Padraic became Esson's 'best friend in Dublin and took [him] everywhere'⁵²).

Esson also reconnected with his old university friend Leon Brodzky (now using the name Spencer Brodney)—who was working as an editor with *The Times Current History*. During his stay in Manhattan, Esson no doubt reminisced with Brodzky about their early aspirations for a national drama. Perhaps the confluence of his reunion with Colum and Brodzky, and the wealth of provocation available on Broadway, stirred Esson's creative spirit. He not only wrote an essay on Synge and Yeats (both destined for *Fellowship*⁵³) but had also returned to work with gusto on *The Fossicker*. He was sufficiently enthused about its development to seek Colum's critical response; foolishly, however, providing the Irish writer with his only copy of the manuscript.

After some months of silence, it weighed on Esson's mind that he couldn't retrieve a response nor indeed the return of the manuscript. In a letter to Colum from London in June 1918, he reports that he'd just seen '*The Playboy* [at the Court Theatre] with Marie O'Neill and Arthur Sinclaire in their original parts,' but appears desperate to get the copy of his play back. 'Would it bother you

⁵¹ *The Bulletin*, 5 November 1914

⁵² 'Irish Memories and Australian Hopes', based on a lecture given to the Australian English Association at Sydney, 14 November 1938. Manuscript, Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

⁵³ JM Synge: A Personal Note', *Fellowship*, April, 1921 p.138; 'WB Yeats on National Drama', *Fellowship*, August, 1921 p.15

much to post over the play? I think I can do better than that.’ He goes on in the same letter to offer his rationale of the draft:

The idea was simply to show the hard living ... successful man finishing just the same as the easy going failure, and really finding content. A new more mechanical generation, farmers, orchardists etc., in replacing the old, the miners who trusted more to luck and had a more personal life. The loose conversations are often meant to be taken lightly and to blend in the mass. The speakers would be in different parts of the scene. But I’ve been too abstract; and I know I’ve put in too much background. Indeed, it is really all background and no play—I’ll have one more shot at it to see if I can make it clearer.⁵⁴

Esson tries a little over twelve months later, again from London, in February 1920: ‘Would you kindly send the play to above address?’ But adds disconsolately, ‘If it has gone astray, it will be of no great loss.’ He made another unsuccessful attempt in May.

With no reply at all from any of his correspondence with Colum, Esson had either developed a new draft from notes or another version, or completely redrafted the play giving it a new title, *The Battler* (for its protagonist Geordie Ogilvie). As it bears some resemblance in form to Synge’s three-act comedy *A Playboy of the Western World*, that he had seen recently, a complete new draft is probable. In Synge’s play the protagonist, Christy Mahon, blunders into Flaherty’s tavern in County Mayo where he claims that he is on the run because he killed his own father. His arrival, like Geordie Ogilvie, in the otherwise sleepy, defunct mining town, disrupts completely the status quo, changing the lives of the inhabitants forever.

But it is not until March 1921 that Esson confidently writes to Vance Palmer that he had ‘finished two long Australian plays’ that he felt ‘pretty sure’ were ‘far beyond the little plays.’

Both are in three acts. One is a comedy set in an old deserted gold-field; ... I don’t think I can be mistaken about these plays. Page by page the dialogue is much richer; and I think the construction is sound. I’ve done all I can to them, and won’t touch them again.⁵⁵

And so—following yet another complete rewrite—*The Battler*, ‘a bush comedy,’ inaugurated The Pioneer Players on the Playhouse stage in Melbourne on Thursday 18 May 1922. It ‘drew a large audience, and was enthusiastically received’ (*The Age*). Although all the reviews were in favour of

⁵⁴Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 56

⁵⁵ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 32

the *idea* of an Australian national drama, they were not as enthusiastic about the play as Esson had hoped. *The Herald* was generous:

‘To encourage a school of drama and acting that will be free from convention, but sincere and distinctive’—that is the commendable ideal of the men and women who have been banded to gather as the Pioneer Players. Last night they lived up to it.

But they went on to damn it with faint praise: ‘*The Battler* is as simple as it is realistic. A stout-hearted old prospector returns to the almost deserted field where his career as a miner began, revives the old atmosphere of feverish excitement by coming on a rich mine, finds that the shaft is flooded by water, and goes back to the West to renew his life-long quest of gold, leaving *The Diggers’ Rest* to sleep peacefully once more like a pond that ripples and then resumes its old placidity. There is no other plot.’⁵⁶ Esson later confirmed with Leon Brodzky that his intended theme was that ‘The past can never be repeated. For instead of the new life being like the old, it is rather hard and commercial; and when the reef is lost there is a feeling of relief that the little village can go on in its simple agricultural way. The play.’ Esson was adamant, ‘depends on character and atmosphere. It has hardly any plot. There is no emotional stress. The interests are simple. The play begins and ends with two old fossickers arguing on the pub verandah.’

The Bulletin was only mildly encouraging about what it called ‘this slim and graceful little comedy.’

The Pioneer Players in whose plan for the occasional production of purely Australian drama lurks the gem of financial success staged their first attempt at the Melbourne Playhouse last week. *The Battler* by Louis Esson strikes the right note, although the blow is insufficiently hard.⁵⁷

Further, *Table Talk*, while praising the play for its good character drawing,’ still asserted that it was too slight at present, to make a whole evening’s amusement.’ *Labor Call* complimented ‘the capable acting and fine presentation of ... a distinctly Australian [comedy] from start to finish, entirely free from even a shade of lewd innuendo, realistic, and a pure source of pleasure.’ They found Long’s contribution to ‘the scenery, especially that of the foreground ... ingeniously designed for the stage of the Playhouse ... appropriate and effective.’⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *The Herald*, 19 May 1922 p.8

⁵⁷ *The Bulletin*, 25 May 1922

⁵⁸ *Labor Call*, 25 May 1922 p.5

Quinton Davis, writing in *The Triad*, however was ruthless. ‘One doubts whether Mr Louis Esson will ever become a dramatist,’ he offered in his regular column on Melbourne Theatre.

He possesses sincerity, earnestness, and the faculty of self-criticism, but there is something immanently feeble in his productions. In *The Battler* he holds up a vest-pocket Kodak to a number of Australian country types and the resultant picture is depressingly trivial. Mr Esson may argue that his play is Life, but Life, even in a perishing mining settlement, is not one darn thing after another. One asks for something more than a parade of village simpletons defectively photographed. They express a sanity as *naïf* as imbecility. They are bereft of interests, fads or problems. The principal characters, whose optimism throws a searchlight on his muddled career, is uncertain of his objective, and trembles on the abyss of melodrama.

‘Mr Esson,’ Davis concluded, ‘is a small-town Ibsen; Lady Gregory in knicker-bockers. His naturalism is affected by covert admiration for the Irish Literary Theatre ... Apparently he desires to found a similar “school” in Australia, and has decided to begin as a kindergarten.’⁵⁹

Meanwhile, Esson had confided to Leon Brodzky about the choice to present his own play: ‘I thought it better to start with a country comedy than with anything tragic—[*The Battler*] is a group play, depends on specially good acting, [but] the company at that time hadn’t got into its stride.’ But, he assured Brodzky, he’d read ‘Shaw’s article on the Art of Rehearsal’ and found it ‘most useful.’

I have studied it carefully. It gives the points I wanted to know. I was in doubt as to how to set about the business, the relationship of words to movement, etc. I’m going to have it read to the company.⁶⁰

Otherwise, he revealed that as far as the season was concerned, ‘the expenses were high, but the show paid its way.’

The Pioneer Players III

The Herald was able to report by the end of June that ‘thanks largely to the efforts of the Mermaid Society and the Pioneer Players, there has recently been an astonishing boom in play-writing in Melbourne. Hilda Esson, as the Hon Secretary of the Players, felt obliged to provide

⁵⁹ ‘Melbourne Theatres’, *The Triad*, 10 July 1922 p. 45

⁶⁰ Esson to Brodzky, 9 October 1922, Brodzky *Papers* [SLV BOX 3921/4]

some editorial in a letter to the editor of *The Argus*, where she highlighted the objective of the Pioneer Players ‘to provide a centre where genuine works of Australian drama may be seen.’

It is the only theatre of its kind in Australia, for the Pioneer Players differ from the repertory societies, in that they stage only new and original works, instead of being content with plays already produced abroad. ‘Drama is the most racial of the arts,’ says Granville Barker, and in a country like ours, where the landscape, modes of life, and types of character are distinctive, there is rich and varied material for dramatic art.⁶¹

The Age reported in July that, undaunted, it was the Pioneer Players’ intention, for the sake of improving the standard of acting, to appear more regularly—every Thursday night—to keep the movement before the public. The so-called ‘continuous season’ was scheduled to launch with a production of Stewart Macky’s ‘romantic play in 4 acts’ *John Blake* on 10 August; this would be followed by Vance Palmer’s outback comedy of station life *The Happy Family*; then, short plays by Henry Lawson, Ernest O’Ferrall [Kodak], Katherine Susannah Prichard, Frank Brown and Montague (Monty) Grover would ‘be produced in the near future.’ *The Melbourne Advocate*’s PI O’Leary stressed that ‘the sincere and essentially patriotic work taken in hand by the Pioneer Players should be supported by all good Australians. These Players are engaged in a most important undertaking, the grand object of which is to assist in bringing into being a real Australian culture.’

For the opening of *John Blake* the venue changed to the Temperance Hall in Russell Street, where ‘a large audience’ appreciated a familiar group of actors (lead by George Dawe, Leo Burke, Frank Keon, Allan Murray, Charles Doherty, Isabel Handley and Hilda Esson). Stewart Macky had cajoled Max Meldrum and 20 year old illustrator Donald Finley (1902-1982)⁶² to assist with the design and painting of the scenery.

John Blake, opined *Labor Call*, ‘conjures up some grim and baneful episodes in the penal days of our history.’ The play, based on the short prose piece by the late Price Waring [aka William Astley (1855-1911)]⁶³, ‘pictures life in Sydney, Norfolk Island and Williamstown between 1825 and 1845, and though the characters are fictitious, the historical atmosphere is maintained.’ ‘The play,’ wrote *The Herald*, ‘is designed to show the terrible effects of the early Australian convict system on

⁶¹ *The Argus*, 16 August 1922 p.9; Hilda submitted the same letter to *The Herald* the following day.

⁶² Finley later designed scenery for Duncan MacDougall’s Playbox Arts Society in Sydney, and established the Turret Theatre.

⁶³ ‘Price Waring’s *Tales of the Convict System* was published in 1892, *Early Days* in 1894; Astley otherwise published political commentary in *The Bulletin* and was a regular contributor to *The Australian Workman*.

both convicts and officials.’⁶⁴ The Players were exasperated by reviews that were less than generous: ‘The series of episodes drawn from the early convict settlement,’ offered *The Weekly Times*, was ‘a phase of Australian history of which we are not particularly anxious to be reminded.’⁶⁵ Macky’s play ‘is strong meat, and is not meant for elderly gentlemen with weak digestions,’ offered *Sporting Globe*, adding otherwise that ‘the costumes were elegant ... few Australians realise that we have a costume period of our own when the gentlemen carried swords and the ladies wore side curls and full skirts and pointed bodices.’⁶⁶ Indeed, it was the demand placed on the enterprise by the physical production values that put everyone under a great deal of stress and ‘owing to the difficulties about costumes and scenery,’ the decision was made not to revive the play beyond 14 September. Unfortunately also, the ‘the convict “language” shocked a few mid-Victorian critics’ and the season was not the artistic nor financial success expected. Macky was demoralised.

A week later, Vance Palmer’s *A Happy Family*—a ‘new and original comedy of station life’ set in the cattle country of West Queensland—opened on Thursday 21 September at the Temperance Hall (set to run for three performances). *The Age* reported that the playwright had ‘lived in the Never Never country of northern Australia,’ and had ‘drawn liberally upon his experiences in creating his characters.’ But, they thought, there has been very little attempt to break away from conventionality.’ The play had good roles for women, however, and ‘distinctive work was done by Misses Hilda Bull [Esson], Eileen O’Keefe, Irene Appleton and Alice Crowther.’⁶⁷ *The Herald* was at pains to explain the poor attendance:

Still engaged in their heroic attempt to build up a school of Australian drama, the Pioneer Players ... presented a four act comedy by Mr Vance Palmer. The public, always interested in and enthusiastic about an intellectual experiment of such national importance, signified the same in the usual manner—by proxy. Precisely why the great majority of Melbourne theatre goers so methodically stay away from Australian plays is a difficult question.

He perhaps answered his own question when he observed that Palmer had followed ‘the tradition that an Australian play must deal with the bush—though in no country in the world is such a large

⁶⁴ *The Herald (Melbourne)*, 11 August 1922

⁶⁵ *The Weekly Times*, 19 August 1922 p.14

⁶⁶ ‘Blazing the Trail. Pioneer Players Seek to Foster Our Drama’, *Sporting Globe*, 16 August 1922

⁶⁷ *The Age*, 22 September 1922 p.9

proportion of the population in the town.’⁶⁸ In what was a shorter than expected season, the play closed on 5 October.

On 30 September, *The Australasian* announced that the Pioneer Players were in rehearsal for their last bill of one-act plays, set for production beginning on 11 October in the new venue at the Athenaeum Hall. The opening was delayed by two weeks, however, and opened on Friday 26 October. In what was a full evening’s entertainment, the plays included Vance Palmer’s adaptation of Henry Lawson’s *Telling Mrs Baker* (it was only a few weeks before Lawson died—2 September—that he made arrangements with the Pioneer Players for its dramatisation); Ernest O’Ferrall’s *The Bishop and the Buns*; Gerald Byrne’s *The New Bridge*; and a revival of Esson’s play *The Woman Tamer*; Stewart Macky provided *The Trap* (also using Price Waring as source material).

The Age, thought the ‘program ... of excellent quality.’ Not surprising, the sentimental favourite was the production of *Telling Mrs Baker*.’ But they also thought that

excellent comedy was contained in *The New Bridge*. ... *The Trap* ... a dramatic episode of Norfolk Island in the convict days, taken from a story by Price Warung [William Astley] ... was satisfactorily produced. ... *The Bishop and the Buns* ... contains some good comedy, but hangs fire in places.

What criticism there was of each play, there were effusive complements directed at the cast, including those in the revival of Esson’s *The Woman Tamer*,

that gave Miss Winifred Moverley an excellent opportunity as Katie, a fickle lady of the underworld. Mr Leo Burke, as Chopsey Ryan, and Mr Frank T Keon as Smithy the Liar, both provided good studies. Mr George Dawe’s Bongo was an excellent piece of make up, and Mr J O’Connell might really have been a member of the Victorian police force.⁶⁹

The program was repeated until Saturday 28 October. The scope of the undertaking was highlighted by the *Sporting Globe*, when it reported that ‘during the evening 25 parts were portrayed, some of the players appearing in two roles. In six months the same people have given three full-length plays and five one-actors, with the exception of one revival, all new and original works. ... Their aim is to discard the old-fashioned conventions and to create a natural school of acting with the most modern methods of stagecraft.’⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *The Herald*, 22 September 1922 p.8

⁶⁹ *The Age*, 27 October 1922 p.110

⁷⁰ *Sporting Globe*, 1 November 1922 p.12

‘In spite of the apathy of the public towards their enterprise,’ lamented *Table Talk* following the season, ‘The Pioneer Players are battling along in their endeavour to encourage the Australian dramatist.’⁷¹

Just before Christmas, a curious par appeared in *Smith’s Weekly*, that reported that Esson’s call-out ‘to produce any playable Australian play’ resulted in him ‘knee-deep in a snowdrift of manuscript.’⁷² This runs contrary to Esson’s private desperation to find suitable plays. The Pioneer Players otherwise took a break over the summer, to reflect on their first year. The primary consideration was to secure ‘a little theatre of their own’ as a permanent, recognisable home for their enterprise.

In the new year, an open meeting was arranged for 26 April 1923 at the Conservatorium Hall ‘to discuss the future plans and organisation of the Players.’ Young Henry Minogue (a recent graduate from Melbourne University, admitted to the Bar in 1922), chaired the meeting. Minogue, inexplicably, was reported to have stated that ‘the best way to realise what the Pioneers had done was to recollect that before these playwrights and players commenced their work the public had never seen real Australians on the stage. The plays by Louis Esson, Vance Palmer, Stewart Macky and Henry Lawson were the commencement of the national drama.’ Other speakers were Mrs Esmonde Keogh, Miss Frances Barkman (a young teacher of drama and University friend of Hilda’s), poet and composer Louis Lavates, Dr James Booth and Nettie Palmer.

Dr Booth (member for North Melbourne) was a bit of a heavy weight; in September the previous year, at the National Federation Conference he proposed ‘a national theatre, as an adjunct to the National Gallery and Public Library, to be subsidised by the Government.’ Mr Foster (Parkville), who seconded the motion, (the minutes reveal) said that the day was gone when they looked down on actors and actress. The reaction was also recorded:

A VOICE. We look up to them.

(*Laughter.*)

ANOTHER VOICE: We might as well subsidise football clubs!

The proposal was rejected, but Dr Booth moved the same motion again at the Conference in 1924. One of the results of this gathering was the formation of the Pioneer Players Club.

By May 1923, The Pioneer Players announced that their second program would begin with the production of *Mother and Son*, a play in three acts by Louis Esson, to be preceded by *The Voice of*

⁷¹ *Table Talk*, 26 October 1922, p.20

⁷² *Smith’s Weekly*, 23 December 1922 p.12

the People, a comedy in one act by Alan Mulgan; dates to be announced. The repertoire for the remainder of the season would be chosen ‘from plays by Katharine Susannah Prichard, Spencer Brodney, Stewart Macky, John Le Gay Brereton, Vance Palmer and others.’ This announcement coincided with the news that Esson’s play *The Drovers* had been chosen by the British Drama League to take its place amongst the recently published omnibus of ‘the hundred best plays, ancient and modern.’

— *Mother and Son* (1923) —

In March 1921, Esson wrote to Vance Palmer from London that he’d ‘finished two plays’ he ‘wanted to write,’ and that he ‘needed a spell.’ One of the plays was the much-worked-over *The Battler*, the second was new, titled *Mother and Son*:

a primitive tragedy, set in the Wimmera district, with a suggestion of bees, duck-lakes, the desert etc. It is a very beautiful district, strange and shimmering, remote for Victoria, where, at least in my time, you came on emus and kangaroos.⁷³

Esson’s time in the Wimmera was early 1907 when he and his first wife Madeleine Tracey took their first ‘real holiday together.’ ‘Next Tuesday Jan 8th,’ Esson wrote to Leon Brodzky, ‘we depart for the Bee Farm and Wild Duck and Red Gums out Horsham way. We shall stay six or eight weeks. I feel I am going to get something good.’⁷⁴

The Essons took the Adelaide Express [‘The Overland’] from Spencer Street Station for the overnight service to Horsham⁷⁵. Crossing the rugged Grampians, the rolling hills beyond flattened to vast plains. Their time in the Murra Murra and the Wimmera over the next two months provided a completely new and inspiring alternative ‘bush’ landscape for Esson. Maddie also fell pregnant.

The period was creatively productive and he published a number of poems and prose pieces responding to the Wimmera environment. ‘A Spring Morning’⁷⁶ and ‘Wild Bees’⁷⁷ are among Esson’s most redolent descriptive verses, sensitive to both the sounds and vision of the bush (observations included to great advantage contributing to the atmosphere in *Mother and Son*):

⁷³ 21 March 1921—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 32

⁷⁴ Letter to Leon Brodzky, written at 93 Drummond Street, Carlton and dated 1 January 1907 *Brodzky Papers* [SLV BOX 3921/4]

⁷⁵ Peter Fitzpatrick suggests the Esson’s spent the first few months of 1906 in Sydney and returned via the Wimmera. This conflicts, however, with Esson’s letter to Brodzky.

⁷⁶ *The Bulletin*, 15 October, 1908; revised for publication in *Bells and Bees* (1910)

⁷⁷ *The Bulletin*, 25 July 1907; revised for publication in *Bells and Bees* (1910)

At peep o' dawn, when the world is still,
Hear the magpies calling!
We leave out hut upon the hill,
Hear the magpies calling!
The soil's unbroken by the plough
From gully deep to ranges' brow;
Primeval peace enfolds us now,
Hear the magpies calling!

But it is his long prose piece, 'Bee-Hunting in the Murra Murra'⁷⁸ that provides the provocation for the small farm run by bee-keeper Kate Lind and her ailing Norwegian husband Peter, with scant help from their wayward and prodigal fiddle-playing son Harry. 'The Sundowner's Song'⁷⁹ and 'Me Old Black Billy an' Me'⁸⁰ along with "The Splitter", 'Swinging Douglas' and 'The Fallen Tree'⁸¹, offer templates for the old splitter Tom Henderson (who is spiritually devoted to the *Koran*).

Esson's protagonist, however, is the Lind's artistic son Harry Lind who, though intended to marry Penny, the neighbour's young daughter, has an affair with shanty-worker Emma. While Harry flees the farm in favour of a duck-shooting expedition, his ill father's condition deteriorates. Harry, with Emma, return to the house during a violent (Chekhovian) storm (indicative of the emotional turmoil in the house); despite her misgivings, his mother reluctantly receives the woman into her home. Peter Lind dies and Harry assumes responsibility for his mother and the farm. Emma, meanwhile, tires of her life with Harry and turns to Jim Blake, the dashing son of a nearby squatter, and they run away together. Harry, stunned by the shock, goes out into the bush on a maniacal ride and is killed.

Whether he was conscious of it or not, Esson's scenario, in particular his character Harry Lind, bears a remarkable resemblance to the situation faced by Eugene O'Neill's consumptive poet-protagonist Robert Mayo in his 1920 Pulitzer Prize winning tragedy *Beyond the Horizon*.⁸² Writing in 1923—just before the premiere of *Mother and Son*—Esson paid homage to Eugene O'Neill as 'a writer of genius, the greatest dramatist that the United States of America has produced, and one who can hold his own with the best of European playwrights of his time.' In London, Esson

⁷⁸ *The Bulletin*, 15 August 1907

⁷⁹ *The Bulletin*, 22 August, 1907

⁸⁰ *The Lone Hand*, April 1, 1908; *Bells and Bees* (1910)

⁸¹ *Bells and Bees* (1910); *Red Gums, and Other Verses* (1912); *The Bulletin*, 23 May 1914

⁸² The success of the production, and the Pulitzer Award recognition were well reported in the British Press while Esson was living in London, including *The Stage*, 22 April 1920 and *Westminster Gazette*, 28 June 1920

had the good fortune to see one of O'Neill's short plays produced by the Everyman Company [April 1921] and though it was not one of his great works, everybody felt that here at last had arrived a dramatist of power and originality. His first volume of plays to be published in England contained *The Emperor Jones* which, in its own way, is a masterpiece. ... Eugene O'Neill may not yet be an absolute master, though he seems destined to become one; but he possesses all the qualities, an intensely tragic sense of life, originality of conception and characterisation, a simple and flexible technique, and a marvellous style—the finest in English drama since Synge's; natural, but rich, vivid and full of picturesque idiom; not the feeble artificial language of the drawing-room dramatists, but a modern style of almost Elizabethan energy and exuberance, that seems to come direct out of life itself.⁸³

There is no doubt that Esson was aware of the play, O'Neill's first full length work (written in 1918) when it opened to great acclaim in February at the Morocco Theatre, New York, and subsequently published in 1920. In 'Mud and Morals', written for *The Bulletin* some years later, it was clear that he followed the critical responses to the premiere of *Desire Under the Elms* while in London:

When a company playing *Desire Under the Elms* which good English critics regard as perhaps the best play yet written in America, was arrested in Los Angeles by the city authorities. O'Neill's only remark was the vague question 'Isn't Los Angeles the place where the motion pictures are made?'⁸⁴

Looking back, however, from the cold winter of 1921, Esson confided in Vance Palmer that he was enthused by his own work:

I don't think I can be mistaken about these plays. Page by page the dialogue is much richer; and I think the construction is sound. I've done all I can to them, and won't touch them again.

As was often the case, he acknowledged Palmer's dramaturgical advice:

As you suggest, I may have to use some modern or cosmopolitan themes. I wouldn't do them as well. But this year I'll try a comedy. It will be a rest, for I've worked very hard lately. I feel pleased that I've finished two plays that I wanted to write, and I need a spell.⁸⁵

⁸³ *The Bulletin*, 15 February 1923

⁸⁴ *The Bulletin*, 2 June 1927

⁸⁵ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 32

Yet another ‘nostalgia’ piece, *Mother and Son* premiered at St Peter’s Hall, Eastern Hill on 7 June. The cast included Alice Crowther, Irene Appleton, Hilda Esson, Leo Burke, George Dawe, Charles Doherty, young Reg Moyle and Stewart Macky (in a return to the stage). The curtain raiser was a short comedy, *The Voice of the People* by Alan Mulgan.⁸⁶ Both plays were directed by George Dawe and designed by Richard Long.

The Pioneer Club had worked its network and there was a large and enthusiastic audience on opening night. Little time was afforded *The Voice of the People* in the press; it was considered that ‘the author seems to lack experience of dramatic writing ... in which not a gleam of humour was apparent. It was played in silence.’ *Mother and Son*, on the other hand, ‘contains a great deal of quiet comedy, and strikes a very human note all through,’ reported *The Age*.⁸⁷ *The Herald* thought the play ‘a reach of dry plain, with here and there a tussock of interest and a tiny rise of climax. ... Ibsen in *Ghosts*,’ it noted,

had a theme somewhat similar to that of the play under review, but what a careful selection of dramatic incident [Ibsen] makes to heighten his crisis. In *Mother and Son* there is no crisis, merely an accident. Things happen, but the only inevitability is that the ending will be unhappy, for that is repertory Drama.. ... Mr Esson has put a short story on the stage and labelled it a play.⁸⁸

The Weekly Times was generally more encouraging, but while *Mother and Son* ‘appeared to make a good impression ... the subject of the play is a very ordinary episode in Australian rural life. It has few dramatic moments, and no sparkling wit. All that can be said is that the story is true to life, but nevertheless uninteresting.’ More damning for Esson and the Pioneer Players was the final paragraph: ‘It is to be feared that plays of this type will never create a popular demand for Australian drama.’⁸⁹

Rubbing salt into the already tender wounds, Esson wasn’t spared the opinion of his nemesis Quinton Davis at *The Triad*:

⁸⁶ Alan Mulgan (1881-1962) was a New Zealand journalist and literary editor, contributing columns under the pen-name ‘Cyrano’ to the *Auckland Star*.

⁸⁷ *The Age*, 8 June 1923 p. 10

⁸⁸ *The Herald (Melbourne)*, 8 June 1923 p. 6

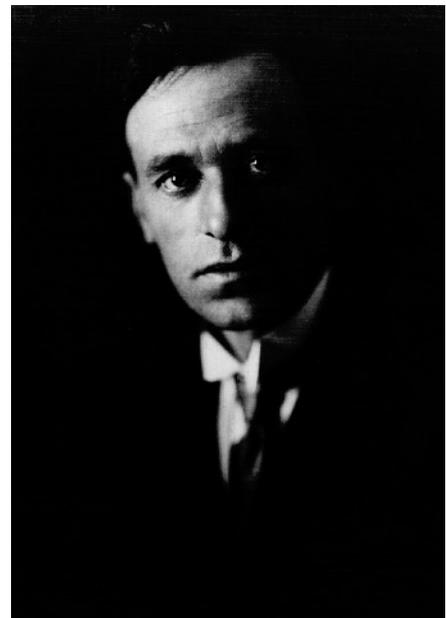
⁸⁹ *The Weekly Times*, 16 June 1923

As a rule a half-hour of Mr Louis Esson will afford one food for sardonic speculation on the future of the native drama in this country, and I am bound to say that his latest masterpiece, *Mother and Son*, doesn't alter one's previous train of thought. For one thing, his writing is enfeebled by the constantly pressing need to depict our Outback life with the invigorating irony of the modern Irish theatrical, little reckoning that the success of the latter is provided by a multitude of types already far gone in the essentials of drama before even they are bundled on the stage. On the other hand, the coverage of bush Australians is so steeped in yokelry that the author, with all his effort to give his characters a sharpened sense of civilisation, has to dedicate them to sheep-stealing, looniness, or drunkenness, in order to make them theatrically purposeful.

Davis believe that *Mother and Son* was an example of this method. The play 'shows some observation, some flintiness of treatment when sentimentality might easily supervene and ruin the author's objective, but it is too resplendent with the delusion that one must have a Back to Yawp Yawp movement to discover the national drama.'⁹⁰

*

Not surprisingly, within a month, the Pioneer Club convened another 'think tank' to attempt to steer a way forward; they met at the Lyceum Club on 27 July where papers on 'the tendencies of contemporary drama' were read by Alfred Buchanan, AR Chisholm (a lecturer in French at the University of Melbourne)—both pessimistic on the present outlook for the stage—and Nettie Palmer (who 'found signs of a renaissance in the growth of the "little theatre" movement'). The Club, convened now by Sheila Sutherland (of the Melbourne Book Club) and Frances Barkman (teacher and member of the Jewish young people's Association Dramatic Circle), were active in establishing a support network that was clearly wide and influential in literary circles. But, history appeared to be repeating itself, and—just like Brodzky's Playgoers' Club (Melbourne Stage Society) the Pioneer Club was devolving into a social gathering with music and play readings (Strindberg's *Creditors* was read at the meeting on Monday 17 September, after which



Louis Esson studio portrait c. 1922

⁹⁰ *The Triad*, 10 August 1923 p. 35

there were songs from Viola Moors and Alan Murray before supper was served. A private reading (in costume) of Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie* was advertised for 22 October.⁹¹)

It was confirmed that the next program of five short plays would appear on 16 August at the Playhouse. Along with a return season of Stewart Macky's *The Trap* and 'Kodak's' *The Bishop of the Buns*, the new plays selected were Katharine Prichard's *The Great Man*, Vance Palmer's *The Trap*, and *Mates* by Esson's half-brother Frank Brown. Esson thought it prudent not to include another of his own plays at this time. Iris Shield (assistant secretary of the Newman Society of Victoria) was now the Pioneer Players' secretary and responsible for collecting dues of one guinea that entitled the subscriber 'to two reserved tickets of each of the three remaining productions for 1923.'

The Pioneer Players second season for 1923 opened on Thursday 16 August; the push for subscribers ensured 'an excellent attendance' at the Playhouse. *The Argus*⁹² thought it a 'Good Bill [directed by George Dawe]. ... Five sincere plays of Australian life, sincerely acted. There was much variety in form and subject. Of the new premieres, Frank Brown's *Mates* was 'a character comedy of the opal fields, with a pert disqualified jockey (Reg Moyle) contrasted with an unsophisticated shearer (Leo Burke). Katharine Prichard's *The Great Man*, dealt humorously with 'a familiar phase of young motherhood, when all the world has to give way to a wonderful baby. ... There was some neat work by Miss Hilda Bull as the mother, and by Miss Kathleen Venman and Miss Irene Appleton as relatives.' Vance Palmer's *The Black Horse*, was 'an impressive tragedy of the cattle country, with reality in the differing views of the father and mother (George Dawe and Alice Crowther) concerning the life of their youthful son (Bryce Dunning). The play was ably shaped, and showed feeling for subtleties of dramatic effect.' It was considered Palmer's 'finest short play' to date.

There was a sense of desperation in the bulk of the reviews, a great good will, but a recognition that the venture was floundering. 'That little band of good Australians, the Pioneer Players,' offered the *Sporting Globe*, 'are striving to bring the native drama from the nebulous to the real.'

Native playwrights have never been overwhelmed with encouragement from the controllers of the commercial theatre. With a few notable exceptions the box-office possibilities of the proposition have never appealed to them, and a struggle to

⁹¹ *The Age* reported on this performance: 'George Dawe gave a very fine study of Chris Christopherson, the old Swedish sailor. His daughter Anna was tellingly presented by Miss Hilda Bull. Mr Leo Burke was excellent as the conceited ship's fireman, and Miss Ruby May showed marked ability as the old harpy, Earthy Owen. Had *Anna Christie* been produced with scenery and with the cast word perfect it would have been a remarkable performance.' 23 October, p.10

⁹² *The Argus*, 17 August 1923 p.11

nurture Australian dramatic art has been left to amateurs, whose only capital or accessories has been their unbounded faith in their own vision.⁹³

It was flagged that ‘an original three-act comedy by Stewart Macky’ would be the third season offering to close the year in November. But when the final performances were advertised on 24 November, Macky’s play was replaced by a bill of four plays: Katharine Prichard’s *Pioneers* (based on an incident from her prize-winning novel, that dealt with the hardship of the early settlers in Western Australia); Furnley Maurice’s [Frank Wilmot] *A Disturber of Pools* (a ‘thoughtful comedy’ in a suburban setting); Vance Palmer’s *Travellers* (a ‘bright shanty comedy’); and the premiere of Louis Esson’s *The Drovers*.

The season opened at the Playhouse on 3 December. *The Argus* review was typical of the rest:

Pioneers began too slowly, with unnecessary talk, and some dragged-in comedy; but action was reached with the arrival of two desperate escaped convicts at a hut, where they found no one but a woman and a baby. From this point there was a good deal of effective work by the writer. ... The ‘disturber of pools’ was Horace, who regarded worldly success and eminence in his suburb as much more important than the ‘sympathy and imagination’ advocated by his wife Martha. ... The ingenious work of the author brought many smiles and some thought. ... Mr Palmer’s *Travellers* were a politician, a barmaid, and a housekeeper, who complained of the fare provided in the hut of a ‘hatter,’ at which the coach had left them. The play gave some well-used opportunities for emphasised character comedy.

‘*The Drovers*,’ *The Argus* concluded, ‘was printed a few years ago. It reads better than it acts, and one cannot conscientiously say that it is suited to the stage. It is too faint even for a spiritual drama.’ *The Age* concurred: ‘*The Drovers* is not so much drama as a description of a mob of cattle breaking away, and of a drover’s life.’⁹⁴

The evening’s cast comprised what was now an experienced and reliable ensemble: Hilda Bull, Leo Burke, George Dawe, Alice Crowther, Reg Moyle, J O’Connell, Bryce Dunning, Charles Doherty, Irene Appleton, Ruby May, and T Jennings.

There was no doubt that there was an enthusiasm and encouragement for the work of the Pioneer Players as ‘worthy,’ but there was no getting away from the generally perceived poor quality of much of the work presented. *The Herald* noted, for example, while the Pioneer Players presented ‘an interesting entertainment with the December season ‘A hut in the Gippsland forest, a suburban

⁹³ *Sporting Globe*, 22 August 1923 p.12

⁹⁴ *The Argus*, 4 December 1923 p.12; *The Age*, 5 December 1923 p.15

garden, a tableland in the northern Territory and a bush shanty [the productions] had little in the way of scenic effect to help out the stage illusion ...⁹⁵ There were issues too with the administration of the organisation, much of the work tending to defer to either Esson's or, more often, Hilda's attention.

No season was presented by the Pioneer Players the following year, 1924: Esson and Hilda fled to the relative calm of EJ Brady's camp at Mallacoota; Vance and Nettie Palmer decamped to Queensland; George Dawe passed away on 5 June; and the following month a vote was taken at the monthly meeting of the Pioneer Club to disband.

At a gathering of the Australian Literature Society in Melbourne on 10 November, Henry Tate presented an address, that seemed to bring the Provincial theatre movement full circle: 'The work of the pioneer more than often goes unsung and forgotten,' he said, recalling 'the spade work of William Moore in the cause of Australian Drama [when] in 1909 he organised his drama evenings, and produced several one act plays by local authors, among whom were Moore himself, Louis Esson and Alfred Buchanan.'

These were an immense success, and undoubtedly inspired the local offerings that have since been produced by the self styles 'Pioneer' players and the Repertory Theatre Movement.

William Moore, Tate went on, was now the art critic of a leading Sydney newspaper, and art, artists and literature owe him a deep debt of this unselfish and unflagging enthusiasm in their interest.⁹⁶

The Pioneer Players IV—Louis Esson's Final Australian Drama Night

In 1924, Esson with his wife and young son, spent most of the year at Mallacoota West, staying under canvas on EJ Brady's East Gippsland property. The invitation came from Brady, an attempt to distract Esson from his funk.. Esson's poem 'At Our Show', published under 'Ganesha' in *The Bulletin*, summed up his cynical mood of disappointment:

He said he'd thrown out toughs with ease,
He'd held the job before.
And so this husky Hercules
We put him on the door.

⁹⁵ *The Herald*, 4 December 1923 p.9

⁹⁶ *The Age*, 11 November 1924 p.10

Ours was a tragic show, high-brow,
In lofty language writ.
If vulgar Goths should make a row,
He'd hurl them from the pit.

He took his stand, and glared around
Our temple of high art
To see who'd dare to breathe a sound,
Alert to do his part.

But no rude man, to give offence,
A scornful glance had shown.
It was the mildest audience
Our Hercules had known.

At last he said, when being feed,
So few were there within;
'It's not a chucker-out you need;
You want a chucker-in!⁹⁷

Having arrive in Mallacoota, Esson wrote to Vance Palmer in early February :

We are sorry the Pioneers had to go bung. I didn't expect them to go on, but I thought there might have been a kind of forlorn hope that Stewart might have seen his way to do something. I don't blame anybody for the failure. It isn't easy to push through something nobody wants, especially without money, resources, or faith.

Anyway we shouldn't have started such a movement in Melbourne. Sydney would have been better, or perhaps Brisbane. I have always hated Melbourne, though I have spent more years there than in any other city. I don't care for the people, the city, the atmosphere or anything. It is a wowser, bourgeois town, without an idea of any kind, and intensely bored with its respectability and stupidity. Its politics, the meanest in Australia, represent its character.

This is not a practical proposition, but Hilda and I have wondered what would happen if we went to Brisbane.⁹⁸

A few months later, his thinking had changed. 'I haven't heard from Stewart [Macky] for a long time,' he wrote again to Palmer in July, 'I would like to get The Pioneers going next year on a

⁹⁷ *The Bulletin*, 27 August 1925

⁹⁸ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 56

sounder and simpler basis. ... I don't want to go to Sydney, where it might be quite possible to exist; I would rather stick to Melbourne and see it through.'⁹⁹

The Essons returned to Melbourne a few months later, following an offer from CN Baeyertz, editor of *The Triad*¹⁰⁰, for Esson to take over the theatre critic's column. His first contribution—a review of Maurice Moscovitch as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*—appeared in the first edition of 1925, but his final paragraph betrayed the bitterness he still seemed to harbour at the poor response to The Pioneer Players' season presented in 1923:

Rarely indeed has Melbourne had the good fortune to see an actor of Moscovitch's power and personality. ... But in our present stage of mental development it is doubtful if we deserve to see a great actor at all, for Melbourne has not a sufficiently large audience capable of understanding great art in the theatre. How could it be otherwise when the younger generation is always knocking at the door ... of a picture show or a foolish musical comedy?¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, along with regular criticism, his published commentary over the next two years was preoccupied by national drama and literature, with major pieces on Yeats, Padraic Colum, DH Lawrence, Pirandello, CK Munro and James Joyce. 'The writer who is provincial and not national,' he offered his *Bulletin* readers, 'splashes on the "local colour" and "idealises" his characters after the fashion of the film.' ...

The writer who aims at universality by selecting what he considers only large and general subjects, independent of place and time, usually achieves sterility. On the contrary, the truly great artist can transmute the humblest material and reveal the universal and eternal in the local and fleeting. It is not the subject matter, but the spirit informing, that creates great literature.¹⁰²

By November 1925 Esson was planning a Pioneer Players season for the following year. Apparently still not having received a copy of the promised published version of Leon Brodzky's *Rebel Smith*¹⁰³ and desperate for new repertoire, he wrote to Palmer—now living in Queensland:

⁹⁹ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 62

¹⁰⁰ *The Triad* was founded in New Zealand in 1892 by Charles Calder Baeyertz (1867-1943). The first Australian edition appeared in October 1915. Baeyertz relinquished his position in 1925.

¹⁰¹ *The Triad*, 1 January 1925 p. 46

¹⁰² *The Bulletin*, 28 August 1924 p.3

¹⁰³ *Rebel Smith*: a play in three acts by Spencer Rodney (aka Leon Brodzky) was published by Siebel, New York in 1925.

I wonder can you and Nettie dig up somebody in Queensland! Get somebody to do a scene in one act! It would be worth the trouble if you got a few people to send you an attempt. How about Nettie giving a little address and asking for contributions (with a few warnings, of course). If you got one with a certain possibility, it would be something. I've had no luck at all. ¹⁰⁴

After a two year hiatus, Pioneer Players redux was an ill-advised but valiant attempt to rekindle the movement. While he brought the old ensemble back together, but yet again—in the absence of the promised play from Leon Brodzky—Esson was forced to supply a hasty replacement, relying on well-trodden source material. Meanwhile, it was announced in May 1926 that their next season—after an hiatus of three years—would take place the following month. The *Argus* reported on the season:

The Pioneer Players, whose aim is the production of Australian drama, will begin their third season on Wednesday evening June 9 at the Playhouse. Already they have presented 17 plays (four full length) by nine authors, and they hope to present a series of plays dealing with various aspects of the natural life.¹⁰⁵

While also reporting that writers such as 'Spencer Brodney', Vance Palmer, Katharine Susannah Prichard, LL Woolacott, Gerald Byrne and Stewart Macky had promised plays. But without any advance warning it was advertised that the season would open with 'a play in four acts by Louis Esson, *The Bride of Gospel Place*.' *Table Talk* flagged that it was 'a play of the life in the underworld of Melbourne' but that

it is a difficult play to act, for there are nineteen characters of varied types, and the settings, such as a lively scene in an all-night restaurant, and a ward in a public hospital, are unusual.¹⁰⁶

Esson had petitioned Leon Brodzky to contribute a play to the Pioneer Players back in 1922: 'We'll have to get our plans ready for next year. Have you any play, long or short, that you would like us to produce? If so, please sent it along,' he wrote on 9 October¹⁰⁷. Brodzky had the draft of a play he called *Rebel Smith*, based on material collected when he was in Queensland in 1920. Esson

¹⁰⁴ Louis to Vance Palmer, 30 November 1925; Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 66

¹⁰⁵ *The Argus*, 10 May 1926

¹⁰⁶ *Table Talk*, 3 June 1926

¹⁰⁷ Letter to Leon Brodzky, 9 October 1922—*Brodzky Papers* [SLV MS6065]

urged him to complete it, but Brodzky procrastinated. Esson sent a telegraph in April 1923: ‘Send Australia play immediately’; in August, Esson was still ‘looking forward with great eagerness’ to receiving the script. Brodzky completed the play the following year on the promise of a production by the Pioneers in 1925. In the meantime Siebel Publishing in New York (owned by his brother-in-law) published the play. Esson was aware of this, writing as ‘Ganesha’ in *The Bulletin* in August that

Spencer Brodney [aka Leon Brodzky], a Melbourne journalist ... after holding good posts on the London *Daily Mail and Weekly Dispatch*, is now hidden away in the huge *New York Times* building, in the ‘Current History’ Department. Always interested in the theatre, and an enthusiastic dramatic critic, he has now published a play of his own in New York. It is called *Rebel Smith*, and is an Australian political play, the setting being an outback pub in Queensland.¹⁰⁸

Esson, however, by late March 1926 was engaged in writing something himself, complaining to Vance that the ‘terrible fires’ and ‘heavy atmosphere’ had been oppressive; he had been ‘very lethargic and unable to write a line without pain and difficulty.’¹⁰⁹ In the absence of *Rebel Smith*, ‘a new play promised from Stewart [Macky],’ nor anything else, it is reasonable to assume that *The Bride of Gospel Place* was written in haste to provide a production in time for the opening. Oddly, and notwithstanding that many of the characters and incidents used dramaturgically in *The Bride of Gospel Place* were based on material published 20 years earlier¹¹⁰, it appears that the play is set in ‘the present,’ 1926; the choice exposes a number of incongruities.

Internal evidence supports the date-of-writing. Spiro, the proprietor of the ‘all-night restaurant’ in Act One is ‘a small, dark, stockily-built Greek of about fifty, with a fierce black moustache.’ He reveals to The Master that he’s ‘travelled the world over—fighting the Turks—pearl fishing in Torres Straits—buying opium in Singapore.’ Given Spiro’s stated age, he would have been 20 at the time of the Greco-Turkish War (The Thirty Days War over the annexation of Crete) of 1897 and available to fight against the Turks. The large pearl-fishing industry in Torres Strait began in the 1860s but reached its zenith in the 1890s when the enterprise supplied over half the world demand for pearl shell. The workforce in both Northern Queensland, Darwin and North Western Australia was a combination of indigenous workers with Malay and Greek and Maltese pearl divers

¹⁰⁸ *The Bulletin*, 6 August 1925

¹⁰⁹ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 68

¹¹⁰ The opening Act is set in an ‘highly popular all night restaurant.’ See ‘Night Hawks’ Retreat: A Melbourne Café de Nuit’, *The Bulletin*, 1 August 1907

(previously sponge divers). Opium was a large problem amongst the indigenous community in North Queensland¹¹¹, the issue arising through the illegal smuggling of opium by the Malay divers from Singapore (where the industry was rampant due to the Chinese workers in the city) as a form of currency. Spiro's back-story embraces this world in the first decades of the century before his apparent arrival in Melbourne to join the burgeoning 'Greek cafe' trade. The ubiquitous enterprise was established by immigrant Athanasios Comino, when he opened his first fish shop and oyster bar in Sydney in 1889 ('handling fish was second nature to island-born Greeks!').

In 'Round the Corner' Esson details the restaurant landscape of Little Lon:

... One finds a variety of all-night cook-shops and coffee-stalls. One is kept by an Australian aboriginal; another by a Jap, whose explanation of slackness of trade—'Don't serve thief'—must gall his rivals; a famed and gorgeous oyster saloon, managed by a Levantine Greek, and other establishments at odd corners, run by a Syrian, a negro, and a half-caste 'Pat.'

But, in 'The Night Hawk's Retreat'¹¹² he details a 'Melbourne Café de Nuit', a 'famous hash-house... a 'highly popular all-night restaurant' that's the only place for supper' the 'interesting proprietor, a short, powerfully-built, tawny skinned, humorous Dago' called Guido.

A wonderful man, this Guido. A Greek, he has been to most countries on the map; he has tried many trades, from running a brewery round Spencer's Gulf and pearl-fishing at Torres Strait, to cutting scrub in Gippsland and running a hash house in Melbourne. He has been over twenty years in Australia, and has always had money. He is a man who could pick up coins in Collins Street. Guido is afraid of nothing that walks.

This 'Night Hawks' Retreat' is popular!

The fire blazes; pots and pans rattle; steaks are being grilled, eggs boiled, sausages fried; customers bawl their orders. ...

Even in the back rooms set apart for the more distinguished visitors a pungent odour of cooking thickens the already tobacco-clouded air. ...

Esson details the prints hung around the cafe, of prize fighters and 'Dago generals' and 'a marvellous battle scene between the Greeks and Turks, a a modern Marathon in which the Hellenes

¹¹¹ See 'Opium and Aborigines: Malay Pearl Divers at Port Darwin', *The Age* (Melbourne), [15 August 1904](#)

¹¹² *The Bulletin*, [1 August 1907](#)

appear like gaudy dolls from a Noah's Ark.' There are placards that bear the legends that 'All meals must be paid for on delivery,' and 'Gents are requested not to spit.'

And what a wondrous crowd gorges round these deal tables—men and women, old and young, of all nationalities seemingly and of many classes!

That absurdly fat man, with cheeks puffed out like a bladder, is a German bassoon player. The dandy-coloured coon opposite, toying with a bunch of tripe, is a professional pug.

Among the crowd we have a Yankee morphiamaniac—a highly educated man, once manager of a big business, but now a derelict, all brought about by the drug. Every hour or so he injects the poison into his system, till his neck and arms and throat are but one mass of ghastly punctures.

A brace of spielers add spice to the company. One is Benno the Bird. Benno wears a silver watch chain with horse-shoe locket attached, sharp-pointed jockey boots, and a red, white and blue buttonhole; he sports a gaudy-coloured 'neck-wipe' flung round his throat; and he tilts his 'lid' far to the back of his head in order to display the lovely hair, well oiled and arranged according to some strict geometrical design, decorating his low, sloping forehead.

A few unfortunate women, some merely girls, shout and curse with their blokes.

Bookies, touts, jockeys, journalist, gamblers, JP's, barristers, doctors—members of all the professions and none—call at one time or another at Guido's when they are having a night out.

Nothing astonishes Guido. A man of the world, he has the same smile for the violinist as for the pavement artist; the same for the pug as for the heavy tragedian.

Esson would also have been aware of the notorious Greek fish cafe located at 213 Lonsdale Street, well known to police as a gaming house and more than once raided as 'a sly grog shop.'¹¹³

Further, Lily's condemnation—'They can keep their beautiful Harbour, and the ruddy Bridge, too'—suggests a revision after 1932, the year of its official opening. It's another indication that the play wasn't intended to be played as a period piece, set in 1907.

The other significant issue with Esson's adaptation is that he'd plundered characters observed and documented in 1907 and relocated them to a 1926 setting. His somewhat romanticised larrikin concept of 'Little Lon' and the Melbourne slums in his verse and fiction at the time was at odds with the current circumstance. The general social attitude to the harsh reality of the slums even a decade later can be seen in a Letter to the Editor by 'Anti-Humbug' of the Melbourne *Herald* in 1919:

¹¹³ See *Geelong Advertiser*, 22 September 1919; John McCallum suggests in *Belonging* that the cafe is based on Fasoli's but the Bohemian atmosphere of that Italian restaurant situated in Lonsdale Street had a very different clientele, especially after it moved to King Street in 1907.

Sir, Most of the slum areas are owned by wealthy men, who have been drawing exorbitant rents for poisonous hovels—over-crowded by the poor, or occupied by persons engaged in criminal or immoral practices.

These owners—many of whom are gentlemen with reputations for philanthropy and piety—of course are ‘quite in ignorance’ as to the character of their tenants. The ‘agent’ collects the rents, which the owner complacently pockets, and ‘no questions asked.’ In any scheme of resumption and the improvement by municipal authorities the names of the real owners should be made public, as should the value of the condemned properties and the rents received. I fancy such procedure would cause a fluttering among the doves of the ‘unco guid.’

As reported in *The Argus*, Architect JS Gawler addressed the Rotary Club of Melbourne on 26 June 1924 on the subject of ‘Housing Problems.’ During his address he declared that ‘The slum problem did not exist in Melbourne, although there were “near slums.” ... At present,’ he went on, ‘the inner resident ring was largely composed of obsolete houses, which must be pulled down in a few years.’ Alderman F Stapley (Chairman of the Town-planning Commission) said that the zoning system would solve slum troubles, because it would prevent the encroachment of business places and factories upon residential areas. Mr AN Kemsley (secretary of the commission) stated that there were no slums in Melbourne, and that the ‘near slums’ would be gradually abolished, particularly those relation to the widening of stress in certain districts. The irony of this bureaucratic cover up was already obvious in some quarters. The Methodist and social reformer F Oswald Barnett for one was shocked when he visited the inner city slum only a year earlier and immediately put in place a campaign for social change and to rid Melbourne of the ‘deplorable conditions’ he’d witnessed.

— *The Bride of Gospel Place (1926)* —

In many ways, *The Bride of Gospel Place* is a dramaturgical development and expansion of his short play *The Woman Tamer*, but his four-act structure provides a crucible to enable him to incorporate a range of characters and situations explored in his verse and prose.

... It was Clara Cooney’s wake. The walls of the stuffy room were draped with black silesia. The coffin containing the remains of the poor woman of the town was placed in the centre of the floor. It was covered with sickly flowers and surrounded with candles. Bottles of beer lay on the side table.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ ‘Down the Red Lock Lane’, *The Bulletin*, 1 November 1906

Esson's Slumtown verse and sketches, particularly his 1906 short story 'Down the Red Lock Lane', provides the basic source material for *The Bride of Gospel Place*; the final act taking place at Lily The Bride's wake at her cottage in Gospel Place. The fundamental romantic, but abusive triangle of Clara Cooney, 'Chinny the Crow' and 'Jugger' is reworked in a four act series of sketches: Lily returns to Melbourne following an unfortunate experience 'in Sydney'—'I was a fool to go'—where she meets and takes up with the young navvy Bush Reynolds (an aspiring pugilist). This singular plot point also directs us to Henri Murger's novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1851)¹¹⁵ as another influence on the play. In Chapter XXII—*Epilogue to the loves of Rodolphe and Mademoiselle Mimi*—it is revealed that Mademoiselle Mimi returns to the fraught relationship with her lover, the poet Rodolphe, after her affair with a Viscount ended abruptly: '... the Viscount kicked up a row with me on account of some verses that were written about me,' Mimi confides in Marcel (one of 'the Bohemians'),

We quarrelled, and I sent him about his business; he is a nice skin-flint, I can tell you. ... He is wealthy enough though, and yet with all his fortune he is as miserly as a clay fire-ball and as stupid as an owl. He would not allow me to drink wine without water, and made me fast on Fridays. Would you believe it, he wanted me to wear black stockings, because they did not want washing so often as white ones. I can well say that I did my share of purgatory with him.

It is clear to Marcel that she was ill: 'It was no longer Mimi, but her ghost.' Murger's novel is unusual too in that, rather than adhere to a strict linear narrative, it is constructed as a series of stories that provide a romanticised insight into the range of Bohemian types who frequent the Latin Quarter in Paris. The mosaic structure is similar to the epistolary novel (such as Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868)). Initially published in *Le Corsaire* in serial form, many of the characters were based on real personalities. Esson appears to use the same dramaturgical approach to construct the form of his play—as did Frank Wedekind in *Spring Awakening* (1891)—the dramaturgical 'whole' is arranged as a mosaic of scenes, building the four acts using sketches of stories with varying degrees of connection and detail; exploiting the core narrative device of the relationship between Mimi and Rodolphe reworked into the troubled and tragic lovers Lily 'The Bride' and 'Bush' Reynolds. The major distinction, however, is that Murger's milieu of the Bohemian world of Paris

¹¹⁵ Available to Esson in a 1915 translation (by Ellen MARRAGE and John SELWYN) published by Greening, New York (1915). Two operas were based on the same material *La bohème* by Giacomo Puccini (1896) and *La bohème* by Ruggero Leoncavallo (1897); the MGM silent film *La bohème*, starring Lillian Gish and John Gilbert, was released in 1926.

(or Esson of Fasoli's) is an awkward imposition on the squalid and nefarious world of Melbourne's underworld Slumtown.

It's also clear that Esson appropriated the three significant situations employed by Murger to set up the first three acts of *The Bride of Gospel Place*: Mimi is introduced—in CHAPTER XI (*A Bohemian Café*) at the Momus Café—as 'a lovely creature, with a voice like a pair of cymbals,' she is Rodolphe's 'new flame;' Esson opens his play at Spiro's 'all night restaurant in Melbourne.' Esson's Act Two takes place in the parlour of the bride's cottage 'some weeks later;' when next we encounter Rodolphe and Mimi they have created a residence together—CHAPTER XII (*A Bohemian at home*)—'in a lodging house in a deserted street situated in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and was perched on the fifth floor because there was not a sixth.' This first attempt at domestic life, in an otherwise turbulent relationship, lasted eight months. In CHAPTER XXII (*Epilogue to the loves of Rodolphe and Mademoiselle Mimi*), Mimi's illness necessitates that she be admitted to hospital, where, as in *The Bride of Gospel Place*, she dies alone.

Murger's description of Mimi provides a similar portrait of 'The Bride':

A charming girl, and especially adapted for both the plastic and poetical sympathies of Rodolphe. She was twenty-two years of age, small, delicate, and arch. Her face seemed the first sketch of an aristocratic countenance, but her features, extremely fine in outline, and as it were, softly lit up by the light of her clear blue eyes, wore, at certain moments of weariness or ill humour, an expression of almost savage brutality, in which a physiologist would perhaps have recognised the indication of profound egotism or great insensibility. But here was usually a charming head, with a fresh and youthful smile and glances either tender or full of imperious coquetry. The blood of youth flowed warm and rapid in her veins, and imparted rosy tints to her transparent skin of camellia-like whiteness. This unhealthy beauty captivated Rodolphe ...

The Bride's observations on 'Bush' appears similar to her French counterpart:

'You don't know what a man Rodolphe was,' Mimi explains to Marcel, 'a mixture of anger and jealousy, who killed me by bits. He loved me, I know, but his love was as dangerous as a loaded gun. What a life I led for six months.'

Esson had been greatly impressed by his time in Paris in 1904 and 'looked back fondly ... on the Latin Quarter of Paris, with its exciting bohemian life.'¹¹⁶ He had referred to his experience and its

¹¹⁶ 'Irish Memories and Australian Hopes', *AEA*, 14 November 1938, Manuscript Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

influence in work, including ‘Unredeemed Pledges’ in 1911: ‘Was this trusty friend pledged, as by Colline, the philosopher in *La Boheme*, for the sake of some consumptive Mimi, or simply to buy beer and crayfish!’¹¹⁷

The premiere of *The Bride of Gospel Place*, took place at The Playhouse, Melbourne, on a very wet Wednesday 9 June, 1926:¹¹⁸ ‘After a week’s perfect weather, there was an unexpected and heavy downpour of rain’ in the hour before the performance. Produced by Leo Burke, the production was presented by The Pioneer Players with a cast that included some stalwarts along with some new faces. The majority, however, were seasoned ensemble members of the Pioneer Players, including Irene Appleton, Ruby May, Charles Doherty, Bryce Dunning, Frank T Keon, Reg Moyle, J O’Connell and Louis’ wife Hilda Bull; Leo Burke did double duty acting in the pivotal role of ‘Bush’ Reynolds and as the director. New faces to the Pioneers included Maisie Bennett as ‘The Bride’; with Ivy Thomson (doubling Suzette and the Ballet Girl) and Violet Groves (doubling Vanity Fair and the Nurse).

The Playhouse had been used by the Pioneer Players in 1923. Formerly the Snowden Cinema in Aikman Street, South Melbourne, the venue was converted into a 770 theatre (with stalls and dress circle) as the home for Gregan McMahon’s Melbourne Repertory Theatre company in 1916.

‘On the whole,’ Esson wrote to Vance Palmer the week after the opening (15 June), ‘we did very well.’ The rain hampered door sales, ‘but the bookings had been good, much better than ever before.’

... The house was almost full, except the balcony, and the show went over not so badly. It was a slow start as usual, not a laugh coming till page 5. We had only two breaks, Joe going out for a plate and not returning, but Frank as Smithy covered it up cleverly ... The second was that the curtain in Act III fell on the screen.

The first act, that on paper seemed the liveliest, made the least effect. But I was lucky in most of the characters. The outstanding successes were Frank as Smithy and Irene Appleton as the Charwoman. But equally good in character were Ruby May, Hilda and Reg O’Connell as the policeman, and Bryce Dunning and Violet Groves (doctor and nurse). The beautiful Ivy did quite well in a difficult and artificial part. We had decent programmes and good music, but we hadn’t made proper arrangements for the front of the house and the ushering was poor. Still it was a decent show.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ ‘Unredeemed Pledges’, *The Bulletin*, 23 March 1911

¹¹⁸ Program held by the Fryer Library, University of Queensland

¹¹⁹ As quoted in Sykes, Alrene, *Five Plays for Stage, Radio and Television*, UQP p. 20

Responding to the single performance, *The Argus* reminded the reader that the Pioneer Players used ‘a non-professional cast’ but ‘there was good work.’ *The Age* believed that ‘Easily the best performance ... was that of Mr Frank T Keon as Smithy the Liar, an underworld crook of humorous phrase and a deep sense of his own righteousness.’ It continued:

Mr Keon handled the part faultlessly, and created much mirth. Miss Maisie Bennett did excellent work in the exacting part of Olive [The Bride], and Mr Leo Burke took good care of the part of Bush Reynolds, which he treated with restraint. Mrs Esson was a convincing Renie, a fickle wife who lives the high lights, and Miss Ruby May made a splendid Madame Delia. Mr Charles Dougherty repeated his Repertory success as the Master, and Mr Reg Moyle was a confidence man whom any magistrate would sentence without the option. Mr J O’Connell was a good constable.¹²⁰

The review concluded with the observation that ‘a large audience was pleased with the merits of the play and the performance.’ Music for the evening—including the Overture from Mozart’s *Le Nozze de Figaro*—[was played] by the Isobel Langlands Trio¹²¹.

Of the play itself, while *The Argus* respected Esson’s ‘effort at a fresh beginning in the attempt to provide Australian drama ... he has not yet reached a quite successful stage art of his own [compared to the naturalism of the Chekhov] ... but the play contains much that is interesting, and very much that is true.’

He has put put real life and real characters on the stage, and if one says that some of the curtains are not ‘effective’—well, there can be something beyond what is usually regarded as stage effect; nearer the truth, and deeper.

‘Mr Esson may not yet reach it,’ the review concluded, but ‘in the present play he has glimpsed it. Most of the characters are people of sordid life in the “underworld,” but they are truthfully presented, without the scales being manipulated either for or against them, and there are points of faithfulness and sacrifice that do something towards redeeming the best of them.’ It was the playwright’s verisimilitude that either drew dramaturgical praise or moral condemnation for sordid lives presented. ‘*The Bride of Gospel Place* is describe as a realistic play, in four acts, of the Melbourne underworld,’ commented the *Australasian* in its favour, highlighting that ‘The objects of the Pioneer Players are the presentation of original plays interpreting aspects of Australian life and

¹²⁰ *The Age*, 10 June 1926

¹²¹ Isobel Langlands (violin), Charles Tuckwell (piano), and Mr A Demarez (cello).

character and the development of a natural school of acting and production.’ On the other hand, they noted that

The characters are from the ‘underworld’—and that is not necessarily a recommendation—but it is clearly an Australian ‘underworld,’ not anything copied from over seas.

They also pointed out a common difficulty with the dramaturgy, suggesting that Esson had

avoided conventional stage method and climax, and has not followed the principle of making everything said or done contribute to the movement of the play. Some of his people give sketches of their history two or three times, and there are other points that have nothing to do with movement or action.

‘But,’ it hastened to add, ‘it is all true—the characters, their sayings, their accents, their points of view.’ *The Bride of Gospel Place* in concluded ‘may not be a play in the ordinary sense, but it is a lifelike series of episodes.’¹²²

Table Talk argued that Esson had ‘made several attempts to write the true Australian play, for which we are all waiting, but in his latest effort ... he has abandoned Australian atmosphere, and deals with the cosmopolitanism of the underworld.’

It is an undoubtedly worthy piece of work, and in dramatic construction, in the handling of the dialogue, and the stage sense, shows an advance upon the author’s previous efforts. Its sordid character will, however, militate against its presentation upon any professional stage.

There is some comedy relief, but it is not exactly incidental to the action of the play, being drawn in by outside characters, except in the one case of Madame Delia, the good hearted fortune teller, in which role Ruby May did good work.

Underlying all is tragedy, and the sordidness that rarely appeals. It is strange that in his plays Louis Esson does not seem able to break away from the sordid side of life.¹²³

Ultimately, however, they felt that ‘this play would show to greater advantage with proper stage mounting, and more experienced interpretation, for the roles have possibilities which for the most part were not touched on this occasion.’

¹²² *The Australasian*, 5 June 1926

¹²³ EJC, *Table Talk*, 17 June 1926

The most keenly observed notice came from *The Australian Worker* who found the production ‘a triumph in its grip and truth.’ Further, Lionel Lynx was

bound to say that *The Bride* impressed me not as ‘an album of sketches (*Bulletin* critic), but as a unified plot, ruthless in its movement from beginning to end with a place for everything (within its ambit) and everything in its place, possibly marred in one respect—the repentant respectability of its climax (thought the author may justly retort that the underworld is nothing if not Respectable.)

Lynx found the characterisation was ‘stupendously well done as writing, and it says much for the Players that it was very finely interpreted by skilful exponents ... One could see a group of them feeling that they had in hand a mission as much as a part.’ He noted that the production ‘raised a large, rather selected audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm,’ but questioned ‘all the trouble and expense for a one night performance!’ Running on his publication’s theme, he asked

why such a play could not be sent to the chief centres of the Commonwealth by Government, as something important enough to be pronounced upon as a developmental enterprise. Consider all the expensive commissions we run on economic issues and our barrenness of expenditure or effort in relation to literature!¹²⁴

The *Adelaide News* believed that Esson ‘failed to hit the dramatic value,’ and wondered if anyone was ever going to write ‘a great Australian play?’

Without doubt Louis has the rare gift of being able to put flesh and blood types upon the stage, but the trouble is that he doesn’t know what to do with them when he gets them there. ... With the superior attitude of certain modern intellectuals, he despises stage technique, with the result that his curtains and climaxes are always missing fire.¹²⁵

There was, nonetheless, ‘plenty of interesting material in *The Bride of Gospel Place* ... All it needs is a good stage producer with no high fangled notions, to knock it into shape.’ ‘Esson had here unloaded a cargo of raw material of a high order,’ began *The Bulletin* review.

But why didn’t the dramaturgist make a play out of his sincere investigations into a neglected, but perfectly legitimate, field for an Australian playwright’s activities? As

¹²⁴ Lionel Lynx, *The Australian Worker*, 30 June 1926

¹²⁵ *News* (Adelaide), 16 June 1926

the thing stands it is less a play an an album of sketches in the manner of George Belcher or Honoré Daumier, and the ill-devised curtains are merely the book covers to Parts I to IV of the collection.¹²⁶

The Argus review—headed ‘Sincere Play by Mr Louis Esson’—for the only performance of *The Bride of Gospel Place* reads like an obituary for the man and the movement.

When there is real Australian drama it will probably take its rise from some such effort as that of The Pioneer Players. Several pieces of Australian authorship and subject have been commercial successes on the professional stage, but when they have adopted Australian men and women as models they have usually burlesqued them, placed them in conventional stage situations, and given them old stage jests and old stage heroics to speak. Stage convention has been abandoned by Mr Louis Esson in *The Bride of Gospel Place*, ... has he abandoned too much—the good points of the stage as well as the bad? Possibly, but his effort at a fresh beginning in the attempt to provide Australian drama must be respected. ... He has not yet reached a quite successful stage art of his own—in the manner, for instance, of the successful movements towards stage naturalness—but the play contains much that is interesting, and very much that is true.¹²⁷

The logistics of mounting the production was a concern for Esson and he whinged to Vance Palmer:

At the finish we had everything to do. Nobody did a solitary thing. Entertainment tax, rehearsals, printing (programmes, tickets and dodgers), scenery, Glen’s props (hundreds of them) and furniture, carting to and from the Playhouse, music, publicity—Hilda and I, especially Hilda, did the lot. The Playhouse people were decent, and the men behind were really expert on scenes and props. When we started, vaguely and tentatively, the company wanted to get busy, and before we knew where we were everything was to be all right. Leo proposed a business meeting of a few men, but we never had it, so we were left with the business. We had to pay every bill and were made responsible for everything. There was never time to get things sorted out. The last few weeks were a whirl and placed as we were we had to go through. Hilda managed everything in the most marvellous way. We did everything well, and yet expenses were kept in reason. When the ticket-sellers weigh in, the expenses will be practically covered. When it’s all over I expect we’ll be about a fiver down, which is not worth mentioning in the circumstances. Without the rain, we would have been a fiver up. A second performance might have been

¹²⁶ *The Bulletin*, 17 June 1926 p. 34

¹²⁷ *The Argus*, 10 June 1926 p.16

successful, but the risk wasn't worth while. We have been extraordinarily lucky. If things had gone wrong, as they might have, we could have been £40 out.¹²⁸

Esson felt the pressure and confided that as far as the Pioneer Players' next season was concerned 'it won't be my play. I don't want the company to bust, for it is getting better. Leo certainly did good work in getting a good company together. He and Frank will be along tomorrow night to discuss future plans.' As it turned out, *The Bride of Gospel Place* was the final production mounted by the organisation and an ignominious final season for Louis Esson.

Esson reputedly lost £5 on mounting the production, but he also lost his enthusiasm and had little incentive to write for the theatre thereafter. *The Bride of Gospel Place* was his swan-song, the few works that followed in manuscript appear never intended for performance, and as his health deteriorated so too did his capacity to write. Esson rallied somewhat the following year when he wrote to Vance Palmer:

[Reg] O'Connell has a scheme for getting some of the Pioneer plays accepted for pictures. I told him to write to you to get your ideas. There'll be money in pictures for somebody.¹²⁹

The momentum for a dedicated provincial theatre enterprise in Australia subsequently stalled in Melbourne as a lost cause.

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Crucially, in 1928, using her pen-name 'Meroo', Katharine Susannah Prichard was awarded first prize in *The Triad* Australian Play Competition. The play—its dramaturgy, its subject matter and its approach to the 'bush'—was a game-changer in the provincial theatre movement; it marked the new modernist phase in the national theatre enterprise. The judges were Gregan McMahon, DH Souter and LL Wollacott. Beginning with a corroboree, Prichard's play *Brumby Innes* tells of station manager 'Brumby' Innes, an abusive drunkard, who exploits his indigenous workers. Prichard was awarded £50 cash and promised 5% of the gross takings in a production planned by Messrs J and N Tait [JC Williamson's]. Gregan Mc Mahon, slated as the director on behalf of the Sydney Repertory Theatre Society, believed *Brumby Innes* 'comparable with the best work of present-day American dramatists.' Some years later, in a lecture given at the University Conservatorium in Melbourne, McMahon went further and suggested that with this play, Katharine Prichard had established 'a

¹²⁸ As quoted in Sykes, Alrene, *Five Plays for Stage, Radio and Television*, UQP p. 20

¹²⁹ As quoted in Meanjin, volumes 6-7 (1947) p.104

dramatic literature distinctly our own.’¹³⁰ But Esson himself honoured his friend and colleague, writing from his position as theatre critic of the *New Triad*:

In his excellent report on *The Triad* play competition, Mr Gregan McMahon compared *Brumby Innes*, by Katharine Susannah Prichard, with the best work of Eugene O’Neill. No higher praise could be given to an Australian dramatist, and personally I agree with every word that Mr McMahon has said. *Brumby Innes* is a play of the Nor’ West, absolutely authentic in character and atmosphere. It is a drama of astonishing power and originality, breathing the very spirit of primitive Australia. The same author has also written two admirable novels, *Black Opal* and *Working Bullocks* and a number of incomparable short stories, the high quality of all her work entitling her, I think, to the foremost place in Australian literature. ... the general feeling being that we had at least one writer whose work could hold its own with the finest contemporary work of England and America.¹³¹

The same year, a ‘remarkable’ play titled *The Touch of Silk*, by twenty-four year old *Punch* journalist Betty M Davies [Betty Roland] was presented at the Playhouse (Melbourne) on 3 November; it was directed by Frank Clewlow for the Repertory Theatre Society. Goulburn Valley soldier-farmer Jim Davidson marries a young French girl, Jeanne, after the War, and brings her home to Australia. ‘Craiser’, in *The Bulletin*, noted the ‘interesting’ reactions:

The Argus patronised it, *The Sun* attacked it on the moral issue, and *The Age*, ever most vocal in supporting the claims of Australian socks and singlets, called it ‘melodrama.’ On the other hand, *The Herald* devoted three-quarters of a column to unstinted praises. The explanation probably is that all the most experienced critics were busy, as was to be expected, at the Palace, burning incense to an average imported English farce comedy. *The Herald* notice was written by Hugh Adam, not one of the regular dramatic midwives, but the paper’s chief leader-writer and a man of intelligence. A non-literary verdict is that of a leading theatrical proprietor who went to learn the truth for himself. He described it to me as ‘no good for the commercial stage, but not only the finest thing of its sort yet written in Australia, but finer than anything imported for donkey’s years.’¹³²

Together these two playwrights represent the most significant, modernist ‘new wave’ of dramaturgy in the Australian national drama. In a very real sense, as suggested by Margaret

¹³⁰ As reported in *The Mercury*, 17 June 1933. Second prize was awarded to *The Bolshevik* by PD McGuire, and third prize to *Governor Macquarie* by Dora Wilcox (Mrs William Moore). *Brumby Innes* remained unproduced until the Pram Factory staged the play in 1972.

¹³¹ 1 January 1928 p.22

¹³² *The Bulletin*, 21 November 1928 p.17

Williams, the collapse of the Pioneer Players, along with Esson's valiant, albeit flawed nationalist agenda and reasoning to forge a unique canon, marks the definitive end of the Colonial period.

Another, more enduring wing of the Provincial movement—that embraced performance outcomes for locally written plays—coincidentally appeared in Sydney in the same year, 1928, an initiative of twenty-one year old actor and director Carrie Tennant (1907-1989). With her company of players, The Understudies, her first season at Burdekin House Workshop [Little] Theatre included *When Jack Proposed* by WA Holman; *The VC* by GV Kearney; *Commedia*, a fantasy by George Cassidy; *Outback* a dramatic episode of the Never Never; and *When in Rome*, a satire by George Selby. Mrs Kearney was an experienced playwright, one of her 3-act plays had recently been secured by JC Williamson and another, according to *The Sun*, was at this time, under consideration in London.' Encouraged by William Moore, Tennant made the move to a more permanent organisation and her Community Theatre found a permanent home in the basement of St Peter's Church Hall in December 1929. In 1932 she formed the Australian Play Society (incorporating The Community Theatre), 'its object ... to produce four full-length plays a year by Australian playwrights,' with a quarterly magazine, *The Australian Drama*, that was the literary organ of the Society.¹³³

While there were sporadic productions of locally written plays across the country during the Depression, the next major milestone in the Provincial movement would be the establishment of the Playwrights' Advisory Board (by Rex Rienits, Doris Fitton and Leslie Rees) in 1938.

Notwithstanding the establishment of Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in 1954—its motto from inception was 'in Australia by Australians and for Australians'—it was another twenty years before Ami McGrath set up her Australian Theatre, producing only Australian plays from 1973 initially at a home theatre in Centennial Park, then in Newtown. The Stage Company in Adelaide (1977) had the same agenda, as did The Griffin Theatre Company (1979) (still in existence 55 years later).

*

By contrast, Esson's enthusiasm for dramatic writing had dwindled; while he observed and applauded the work of Prichard and Davis, his own few theatrical attempts referenced not the emerging but old forms. Of the three completed full length plays Esson attempted after 1926, two

¹³³ The Daily Telegraph, 12 February 1932 p.4

were historical chronicle plays (*The Southern Cross* and *The Quest*), the third, continued his Pioneer Players' preoccupation with nostalgia and landscape, but this time the subject matter evolved into a romantic Gothic thriller.

— *Shipwreck* (1929) —

Esson, with Hilda and their son, five year old Hugh, spend time with EJ Brady at his camp at Mallacoota on the East Gippsland coast in early 1924 (recording the stay almost verbatim in *Australia Felix*). He was not unfamiliar with the breadth of the Gippsland landscape, with his early play *Dead Timber* set in the far west of the district (around Noojee, Kinglake, Erica and the Dandenong Ranges) and some of his most redolent verse published in *The Bulletin* dates from earlier visits (up to 1915) with his uncle, John Ford Paterson.

Writer EJ Brady—the author of *Australia Unlimited*—first camped in the coastal settlement at Mallacoota in 1909 with the intention of establishing a 'writers colony'¹³⁴, he bought property and settled in the area in 1914, at which time he established a farm. He and Esson had met through Fasoli's and shared a commitment to socialism as well as a national literature. Brady's first collection of poems, *The Ways of Many Waters* (published by Thomas C Lothian in 1909), exposed his interest in ships, sailors and sea-going life. The sea-shanties sung by Carl and Ben in the play come from Brady's 'Yankee Packet' and 'Lost and Given Over'. Brady was also no doubt aware and interested in the many shipwrecks that occurred off the rugged coast line from Bastion Point around to Port Albert throughout the early days of the settlement, and able to share these stories with Esson during their regular late afternoon chats during his visit.¹³⁵ Hilda, in her introduction to the published play records that

In the yard of the fishermen and stockmen who gathered in our tent at night, Louis heard ... of the eternal folk-tales retold in a new and primitive environment. Just as the Irish peasants told Synge a tale used long before by Boccaccio, and the Gold Hair legend of Brittany that caught the imagination of Browning, so these dwellers in one of the most beautiful and remote corners of Australia had their prototypes of the old stories.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ What Hugh McCrae referred to as 'the Brady-Esson Sanatorium for Decayed Dreamers?' Hugh McCrae to AG Stephens, 6 October 1910—AG Stephens *Papers*, Mitchell Library, SLNSW

¹³⁵ Esson diarised a typical exchange in his play *Australia Felix* (1928)

¹³⁶ *The Southern Cross, and Other Plays*, Robertson & Mullens (1946)

Esson wrote to Vance Palmer on 20 January 1924:

The whole country from Orbost to Eden is full of interest. The coast is magnificent and the bush at the back the wildest I've seen. There is plenty of material for literature, the beauty of nature, ocean, lake, river; mountain and forest, and the interest of the characters, stockmen, hunters, fishers, roadman, many of them primitive, and some lawless and dotty. It's one of the richest places I have ever been. ... I have done a month's work ...¹³⁷

While there, he worked on completing *The Bride of Gospel Place*, 'brought in about a dozen chapters' of a novel, and conceived the idea of a Gothic drama set in a remote shanty on the rugged Gippsland coast south of Bastion Point and Gabo Island; utilising the classical stories of 'Phaedra, married to an old man and in love with his son' (a relationship exploited in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*) and Hippolytus—'whose trampling steeds became a wild stampede of bullocks'—adapted to provide a suitable gruesome denouement. As Esson writes to John Le Gay Bremeton in April of 1924, this would be his 'fifth long play.'¹³⁸

Despite the idyllic and inspirational surroundings, once winter set in, living in their bark-walled humpy in Gippsland was too exposed to the cold winds off the Southern Ocean and proved uncomfortable, so the Essons returned to Melbourne in late July.

The Bulletin published verse by Esson, inspired by this visit that he later used to set the scene for his play. We recognise a 'grim and grisly ... shanty' where

At the mustering there comes a change,
Where the red cliff fronts the sea;
Young cattlemen, who ride the range,
Are full of devilry.¹³⁹

A similar 'eyrie perch' 'upon a jagged hedland' hosts

Monaro boys, Gippslanders,
And Dutchies, Finn and Swede –

¹³⁷ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 55

¹³⁸ 12 April 1924—Brereton *Papers* NLNSW[MS 281/6/263]

¹³⁹ 'Mother Hogan's', *The Bulletin*, 14 February 1924

Who'd cross the Devil's ocean,
Nor care for chart or log,
To drink der fill, py golly,
Of Mother Hogan's grog.¹⁴⁰

Meanwhile, below, 'The Southern Ocean'

Wants no human lovers.
Old ships, old captains, Spanish, Portuguese,
Or Dutch or English, long-forgotten lie;
And still her guardian rollers thunder by
To keep intruders from her jealous seas.¹⁴¹

We're introduced to 'old Chris' [the old Finn Carl in the play] who 'brings in the stores' in his cutter —'only twenty,/Or less than twenty, ton'¹⁴²—and the 'Blue-shirted horsemen [Stumpy's son Tom] ... /Down from the ranges' brow' who bring cattle down to 'swim/The Mallacoota lake.'¹⁴³

Esson also evokes something of the supernatural Gothic aspects of the plot in a piece of short fiction titled 'Drifting Sand', published by *Smith's Weekly* in September 1924:

Even hardened old bushmen, who had lived all their lives in the district, avoided the place.

'I always go round it myself,' said Dave, who was out duck-shooting on the saltwater lakes.

A weird, lonely place it was, lost in the scrub-covered hills by the sea. Only a few people were scattered about, but cattle were put out by bushmen and allowed to run wild till the mustering. The stockmen had ridden all over the ranges and round the lakes; but there were never any cattle to be found in the four or five square miles of country Dave had just pointed out.

'No beast will go near it,' he said. 'It's all dead, quite dead. Why, not even a bird will fly over it.'

'Look there,' said Dave, from the top of a jagged cliff.

A south wind was blowing from the ocean, and lifting the sand from the hummocks that lay across the inlet. Thick clouds of driving sand were swirling about.

¹⁴⁰ 'Red Cliff', *The Bulletin*, 14 August 1924

¹⁴¹ 'The Southern Ocean', *The Bulletin*, 25 September 1924

¹⁴² 'The Cutter', *The Bulletin*, 20 March 1924

¹⁴³ 'Swimming Cattle', Brady, Edna J, *Mallacoota*, (1998) p. 44

The idea for a drama languished for the next three years, however, during which time Esson was preoccupied with the production of *The Bride of Gospel Place*. But, in January 1928, Esson wrote to Vance Palmer about the development of a draft of the play that he now called *Shipwreck*.

I feel more like work now than I have for years. I went very flat and stale for a bit. Any kind of change and shake-up sometimes works wonders, I'm going to finish *Shipwreck*, which I hope to make 100 per-cent better. I've made a reconstruction. New scenes will be introduced and dull stuff thrown out. I have a much better movement in it. It has to be wild and reckless, with the atmosphere of the place. I have hopes it will be at least an effective stage-play, good to act, that I'll be able to send to some actor.¹⁴⁴

Interestingly too, during the play's development, Esson had received a copy of Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Working Bullocks*, her most recent novel published by Jonathan Cape (London) in 1926. It impressed him enormously and he reviewed the book in his regular column in *The Bulletin*.

Working Bullocks ... is her finest work, and probably the best novel ever written in Australia. We live through it rather than merely read it. We forget the printed pages, and seem actually to be among the big timber with primitive working people. It is a life experience, for this is an elemental work, powerfully realised, without a thought of concession or compromise. From the moment Red Burke appears against the sombre background of the bush, with his team of bullocks, to his last defiant cry of Mrs Coulburn, we are with real people in real situations. They are all bush folk, taken simply as human beings and treated without a touch of sentimentality or caricature. There are no heroes, no supermen; but the great jarrah forest has got into the book and filled its pages with glamour and mystery. Nothing is common or matter of fact. Life moves to a large and noble rhythm in this primitive Western world.

He refers to Prichard's characters as 'rough,' but having 'a natural dignity;' he was taken with 'the writer's vision' as being 'authentic.'

[Prichard] has no mere prettiness or cleverness derived from the naughty nineties, and none of the inhibitions and insipidities associated with the great Victorian age. She adds no meringue-cream that Anatole France tells us often badly dissimulates the poverty of the cake. It is absolutely sincere work, deeply felt and truthfully expressed.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 93

¹⁴⁵ 'Katharine Susannah Prichard', *The Bulletin*, 31 March 1927

Esson exploited the major tropes of the Romantic Gothic genre and sets his play *Shipwreck* in ‘the late nineteenth century’ at a gloomy clifftop, ‘cut off from the rest of the world,’ the shanty built on the remnants of the wrecked ships (a nod to Shaw’s *Bleak House*) that perished historically on the savage coast of the Southern Ocean below.¹⁴⁶ Scavenging off this carnage is ‘Stumpy’ Johnson, Esson’s ‘authentic’ villain, a 60 year old ‘queer and sinister’ bushman and bullocky with ‘long matted hair, and a straggling, greyish beard,’ who lost a leg in a splitting accident thirty years ago. Esson builds on the supernatural foreboding through the revelations of Stumpy’s estranged son Tom who reveals that ‘we’re a bad family and there’s a curse on the place.’

TOM. You know what the old man is—well, his father was worse. It was in the early days.
One night he brought in some blacks, and tied them to trees. He had supper, turned in;
and can you believe it, when he got up next morning he shot them all—in cold blood.

By the early months of 1928, the play appears to have been sufficiently finessed. ‘I was going to show *Shipwreck* to [Russian/American actor Maurice] Moscovitch,’ he writes to Vance Palmer, but ‘Moscovitch left suddenly for New Zealand.’¹⁴⁷ Esson had interviewed the Russian visitor and found him to be among the greatest actors ‘of our time ... when Moscovitch is on stage we forget we are in a theatre; we are looking at life, real life, as in a picture by Rembrandt.’¹⁴⁸ The concept of theatrical ‘authenticity’ appeared to be preying on Esson’s mind.

A year later, anticipating a visit by the Palmers to Carton where he and Hilda were then living, Esson wrote to Nettie that he has ‘got very little of any use to show you,’ but he had completed *Shipwreck*, ‘which is considerably altered.’¹⁴⁹

Esson opens his four act play appropriately—his structure is familiar—on a wild and stormy winter’s night—‘the worst weather in years.’ On the promise of £1000, recently widowed Martha Kennedy has brought her 19 year old daughter Madge to the isolated shanty as Stumpy’s prospective wife; Stumpy ‘likes them young and fresh and frisky.’ ‘Madge thinks I’m too old,’ he

¹⁴⁶ While *The City O’ Liverpool* and *The Lass O’ Gowrie* are fictional vessels, their factual counterparts may have referred to, in the first instance, the two-masted schooner *Ariel*, lost on the bar at Port Albert in 1846 (with about 50 head of cattle and about 100 sheep on board); ‘It’s fifty years and more,’ Stumpy tells Madge’s mother Martha, ‘since *The City O’ Liverpool* went to the bottom of the sea.’ In the second, the barque *Mary Warner* that floundered on the bar off Gabo Island in 1892 (at the time the play is notionally set).

¹⁴⁷ 20 April 1928; Maurice Moscovitch arrived in Australia with his company under the management of JC Williamson in October 1924 with repertoire that included *The Merchant of Venice* and *Trilby*. He left at the end of 1929, his son Nat Madison remaining behind to appear at the Tivoli Theatre in vaudeville.

¹⁴⁸ ‘*The Merchant of Venice*’, *The Triad*, 1 January 1925

¹⁴⁹ 5 March 1929, La Trobe [MS 12156]

barter with Madge's mother, offering a further '2 or 3 pound a week,' 'and she doesn't like this wooden leg, but I'll show her I'm as good as any o' the young 'uns. And I've got the money to pay for everything.' Stumpy is even prepared to disinherit his own son Tom, pledging Madge 'everything after they marry.' Despite her fear and obstinacy, Madge's sobbing appeals fall on her mother's deaf ears and, the transaction complete, it is agreed that the couple will marry in Eden the next day.

Esson picks up the story two months later; Mrs Madge Johnson now resigned, numb to her circumstance and surroundings. Stumpy is preoccupied scavenging the spoils of yet another shipwreck, *The Lass O'Gowrie*. Supplies and some social respite for Madge arrive with old Carl and his young off-sider Ben, the latter taking a keen interest in the shanty-keeper's young wife, attempting a joke when he hopes Stumpy treats her 'better than he treats his bullocks.' Stumpy's son Tom also arrives—'he's like his mother, she was a great horse-woman, bred on the hills'—but he is shocked to discover that his new step-mother is Madge Kennedy, a girl he had once 'been sweet on' himself.

As functionaries, Carl and Ben represent the 'modifiers' in Esson's dramaturgy; both contrast thematically with their counterparts Stumpy and Tom; although Tom petulantly rejects her, both he and Ben become rivals for Madge's attention, Esson providing the inclusion of a 'romance' trope in his bleak scenario. Stumpy becomes suspicious of his wife's behaviour, but is distracted when his nefarious business enterprise is put under threat with the arrival of the 'bluff and hearty' constable Sergeant Gregory to investigate the report of the shipwreck. Meanwhile, Madge and Tom reconcile, and she implores him to take her away. Stumpy catches the young couple kissing and threatens them, forcing Tom to leave. Stumpy then gloats about the bounty from the wrecked ship hidden in the shed, but Gregory, back on the scene, discovers the compass from the *Lass O'Gowrie* and arrests Stumpy. Alone, Madge then goes to the cliff and fires two shots into the air (the prearranged signal for Tom to return). The triangular plot device is derivative of Dion Boucicault's *London Assurance*.¹⁵⁰

Act Three, as usual in Esson's dramaturgy, becomes a divertissement: it is twelve months later, Stumpy has been in gaol and Tom and Madge, still living at the shanty at Shipwreck, now have a baby son. The action turns on Stumpy's unexpected arrival home; a subsequent violent exchange between the two men results in the shocking death of the baby and Stumpy fatally shooting Tom.

¹⁵⁰ Two shots from off stage is used as a signal in Dion Boucicault's, *London Assurance* (5.i). Boucicault's play concerns the aging Mayfair playboy Sir Harcourt Courtly who arranges to marry 18 year old Grace Harkaway by special provision of her dead father's Will; Grace is ultimately wooed by Courtly's son Charles.

A few days pass, Madge continues, albeit defiantly, to mourn. To stop her escaping while he takes ‘a couple o’ prospectors’ into the hills, Stumpy chains Madge to a wall in the shanty; so anxious is he to get back that he decides to traverse the notorious and cursed ‘debbil-debbil country’:

... the stockmen always ride round it—they’re scared of it too. It’s always been like that. It’s the queerest kind o’ place I ever seen. There’s no cattle runnin’ wild about there. No beast’ll go near it. There’s not a damned lizard on it. There’s no life at all, not a blade o’ grass. Even the birds won’t fly over it. It’s all haunted or blasted or somethin’. It’s debbil-debbil country right enough.

As darkness falls, Stumpy returns, his body crushed and bloodied; giving truth to the curse, he’s been trampled by his own bullocks, blinded when his barb-wire-tipped whip catches him in the eye. In a devastating denouement standoff, Madge is unable to reach Stumpy to help him; Stumpy has lost the key to the bullock chains restraining her. Stumpy becomes delirious, groans and falls back. The generic conclusion would demand that the curtain fall on this gruesome scene with the young wife’s horrifying realisation of her own lingering death.

STUMPY (*Muttering in delirium*). Go on, you brutes. ... I’ll slash you and flay you and blast you. ... What the hell now! Tom’s is it! (*Laughs wildly*.) I’ve got you now, Madge. You’re chained up, my beauty. You’ll gad about no more. ... Oh, the bloody wire. ... I’m blind. ... Curse the brutes ... curse them ... Madge ... Madge ... blackfellows ... debbil-debbil country ... it’s dead. ... It’s all dead ... the curse. ... Ah ... I’m gone ... ah ... ah!

(*STUMPY groans and falls back.*)

(*Pause.*)

MADGE. The light’s fadin’ It’ll be dark in a minute.

(*Pause.*)

How are you now, Stumpy? You’re boss, are you, and you can do as you like. ... You do look funny, lyin’ there, crumpled up agin the wall. ... You must be done in, Stumpy. ... Can’t you move? Stumpy, you old devil, Stumpy!

(*Pause. The light fades.*)

Esson, however, needs to rescue ‘the damsel in distress,’ and Carl and Ben arrive in the nick of time. In a lengthy coda, Esson reinvigorates the romantic melodrama, bringing Ben and Madge together (the anti-heroes triumph); he promises to get her away from Shipwreck and look after her. As Hilda explained it, ‘the very violence of the characters and incidents was too remote’ from Esson’s type of mind. ‘He had no psychological key to the expression of brutality for its own sake,

and the play is too external in treatment, too crowded with incident, to achieve artistic unity.’ I’m not sure which company he had in mind to produce the play, but he was very particular about what his characters wore, pen sketches of characters he’s seen or met perhaps: Madge, for example is ‘dressed in a short dark skirt, leggings, a rough woollen jacket and a man’s felt hat.’ Otherwise, he gives the scenic artist a very specific ‘impression’: in Act Two, in lyrical mode, Esson locates the action

... on the cliff, overlooking the Southern Ocean. The sea is like green jade near the shore, but deep blue in the channel. All round the shore there are trees and grasses down to the water's edge, twisted apple-gums, slim acacias, and great masses of tea-tree. On one side there is the opening of a big rough shed. On the other, old, grey, lichen-covered rocks on which brown nets are spread.

Shipwreck was not produced on stage during Esson’s lifetime; there is no mention of the play in his correspondence after 1929.

By this stage, however, Esson appears to have himself acknowledged that his personal ambitions for a national theatre were beyond him; certainly that his own career as a dramatist was well past its used-by date. He all but surrenders, while in his critic’s chair at *The Triad* in 1925, in a summation of the current state of Melbourne Theatre:

Sydney will be jealous, I suppose, if I try to make too much of the sensational revival of Drama in Melbourne. But our record speaks for itself. Some of our impresarios have had simultaneous inspirations, with the result that we have recently been regaled with a series of performances that I would defy London or New York to equal. There has been a veritable Renaissance of the Old Legitimate, an orgy of classics, an epidemic of neglected masterpieces. It is the fulfilment of our highest hopes, when Melbourne’s supremely critical audience has at last come into its own. The prayers of old theatre-goers have been answered, and now we are receiving what is our due. ... Our theatre has become like a museum or rather an old curiosity shop of theatrical antiques. Many of the specimens may be somewhat mouldy or moth-eaten, but there is no question of their authenticity. They are guaranteed by our most trustworthy connoisseurs. Will the frivolous Barbarians, who live around the Harbour, really believe that within the last few weeks this favoured city has been able to revel in a bewildering succession of epoch-making plays including such notable examples of the dramatic art as *The Silver King*, *Charley’s Aunt*, *A Royal Divorce*, *Rip Van Winkle*, and *The Private Secretary*, with others of the same high order to follow! What other city in the world would have the courage to present a modern audience with such a programme! But we have not failed in appreciation of the choice intellectual repast set before us; and, as a reward, we have soon have

exciting revivals of *East Lynne*, *The Lights of London*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* added unto us.¹⁵¹

Although, one suspects Esson may have had his tongue firmly lodged in his *fin de siècle* cheek!

¹⁵¹ 'The Melbourne Theatre', *The Triad*, 2 November 1925

— CHAPTER SIX —

The Commercial Theatre Enterprise & The National Drama

... Though J C Williamson maintains
That he alone provides the best
Imported stars, all else disdains –
Louis Esson, ‘Unimpressed.’ *The Bulletin*¹

Preamble

In his Introduction to *Australia in 50 Plays*², Julian Meyrick embraces Leslie Rees’s origin narrative of the Australian drama, framing his monograph—‘an account of the remarkable relationship between our national drama and our nation life’—with reference to ‘journalist Leon Brodzky’s [sic] despair at the time of Federation at the lack of connection between Australian theatre and Australian national life.’³ Brodzky contributed his first articles on dramaturgy (and Irish nationalist poet and playwright WB Yeats⁴) when he was only 19. While still at university, he wrote a clarion call for ‘the local dramatist’ in a major article in *The Critic*. In his argument, however, he gave his readers the false impression that the prevailing repertoire staged by the Commercial theatre excluded locally written plays.

The Australian stage is held by plays that are written everywhere and anywhere but in Australia. Of late we have had *Resurrection*, a Russian novel dramatised by a couple of Parisian theatrical hacks; *Are You a Mason*, an adaptation of a German farce; *Oh, What a Night!* A farce from the French; *Monsieur Beaucaire*, an American piece; and *If I were King*, a Cockney romantic drama; and so on, and so forth.⁵

¹ *The Bulletin*, 1 May 1913. [GANESHA]

² Meyrick, Julian, *Australia in 50 Plays*, Currency Press (2022)

³ Meyrick (p.1) quotes Rees’s misquote of Brodzky from his article ‘Towards an Australian Drama’, *Lone Hand*, 1 June 1908. ‘Many of us are almost in despair,’ Brodzky wrote from London, ‘when we see how little relation the theatre in Australia has to the national life of the country. There is no Australian dramatist earning his livelihood by writing for the Australian stage.’

⁴ ‘Leon Brodzky on the drama’, *The Bulletin*, 16 August 1902; ‘Yeats’ Celtic Twilight’, *Table Talk*, 11 September 1902

⁵ ‘The Local Dramatist’, *The Critic*, 12 December 1903. Brodzky does concede that Australian playwright GW Elton’s *Oh! Mr Pennilove* was ‘a distinctly original bit of work,’ that premiered at the Melbourne Bijou (18 October 1902); and that Haddon Chambers—whose *A Modern Magdalen* was successfully toured by the Musgrove Comedy Company in 1902—was to be ‘set down as an Australian Dramatist.’

Meyrick is correct, nonetheless, to credit Brodzky as the first to champion a national theatre enterprise *post-Federation*.⁶ ‘When I set out on the Melbourne experiment,’ Brodzky continued some years later in *Lone Hand*, ‘I wanted a society to produce plays, like the Stage Society ... in London, or, better still, the Irish Theatre in Dublin.’

But at the time I knew hardly anything about those institutions; and as those who responded to my call were cultivated people interested in good plays rather than people in earnest about building up something new, I was forced to let the [Stage] Society be turned into a sort of pleasant social institution for the reading of plays over the tea-cups, and for the reception of leading actors. To such a body there is not the least objection. But it is quite outside our purpose, and no real concern of those who want to see Australian plays produced and the foundations laid of an Australian national drama. Ours is a serious affair, and a task sooner or later to be undertaken.⁷

Brodzky highlights a significant concern to Australian theatre historians: the distinction between ‘the foundations of an Australian national drama’ and the mechanism of their production, suggesting that the Commercial (or popular) theatre was contrary to the enterprise. Esson saw the appeal to the Commercial ‘impresario’ (like JC Williamson, the MacMahon Brothers or the Tait Brothers), by playwrights such as Arthur Adams and Bert Bailey, as anathema to the cause of Australian dramatic writing. In the first instance, he saw the ‘emerging national theatre’ as the domain of the Provincial (or literary) theatre; Gregan McMahon allowed relatively few new Australian modernist plays into his otherwise internationalist repertoire of the repertory movement. Both Esson, and to some extent McMahon, were antithetic to the Commercial Theatre ethos, but in reality the rinteraction between each of the three strands of theatrical enterprise was extremely fluid.

Meyrick contributes to the dilemma, noting—especially in terms choosing the plays for his ‘representative’ monograph—that ‘at the time of Federation and for 30 years afterwards, there are only *a few plays of note* by Australian authors,’ [my emphasis] despite also suggesting that ‘from the 1860s onwards, the quantity of theatre was considerable.’⁸

What is noteworthy for consideration here is the factual existence of a buoyant ‘theatre industry’ to be contrasted with a supposed paucity of an emerging canon of ‘Australian drama.’ Meyrick clarifies his own choices arguing that ‘the problem of picking plays from the 40 years after

⁶ Although it’s unclear why Meyrick chooses to reference Brodzky’s intended enterprise with the Provincetown Players and the New York Theatre Guild, both founded over a decade later (in 1915 and 1918 respectively).

⁷ ‘Towards an Australian Drama’, *The Lone Hand*, 1 June 1908

⁸ Meyrick *op. cit.* pp.16-17

Federation is also a problem of discovery,' and, importantly, his book 'is not a history of Australian drama *per se*, it is about the history of the nation seen through the lens of *some* [my emphasis] of its plays.'⁹

None the less, in setting up a foundation narrative of his own, Meyrick perpetuates the Rees tradition and relies on the distinction between the Commercial Theatre, and 'in drastically decreasing order of size and scope, the Repertory Theatre movement, which dealt mostly with the "serious" contemporary repertoire from overseas; and the nationalist [Provincial] theatre, which focused on local drama.'¹⁰

But Meyrick's agenda is reliant on the conflation of both the form and the content: not only the plays but the who and how of their production. To the point, Meyrick begins his survey of 20th century Australian drama by using contrasting productions that both premiered in 1912.

On the one hand he cites *On Our Selection*, Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan's adaptation of the Arthur Davis (Steele Rudd) stories that was commercially produced¹¹ and toured nationally and internationally over the following decade by Bert Bailey's New Dramatic Organisation. The writing team of Bailey and Duggan had enjoyed previous commercial success with *The Squatter's Daughter; or, the Land of the Wattle* (1907) and *The Man from Outback; or, Stockwhip and Stirrup* (1909).

The contrasted play—seemingly more 'worthy'—was another comedy, Louis Esson's 'brilliant comedy of Australian politics' *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, produced by Gregan McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Theatre. When the Melbourne *Herald* reported on the play's publication a month after its premiere¹², it made the curious assertion that Esson's play 'possesses the distinction of being the first long Australian comedy originally produced in Australia.'¹³ One can only suspect that the recently deceased Alfred Dampier might have turned in his grave at the suggestion, and producers Bailey and Duggan may have bristled, given the extended commercial season of their current bush comedy in Sydney against the single pro-am performance of *The Time Is Not Yet*

⁹ Meyrick, Op. cit. pp.16-17

¹⁰ Meyrick, Op. cit. p.4

¹¹ *On Our Selection* premiered at Sydney's Palace Theatre on 4 May 1912.

¹² By Fraser and Jenkinson, Melbourne.

¹³ *Herald* (Melbourne) 8 August 1912 p.4

Ripe.¹⁴ Meyrick mounts the argument the ‘despite the disparity in their commercial impact ... *dramatically* their influence is the reverse of what [the audience attendance] suggests.’¹⁵

For all its wild popularity, *On Our Selection* marks the end of a certain kind of creative endeavour. *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* points forward to the plays that would come next. Many of these proved no more profitable than *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*. But in pursuing a national drama, box office success is a misleading hare to chase.¹⁶

Bailey went on to collaborate with Ken G Hall on the screen adaptation that resulted in Cinesound’s first major full-length feature film (released in 1932).¹⁷ *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* was not revived until a student production at the University of Melbourne in 1972, sixty years later.¹⁸ The play’s first professional revival occurred the following year, also in Melbourne, in a joint production by the Melbourne Theatre Company and, ironically, the commercial producers JC Williamson Theatre Limited.¹⁹

Meyrick is at pains to point out, however,

that whatever else Australian drama may be, it is not pure. It is pointless to look for an exact moment of national inception. Australian drama grew democratically, incrementally, ineluctably, until one day it bent the imperial frame of reference around it sufficiently to claim it as its own.²⁰

Perhaps so, but the question becomes when this metallurgical adjustment took place and at what dramaturgical consequence?

Meyrick suggests that it fell to Gregan McMahon, and that the two companies that he founded—the Melbourne Repertory Theatre (MRT) (established 1911) and the Sydney Repertory Theatre (SRT) (established 1921)—

¹⁴ Contrary to Meyrick’s suggestion that the play ‘had a run of a few weeks.’

¹⁵ It is estimated that more than a million people saw *On Our Selection* between 1912 and 1916. Rather than ‘the end’, *One Our Selection* established a genre and spawned a number of offshoot productions of similar ilk including Sumner Locke’s *Mum Dawson, Boss*, Philip Lytton’s *The Waybacks at Home and in Town* and the hugely successful *Possum Paddock* by Kate Howarde; as well as the sequels *McClure and the Parson* and *Grandad Rudd*.

¹⁶ Meyrick. Op. Cit. pp.24-25. It’s an argument that is highly contestable, especially given the *On Our Selection*’s ongoing success and enormous cultural influence, and conceptually the play was a nostalgic parody.

¹⁷ According to Andrew Pike (Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900–1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press (1998) p.158) the film earned a staggering £46,000 in its first year of release (its production budget £8,000).

¹⁸ The production by the Janet Clarke Hall Dramatic Club was directed by John Smythe.

¹⁹ The production was directed by Malcolm Robertson, designed by Kristian Fredrikson.

²⁰ Meyrick, Op. Cit. p.24

were key to the production of Australian drama in the years after Federation. McMahon presents as the first modern Australian stage director in much the same way as Esson appears as the first modern Australian playwright.’ That is, they were *self-consciously* Australian theatre artists, psychologically distant from the British imperial touring circuit, with its glittering career opportunities and cultural dead-ends.²¹

Esson’s nomination as ‘the first modern Australian playwright’—based on *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, and his three one act journalistic ‘sketches’—must be challenged. Meyrick is not the only commentator who chooses to exclude from consideration contemporary playwrights such as: Sumner Locke (*The Vicissitudes of Vivienne* (1908); Kate Howarde (*Why Girls Leave Home* (1914); Arthur Adams, Mary E Wilkinson (*Wither?* (1914)); or, Katharine Susannah Prichard (whose one act play *The Burglar*—that premiered on the same bill as Esson’s *The Woman Tamer* in 1911—offered a far the more provocative and ‘modernist’ dramaturgy). Also excluded are Australian playwrights enjoying success in London: Leon Brodzky (*The Humour of It* (1912)); C Haddon Chambers (*The Golden Silence* (1903), *Sir Anthony* (1907)); and later, amongst others, Harrison Owen²² (*The Gentlemen in Waiting* (1925)).

Meyrick’s assertion about the MRT and SRT being ‘key’ to the production of Australian drama’ also denies the vast canon of Australian drama produced in the 19th century (embargoed from consideration presumably because they were not ‘art’ or ‘literary’ and intended from commercial production). Apart from anything, despite McMahon’s co-production with William Moore (the Australian Drama Night in 1911), and, apart from a few exceptions,²³ the MRT’s repertoire until it went dark at the end of 1916 was totally reliant on plays that were ‘written everywhere and anywhere but in Australia.’ Galsworthy, Shaw, Pinero and Ibsen dominated.²⁴

One of the exceptions was a revival of Arthur Adams’ *Mrs Pretty and the Premier* produced in 1914.²⁵ Shortly after, in his article titled ‘Towards an Australian Drama’ (printed in the Red Pages of

²¹ Meyrick, Op. cit. p.20

²² Esson, writing on the Melbourne Theatre in *The New Triad* (1 February 1928) refers to Harrison Owen as ‘the only Australian playwright since Haddon Chambers, who has achieved a notable success in the London theatre ... Owen is a writer with wit and intellect, better worth playing than the majority of English playwrights.’

²³ *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* (1912), Arthur Adams’ *Mrs Pretty and the Premier* and Mary E Wilkinson’s *Wither?* (1914)

²⁴ When the Company reopened in 1921, MRT didn’t mount an Australian work until Isabel Handley’s *The Mandarin Coat* in 1925, and then three years later, the significant premiere of Betty Roland’s *The Touch of Silk*.

²⁵ Arthur H Adams’ *Mrs Pretty and the Premier* was directed by Gregan McMahon and premiered at the Athenaeum Hall, Melbourne, on 26 September 1914; the Sydney Repertory Society presented a season at Repertory Theatre on 18 November the same year as part of the ‘festival week of Australian drama.’ It was presented at Theatre Royal, Manchester in December 1915, produced by and starring Arthur Bourchier.

The Bulletin), Esson took umbrage and generated some heat: ‘The commercial theatre exists,’ he began, ‘for those who are so depressed by the dreariness of existence that they wish to escape as far as possible from art and life.’ Seemingly forgetting his own political—‘fecklessly commercial’—comedy, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, he chose to vent, with a very personal attack on a colleague, who, he believed, engaged in an act of creative betrayal that, in Esson's view, would effectively stall a national theatre movement. ‘I can find no justification for its existence,’ Esson—in ‘Socialist commentator’ mode—went on:

Except for some such explanation it would be a dark mystery why Arthur Adams should ever have written *Mrs Pretty and the Premier*, and then published it. It must have been a wearisome process, for, as Chekhov says, nothing is so tedious as a tedious play. It is impossible the author could have had any illusions about it. He must have known it was hopelessly bad, false at the foundation and shaky all through. ... It may be bad enough to earn a long run on the heathen stage, and the author may draw 1,000 pounds a week for it, but that is his concern, not mine. And what has all that to do with the Repertory movement and the beginnings of Australian drama! ... A play like that baffles criticism. It is really tantalising; there is nothing to hit. To attempt to apply any dramatic principle to it is like bringing up a howitzer to crush a mosquito.

Esson concluded with something of his own attempt at a manifesto, while making every effort to dismantle his colleague's achievements:

The author may say, in excuse, it was meant only as a light conventional comedy, something suitable for the commercial stage, a harmless enough little pot-boiler, and was never intended for a moment as a work of art. If that be so, I can only say: Why wasn't it so intended? What right has Adams, or anybody else, to do less than his best?²⁶

The discussion spread to the pages of *The Socialist*²⁷ where there were suitably resolute arguments for both sides, including from DH Souter and the Reverend F Sinclair²⁸, both responding to Esson's call for ‘sincerity’ in the drama, denouncing Adams for basically wasting his talent on writing for

²⁶ ‘The Australian Play’, *The Bulletin* (Red Page), 5 November 1914

²⁷ ‘The Australian Play: A Bout with AH Adams of the Red Page’, *The Socialist*, 18 December 1914

²⁸ Cartoonist and journalist David Henry Souter (1862-1935) was a prolific contributor to *The Bulletin*; he was also a librettist and playwright and had two plays produced by the Sydney Repertory Society in 1914. The Rev F Sinclair had been the publisher of *The Socialist* since 1910; he and Esson were friends and colleagues through membership of the Socialist Party.

the commercial theatre. Adams himself wouldn't be baited, allowing smugly for his success to speak for itself!²⁹

Critic John McCallum, in *Belonging*, uses Esson's polemical attack on Arthur H Adams to draw the more immediate distinction between the nineteenth century commercial tradition and the early twentieth century repertory tradition. 'Adams wrote well-made plays about very modern problems faced by articulate city characters who live in nice houses with Sydney harbour view,' argues McCallum, the plays 'have charm and humour.'³⁰ Further, McCallum concedes that the rejection of the commercial melodrama—notwithstanding its 'bush legend' 'Australian-ness'—was that audiences post-federation began to prefer the tantalisingly voyeuristic modernist dramaturgy, particularly the 'realism' on display in the Repertory Theatre. This notwithstanding that the 'homely bush comedies' that were the mainstay of the more successful late century melodramas, codified to a great extent by Bailey and Duggan, continued to gain audience favour until at least 1919 with the premiere of Kate Howarde's enormously successful 'homely bush comedy' *Possum Paddock*³¹.

Also accelerating the negative trend was the cost of producing the spectacle required of melodrama (especially during the depression of the 1890s) in favour of the less expensive demands of 'the box set' or the new scenography espoused by Edward Gordon Craig³² (1872-1966) and Adolphe Appia (1862-1928). Appia rejected two-dimensional painted representation of scenery; the fundamental of his approach was that he wanted the actor to be *in* the scenery, an active 'living' component of the setting (as opposed to acting *in front of* the backdrop). Further, the artificiality of the 19th Century scenography was suddenly highlighted by the screening of the Australian produced feature film—most likely a world first premiere—*The Story of the Kelly Gang* in 1906 (directed by Charles Tait; and produced by William Gibson and Jillard Johnson, supported by the commercial theatrical entrepreneurs, the Tait Brothers).

²⁹ A similar argument, about 'Art' versus 'Commercial' repertoire erupted between Wayne Harrison, outgoing Artistic Director of Sydney Theatre Company, and his replacement Robyn Nevin in 1999. When announcing her inaugural season she made her position clear: 'Historically we were funded so that government could ensure the provision of serious and excellent theatre to its common its that independent producers would not provide. ... As the culture has shifted and this company has more and more resembled an independent producer, concerns have been expressed by artists, audience, government and commentators. As an outsider, I expressed concern. Having moved inside the Company and felt the ship tilting this way and that, I acknowledge two facts: the balance between art and commerce remains the trickiest challenge of them all and the STC must work harder to achieve that balance.' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 September 1999 p.13

³⁰ McCallum, *Belonging*, Op. cit.pp. 20-21

³¹ *Possum Paddock* premiered at the Theatre Royal (Sydney) on 6 September 1919, directed by the author; it was much revived.

³² Gordon Craig's highly influential essay, 'On the Art of the Theatre' was published in 1911.

Peter Fitzpatrick, in his chapter on ‘Australian Drama 1850-1950’, in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*³³, perceives ‘the terrain’ of the 19th Century as ‘decidedly barren,’ but from his perspective,

it suited the myth to see the writer as an intrepid explorer in a barren land, and to adapt the powerful Australian iconography of a continent empty and unknown at its heart.

‘Louis Esson,’ Fitzpatrick continues, ‘certainly liked to see himself as that kind of pioneer, and the fact that his journeyings mostly ended in disaster simply added to the strength of the metaphor and the status of the playwright. The myth rested on the assumption that there were no footprints in that particular desert.’ But it was a decidedly misinformed and reckless assumption.

Fitzpatrick was Esson’s biographer—his *Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson* was published by Cambridge University Press in 1995—and it is not surprising that Esson is employed as both a narrative signpost and a device in his foundation narrative that, quite rightly, begins over half a century earlier.

Fitzpatrick, however, endorses Richard Fotheringham’s observation that ‘For just under one hundred years—from 1832 until 1930—live theatre flourished as a commercial industry in Australia.’³⁴ The popularity of the commercial enterprise, Fotheringham argues, ‘is to be understood not merely in terms of a desire for diversion but as part of a complex and defining set of evolutionary rituals by which a colonial society compensated for being a long way from “home.”’ Fitzpatrick makes the point that these ‘signs of colonial communities vigorously seeking entertainment and cultivation’ seemed ‘at odds with the unsympathetic *terra nullius* through which [Esson] saw the Australian playwright attempting to forge a path.’ Fitzpatrick chose to define his narrative, not by contrasting the three levels of ‘theatre’—the mechanism for performance—but by being inclusive of the platforms that produced the ‘Australian drama’: ‘stage plays by, for and usually about Australians.’

Fitzpatrick cites ‘the distinction that mattered for Esson’ was that between ‘commercial and literary theatre’ (as argued by McCallum) ‘when he wrote about the pioneering playwright’s need to find images of cultural distinctiveness and to bring them to the stage.’ To this end, Fitzpatrick

³³ *Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, State Library of NSW ([Digital Resource](#))

³⁴ Richard Fotheringham (ed.), ‘General Introduction’, *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage, 1834-1899*, UAP (2006) p.1; Fitzpatrick Op.cit. p.180

frames his history of Australian drama by comparing and contrasting Esson's thematic concerns across his canon:

Esson sought an alternative source for what might be unique about this country in the larrikin subculture of the city

as opposed to the myth of 'the typical Australian' as a practical man as characterised by Russell Ward's concept of 'the Australian Legend' in retrospect.³⁵ Esson becomes a preoccupation as 'a particularly instructive case-study

... for the definition of what an Australian play and an Australian playwright might be, for the preconceptions surrounding the idea of a national drama, for an analysis of the intersection of notions of the serious and the popular, the authentic and the imaginary, the derivative and the new.

What is crucial to Fitzpatrick's narrative, however, is that while he champions the centrality of Esson to the foundation narrative—with reference to both the early plays, including *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, and later those produced by the Pioneer Players—he acknowledges that Esson 'was not precisely representative of Australian playwrights of his time.' Rather, Esson 'articulated ... a version of the nationalist aesthetic in its most extreme, but also its most coherent form.' Fitzpatrick appropriately saw George Darrell and Alfred Dampier as 'the giants of the popular theatre,' and that *The Sunny South* (1883), for example, finds 'its subject precisely in the conflicting claims of national and cultural affiliation that Esson experienced, but refused to admit, in either his polemics or his plays.'³⁶

Pioneer Dramatists—'By Australians For Australians'

The commercial theatre was the mainstay of public entertainment in the Colony since Governor Richard Bourke granted the first licence to Barnett Levey in April 1832, and the industry was inaugurated with the 'Australian' premiere of Douglas Jerold's nautical melodrama *Black-Eyed Susan; or, All in the Downs* in the saloon of his Royal Hotel nine months later. Hobart was subsequently the cradle for the fledgling 'provincial' Australian drama twelve months later when Henry Melville's *The Bushrangers; or, Norwood Vale* was premiered [7 June 1834]³⁷. The play is

³⁵ Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Our (1958), p.1; Fitzpatrick, Op. cit. p.182

³⁶ Fitzpatrick, Op. cit. pp. 183-84

³⁷ The play text was published in Melville's own journal *The Hobart Town Magazine*, April 1834 pp.82-96

distinguished as being the first produced play to request the Australian landscape in its stage directions [‘Mr Norwood’s hut in rural Van Diemen’s Land;’ ‘A camping area with a cooking fire in the bush’] and explored the Colony’s emerging cultural identity (including the first indigenous stage character).³⁸ I should clarify, that the 29 Australian plays written in the two decades following Melville were by playwrights ‘resident’ in the Colony³⁹; it is only with the publication of a Shakespearean inspired blank-verse drama *The Bushrangers* [aka *The Tragedy of Donohoe*]⁴⁰ in 1835 by poet and actor Charles Harpur (1813-1868)—a Currency Lad (born to convict parents)—do we get the first contribution to a truly Australian canon (‘by an Australian for Australians’).⁴¹

The fledgling industry received its boost with the arrival in the Colony of actor and producer George Coppin (1819-1906) in March 1843. He quickly established his credential and found public favour, his enterprise culminating in his collaboration with John Lazar to refurbish the old Queen’s Theatre in Adelaide (relaunching the venue as the Royal Victoria Theatre in December 1850). Various ventures followed the Gold Rush (including tours by the tragedian Gustavus Vaughan Brooke and Irish dancer Lola Montez), but Coppin’s major influence on the local drama was consolidating a national touring circuit (that included New Zealand) and, crucially, in 1874 introducing American actor JC Williamson to Australia in *Struck Oil!* As a commercial producer on a national scale, Williamson would continue Coppin’s entrepreneurial trajectory, especially in building both a chain of venues and along with that, a dedicated national audience.

As Richard Fotheringham reminds us:

In spite of the research and publications between 1948 and 1978 of Paul and Frances McGuire, Betty Arnott, Leslie Rees and John West, the existence of this industry was forgotten. It’s sheer size and influence was ‘underestimated.’⁴²

Courtesy of the scholarship of Eric Irvin (*Australian Melodrama: eighty years of popular theatre*, Hale & Iremonger, 1981) and particularly Margaret Williams (*Australia on the Popular Stage 1829-1929*, OUP, 1983), however, we have the benefit of a more comprehensive list of Australian plays (over three hundred) produced during the Victorian period. These plays may be divided into

³⁸ *The Bushrangers* by David Burn (1799?-1875) is considered the first Australian drama with an Australian setting and subject matter to appear on stage, but the venue was the Caledonian Theatre, Edinburg (Scotland) 8-10 September 1829.

³⁹ Notable examples include the ‘scurrilous satire’ *Life in Sydney; or, The Ran Dan Club*’ by ABC (1843); and James R McLaughlin’s *Arabin*; or, *The Adventures of a Settler* (1849).

⁴⁰ Harpur continued to refine the play; Donohoe was replaced by ‘the more allegorical Captain Stalwart’, resulting in the new version *Stalwart the Bushranger* (1867). It has never been performed.

⁴¹ Harpur played a minor role in Levey’s production of Isaac Pocock’s *The Miller and His Men* in October 1833.

⁴² ‘Introduction’, *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage 1834-1899*, The Academy Editions of Australian Literature (2006) p.xxiv

either adaptations (or more accurately, appropriations) of European or American drama into a distinctly Australian setting, or original material. Genres range between burlesque, melodrama, pantomime, comedy and drama. While only a limited number of scripts are extant, we do have extensive newspaper commentary and reviews: the theatre *was* the most popular form of municipal entertainment, the volume ‘giving the lie to the often repeated statement,’ according to Richard Fotheringham, ‘that there was no Australian drama in the 19th century.’ If there was an impediment it was not only recalcitrant producers, but often hostile Anglophile critics. ‘Jacques’, in his review following the premiere of *Turtle Soup* at the Theatre Royal in Melbourne in 1865, alluded to the problem:

Now there be critics who hold it to be a heresy quite unpardonable to pronounce a favourable opinion upon local literary efforts, and, therefore, if I were to say anything beyond the bare chronicle of the fact that an original farce has been produced at the principal theatre in the Colonies I should be denounced as false to the creed which ignores everything not cast in a European mould. Singularly enough, however, the coloniophobists are at fault this time, for out of the three Melbourne dailies, two have pronounced favourably upon *Turtle Soup*, so that the author, whoever he may be, will perhaps take heart of grace, and try his hand upon another subject. It is however quite true, that, whatever the critics say, the audience is exceedingly well satisfied with the piece. ...

We have no clue as to the playwright beyond him (or her?) being ‘a local celebrity’; the plot was ‘founded upon an incident which was reported in the Melbourne papers some time ago’ and ‘laid at South Yarra.’ ‘Jacques’ concluded by stating that his ‘private opinion is that there is an infinity of local subjects that might be advantageously worked up for stage representation, if managers of colonial theatre could empty their heads of the prejudices that prevent their regarding as exclusively worth their consideration the production of European playwrights.’⁴³

Meanwhile, another interesting industrial anomaly arose once ‘the long run’ and national touring was introduced from the 1860s. Professional touring companies began a practice of building the ranks of their larger professionally cast plays by using a cohort of amateur actors recruited locally at each centre.⁴⁴ At this stage in the narrative, there appeared to be an amenable and fluid interaction between the amateur and the professional ranks that lasted until the end of the century when the

⁴³ *The Australasian*, 6 May 1865 p.9; see also, *The Age* (Melbourne), 2 May 1865 p.5; *The Herald* (Melbourne, 2 May 1865 p.2

⁴⁴ At the Royal Princess’s Theatre in Sandhurst (Bendigo), Victoria, for example, professional touring companies would often supplement their cast by using local amateur actors from one of the many community theatres established during the 1850s (The Sandhurst Amateur Dramatic Club, The Philanthropic Dramatic Club, The Pickwick Club or The Volunteer Rifles Dramatic Club).

‘little theatre’ movements (with critical megaphones like Esson) initiated the schism, but on philosophical not necessarily industrial grounds.

What the 20th century Provincial movement attempted to minimise in the process of legitimising a modernist ‘national theatre’ was an astonishing cohort of 19th Century writers—including Edward Geoghegan, William Mower Akhurst, Walter Hampden Cooper and George Darrell—many actor/producer/playwrights—and their influential and popular plays (respectively): *The Currency Lass; or, My Native Girl* (1844), *The Battle of Melbourne; or, A Column Wanted, Hazard; or, Pearce Dyceton’s Crime* and *The Sunny South*. Amongst this list, while not always providing local context, we need to highlight the neglected female writers Kate Warde (*No Names* (1865)), Rose Evans (*Quite Alone* (1872)), Helen Benbow (*For £60,000* (1874)), Mrs Alfred Phillips (*Duty* (1874)) Katherine Russell [Mrs Alfred Dampier] (*The Flying Dutchman; or, Vanderdecken* (1880)), Mrs Henry Hughes (*La Fete du Village* (1875)), and Blanche Lewis (*The Wreck of the Inverness; or Twenty Years After* (1900)).

What was lost in this great ‘art versus commercial’ wrangle, was that these plays—later considered frivolous at best, ‘popular’ the more pejorative tag—were hugely influential on the development on the emerging Australian culture, the idiom of our language, and the defining qualities of our antipodean ‘identity.’ Edward Geoghegan’s *The Currency Lass*, for example—‘a musical piece,’ the first known comedy on a local theme—that premiered at the Sydney’s Victoria Theatre in May 1844 was reviewed by *The Australian* critic who thought ‘the play was produced with considerable success.’ ‘The dialogue,’ it went on, was ‘truly *colonial*—rather too much so for our taste—although the “Cabbage-tree hats,” that crowded the pit and galleries on its first night of representation testified their approbation of its merits, in their estimation, by clamorous applause.’ Set in both England and the Colony, the plot concerns an English gentleman who believes his nephew to be marrying a ‘currency lass’ who he mistakenly believes to be a ‘native girl,’ or Aborigine; he sails to New South Wales to thwart the marriage. The antics of the eponymous heroine, Susan Hearty—‘who personates a variety of characters to obtain the consent of the old gentleman to the marriage of herself and his son’⁴⁵—in many ways established an enduring stereotype. Geoghegan, according to Katherine Newey, made ‘use of his audience’s knowledge and recognition of theatrical conventions, and particularly theatrical character stereotypes.’

The pervasiveness of melodrama’s meta-theatrical codes of representation is emphasised by the ease with which they can be transported to the other side of the

⁴⁵ *The Australian*, 30 May 1844 p.3

world. The use of such dramaturgical principles in the Australian context suggests the extent of their durability and familiarity, and the flexibility which comes from deeply entrenched conventions. They also suggest, for historians of Australian theatre and popular culture, how early a distinct Australian identity was assumed as a matter of national and personal pride.⁴⁶

Further, while there is no mention of who John Lazar (1801-1879), the manager of the Victoria Theatre, employed to paint the scenery, the audiences would have been made aware, albeit in the play's 'theatrical' setting, of the contrasting scenery between England and the Colony.

Professional scenic-art skills arrived in Australia with Danish cartoonist, artist and scene painter Alexander C Habbe (1829-1896) in 1855, with a dramatic version of *Faust* his first major commission at the Royal Adelphi in 1863, and with Garnet Walch's 'all Australian pantomime' *Trookulentos* the following year. His contemporary John Hennings (1835-1898) landed in Melbourne from Germany also in 1855 and found work immediately at the Queen's Theatre, painting their Christmas pantomime.⁴⁷ Both men were prolific and successful in their new homeland; they were joined by Alfred Clint (1843-1923) in 1865 (engaged as Hennings' assistant), and John Brunton (1849-1909), brought to Australia in 1886 by the management of Williamson, Garner and Musgrove.

These artists were leaders among a large cohort who were active during the height of the Commercial theatre enterprise from 1870 to the impact of the Depression in the 1890s. Crucially, the period coincided with the a major shift in the response to the representation of the Australian landscape in the visual arts. Art historian Bernard Smith cites Louis Esson's namesake Swiss born Louis Buvelot (1814-1888)—a good friend to Esson's uncle John Ford Paterson—who arrived in Melbourne in 1865, as 'the Father of Landscape Painting in Australia.' Buvelot, 'through his teaching, wide influence and example,' suggested Smith, 'created a school. ... The artists who worked before him worked in isolation.' Buvelot applied the *plein-air* tradition of the Barbican school to the Australian landscape, a methodology that led to the creation of the Heidelberg School of Australian impressionist painting (that included Paterson).⁴⁸ There is little doubt that William Kinchella (1846-1898)—the first acclaimed Australian-born scenic artist—was abreast of the movement and his work was on show to audiences from the mid-1860s until his death. Kinchella

⁴⁶ Newey, Katherine, 'Melodrama and Metatheatre: Theatricality in Nineteenth Century Theatre', <https://typeset.io/pdf/melodrama-and-metatheatre-theatricality-in-the-nineteenth-2xp4fgxme5.pdf> p.97

⁴⁷ Marcus Clarke used John Hennings as his model for 'Vandyke Brown', the scene-painter in his 'spoof' article on pantomime production in *The Weekly Times*, 31 January 1874.

⁴⁸ Smith, Bernard, *Australian Painting 1788-1990*, OU (1962) pp.53-64

was associated with both the Queen's Theatre (Sydney) (providing backdrops for Cooper's *Hazard; or, Pearce Dyceton's Crime* and Alfred Dampier's *All for Gold; or, Fifty Millions of Money* (1879), and responsible for numerous productions starring George Darrell (including *Under the Southern Cross* (1885)). His major collaborations however, were with Alfred Dampier, both at the Gaiety and Royal Stand Theatres (Sydney) and the Alexandra Theatre (Melbourne). The quality of his work was attested by *The Daily Telegraph* in its review of *Under the Southern Cross*:

The piece is remarkably well mounted, and the various scenes do credit to the facile brush of Mr Kinchella. ... The applause throughout was most liberal.⁴⁹

In Louis Esson's short sketch *Australia Felix*, the poet bushmen Gavin observes:

GAVIN. In my opinion, Australia hasn't been discovered yet. That's a job in store for our writers and artists. Captain Cook discovered only the outline.

The *scenic* artists employed during the heyday of the Australian Commercial enterprise can take much credit for 'visually' discovering Australian and informing the predominantly urban audiences of the unique quality of the Australian bush through their work on the vast canvas available in the boulevard theatre while servicing the production of locally written drama.

By the end of the century, the presence of a certain number of Australian plays in the repertoire of the Commercial producers was an established fact. The worst the critics could say of most of them was 'that they were at least equal to plays of the same kind from England.'

Coming out of the Depression, JC Williamson's continued to pursue its wholesale importation of productions (drama and musical comedy) from both London and New York until the great man's death in 1913. Meanwhile, a range of smaller independent operators began to impinge on the market place: Meynell and Gunn, Phillip Lytton and J Clarence Lee, Edward I Cole and Bert Bailey to mentioned a small few. While their repertoire contained some locally written work, only one entrepreneur, William Anderson (1868-1940)—who gained his early experience working for the MacMahon Brothers in Sandhurst, with a reputation as 'the youngest theatrical manager in Australia'—made the choice to foster local playwrights. Anderson was responsible for staging Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan's⁵⁰ *The Squatter's Daughter* that, *The Glen Innes Examiner* noted, was 'written in Australia, by Australians ... [in which] the most striking feature of the performance ...

⁴⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 10 November 1885 p.6

⁵⁰ Theatre Royal (Melbourne), 9 February 1907.

was the splendid scenic effects.⁵¹ This was followed by the same authors' *The Man from Outback* (1909). Responding to this production, *The Age* observed:

The generous response made by the public ... to the advertised invitation to witness the new play, *The Man From Outback*, made it abundantly clear that the sentiment of patriotism which has recently manifested itself throughout the Commonwealth in no uncertain way has embraced the Australian drama as a fit and proper subject for protection by public patronage.

As if to foreground the achievement, the column continued: 'It was an Australian play the people crowded in to see, toned with Australian colour, full of true Australian incident and written by Australians. The theatre was overcrowded and hundreds turned away.'⁵²

Meanwhile, for contrast, William Moore's Australian First Australian Drama Night—featuring four of his own plays⁵³—had just concluded its one night season at the Oddfellows' Hall on 30 March.

Ultimately, I concur with both Fotheringham, and particularly Margaret Williams, who completely omit the occasion of Federation as a division in the foundation narrative of a national drama; the through line, observing a continuous progression that began with Levey and concludes with the economic collapse in October 1929 (or, as pointed out in the previous chapter, with the plays of Katharine Susannah Prichard and Betty Roland in the late 1920s) provides a much richer understanding of both the growth of the industry as a whole, but also charts a more enlightened appreciation of 'the remarkable relationship between our national drama and our national life.'⁵⁴ While Louis Esson makes a conspicuous appearance in this narrative, his contribution cannot be construed as either pioneering nor 'paternal.'

There was, however, another incremental threat to the durability of live performance in Australian that dated back to the 1890s, but made concrete in 1906 with the screening of Australia's first feature length motion picture. While some regarded the new medium as a threat to the national drama, I suggest it in fact enhanced its process and progress, particularly in terms of generating further ideas around cultural identity and the Australian landscape (both essential components to

⁵¹ *Glen Innes Examiner and General Advertiser*, 8 November 1907 p.2

⁵² *The Age*, 3 May 1909 p.11

⁵³ These included: *The Only Game*, *Acting a la Mode*, *The Last Edition* and *England Versus Australia*.

⁵⁴ Meyrick, Op. cit.

Esson's rhetoric); the form of the national drama was different, the dramaturgy of telling Australian stories continued but under a very specific circumstances.

The Fledgling Australian Cinema: A National and nostalgic 'photo-Drama'

The drama is my pride and care,
Not morbid plays in verse or prose.
The flickering film is my affair –
I'm Critic of the Picture shows.

Louis Esson [GANESHA], 'Ballade of the New Dramatic Critic,'⁵⁵

After such an extraordinary stage production [*The Lady*] one is inclined to think that the pictures are not so bad after all. At least they are silent.

Louis Esson, *The Triad*, 1 June 1925 p.29

Adelaide born actor Arnold Denham (aka Arnold Boulger) moved to Sydney and joined the Charles Cartwright Company in March 1898. Amongst his first productions at the Criterion Theatre (Sydney) was a revival of Haddon Chambers' *The Idler*; Denham's performance in a minor part did 'not call for special mention.' Fortunately, Denham was of independent means (his father was Professor Boulger, a classicist at Adelaide University) and following the Company's season in Perth, Denham remained in the west, leased the Theatre Royal and produced a short season of musical comedy (*My Sweetheart*, from 17 September; Denham himself playing Dudley Harcourt). By Christmas he was back in Sydney and his one act play *A Studio Episode* closed the benefit given to Hosea Easton at the Opera House. The play was an 'interesting addition to Australian dramatic literature,'⁵⁶ 'the dialogue is well written,' wrote *The Australian Star*, 'and the ... story graphically told.'⁵⁷ Another play by Denham, *Into the Night*, premiered at the benefit for FJ Josephson in the same house on 15 July. By the end of the week, his new 'historical and sensational drama, *The Kelly Gang: or, the Career of Ned Kelly, the Ironclad Bushranger of Australia*, was presented by Denham's new Company.⁵⁸ The play dealt with the leading events in the history of the famous gang of outlaws,

⁵⁵ *The Bulletin*, 28 May 1914

⁵⁶ *Evening News*, 31 December 1898 p.4

⁵⁷ *The Australian Star*, 23 December 1898 p.2

⁵⁸ The premiere took place at The Opera house (Sydney) on Saturday 22 July 1899. Kate Howarde advertised her own version of the story for performances at the Theatre Royal in Perth in January 1900 titled *Outlaw Kelly*.

who for over two years terrorised a country larger than Great Britain, and cost the Governments of New South Wales and Victoria over £115,000 to exterminate. The play will be full of startling incidents, including the murders of Sergeant Kennedy and two of his party, the shooting of Aaron Skerritt, the sticking-up of the banks at Jerilderie and Eureka, and Ned Kelly's last stand at the famous battle of Glenrowan, during which will be show the burning of the hotel.⁵⁹

Apparently, the whole was 'depicted with remarkable realism'; the armour to be worn was copied from the originals then in the Treasury, Melbourne. The production was an enormous hit—*The Evening News* predicting 'a prosperous run.' In the week following the opening, Denham's company fused with MB Curtis's at the Criterion, where the piece was 'strengthened by special scenes illustrating aboriginal camp life.'

Five years later, Denham's scenario was used by Charles Tait (1868-1933)⁶⁰ when he directed the first feature length dramatic film produced in Australia (possibly the world). *The Story of the Kelly Gang* premiered on Boxing Day 1906 at the Melbourne Town Hall, followed by a season at the Athenaeum Hall. It was produced by his brothers John and Nevin Tait (owners of the Athenaeum) in association with partners William Gibson (1869-29) and Millard Johnson (1860–1946) who were film exhibitors with technical experience (as cinematographers, and in the new technology of developing film stock). The first night audience responded to 'the realism,' so much so that the critic of *The Argus* described the colour of Ned Kelly's clothing—odd, given that the film was shot in black and white!

The Melbourne premiere provided additional realism by using actors behind the screen to provide dialogue, train whistles, gunshots and other sound effects. It had its Sydney premiere a month later (9 February) before a national tour.

Having worked for Allan's Music Warehouse as an office boy from age 15, Charles Tait became a partner in 1900; he was concurrently manager of JC Williamson's Operatic Concert Company. Younger brothers John (1871-1955), Nevin (1876-1961) and Frank (1883-1965) established themselves as concert promoters in Melbourne from 1902 under the banner of J & N Tait Ltd; Charles was a business consultant. In 1904 they began screening motion pictures from Europe and

⁵⁹ *Evening News*, 21 July 1899 p.5

⁶⁰ The screenplay credit was shared with brother John. The full synopsis of the film was published in *The Age*, 22 December 1906 but did not carry Denham's name, however, the six scenes did correspond to those used in the 1899 melodrama. See Eric Reade, *History and Heartburn: The Saga of Australian Film*, Harper & Row (1979) p.5

the United States of America and in early 1906 earned enormous financial success with ‘the most costly, interesting and sensational moving picture ever taken in the world, *Living London*.’⁶¹

The Story of the Kelly Gang established the ‘bushranger’ trope (peculiar to Australia) and, with its themes of anti-authoritarianism and miscarriage of justice, the genre was equally as popular on screen as they had been on stage.⁶² It also initiated a trend, both on film and in the theatre, for referencing and disseminating history, continuing the development of the National Drama. Nostalgia, it appeared, meant ‘big business.’ Further, the circumstance of the film’s production reveals the compliant transition of the commercial theatre enterprise (including a reliance on local writers) to the emerging moving picture industry, and in doing so emphasising Australian stories, further codifying antipodean culture and identity.

The Tait's follow up film in 1907 was *Robbery Under Arms*, ‘taken from incidents in Rolf Boldrewood’s celebrated novel.’ The same source material was used for Charles MacMahon’s (1861-1917) version released in the same year. Two years later Bert Bailey directed a screen version of *The Squatter’s Daughter* (based on his play *The Squatter’s Daughter; or, The Land of the Wattle* (1907), co written with Edmund Duggan); it was produced by William Anderson (using his acting company from the Kings Theatre, at the time performing the Bailey/Duggan play *The Man from Outback*).

Despite the prevailing rhetoric to the contrary, the cross over of talent was crucial to the success and development of the art form. It is a frustrating peculiarity that Leon Brodzky, Esson, along with subsequent commentators, all chose to disregard this fundamental symbiotic relationship within the sector.

In 1911, the Tait's joined with Gibson and Johnson to establish the Amalgamated Picture Company Ltd (APC) for ‘the purpose of promoting the finest and best class of picture Entertainment yet seen in the Australian colonies.’⁶³ Their first production was the screen adaptation of William Lincoln’s *After Sundown* (1911). Amalgamated combined with its main opposition, Australasian Films, in 1912, and the Tait's returned their major focus to staging concerts.

William Lincoln (1870-1917) was born in Melbourne and made his debut as a playwright with *One Summer’s Eve* (1890); *The Bush King* (1893) premiered in London before its Melbourne season

⁶¹ ‘In the space of two hours all the different modes of life and livelihood in the streets of London are shown ... all the principal streets, bridges, towers, institutions ...’ *Table Talk*, 25 January 1906 p.18

⁶² The Tate’s returned a profit of £24,000 from their production budget of £1,000.

⁶³ *The Argus*, 4 March 1911 p.23; For the decade from 1913, Gibson and Johnson relocated to the United States where they acted as film buyers for Union Theatres and Australasian Films (a production and distribution company; later Greater Union).

in 1894.⁶⁴ Lincoln's play *After Sundown* was produced in 1896. From 1904 he worked for JC Williamson, managing his Anglo-American Bio-Tableau, as well as the Australasia tour of the Gaiety Company. He made his film debut as writer/director with *It is Never Too Late to Mend* (1911)⁶⁵ for the Tait/Johnson/Gibson conglomerate. At the time he was made a director of the fledgling APC, he was manager of the Paradise of Living Pictures movie theatre in St Kilda. Following *After Sundown*, Lincoln was responsible for 9 APC films over the next twelve months, including *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (based on the Fergus Hume novel), *The Luck of Roaring Camp* and *Breaking the News*.

Lincoln then partnered with Godfrey Cass (the Lincoln-Cass Film Company) in 1913; they made eight films in twelve months (including *The Sick Stockrider*, adapting the verse of Adam Lindsay Gordon). He then wrote scripts for JC Williamson Ltd when they moved into film production (including *Within Our Gates* (1915) and *Within the Law* (1916) directed by Frank Harvey and Monte Luke respectively).

The trend in film making continued throughout the War, production companies proliferating. Notable directors included the Alfred Rolfe (*Captain Midnight the Bush King* (1911), *Captain Starlight; or, Gentleman of the Road* (1911), *The Cup Winner* (1911) and *The Sunny South, or the Whirlwind of Fate* (1915) (based on the play by George Darrell); John Gavin (*The Drover's Sweetheart* (1911)), Gavin's wife Agnes wrote the screenplay, as she did for eleven more of her husbands films, including his last *Trooper O'Brien* (1928); and Beaumont Smith (*Our Friends The Hayseeds* (1917)).

Louis Esson appeared oblivious to—or chose to ignore perhaps—the new entertainment platform and its nationalist imperatives, the subject does not appear in any of his published commentary nor his correspondence prior to his few years in New York and London from 1917. He was still abroad when his friend CJ Dennis achieved some notoriety when actor/director Raymond Longford (1878-1959), encouraged by his younger creative partner Lottie Lyell (1890-1925), committed *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*—Dennis's popular verse novel—to the screen.

Longford began his career acting, a useful member of Edwin Geach's Popular Dramatic Organisation from 1900, scoring 'a distinct success' in the tour of Guy du Maurier's *An Englishman's Home* (1909); also in the cast was 19 year old Lottie Lyell. They appeared again together the following year in Rupert Clarke and Clyde Meynell's Metropolitan Dramatic

⁶⁴ Alfred Dampier purchased the rights and a revised version appeared in 1901; it was released as a film in 1911 titled *Captain Midnight, the Bush King*.

⁶⁵ Based on the novel (and play) *It Is Never too Late to Mend: A Matter-of-Fact Romance* by Charles Reade (1865).

Company's production of Walter Howard's *Her Love Against the World*. Longford and Lyell then retired from the stage in favour of roles in three films directed by Alfred Rolfe (for producer Charles Cosens Spencer): *Captain Midnight, the Bush King; Captain Starlight, or Gentlemen of the Road*; then in *The Life of Rufus Dawes* (all released in 1911). Longford made his directorial debut in 1911 with *The Fatal Wedding* (based on the play in which he and Lyell had performed in 1907). Longford was then appointed director of production for Spencer's Pictures, Lyell became his collaborator (as leading lady, screen writer, art director, editor, and often sharing responsibilities as co-director). Over the next few years they released *The Romantic Story of Margaret Catchpole* and *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* (with Nellie Stewart), *The Midnight Wedding*, *Australia Calls* and a documentary, *The Naming of the Federal Capital*.

Longford and Lyell went freelance in 1912 (after Spencer's Pictures merged with Australasian Films Ltd) and worked on a number of projects before establishing the Southern Cross Feature Film Company in South Australia after the War. Longford's first film for Southern Cross was *The Woman Suffers* (1918) with an original screenplay; Lyell as the star. The 'photo-play' was highly regarded: '*The Woman Suffers* is absolutely Australian in its general creation,' wrote the *Adelaide Advertiser*.

All the ingredients happen within the Commonwealth and the redolent atmosphere of the healthy bush permeates the film from the beginning to the end. ... The scenic choice is especially meritorious. The film version of the Adelaide hills, for instance, intensifies the grandeur of some of nature's great masterpieces there. ... The film is uniformly clear, and the details are always well developed.⁶⁶

The cinematography (by Arthur Higgins) was also central to the success of *The Sentimental Bloke* that was released the following year, the realism depicted was 'a revelation.' The sequel, *Ginger Mick* was released in 1920. Theatrical entrepreneur EJ Carroll agreed to distribute both films, along with the financing the dramatisation of fellow Queenslander Steele Rudd's Dad and Dave sketches, adapted as *On Our Selection* (1920) and starring Bert Bailey, with its own sequel, *Rudd's New Selection* released in 1921.⁶⁷

The other film of note to be released in 1920 was Franklyn Barrett's screen adaptation of *The Breaking of the Drought* (screenplay by Percy Rea, based on the stage play by Bland Holt and Arthur Shirley). The play, when it premiered in 1902, was much praised as 'a drama of the bush, but

⁶⁶ 25 March 1918 p.9

⁶⁷ Lyell had no part in either of these two films as she had developed tuberculosis. Following her recovery, she and Longford established an independent company, Longford-Lyell Australian Picture Productions; she was creatively active until she died aged 35 just before Christmas in 1925.

not the bush only, for in the play of human passions which runs through the drama ... city and country, seashore and bush. ... Splendidly staged ...[it] appeals strongly to Australian sentiment.’⁶⁸ On the films release in July 1920, Australia was suffering its own ‘big drought for two years.’ The screening immediately connected with the zeitgeist:

It is a great production, and gives a real insight into the battles and trials the man out-back has to face. Little does the city-goer know of the big battles put up by the man on the land against the hardships a long drought brings with it—the struggle to keep live stock alive—only to see them dying from hunger and thirst. Indeed these heroes of the bush are built of the right stuff. The public will see it all in this magnificent production, produced by Australians in Australia.⁶⁹

The subsequent decade was difficult for the Australia motion picture industry as British and American production companies took control of exhibition and distribution. American films dominated the cinemas, often to the exclusion of Australian features. As early as 1922 the ‘stranglehold’ was noticeable:

The British Trade Commissioner in Australia, Mr McGregor ... declared that in Australia American film interests have a stranglehold on the movie theatre, and that English and Australian films can only be exhibited if it suits the American interests, though the public would welcome them. The duration of the American monopoly depends on the public patience and enterprise of British film manufactures in removing and destroying the American monopoly. The Australian film industry is almost at a standstill, though Australian episodes and scenery are most suitable for artists and interesting treatment.⁷⁰

Sensing an approaching storm, J & N Tate diversified, and on behalf of JC Williamson Limited, formed the Broadcasting Company of Australia Pty Ltd, and took on the licence for 3LO radio in Melbourne. Their wireless station at Braybrook was officially opened on 13 October 1924, broadcasting Dame Nellie Melba’s farewell performance in Melbourne.

Film historian Graham Shirley regarded the McDonagh Sisters as ‘the most talented of the late silent era filmmakers in Australia, and the most courageous of the early talkies.’⁷¹ Paulette

⁶⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December 1902

⁶⁹ *The Register*, 26 July 1920

⁷⁰ *Tweed Daily*, 27 December 1922 p.5

⁷¹ *Film News* 1 December 1978 p.5

(1901-1978) was the director. ‘At first, there was an instinctive feeling that, being a girl,’ Paulette revealed to the *Sunday Sun and Guardian*,

Men would resent one encroaching on their masculine fields. But when I actually met and had dealings with them, I realised just how absurd this was; on the contrary, I learned to value their camaraderie and good fellowship—it helped us over man a difficult patch.’

Paulette, the youngest, collaborated with her sisters Phyllis (1900-1978) and Isabel (1899-1982) as producers. As women, as producers (MCD Productions), they were pioneers during one of the most testing times for the sector as the age of ‘the talkies’ and Hollywood began to encroach on the local motion picture industry. Isabel also acted (under the name ‘Marie Lorraine’); Phyllis was the art director; their brothers John and Grant organised finance and ‘helped out where they could.’

Between 1926 and 1933, they made four features ‘infinitely more sophisticated than any other local films of the period.’ Their first film, *Those Who Love*, entirely financed by their father⁷² and built on an original scenario by Paulette, was released in 1926. It was distributed by JC Williamson Films. Paulette was also ‘the scenario writer’ for *The Far Paradise* that followed two years later. According to *The Western Mail*, *Those Who Love* ‘was something unique in the history of the industry. ‘*The Far Paradise* marks an advance on the previous effort, and shows that in favourable circumstances production in Australia can be carried out at a comparatively small expense.’ The budget for the former was £1,000, twice that amount for the latter.

The Cheaters (1930) was a silent film, but sound was added in post production and it suffered mixed reviews. Journalist and MP Les Haylen wrote the screenplay for *Two Minutes Silence* (based on his anti-war stage play of the same name directed by Carrie Tennant at the Community Playhouse in Sydney in 1930). During the production of the film, a journalist who visited the set referred to Paulette McDonagh as ‘one of the few women picture directors in the world, and probably the most outstanding figure in the Australian motion picture industry today.’ The film premiered in 1933, distributed by Universal.

Meanwhile, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927)—one of the last major features of a troubled decade for the industry—was written and directed by American Norman Dawe (based on the novel by Marcus Clarke, its third screen adaptation); produced by Australasian Films /Union-Master with a budge of £60,000 and shot in Sydney (Bondi Studios) and on location in Tasmania, it was reportedly the most expensive Australian silent film ever made (but didn’t return its

⁷² Dr McDonagh had attended on JC Williamson.

investment). The project was intended for Longford, but the producers (one of William Gibson's last decisions before he died) wanted to secure an American release, so both director and major stars were imported for the film. 'In six months,' it was reported positively, 'the entire local industry has been revolutionised—new techniques and angles have been introduced under the influence of American direction.'⁷³

The argument brought by many theatre historians and critics, including Louis Esson, that the Commercial Theatre had little interest in promoting nationalism in performance is less convincing when it is realised that many of the theatre producers operation from the 1880s and 1890s began to invest in the Australian film industry in the new century and actively encouraged the telling of Australian stories (the most successful relying on established Australian literary sources—novels and plays—and Colonial history). Esson sceptically contributed a number of satirical poems—using his pseudonym 'Ganesha'—to *The Bulletin*, one was 'The Movie Lover' published soon after the release of *On Our Selection* :

The play last night I went to see
Was made of words, a talking show
That had no sort of thrill for me;
The speech was long, the action slow;
Those spouters would have got the bird
For dealing out that Shakespeare guff;
A live play should be seen, not heard –
Give me the Get-a-move-on stuff!

I've got no time for Ibsen's plays,
I never could stand Bernard Shaw;
And as for Steele Rudd, spare me days,
I can't see what makes him a draw.
On Our Selection's comedy –
I heard it once, that was enough.
These high-brow drama don't get me –
Give me the Get-a-move-on stuff!⁷⁴

The majority of Australian feature films made in the thirty years following Federation were nostalgia pieces, but distinctly 'made by Australian for Australians.' Compared to the Provincial Theatre's modest reach, these films helped to not only provide access to 'the bush' but also to help

⁷³ *Campbelltown News*, 4 February 1927 p.5

⁷⁴ *The Bulletin*, 1 December 1921 [GANESHA]; another poem, 'Film Haunted' also appeared in *The Bulletin*, 11 January 1923 [GANESHA]

define the emerging identity of the nation; it focused on both the convict and colonial periods and crucially didn't shrink from exposing the harsh reality of what it meant to be an Australian.

History & Adaptation: 'this golden past'

The 70th Anniversary of The Eureka Stockade—in which Peter Lalor led the diggers against Government troops at Ballarat on 3 December 1854—was officially celebrated on Sunday 30 November 1924 with a 'pilgrimage to the old historic battleground' on the Stockade Reserve; the theme of the speeches were 'the historical event.'⁷⁵

Interestingly, Williamson, Garner and Musgrove presented the first stage iteration of the rebellion in a national tour of Fred Marsden's *Eureka* (1887), as a vehicle for JC Williamson and Maggie Moore. A number of theatrical responses to the history of Eureka followed, notably Edmund Duggan's *The Eureka Stockade; or, The Fight for the Standard* (1897), EW O'Sullivan's *Eureka Stockade: A Melodrama in Four Acts* (1898) and Randolph Bedford's *The Flag of Stars* (1915). A screen version of the story—*Eureka Stockade*—was directed by George Cornwell and released in 1907 (it was the second feature film made after *The Story of the Kelly Gang*). The subject was tested on the public again in 1915 in the film *The Loyal Rebel*, directed by Alfred Rolfe. *The Sunday Times* reported that 'in weaving his story ... around the Eureka Stockade, Arthur Wright

achieved one of the finest combinations of the dramatic and historical yet produced for photo-play purposes, and because of the typical Australian atmosphere it creates, the scenario was awarded the first prize in the competition held recently among Australian authors.

Louis Esson was more than aware of the formidable contribution Mrs Euphemia Coulson Davidson had made to the Melbourne Provincial theatre movement since the War (in both her prolific and award winning playwriting career, and her spirited attempts to establish the momentum for a national theatre). Esson knew Coulson Davidson as a theatrical competitor in a niche enterprise, an informed public speaker who lectured regularly and authoritatively on matters pertaining to the national theatre. On 8 April 1925, for example, she contributed a 'biographical and critical sketch of the dramatist' John Millington Synge—a subject on which Esson thought he had propriety rights—to the members of her Playlovers' Club at the Lyceum Club.⁷⁶ A selection of her plays were given at

⁷⁵ *The Geelong Advertiser*, 1 December 1924

⁷⁶ *Table Talk*, 16 April 1925

the Masonic Hall in Melbourne on November 29 1923—where it was noted that her work disclosed ‘the influence of Maeterlinck and WB Yeats.’⁷⁷ Earlier in the year her play *Sorell* was bracketed with Millicent Armstrong’s *Fire* for third prize in *The Daily Telegraph* Play Competition. This was only a week before ‘the laudable’ Pioneer Players—now in their third year—presented what was to be their final program.

Euphemia Coulson Davidson’s contribution to the Eureka franchise, *The Forerunners (in the Reign of Victoria): a Historical Play*, began circulating around literary circles in 1925; it was the first of the post-Anniversary play scripts on the subject to surface.

— *The Southern Cross* (1927) —

Following the failure of the Pioneer Players, Esson pulled back from active engagement in the theatre. He wrote criticism, literary commentary, some verse and a great deal of short fiction (for *The Weekly Times* and *The Australian Woman’s Mirror*). What plays he did attempt however seemed to deny the evolution of international dramaturgical trends and the national mood.

Esson was certainly aware of Euphemia Coulson Davidson’s widely circulated copy of *The Forerunners* so it is somewhat surprising that he informed Vance Palmer in November 1926 of his own theatrical adaptation of the events of Eureka.

... I don’t know what Hilda said about my historical play, but Nettie guessed right when she thought it must have been about Eureka. I woke one morning, and found I was interested in the subject, though I had thought little about it before then. I don’t think I was influenced by Mrs Davidson’s effort, which I had quite forgotten. Maybe the subject may have influenced me subconsciously. Anyway, the theme dropped into scenes of its own accord. I don’t see how the main scenes could be altered. I read Ross and Turner, and they give a good deal. Many sidelights came from the histories of Victoria.⁷⁸

Indeed, Hilda, his wife, had written to Nettie Palmer in October 1926 that Esson had just begun ‘a new work.’⁷⁹

Robert Ross (1875-1931) was editor of *The Socialist* and a founder of the Victorian Railways Union; he was the author of *Eureka—Freedom’s fight of ’54* (1914). Henry Gyles Turner

⁷⁷ *Table Talk*, 13 December 1923 (extracts from Coulson Davidson’s *Sitting It Out*, *The Star of Bethlehem* and *God Gift*, the latter a one-act play that ‘convincingly suggests that the author can write a witty and epigrammatic comedy of more solid structure’.

⁷⁸ 15 November 1926, Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.Cit. pg.79

⁷⁹ Hilda Esson to Nettie Palmer, 6 October 1926—Palmer *Papers* [NLA MS1174]

(1851-1920) was one of the founders of the *Melbourne Review* and well known in Melbourne literary circles; his prose account of Eureka, *Our Own Little Rebellion* was published in 1912. Esson was also familiar with Edward Dyson's novel *In the Roaring Fifties* (1918) and Nettie Palmer had sent him Henry Handel Richardson's *Australia Felix*, the first part of her novel *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

I was greatly interested in *Richard Mahony* that Nettie was so thoughtful to send. It just came at the right time. It seems to me an honest, well written and authentic book. There is no silly plot and no cheap emotional effects. I should tip her hero was a relative, for he is so real and understandable. The Eureka part is brief, but, I think, correct in detail. And the picture of life in the diggings, the contents of a store, the scenes and costumes, the state of the roads the look of the buildings, is truthfully rendered. The author has an extraordinary knowledge of Ballarat. Parts of the book, some of the marriage affairs, for example, seemed to me a bit dull, and I should have preferred more about Eureka and other exciting episodes of the time. ... But, don't you think, everything considered, it is one of our very few distinguished Australian novels! Who is 'Henry Handel Richardson'? Does Nettie know anything about her life? And what is the trilogy to be? There is no doubt she is an important writer.⁸⁰

In the same letter, Esson reveals, however, 'that the source book, my Plutarch or Holinshed, is Raffaello Carboni's book,' his eyewitness account of the conflict, *The Eureka Stockade: The Consequences of Some Pirates Wanting on Quarter-Deck a Rebellion*, published in 1855.⁸¹

It is rare, but [Socialist lawyer and politician Maurice] Blackburn got a copy for me from the Commonwealth Library. It's a little gem of a book in its own way. I would defy anyone to do Eureka without him. He will be my chief character, and about half of the play will be taken direct from his account. He is a Roman, a man of 40, a little red-headed man (not our usual idea of an Italian), a teacher of languages, and a gentle, quaintly humorous character. I don't think he was a revolutionary, with definite political ideas. I think he was more a man who thought life should be better but knew by experience that it was always the same story of oppressors and oppressed. He is the sole authority for the most vital scene. In his quaint style, using many languages, he give the characters, the scenes, and many verbatim speeches and sayings.

Despite his initial enthusiasm, he did little work on the play before Christmas, although he was thinking deeply on the significance of the events:

⁸⁰ Letter to Vance Palmer, 28 December 1926— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.Cit. pg. 82

⁸¹ <https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks/e00015.html>

My own view is that the idealists or rebels, those who visioned a new free life in a new country, were few and far between. The great majority of diggers, including Lalor, resented the licence fee and the tyranny of the troopers, but if they got a better spin and were given a vote, they were satisfied with the Government. I'm trying to keep things in proportion. The Irish were prominent, and my chief characters, who are not historical, are a young Irish couple who are in the thick of it.⁸²

'I'd have easily been finished now,' he complained to Vance Palmer, 'but I've been compelled to do a bit more journalism.⁸³ I haven't done the last act, and it's a little further off now that it was a month ago. However, in good form, I'll strike it up in a week. I think you will enjoy the life of the period. I found it most exciting in every way. It is obviously picturesque and romantic.'

According to Peter Fitzpatrick⁸⁴, as Esson was so impassioned to get the historical details right, Hilda—who was a full-time medical practitioner at the time—joined her husband over many evenings at the State Library in Melbourne undertaking research on the Eureka rebellion. Sadly, there is little detail existent in the manuscript; so much (including large slabs of dialogue) is reliant on both Carboni's history and transcripts of the diggers' court case.

The dramaturgy of the play underwent a considerable development. In planning the work, based directly on Carboni's narrative, he detailed the basic plot to Palmer in a letter (15 November 1926):

I've arranged the story in three acts, divided into about fifteen scenes. I open on the gold-fields with the arrival of the new Governor Hotham. The first act ends with the great meetings on Battery Hill, with Raffaello's speech, resolutions by Lalor and Vern, and the first burning of the licences in a bonfire. The Australian flag is here hoisted for the first time.

Act II is a block of actual happenings. It opens next day with a digger hunt, the last on record. There is a scene in a store where Lalor is elected commander-in-chief. Follows on the same day a kind of fragment, the oath to the flag. And that night an interview in the Government Camp. Then come three Eureka scenes, Friday, Saturday, and the attack on Sunday morning, which ends the act. I practically finished the first two acts in a few weeks; but journalistic necessity prevented me from starting Act II, which I could easily have finished by now. It may be a few weeks now before I can tackle it. I want to give the atmosphere as well as the ideas of the time. It ought to be a picturesque thing. I want to be fair to everybody, including Hotham, who is not uninteresting; there will be a dozen chief characters, but the most important of all will be the crowd that will be individualised and swayed by different motives. Reading the old histories I was surprised how

⁸² To Vance Palmer, 2 December 1926—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.Cit. pg. 81

⁸³ Esson contributed monthly theatre reviews and occasional articles to *New Triad*.

⁸⁴ Peter Fitzpatrick, *Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson*, Op. Cit.

interesting the life of the country was. Eureka and the goldfields are the most spectacular part, but other events are just as interesting in their own way.

Esson was grateful to Nettie Palmer for supplying German sentences ‘intended for a German blacksmith manufacturing pikes in the opening of the first Eureka scene,’ and requested ‘another few German sentences (with translations at the side), for Vern, a flamboyant young man.’

He was a great ladies’ man. How would ‘Ah, the beautiful ladies!’ go in the Germanic tongue. Or some expression of his romantic regard for the fair sex. Or a military sentence: ‘I have studied the art of war’—or anything like that. I shall be very grateful for Nettie’s assistance. . . . Could she manage for the latter—‘I’ll stick them like pigs’ (while he’s making pikes) or words to that effect.⁸⁵

Six months later, Esson could confirm that he’d finished ‘the Eureka play’ that he had titled *The Southern Cross*.

I’ve tried to present the characters and events faithfully without conscious prejudices. I simply let things go their own way. I have no idea what impression it makes. I made an effort to create heroes, but Lalor comes out very well all the same. Raffaello, I think, is a quaint figure, and Hotham is not unattractive. The stockade scene is fairly elaborate, with a suggestion of muddle and mixed motives, but I think it’s fairly natural and authentic. I enjoyed doing the play, and I’ve put in no deliberately false strokes for the sake of effect.⁸⁶

It was at this time that he received a manuscript copy of Katie Prichard’s new play—‘a hefty one of the Nor’-West, with abos [sic]’—later titled *Brumby Innes* and submitted to *The New Triad’s* PlayWriting Competition, the deadline for which was 30 June.

The impact of Prichard’s extremely provocative play appeared to rattle Esson,

I heard from [Ernest] Watt yesterday that Katie had won *The Triad* Play Competition. She was surprised when I told her the result, and with her usual generosity, which was quite spontaneous, she said she would have preferred either of us to have won.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.Cit. pg.79-80

⁸⁶ Letter to Vance Palmer, 6 July 1927—quoted in *Meanjin Quarterly*, Volume 6 (1947) pg. 103. Although, to the current reader, the play appears cumbersome and overly dependent on its source material to be dramatically viable for performance; it is dramaturgically still a very rough draft.

⁸⁷ Esson to Palmer, 29 November, 1927— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.Cit. pg.81

He wrote again to Palmer just before Christmas 1927:

I'll try to get a copy of *Eureka* and send it to you. It may be duller than I thought it was; with the issues public rather than personal. *Brumby Innes*, I hope, will be published in *The Triad*. It's a more original and powerful play than mine, but I can hardly believe yet that Tait's will do it. It's 'veritable,' an absolutely truthful picture, so why not present it! We're too frightened of life, and a bolder outlook might be much more helpful and essentially more moral. If by any chance Tait's buck at it, the Pioneers might be able to have a shot at it. I'm hoping her last act will be restored, which will bring us into a larger rhythm of nature again.⁸⁸

He also appears to take her criticism to heart, sharing that 'Katharine reckons I've gone stale. ... I can hardly realise we've been four years in town living within closed walls. It seems necessary to go constantly to nature for fresh impressions; even the physical side is important.'⁸⁹ He admitted, too, a few weeks later that he didn't 'keep a consistent standard' himself.

Prichard's play was confirmed publicly as achieving first prize, in the *New Triad* Competition. Gregan McMahon emphatic that '*Brumby Innes* to be in a class by itself in originality of subject, atmosphere, characterisation, virility and technique, it is a very remarkable work, comparable to some of the best of Eugene O'Neill's, and it is, moreover, essentially Australian.'⁹⁰

Soon after the announcement, Esson ran into Gregan McMahon, who told him he was 'very keen on Katie's play.' 'He wants to organise a special professional company for it,' Esson relayed to Palmer.

If it is successful, as he expects it to be (though, of course, nobody can tell these things), he will keep the company and do other Australian plays. He said he found five or six in the competition that he would like to do. He thought my *Eureka* play was good and seems willing to do it. The play that came second was by [DP] McGuire [*The Bolshevik* by 'Obadiah Ren'], *The Triad* correspondent. I correspond with McGuire, who is only 24 or 25, intensely literary, learned and a keen dialectician. I found him an attractive young man. He is going to send his play, the first he has ever done, to me to read. He says it has glaring faults that he doesn't know how to correct. But it seems to be good strong stuff. We had word that the play placed third was by Dora Wilcox, but this was wrong. [Third place was in fact awarded to 'Isca' the pen name used by Dora Wilcox when submitting her play *Governor Macquarie*.] In any case it wouldn't be among those Mac [McMahon]

⁸⁸ 6 December 1927— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.Cit. pg.82

⁸⁹ Esson to Palmer, 6 December, 1927— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.Cit. pg.82

⁹⁰ *The New Triad*, 1 December 1927

would do. The other plays he fancied I know nothing about. The chief point is that if he succeeds with *Brumby*, the foundations of an Australian drama may be laid. No decent Australian play has as yet been done professionally. *On Our Selection* and *The Sentimental Bloke* have done a lot of harm. But a few decent works would create a different impression of what an Australian play might be. We can only hope for the best.⁹¹

The disappointing, and no doubt dispiriting, subtext to all this, was that Palmer had cajoled Esson into submitting *The Southern Cross* to the same competition where he was shortlisted with eight others, but not represented in the top three.

I hand't thought of sending in a play for *The Triad* Competition till you suggested it. Perhaps I'll send in the Eureka which happens to be a picturesque subject. ... I think it's pretty good. I've followed the actual course of events, and tried to make the characters as like themselves as possible. I think it's a human stockade without heroics, I'm calling it *The Southern Cross* after the diggers' flag.⁹²

By April 1928, following *The Triad* announcement, he tells Palmer that he's 'going to give the Eureka play another look over.'

I may have it a bit too cluttered up with facts. Each point at first seemed interesting to me; but I see it would be better to make sacrifices for the sake of the general effect. It is all painfully faithful; but it would be more effective if I tried to get more inner truth of event and character. It is only a question of a few days' work; but I fancy with a little more fat to Lalor a little more cohesion, and more stress on some personal scenes, it might turn out a possibly successful play. It is a good subject, with picturesque scenes and costumes, and a variety of characters that are fairly interesting. Australians should really like it.⁹³

A few months later, Esson was rocked by the sudden death of his half-brother Frank Brown, who died in late November 1928. This loss upset his work process and seriously eroded his confidence.

Esson eventually resumed work on *The Southern Cross*, writing to his old theatrical colleague William Moore in 1930, that his 'chronicle play' was now structured in '4 acts and 12 scenes.'⁹⁴

⁹¹ 20 January 1928— quoted in *Meajin*, Volume 6 (1947) p.103

⁹² Esson to Palmer, 10 March 1927— Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op.Cit. pg. 79

⁹³ 26 April 1928 — quoted in *Meajin*, Volume 6 (1947) p.103

⁹⁴ c. 1930—La Trobe [MS12156]

The following April (1931), it was announced that *The Forerunners* by ‘Mrs E Coulson Davidson of Warrigal Road, Oakleigh’ was the winner—out of 112 entries—of the competition arranged by the Society of Australian Authors and the Repertory Theatre for the best three act drama; she received £50.⁹⁵ It is not known if Esson submitted his own Eureka, or any other, play to this competition but it was Campbell Howard, writing to Allan Asbolt in 1961, who pointed out that Coulson Davidson’s play continued to haunt the development of Esson’s dramaturgy. Howard believed *The Forerunners* was ‘perhaps the best of the lot on Eureka. Eureka, of course, I think is an impossible subject for a stage play unless, of course, if perhaps written for a Shakespearean stage and using the Shakespearean technique.’ Further, speaking with Nettie Palmer about this play he commented in the letter to Palmer (dated 15 November 1962) that ‘Esson avers he knew nothing of the Davidson play when he wrote his *Southern Cross*. Nettie arched her eyebrows and said “Louis was like that. He remembered what was convenient.”’⁹⁶ In subsequent correspondence with Clem Christensen (then editor of *Meanjin*) Howard again quotes Esson’s letter

in which Esson said he didn’t think *Southern Cross* owed anything to Mrs Coulson Davidson’s play yet Esson’s first draft of the play [Manuscript A] has an identical conclusion scene or act with Mrs Coulson Davidson’s final scene, but Esson amended that final scene and his note [actually Hilda’s note] on the manuscript says ‘amended at the request of Katharine Susannah [Prichard].’⁹⁷

Notwithstanding her concerns about some aspects of the script and its source material, Katharine Susannah Prichard championed Esson’s play and attempted to persuade Keith George to do the play at the Theatre Guild in Perth.⁹⁸ Esson was reasonably confident in finally getting a production in May 1938, writing to Leslie Rees that ‘I have hopes [*The Southern Cross*] will be produced in Perth this year. It’s a good subject; and there’s no reason why half a dozen plays couldn’t be written about it. They would all be different.’⁹⁹

The Southern Cross has never been performed.

⁹⁵ Second prize went to Mr Leslie Lovell Woollcott’s *The Magic Year* (Sydney), and third to Miss Betty Davies for *Tomorrow’s Bread* (Victoria). *The Argus*, 21 April 1931

⁹⁶ 23 February, 1961—Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

⁹⁷ 12 December 1961—Campbell Howard Collection, UNE; see variants in APPENDIX A

⁹⁸ According to Tim Fitzpatrick, *Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson*, Op. cit. p.343

⁹⁹ 28 May 1938—Leslie Rees *Papers*, NLNSW

— CHAPTER SEVEN —

Co-Authorship

Louis Buvelot Esson & Francis Paterson Brown

Disputed Plays

Frank Brown was a friend to value and a man to admire. It was as a sportsman that the public knew him best— a sportsman in the best and most exalted sense of the term. And, in every sense, he was a straight dealer and a loveable man.¹

CJ Dennis

Unlike Esson, his half-brother Frank Paterson Brown was a physically active, adventurous and inquisitive boy who made friends easily and, even at an early age, was a high achiever. The contrast is obvious in a charming studio portrait of the two, taken around the time of Esson's 20th birthday: the elder boy seated somewhat stiffly with his legs crossed, his elfin features— youthfully handsome—display a quizzical smile as he evasively gazes beyond the camera. Despite Esson's protective embrace, Brown otherwise dominates the photograph: the stocky young lad poses casually, one hand in his pocket confidently; while he leans into his elder brother, he stares defiantly—almost impatiently— into the camera lens.



Esson often quipped he was their mother's favourite and described Frank as 'vital' and a man who 'loved life.'

He was one who took no thought of the morrow, and perhaps it is as well that he has not to bear the disappointments of the world. He always lived in a happy, sunny world and he was an enthusiastic boy to the end. It is not out of sight out of mind. Some people long dead are still living to me.

Given this close and dependent relationship it is easily suggested that Esson may have relied on Brown's generosity to contribute details of his venturesome life in the dramaturgical development

¹ *The Herald*, 27 November 1928

of the three one act plays whose authorship is questioned: *The Drovers* (1920), *Mates* (1923) and *Andeganora* (1937).

The ruggedly masculine bush settings of a drovers' or brumby-runners' camp in the remote back country of the Northern Territory, or the opal fields of north-western New South Wales, were personally unknown to Esson. He had no experience at all of the lifestyle nor the idiom of its *dramatis personae*; nor did he hold any intimate knowledge of indigenous customs and practice as explored in two of the short sketches. Brown, on the other hand, had the lived-experience, and had also made an anthropological study of aboriginal culture throughout his residency in the 'never-never.'

It is my contention that each of these three 'contested plays' originated as an outline or an original draft by Frank Brown, subsequently embellished and dramaturgically refined by Louis Esson. The most appropriate accreditation is that the brothers collaborated and should share authorship.

Francis (Frank) Paterson Brown (1887-1928)

Esson's mother Mary Jane, still a young widow at thirty-two years old, married gentleman-farmer and storekeeper George Alfred Brown (1834-1897) at High Church, Geelong, on 15 January 1887. George Brown, a widower himself of three years, was twenty-three years Mary Jane's senior. He owned property in regional Victoria at Berwick, where the couple resided. Their son Francis (Frank) Paterson Brown was born later the same year, on 13 November. His early years were spent in the family homestead, *Inveresk*, in High Street, Berwick² (41 km south east of Melbourne, on the Gippsland fringe). George died, aged 62, 29 December 1896, a month after Frank's 10th birthday.

Already showing remarkable athletic potential, it was decided in 1901 that Frank attend at Scotch College, the Presbyterian boarding school located in the inner-eastern Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn; initially under Alexander Morrison, the school's stern, disciplinarian principal since 1856.³ Eighteen year old Frank also showed some aptitude for the theatre when he performed in the Caledonian Society's Scottish Concert at the Masonic Hall.

² Designed by Little and Beasley; *Building, Engineer and Mining Journal*, March 28 1891

³ In his first year Brown gained second place in the Under 14 Cup; the following year he won the Championship under 16, and represented the College in the Inter-School hurdles; he was Champion again in 1903. In 1904, he won the Scotch College Athletic Championship and the Public School Championships over 440 yards (56 seconds) and one mile (4 mins. 53 secs). In 1905 he was the first Public Schools' athlete to win an Australian Open Championship, carrying off first honours in the 440 yards hurdles event 'on a heavy track' at Sydney's Cricket Ground.

A pleasant variety in the program was scenes from the ‘Gentle Shepherd,’ arranged by Miss Eloise Juno, whose pupils the Misses Jean Richardson and I Watsell, Messrs J Harvey Picken and Frank P Brown impersonated the characters.⁴

But athletics was his immediate post-school sporting ambition, and at the Amateur Victorian Championships held in Bendigo, Brown won the 120 yard sprint hurdles and finished second ‘in the quarter.’⁵

To celebrate his twentieth birthday, Brown joined his mother, accompanying his step-brother Louis, on an international assignment to post stories from various centres in Asia (Sri Lanka, India, China, Japan and the Straight Settlements) for *The Lone Hand*. They were away six months, arriving back into Sydney on 16 June 1908. In the new year Brown—described in the press at this time as ‘a man of independent means’ (no doubt, following his 21st birthday, and his father’s legacy)—took an adventurous journey overland to Port Darwin.

He went by train to Bourke, and thence, with horses worked along the edge of the Stony Desert, thence on to the Roper River, and through practically unexplored parts of Arnheim’s Land. Northern Territory. At Pine Creek he took [the] train to Port Darwin.⁶

He sailed from Darwin to Sydney arriving on 27 October 1909. He made it known that it was his intention to then make a trip to Scotland, but instead, he made a return trip to the Territory. Having done the reconnaissance, this time he turned his attention to ‘exploring, prospecting, hunting and ethnological research in the widespread region which is now to be administered by the Commonwealth Government.’

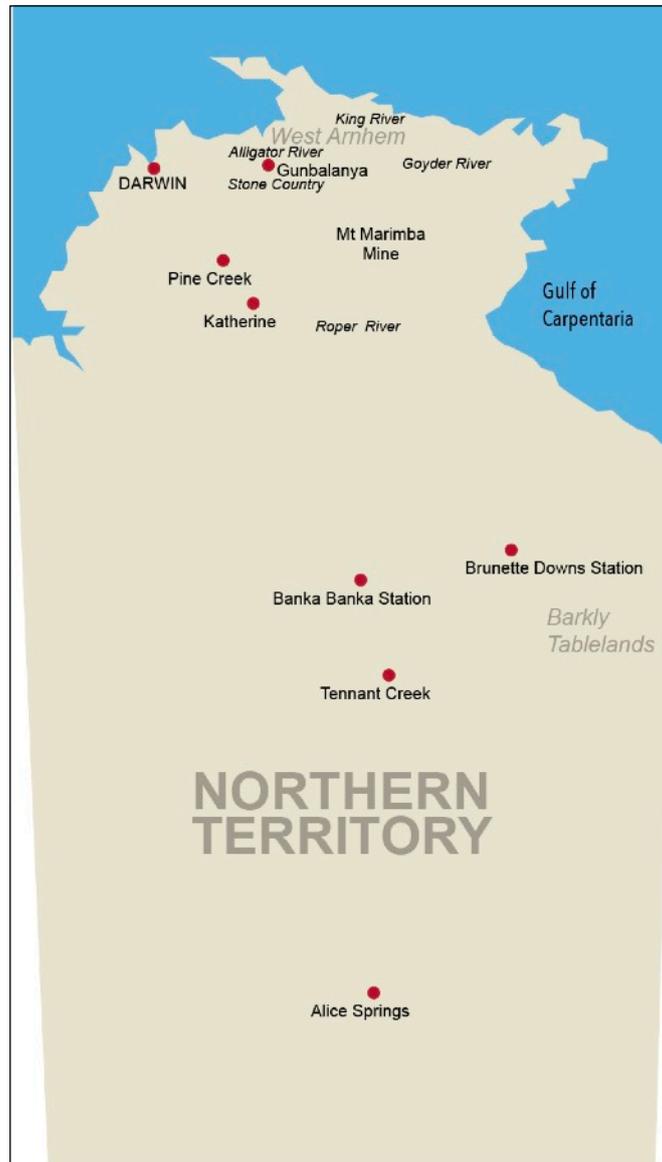
Brown concentrated his attention on the indigenous people located on the East Alligator River, and as far east as Liverpool River. He ‘compiled a vocabulary and secured accurate information in regards to their tribal customs and marriage laws. ... A knowledge of these customs and laws he considers to be indispensable to anyone who may be selected by the Government later on to overlook the welfare of the natives, for it will be only by a thorough understanding of their peculiarities and prejudices that they may ultimately be induced to live in comparative harmony in reservations which may be set apart from their segregation. ...’

⁴ *The Argus*, 28 July 1906 p.19

⁵ *Table Talk*, 11 April 1907 p.27

⁶ *Referee*, 27 October 1909 p.9

Mr Brown struck east and got among the tribes along the King and Liverpool rivers. In this practically unknown country the tribal subdivisions rove much as they have always done. Thousands of natives are scattered about the country, and the mo for the most part they are bitterly hostile.⁷



There was also an investment opportunity. As reported in *The Bulletin*:

Frank Brown, a vigorous young Australian, having some time on his hands, and some few pounds in his pockets, overhanded from Bourke to Port Darwin last year with a mate. On the trip they found something that looked like a mine at Marimba. Brown frankly said he didn't know a mine for certain when he saw it; but he took in samples and they assayed well enough. As it turned out the mining man whose the Melbourne syndicate set up said it wasn't a one. But Brown wasn't finished with the Territory. He went back and roamed all over the north of it for six months and comes

⁷ 'Seen Through Observant Eyes', *The Age* 31 Jan 1911 p.9

south again surer than ever that it is going to do great things when the markets are available.⁸

The Boolman silver, lead and zinc field, also known as Mount Marimba property, was pegged by Frank Brown. The lease was situated about 100km from the Roper River, and 100km from the Goyder.

Alternately it can be reached by traversing a route 380 miles in length from the Pine Creek. Mr Brown, accompanied by TJ Bradstreet—who prospected four leases of 80 acres each, described by them as occurring in limestone country—came to Melbourne early last April, and after negotiations with a Melbourne firm of legal managers, a syndicate company as formed, called the Mount Marimba Prospecting No Liability. The nominal capital was £6000, divided into 600 shares of £10 each. Of these 225 shares were subscribed for at £10 per share; 175 shares, fully paid up, were allotted to the vendors, F Brown and others.⁹

It was during this trip to Darwin that Brown sent Esson a telegraph, congratulating him on the production of his first play, *The Woman Tamer* in October 1910.

Brown was back in Melbourne by January 1911, undergoing medical treatment for the relief of wounds inflicted by a wild stallion, but, despite early indications, keen to get back to training and track work. Summing up his time in the north, Brown told the *Melbourne Age* that it was

a country of which Australia will one day be proud; it has fine harbours, fertile soil, minerals, fisheries, pastoral resources and a regular, though tropical climate. Once the place gets a fair start, population will flow into it from all over the World. At the present it is the land of romance.

In a surprise announcement to many, given his absence from athletics for nearly two years, Brown was selected as Victoria's representative in the team of eight Australians to compete in the Inter-Empire sports championship, held as part of the 'Festival of Empire' in London in July 1911 to coincide with the Coronation of King George V.¹⁰ The Games took place at the Crystal Palace during the last week of June. He finished third in the 110 metres hurdles event. Brown then took up

⁸ 5 January 1911, p.18

⁹ *The Bendigo Independent*, 16 July 1910 p. 3

¹⁰ Brown's departure for London was delayed, however, after contracting a chill while attending the St Patrick's Day Sports; he was hospitalised, but eventually given the all clear to sail by 5 April. He and colleague GA Wheatley (the Australian middle distance champion runner) were in London by the end of the month, sharing accommodation in Highgate Road and training together at Tufnell Park.

an invitation to compete in the Berlin Athletics Championships a few weeks later. It was here that Brown drew an extraordinary amount of publicity, earning him ‘Hero’ status:

In the start of the hurdle race a German sprinter started before the signal, and was penalised by being put back a few yards. The Australian [Frank P Brown] beckoned him to start even, and as the other came alongside the crowd burst into cheering. Mr Brown had had the bad luck to injure his knee in the race, but stuck to it pluckily, and came in a good third. By this time his sportsmanlike action had created a furore, and he was carried shoulder high through the cheering crowd. He was introduced to the Crown Prince [Wilhelm], who subsequently presented him with a silver cup as a memento of the occasion. It was surmounted by the German eagle and bore a suitable inscription.¹¹

Brown didn’t return to Australia immediately, instead he took up an invitation to box Georges Carpentier in Paris¹², then spent six months on a walking tour through Africa and then onto North America; he organised a wild-west show in New York, and later inaugurated the world-famous Calgary stampede with early screen cowboy Tom Mix and others; he also, apparently, spent time ‘cow-punching in Canada.’ He was back in Melbourne briefly in May 1912, before returning to the Northern Territory and, apart from buffalo hunting, also undertook a pearling expedition.¹³

It was during this period that Brown began to write creatively about his experiences. He contributed a range of articles—particularly on the potential use of Territory’s wild horse population—throughout the year. His time, otherwise during 1913 and early 1914 was consumed by a massive undertaking, as described by *Table Talk*, who reported on ‘Frank Brown, drover’ who, on a Government contract, spent

a ten months’ journey of 1500 miles, from Sth Queensland to Darwin with a flock of sheep which were wanted to give the local land valuers their daily roast of mutton. This is one of the greatest droving feats ever accomplished in Australia. The country traversed was fairly overrun by blacks, and very short of water, and yet the flock was piloted though without any appreciable loss.¹⁴

Saturday Review noted that Brown arrived in Sydney from Darwin on 2 May 1914, in transit to Melbourne the following week.

¹¹ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 7 September 1911 p.7

¹² Brown held his own for two rounds but was knocked out in the third. *The Herald* (Melbourne), 9 October 1920

¹³ *Referee*, 15 May 1912; *The Australasian*, 9 November 1912; *Referee*, 7 April 1915 p.15

¹⁴ *Table Talk*, 7 May 1914 p.6

Brown then chose to invest in a large pastoral estate in Monea in northern Victoria (on the Albury-Wodonga railway line), and became a grazier. The property was also conveniently close to his mother, Mary Jane, now remarried as Mrs James Gibb and living in the Riverina.

Brown was 27 when Australia entered the First World War in August 1914. He was reunited with his step-brother Louis when family gathered in September for the wedding of their cousin John Ford Paterson Jr (Hugh Paterson's son) to Kathleen Hepworth (in the presence of the Prime Minister Andrew Fisher). Marriage was in the air and, as the property of Monea was well established, Brown announced his engagement soon after Christmas to Edith (Edie) Calder, an actress then appearing in JC Williamson's production of *Cinderella* at Her Majesty's in Melbourne. They were married at St Andrew's Church, Carlton on 11 March 1915. Their son Stuart Paterson Brown was born on 16 September the following year. Within a month, it was announced publicly that Brown had enlisted for active service in the AIF.¹⁵ Esson, meanwhile, had decided to spend the War in the United States of America, and Frank and Edie joined them for a farewell meal at the Cafe Denat, 80 Bourke Street—organised by Vance and Nettie Palmer—on 10 November. Brown spoke to the good health of his step-brother.

Having sold the property at Monea (in November 1915), home for Edith and Stuart was at Almond Villa, Manningham Street, Parkville West when Brown officially signed his Enlistment Papers on 23 February 1917 [Service Number: 28951] just prior to going into Maribyrnong Artillery Camp, securing the entry rank of Sergeant (and destined for the 8th Australian Field Artillery Brigade). He met with Louis and Hilda briefly in London in August 1918 before going over to France.

Joining the Brigade in Europe, Brown missed the bloodiest of the trench warfare in Pozieres, but he joined his unit in Belgium advancing to the Hindenburg Line. The battalion successfully assisted in stopping the German spring offensive. Brown saw action fighting near Hamel, and later fought near Amiens. According to the Australian War Memorial:

This advance by British and empire troops was the greatest success in a single day on the Western Front, one that German General Erich Ludendorff described as '... the black day of the German Army in this war ...'¹⁶

¹⁵ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 20 October 1916

¹⁶ Australian War Memorial: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51455>

The Brigade continued operations until on 11 November 1918 ‘the guns fell silent.’ While most members returned home to Australia for demobilisation, Brown crossed the channel where he reunited with Louis and Hilda who had been living in England since late 1917. ‘Frank is in London,’ Esson wrote to Vance Palmer in March 1919,

... doing something at Australia House ... but he may soon return to Australia ‘on business.’ He got a bit of gas and lost weight, but on the whole he has been fairly lucky.

It was a fortuitous time for Esson. In the first instance, William Moore was attempting to organise a London version of his ‘Australian Drama Night’ for December 1919, and it was his intention to present a new one-act play by Vance Palmer (*The Prisoner*, a comedy set in outback Queensland); *Anoli, the Blind* (a drama about the cane country of North Queensland); a new work by Sidney Tomholt (then attending the University of London); and a new play by Esson. Henderson’s had already agreed to publish his three early one act sketches—*The Woman Tamer*, *The Sacred Place* and *Dead Timber*—recommending an additional play to bulk out the slim volume. His original manuscript and only copy of *The Fossicker* was still with Padraic Colum apparently, so Esson was in search of a topic and theme, something with an ‘outback’ flavour to complement Palmer’s play. Brown—according to Esson’s son Hugh, and ‘family tradition’—gave him the story that appears to reference his Government droving contract from before the War, with some local ‘Binghi’ insight to pepper the plot. Certainly, the given circumstances of the Barkly Tablelands, and the intimate knowledge of the drovers and their idiom, as well as specific knowledge of the indigenous people belongs to Brown; Esson had never set foot in the Northern Territory nor had any knowledge of droving cattle in the Never-Never.



Frank P Brown studio portrait—1920

It is highly unlikely that Brown provided a first draft of the play (as suggested by Leon Brodzky), but he was in London for a month or two, and available to assist with the dramaturgical development of the short work before making the trip back to Australia and reuniting with his wife and son. William Moore, having met his future wife, New Zealand poet Dora Wilcox, decided to return to Australia at the same time, settling in Sydney. The planned Pioneer Players Australian Drama Night in London didn’t eventuate.

Vance Palmer relates that

all that summer he [Louis] worked ... trying in a Bloomsbury flat to capture the atmosphere of a cattle camp on the Barkly Tablelands, with the sun coming up over the arid plains, the drovers anxious about the dry stretch ahead of them, and the cattle 'pegging for a drink.' Louis was a slow worker. He would try out every phrase of his drovers' dialogue to make sure it was idiomatic. 'On horseback,' he would mutter, pacing about the room, 'on horseback, it doesn't seem right'. 'In the saddle,' someone would suggest, and his face would light up as if he had just dislodged a pice of grit from his eye.¹⁷

This however, suggests 'fine tuning' at best rather than actual composition. What was titled *The Drovers*, a collaboration between Frank P Brown and Louis Esson, however was completed and ultimately included in *Dead Timber and Other Plays*, published by Henderson's in November 1920, under Esson's sole authorship.

— *The Drovers* (1920) —

Esson's masterpiece.

Keith Macartney¹⁸

The Drovers ... is a tragedy of the stock-route. ... The situation has the true inevitability of Greek tragedy. No play of ours more powerfully shows the grimness of a fate that broods over the men who pit themselves against our vast inland wildernesses.

Leslie Rees¹⁹

While droving through the top end, a young, inexperienced Jackaroo inadvertently fires his gun causing the already parched cattle to stampede. The action opens when two young drovers carry veteran 'Briglow' Bill into camp; he has been seriously injured 'on the inside.' The Cook makes Briglow comfortable and provides the drovers with breakfast. The Boss, meanwhile, has ringed the cattle bringing them under control, and attempts the same in camp offering painkillers to his dying mate and placating his team when he makes the pragmatic decision that they must move forward with the cattle—'we've got to get on'—leaving Briglow behind. Despited the protestations of the guilt-ridden Jackaroo, Briglow is resigned to his fate, comforted only by the company of the young

¹⁷ as quoted in *Australasian Drama Studies*, Issue 28-29 (1996) pg. 202

¹⁸ 'Louis Esson and Australian Drama', *Meanjin* (Vol. 6, No. 2) (1947) pg.104

¹⁹ Rees, Leslie, *Towards and Australian Drama*, Angus & Robertson (1953) p.75

aboriginal boy Pidgeon, instructed to remain with him. As the sun rises and Pidgeon chants his lament, the Drovers disappear with the cattle, ‘on their journey across the long, dry stage,’ Briglow ‘falls back exhausted ... his pipe rolls along the ground.’

In conception, the dramaturgy of *The Drovers* owes much to JM Synge’s tragedy *Riders to the Sea*, where the offstage drowning of Michael (also having fallen off his horse)—son to the widow Maury and brother to Nora and Cathleen—is the inciting incident; the long wait through the night to confirm what is already assumed inevitable: that their brother is dead. But the structure of Synge’s play is far more cohesive, compared to the nine short beats provided in Esson’s dramaturgy, where the urgency of the story, such as it is, unfolds rhythmically with the many clumsy entrances and exits of characters into the camp, trying to maintain Briglow as the focus: the unfortunate victim who embodies the dynamic action, as he slowly and painfully expires. The constant reference to the desperate, unremitting thirst of the cattle in the barren landscape is a pitiful reminder of his own fatality.

Historically, the overwhelming positive reception to *The Drovers* followed a literary response (a *reading* of the play). Prior to its premiere on stage, it had already been included in the British Drama League’s list of *A Hundred and One Best Plays*²⁰. The critical responses to the opening performance, given by the Pioneer Players on Monday 3 December 1923 in Melbourne, were complimentary but less effusive: ‘well staged and acted’ (*The Herald*); ‘a striking bit of realism, in which the animating spirit of the party is well depicted.’ (*Labour Call*); and, tellingly, ‘not so much drama as a description of a mob of cattle breaking away, and of a drover’s life ... all the characters are naturally drawn.’ (*The Age*) As in his three previous one act sketches, this play relies on a vivid ‘impression’ of the scene; it is an account of an experience; the operative word is ‘realism.’

Brown, not Esson, lived the circumstances, the observations are clearly his. The redolent mood is created by Brown first-hand knowledge and provided by Esson in the scene descriptions and stage directions, including a demanding number of off-stage sound effects (the shot fired; ‘*thunder of hoofs heard,*’ ‘*stock-whips cracking—a stampede of cattle*’); atmospheric effects (‘eating dust on the tail of the mob’; the aroma of the Albert’s stew and fresh damper); and the lighting changes take us from pre-dawn to sunrise (providing a scenic apotheosis to coincide with Briglow’s death). These physical production details are rare in Esson’s dramaturgy.

²⁰ *The Monthly Chapbook* for June contained a list of 101 Plays recommended by the Plays and Publications Committee of the British Drama League, a reported in *Daily Herald*, 29 June 1921

It is Brown voice that we hear in Albert, the Yorkshire Cook, as ‘narrator,’ who provides a theatrically evocative verbal picture of the boss drover Alec, with the young drovers Bob and Mick steadying the mob—again off stage—after yet another stampede:

COOK (*To BRIGLOW*). By gum, that Bob can ride. ... See him jump on that brumby brute! ... By gum, tho', look at the old bloke putting a bend on them. ... He's got 'em. ... Wheeled 'em a treat. Bob's up now, so's Mick. ... They've got 'em all right. ... Got 'em rounded up, and fetchin 'em back to camp. ... Say, Briglow, ain't old Alec a bird! You should have seen him bending that mob, right on the shoulder o' the lead, swooping round 'em like a hawk.

That this action could never happen within the time-frame of Albert’s speech is immaterial. The given circumstances in *The Drovers* are otherwise straight forward: legendary bushman and boss drover, Alec—a man of ‘about 50, tanned, wrinkled, with thick bristling eyebrows, and great hair and beard ... bandy legged, but sturdily built’—leads a team of drovers making their way across the Barkly tablelands to Darwin; they are camped on ‘a muddy water-hole, where’ there’s not enough water to fill your hat, and five hundred cattle mad for a drink!’

The small coda, where Pidgeon is left behind, charged by Alec to tend to Briglow, however, does move us beyond the stereotype of the stock, comical stage Aborigine of the 19th century melodrama; it’s clear that Frank Brown knew his subject intimately and respected the culture. Pidgeon’s poetic lament, in pidgin, looks forward in both content and form (most effectively taken up dramaturgically by Katharine Susannah Prichard in her play *Brumby Innes* some eight years later). There is a awesome ambience created as Briglow lies on the ground close to the earth, his head resting on a swag (he denies both Albert’s stew and the bottle of pain-killers), accepting of his imminent fate. He regrets that he is in the shade while his mates weather the blistering sun. As he succumbs, Pidgeon sits by him, clicking sticks together in a dying pulse-like rhythm and chanting a bush ritual of survival and rebirthing:

PIDGEON. You, Briglow, and old man Boss, you savvy bush all-the-same blackfellow. ... I think first time you blackfellow, Briglow. You die, then jump up white fellow. Now you die, and bye'n'bye ... next time, you jump up blackfellow, alonga new fellow country—good country—plenty water, plenty fish, plenty tucker. ... You die all right.

BRIGLOW. That’s right Pidgeon, I'm going.

PIDGEON. Poor fellow! Me sit down, wait along Boss. Old man soon come back alonga shovel ... put him deep in ground ... dingo can't catch-im bone.

Me make little-fellow hill; me build up little mound, grass, bushes, stones, keep off bad spirits alonga bush. That one frighten-im debbil-debbil ... debbil-debbil can't catch-im Briglow now.

To underline the bush resurrection theme, the final stage direction asks that 'Pidgeon picks up [Briglow's] pipe, and then sits smoking, again chanting to himself, and clicking the sticks together.

But from the unlikely situation of his flat in Bloomsbury, Esson (with significant input from Brown no doubt) is mythologising; the play provides an overtly romantic view of the Australian bush legend. But the time had passed, even by 1923; *The Bulletin* literary agenda had moved on from the turn of the century when the forging of an 'Australian identity' was ripe. Their champion then was Henry Lawson. Lawson died in neglect, a drunkard, suffering a cerebral haemorrhage on 2 September 1922 and his peculiar account of the outback appeared to be lost with him.

*

It was reported in *The Weekly Times*, that after a lay off in London, Brown was back in Melbourne and looking well in July 1919.²¹ Louis and Hilda stayed on for another two years. Esson reported to Vance Palmer that Brown had returned to farming and had taken 'a place on the Murrumbidgee.'

So far he seems contented. The maize is 12 feet high, water-melons are 60lb weight, one of the finest rivers flows past the back door, there are Murray Cod and black duck, the horsemen and stockmen are famous—but the burning question is the Punt across the River, and the Government is again going to be 'approached.' That is real Australia.²²

Part of his decision to move to southern NSW may have been to be close to his mother in Glenroy (near Wagga Wagga). Only four months prior to getting home, Brown's step-father James Gibb died, leaving his mother Mary Jane a widow for the third time.

Over the next couple of years Brown reminisced about his early adventurous life and committed a number of these to prose, the stories published regularly in *The Herald* from early 1922.²³ Concurrently, he also contributed articles on 'home training for boys ... who wish to become strong

²¹ 12 July 1919 p.20

²² 21 May 1921 Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Georgian House (1948) p.35

²³ 'Back o' Bourke', *The Herald*, 1 April 1922 p 13; 'In the Jam-Tin Belt', *The Herald*, 3 June 1922; 'The Bushman's Craft', *The Herald*, 5 August 1922, p.13

and vigorous' in *Pals* magazine. Esson had returned to Australia by this time and already—with Vance Palmer and Stewart Macky—agitating 'to established a small theatre for purely Australian plays—a national rather than a repertory theatre.'²⁴ While his only play *The Battler* [originally *The Fossicker*] was to be the inaugural production of the newly formed Pioneer Players scheduled for May 22, amongst the playwrights Esson publicly announced for the 1923 season was 'a short play by Frank Brown.'²⁵

On 22 July 1922, the *Sporting Globe* notified its readers that Brown, 'a great athlete, who has distinguished himself in various other branches of amateur sport, including boxing and wrestling,' would join the paper as a journalist to write on athletics (to coincide the the first mid-week issue that appeared on 16 August).

— *Mates* (1923) —

While there was an expectation that Frank Brown would contribute a play to the Pioneer Players it was a last minute dash to produce a first draft of *Mates*. The expected play from Leon Brodzky (Spencer Rodney) had not arrived as expected in April 1923, and their next season was scheduled for August.

Mates is a superficial, character driven bush farce, appropriately set on a very hot day—'a hundred and twelve in the shade' (presumably to raise the romantic stakes a well)—at a shanty 'near the opal fields' in north western New South Wales. There's a drought, and times are tough on the fields. Thirsts need to be satiated! Carrie, the attractive and accommodating yet bored shanty-keeper, tends a bar short on customers.

We recognise a similar dramaturgical pattern in the set up and fundamental structure of the short sketch. As in *The Drovers*, the opening involves an injured man carried into the scene, the dramatic action reduced to an examination of the subject and the theme broadcast by both the title or the play and its opening line: 'It's my mate.'²⁶

Interrupting Carrie's seemingly uneventful day, a hefty, guileless shearer, 'Big Bill' Ross, collapsed into the shanty literally carrying his exhausted, dehydrated and unconscious little mate Joe.

²⁴ *The Weekly Times*, 17 September 1921

²⁵ *The Age*, 6 July 1922

²⁶ There is a great temptation to believe that these two men are thinly disguised pen portraits of the two step-brothers: Brown, the burly but benevolent shearer; Esson, the little disqualified jockey—a theatrical cousin to Smithy the Liar in *The Woman Tamer*—with his underworld jargon and cocky sense of humour. The pair are reused in *Vagabond Camp*.

CARRIE. Poor chap, he looks bad. What's wrong with him then?

BILL. Done up a bit, that's all. He's not used to the track, and we've come a few miles. ...

CARRIE. He's only a lad, and he don't look too strong.

BILL. He's a townie ... he don't know the bush.

Joe, we discover is a jockey—'only a light-weight, seven stone six'—younger than Bill, 'disqualified for suspicious riding,' and 'scratched from all events,' who subsequently fled Melbourne but couldn't handle 'the swag,' and 'cracked up on the track.' The mates are contrasted to the point of cliché, not only physically, but—even by the 1920s—in the trite city/bush dichotomy represented in their personality, attitude and sense of humour. Their mateship, however, is tested, when both are attracted to the young shanty keeper, who encourages their love-making spiel. The men fight, Carrie screams, but the scene is defused just in the nick of time with the sudden return of Carrie's husband Ned Devine. The 'mates have been duped, it was 'just a bit of fun.' Ned encourages the boys, back from the brink, to shake hands.

The situation of two contrasting 'mates' competing over the same girl is reminiscent of the circumstance of both *The Woman Tamer* and *Vagabond Camp*.

The sketch remains buoyant throughout, with the tense atmosphere between Joe's city street-savvy humour and Bill's grandiose bush sentimentality, both contrasted with the simple playfulness and optimism of the young married couple who own and run the remote shanty.

The extant manuscript appears to have been written in haste and based on two articles Frank had recently published in the Melbourne *Herald* (in a series about his experiences and observations on his trek from Melbourne to Darwin from 1909). One, titled 'Back o' Bourke'²⁷ is about a shearer he'd met on the train from Bathurst to 'that murky-looking little town, squatting on the plains', and where at their hotel they later lamented that

This is not the Bourke of the 'eighties, the romantic Bourke celebrated in the stories of Henry Lawson. ... Now Bourke lives on the traditions of the past. There are no more 'Opal Queens,' no more 'Black Diamonds.'

The second, 'In the Jam-Tin Belt: The Opal Queen's Dead Romance'²⁸, Alec (the narrator) and his wise-cracking little mate simply referred to as 'Shadow—'travellers from Bourke goin' north'—

²⁷ *The Herald*, 1 April 1922

²⁸ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 3 June 1922 p.11

meet with the infamous ‘opal queen’ at her shanty on the fringe of the opal fields. While the story is a throwback, the script is peppered with contemporary references (including silent film star Theda Bara, and the American heavy weight champion boxer Jack Dempsey).

The extant script, typed in Hilda’s typical format, with amendments by both Frank and Louis suggests a joint development from Brown’s original idea. Hilda Esson told Leon Brodzky that it was ‘one of Louis’s that was handed over to Frank Brown to touch up as Louis didn’t want his name on the program.’ This is ungenerous at best, as it is obvious that the reverse was the case: Esson appears to have finessed the dramaturgy (and the underworld-idiom for Joe), and as is often the case, the cast in rehearsal must have contributed a great deal. Brown, for example, was delighted by the casting of Ruby May. ‘It does not often happen,’ he revealed to *The Sporting Globe*,

that an actor or actress gets more out of a part than the author intended, yet that is just what Miss May has done with Carrie. ... When I wrote the play, I felt rather dubious about offering her the part, and I was afraid that she would be dissatisfied. That is not Miss May’s way, fortunately. She studied hard, and surprised me by developing the part into one of distinct value.²⁹

Despite the awkward, cause-and-effect, farcical aspect of the play’s structure, there is an authenticity about the characterisation and the situation that could only come from direct observation and experience. By and large most of this supplied by Brown, but it’s easy to imagine that Esson finessed Joe’s language and supplied some of ‘the street humour,’ but it would have been director George Dawe (with Leo Burke and Reg Moyle) who provided the schtick.

Whatever the case, while Frank Brown took the credit on this occasion, it was clearly a collaboration.

The only surviving manuscript also appears to be a pre-production script and incomplete; certainly it is not the production draft of the play that was performed by the Pioneer Players at the Playhouse on Thursday 16 August 1923, under the direction of George Dawe. For example, the review in *The Advocate*³⁰ suggested that the production closes with Ned and Joe actually playing at two up; the review in *The Australasian* confirms that the mates reconcile: ‘The friendship ... shattered by a woman ... [but] cemented when it was found that she had fooled both men.’³¹

²⁹ *The Sporting Globe*, 15 August 1923

³⁰ 23 August 1923 p.3

³¹ 25 August 1923 p.31

Brown and his wife attended the performance of Louis Esson's *The Drovers* when the Pioneer Players presented it at the Playhouse a few months later on 3 December. It played alongside Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Pioneers*, Furnley Maurice's *A Disturber of the Pools*, and Vance Palmer's *Travellers*.

*

Over the next eighteen months Brown (known to his readers as 'The Count') remained busy with his work on *The Sporting Globe*—particularly with all the preparations undertaken by athletes destined for the Olympic Games held in Paris in July 1924. He also continued to make contributions of life-writing and fiction to the Melbourne *Herald*.

The following year, it was announced that Brown, would relinquish his full time position with *The Sporting Globe* and, with a commission from Stadiums Limited, tour the world (the United States of America and Europe) to secure boxers and wrestlers for Australia.

It was almost entirely due to the efforts of 'The Count' that professional wrestling was revived in Australia with marked success, which culminated in the Melbourne Stadiums Ltd staging the world's light-heavyweight championship between Ted Thee and Walter Miller. ... No man in Australia today has a better knowledge of Australia's requirements.³²

Brown left for the United States of America at the end of July. Over the next nine months he spent most of his time in New York and engaged a number of boxers—especially African-American fighters—destined for bouts in Australia under the patronage of Melbourne Stadiums. Brown was in London by March 1926, from where he progressed his recruitment on the continent. He was back in Australia, resuming his position at *The Sporting Globe*, by the beginning of August 1926.

It was 'with tragic suddenness' that *The Argus* announced that Frank Brown, boxing and athletic editor of *The Sporting Globe*, died at his home in Park Street St Kilda on 26 November 1928, two weeks after his 41st birthday.

He had been suffering from a comparatively minor dental trouble for a month, but was to have resumed duty today. He went for a walk in the afternoon, and collapsed, dying without regaining consciousness.

³² *The Herald* (Melbourne), 30 June 1925 p.4

Sportsmen and athletes will learn of Mr Brown's death with regret, for he was held in affectionate esteem in sporting circles.³³

Esson was devastated by Frank's death. 'It was so sudden we could hardly believe it,' he wrote to Vance Palmer a few days after.

He had had an illness, but everyone thought he was getting better. A friend saw him at six and when he returned at eight for a game of cards Frank had gone. He was resting in bed after tea, with a cigarette and a magazine, when he suddenly collapsed and that was the finish. He was buried the next day, and though there was no time for a funeral notice it was surprising how many people went to the cemetery. The house was filled with flowers. He had an extraordinary number of friends and most of them were really deeply affected. His editor, Bill Foster, a fine chap, absolutely collapsed at the news and *The Globe* staff did nothing all morning, though the paper had to come out next day. It is unusual for a man to be so affectionately regarded by so many men of different types. Sports of all kinds were there, fine young men, and there were scores of people I didn't know who spoke of him with the greatest enthusiasm. And men like Monty Grover, [CJ] Dennis and Jim MacDonald were terribly upset.³⁴

— *Andeganora* (1937) —

In 1936 Esson's old colleague William Moore, collaborated with writer and academic Tom Inglis Moore (1901-1978) (no relation)—at the time literary editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*—to collate an anthology of previously unpublished short Australian plays for publishers Angus and Robertson. Bill Moore contacted Esson, still living in Melbourne, and requested permission to include *The Drovers* (despite it having already been seen in print).

Interestingly, a few months before hearing from Moore, Esson wrote to Vance Palmer that he had completed 'during the summer, five one-act plays, all entirely different, from farce to tragedy.' We know nothing of



these plays, apart from one. Responding to Moore, Esson argued against reissuing *The Drovers* in favour of a new work:

³³ 27 November 1928

³⁴ 29 November 1928—Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Georgian House (1948) p.102

An Abo. [sic] one, from Frank's notes, may be the best piece I've ever done. It is a cunning murder or manslaughter of the boss by a young abo, inspired by his old father. The sympathy should be with the abos. This might be better than *The Drovers* but that is for you to decide.³⁵

The very short sketch titled *Andeganora*—the name he gave the old, blind Aboriginal elder who dominates the action—was published the following year in *Best Australian One Act Plays* (1937); William Moore provided an overview of Australian Drama in his Introduction. In the twilight of his career, Esson was pleased to share the pages with 20 other literary colleagues both old (Dora Wilcox, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Sydney Tomholt, Vance Palmer and Stewart Mack) and new (Betty Roland, Dulcie Deamer, Millicent Armstrong, Miles Franklin and Leslie Rees). Those selected were chosen from a list of 200 submitted by their authors.

'Memorable among the stage plays of general character is Louis Esson's *Andeganora*,' *The Bulletin* responded to the volume,

A story of conflict between white and black, with a Northern Territory campfire setting. Like the same author's *The Drovers*, its power is in its atmosphere and suggestion. Very stirring is old *Andeganora*'s chanting over the fire as he incites his young tribesman to kill the wife-stealing white man.³⁶

The Telegraph, on the other hand, thought it 'a rather scrappy sketch in which aboriginals figured largely, and not very pleasantly.'³⁷

Esson's ill health necessitated his relocation to Sydney just before Christmas, and, putting his affairs in order, he wrote to Vance Palmer ('Comrade in Letters'):

... I've just been making my will (literary). I haven't much to leave, only a few plays; and being ultra-conservative, I mean them for my friends, dead and alive. At the moment I have only four long plays worth considering, and two are for Hilda, one for Katharine, and one for Bill [Moore], who was my first producer and started me on the downward path. Obviously the next one would be for you, and I still have hopes something might come to light this summer. In the meantime, I feel that as Brady doesn't care for plays, I needn't dedicate the book to him; the play I owe him will do. That leaves me three small things (I have little riches) and one is for Hilda, and one, *Vagabond Camp*, for Katharine, who goaded me into doing it. So, till I can

³⁵ Moore *Papers*, La Trobe [MS12156]

³⁶ *The Bulletin*, 15 September 1937

³⁷ *The Telegraph*, 30 July 1938 p.15

find something more important, will *Andeganora* do, as a symbol of our long companionship? Personally, I think it is as good as any one-act play I've written, though I might've be a good judge of my own work. I prefer it to *The Drovers*, for the gin gives it more kick.³⁸

Andeganora was first performed by the Sydney Drama Society within twelve months of the publication, at the Little Theatre (Phillip Street), Sydney—referred to as ‘the smallest theatre in the world,’ holding only 50 people—on Saturday 23 July, 1938, one of four Australian plays produced by Rosalie Wilson and under the direction of Alfred Race. The other plays included *At Dusk* by Millicent Armstrong, *Seeing Granny Off* by Hey Simpson, and scenes from M Barnard Eldershaw’s novel *A House is Built* (adapted by Rosalie Wilson).

Esson was in Sydney at this time, and Rosalie Wilson ‘hoped’ that he would attend the production, there is no evidence that he did so. Although, *The Australasian* made a point of saying that ‘after a long absence ... it is good to see his work again being played in the theatre.’³⁹

Of the few reviews, *The Sydney Morning Herald* felt that *Andeganora* ‘was an unusual offering, concise and well written, but somewhat sketchy.’⁴⁰ They felt that the demands of the play beyond the amateur players. *The Sydney Mail* wrote similarly:

Louis Esson’s *Andeganora* proved to have the merit of poetry to such a degree as to suggest that its interpretation by skilled actors would be essential to its success as a stage production. Nevertheless, the amateur performers contrived to bring out much of the delicacy of the story, even if they failed to impart the necessary vigour in the action.⁴¹

The constant reference to *The Drovers* reminds us that the situation, characters and idiom of *Andeganora*, especially this late in his life, sat outside Esson’s sphere of life-experience and, as he had done previously, it is clear that he relied heavily on ‘Frank’s notes’ and short story. But there are other contributing factors.

Brown’s sensitivity and intimate knowledge with regard to the indigenous community of Arnhem Land was reported in the *Melbourne Age* in 1911 (31 January):

³⁸ as quoted in Fitzpatrick, Peter, *Pioneer Players*, Op.cit. pg.336

³⁹ *The Australasian*, 30 July 1938 p.46

⁴⁰ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 July 1938 p.5

⁴¹ *The Sydney Mail*, 27 July 1938 p.42

Mr Brown fitted out a well equipped party, and travelled with a mob of pack and ride horses, taking plenty of time, in order to make a study of the character of the country and its possibilities, and to collect as much information as he could concerning the lesser known tribes inhabiting the country along the rivers which find their outlet on the north coast.

In order to gain as keen an insight as possible into native ways he made a permanent camp on the Alligator River, and combined ethnological research with buffalo hunting. This he found to be far the best way of getting into intimate relations with the black, whose natural hunting instincts were were appealed to, and who regard the hunter as a man after their own heart—one to be respected, whereas the purely scientific student, who goes among them a strange being, who can take no part really in their mode of living, and who spends his time seeking to gain information by asking questions, is frequently regarded with suspicion, and more often than not deliberately misled.

Two years later, Harrison Owen, in *The Bulletin*, also noted:

The dramatic possibilities of Brother Binghi [a derogatory term for an Aborigine] have not been properly exploited, but Frank Brown (half-brother to Louis Esson), who spent some time with Binghi in the Northern Territory, has written a one-act play, *The Spirit of Our Ancestors*, in which the principal characters are aborigines. The playlet is really an attempt to justify the murder, by an aborigine, of a white trooper. Brown, who knows his subject, evinces much sympathy for Binghi. The play may be produced at the Australian Drama Night, which the faithful in Melbourne are organising, in the absence of the prophet Billmoore [William Moore].⁴²

While there is no record of a production of *The Spirit of Our Ancestors*, but Frank himself reworks the material for a short story that appeared in the *Melbourne Herald* on 3 November 1923 under the banner ‘Art and the Elements’, and accompanied by an illustration by Hal Rooney.

The old blackfellow was waiting for death to claim him.

Sometime before daylight his spirit would be called by his ancestor who lived in the moon.

He crouched on his hunkers beside a tiny fire and appeared resigned to his fate. He must die, so why protest against the inevitable? Yet there was something to regret, and as his palsied fingers fumbled ins scanty grey beard he reviewed the circumstances that had brought him to this pass.

He had long ruled the tribe by his strong magic, and many other tribes in the northern parts of Australia had bowed before his power. ...

⁴² *The Bulletin*, 13 March 1913 p.9; a short story by Frank Brown, published in *The Herald* (Melbourne), 3 November 1923, has a similar theme.

Again, it is appropriate that the brothers share credit for *Andeganora*.

— CHAPTER EIGHT —

Louis Esson: The Last of the Colonial Playwrights

Louis Esson has a reputation possibly higher than that of any other native playwright ... and yet his reputation rests perhaps more upon his influence than his actual dramatic achievement.

Keith Macartney⁴³

The last decade of Esson's life was frustrating due to his rapidly declining and often crippling health. The malaise first manifest in a recurring nervous condition soon after the demise of the Pioneer Players. The condition was exacerbated by the untimely deaths of Frank Brown (in 1928), and the next year by his uncle James Paterson. Four years later his mother Mary Jane who, having survived her third husband, also died, naming Esson as her principal beneficiary. That Hilda's romantic relationship with her colleague Dr John Dale was also known to Esson—and to their close Melbourne friends—caused both their estrangement and considerable bitterness.

Smith's Weekly reported that Esson was 'still keenly interested in the progress of the production of Australian plays ... [and] recently turned his attention to radio work, and is engaged in writing plays and sketches suitable for broadcasting.' But in reality Esson wrote little during this time: a short play *Andeganora* (published by Angus and Robertson in William and T Inglis Moore's collection *Best Australian One Act Plays* in 1937); one attempt at a radio play *Lola, the Lorelei* (not broadcast); and the unfinished manuscript *Lachryma Christi*. 'He belongs to no clubs,' the *Weekly* went on, 'and admits to no hobbies outside his own home and has a special liking for cats as pets.'⁴⁴

Esson remained politically aware, however, and involved himself in the public protest with regard to the banned Czechoslovakian author Egon Kisch (joining colleagues Vance Palmer, Katharine Susannah Prichard, EJ Brady and Max Meldrum), and also contributed his name to the fight against censorship.

Esson was eventually convinced to relocate to Sydney permanently—'as an experiment' to help control his neuritis—in 1937. 'Sydney climate marvellous,' he wrote in his diary,

warm, sunny, mild, equable—weeks and months almost perfect ... I greatly prefer Sydney to Melbourne. 'Thebes did his green unknowing youth engage. He chooses Athens in his riper age.'

⁴³ *Meanjin* Vol 6/2, (1947) p. 94

⁴⁴ *Smith's Weekly*, 30 October 1937 p.13

He also enjoyed some residual infamy as the one time 'poet of the slums' and 'veteran playwright,' in a literary community that included Guido Baracchi and Betty Roland, Miles Franklin, Majorie Bernard and Flora Eldershaw, Bartlett Adamson, Florence James, Dora Wilcox and William Moore, Winifred Hamilton, Xavier Herbert and Mary Gilmore (who lived in a flat across the road in Kings Cross), as well as other members of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW) who all took a respectful social interest in the now old and frail writer.

Arriving in Sydney just prior to the War, it was obvious that the depression had taken its lingering toll on the commercial theatre; by 1935 there were only two boulevard theatres operating (The Theatre Royal and the Criterion), and no major touring companies. On the other hand, a former student of Gregan McMahon, Doris Fitton, had established the Independent Theatre in 1931 and she continued presenting a repertory of plays (using the Savoy Theatre or their Club rooms at 175 Pitt Street) throughout the decade; Bryant's Playhouse (formerly Community Playhouse), with an annexed acting school, operated out of their theatre in Forbes Street, headed by actor and teacher Beryl Bryant (with her father actor George Bryant); Scott Alexander took over the helm of the New Sydney Repertory Society from Gregan McMahon at the St James Hall in 1931 (becoming the Kursaal Theatre under the same director from 1934) and performed at their premises at 36 Pitt Street; The Australian Repertory Theatre Players began working at their Club Rooms at 305 Pitt Street from May 1935; The New Theatre League (formerly The Workers' Art Club) began in 1936; and Beatrice Tildesley established an antipodean branch of the British Drama League in 1937. Similar networks of small amateur repertory company were proliferating across the country.

Leslie Rees—still Writer and Play Editor at the ABC—welcomed Esson to Sydney publicly in an article titled 'Early Repertory Days': somewhat wistful in tone he reinforced that 'Esson has been dubbed the father of the Australian repertory drama,' he wrote in *The Sydney Morning Herald*,

His visit will bring to a gradually diminishing few a fragrant remembrance of those pre-war days—which now in their perspective seem to have had a special bouquet and charm—when William Moore began his Australian Drama Nights in Melbourne and so heralded the birth of the repertory idea in this country.⁴⁵

Rees, seemingly prone to inaccuracy, was corrected for his misinformation at the time by Moore's widow Dora Wilcox (Moore died the previous November⁴⁶).

⁴⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 June 1938 p.21

⁴⁶ Bad news for Esson seemed to come in threes: CJ Dennis also died, in July 1938 (Esson read a paper in appreciation of Dennis at the FAW); and actor Tom Skewes died a month later.

It is surprising, given his life-long antipathy to both the Commercial theatre, and his lack of any real engagement with the Repertory movement (following *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*), that Esson's final play—albeit incomplete—should so blatantly reference the accepted modernist dramaturgy of a writer like Henrik Ibsen (preferred by both enterprises). And yet, bookending his career as a playwright, over two decades later after his experience with Gregan McMahon, Esson's last script is so unashamedly intended for these much denigrated entertainment providers. Perhaps it was the influence of his new friend, teacher and playwright Dymphna Cusack, whose influential network included directors like Joyce Mortlock (The Repertory Club Theatre) and May Hollinworth (Sydney University Dramatic Society (SUDS)), all associated with the proliferating range of theatres then active in his newly adopted city; or maybe it was the interest and support shown by Leslie Rees (Playwrights' Advisory Board) rekindled his play-writing ambitions, a 'last hurrah!' There is a great sense of regret and sadness in the play, no doubt a reflection of his debilitating health and breakdown of his relationship with Hilda. Whatever the case, the dramaturgical style is 'nostalgic' and old-fashioned in both form and its doleful content.

— *Lachryma Christi [Isabel] (1938)* —

DENIS. I like your flat, Isabel. It's modernist—that means a quaint mixture of the old style and the new—and the new is older than the old—it's amusing, but you've made it liveable.

Esson makes no mention of a play called *Lachryma Christi* in his correspondence. Katharine Susannah Prichard, when asked, knew nothing of it, responding to Campbell Howard in 1961:

Afraid I don't know anything about it. Never heard it discussed, & it seems to belong to the time Louis & Hilda were in New York—is not so mature in style as later work, the dialogue stiff, & cerebral, it seems to me.⁴⁷

Hilda and Louis arrived in New York in December 1916. After six months months living in a small Bohemian flat off Washington Square, they moved uptown to a larger apartment at 1947 Broadway at W66th Street⁴⁸ where they stayed for three months (leaving for London in September). Esson wrote to Vance Palmer (28 June 1917):

⁴⁷ Katharine Susannah Prichard to Campbell Howard, 26 February 1961—Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

⁴⁸ Now the site of the Julliard School Irene Diamond Building.

We have a big room in the Lincoln Square Arcade, with steam-heat, electric light, piano, bath, ice-box, elevator, etc. In the same building are two restaurants, a chop-house, billiard saloon, ice-cream parlour, shoe-shine stall, barber's shop, pawn broker's, picture-theatre, etc. And the characters include Howard Chandler Christie [sic]⁴⁹, Alex Sass (late of Melbourne *Punch*), [Reginald] Russom (artist on the *New York Times*, and a Sydney man)⁵⁰, a chauffeur, a German baroness, and many eccentric types. We have taken the room over from Sass, who has shifted across the hall. The furniture and decorations are his, and they are artistic.⁵¹

Esson knew illustrator Alex Sass both from his work on Melbourne's *Punch*, and it was Sass who illustrated Esson's short story 'The Potboiler' for *Lone Hand*⁵²; he too had only just arrived in New York, having just contributed to EJ Brady's book of verse *The Ways of Many Waters*. The view from Sass's apartment, apart from fuelling Esson's sense of isolation, was at least useful, as Prichard suggested, for providing a setting for Isobel's New York 'digs':

In Sass's room you can sit at the window overlooking Broadway. It is quite a busy spot—subway and elevated stations, six or eight streets crossing, and a ceaseless flow of traffic; buses, cars, wagons, and millions of automobiles.⁵³

In the same letter, much like his own 'eccentric' Isobel, Esson revealed that he felt 'as alien as most people from this kind of life, but yet, in cold blood, I have to admit that it is much superior to Melbourne or Sydney. We have often had discussions about Australia, but it seems that any artist or writer has to get out: there is no help for it.'

Esson otherwise attempted to insinuate himself into the literary and theatre world in New York, attending talks and plays; he also wrote on topics that ranged from American literary criticism, and the New York Theatre, admiring 'the plays which deal directly with American life' as they 'are much more interesting.' He thought that much of what he saw had 'considerable merit,' although he was never quite 'convinced.'⁵⁴ Harking back to earlier rhetoric in Melbourne, Esson admired the

⁴⁹ Christy was an American war artist and illustrator—his illustrations appeared regularly on the covers of *Scribner's*, *Harper's* and *Leslie's Weekly*; but, he was best known for his illustrations of 'the modern American woman, popularly known as 'the Christy Girl'.

⁵⁰ In his late twenties, cartoonist and illustrator Reg Russom had studied under Julian Ashton in Sydney and considered a prodigy before relocating to New York in 1916.

⁵¹ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 9

⁵² *The Lone Hand*, September 1907

⁵³ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 10

⁵⁴ 'The New York Theatre', *The Lone Hand*, 1 May 1918

repertory and provincial ambitions of companies such as Washington Square Player, but denounced the dramaturgy and attitude of David Belasco, and the Broadway commercialism that he represented.⁵⁵

Esson also reconnected with his university friend Leon Brodzky (now known as ‘Spencer Brodney’ and then editor of the *New York Times*’ monthly, *Current History*) and playwright Padraic Colum, who was such a generous company in Dublin back in 1904. In a letter to Colum (1 January 1917), Esson wrote of his marriage to Hilda, who he revealed was ‘a doctor by training,’ but admitted, interestingly, that ‘she would rather be an actress.’

Esson would have been aware of the tremendous success that Coral Brown enjoyed in the eponymous role in Gregan McMahon’s revival of *Hedda Gabler* at the Garrick Theatre, Melbourne, in December 1933. By this time Hilda’s extra-marital relationship with John Dale was common knowledge among their friends. Esson was ill and became reclusive, ‘almost living on aspirin and phenacetin’ (Netter Palmer wrote to Vance, 19 August 1930⁵⁶). Esson committed little to paper over the next six years: his letter writing fell off; there was no verse; he contributed a piece on ‘Realism in Literature’ to *The Bulletin* (13 January 1932); and there’s an unpublished essay on ‘Nature and Bernard Shaw’ (c. 1936).

A possible influence on the origins of *Lachryma Christi* may very well have been the confluence of seeing *Hedda Gabler*; news of Coral Brown’s subsequent departure to pursue her career abroad early the following year⁵⁷ (much like Isabel); the estrangement from his wife; and his illness that led to the experimental move to Sydney in 1938.

There are a number of markers in the play that suggest—in the absence of any other manuscript copies—this draft dates from late 1937 into 1938.

There are references to both Roosevelt’s New Deal and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, so we can safely assume that the writing of *Lachryma Christie* occurred after 1933. The following years leading up to the War were also considered the peak period of the modernist movement in all art forms and Isabel, as a ‘modern,’ decorates her New York and Darlinghurst flats, as Maurice tells us, with a ‘combination of the classic and modernist.’ A more definite marker, however—and indicative of Esson’s pursuit of ‘realism’—is Mrs Burke’s comment that there was ‘a first-class murder in the cabaret over the road there.’ Having moved into his flat in at ‘Holmside’ at 62B, Darlinghurst Road,

⁵⁵ See ‘Some Distinguished Playwrights—and Belasco’, *Pearsons*, April, 1917

⁵⁶ Palmer *Papers* [NLA MS 1174]

⁵⁷ Coral Browne made her amateur debut in Shaw’s *You Never Can Tell*, directed by Frank Clewlow; her professional debut was as Margaret Orme in Gregan McMahon’s production of *Loyalties* at the Comedy Theatre Melbourne in 1931.

King's Cross in late 1938, Esson would have been aware of reports of the night, a year earlier on 17 September 1937, when the 250 pound George Jeremiah 'Jerry' Lynch was shot in the Top Hatter's Cabaret, just across the road at 83 Darlinghurst Road.⁵⁸ But Esson would also need to have been *in situ* to be able to report on the view from his flat window perched on the heights of the Darlinghurst ridge looking out over Woolloomooloo to 'the Harbour, the ferries, the twinkling lights.' Coupled with the fact that roses and parrot-lillies bloom in November would suggest that the writing of the draft occurred in the closing months of 1938.

There is a manuscript bearing the title *Lachryma Christie*⁵⁹ included amongst a bundle of plays submitted by Esson's wife Hilda to Frank D Clewlow (1885-1957), the newly appointed Drama Director of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, suggesting that they might be adapted for radio. Clewlow responded to Hilda, quoting Leslie Rees's assessment and concern about the quality of *Lachryma Christi*:

... the story is all too slight and undeveloped, its passion too belted in, the practical considerations of the situation disregarded. On the air, when shorn of the fine detail of the dinner scene, I am afraid it would seem even barer and would not evoke an emotional response.⁶⁰

The conclusion, subsequently, that *Lachryma Christi* might be an early work rests, argued Peter Fitzpatrick, on an estimate of its quality, but 'behind that view is a model of "natural" artistic progression which is questionable in itself, and especially dubious in relation to a writer whose powers, most people seemed to agree, were in decline.'⁶¹

We don't, however, have the benefit of a completed manuscript. The extant papers suggest a missing 'Act II', providing only ACT I—set in Isabel's flat, Broadway, New York—and ACT III—Isabel's flat, Kings Cross, 'with Harbour views.' While clearly there is a significant gap in the narrative—the development of Isabel and Geoffrey's relationship, and her decision to return to Australia to follow him—there is also the consideration of length: currently Act I runs to 6,200 words, Act III 4,500, a total of 10,700 words—the full length *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* is 17,000 words in length—suggesting we are deficient about a third of the play, ACT II.

⁵⁸ His shooting may have been over gambling debts but in a series of articles in *The Argus*, the Melbourne gunman 'Pretty Boy' Robert Walker claimed he had shot Lynch because he was either going to be beaten up or shot, and that Lynch's death was the culmination of a quarrel which had begun in Parramatta Gaol. *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 September, 1937

⁵⁹ J D Hainsworth—in 'Some Louis Esson Manuscripts' *Southerly*, 3 December 1983 p.347—mistakenly refers to the play as *Isabel*.

⁶⁰ 22 May 1937—Anderson *Papers* [NLA MS 6946/15/21/77]

⁶¹ Peter Fitzpatrick, *Pioneer Players*, op. cit. p.310

One intriguing thematic inclusion—a reflection of Esson’s estrangement from Hilda and his move to Sydney—is also pertinent. It’s the play’s allusion to Strindberg’s one act drama *The Stronger* (1889)—the source material for Isabel’s ‘virtuoso’ audition monologue in New York. The plot is simple: while out Christmas shopping Mrs X, an actress, accidentally meets another actress, Miss Y at a cafe. It transpires that Miss Y was once a rival lover to her husband. The dramaturgy is unique, in that Mrs X does all the talking, Miss Y unable to get a word in; the husband, the subject of the discussion never appears. The triangular relationship is ambiguous, except that, while apparently secure in her marriage, it seems inevitable that the silent Miss Y may ultimately turn out to be ‘the stronger’ rival. Thematically, this may be self-reflective, as Esson’s estrangement from Hilda was to some extent a response to his wife’s growing romantic attachment to her Melbourne colleague, ‘the kind-hearted medico’ Dr John Dale.

The *Lachryma Christi* [sic] of the title refers to the ‘warm and heady ... [Neapolitan] wine ... a special favourite’ of Isabel’s, that she serves to Maurice at their first meeting; she was ‘first attracted by the name.’ Esson misspells the name *Lachrymae Christi* (Latin for ‘Tears of Christ’) in his manuscript; the term derives from an old myth that Christ, crying over Lucifer’s fall from grace, cried his tears on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius (Campania, Italy) and gave divine inspiration to the grape vines that grew there. As a religious and literary reference, it is also used by Christopher Marlowe, Voltaire and Alexandre Dumas; more likely, given Esson’s interests, is American modernist poet Hart Crane’s mystical poem ‘Lachrymae Christi’ published in his first published collection, *White Buildings*, in 1926 (with a preface by Eugene O’Neill). Crane’s poem turns on ‘inspiration’, and ultimately the concepts of ‘betrayal’ and ‘resurrection.’

In what we do have of the script, we can discern a plot that concerns an ex-patriate Australian actress Isabel (we never learn her surname⁶²) who is involved in ‘a technical marriage’ with her New York agent Geoffrey Todd, ‘an exuberant man of about forty.’ They (like Louis and Hilda towards the end of his life) live separate lives in separate apartments. Isabel’s first great success in in the United States of America was as Hedda Gabler—a convenient detail to link Esson’s dramaturgy to the great ‘realist’ playwright—the action opens with the actress scoring a new major role on Broadway and just about to go into rehearsal.

Isabel hosts a small cocktail party for a group of other ex-expatriate friends: Denis is a struggling artist (who has just finished painting a portrait of Isabel) and his fiancé, the socialite Rosalie Gregory (daughter of New York financier John Gregory, who has become Denis’s patron). The

⁶² Memories of the actress Isabel Handley, who played Doris in *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*, may have supplied the unusual name; but equally likely was Lady Isabel Vane, the unfortunate heroine of *East Lynne* revived in Melbourne in 1927 and reviewed by Esson in *New Triad*.

preparations are made by her elderly film-loving housekeeper Mrs Burke. Meanwhile, Isabel's manager (and estranged husband) arrives first to discuss business—her forthcoming Broadway opening—and gets her to sign the lucrative contract he's negotiated before rushing off for another assignment. The inciting incident of the play, occurs after the arrival of her guests and Isabel is introduced to Den's boyhood friend, Maurice Hanley, 'the famous Australian cow-boy novelist,' who has just arrived in New York and living in a bachelor flat at Washington Square. She is smitten. Over drinks and sandwiches they discuss 'art' and Australians abroad, but when Denis and Rosalie make an early exit, Isabel and Maurice remain. Their first exchange is lifted directly from Esson's life:

ISABEL. This is Broadway, Maurice.

(MAURICE goes to her side, also looking out.)

MAURICE. It's a wonderful view. It doesn't seem real.

ISABEL. A symphony of light and noise and speed—marvellous—fantastic—it gets you, somehow.

MAURICE. It's a strange world to me.

ISABEL. Look. That's life, Maurice, modern life.

MAURICE (*Turning away*). It hasn't got me. I'm an alien.

ISABEL (*Returning to room*). Nonsense.

MAURICE. This is the most urban city on earth—the most artificial. I'm too primitive for it. There is a peasant in me.

ISABEL. You haven't settled down yet. It's an exciting place, stimulating to work in. How's the writing game?

MAURICE. Pretty tough. I managed to sell a few stories to popular magazines—adventure stuff—and I thought I'd made not such a bad beginning, till an American friend assures me that I was in the very slums of literature.

Serving what is now an intimate supper, Isabel pours Maurice a glass of her favourite wine, *Lachrymea Christi*—'a wine for lovers.' As the evening progresses, Maurice impetuously embraces Isabel; 'Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?' she responds (quoting Shakespeare's *As You Like It*), confirming their mutual, albeit sudden first attraction. The significant question left to ponder at the end of the act is how Maurice is to deal with his own engagement, quickly clarifying,

MAURICE. I'm not technically engaged. I'm on probation. The family decided I should have to make good before I could be considered.

Isabel, of course, is also still ‘technically’ married to her agent! ‘How will this fadge?’ We don’t have the benefit of knowing the success, or otherwise, of Isabel’s play, nor of the development of the six-month relationship between her and Maurice and the ‘gay times in New York.’ Nor do we know the length of time that transpires between their meeting and the beginning of Act Three at which time—‘some months’ after Act Two—Esson reunites the pair over yet another supper, but this time in her Kings Cross flat (complete with Mrs Burke in attendance); Isabel—newly divorced from Geoffrey—is in Sydney to perform in a new play.

MAURICE. How’s the show going?

ISABEL. It’s a terrific rush.

MRS BURKE. We’ve all been leading a fast life. This is Isabel’s first night off.

ISABEL. You know what a new production means, discussions about lighting—drapes, props—all the damned modern mechanics—intensely interesting and important, with everybody in a tempestuous whirl, from the producer to the electrician—artists as men of action—thank God we open next week.

Isabel’s expectations of the relationship, however, are dashed when Maurice—having spent time back on station life with his family—reveals that he is engaged to be married. Isabel responds badly; ‘Passion—tempestuous passion,’ she admonishes her ex-lover, ‘seems to demand a fatal ending.’ Esson can’t resist a grossly melodramatic ending and, quoting Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, Isabel empties cyanide powder (from her ring) into her glass of *Lachrymae Christi*. After consuming the draught, she dies in Maurice’s arms, Denis’s portrait (like that of old General Gabler) bearing witness to the pathetic end. The script is insufficiently complex—what imagery there is is not exploited, nor is there adequate subtext—to invoke the ramifications of Hedda Gabler’s fatal pistol shot. Rather, it’s an ending worthy of any of the feckless melodramas of David Belasco (that Esson despised); at best, Esson conjures the pitiful end of Oscar Wilde’s Sibyl Vane (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*) the actress who poisons herself on learning that Dorian no longer loves her. ‘You’re an anachronism,’ Maurice suggested to Isabel earlier in the evening, ‘You’re living in the wrong century.’ As a portrait of a ‘modern’ woman, Isabel is no Doris Quiverton (philosophically nor politically); interestingly both Maurice and Sydney Barrett are both station owners. Esson is maudlinly self-reflective and imbues the final scene with self-flagellatory pathos. It is especially telling in the regret Esson reveals through Maurice, his failed writer’s regret:

MAURICE. I want to write a real novel some day—not yet. I’ll have to go out into the bush all alone and think quietly, and try to puzzle out what it all meant.

No stage performance of *Lachryma Christi* is recorded.

*

Leslie Rees's interest in Esson may have been calculated: 'Once upon a time,' he'd written some months earlier in anticipation of his arrival, 'we did have a sort of a theatre in Australia, but that theatre is now dead.' He was addressing the Central Cultural Council at the Feminist Club on the topic 'A Hope for Australian Drama.' 'There is a disappointingly small list of plays that deal with Australia's past,' he was quoted in *The Labor Daily*, 'and a great number of Australian playwrights choose subjects that are entirely foreign both in their settings and the writer's knowledge of them. Australia had seen a number of good poetic dramas and poetic fantasies, which proved that Australians were not lacking in satires, as has been alleged.' Apparently, Rees said 'he still believed that there was a hope for Australian dramas.'⁶³

It may be cynical to suggest that Rees employed Esson as the poster-boy for his recently formed Playwright's Advisory Board (with Doris Fitton and Rex Rents), but it does explain his effusive nostalgia.

Esson was pleased otherwise to receive an invitation to further reminisce with a lecture to the Australian English Association, 'Irish Memories and Australian Hopes': 'Something here in Sydney,' he revealed to his audience, 'I can't define what it was—it may have been a literary conversation—a discussion of a new book—some thought of the future and our national destiny—recalled suddenly and vividly days and nights in Dublin long ago.'⁶⁴ He was also guest of honour at the June studio night of the Sydney Drama Society, and asked to speak on WB Yeats at a meeting of the FOW (a memorial to the Irish writer who died in January 1939)⁶⁵.

Playwright Dymphna Cusack accompanied Esson to most functions; she became his constant companion and chaperone, and reignited some of his earlier romantic spirit by always introducing him as 'Celtic Twilight'—a description first applied to Esson by Frank Dalby Davison—a throwback to his youthful immersion in the Irish National Theatre Movement; and Esson himself had traded off the meetings he had with the major players of the movement his entire career.

⁶³ 2 April 1938 p.8

⁶⁴ The address later published in *The Australian Quarterly*, 2 June 1939

⁶⁵ This paper was published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* under the heading 'Poet and Mystic: The Man I Knew', 4 February 1939 p.21

Esson would have been interested to read Gregan McMahon's views (on the occasion of him receiving the CBE in the Birthday Honours the same year) where he drew attention to the National Drama.

In the early days of repertory we put on the best Australian play I ever saw—*The Superior Race* by the late Professor EHC Oliphant ... and Mary Wilkinson's *Wither?* ... and plays by Louis Esson and Edward Dyson and Blair Young ... then there is Katharine Prichard's *Brumby Jones* [sic] and Louis Stone's *Lap of the Gods*...⁶⁶

This was the first of a roll-out of retrospectives. Another major piece, under the headline 'Louis Essen [sic], who made "The First Original and Distinctive Contribution to Our Drama",' appeared in *The Australasian*, 15 April 1939. Here, Esson was described as providing, 'the first original and distinctive contribution to our drama,' and further, that *The Woman Tamer*, was 'the first Australian city slum play.'

He was a master of his craft and possessed of an extraordinary fund of knowledge, he is generous in his criticism and helpful advice to the literary tyro. His simple tastes run to beer and cigarettes.

An overview in *The Sun*, suggested that 'probably Louis Esson, who has given [the Australian drama] a lifetime of hard work, has done more for the cultural theatre than any other man, but [the article had] left out the culturists, being merely intended to show that the Australian effort, given an opportunity, has been a success in the commercial theatre.'⁶⁷

Esson returned briefly to Melbourne, but it was decided that Sydney was the better option—where he had been 'fairly active' according to Nettie Palmer⁶⁸—and Hilda's friend, playwright and actress Catherine Duncan, was charged with finding him a more suitable and sunny apartment. He was newly accommodated at Allenby Flats, 46 Macleay Street (corner of Greenknowe Avenue) before Christmas. Unfortunately, for Esson, Dymphna Cusack had fallen foul with the Education Department (over a long running worker's compensation case, coupled with the publication in 1939 of her controversial novel, co-authored with Miles Franklin, *Pioneers on Parade*) and was abruptly transferred to schools in Bathurst, Parkes and Newcastle. He maintained a correspondence with her but the letters contain little joy:

⁶⁶ *The Argus*, 21 June 1938 p.8

⁶⁷ 18 June 1939 p.11

⁶⁸ 28 November 1940—Palmer *Papers* [MS 1174/1/5849]

I'm sorry I have no news of this city, as I go nowhere, except on Saturday to a cricket match, and rarely see anyone. It's queer to live like a hermit. It's my own fault, for somehow I can't love my fellowmen enough and as this feeling is reciprocal I can't complain if people don't want to see me.⁶⁹

Two months later, Hilda came up to Sydney to deliver a paper at a Conference (on 'women's work') in Sydney; she attended a function at Government House on Monday 22 November and checked on Esson in his small flat—'he always loved me to come back with a "story"'—and found him 'dopey and wandering.' With all, he had contracted pneumonia. She tended him for the remainder of the week, sending for their son Hugh to join her from Melbourne. Esson 'faded slowly,' hardly spoke, but at one point, with the pain subsided by the morphia, and momentarily animated, he ruefully attempted to recite King Charles' deathbed speech about taking 'an unconscionable time in dying.'

Hugh was with Hilda in the room when Louis Esson died in the early hours of Saturday morning 27 November. He was sixty-four.

DE QUEIRÓS. I feel faint. ...

LUIS. It's the heat.

DE QUEIRÓS. Can this be the end of the quest! ... Was it only a dream, Luis?

According to Leslie Rees, the funeral service was held 'in a wretched King's Cross parlour, with crude music and blatant lighting effects—just a few people, including Katharine Susannah Prichard the novelist (over from Perth, a very old friend) and Louis's wife Hilda. It was a poor finish to a life spent more or less vainly in pursuit of fine aims.'⁷⁰ Afterwards, Hilda and Hugh, with a small cohort of friends—Frank Dalby Davison, Miles Franklin and Katharine Prichard—drove out to The Gap at Watson's Bay on Sydney's South Head and scattered Esson's ashes into the Pacific Ocean.

Esson's hometown paper, the Melbourne *Age* declared that 'with the passing of Louis Esson Australia has lost one of its finest minor poets and its first successful playwright.'

Esson made enduring literature of the bullockies, selectors, shearers, splitters, camel drivers, drovers, and their wives, and like those pioneers, he should receive praise and respect.⁷¹

⁶⁹ 1 November 1943—Cusack *Papers* [MS 4621/1/59]

⁷⁰ As quoted in Fitzpatrick, Peter, *Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson*, Op. cit. pg 340

⁷¹ 'AJH', 'An Australian Playwright ... Pioneer Dramatist', *The Age*, 11 December 1943

Esson had an extraordinary and creatively productive life in many ways, and his death stimulated a considerable literary response and retrospection. But AJH (in *The Age*) seriously misrepresents Esson's themes and dramaturgy, and his legacy. These and subsequent opinions appear to have either no real knowledge of the plays themselves—certainly exaggerating their influence—or deliberately chose to engaged in hagiography. Frank Dalby Davison believed prosaically that Esson

belongs with those whose past achievement is the touchstone of our hope for the future. In this he groups with [Rolf] Boldrewood, [Henry] Kendall, [Henry] Lawson, [Tom] Collins [aka Joseph Furphy], [Bernard] O'Dowd, Chris Brennan and others ... whose work ... remains part of our life and thought.⁷²

'M Barnard Eldershaw' [Flora Eldershaw and Marjorie Barnard] wrote that 'Esson's plays are an exploration of the Australian spirit.' Other, more recent commentators, further indulged and built Esson's dramatic and theatrical reputation. Leslie Rees, the major protagonist, thought

Louis Esson's crusade was real and significant and his contribution of first rate plays, though small, is entirely valuable in our literary and dramatic history.⁷³

The 'Culturalist's' Quest

DE QUEIRÓS. ... Storm or calm, sunlight or starlight, I must follow the quest.

The concept of a pioneering 'crusade,' to discover an Australian cultural identity through a national drama, however appropriate to the man and his personal literary pursuits, cannot be adequately evidenced from either Esson's canon, nor his verse, nor his prose (fiction nor commentary); and whatever achievements that can be allocated to the ill-fated Pioneer Players, notwithstanding the suggestive name, come after at least half a century of practical moves towards the patriotic promised land were already evident in the 'for Australians by Australians' movement in the commercial theatre in the late 19th century, especially The Australian Theatre of Alfred Dampier.

Esson's personal 'quest' was no doubt genuine and he succinctly laid out his thesis in his first piece of dramatic writing, *Terra Australis: Fragments of a Conversation*:

⁷² Frank Dalby Davison *Papers*, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales [MS 1945]

⁷³ Rees, Leslie, *Towards and Australian Drama*, Angus and Robertson(1953) p.80

THE MYSTIC. In the old worlds the mind grows languid with the burden of beauty bequeathed by the Past. Australia is not a country; it is a symbol. We look dawn-ward. For the shaping of her destiny *Terra Australis* sets forth blithe and light-hearted, singing only of the crispness of morn, the promise of spring, the eternal joy of the earth.

THE STRANGER. *Terra Australis*, was not that the Great South Land de Queirós sailed for?

I suspect, however, that Esson fully realised himself that he had failed; or in Fitzpatrick's metaphor, was unsuccessful and unable to leave any real 'footprints in the desert'; his neuralgia somehow symptomatic of this deeply felt abreaction and he chose to leave instead an apologia albeit in dramatic form.

Esson carried a longstanding fascination for the Portuguese navigator Pedro Fernandes de Queirós and his play *The Quest* chronicles six scenes of 'departure' dominated by aspiration, failure and ultimately resignation and death. The play is expressionist in both form and content, and more than any of Esson's plays arguably the most personal.

— *The Quest* (1930) —

During his stay in New York in 1918, Esson became interested in contemporary American drama. He dryly observed that 'fairly good work has been done in picturesque melodrama and social comedy ...'

writers like George H Broadhurst ... George M Cohan, Booth Tarkington⁷⁴ and a school of Broadway playwrights, ingenious writers who can contrive a neat plot and know all the tricks of the trade, but have nothing whatever to say; and above all, David Belasco, the greatest apostle of commercial American drama, who stated that the theatre was never in a better or healthier condition than it is today, or rather, was yesterday, when his own cheap and blatant productions reached the height of Broadway Fame.

This was by way of contrasting Eugene O'Neill, 'a writer of genius ... the greatest dramatist that American has produced.' A few years later, in October 1921, while in London Esson saw O'Neill's one-act play *Diff'rent*, given by the Everyman Company in Hampstead and, although he didn't

⁷⁴ George M Broadhurst (1866-1952); George M Cohan (1878-1942); Booth Tarkington (1869-1946). See 'New York Theatre', *The Lone Hand*, 1 May 1918; 'The Washington Square Players', *Fellowship*, July 1920 p. 182; 'Eugene O'Neill', *The Bulletin*, 15 February 1923

consider it a ‘great work,’ he felt along with the critics that ‘a dramatist of power and originality’ had arrived. Also during this time, O’Neill’s first volume of plays was published and it contained *The Emperor Jones* that Esson considered ‘a masterpiece.’ Of the play, Esson wrote,

the pursuit of Jones through the tropical forest, with the relentless beating of the tom-toms gradually getting louder and nearer, the visions of his past life—he is an escaped convict—his courage and quaint humour and fears and superstitions, and his desperate but hopeless effort to escape, suggested something of the inevitability of a Greek tragedy.

Crucially, the dramaturgy intrigued Esson: ‘It is almost a one-part play, consisting of eight short scenes, six of which are in monologue, a strikingly original creation in both form and spirit.’ ‘Eugene O’Neill,’ he wrote, ‘may not yet be an absolute master, though he seems destined to become one; but he possesses all the qualities, an intensely tragic sense of life, originality of conception and characterisation, a simple and flexible technique, and a marvellous style—the finest in English drama since Synge’s; natural, but rich, vivid and full of picturesque idiom.’⁷⁵

In a follow up essay, also published in *The Bulletin*, Esson articulated his views on the playwrights of ‘the ultra-modern school’—Strindberg, Andreyev and Eugene O’Neill—noting their reaction against ‘the older forms of realism or “Representation.” ‘Naturalism,’ he argued, ‘has given place to symbolism, impressionism to what is called “expressionism”.’ He admired the ‘tendency towards greater freedom of expression, both in form and content, a contempt for dogmatic formulas, and a desire for bold experiment.’⁷⁶

Esson specifically nominated the German playwright Georg Kaiser as ‘a good example of “expressionism” in drama.’ He had seen the Stage Society’s production of Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* at the Lyric, Hammersmith, in March 1920. *From Morn to Midnight: A Play in Seven Scenes*, to give it its full title⁷⁷, was summarised by Esson in his *Bulletin* article:

There is no plot, no climax, no *scène à faire*; and practically there is only one leading character, as in Eugene O’Neill’s *Emperor Jones* and the *Hairy Ape*. The story deals with the spiritual adventures of a cashier in a bank in a German town. ... Everything is disillusion, deceit, futility. He ends the comedy with a revolver shot.

The play, which has plenty of energy and a savage humour, is not as gloomy, as it might look from its mere story. Indeed, the story, the external action, is nothing. The

⁷⁵ ‘Eugene O’Neill’, *The Bulletin*, 15 February 1923

⁷⁶ ‘Expressionism’ in Drama—*The Bulletin*, 15 March 1923

⁷⁷ Kaiser’s remarkable play was written in 1912, but not performed until 1917 in a production by Max Reinhardt.

adventures of the cashier are symbolic, though the symbolism is often grotesque and rather heavily Teutonic. Instead of characters there are states of soul, instead of the representation of life there is an attempt to suggest the dynamic forces that lie beneath its surface. This is what is meant by 'expressionism,' a tendency that can be traced in most branches of modern art.

From Morn to Midnight is a good enough example of a new school of drama; but it is unlikely that it will appeal to any of our repertory societies.

The Stage Society's production was in a translation by Ashley Dukes. Esson purchased a copy from the Bomb Shop that was published by Hendersons—Esson's London publisher. Having further studied the work Esson concluded, that

From Morn to Midnight is by no means a great play perhaps it is not even a good one; but regarded as an example of a new technical method, it has considerable interest. Everybody is tired of the so-called 'well-made' play, with its pretence of unity, and its limited scenes into which every action must be fitted. The new school favours a freer structure, in the Elizabethan rather than the Greek style, seeking rather than avoiding frequent changes of scene.

It is not difficult to make the link between O'Neill and, especially, Kaiser's expressionist dramaturgy and Esson's historic chronicle play with the working title *Queirós*, but ultimately called—perhaps a nod to Kaiser—*The Quest: A Dramatic Legend in Six Scenes*. In Esson's own words, 'there is no plot, no climax, no *scène à faire*; and practically there is only one leading character.' However, Esson's 'story deals with the spiritual adventures' of a Portuguese navigator in search of the Great South Land, *Terra Australis*.

'I want to do three or four plays,' Esson wrote to Vance Palmer (29 October 1927), 'for which I have ideas and rough notes, and I must at least finish one during the summer.'

At present I'm working at a discovery play, with De Queirós as the hero. There are a few original documents extant, not many, but enough to give a clear idea of the voyage. I'm delighted with De Queirós, a Portuguese who is as idealistic and fanatical as Don Quixote. He never reaches Australia, though he is certain there is a Great South Land, but he gets as far as the New Hebrides. There are scenes in Seville, Madrid, Lima, the South Sea Islands, Panama, and on board the ship. The date is 1605. I don't know how I'll get on, but I'm hoping for the best.

At least one of the ‘few original’ extant documents was Clements Markham’s translation of *The Voyages of Pedro Fernandez de Queirós, 1595 to 1616*⁷⁸ (available at the State Library of Victoria in 1904) which contains de Queirós’ own account of his voyage in 1605. Esson confirmed soon after New Year in 1928, that ‘the new work will be *Queirós*.’⁷⁹

DE QUIROS. Listen, my good Luis, there’s no time for jesting. I’m fifty, and I feel old and sick; disease has sapped my strength, now when I need it most.—Scene Six

Interestingly, Esson was approaching his fiftieth birthday, his health in decline; his hero de Queirós was the same age and in a similar condition. But after three months, the piece remained incomplete. He tells Nettie Palmer, that

Queirós is down in notes and in my head. It should have been finished now; but it is only begun. Even when I felt all right and sat down to do a scene, I lost physical energy too soon.⁸⁰

Esson appears to have made some progress over the next twelve months, writing to William Moore, the he’d ‘just written two historical plays ... One deals with the Eureka outbreak. The other has de Queirós as hero, a romantic piece in six scenes. It begins in 1600, and I don’t think we can get further back than that.’

Despite the offer of a permanent ‘position in his own office,’ and suffering ‘delicate health,’ thirty-five year old navigator Pedro Fernandez de Queirós leaves his wife and two children in his quest ‘to sail for the Great South Land.’ Dressed as ‘a pilgrim and carrying a staff’ he travels to Madrid where, three years later, he petitions the King to fit out a fleet for the discovery of a New World; the specially selected Council of Three are convinced of his ‘knowledge and sincerity’ and grant his request. He assembles a crew in Lima, Peru, but the expedition, comprising three ships, eventually departs from Callao in 1606. Joining him on board *The Capitano* are acolytes De Vega (‘a noble, soldierly youth’), Juan (a rich, slightly dissipated, but handsome and romantic youth’) and ‘an attractive young man of twenty-one, a poet’ Luis de Belmont Bermudez.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Pedro Fernandez de Queirós [Sir Clements Markham (Trans.)], *The Voyages of Pedro Fernandez de Queirós, 1595 to 1616*, Hakluyt Society (1904)

⁷⁹ Letter to Vance Palmer, 20 January 1928, reproduced in Vance Palmer, *Louis Esson, and the Australian Theatre* (1948) Op. cit

⁸⁰ Letter to Nettie Palmer, 4 March 1928—La Trobe [MS12156]

⁸¹ The tripartite characters of ‘the soldier, the courtier and the scholar’ used in the dramaturgy of Shakespeare’s tragedies as the ‘ideal makeup of the Renaissance Prince (as suggested by Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince*). Here used expressionistically by Esson to highlight and contrast the leadership qualities exhibited by de Queirós.

Some months later, ‘drifting in the great Gulf ... somewhere in the South Pacific,’ the crew are restless and bored, resorting to gambling on deck to pass the time. The frivolous past-time is prohibited by de Queirós and the crew leader, Gonzalez, is punished and the dice and cards thrown overboard. Morale is at its lowest ebb, Juan fears reprisals from the mercenary sailors: ‘They look threatening. Let us turn back or we’ll all die of hunger.’ The soldiers agree, but de Queirós convinces them otherwise and the men return to work and ‘all seem in good humour again.’ Luis and de Queirós share their aspirations:

LUIS. I'm but a minor poet, a singer of light songs. Immortal themes are for the masters.

DE QUEIRÓS. If I were a poet I would sing of the Maiden of the South, the Unknown Continent; for, like old Magellan, who burned with love for her, I know she is so beautiful, Luis, and more desirable than the ladies of Lima who are famed for beauty.

LUIS. But the ladies of Lima are sometimes kind.

DE QUEIRÓS. My Maiden is a Spirit. Her head is veiled, and flames flash all about her, threatening intruders; but she waits for her own true lover with eager eyes, like a Moorish maiden behind her veil.

But the sight of land arrests their attention. Six weeks later, back on board and with a storm threatening, we learn that they encountered ‘only an island not the Great Southern Land’ they sought. The storm gathers, the ‘darkness ... soon upon’ them; the disappointment is palpable with blame being directed towards the Captain, now seriously ill, unable to walk. The mood worsens as Juan reports that De Vega has abandoned ship; the enveloping storm ‘rages’ and ‘darkness begins to fall.’

Nine years pass, de Queirós, ‘old-looking, sick and haggard,’ is recognised on the wharf in Panama; he empathises with a beggar but is recognisably delusional:

DE QUEIRÓS. Who are you?

BEGGAR. A poor beggar, sir. I've been long on the roads.

DE QUEIRÓS. And I too; and on the seas.

BEGGAR. I ask but a trifle for a crust and a cup of wine. ...

DE QUEIRÓS. I've travelled far, and I owe money for rent, for fares, and the hire of mules. But what's a little gold and silver. I'll gain riches to pay for all.

(Enter LUIS, who quietly watches the scene.)

BEGGAR. All I want from this world is bread and patience and death with repentance.

DE QUEIRÓS. We're both seekers, friend. Go with God.

Luis supports the once great navigator to a bench.

DE QUEIRÓS. ... People think I'm mad, mad with voyaging. But I made a vow in youth that my life would be devoted to this glorious discovery. I must fulfil my vow.

(Pause.)

My work is just beginning. *(With ecstatic expression.)* Look ... I can see it ... that lone and lovely land. ... It seems the best and fairest has been kept to the last. ...

He collapse in Luis' arms.

The play was never performed, but given the size of the cast (including a large number of supernumeraries) and especially the scenic demands required⁸² (with the expectation that the scenes are continuous, with no interval). I don't believe Esson ever intended it to be seen on stage (it would have been a scenographic test even for a major commercial producer).

The Last of the Colonial Playwrights

Personally, I can see little prospect for any play, far less the foundation of a National Drama, that is not modern. Historical convention and cloak-and-dagger romance will lead us nowhere. A dramatist must know intimately the characters and situations he writes about. Drama cannot be made at second hand. It has always been closely associated with the life of the people. And as Havelock Ellis observed, it is only by being national that one becomes international.

Louis Esson⁸³

Esson's perspective, following the performance of his first play in 1910, is sound enough as a manifesto. Leon Brodzky aspired to the same sentiment a few years earlier:

no Australian Literature Society will ever do anything unless it is animated with a genuinely Australian sentiment, not the hybrid-Imperialism which is of no use to England and still less to Australia.'⁸⁴

Esson uses the term 'modern' its adjectival sense, as 'relating to the present, as opposed to the remote past,' advocating for contemporary content and forms. The irony is that the majority of the

⁸² Two very specific interior scenes; an outdoor garden scene (with fountain); and a massive set piece that required 'a portion of main deck ... with projection of raised poop deck ... the low bulwark of the far side of the ship is seen ... a backcloth of sea and sky'; and a wharf 'with a view of the sea.'

⁸³ *The Bulletin*, 27 October 1910

⁸⁴ 'Leon Brodzky, 'The Australian Literature Society', *The Tocsin*, 16 June, 1904

plays that make up his canon are nostalgia pieces in appropriated and conventional forms. He only ever discussed the concept of Modernism' in terms of the visual arts—like those painters of the Heidelberg School or Max Meldrum who 'advocated the departure from traditional styles or values.'⁸⁵ Interestingly, it was Meldrum who considered Esson's namesake Louis Buvelot, with his supposed 'objectively truthful' rendering of the Australian landscape, that marked the close of the Colonial period in the visual arts when he died in 1888. Esson himself recognised Buvelot as 'the first real painter to appear in Australia' who belonged 'to a different class from all the other early painters.'⁸⁶ But this perspective must be assessed in terms Buvelot as a painter occupying the transition from the imperialist/colonial gaze and the inspired response to landscape by the Heidelberg school.

Both Esson and Brodzky, as undergraduates, had studied the drama. Following Esson's death, Brodzky wrote to Esson's wife Hilda from New York:

Louis was a very important influence in my life, for it was to him I owed my introduction to a great deal that has made modern literature. I first heard of Ibsen and Wilde from him, of the French symbolists and also the French painters of the Impressionist school. I am sure he was the first person to tell me of Verlaine and 'all the rest is literature.' Strange, too, it was Louis who planted one of the first seeds of Socialism in my mind when he put before me the argument of Wilde's essay, 'The Soul of man Under Socialism'.⁸⁷

Both young men were 'culturalists,' in the sense that their discourse on nationalism, particularly in terms of building a national drama, was a reaction to their reading of Europe 'modern literature' but also infused with a political (Socialist) imperative. This accounts for their—and the provincial theatre movement generally—developing an antagonism towards both the repertory theatre and commercial theatre, in particular, for their reliance on imported plays for their repertoire.

Where Esson faltered, however, was that he appeared to assume a distinction between the non-Australian play and its subject matter and the prevailing European dramaturgy: the genre and style of the work in the writing, its content and the performance. Esson, in placing so much emphasis on the philosophy of Yeats and Synge, and their Irish Nationalist Abbey Theatre model, for example, he could be accused of actually 'importing' his nationalism, at least in terms of 'the theatre' if not

⁸⁵ 'The Legend of Australian Art' (manuscript 1938), Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

⁸⁶ 'Australian Art,' *The Triad*, 1 September 1925, pg. 63

⁸⁷ 26 November 1945; quoted in Fitzpatrick, Peter, *Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson*, Op. cit. pg 25

the actual drama. The problem was exacerbated by his foolhardy attempt to infuse his own plays—based on appropriated dramaturgical structures—with local settings and characters.

The early slum and bush sketches were derivative of Lady Gregory; Shaw, Wilde, and Jerome were the prime scaffolds for building *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* (on which his reputation for many commentators rests); *The Battler* owes much to Synge; while *Mother and Son* and *Shipwreck* are products of Esson's fascination with Eugene O'Neill; Ibsen inspired *Lacryma Christi*; and, it is to Kaiser that he paid homage in *The Quest*. The three works Esson wrote in collaboration with Frank Brown, like his early slum sketches—*Mates* uses the same fundamental plot as *The Woman Tamer*, for example—never quite reach their potential as drama.

There was an inkling of something amiss in Esson's trajectory in an extraordinarily perceptive review of his collection *Dead Timber, and other Plays* (1920) in *The Australian Worker* by its editor Henry Booth:

Mr Esson handles his characters well. They move easily and naturally within their narrow range of action. The dialogue displays a sure instinct for essentials. The local colour is laid on with admirable judgment. So far so good. Everything is right—save one thing. But what a vital thing—the atmosphere!

The plays are thoroughly Australian in outward appearances—the landscape, the men and women, the clothes, the language—yet the atmosphere pervading all this is not Australian; it is something that troubles the lungs, pumped in from alien sources. ... Mr Esson is well acquainted with the literary achievements of the old world, and like most writers, at least in the earlier stages of his career, has been ensnared by tendencies and current that had a special lure of him ...⁸⁸

Campbell Howard expressed a similar sentiment some decades later; he believed that Esson's 'motivation was all wrong.'

He was motivated by patriotism instead of by an inner compulsion to express something in dramatic form. He failed to observe the CS Lewis dictum 'if you wish to write a sonnet to your lady you must not only love your lady but love the sonnet.' And while there is no doubt that Esson loved the theatre, more is required if one is to write for the theatre.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ A review of *The Woman Tamer* by HEB [HE Boote, poet and Editor] in *The Australian Worker*, 27 January 1921 p.13. Esson was consistently obsessed by what his characters wore and was a particular feature of his impressionist dramaturgy!

⁸⁹ Writing to Professor K Macartney, 14 September 1962—Campbell Howard Collection., UNE

Ironically, this is the dilemma that Esson articulated in *Heart of the Rose*, in his earliest piece of dramatic writing, *Terra Australis*. Esson's intellectual intentions were profound, but his dramaturgy failed to realise the potential. Much of the problem comes from the idea that Esson's drive was the creation of a 'new culture' where, fundamentally, the drama—even according to Aristotle—is mimesis rather than invention. The process of Federation encouraged 'separation' from both 'the past' and 'the homeland,' but in reality while the community of the federated colonies were empowered by a sense of self-reliance, they still felt strong cultural links to heritage (and collectively would continue to do so until at least the 'New Wave' movement in the performing arts that took root initially in the the late 1920s, but more radically in the 1970s, but institutionally following the establishment of the Australia Council for the Arts, and subsequently when the new 'Municipal' subsidised theatre enterprise was established).

Vance Palmer related a discussion he had in July 1916, following a lecture given by his wife Nettie at the Repertory Theatre Club about 'Provincialism in the Playwright' detailing the National Dramatic movements in Russia, Scandinavia and Ireland:

most of those taking part in it were convinced that there were two reasons why we had no hope of creating a drama of our own—we were too far away from the world's centre, and we hadn't enough people. 'Then what are you going to do about it?' challenged [Frederick] Sinclair, a friend of Esson's, and later Professor of English at Christchurch [New Zealand]. 'What plans have you for shifting this continent nearer to the world's centre? And exactly what number of people would you consider a quorum?' ... The plain fact was that the idea of a national drama was not a thing that warmed their imaginations: the occasional production of a play that had had a success of esteem in London or New York was enough to sate their not very urgent dramatic thirst. And it must be admitted that the supposition that we could evoke enough drama to keep a movement going called for an act of faith.⁹⁰

Swept up in the argument, Esson perhaps didn't realise the perverse irony of his own suggestion when he later championed visiting actor Maurice Moscovitch: 'We need a man like Moscovitch. What a director of a National Theatre he would make!'⁹¹

One of the early few to reassess—at least a portion of the canon—Keith Macartney (University of Melbourne) found that 'Louis Esson's plays, when read, are undeniably disappointing. 'There is,' he observed, 'a sense of restlessness in the many entrances and exits, and the author never seems quite able to develop a scene into proper dramatic significance!' Macartney does concede, however,

⁹⁰ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson And the Australian Theatre* Op. cit. (Preface)

⁹¹ 'Melbourne Theatre,' *The Triad*, 1 October 1925 p.52

that ‘the strength of Esson’s plays lie in their genuine attempt to express Australian life in dramatic terms. ... We see in them a desire to give Australia an individual and authentic version of that social art which would be the possession of every nation.’⁹²

Unfortunately, Macartney fails to be specific, generalising, when an analysis of the majority of the plays does not support his conclusion. Subsequently, Leslie Rees put Esson’s legitimate legacy in peril by elevating him to Legendary status, while generously forgiving the failure of the Pioneer Players as ‘mere half success.’ Rees championed the ‘classic quality of the short plays that revealed a rare sense of form and finality,’ but agreed somewhat that ‘his longer plays,’ otherwise, failed ‘in acting interest [and] brought him no credit in the theatre, though they continued to reveal a poetically sensitive and vital mind.’

Others, later in the century, like Katharine Brisbane, Leonard Radic and John McCallum assert his nationalistic drive as a ‘pioneer’ and continue to define his specific theatrical model as that of the Irish folk drama of Yeats and the Abbey Theatre group. McCallum, however, does argue that the model was ‘inappropriate’ and makes the distinction that ‘Esson’s idea of Australian-ness ... remained essentially romantic.’⁹³ In contrast HG Kippax (a theatre—rather than a literary, or academic—critic) perceived in Esson a romantic, ‘imperialist’ sensibility:

In attempting to establish an indigenous drama in the wake of *The Bulletin* nationalists, [Esson] tried to dramatise what was distinctive and ‘real’ in ... society. This concern with ‘reality’ was obsessive. To artists living in colonial society the contradictions between the ‘reality’ described in their imported reading and the ‘reality’ of their own experience were bound to be provocative.⁹⁴

Rather than start a ‘new movement’ then, to delineate and make sense of the yet undiscovered interior of Australia—‘Captain Cook discovered only the outline’—it is clear Esson was the last of the dramaturgical imperialists, especially if we accept that the colonial phase of our dramatic history—as argued by Richard Fotheringham and Margaret Williams—concludes with the Depression in 1929.

Much like his namesake Louis Bouvelot, Esson ‘painted’ the indigenous landscape with a culturally inappropriate palette (mind-set and aesthetic), his canon reveals experimentation with

⁹² Macartney, Keith, ‘Louis Esson and Australian Drama’, *Meanjin Quarterly* Vol 6/2, 1947

⁹³ McCallum, John, “‘Something with a cow in I’’: Louis Esson’s Imported Nationalism’, *Overland*, No. 108 (1987) p.6

⁹⁴ quoted in Christensen, CB, *On Native Grounds: Australian Writing from Meanjin Quarterly, August and Robertson (1968)* pg. 197

‘old world’ forms, with new world content; all with the best, but misguided intention. His canon, ultimately, must be assessed as the very ‘hybrid-Imperialism’ warned to be avoided by Brodzky.

Esson’s wife, Hilda had earlier clarified her husband's poetic, often painterly, and impressionist intentions in a letter to Nettie Palmer:

I feel that [Max Meldrum's] dictum for painters applies equally to writers. He claims only to be an interpretative, not a creative artist, to try only to render accurately and in right proportions the multitudinous variety and beauty that any scene or subject in nature presents. He says that all art has progressed clearly in one direction—It has gradually eliminated the conventional, and approached closer and closer to nature. ... In literature similarly, Louis was reflecting [Meldrum's dictum] ... gradually the conventions are being removed, the stiff plot, the hard construction, the conventional shape into which life was supposed to be squeezed.⁹⁵

Through his prose, Esson’s attitude to art and literature evolved into a determined and fascinating thesis. He confirmed his artistic objectives, and the influence of his experiences abroad, in an article, ‘Nationality in Art’, where he stated that he distrusted ‘whatever is abstract and universal’ and concurred with Synge in despising ‘anything abstract and cosmopolitan.’

What is meant by cosmopolitanism or universalism is sometimes nothing but provincialism in disguise. It is provincial to have no standards, no taste, no ideas, but to accept without thought whatever comes from abroad. ...⁹⁶

To shift the focus back to literature, Esson went on to explain that

the writer who aims at universality by selecting what he considers only large and general subjects independent of place and time, usually achieves sterility. On the contrary only the true artist can transmute the humblest material and reveal the universal and the essential in the local and fleeting. It is not the subject matter, but the spirit informing it, that creates great literature.⁹⁷

As far as its application to the drama is concerned, he has much in common with the young British dramatist, and contemporary, CK Munro, in saying that

⁹⁵ Hilda to Nettie Palmer, 23 February, 1925—Palmer *Papers* [MS 1174, Series 28, Folder 23]

⁹⁶ *The Bulletin*, 1 February 1923

⁹⁷ ‘National Literature,’ *The Bulletin*, 28 August 1924

drama deals with the essentials of human action as a painter deals with the essential patterns of form and colour, and that therefore it is no more relevant to point out that in superficial respects a play differs from the corresponding reality than it would be to point out that the number of leaves a painter has put on a tree are not the same as the number on the original tree.⁹⁸

In her introduction to *Southern Cross, and Other Plays* Hilda Esson (often Esson's editor and amanuensis), made the glum observation that 'Louis was not very lucky,' referencing what Vance Palmer had once said to her:

that there is a good deal of luck in the history of a writer; a happy theme, one that can evoke all his powers and qualities, must come along at the right time, and he must find a form that he can handle successfully.⁹⁹

But after his death the epitaphs came: 'Pioneer Dramatist'; 'Father of Australian Repertory Drama'; 'the first [playwright] consciously to define the hardening effect upon the Australian character of the stubborn land'; 'in a literary-dramatic sense, the most important dramatist Australia produced in its first one hundred and fifty years of settlement.'

While Esson certainly deserves to claim a unique tile in the mosaic of the Australian drama, he cannot lay claim to any of the honourifics applied to his career.

In reality, Esson's essential milieu was journalism. Esson's 'natural' voice—a confident, relaxed and personable voice—can be found in his weekly football commentary—as 'Centre'—for *Punch*; or in his perceptive, wonderfully evocative and detailed series of articles 'From the Oldest World' as foreign correspondent for *The Lone Hand* while travelling through India, China and Japan; or his provocative and influential observations of Australian 'institutions' for *The Socialist*; but, especially his informed and sharp-witted theatre reviews for *The (New) Triad*.

'It will be a fearsome blow,' he wrote to AG Stephens,

if I find I am only a sentimental old-fashioned romanticist like Shaw ... instead of a symbolist realist like Euripides. I am beginning to find a style—that is all—but often I slip back into old methods.¹⁰⁰

A National Drama—A Revised Origin Narrative

⁹⁸ Esson, quoting Munro in 'CK Munro', *The Bulletin*, 30 July 1925

⁹⁹ Esson, Hilda (ed), *The Southern Cross, and Other Plays* Op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ Esson to AG Stephens, 26 January 1912—AG Stephens *Papers*, SLNSW

While Conder and Streeton were carrying Australian sunshine to London, another group of landscape painters represented by J Ford Paterson, Fred McCubbin, Walter Withers, and David Davies were endeavouring to develop a national school of painting. It is difficult to see a new country with clear and unprejudiced eyes; but the aim of these painters was to put aside recollections of Europe, and to capture something of the true spirit of the country.

Louis Esson, 'Australian Art'¹⁰¹

These plays were written for the Australian stage. One of the many drawbacks to their production is that there is no Australian stage.

Arthur Henry Adams¹⁰²

'I don't know enough about life to write good plays ... but I think I know enough about the theatre to write a successful one.'

Harrison Owen¹⁰³

Adams is clearly disingenuous; Owen is smug! Both men, like Esson, were successful jobbing writers of verse, prose and drama (Harrison Owen achieving huge success in London during the 1920s). The narrative of the Australia Drama—if the shackles of prevailing historical trends [predominately male hagiography] are removed—provides an invigorating constant tug-of-war: fundamentally between the positions taken by Adams and Owen; but also between the 'Culturalists' and the Commercial theatre; between patriotism and parochialism; imperialism and decolonisation; between the achievements of both male and (highly unrepresentative) female playwrights.

Firstly, we recognise that the development of an Australian cultural dramaturgy—a colonial imperialist dramaturgy—from its inception in 1834 (when colony resident Henry Melville's *The Bushrangers; or, Norwood Vale* was premiered) was continuous for virtually a century until 1928 when the transition to the second 'modernist' new wave was marked by the publication of *The Touch of Silk* by Betty Roland and the award of the *New Triad* PlayWriting Competition to Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Brumby Innes*. The idea that Federation in 1901 somehow divided the old world from the new lacks justification and is unhelpful: Bland Holt's 'splendidly staged' production of Arthur Shirley's 'drama of the bush' *The Breaking of the Drought* at the Lyceum (Sydney) in 1902, proved that melodrama had not entirely lost audience favour locally, with The

¹⁰¹ 'Australian Art,' *The Triad*, 1 September 1925, pg. 63

¹⁰² *Three Plays for the Australian Stage*, William Brooks & Co. (1914) p.3

¹⁰³ As quoted by Nettie Palmer, *The Brisbane Courier*, 15 October 1927 p.22

Sydney Morning Herald critic noting that it ‘appeals strongly to Australian sentiment’¹⁰⁴; Kate Howarde’s melodrama *Possum Paddock* enjoyed a national and internationally successful tour after its premiere in 1919, adapted as a film, and was much revived subsequently; one of the last great silent films made in Australia was Norman Dawe’s adaptation of *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927).

The discourse surrounding a National Drama—what I articulate as the ‘By Australians For Australians’ movement—we see first associated with Charles Harpur’s *The Bushrangers (The Tragedy of Donohoe)* in 1835. When the play was extracted in *The Sydney Monitor* it boasted the subheading ‘Written by an Australian.’¹⁰⁵ A dogmatic patriotic approach, in both society and the arts, was certainly evident fifty years before the new wave of ‘nationalism’ in drama attempted by Leon Brodzky, William Moore, Euphemia Coulson Davidson and Esson, Vance Palmer and Stewart Macky with their Provincial theatre movement in the first three decades of the new century. The ‘By Australians For Australians’ movement was made overt in 1878 with the publication in Queensland of *The Australian*:

a new monthly magazine, published by Turner and Henderson, Hunter Street Sydney, and avowedly written by Australians for Australians. It professes to be ‘national’ in relation to its politics and its view of all public and social questions, and to be ambitious to place before the reading public such literary diet as they will approve, and to provide a monthly bill-of-fare that will offer something for everybody; the whole to be ‘racy of the soil,’¹⁰⁶

The first issue of *The Bulletin*—the weekly magazine popularly known as ‘the bushman’s bible’—began publication in January 1880 with a specific focus on Australian material.

The catchphrase caught on over the next decade with *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*—‘a history of Australia, written by Australians for Australians ... illustrated by Australian draftsmen, printed by Australians, bound and published by Australians’—published by The Corowa Free Press in September 1887. *The Australian Star*, ‘the Newspaper by Australians for Australians,’ had 30,000 subscribers by 1890 and boasted that

¹⁰⁴ 27 December 1902

¹⁰⁵ *The Sydney Monitor*, 7 February 1835 p.4

¹⁰⁶ *The Queenslander*, 12 October 1878; The Prospectus, issued for the ‘Political Weekly Journal,’ established by the Queensland Catholic Newspaper Company Limited, stated that it was ‘a family, social, political, literary, mining and agricultural’ publication.

the paper is managed and conducted throughout by Australians, and its success goes to show that even in the journalistic line we in this distant land can keep pace with the olde world centres of civilisation and progress.¹⁰⁷

‘Written, designed, engraved and printed in Australia, by Australians, for Australians ... and therefore The Australian National Pictorial,’ was *The Illustrated Sydney News*’s advertising pitch in 1891, encouraging its readers that it was ‘the best Australian Illustrated Paper to mail to friends at Home.’¹⁰⁸ Even Toohey’s Sparkling Amber Ale ‘both refreshing and invigorating’ was ‘specially brewed by Australians for Australians.’¹⁰⁹

Concurrently, these publications (amongst others) fuelled a growing public discourse on patriotism:

[Patriotism] should be encouraged as a thing which involves the very opposite to selfishness, namely, a true appreciation of the advantages which a people possesses—a desire to make the most of those advantages for the benefit of that people, and at the same time a kindly welcome to all who desire to share in them.

This editorial was published by the *Evening News* (Sydney) under the banner ‘Australia for Australians’ and also makes a crucial point that the current generation, by and large, were the children and grandchildren of colonists and those immigrants who arrived with the gold rush of the 1850s.¹¹⁰ ‘We have here a community, a people as completely free—in a national sense—as could well be imagined.’¹¹¹ Of course, while the ‘deliberation, consultation and debate’ about the inefficiency of the colonial system had been going on for two decades, the official move to Federation was sparked by Sir Henry Parkes rousing address at Tenterfield in 1889 calling for ‘a great national government for all Australians.’¹¹²

This social and political situation informed the development of the theatre. A commentator from *The Leader*, newly arrived in Melbourne from London, wrote, after attending a production of People’s Theatre in May 1880 wrote of George Darrell’s *The Forlorn Hope*:

¹⁰⁷ *The Australian Star* (Sydney), 8 February 1890 p.5

¹⁰⁸ Established as a monthly English language newspaper in 1853, *The Illustrated Sydney News*, when edited by John J Horrocks in 1891, could boast that it had ‘the largest pictorial circulation in Australasia.’ Advertisement published in *Evening News*, 19 May 1891, p.4

¹⁰⁹ *The Australian Star*; 28 October 1893 p.11

¹¹⁰ According to the 1881 Census, the population of Australia was 2,250,194, equal distribution of males and females;

¹¹¹ *Evening News* (Sydney), 30 July 1887 p.4

¹¹² ‘The Federation of Australia’, Parliamentary Education Office— <https://peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/history-of-parliament/federation/the-federation-of-australia/>

A piece for which its numerous admirers claim that it is none of your foreign importations or dubious ‘kickshaws,’ but a healthy, home-made article to suit healthy palates, written by an Australian for Australians, and as such giving a faithful picture of colonial manners and life. The piece was well worth seeing, and I have to a word to say against it.¹¹³

It is crucial to accept that this preoccupation occurred during the establishment and expansion of the commercial theatre sector in Australia: entrepreneurs like George Coppin, the MacMahon Brothers, JC Williamson and others were maligned, citing their lack of support for an Australian canon. In reality, with their fiscal imperatives, their primary responsibility was to both entertain the vast expatriot audience while educating the subsequent generation of ‘currency lads and lasses’ to a range of repertoire; it is no different to commercial managements in Australia today, nor to the subscriptions seasons of our major state theatre companies like the Sydney Theatre Company—in the subsidised Municipal movement—juggling the commercial demands ‘to [financially] break even’ with those of the ‘culturalists.’¹¹⁴

One vital phenomenon of our history, however, is the number of actor/manager/playwrights who staked all on the development of a local drama. One such ‘pioneer’ was Sussex born actor-manager Alfred Dampier (1843-1908) who was invited to Australia via a syndicate of local produces (that included George Coppin and Henry Harwood of the Theatre Royal, Melbourne) in 1873. His early performances included *Hamlet* and *Mephistopheles* (in his own adaptation of *Faust*). He soon formed his own company and his stage adaptation of Marcus Clarke’s novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* gained major kudos in 1886. In 1888 Dampier took the lease on the Alexandra Theatre in Melbourne, repeating early success by providing theatrical versions of Rolf Boldrewood’s *Robbery Under Arms* (1890) and *The Miner’s Right* (1891). That his repertoire was predominantly locally written plays (albeit many his own)—the only producer to do so—lead him to designate the venue in his marketing as ‘The Australian Theatre.’ In advance publicity, Dampier’s ‘manifesto’ was reported in *The Herald* (a significant document in our foundation narrative):

In advance of his reappearance at the Alexandra Theatre, Mr Alfred Dampier has issued a manifesto, which is well worth of consideration, since in it he avows his intention to do his best to give expression to Australian dramatic art. It has been his study, he tells, whenever practicable, to produce original dramas written by Australians for Australians, and performed by a representative Australian company.

¹¹³ *The Leader*, 22 May 1880 p.6

¹¹⁴ Of the 16 plays listed in the Sydney Theatre Company’s 2023 Subscription Season 9 are imported, 3 are adaptations from Australian novels, 3 are new Australian plays, 1 is a new Australian musical.

He has undoubtedly done all that he claims, and if sometimes the drama have been a little crude they have certainly not been wanting in power. They have all been admirably acted and tastefully mounted. Indeed, the scenery and accessories of *Robbery Under Arms*, his latest venture in this line, were not only remarkably effective in themselves, but were likewise so characteristically Australian, as to be perfect revelations of the great possibilities the manager of the future will have at his command. In preparation for his forthcoming campaign, Mr Dampier tells us he has ... various pieces by Australian authors under consideration. This is very good news, because it shows that with the increase of population, which bids fair to give us the size of a nation, we are developing national characteristics. We have no wish to see every theatre in Australia eternally occupied in the performance of Australian drama, and we are perfectly aware that we derive great benefit and pleasure from the production of European pieces and the visits of European artists. But we are all proud to know that a large contingent of clever Australian actors is to be found in our dramatic army, and are gratified to see that Australian literary energy is pushing its way to the front. Mr Dampier is devoting his talents to uses which will gain him universal sympathy, and when he returns to the Alexandra Theatre on Saturday, a great deal of genuine national feeling will underly the general wish for his success.¹¹⁵

‘While relying on traditional devices of the form,’ wrote Dampier’s biographer, John Rickard, ‘these melodramas used a range of stock Australian characters and revealed an aggressive, nascent nationalism.’¹¹⁶

‘Pioneering ... writer and producer’ Catherine (Kate) Howarde (1864-1939), is frustratingly denied acknowledgement in current histories, I suspect because she was a theatre polymath—one of Australia’s few female theatrical entrepreneurs—and her diverse activity was difficult to separate and classify, and that her influence bridged the 19th and 20th centuries; her success running across both theatre and film as producer, actor and writer. Born in London, she migrated with her family (including 4 siblings) to New Zealand and married aged 20 to a Christchurch musician William de Saxe. Her Australian debut as an actress was in Bella Sutherland’s Vital Spark Combination in Thomas Williams’ *Turn Him Out* at the Olympic Theatre in April 1886. She established the Kate Howard Dramatic Company a decade later and toured extensively, particularly in rural areas—what she called ‘bushwacking’— performing community halls and her own tent (her Pavilion Theatre). She travelled abroad in 1906, survived the San Francisco earthquake and subsequently worked as a

¹¹⁵ *The Herald* (Melbourne), 11 November 1890; at this time, *The Herald* reported that Dampier had also ‘dramatised Mr Rolf Boldrewood’s story, *The Miner’s Right*, and written two dramas, entitled, *For Love and Life* and *This Great City*. He has matured and elaborated a drama entitled *The Morning of Life* by Mr McNeill.’ This is the first reference I’ve found to a local dramaturgical process.

¹¹⁶ Richard, John, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, ANU, 1972— <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dampier-alfred-3360>

theatre critic in New York (where she remarried, to Scottish comedian Elton Black) before spending time in London. Back in Australia from 1909, the Kate Howarde Company returned to regional touring nationally and presented seasons at the National Theatre in Balmain. Her major canonical writing for the stage include *The White Slave Traffic* and *Why Girls Leave Home* (1914), and *When the Tide Rises* (1919). Her ‘much-talked-of’ comedy-drama *Possum Paddock* premiered at the Theatre Royal (Sydney)—after an ‘out of town tryout’ in Armidale—6 August 1919. Written, produced and presented by Howarde, the play concerns the rivalry between two outback cockies, Dad McQuade and old Dan Martin, over a 50 acre paddock (there is also ‘a love affair between the young people’). Howarde’s advertising made a point of highlighting the production’s credentials:

KATE HOWARDE
Presents
THE ALL AUSTRALIAN COMEDY-DRAMA
‘POSSUM PADDOCK’
Interpreted by a Specially Selected Cast of
AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS
Headed by the Brilliant Australian Comedian
Mr FRED MACDONALD
(The Inimitable Dave of *On Our Selection*)
Written in Australia
By an Australian
Acted by Australians
Scenery Australian
Full of Australian Sentiment
Fuller of Australian Comedy
With a tremendous appeal to the Australian Heart
Now waiting the endorsement of its first
Australian Audience¹¹⁷

Howarde adapted the play for film; she lead the cast and—controversially—co-directed with Charles Villiers. The film was released in 1921.

It’s discernible, then, that the pocket of Provincial Theatre activity—from Brodzky’s early clarion call in 1902, to the demise of the Esson’s Pioneer Players in 1926—was a small, experimental subset of a much more extensive narrative. The Repertory movement—that began with Bryceson Treherne in 1908 and progressed by Gregan McMahon—on the other hand, quickly developed during the the 1930s and 1940s—in the post-colonial period—while the commercial

¹¹⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 August 1919 p.18

theatre was durable against the economic reality of both the depression and the impact of emerging (Hollywood) film industry.

The trajectory of the Repertory movement and the subsequent push for a National Theatre, however, would divert dramatically with the appointment of HC Coombs as Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction in 1943; his priority was domestic policy ‘aimed at full employment and rising living standards.’ A friend of Leslie Rees from their youth in Western Australia, Coombs was then appointed as Governor of the Commonwealth Bank in 1949, Chair of its Board in 1951. Coombs was interested in the arts, and encouraged by Rees, was instrumental in setting up a National Theatre Trust—to be named in honour of the new Queen’s recent visit ‘The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust’ (AETT)—(Coombs was founding Chair from 1954-1967). The National Trust was established with £100,000 capital ‘to develop drama, opera and ballet in Australia.’ The current AETT website carries the byline: ‘Supporting the Arts in Australia by Australians and for Australians since 1954.’ The Trust established the first ‘subsidised’—or Municipal—theatre company, The Trust Players—under director Robin Lovejoy—in 1959. In due course, the Trust initiated the establishment of the Australian Ballet and the Australian Opera, and the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA). The Trust issued its first grants in 1968. The creation of the Australia Council for the Arts, the Commonwealth Government’s arts funding and advisory body was announced in 1967 by Prime Minister John Gorton.

*

‘The drama of a country is the expression of its national spirit,’ a critic noted in the *Sydney Mail* in 1913. ‘It has grown from the hard crudities of melodrama. The outcome of a struggling civilisation has advanced past the rough farces and unskilled comedies of a vital, yet uncultured, community.’

Change is in a large measure the result of conflict, which alone can give the drama any real value, and not only conflict between character and character, but the conflict that ensues on the unfolding of life. ... Life has become more complex (or so it seems) and dramatic form, while becoming more simple in expression, is become more complex in reproduction, and more difficult to understand. ... The tendency of art, despite its affectations and its vagaries, is towards perfection, just as is the trend of civilisation. It were quite reasonable if a doubt were expressed as to the existence of any real dramatic art in Australia. By ‘art’ is implied ‘rational.’ And, although a drama indigenous to the soil, as is fostered by the Abbey Theatre

in Dublin, has not yet arisen here, evidences of a certain distinctive drama have been manifested from time to time.¹¹⁸

In his pioneering sociological study *Women in Australia*, Norman Mackenzie expressed what he saw as the reality of the situation in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century: ‘Australia is more “a man’s country” than other industrial democracies.’¹¹⁹

In her monograph *The Real Matilda* Miriam Dixson also attacked the exclusion of women in traditional myths: ‘there are ... no women in the pantheon of Australian gods.’¹²⁰ But, there certainly were many female playwrights who have been overlooked in the chronicles who deserve to be elevated to ‘the Antipodean Valhalla’ if only, at the very least, to provide an equitable cultural balance and a perspective on ‘Change’ and ‘the conflict that ensues on the unfolding of life’ in Australia.

The documentation of our history, and hence our ‘national spirit’ at this time was written by men—T Inglis Moore, Vance Palmer, Leslie Rees—all colleagues of Louis Esson and, in one way or another (editor, collaborator or critic), personally impacted by his progress.

If, in the prevailing narrative of the Australia drama, the patriarchy of Louis Esson is challenged, then a revision that honours the dramaturgical experimentation and unique cultural perception of a cohort of neglected female (as well as some additional male) playwrights and theatre makers emerges. The ‘change’ their ‘distinctive’ plays document renders more complex our understanding of the emerging nation; of course, it more inclusively completes the social tapestry.

Katherine Russell, for example, was an accomplished actress and theatre polymath, sharing the stage with both her husband (Alfred Dampier) and daughter Rose; theirs was a co-dependent, creative and managerial partnership; she is barely recognised, however, for *The Phantom Ship*—her successful dramatisation of *The Flying Dutchman*—that opened at the Alexandra Theatre on 26 December 1890. ‘The piece was well played,’ *The Age* responded, ‘and was received with marked favour by an audiences that crowded every portion of the theatre.’¹²¹ Russell was equally adept, if over-looked, as a costume designer, *The Adelaide Express* noting that ‘the costumes [for *The Three Musketeers*] ... are historically accurate and appropriately handsome.’¹²²

¹¹⁸ *The Sydney Mail*, 20 August 1913

¹¹⁹ Mackenzie, Norman, as quoted in Dixon, Miriam, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia*, UNSW (1999) p.21

¹²⁰ Dixson, Miriam, *The Real Matilda: woman and identity in Australia, 1788-1975*, UNSW (1999) p.11

¹²¹ *The Age*, 27 December 1890 p.8

¹²² *The Express and Telegraph*, 8 May 1899 p.2



Playwrights: Sumner Locke • Katharine Susannah Prichard • Mary Wilkinson • Millicent Armstrong

In *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century*, Sheila Rowbotham references the novel, *On the Threshold* (1895) by British socialist and feminist Isabella Ford, that depicts ‘a new woman heroine struggling with the claims of family, the decision of whether or not to marry, and her yearning for an active, independent life.’¹²³ Rowbotham quotes Dora Montefiore (another feminist socialist) who described the *fin-de siècle* new woman in 1898 as

*Pausing on the century's threshold
With her face towards the dawn ...*

It’s a striking image—Janus-like—in that the position of the portal gives the viewer the opportunity to look both back as well as forward. Montefiore coincidentally is also quoted by Susan Pfisterer, in her book *Early Feminist Traditions in Australian Theatre*, where she appropriates the ‘threshold’ imagery in support of the existence of a new genre that she nominates as ‘New Woman drama.’¹²⁴ Pfisterer singles out playwrights Mrs ES Haviland and Katharine Susannah Prichard as primary contributors, but attention must also be paid to Mary Wilkinson and Millicent Armstrong.

Sydney poet Mrs ES Haviland (*née* Birdson; aka ‘Philip Dale’] is credited with the three act comedy *On Wheels* dates from 1896. It concerns a unique family in crisis: a widowed rector meets with financial problems, and in an attempt to solve the predicament, his two daughters Concord and Prudence (both ‘New’ women) decide secretly that they’ll enter a bicycle race for the prize money. Meanwhile, a long-lost uncle ‘Moggs’ arrives, befriends his young nieces and assists the girls in

¹²³ Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century*, Verso (2010) p.2

¹²⁴ Susan Pfisterer, *Early Feminist Traditions in Australian Theatre*, University of New England (1996) p.78; ‘As defined by the mainstream media’—according to *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*, OUP (1995) ‘The New Woman (1890-1920) was a revolutionary social ideal at the turn of the century that defined women as independent, physically adept, and mentally acute, and able to work, study, and socialize on a par with men. The popular image of the New Woman was related to a new consumer and leisure ethic, to health and dress reforms, to rising pressure from woman's suffrage, to gains that women had made in their access to higher education, and to expanding service and public sector occupations.’

their pursuit. They win the race, but in the mashup it is discovered that Moggs is in fact a woman *en travesti*, further she is a thief (on the run from the police) and a bigamist, and has in the meantime married the rector's sister, Aunt Amanda de Grey. Pfisterer argues that the play intended 'to attach the very core of gendered security in late nineteenth century Australia ... and to scrutinise gender systems.' In reality, Mrs Haviland was engaging in a common theatrical trend popularised by EE Rice's burlesque *Evangeline*—a national tour presented by the MacMahon brothers in 1891—and major American stars like John F Sheridan (best known for the character Widow O'Brien he created in George Fawcett Rowe's musical farce *Fun on the Bristol*) and his wife Alecia Jourdain who was a male impersonator.

The play charts the daughters' rejection of their strict upbringing and their feminist desire for adventure, to be educated, have financial independence and enjoy freedom of choice; the women characters have principal roles in this comedy, and both the 'on wheels' metaphor, and the more dramatic cross dressing 'uncle,' are dramaturgical devices that are unorthodox and provocative, the playwright herself a perfect example of the 'New Woman.'

I can find no record of a public performance of *One Wheels*, but a private production is likely to have been given at the Sydney School of Arts (where Haviland's husband Cyril was Secretary, known to regularly provide 'amusing and interesting' limelight entertainments).

Writer and political activist Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969) was born in Fiji (during the worst hurricane known there for years). The family moved to Launceston, then Melbourne where her girlhood friends included Hilda Bull (Mrs Louis Esson) and Nettie Higgins (Mrs Vance Palmer). She became a cadet journalist, but after the suicide of her father in 1907 she went to London. Returning home to a job on the Melbourne *Herald*, she was initially hesitant about supplying her short play *The Burglar*, requested by William Moore to be presented at his Australian Drama Night in 1910. Moore was originally going to direct the piece but when Katharine went to the first rehearsals, she recalled, writing to Campbell Howard that

she found that Bill Moore had—to her horror—changed all the entries and exits, and was having production problems: he tore his hair out and said it wouldn't work and he didn't know what he was going to do with this play, it just wouldn't work. So I said, very well, I'll produce it myself, and I did.

The Burglar is not so much a companion piece to *On Wheels*, but given its existence at this time, it does serve as a post-suffrage, New Woman treatise: now that women have the political power and some of the freedoms, how do we use it? The plot revolves around a young thief who has been

funding his education robbing Toorak mansions. He is caught during the act by Sally, the ward of the owner of the house. The two engage in a lengthy political discussion. Sally is faced with a dilemma: she is torn between her pity for the young working class burglar attempting to make his way in the world; and her responsible to guard the jewels entrusted to her care. ‘The play was obviously a vehicle for conveying socialist principals,’ wrote *The Herald* critic, ‘There are some long speeches, in which the sordid picture is revealed on one side, the discontent of the young lady is conferred on the other.’ Notwithstanding the tepid critical response, the dramaturgy is audacious; the polemic timely; the production a significant historical marker (especially if compared to Louis’s ‘slight sketch’—*The Woman Tamer*—that was presented on the same program). Back in London Katharine wrote two curtain raisers for The Actresses’ Franchise League: *Her Place* (1913) and *For Instance* (1914). Her novel *The Pioneers* (1915) won top honours in the Hodder and Stoughton Empire Literature Prize and made into ‘a picture film’ *The Pioneers* (1916) film directed by Franklyn Barrett and released in March 1916; in a remarkable achievement of early ‘multi-platforming,’ she adapted an episode from the novel for performance by The Pioneer Players—*Pioneers* (1923) (and later again, a three act version (1944)); the Players also presented *The Great Man* (1923) (a comedy dealing with the frustrations of parenting). She married Ric Throssell and they moved to Western Australia in 1920; her two plays later in the decade were *Bid Me To Love*—a love triangle and adultery set amongst the fashionably rich in the Perth hills—and the critically and culturally important *Brumby Innes* (1928).

Another writer who appeared to eschew her early dramatic potential in favour of the novel was Brisbane born Helena Sumner Locke (1881-1917). Her family moved to Melbourne in 1888; where her elder sister Lilian was a suffragette and gained some notoriety as ‘one of the earliest women leaders of the labour movement in Australia.’ Sumner’s first poem ‘The Rose and the Cloud’ was published by *The Native Companion* in 1907¹²⁵ and she contributed short stories to *The Bulletin*. The following year her first play, a four act comedy-drama, *The Vicissitudes of Vivienne*, was produced by Harry Hill and premiered at Her Majesty’s (Melbourne) on 26 September 1908. The widow, Vivienne Clarence, embezzles £14 while working as secretary to a philosopher; the theft discovered, she repays the sum by suggesting she work as a charwoman in the philosopher’s house. Observing her her single-minded resolve for reparation, the philosopher’s love for her is rekindled and ‘he makes a declaration of his passion late at night through the telephone.’ *The Bulletin* hailed Sumner Locke as ‘Australia’s pioneer-ess in serious stage work.’¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Included in the same volume was Esson’s short story ‘The End for the Pilgrimage’

¹²⁶ *The Bulletin*, 6 August 1908 p.24

The following year, ‘she put down her hat-boxes,’ explained *The Bulletin*, ‘pulled out her hatpins and charged her fountain-pen’ and collaborated with Stanley McKay on the short tragicomic play *A Martyr to Principle*, produced at the Theatre Royal in September 1909¹²⁷. The play related the story of a young man, recently engaged, who discovered he has consumption.

He broods upon the thought that he may infect his wife. ... So on his wedding morning a thought is hatched and he takes poison. ... The best-man is also in love with the wife and the audience is left to nourish the hope that the cheater’s bride will soon have a second offer to face the altar.¹²⁸

Sumner Locke turned full time to prose with the publication of the highly successful novel *Mum Dawson, ‘Boss’* (1911) and its sequels. She went abroad in 1912 and worked as a journalist in London but returned to tend to her ailing mother in 1915. Another novel, *Samaritan Mary*, was published the following year. She married her childhood sweetheart, accountant Henry Logan Elliott in January 1917, but he was called up for War duties and left for Europe two weeks after the wedding.

At Bert Bailey’s request, Sumner Locke adapted *Mum Dawson, ‘Boss’* for the stage. The setting is the bush, and deals with the fortunes of a family of settlers who have been persuaded into a get-rich-quick scheme. It was produced by the Bert Bailey Dramatic Company and opened for a 12 nights’ season at the Criterion Theatre Sydney on 22 January 1917. Bert Bailey played Dawson, the old selector, Lilius Adeson ‘amply filled the role of Mum Dawson.’

Miss Locke has struck an entirely new idea in *Mum Dawson*, it being quite unlike anything that has yet been seen in an Australian play. The crisp, racy dialogue is in Miss Locke’s very best style and the characterisation vivid and strong.¹²⁹

The same publication (erroneously) noted that *Mum Dawson, ‘Boss’* was ‘the first play written by an Australian woman to be produced by an Australian management,’ yet another example of the fickle press. Locke died tragically in childbirth the following October (her son was novelist and playwright Sumner Locke Elliot). In their obituary, *The Triad* vividly suggests what a great loss her talent was to the development of the Australian drama:

¹²⁷ The other play on the program was *Niobe*; the profits from the event went to St Martha’s Industrial Home.

¹²⁸ *The Bulletin*, 2 September 1909 p.22

¹²⁹ *The Brisbane Courier*, 6 January 1917 p.12

Sumner Locke had an acute sense for rustic character and rustic types. Too many writers in Australia depict bush-life as either screaming farce or grim and gloomy tragedy. Sumner Locke was not one of these. Her perspective was true. She perceived the tragedy of bush-life, but not in the bizarre and abnormal shapes which present themselves to the morbid school of Australian novelist. Her pictures had balance and light and shade. She realised that bush life is not all 'weird melancholy,' as the late Marcus Clarke described it. She had an eye for other aspects—for the charms he beauty, and the humour of the bush, and the homely sentiments of the people and having broad sympathies her work was always infused with human interest.¹³⁰

Geelong born Mary Wilkinson (1887-1971) made her theatre debut with a 3 act play called *Wither?* in 1914, directed by Gregan McMahon. While not necessarily a 'suffragette' play, it riffs on feminist issues, particularly the 'equality of treatment in the workplace.' The heroine is a young woman who, having surpassed her male colleagues at University, discovers that she is handicapped in the workplace by her sex. Ellis Hillson, forced to give up her tertiary education when her father loses his job, takes a position as a typist. Unable to gain promotion in the firm—due to the progression of less qualified men—her frustration, along with others in the typing pool, is explored in a pivotal scene where the issue is raised during the typists' lunch hour when they discuss 'the position of women clerks and the injustice of their not receiving equal pay for equal work with men.' To make matters worse, Ellis is also fated to suffer from the inconstancy of love which 'places a pretty face and a coming-on demeanour before a constant purpose and a restraining sense of duty.' The production was a huge success for the MRTC when it premiered at St Peter's Hall on 18 July 1914. 'The play breathes sincerity and felling,' declared *The Leader*.¹³¹ 'It says much for the dialogue of a play,' *The Herald* added 'with but little dramatic action, and for the way in which it was presented under the direction of Mr Gregan McMahon, that it held the grip of the audience that thronged the hall, and at times raised it to enthusiasm.'¹³² The play was then mounted by Annie Horniman's Manchester Repertory Theatre in England in late 1915. Her follow up play was *The Lighthouse Keeper's Wife*—the incipient insanity endured by the keeper's wife, Mary Boake, induced by long years of loneliness on a sea-girt island—presented by the Mermaid Society in 1922; and *The Whirlpool*—an intergenerational comedy about women in a Melbourne factory—the following year.

¹³⁰ *The Triad*, 10 November 1917 p. 15

¹³¹ *The Leader*, 25 July 1914 p.17

¹³² *The Herald*, 20 July 1914 p.7

Millicent Armstrong (1888-1973) was one of the first female graduates from the University of Sydney achieving First Class Honours in English (1910). Her first short story was published in *Theatre* in 1914 (under the nom-de-plume 'Emily Brown'). Millicent left for France in early 1917 where she contributed to the War effort, attached as an orderly to a unit of the Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service stationed at the ancient Abbaye de Royaumont, Asnières-sur-Oise. She was sent to the advance hospital at Villers-Cotterets, Aisne, which was taken over by the French military and became Hôpital Auxiliaire d'Armées No. 30. She was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* for her bravery in reaching wounded soldiers while under fire. After the War she took up 400 ha near Gunning, NSW—the result of the Returned Soldiers Settlement Act—and became a farmer. She quickly completed three short plays based on her experiences: *Fire* (about a returned soldier) was given third place in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* play competition in 1923 (shared with Euphemia Coulson Davidson's *Sorell*). The scenario is quintessentially of the bush, and psychologically impactful. Etta Fitzgerald, with her brother Hugo, own a property in western NSW (near Warren). She is being courted by neighbour Harry Carruthers, but the relationship is threatened when Hugo invites a new neighbour, Michale Glen, to call—Glen had served in Hugo's battalion during the war in France. On arrival, Etta's new maid, Crystal Rose, is overcome with violent emotion at the sight of Carruthers; Glen promises to befriend Crystal, giving her refuge in his hut. We later learn that she had been deserted by her lover. Etta becomes fond of Glen, but is horrified to learn that he has been in prison for murder, but she is not aware of the full story, and becomes engaged to Carruthers. Later, however, Etta witnesses a conversation between Carruthers and Crystal, which reveals that her fiancé was in fact the author of Crystal's tragedy. At that moment, news arrives that a bushfire is threatening the property. Etta and Crystal tend to tired fire fighters waging a losing battle against the fire at Glen's hut. Hugo and others carry in a dying man, who has been burnt in rescuing another. It is Glen. There is a touching scene between he and Etta that not only exonerates Glen, but bonds them both.

Armstrong's *Drought* (a desperate farmer suicides just before the rains come) followed soon after and was awarded the 1923 Rupert Brooke prize (and given a production in London, winning the International One-Act Play competition; *At Dusk* (concerning two sisters living in the Australian bush; their contented lives change with the unexpected arrival of a mysterious man from their past) was published in William Moore's Australian one-act play collection in 1937, and subsequently performed by the Sydney Drama Society (23 July 1938). Her other plays include *The Unfortunate Archibalds* (1931), *Nina* (1936) and *As the Moon Sets* (1958). She wrote one unpublished novel *Five Pretty Sisters* in collaboration with her sister, Helen.

These women contributed significant plays, providing a unique perspective on a range of issues that contributed to the fabric and culture of the first decades of the 20th century. The theme of Davidson's play *Sorell*, for example, concerns the inherited 'vices' of alcoholism and gambling; Armstrong's plays *Fire* and *Drought* foreground both the immediacy of the impact of war and of the Australian landscape. In both these cases, the women were writing contemporaneously with the quaint 'Celtic Twilight' nostalgia of the Pioneer Players' ill-fated program. The value of these 'new women' playwrights needs to be reestablished, affirmed and championed as crucial cultural documents in the history of a national drama and intrinsic to a new foundation narrative.

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When she published the posthumous collection of Esson's plays, *Southern Cross and other Plays*, Esson's wife Hilda asked a number of his friends to contribute 'Memories and Impressions.' EJ Brady met Esson at Fasoli's Bohemian cafe in 1906; Esson was just establishing himself as a poet, and not even contemplated writing drama at this time. 'In less than an hour,' recalls Brady, 'we cemented a friendship which lasted nearly forty years.' Brady's most telling contribution to Hilda's book, however, was the revelation that when he 'came to know Louis Esson's mind' he

realised that his genius would never lift him in this country to get great heights of popularity; but he would make a valuable contribution to its literature. ... Detached from the mundane, he followed an ideal that brought him small recognition, but perhaps a greater personal satisfaction than he would have gained from profit or applause.¹³³

Paul Carter, in *The Road to Botany Bay*, examining 'the poetic constitution of colonial society' believes that to historians

Australia was always simply a stage where history occurred, history a theatrical performance. It is not the historian who stages events, weaving them together to form a plot, but History itself. ... Such history is a fabric of self reinforcing illusions. But above all, one illusion sustains it. This is the illusion of the theatre, and, more exactly, the all seeing spectator. ... Nature's painted curtains are drawn aside to reveal heroic man at his epic labour on the stage of history. This kind of history, which reduces apace to a stage ... might be called imperial history.¹³⁴

¹³³ 'Memories and Impressions', *Southern Cross and Other Plays* Op. cit. pp.215-216

¹³⁴ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Faber and Faber (1987) p. xv

As far as the narrative of Australian drama is concerned, the physical stage was the platform on which colonial culture and identity was reflected back at the changing society. The theatre's diverse demographic over the period—1829-1929—is an organic and symbiotic evolution of the national identity. The 'industry' of the theatre had its genesis in an amateur movement that by the 1840s evolved into a commercial enterprise that was consistent in providing 'entertainment' for willing audiences throughout. The Repertory Theatre—a world-wide phenomenon of the modernist 'culturalist' movement, notionally (but mistakenly) antithetic to the ambitions of the commercial entrepreneur—contributed a new dramaturgy that was dense and sophisticated, provocatively accelerating generic and stylistic 'change' in not only *what* Australians saw but *how* Australians saw it. The Provincial theatre, the concern by Edmund Duggan, William Anderson, Alfred Dampier, Leon Brodzky, William Moore, Euphemia Coulson Davidson, Louis Esson and others to build both a 'national theatre' and a national drama was a breakout, stand alone venture that embraced the commercial, repertory and provincial sectors. That the movement perceptively failed until the great Municipal subsidised agenda was established after the Second World War doesn't negate its importance nor influence.

The hagiography perpetrated by our dramatic historians, placing far too much weight onto the small frame of Esson's engagement has obfuscated the larger picture of the origin narrative of our theatre; certainly demonising the commercial enterprise and ignoring the contribution of a wealth of female playwriting.

An enormous contribution by Louis Esson— A legacy of drama, verse and erudite prose—nonetheless remains:

LUIS. ... Honour to de Queirós, the last of our long and glorious roll of sea-men. He has not failed. He has opened the way for great future discoveries. Oh, Great South Land, the *Terra Australia* he so sought and loved—I believe his vision was true. ... Others will follow the quest.

(CROWD stands round reverently, as LUIS bends over DE QUEIRÓS.)

Curtain.

— APPENDIX A —

Louis Esson: Plays
A SCHOLARLY EDITION

All the typing was done by Hilda on a portable Remington and later a Corona. She was a self-taught typist as the scripts attest. Louis always used a very soft pencil (4B).

Hugh Esson¹

A Scholarly Edition

The scholarly editor's basic task is to present 'a reliable text': 'accuracy with respect to texts, adequacy and appropriateness with respect to documenting editorial principles and practices, explicitness and consistency with respect to methods.'² 'Serious readers,' G Thomas Tansell confirmed,

will wish to know that the texts in front of them are reliable ones, and they will wish to have available for each work a textual record indicating its textual history and listing the variant readings that have been present in significant texts of it. The task of the scholarly editor is to prepare such editions, placing before readers the evidence necessary for an intelligent approach to each work.³

However, Tansell also provides our first hurdle, explicitly stating that 'Works intended for publication should be printed so as to reflect their author's intentions.'⁴ 'I am never anxious to get plays published,' Louis Esson himself wrote to Vance Palmer:

A play is meant to be acted, not read. I regard the text only as a musical score. That is why I avoid comment as far as possible. Directions should be purely practical; anything else is, strictly speaking illegitimate. Shaw tried to make a play compete with the novel as a book, but it can't be done. The forms are quite different.⁵

In the current circumstance we deal with theatrical scripts and, as confirmed by Tom Stoppard a play is 'an event rather than a text that one is trying to convey. Text is merely an attempt to describe an event'⁶

In other words, the written play texts are 'pre-texts' to performance. Cast lists, stage directions, scenic division as well as character names and dialogue (and, indeed, the actual layout of the dialogue as written) and, crucially, punctuation, together form 'the script' from that the director and actors (and other creatives) derive 'meaning.' Just as Shakespeare uses half-lines and colons to offer textual clues; as much as Tennessee Williams differentiates between the ellipsis and the dash; or, Pinter makes the distinction between a 'pause' and 'silence,' Esson also exhibits a peculiar syntax and expression of action to supply information to the performer.

A pre-text is typically the foundation of the performance, eg the play script (including dialogue and stage directions). It is generally recognised that 'drama [pre-

¹ Louis Esson's son Hugh to Professor JD Hainsworth, 18 November 1982—Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

² 'Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions', Modern Language Association (MLA) (2011)—<https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Publishing-and-Scholarship/Reports-from-the-MLA-Committee-on-Scholarly-Editions/Guidelines-for-Editors-of-Scholarly-Editions>

³ Tanselle, G Thomas, "Texts of Documents and Texts of Works", *Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing* Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia (2003) p.5

⁴ Tanselle, Op. cit. p.15

⁵ Esson to Palmer, (21 March, 1921) in Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Georgian House (1948) p. 32

⁶ Tom Stoppard as quoted by Purse, Nigel, *Tom Stoppard's Plays: Patterns of Plenitude and Parsimony*, BRILL (2016) p. 554

text], as fixed and recordable, is the part of theatre most accessible to examination and analysis'.⁷

A significant component of this compilation involves, in the first instance, my transcription of each of Louis Esson's plays, and then to apply a consistent approach to 'textual criticism.' That is, to employ the range of insights provided by scholars working in the field of editorial theory to determine the appropriate 'copy text' from which a reliable, final edition might be determined.

Scholarly editing is the use of the insights provided by textual criticism to produce new documents ... containing critically constructed texts that draw readings from any relevant documents and from the editors' own thinking.⁸

Scholarly editors agree that their goal is to discover exactly what an author wrote and to determine what form of his work he wished the public to have. If the edition is to be a work of scholarship—a historical reconstruction—the goal itself must involve the author's 'intention'.

Author's intentions change over time, however; and although the apparatus of a critical text can record the readings that reflect such changes, the critical text itself can only represent the author's intention as it stood at one particular time.⁹

Because of a range of circumstances, Esson's authorial intentions did change over time. In some cases it was philosophical or political (*The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*), often there were 'outside influences' (*The Southern Cross*).

It was customary for Esson to write his first drafts in long-hand in pencil; following his second marriage, his wife Hilda (*née* Bull) would then provide a type-written draft (in which she would often make 'corrections' or 'changes'); Esson would tacitly acknowledge these changes and make further emendations (often in black pen)—his handwriting is distinctive, occasional undecipherable. In one particularly case, the much reworked manuscript of *The Southern Cross*, Esson was prompted to completely excise an entire scene and rework the ending because Hilda (and others, including Nettie Palmer and Katharine Susannah Prichard) considered the form and content of the scenes too closely resembled a contemporary play on the same subject (*The Forerunners* by Euphemia Coulson Davidson).

The choice of 'copy text'—that text judged to have 'presumptive authority'—is therefore the central decision for the critical editor to make. In the case of Louis Esson, there are both traditionally published texts (over which Esson had final editorial control), performed (published) texts and texts in manuscript (with multiple layers of emendation, whose chronology needs to be determined); there are also drafts of plays in manuscript. There will be points at which the editor has insufficient evidence to make reasoned textual decisions and must fall back on the readings of a text judged to have 'presumptive authority'. Of the various approaches to the selection of a copy-text that are conceivable, the rationale that has had the greatest influence in the last quarter-century—indeed, has shaped the modern editing of literary works—is the one formulated in 1949 by WW Greg.¹⁰ While Greg's approach emerged from his work on Elizabethan drama it is a useful guide to formulate a rationale for editing heritage Australian drama in manuscript. What Greg provided was

⁷ Quoted in Sant, Toni, *documenting Performance: The Context and Process of Digital Curation and Archiving*, Bloomsbury Publishing (2017) p. 175

⁸ Tanselle, Op. cit. pg. xiv

⁹ Tanselle, Op. cit. pg. 18

¹⁰ Greg, WW. 'The Rational of Copy-Text', *Studies in Bibliography* (Vol 3), Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia (1951)

a rationale for selecting, and then emending, a basic text in those cases in which the choice was not made obvious by the historical, biographical, bibliographical or linguistic evidence available.

An editor requires some guiding principle by means of which they can maximise the chances of adopting what the author wrote and minimise the chances of incorporating unauthorised readings into their text. In Fredson Bower's words, the task is 'to approximate as nearly as possible an inferential authorial fair copy, or other ultimately authoritative document,' or, following Greg's theory 'will produce the nearest approximation in every respect of the author's final intentions.'¹¹

As editor I made judgments about the author's intention on the basis of all the available evidence; the strength of those judgments, in turn, depended on my accumulated historical knowledge and literary sensitivity.

The job of a scholarly editor, therefore, can be stated as 'the exercise of critical thinking in an effort to determine the final intention of an author with respect to a particular text.'¹²

My editorial task was not to 'improve' upon the playwright's decisions, even when I believed that the author made an unwise revision. An editor's judgment is directed toward the recovery of what the author wrote, not toward an evaluation of the effectiveness of the author's revisions.

The scholarly editor will amass all the evidence he can find bearing on each textual decision; but, whenever the factual evidence is less than incontrovertible, his judgment about each element will ultimately rest on his interpretation of the author's intended meaning as he discovered it in the whole of the text itself. What controls the editor's freedom of interpretation is his self-imposed limitation: he is concerned only with the intention which his knowledge of the author and the period allows him to attribute to the author.¹³

Necessarily, my critical edition required an apparatus to efficiently inform the reader of both the 'reliable copy text' but also detail the various emendations made in the process of writing. This information highlights the dramaturgical process and often points to literary allusions and other external influences on the development of the work. For example, in the development of *The Quest*, Esson was heavily reliant on *The Voyages of Pedro Fernandez de Queirós, 1595 to 1616*, translated and edited by Sir Clements Markham, Hakluyt Society (1904) then available in the Melbourne Public Library (as it was then known) and the choices he made in selecting incidents (and in some cases dialogue) is a fascinating indication of his methodology.

The Apparatus

There is no question, then, in critical editing, of any concealment or distortion of historical evidence: by consulting the notes a reader can always reconstruct the textual features of the relevant documents.¹⁴

For accuracy, it is crucial to place before the reader the evidence that underlies my textual decisions. To make clear exactly what emendations I've made in a particular basic text and what other variants exist in other relevant texts I use the following Critical Apparatus:

¹¹ Bowers, Fredson, 'Textual Criticism', *The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, (1970); see 'Textual Criticism', in James E. Thorpe (ed.), *The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, New York (1968) pp. 23–42

¹² Tanselle, Op. cit. pg 29

¹³ Tanselle, Op. cit. pg 43

¹⁴ Tanselle, Op. cit. pg. 15

1. Prefatory notes explaining the primary source of the text [published or in manuscript]; the context of its writing; description of the editorial principles—including authority employed—followed to arrive at the 'copy text'; the textual history of the individual work, and any special problems that emerged from the application of those principles to that particular historical circumstance.
2. Record of 'Variant readings' at the foot of the page.¹⁵ The format includes:
 - a) A footnote number to locate the variant in the text
 - b) The portion of text to which a note applies
 - c) This is closed by a right bracket (]), after which is provided
 - d) The list of variants, each of which is followed by the source in which the variant is found (A, B or C).
3. End matter or explanatory notes (including definition of obscure words, identification of historical allusions; variant readings (if otherwise too long for footnotes), plus other historical and linguistic information); and, reference to relevant subject matter in Louis's correspondence, prose or verse.

The layout for the presentation of each of the play texts has been standardised to a contemporary style based on tradition:

Act and Scene Headings— bold roman;

Stage directions—indented in italics; in parenthesis;

Character names—All Caps; full stop followed by single space;

Dialogue—justified left; left indent.

Accidentals¹⁶ have been corrected and standardised to the format. Foreign words and words underlined for emphasis in the manuscript are italicised.

¹⁵ As I believe that the variant readings are crucial to a dramaturgical analysis, I use footnotes to enable comparative readings. This is contrary to the tradition of an 'uncluttered' edited text as espoused by Fredson Bowers (who preferred the critical apparatus as endnotes).

¹⁶ A collective term invented by WW Greg, now widely used to mean 'the punctuation, spelling, word division, paragraphing, and indications of emphasis in a given text—things 'affecting mainly its formal presentation,' as he put it. 'The Rationale of Copy-Text', *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1951)

Terra Australis

Fragments of a Conversation

Background

Louis Esson was introduced to publisher Thomas Carlyle Lothian (1880-1974) through his association with Fasoli's café

Lothian arrived in Australia with his father John in 1888. Reaching the age of twenty—after working for four years at Cole's Book Arcade in Melbourne, and learning the fundamentals of the book trade—he joined his father's business representing British publishers distributing in Australia (Walter Scott, amongst others). Lothian's first job was to travel Australasia pitching to booksellers. By late 1905, he was trading under his own name as an educational publishers' representative, but soon saw an opportunity in what was an otherwise small field in publishing: EW Cole; Whitcombe & Tombs; and George Robertson the major players.

Lothian was attracted to literary people and frequented the societies formed to discuss and promote their works. In November 1905 he heard Bernard O'Dowd read part of his new poem *The Silent Land* to the Literary Society of Melbourne.¹ Lothian offered to publish it, and others poems, in a small collection. There was a volley of correspondence over the next few weeks.² He proposed 'the half-profit system,' retaining publishing rights for seven years (after which time all rights would revert to the author). But by then, he wrote, 'I hope that we shall have other matters between us, and both be satisfied with our mutual contract.' O'Dowd agreed, and encouraged Lothian's venture, referring to 'the stagnation that has for many years affected publishing energies in Victoria'.³ O'Dowd then selected additional poems and made constructive suggestions regarding the typeface and cover. Printed by DW Paterson Co, the resulting 8vo booklet was ready for Christmas 1905. Its recommended selling price was one shilling

On the strength of the volume's success, Lothian took offices in the Australian Building, 49 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne and set about an ambitious publishing program for 1906. Fortuitously, a fellow tenant in the building was the Commonwealth Press Agency that promised 'Everything connected with the Art of Publicity.' The business was part owned by journalist, editor and poet Edwin James [EJ] Brady (1869-1952) who had himself only just arrived in Melbourne.

Brady was born in Carcoar, New South Wales, the son of Irish parents. In his youth he spent time in Washington, USA, during which time his father, a policeman, fought in the Civil War. Back in Australia in 1881, young Brady completed his education and worked as a clerk for *Dalgety and Co* on the Sydney wharves. He was 'let go,' however, when he refused to act against the maritime strike in 1890. He then joined the Australian Socialist League. Over the next decade Brady wrote articles for a range of publications including *Truth*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Freeman's Journal*, and was the editor of the weekly broadsheet *The Arrow* from 1896. *The Bulletin* began publishing his verse from May 1891, and his first volume of poetry—*The Ways of Many Waters*—appeared in 1899 (he was thirty years old). For the next two years Brady took time out, travelling (by covered wagon) up the east coast of Australia heading to the Gulf of Carpentaria; he was 'in search of adventure and creative inspiration.' His trip unfortunately stalled at Townsville due to the drought. From 1901, he settled in Grafton on the NSW north coast and acquired a part-ownership in *The Grafton Grip* (newspaper), which he edited. His second volume of poems—*The Earthen Floor*—was published by the *Grip* in 1902. It was here he met his life-partner Norma Lynda Dalby. The couple settled in Sydney in 1903 to enable Brady to embark on another business venture: he established the

¹ *The Argus*, 23 December 1905, p. 4

² The letters held in The Lothian Publishing Co. Pty Ltd *Papers*, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria

³ O'Dowd to Lothian, 16 November 1905—The Lothian Publishing Co. Pty Ltd *Papers*, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria

Commonwealth Press Agency, and in the first year of operation issued 'an illustrated book, entitled *Sydney Harbour*, by Mr EJ Brady. The illustrations are artistic productions, and the letterpress teems with information and is descriptive without being fulsome.'⁴ He also took the editor's chair at a Labor newspaper, *The Australian Worker*; stepping down in September 1905 in favour of making regular contributions as a freelancer. A year later Brady moved his agency to Victoria.

Lothian's first literary journal, *The Native Companion: An Australian Monthly Magazine of Literature and Life*, was launched in January 1907; its editor was Bertram Stevens (1872-1922). Stevens was an 'up-and-coming' editor having abandoned a career in the law to work full time in the publishing industry.⁵ Production and communication was immediately problematic as Stevens was working remotely from Sydney. Nonetheless, he chose the title and designed the cover for the journal (the artwork completed by DH Souter⁶), and established its contents format (to include 'reprinted literary gossip, book-news, prose and verse from the Old World, and original work.' What they hadn't counted on was the competition from similar magazines: *The Bookfellow*, was instigated by AG Stephens; and, founded by JF Archibald with editor Frank Fox, *The Lone Hand*—recognised as 'a sister publication to *The Bulletin*'—was also launched in May.⁷

The first edition of *The Native Companion* gleaned good notices, the *Adelaide Advertiser* noting that the journal 'starts its career with a very diversified list of topics, some original and others selected from standard and contemporary literature. As a beginning it makes a good impression.'⁸ Despite Stevens corralling a strong list of contributors, advertising proved elusive and the journal struggled.⁹

Brady, meanwhile had settled into Melbourne literary life and was a regular at Fasoli's café in Lonsdale Street, 'the headquarters and rallying-point of all literary and artistic life in Melbourne' (including Louis Esson).¹⁰ According to Brady, it was over dinner at Fasoli's that Lothian offered him the editorship of the failing *Native Companion*. Bertram Stevens, apparently, 'withdrew gracefully.' The formal partnership agreement was drawn up in May with Brady's first issue (Volume 2) to appear in July. The deal entitled Brady 'a half share of profit and a free page to advertise his business,' but Lothian 'retained sole financial and literary control, and free advertisement on up to ten pages (or more with payment by agreement).' 'Mr EJ Brady takes over the editorship of *The Native Companion* from Mr Bertram Stevens,' the *Freeman's Journal* was quick to report.

Under Mr Stevens the publication was certainly literary, but scarcely representative of current writers. Mr Brady has infused his spirit of energy into his task, and promises to turn out a periodical brimful of current literary interest, and representative of the best Australian writers. Mr Brady is well known to *Freeman* readers as the author of some stirring Irish verse. ... The price of the magazine is to be raised to sixpence, and Mr Brady (who, though a New Souths Wales man) is now living in Melbourne, will considerably enlarge its scope. *The Native Companion* will

⁴ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 18 November 1903, pg. 16

⁵ Steven's early publications included John Farrell's *My Sundowner and Other Poems* (1904); George Essex Evan's *The Secret Key and Other Poems* (1906); and *An Anthology of Australian Verse* (1906).

⁶ David Henry Souter (1862–1935), artist and journalist; contributed cartoons and illustrations to a range of publications including *The Lone Hand* and *The Bulletin* (where he was lead cartoonist for over thirty years).

⁷ Bertram Stevens would edit *The Lone Hand* (1912-1919)

⁸ The *Adelaide Advertiser*, 16 February 1907, pg. 13

⁹ Lothian also launch the trilingual magazine *Trident* in May 1907 edited by Walter Murdoch, its readership was the educational sector.

¹⁰ 'The Death of Mrs Kate Maggia of Fasoli's Cafe', *The Herald* (Melbourne), 21 June 1929, pg. 6

contain 'bright short stories, descriptive articles, artistic line drawings, literary criticism, book talks, personal sketches, cheerful verses, national politics, and other special features.' Contributors will include Bernard O'Dowd, Louis Esson, Randolph Bedford, Roderic Quinn, and other writers [Frank Morton, Beatrix Tracey; Sumner Locke, 'Sydney Partridge' [Mrs Hal Stone], 'Kodak', [EF O'Ferrall], 'Furnley Maurice' [Frank Wilmot], WM Whitney and Mabel Forrest.]; and Mr Brady, in the July issue will begin the story of his great drive through Australia, when, in a covered wagon, he travelled over 3,500 miles of fertile and beautiful country, taking pictures by the way. We are sure that his activity in such a cause deserves a substantial response from Australian Readers.¹¹

Esson's contribution to the first edition was the short story 'The End of Pilgrimage' about a group of Australian artists living in the Latin Quarter in Paris 'who came [to Rogerson's atelier in the Rue de Seine], two or three nights every week, to draw, to hear a little music, or to discuss all things in the world of art and life.'

Needless to say, many of the writers and illustrators—Alex Sass, Percy Benison, Jack and Dora Sommers, Lionel and Percy Lindsay, Ita Rentoul and Laurie Taylor; Ruby Lindsay and Blamire Young (who illustrated the covers)—were Fasoli 'Bohemians.' Sumner Locke (Helena Sumner Locke Elliott) was both a contributor and assisted Brady in the office. All submissions were Australian apart from the inclusion of nineteen year old New Zealander Katherine Mansfield¹². It was appropriate that the first issue was launched at Fasoli's on Tuesday 30 July 1907. 'A famous night ... at the King Street place¹³ celebrated the coming out in a new form of a little literary monthly—*The Native Companion*,' recalled writer and public servant RH Croll (1869–1947).

I was told that everybody would have to 'do something,' so I wrote some verse ...
But I need not have bothered, there were enough of the well-known of the writing,
artistic, musical and dramatic worlds to have provided programmes for several
nights without calling on anyone else. What a crowd there was! We had scarcely
room to ply our knives and forks, and as the wine went down the voices went up,
until all West Melbourne must have known there was 'something doing' at Fasoli's.¹⁴

By the time the second edition appeared in September, Lothian brought Herbert Nathaniel Straus¹⁵—a lawyer introduced by Brady—into the enterprise as a third partner. But the journal struggled to find a market. 'The magazine,' as Katharine Susannah Prichard recalls, 'did not survive the gay ways of its creator and editor. A rumour spread that when its business affairs were on the rocks, he and his partner went off on a spree and got somebody to announce to creditors that they

¹¹ 'The Bookworm's Corner', *Freeman's Journal*, 20 June 1907, pg.27

¹² Kathleen Mansfield Murry (1888-1923). Having just returned from schooling in England, her submissions to *The Native Companion* were made the pseudonym 'K Mansfield'; this was her first fee paying prose and Brady was her first professional editor.

¹³ When Vincent Fasoli retired in 1905, he left the management of the establishment at 108 Lonsdale Street, in the more-than-capable hands of his daughter, Katherine, by this time married to Nerino Maggia (a civil engineer who worked for the Romanian Government, and later laid out the bend and Ballarat tramway systems). In 1907 she sold out to Lorenzo and Louisa Camusso, and moved to new premises at 140 King Street. The building had been a private hotel under various proprietors since 1860 and known successively as the Welsh harp, the West End gin Palace, the All nations, the Rose of Denmark and, at this time, the West Melbourne Hotel.

¹⁴ Croll, Robert Henderson, *I Recall: Collections and Recollections—1939* [<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks15/1500211h.html>]

¹⁵ Herbert Nathaniel Straus (??-1950), trained in law, first appearing as a commission agent, later simply as an investor, with interests chiefly in finance and real estate. A member of a family prominent in Manchester's Jewish community, his nephew was the novelist, bibliographer and private printer Ralph Straus (who visited Melbourne in 1907).

were dead.¹⁶ Indeed, following the December issue—unable to secure adequate advertising—Lothian, advised by Straus, closed the enterprise. Lothian, however, was determined and *The Native Companion* was quickly replaced by another, this time (prudently) a quarterly literary magazine published in a limited edition of 500 copies; it was to be edited by William Mitchell (well known at Fasoli's as 'The Mystic'). Esson provides a quick pen sketch of Mitchell in his overview of Melbourne's 'Cafe de Nuit' [aka Fasoli's] for *The Bulletin* titled 'The Night Hawks' Retreat':

Melbourne is not a late city. Like London, it 'douses the glim' somewhere about midnight. ... But we be busy folk, slaves of the day's work. All things revolve in the light o' the sun. Except some stately John and some late and delaying drunk, hardly an alien soul can be seen poaching on the night-hawks' preserves.

'What about supper?' observes The Mystic. The motion is put and carried. We leave the Hall of Dialectics.

'Isn't the night lovely?' exclaims a Damosel of the Crayon. 'Why do people ever go to bed?'

... Through the luminous misty buildings rise huge and mysterious; all harsh outlines are softened by the magic of night. ...

'Hang the coffee-stall! Let's go to Guido's,' remarks the Busy Journalist. 'That's the only place for supper.'

The Red-Headed Sport relates two of his youthful adventures at his famous hash-house. The company is impressed.

A glittering window starts out in the darkness. This is the Night Hawks' Retreat, a highly popular all-night restaurant. We find the place in full swing. Guido accords us a joyous welcome. The fire blazes; pots and pans rattle; steaks are being grilled, eggs boiled, sausages fried; customers bawl their orders. The interesting proprietor, a short, powerfully-built, tawny skinned, humorous Dago, leans over the counter and shouts, 'All-aright, give er bloke-a er chance.'

Our Mystic contends that a supper should be composed as a complete whole, all details being chastened and subdued to preserve the general harmony. No dish should stand out in bold relief. It should be a thread, the necessary complement to what preceded it, the gracious introduction to what is to follow. The Red-Headed Sport is too busy making good with the Crayon Damosel to heed this subtlety, and the Busy Journalist tries to talk Homeric Greek to Guido. 'Righto'—Guido rushes to attend to clamorous customers.

... The Mystic pays. He always does. That's the sort of mystic we appreciate.¹⁷

Esson paints Mitchell as a generous, socially sophisticated (perhaps affected) host; confident, affable but controlling. Stuart Sayers, in *Thomas Lothian and his printers*¹⁸, referred to Mitchell as 'a minor poet and aesthete' who 'was intensely influenced by French symbolist poetry and by the role of the poet-prophet.' (Mitchell, within a few short years, would wreak a considerable damage on Esson's life.)

The Heart of the Rose

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways ...
Come near; I would, before my time to go,
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:
*Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.*¹⁹

¹⁶ Prichard, Katharine Susannah, *Child of the Hurricane*, Angus and Robertson (1963). Prichard also recalls speculation that Brady has 'fled to Sydney' or 'committed suicide.' As it transpired, Brady apparently went on a 'drinking spree' and then a hiking trip through East Gippsland to Mallacoota.

¹⁷ Louis Esson, 'The Night Hawks' Retreat', *The Bulletin*, 1 August 1907, pg.43. Mitchell was the second son of David Mitchell (formerly of Rakwana, Ceylon).

¹⁸ Sayers, Stuart, *Thomas Lothian and his printers*, Victorian Printing Historical Society (1990)

¹⁹ Yeats, WB, 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time', *The Rose* (1893)

Mitchell's inaugural issue of *Heart of the Rose*²⁰ was released in December 1907. Sayers believes it was 'a remarkable publication, lavishly produced, but too precious to survive.' The theme was certainly 'contrived,' and its contents responded to both the romantic nationalist revivalist tendencies—the Celtic Twilight—of its editor as well as the Socialist 'radical aesthetic' of Bernard O'Dowd²¹ whose 'prose excursion' 'Morgana Mine and Other Realities' puts Lionel's Lindsey's frontispiece—"The Edge of the World"—into a context, and introduced its readers to the themes of the publication and its contributors; Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver refer to the essay as 'a manifesto for the journal's poetic vision of Australia, drawing directly on Verlaine's image of the poet as a spirit of the air.' 'O'Dowd,' they continue,

offers a delirious, panoramic vision of a country that is literally possessed by its poets, whose spirits seem to flow through the places they inhabit. As it does so, it creates a unique literary canon that the journal then absorbs into itself, allowing *The Heart of the Rose* to produce a kind of indexical relationship to the landscape, and to a national literature.²²

'Mr O'Dowd is a lawyer, the Parliamentary draftsman to the Victorian Government,' Esson wrote some years later (reviewing O'Dowd's inclusion in Walter Murdoch's *The Oxford Book of Australian Verse*), 'he is also a Socialist, an economist, an aesthete, a mystic.' Of his poetry, Esson thought O'Dowd had

affinities with [William] Blake and Walt Whitman, and in his personal influence, with the Irish poet-economist 'AE' [George Moore, 'The Mystic']; and he is as moral and didactic as Mr Bernard Shaw. He preaches what he calls 'poetry militant,' and holds that the real poet must be an Answerer of the real questions of his age. So he deals with politics, religion, science, and social reform, subjects usually regarded as unfit for poetic treatment. He is a *vates* [prophet] rather than a *poeta* [poet].²³

²⁰ With Mitchell as editor, Lothian published four 'themed' and individually titled volumes in this series [*The Heart of the Rose*, *the Book of Opal*, *The Shadow on the Hill* and *Fire o' the Flame*] (December 1907–October 1908) each with a limited print run of 500 copies. Esson's second contribution was with his poem *Evening Hymn to Krishna*, published in Vol 1 No 4.

²¹ Bernard Patrick O'Dowd (1866 – 1953), poet, activist, lawyer and journalist. Apart from O'Dowd's connection to Lothian, he and Louis mixed in the same literary and political circles through both Fasoli's and the Victorian Socialist Party. Active as a lecturer with the Victorian Socialist League from about 1900, O'Dowd and Louis were a founding members of the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP) in 1905, O'Dowd assisted with editing its paper, *The Socialist*.

²² Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver, 'Journals and Literary Aesthetics in Early Post-Federation Australia, JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature —<https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/viewFile/9928/9816>

²³ Louis Esson, 'Australian Poetry' [review of *The Oxford Book of Australian Verse*], *The Observer* (London), 20 October 1918

Paul Verlaine²⁴ is represented with 'Ars Poetica' (1882), as the final entry in the journal (in a fresh, albeit prose, translation by 'Owen Roe O'Neil' [aka Nettie Higgins]²⁵) bookending O'Dowd's platform:

Music before all else! And let your music be the irregular, which is vaguer, and melts into the air, being nowise hampered or circumscribed ... Music still, music ever! Your verse should be the winged. Something that is felt to flee from a soul on departure for other skies, other loves. It should be the good Fortune that is shed abroad not the fresh morning wind, bearing the fragrance of mint and thyme—all the rest is literature.

Even by the time of Esson's death, *The Bulletin* looked back on *The Heart of the Rose*, and particularly O'Dowd's bathetic profundity, as 'buoyant, sincere, earnestly attempting to give a European dignity to an Australian literature then chiefly concerned with the Horse; but so mannered in style and inflated in tone as to read almost comically today.' Further noting that

the notion of the Centre not as the 'Dead Heart' but as the Australian Olympus is good critical sense as well as good patriotism ... but he did not realise that, by using the native idiom and by avoiding, as far as possible, imported imagery, Paterson in verse and Lawson in prose were—as he was not—practising what he so enthusiastically preached.²⁶

The other prose pieces offered in *Heart of the Rose* were [Hugh] McKay's 'Argo and the dreamers', AT Strong's²⁷ extended essay on French poet 'Charles Baudelaire' (a major influence on Verlaine), and GA Lloyd's paragraph 'The Heart of the Rose'; the remainder of the contributors (Enid Derham²⁸, John Le Gay Brereton²⁹, Jessie Mackay³⁰, Sydney Jephcott³¹ and FS Williamson³²) provided responses in verse; Esson chose instead—and provocatively—to include a short scene in dialogue, *Terra Australis*. The form was not unusual in newspapers as short fillers, but demonstrates Esson's inquisitive capacity to appropriate new literary forms when the opportunity was offered.

²⁴ Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), French lyric poet; first associated with the Parnassians and later known as a leader of the Symbolists. With Stéphane Mallarmé and Charles Baudelaire he formed the so-called Decadents. Louis references Verlaine a number of times in his commentaries, but quotes an anecdote in his piece on Irish-American editor, novelist, short story writer, journalist and publisher Frank Harris (1855-1931) (*Fellowship*, September 1921):

[Harris] had a kindly feeling for the memory of Oscar Wilde, the most whimsical, delightful person, he said, and the greatest talker of his time, a greater talker than Meredith. He liked too, Ernest Dowson, who has few admirers nowadays. Instead of writing of Verlaine, he interviewed Madame Verlaine. 'It is useless,' he said 'to write a criticism of Verlaine, whose poems will be an essential part of the culture of every educated Frenchman. Nobody will want our opinions; but perhaps the future would be interested to know how the great poet appeared to his wife.' Harris took great trouble over this article, but the result was slight. Madame had little to say about Paul, and her opinion of him as a husband was not high. In *JM Synge: A Personal Note (Fellowship)*, April, 1921, Louis revealed that '[JM Synge] liked Anatole France for his 'curious personality,' and I believe, Pierre Loti; of the symbolist poets, he cared greatly only for Verlaine.'

²⁵ Janet Gertrude 'Nettie' Palmer (née Higgins) (1885-1964); she and Vance Palmer met in 1909; they married in London in 1914. Nettie was a close friends with both Katharine Susannah Prichard and Hilda Bull. Higgins published under a number of pseudonyms: 'Shalott', 'L' and 'Owen Roe O'Neill' [Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill] (1585-1649), Gaelic Irish rebel commander.

²⁶ 'Celtic Twilight', *The Bulletin*, 23 December 1942, p. 2

²⁷ Sir Archibald Thomas Strong (1876 – 1930), scholar and poet; a long-term literary critic for the *Herald* (Melbourne) newspaper.

²⁸ Enid Derham (1882–1941), poet and academic.

²⁹ John Le Gay Brereton (1871-1933), literary scholar and writer.

³⁰ Jessie Mackay (1864–1938) New Zealand poet, journalist, feminist and animal rights activist.

³¹ Sydney Jephcott (1864-1951), Australian poet.

³² Francis Samuel Richardson (1865-1936), poet and educator.

Based on the classic device associated with the 'Socratic dialogue'—a prose 'conversation,' usually with Socrates as a character—it was popularised in the nineteenth century in England by Anstey Guthrie (1856-1934) through his *vores populi* in *Punch*. 'Dialogues', however, were in evidence in Australian publications from the 1840s.³³ Many were witty reflections on social customs, other dialogues were political, philosophical or didactic. You can see the influence in the extended dialogue cartoons championed by *The Bulletin* later in the century.³⁴

Terra Australis

To respond to Mitchell's brief for inclusion in *Heart of the Rose*, Esson adopts the poetic attitude of the Celtic Twilight in a pseudo-dramatic form invoking, not the classical 'Olympian' symbolism of O'Dowd, but the cartographic conception of Australia as *Terra Australis*, the 'South Land'—referred to as *Terra Australis Incognita* ['Unknown South Land']—imagined by the map-makers of the middle ages to have existed in the southern hemisphere. Clearly, Esson had a political and philosophical point to make and was conscious of the range of views on the subject at hand; he was drawn to the form of the dialogue as the most effective way of articulating three distinct points of view. In the manner of writers like Bernard Shaw³⁵, each character carries a specific rhetorical perspective; the argument personified. The form was exploited by 'expressionist' playwrights such as Frank Wedekind (1864-1918), August Strindberg (1849-1912), Oskar Kokoshka (1886-1980) and, later, Samuel Beckett (1906-1989).

Copy Text

Louis Esson, 'Terra Australis', *Heart of the Rose*, [Volume 1, Number 1], 9 December 1907.

³³ "The Celebrated Dialogues', *The Observer* (Hobart), 3 October 1945; 'Steam Communication, A Dialogue', *The Courier* (Hobart), 17 March 1856; 'A Dialogue', *Freeman's Journal*, 29 September 1877; 'A Dialogue of the Tea-Table', *West Gippsland Gazette*, 4 December 1900

³⁴ Tom Durkin (1853-1902), for example.

³⁵ Cf. Higgins, Pickering and Eliza, in Shaw's *Pygmalion*; Shaw's didactic approach to characterisation explained in his preface 'A Professor of Phonetics'.

Characters

THE HOST
THE MYSTIC
THE STRANGER

Setting

The hut, Lazy Creek.



'The Edge of the World' (Frontispiece), *The Heart of the Rose* (Vol 1 No 1) by Lionel Lindsay

ACT ONE

(*The hut, Lazy Creek.*)

THE STRANGER. ... This blue night sky is charming. Even gum trees lose their gloom. A strange country, Australia. One misses only the charm of the Past.

THE HOST. What do you mean by the Past?

THE STRANGER. The human past. Australia has been born too late in the world's history ever to become a beautiful country. All beauty, says Carducci, dwells in the Past. Australia has no past. I mean no great epochs like Periclean Athens, Florence under the Medici, like England in Shakespeare's time. It has no romantic glamour, legends nor folk tales, castles, abbeys, nor battle-fields—no Louvre nor Vatican; with all its beauty of Nature it is an empty country.

THE HOST. Empty? It's stuffed, stuffed with worn out things—novels, plays, pictures, castoff fashions. The Prometheus of the Australian Imagination is fettered to the mountain of British Fact.

THE STRANGER. But you have no classics, no old masters.

THE MYSTIC. Therein lies our salvation—this very isolation, this landscape so suggestive ...

THE STRANGER. The Past exists, having existed. The Future is nothing.

THE MYSTIC. In the old worlds the mind grows languid with the burden of beauty bequeathed by the Past. Australia is not a country; it is a symbol. We look dawn-ward. For the shaping of her destiny *Terra Australis* sets forth blithe and light-hearted, singing only of the crispness of morn, the promise of spring, the eternal joy of the earth.

THE STRANGER. *Terra Australis*, was not that the Great South Land de Queirós sailed for?

THE MYSTIC. Yes, but Australia is not, Bernard O'Dowd tells us, restricted by geographical boundaries. She is everywhere, in America, India, Italy, ancient Persia, in modern Ireland, too; Greek philosophers dreamed of her, meditating in the Academe, in painted stoa, in the garden of Epicurus—and Indian teachers under the Bo tree—and prophets who 'dimly taught in old Crotona.' William Morris, who was a seer, found *Terra Australis* in Chaucer's England. Spanish captains like Balboa and Ponce de Leon and de Queirós sought her over seas; and the world today still strives to pluck out the heart of her mysteries. *Terra Australis* beckons at the slip-rails of the Imagination, promising but to the rebels a fresh perception of beauty, an un-blazed track to truth.

THE HOST. Be calm! Of course, all the old masters were Australians. Rodin is an Australian, and Ibsen and Maeterlinck. Walt Whitman was almost obsessed by what a distinguished critic described as the 'Australianity of things Australian.' Plato and Gautama Buddha, Michelangelo, Wordsworth, Blake and Paul Verlaine, Whistler and Norman Lindsay—they are all very patriotic Australians.

THE STRANGER. I don't follow you, quite.

THE HOST. I am only stating facts. The rebel, that is the originator, the man who stamps character, personality, it if seem worth while, on the things of this world, always seeks the new thing, the

unknown, *Terra Australis*. And it is only the rebel who ever becomes the classic. Thus all old masters are Australian.

THE MYSTIC. The Future is very rich—virgin Ocean—primeval Bush. The old worlds—Europe, Asia—lose touch of reality. Their pulse grows feeble; they repeat only the thoughts of their ancestors, living at second-hand. Australia feels the life-giving Sun in her blood. Will not her statement be more vivid, more splendid, with a flush of the Tropics, luxuriant, full of colour and melody, with space and freedom in it, joyous a thing of beauty?

THE STRANGER. A cigarette please. This summer night is decidedly fanciful.

THE HOST. Would you like to sleep outside? One thinks better at night, especially under the trees. They are quite friendly here.

THE STRANGER. That's a good suggestion. That may help one to understand things.

THE HOST. Are you all right? Here's your bluey. Good night.

Notes

Periclean Athens: In the decade before 500 BCE, the Athenians established the world's first democratic constitution. This new kind of government was carried to its classical form by the reforms of orator, statesman and general Pericles (495–429 BCE, whose name means 'surrounded by glory') a half-century later, and during this time Athens blossomed as a centre of education, art, culture, and democracy. Louis references Pericles in his verse 'Kelly in Greece', 'The Blood and Thunder Banner' and 'The Major Prophet'.

Florence under the Medici: Under patriarch Cosimo de Medici (1389–1464), whose wealth and influence was initially derived from the textile trade, the family established the Medici Bank (1397–1494) facilitating their rise to political power in the Republic of Florence. The Medici financed the invention of the piano and opera; funded the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica and Santa Maria del Fiore; and were patrons of Brunelleschi, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Machiavelli and Galileo among many others in the arts and culture.

England in Shakespeare's time: The Elizabethan era is the epoch in the Tudor period of the history of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). Often depicted as 'the golden age' in English history, the era represented the apogee of the English Renaissance and saw the flowering of poetry, music and literature. The Elizabethan period has become synonymous with the most famous writers of the English language: Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and many others who established a new dramaturgy. Louise was an avid reader of Shakespeare; he refers to the Bard specifically in his verse 'Ode of Welcome', 'Epilogue', 'Curse Comprehensive of the Dejected Bard' and 'The Movie Lover'.

Bo tree [aka, Bodhi tree]: according to Buddhist tradition, the tree under which the Buddha sat when he attained Enlightenment (*Bodhi*) at Bodh Gaya (near Gaya, west-central Bihar state, India).

prophets who 'dimly taught in old Crotona': Cf. *The Revolt of Islam* by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Canto Seventh

XXXII

*And on the sand would I make signs to range
These woofs, as they were woven, of my thought;
Clear elemental shapes, whose smallest change
A subtler language within language wrought--
The key of truths which once were dimly taught
In old Crotona; and sweet melodies
Of love in that lorn solitude I caught
From mine own voice in dream, when thy dear eyes
Shone through my sleep, and did that utterance harmonise.*

Croton (Latin, *Crotona*) (in what is now the now Calabria in southern Italy): an Achaian colony founded in c.710BCE by Myscellus. The city flourished. Pythagoras found his school at Crotona in the fifth century BCE; his pupils included the medical theorist Alcmaeon of Croton and the philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer Philolaus.

William Morris (1834–1896): English textile designer, artist, writer, and socialist associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the English Arts and Crafts Movement that revolutionised Victorian taste. Towards the end of his career, Morris began to focus increasingly on his writing, publishing a number of prose narratives, including his most celebrated: *News from Nowhere* (1890). Infused with Socialist ideas and romantic utopianism, Morris offers a vision of a simple world in which art, or 'work-pleasure,' is demanded of (and enjoyed) by all. 'The object of a newspaper—its *raison d'être*—is to sell advertising space. ... William Morris, who was a seer, knew this well.' Esson wrote in 'The

Newspaper', 'In his *News from Nowhere* he tells us that Parliament House, which was retained in the new Society as a relic and awful warning of a stupid past, was turned into a Dung Market.' Esson references him again in 'The Disadvantage of Sanity', 'Socialism and Dogma', 'Something With a Cow in It', 'Poets in Parliament' and 'WB Yeats on National Drama'.

Vasco Núñez de Balboa (1475–1519): Spanish explorer and conquistador. Establish the town of Darién on the Isthmus of Panama, becoming interim governor. In 1513, Balboa led an expedition from Darién to search for a new sea—reportedly to the south—and for gold. He hoped that if he was successful, he would win the favour of Ferdinand, the King of Spain. While the precious metal eluded him, he did find the Pacific Ocean, and claimed it and all of its shores for Spain. Esson references Balboa in *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* and *The Quest*.

Juan Ponce de León (1460–1521): Spanish conquistador; led a European expedition for gold, which eventually brought him to the southeast coast of what would become the United States. He named Florida and went on to become the first governor of Puerto Rico.

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917): French sculptor, generally considered the progenitor of modern sculpture. Schooled traditionally, he did not set out to rebel against the past, but took a craftsman-like approach to his work. He is known for such sculptures as 'The Kiss' (1889), 'The Burghers of Calais' (1889) and 'The Thinker' (1902).

Walter 'Walt' Whitman (1819–1892): American poet, essayist, and journalist; often called 'the father of free verse'. His poetry was seen as controversial in its time, particularly his collection *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which was described as obscene for its overt sexuality. In his Review of *The Oxford Book of Australasian Verse*, Esson favourably compares Bernard O'Dowd with both William Blake and Walt Whitman.

'**Australianity of things Australian**': Cf. Australian poet and literary critic Christopher Brennan (1870-1932) who wrote in *Hermes* (1902):

the Australianity of [the Australian nationalist school of literature], which largely dealt with and was mainly addressed to mythical individuals called Bill and Jim, was painted on, not too laboriously, from the outside. What ruined the school was that it forgot its main (and only) object after all and took to celebrating imported fauna, such as the horse and the jackaroo.

Plato (427—347 BCE): Greek philosopher; student of Socrates and the teacher of Aristotle. Plato's middle to later works—including his most famous work, the *Republic*—blend ethics, political philosophy, moral psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics into an interconnected and systematic philosophy. Louis references Plato in his verse 'Kelly in Greece', 'Far North' and 'Demetrius'.

Siddhartha Gautama [aka the *Buddha* 'the awakened one'] (c.563 BCE/480 BCE–c.483 BCE/400 BCE): leader and founder of a sect of wanderer ascetics (*Sramanas*) that came to be known as *Sangha*, to distinguish it from other similar communities. The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama are considered the core of Buddhism: after his death, the community he founded slowly evolved into a religious-like movement which was finally established as a state religion in India by the time of Emperor Ashoka, during the 3rd century BCE. Esson writes about Buddha and Buddhism in his travel articles 'From the Oldest World' (responses to his assignment in India and published in the *Lone Hand* between May and October 1908).

Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1564): Italian sculptor, painter and architect who, during the High Renaissance, exerted an unparalleled influence on the development of Western art. His art demonstrated a blend of psychological insight, physical realism and intensity that was totally original. Michelangelo received commissions from some of the wealthiest and most powerful men of his day, including popes and others affiliated with the Catholic Church.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850): English poet, whose 'Lyrical Ballads' (1798), written with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped launch the English Romantic movement. Cf. Esson's 'The Two Wordsworths' (*The Bulletin*, 30 December, 1926).

William Blake (1757-1827): English engraver, artist, poet, and visionary. Regarded as the earliest and most original of the Romantic poets, his works included: 'Songs of Innocence' (1789) and 'Songs of Experience' (1794). Esson referred to Blake as 'a genuine mystic' ('Some Distinguished Playwrights—and Belasco', *Pearsons*, April, 1917).

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903): American-born, British-based artist. Averse to sentimentality and moral allusion in painting, he was a leading proponent of the credo 'art for art's sake.' Esson references Whistler a number of times throughout his commentaries; he cites the artist specifically amongst a range of artists in his letter to the Editor of the *Irish Times* (5 January, 1905) encouraging the Dublin National Gallery to acquire a collection of Impressionist paintings.

Norman Alfred William Lindsay (1879–1969): Australian artist, etcher, sculptor, writer and editorial cartoonist. Lindsay was a significant contributor to *The Bulletin* from 1901 and, in 1905 supplied the illustration to accompany Esson's poem *Silenus to a Young Satyr* (*The Bulletin*, 28 December).

The Disadvantage of Sanity

Louis Esson re-states his case with a difference

Background

Louis Esson recalls first meeting the English poet and writer John Masefield (1878–1967) at a reception arranged by Lady Gregory at the Criterion Restaurant, London, following the performances of the fledgling Irish National Theatre given on Saturday, 26 March, 1904 (at Kate Santley's Royalty Theatre in Soho).

I was introduced to Mr John Masefield, who, a week later, invited me to his rooms to meet the author of *Riders to The Sea*—JM Synge. ... After dinner we sat in Mr Masefield's pleasant study, and the conversation about literature, drama, and the raw material of art, lasted till two o'clock in the morning. Unlike Dr Johnson, Synge never talked for the victory; but whatever he said is valuable, I believe, if for no other reason than that Synge said it, though it seemed to me always to have great weight. He was a scholar, precise in his phrases, perhaps even a little formal in conversation, but always frank in his opinions. But what is said at night over a pipe should not be taken quite literally; and if I repeat a few of Synge's sayings, it is only as a suggestion of his characteristic attitude towards life and literature. He held, with Mr WB Yeats, that the writers of every country should 'keep within their own borders'. As the Greeks did, and believed that in the best ages writers came in groups, working for a common aim, like the Elizabethan dramatists, or the Abbey Theatre group he was proud to belong to; for everyone, for good or evil, was influenced by his surroundings. 'Artistic movements arise,' he said, 'when a definite end is kept in view and proper standards established. It has nearly always been so.'¹

Masefield, born in 1878—the same year as Esson—had run away from boarding school for a life at sea where he discovered a passion for writing and story telling. He jumped ship in New York and found work first tending bar, then in a carpet factory, and devoted all his earnings to buying books (both modern and classic literature). He returned to England in 1897, just after his nineteenth birthday. Masefield's first collection of poems, *Salt-Water Ballads*, was published in 1902. Four year's later he met Constance de la Cherois Crommelin (twelve years his senior) and they married in June 1903. At this time of his meeting with Esson in 1904, the Masefields were expecting their first child.

Multitude and Solitude, Masefield's fourth novel, was published five year's later in 1909. An expressionist 'novel of ideas,' it concerns the attempts by a semi-successful playwright and novelist, Roger Naldrett, to justify himself as an artist and his position in society; Naldrett represents not so much Masefield himself, but as a sort of dramatization of the various options possible to him at this time. By Chapter XI, the action moves from London to a remote village in Africa. Naldrett tends to his companion Lionel Heseltine who has a fever:

[Roger] knew that if he let it begin to get upon his nerves he would be ruined. He took himself in hand on the second day of Lionel's fever. His situation made him remember a conversation heard years before at his rooms in Westminster. [His mysterious friend John] O'Neill [Synge] and a young Australian journalist [clearly Louis], of the crude and vigorous kind nurtured by *The Bulletin*, had passed the evening in talk with him. The Australian had told them of the loneliness of Australia, and of shepherds and settlers who went mad in the loneliness on the clearings at the back of beyond. O'Neill had said that at present Australian literature was the product of home-sick Englishmen; but that a true Australian literature would begin among those lonely ones. 'One of those fellows just going mad will begin a literature. And that literature will be the distinctive Australian literature. In the cities you will only get noisy imitations of what is commonest in the literature of the mother country.' They had stayed talking till four in the morning. He had never seen the Australian since that time. He remembered now his stories of shepherds who bolted themselves

¹ 'JM Synge: A Personal Note', *Fellowship*, April 1921, pp. 138-142

into their huts in the effort to get away from the loneliness which had broken their nerve. He must take care, he said, not to let that state of mind take hold upon him.²

The following year, literary critic, novelist and journalist JHM Abbott (1874–1953)—just returned from London and a regular contributor to *The Bulletin*—reviewed Masefield's novel, the review title was 'The Future of Australian Literature'. After providing the key lines from the above quote, he speculates as to Masefield's 'theory' and considers 'his vision as dim as his utterance is untrue and wide of the mark.'

For, just consider what it means, if it means anything at all, it means that the future of Australian literature is to lie in simple lunacy, in degeneracy and melancholia. ... For one Australian, at any rate, the writer utterly refuses to believe any such thing. It is too sad a thing to believe in the happiest country in the world.

Abbott notes 'the short past of Australian literature' and points to Marcus Clark—'possibly a "home-sick" Englishman'—who is quoted as saying that 'the key note of the Australian Bush was Weird Melancholy' (a 'mendacious phrase' that 'caught on'). Whatever the case, he sees nothing in Clark's work to lead anyone to suppose 'that he really believed it himself,' and goes on to make the same observation of Henry Kendall, Adam Lindsay Gordon, Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson: 'the majority of them regard the Bush as a kindly friend with a beauty that is peculiarly her own—but which is neither morbid, weird nor melancholy.'

The Bush today—and by the Bush one means the real Australia, in the same sense that the Shires, and not London, are the real England—The Bush today breeds a race of hardy boys and girls who are to be the future of Australia. And no one who knows the Bush people will admit that it is anything other than, a sane, vigorous and humorous people. It is in the last-mentioned quality that real sanity lies. You cannot go mad if your sense of humour is unimpaired. You may become a religious maniac, but you cannot become a fun maniac. The maddest humorists are generally the sanest of individuals. No shepherd with a true sense of humour ever in his loneliness hanged himself. When he was destroyed himself in a fit of DTs his sense of humour has been as much in abeyance, or as distorted, as his other faculties. And its sense of humour—the Australian's appreciation of healthy fun—is one of the Australian peoples most strongly-marked characteristics. A people with such a characteristic could never become a maudlin, morbid, melancholic people whose 'distinctive literature' would be the sort that John Masefield suggests. For one thing, it would not be possible that it would tolerate such a literature—would buy, borrow or steal it to read.

Abbott speculated that Masefield should reflect rather on 'England herself,' with her prospects for 'an insaner literary future,' and provided his own ideas for an Australian literature:

What literature's future is to be in Australia no man can certainly predict. There is such a lot of future. But this much the writer would humbly beg to offer as his own unworthy and somewhat broad prediction. It will be wholesome, it will be optimistic—above all, it will be essentially sane. There is yet to come the great struggle which we will have to make to preserve an Australian people in the Australian continent. The tragedy of War must do much to shape a literature. The heroism, self-sacrifice, and stubborn courage called forth by war have shaped the literatures of Europe, Asia, Africa and America. War is bound inevitably, in the nearer or further future, to shape the destiny of ours. But it will be with no sadness of Death that it will most concern itself. It will be with the happiness of the full and abundant Life that its people shall have striven for and won—that the future literature—the distinctive literature—of Australia will have to do. And it will be the sane, clean and wholesome literature of a sane, clean and wholesome Australian People. At least, that is the way it gets the writer.³

² John Masefield, *Multitude and Solitude*, Grant Richards, London (1909)

³ *The Bulletin*, 24 March, 1910, Red Page

While it is never overtly mentioned that the inspiration for Masefield's 'journalist,' Esson, nonetheless chose to respond the following month ('The Menace of Sanity in Literature'⁴) initially arguing that Abbott had misinterpreted Masefield and, in reality, the point raised was that 'there is more possibility of a distinctive Australian literature arising in the lonely mysterious country back o' beyond than in the cities,' than in any imperialist replicas. Esson makes the further distinction 'that a fresh vision of life, a new development of literature, may come from "those fellows just going mad" the shepherds and settlers and sundowners who have fallen body and soul, ... under the magic spell of the Bush.' He quite rightly gives due credit to Synge:

I remember the late JM Synge, that most original Irish dramatist, saying on this very point, when told of the loneliness of the Bush and of the folk who often went mad there, 'Are they not interesting, then, when they are going mad?' He meant no more than the character in Masefield's book meant by this 'weird, unhealthy theory'—that these people would have less common thoughts, and see flashes of the world in more vivid colours, than their more prosaic fellows. Synge, who founded his own plays on the ways and delightful talk of the most primitive peasantry in Europe, the people of the Arran islands, dreaded the time when they would become well-to-do and sensible. They will be useless for literature then,' Synge observed. 'Leave them as they are.' The so-called 'advantages of civilisation,' such as railways, newspapers and music-hall songs, tend to destroy rather than to stimulate literature.

In the meantime, however, he builds an argument making the distinction between 'madness' and 'sanity' in on the construct of Australian literature. Abbott's 'sane, vigorous and humourous people' lack imagination and are incapable of the 'romance of the Bush'

Australians, at present, are too sane to be Nature worshippers. The Bush can inspire lyric deliciousness or tragic grandeur; but no oblations are made to Dionysus or Demeter. ... Our legends are founded, not on the wonders of the world, but on reports of the export trade. It is the penalty of our unfortunate health and sanity.

The present Australian type is too 'sane' to be imaginative, too 'vigorous' to give way to romantic passion, and too 'humorous' that is, too matter-of-fact, to feel the fantasy of anything. Compare the Australian for a moment with an Irish or Spanish peasant, and his chance of creating a literature seems small indeed. The Spaniard or Irishman is usually lazy and inept. But he has leisure for dreams; he rejoices in tales and songs and quaint wise sayings. The Australian, who is a hard, efficient grafter, has nothing to say.

Esson's preference, on the other hand, (and quoting Plato) is that 'Every artist ... is more or less mad, intoxicated by the wine and roses of life. He sees things differently from the man in the street. If he could not, there would be no justification for his existence. The pathway of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.' The impact of Bernard O'Dowd's provocation twelve months earlier—'Does Australia have a soul?'⁵—continued to reverberate. O'Dowd's complaint against 'the disciples of the "art for art's sake" shibboleth, was that they demanded the triumphant stage without carrying out the duties of the militant stage. "Art for art's sake" was a useful dogma for the student and beginner, but not an advisable doctrine for the artist or poet in the real work of his life. The fact of evolution and the fact of Australia made Australian poets, if they would, essentially poets of the dawn, whose functions were to chart the day—marching poets, working poets, poets for use, poets militant.' Esson picks up on O'Dowd's central claim that 'in every age of human progress the poet ['the artist'] has been the most authentic and effective creator of gods and of the mythologies that give them blood and bone and power'. In Esson's words, 'the pathway of excess leads to the palace of wisdom

⁴ *The Bulletin*, 14 April, 1910, Red Page

⁵ 'Poetry Militant', O'Dowd's address at the Literature Society of Melbourne at the Masonic Hall, 28 May, 1909; reported by *The Argus*, 29 May 1909. Katharine Susannah Prichard, apparently, left the lecture 'almost too exalted and exhilarated to speak'; Nettie Palmer similarly found him inspiring, especially for his belief 'in a better future for humankind.'

... [and the development of any indigenous] Literature is threatened to be extinguished by the gospel of health and sanity which seeks to bind, with rationalistic chains, the Promethean Imagination to the Rock of Fact.' 'This gospel,' Esson is emphatic, 'has a special danger for Australia—a country which has been inflicted by sanity from the time of its discovery.'

Esson then charges Abbot with an 'aggressive commercial philistinism,' and is adamant that his proposed "sane, clean and wholesome literature" that is threatened to be produced by "a sane clean and wholesome Australian People" will ultimately fail 'to inspire enthusiasm.'

Australia has produced no 'unwholesome' literature like that of Baudelaire, no pessimistic literature like that of Gorki, no 'insane' literature such as Blake or Shelley produced. ... The Hebrew Psalmists, the Greek dramatists, the artists of the Italian Renaissance, the Elizabethan poets, indeed the creators of nearly the whole of the great art and literature of the world, would never be regarded by the bourgeois as sane, or clean, or wholesome. Australia, unlike Russia, a country with somewhat similar characteristics, has not yet discovered her own soul. The national imagination must become more intense, or there is a danger that Australia will produce in the future a literature imitating what is commonest in the literature of the mother country.

Esson does concede that 'Australia is not ... the happiest country in the world' and concludes with an apologia:

The hard grafting Australian population has no time for the Arts, and therefore no time for life. A wave of Anglo-Saxon philistinism, carrying along with it the utilitarian virtues has overwhelmed the whole continent. Our irrational rationalism, our extravagant waste of energy in business, our immoral worship or work, our deplorable sanity and health and common sense do not make for joy or beauty or splendour. Australia has no fine buildings because it has no noble idea to enshrine. ... Our cities, save Sydney, which is beautiful by the grace of God, not the hand of man, are like English provincial cities, the ugliest that encumber the earth. ... We take no real interest in music or drama, or painting. Our wealthy men are not Medici. And in the minor arts of life we are still Barbarians. We prefer hideous hotels, where people stand round a bar and drink like cows, to cafes, where one can sit at a marble table, and hear perhaps a little music, or talk to one's friends. We prefer beer and whiskey to wine, meats to fruit. We are cursed by Sabbatarianism in its crudest form, mistaking gloom and indigestion for religious feeling. We have no folk songs, no national dances, no fine craftsmanship, simply because we are too foolishly sane to be happy, and the arts are children of joy and ecstasy.

He repeats: 'From such surroundings what kind of literature can we expect but "noisy imitations of what is commonest in the literature of the Mother Country!"' agreeing with Synge, who had no desire to see Ireland adopt English habits and become prosperous and respectable.'

He preferred the country as it was, poor, shiftless, but very keenly alive. Hence he thought that there was more chance of an Australian literature springing up among 'these fellows just going mad' in the country back o' beyond than among the farm and city dwellers who were under the influence, not of Nature, but of the daily newspaper.

Furnley Maurice [aka Frank Wilmot]⁶ (1881–1942)—a pseudonym used from 1905 due to what he perceived as prejudice from *Bulletin* editor AG Stephens—was a regular at *Fasoli's*, on the fringe of The Victorian Socialist Party, and mixed in Esson's literary circle. He 'stirred the pot,' responding a month later, wondering 'Why is there all this worry about art and literature? These things are not important.'

⁶ Wilmot, whose father was an ironmonger and pioneer of the Socialist movement in Victoria, began working at *Cole's Book Arcade* at fourteen, and contributed verse to *The Tocsin* before he was 20; he also produced his own monthly magazine called *Microbe*. His first volume of poetry, *Some Verses*, was published in 1903.

The only important thing in the world is industry—doing the best you can as earnestly as you can. Utilitarianism (the ugliest word that ever crawled into the critics' vocabulary) is, and has been, the only inspiring force, the only practical foundation of everything that was ever of any importance to human life. The way these art-and-poet-people talk, one would imagine that the Milan Cathedral (that will do for the argument) was designed and completed purely for art's sake, and that the people afterwards accidentally discovered that if you go inside it, it would keep off the wt.

'Our irrational rationalism, our extravagant waste of energy in business, our immoral worship of work, our deplorable sanity and health and common-sense do not make for joy or beauty or splendour.'

Maurice condemns Synge as 'a sort of effeminate ogre gorging himself with human misery of his own amusement,' and reject's Esson as the champion of 'the cult of the "aesthetic" force. 'Patriotism, religion and the pursuit of material comfort' rather 'come before art in the estimation of the most estimable citizen,' he went on, 'and if there were no such society there would be none to listen to the cries of the broken-hearted 'cult', and as the aesthete would not exist if there were nothing to weep about.' He then riffs on the dangers of 'leisure' and 'happiness' and warns against 'consciously' being 'attracted towards madness' and advocating 'insanity as the key to greatness.'

Australia will get her literature when she deserves it, she she has earned it by her effort, her aspiration, her success and her failure; but Australia will get no literature by chasing pretty words with her hat like a boy after butterflies. You have to work hard to earn a literature, and you must not work in expectation of that literary result, or you will spoil everything by becoming artistic and self-conscious. Australia must go forward and take its chances whether or not there be a literature and an art hidden in her future. We must go forward. Although they have served excellently in the past, still we must try to forget 'the vain songs of ancient heathendom, the trifling legends, the funeral chants.'⁷

Sydney poet Robert Crawford (1868-1930)—whose collection of verse, *Lyric Moods*, had just been published (and highly respected by AG Stephens)—came to Esson's defence on 9 June.

The man who can thus write of art and literature, and yet practise verse-writing, is surely beyond redemption. He is merely a dilettante, and had better stick to digging. His deplorable sanity may die with him, and none be the worse. The men who have made a real and abiding impression in art and literature were of quite another stamp. They were, above all things, sincere in the worship of their art, and were the last to sling mud at the votaries of beauty. Australia will get her literature doubtless, but it will not be on the 'utilitarian' lines of O'Dowd and Co. Half a dozen of Blake's or Shelley's lyrics are essentially more to humanity, more to the awakening of the 'divine' in man than all the testaments and preachments of Browning, Whitman and Davidson. Let prose stick to her own last, and if 'life' is an important cow, let it not be seen through a temperament ... Esson has the right end of the stick; and when patriotism has died, when religion has died, when the incessant thought of material comfort has died—when we (if ever) are free of all those pitiful things, then may we look for the higher manifestation of ourselves in the literature—that is, the life of the land. There is fundamentally no life, but this; for the sane, practical, everyday existence of the average estimable citizen is a mortal death. He eats and drinks and propagates his kind—any other animal can do as much. ⁸

Esson followed up, restating his case 'with a difference,' in the short dialogue published on 9 June that he titled *The Disadvantage of Sanity*.

⁷ *The Bulletin*, 19 May 1910, Red Page

⁸ *The Bulletin*, 9 June 1910, Red Page

Copy Text

Louis Esson, 'Louis Esson re-states his case, with a difference', *The Bulletin* on 19 May 1910.

Characters

A PAINTER, just returned from Paris
A JOURNALIST

Setting

A Sydney café.

ACT ONE

(A Sydney Café.)

JOURNALIST. A glass of wine?

PAINTER. There is still inspiration in wine. But only those incapable of appreciating good wine can now afford to drink it. ... Let us sit outside, *sur les toits*, and watch the Harbour! I forgot. One must not enjoy oneself in public.

JOURNALIST. Sydney is not Paris.

PAINTER. Sydney should be a city of the Arts, a Venice, a Paris, why not? Sydney has a soul. The Harbour is her soul. It induces one to paint. Do not misunderstand me. They paint better over there in Melbourne. I mean Sydney incites one, provokes one to paint.

JOURNALIST. Why do we need painting? Why should we pay for a copy of something in a gilt frame when we can get the original for nothing?

PAINTER. You do not buy any pictures, if you put that to your credit; but do you ever see an 'original'? People see what they are taught to see. Do you mean to tell me the *bourgeois* sees anything except the *bourgeois* effects in nature? Art is nature seen through a temperament; nature is art seen through the bad taste of the illustrated newspapers.

JOURNALIST. Nonsense! A cow, anyway, is better than a cow seen through a temperament.

PAINTER. A cow seen through Millet's temperament is more valuable than any cow ever exhibited at the agricultural show.

JOURNALIST. That is too Parisian. Do you miss *Le Rat Mort*?

PAINTER. I do. And I have made a discovery. Australia is too English. It is a very great discovery. It explains why we have no *Rat Mort*. It explains everything—the villa and the last train, our solemn newspapers, the ladies' hats, and pantomime. It explains our boisterous dullness. The Imperial Octopus holds Australia in Anglo-Saxon suckers.

JOURNALIST. My dear chap, you are wrong there. Look at the Irish—the Celtic⁹ element—in our race!

PAINTER. The Celt¹⁰ has succumbed to the Saxon, as he usually does. He has lost his character. He is quite prosperous. When the Irishman is a failure he may be a poet and dreamer; when he is a success he waxes his moustache and becomes an alderman.

JOURNALIST. That sounds like libel.

PAINTER. I maintain we are not an amusing nation. Australia is a beautiful and interesting country. It is a land of romance; but it is we who are too dull to see it. Are we not monotonous? From Port Darwin to Adelaide, from Perth to Brisbane, all through the continent you hear the same language, you see the same houses, all roofed with galvanised iron, and you meet exactly the same people with the same simple faith in hard work and progressive legislation. ... Bread and circus—that symbolises life. Backward, fascinating places like Spain and Italy have too little bread. But Australia has too little circus.

JOURNALIST. Paris has corrupted you. Still, one can hardly be expected to appreciate the charm of one's own country. It is a natural tendency of the human mind to imagine another man's wife more attractive than one's own. But how can you call Australian life dull? We are usually charged with over-fondness for pleasure.

PAINTER. Pleasure? Do people go to the theatre for pleasure? Do people get pleasure in horse-racing? Strange how they find life so uninteresting!

JOURNALIST. There are only amusements. Our real business is hard work.

⁹ Celtic| Keltic

¹⁰ Celt| Kelt

PAINTER. What have you produced, a *Mona Lisa*? A *Midsummer Night's Dream*?

JOURNALIST. Good Heavens! Art and poetry are all very well, but they are only ornaments. They are not beef and beer. They are not essentials. You put art before life. Australians put life before art. Do you condemn us for that?

PAINTER. *Tiens!* In the first place, what you call life's not life at all. In the second place, art is not a trinket, a *bon-bon*, a liqueur; art is energy, art is life.

JOURNALIST. What?

PAINTER. Well, the essential oil of life, the kernel of the nut, the garlic in the salad. Did not Schopenhauer explain that music was as direct an expression of Will as nature itself? Art does not imitate nature. Is it not art rather that frees us from the illusion of the material, lifts the Veil of Maya, brings us in tune with the eternal rhythm of the universe! Music, Painting and Poetry have been called the Gates of Paradise. The world of imagination is the real, the eternal world. ... Do you call your common hours, when you are eating roast beef or playing billiards, life? Only in your intensest moments, in moments of passion—in love, religion, poetry—do your lips touch even the rim of the fountain. ... Whenever I enter a business office, a lawyer's or merchant's, I choke for breath. I walk among tombs. And a ghost appears, in a tall hat with a bag in its hand. Is a man doing what you call useful work, that is, useless drudgery, quite alive? Like a mediaeval saint he has renounced the world; but unlike his predecessor he has entered a monastery of make-believe. A stock-broker is a phantom. Life! A naked holy man by the Ganges comes closes to life. There is more life in a gallery of Greek marbles. There is ...

JOURNALIST. Are we alive now, drinking wine?

PAINTER. It depends how we drink the wine.

JOURNALIST. Australia is a young country. We have to face elementary problems. I have great hopes for our athletic democracy.

PAINTER. To the devil with democracy! Art is aristocratic, tyrannic. Democracy is the greatest foolishness of the greatest number. If this democratic continent sank under the ocean tomorrow, what would the world lose? A Sphinx, a frieze of the Parthenon, Ghiberti's gates, a Titian *Bacchanal*, a *Hamlet*, a *Père Goriot*, a *Tristan and Isolde*? I think not. It would lose our prospects. If this is due to athletic democracy let us have an Elizabeth, let us pray for a Nero!

JOURNALIST. My dear chap, you desire an impossible world, where people lived by taking in one another's poems and pictures and symphonies. As Leonardo da Vinci, by selecting the ugliest parts of the ugliest animals and piecing them together, produced a monstrosity of ugliness, so the aesthetes, if their ideas could be carried out, would create an absolute monstrosity of beauty. ... After all, it is the plain honest worker you despise that is the true nation-builder. Men who can work (and fight if necessary), women who can rear a large and healthy family—these are the people a young community demands. Afterwards, if you like, it may find some niche for the elegant artist, in long hair complaining of his neglect by an ignoble populace.

PAINTER. A hit, a palpable hit. *Cépendant*, only the artist works. Other people are idlers. In William Morris's *Utopia* everybody works, works at some art; in a properly ordered State what else is there to do? It is only by some creative effort that man touches reality. Listen! If a man makes a chair or a cup he should stamp it with his personality, put his soul into it, as craftsmen did in Athens, in Italy; the chair or the cup, then would be a personal thing, alive with the joy of creation. Everything should be made like that.

JOURNALIST. Everything can't be beautiful and joyous. You are joking now.

PAINTER. Do you know ugly things are a modern invention? I sometimes think Darwin invented them. Perhaps it was Newton. Really, there was no bad costume till after the Elizabethan era. You cannot find a vicious sofa or an immoral table that is not the product of industrialism. Ugliness is the denial of life.

JOURNALIST. That is an extreme view. You have no toleration.

PAINTER. Truth is always extreme. I do not pretend to be tolerant. I cannot appreciate both Wagner and Verdi, Manet and Leader, Flaubert and Hall Caine. ...

JOURNALIST. In his pamphlet on *Poetry Militant* Bernard O'Dowd says we have too much art.

PAINTER. *Bon Dieu!*

JOURNALIST. And that we want more matter, more purpose, more moral in our work.

PAINTER. Do you agree with him?

JOURNALIST. Nobody does.

PAINTER. Even that does not make him right. O'Dowd is a galley-slave chained to the oar of the Categorical Imperative. Every schoolboy knows that Art stands above Ethics. The world and existence are justifiable only as aesthetic phenomena. Nietzsche said that. It is a great truth. And did not the High Priest of Paganism, Théophile Gautier, declare that '*la correction de la forme est la vertu*'? If the universe has no rhythm, no composition, no sense of style, tell me, what is the good of it?

JOURNALIST. Decadent doctrine.

PAINTER. Too much art? Did you ever see a poet enter a Sydney café, push his fingers through his hair, and announce that he has abolished the Symbolists? Will any editor of your acquaintance draw a sword over one of O'Dowd's sonnets? Has blood been spilt at a Marshall-Hall concert? Has any landscape of Streeon's cause a riot in Pitt-street? They did such things in Athens. ...

JOURNALIST. May I use some of your remarks? That is journalism.

PAINTER. Why do you need journalism? Literature deals with the eternal verities. Journalism deals with facts. Facts are stupid Balzac says. It is only those things that never happen that are worth reading about.

JOURNALIST. They may do good.

PAINTER. Well, be sure to say I see no signs of the democracy becoming addicted to the poppy heads and camomile of such an enervating gospel as *l'art pour l'art*. Say that? It will make me popular. Now let us run down to Manly and watch this siren city singing to the stars. How she fascinates them!

JOURNALIST. And, despite your aesthetic sophistry art cannot compete with nature.

PAINTER. My friend, even what you call nature, by working within limits, is decidedly a work of art.

Notes

sur les toits: (French) *sur*, on; *les toits* roof; (Colloq.) in the shade.

Jean-François Millet (1814-1875): French artist, best known for his paintings of peasants toiling in rural landscapes, (and the religious sub-texts that often accompanied them); he saw Godliness and virtue in physical labour. He turned his back on the academic style of his early artistic education and co-founded the Barbizon school (near Fontainebleau) with fellow artist Théodore Rousseau. Louis discusses Millet in 'Three for Ireland' (*Bookfellow*, February 1912) and 'Irish Memories and Australian Hopes' (1938).

Le Rat Mort: (French) *The Dead Rat*. According to the *Guide des Plaisirs à Paris* for 1900, the restaurant *La Rat Mort*, situated in the place Pigalle, owed its unpleasant name to 'a rat which was punished by death for having disturbed a pair of clients who were enjoying a very private conversation in a very private dining room.'

The Imperial Octopus holds Australia in Anglo-Saxon suckers: Octopuses were a popular trope in political art in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the most famous from 1882, 'The Devil Fish in Egyptian Waters', an American cartoon depicting John Bull [England] as the octopus of imperialism grabbing land on every continent.

Mona Lisa [La Gioconda] (1503-06): a half-length portrait in oil (thought to be Lisa Gherardini, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo) by the Italian Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci.

A Midsummer Night's Dream: comedy by William Shakespeare (1595/96).

Tiens!: (French) an interjection, Look!

Veils of Maya: Hindu belief that states we view life through a series of distorting veils that prevent us from seeing 'actual reality'.

Sphinx [The Great Sphinx of Giza]: a limestone statue of a reclining mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a human. Facing directly from West to East, it stands on the Giza Plateau on the west bank of the Nile at Giza, Egypt. The face of the Sphinx is generally believed to represent the Pharaoh Khafre.

a frieze of the Parthenon: the high-relief pentelic marble sculpture created to adorn the Parthenon, a former temple, on the Athenian Acropolis in Greece. It was sculpted between c.443-438BCE.

Ghiberti's gates [The *Gates of Paradise* (Italian: *Porta del Paradiso*)]: a pair of gilded bronze doors designed by the Italian sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) for the north entrance of the Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence. At completion, they were installed at the east entrance (1425–52).

Titian Bacchanal [*The Bacchanal of the Andrians* (1523-24)]: oil painting by the Italian artist Titian [Tiziano Vecellio] (1490-1576), the most important representative of the 16th-century Venetian school.

Hamlet [*The Tragedy of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark*]: play by William Shakespeare (1599-1600).

Le Père Goriot [*Old Goriot* or *Father Goriot*] (1835): novel by French novelist and playwright Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850). Set in Paris in 1819, it follows the intertwined lives of three characters: the elderly doting Goriot; a mysterious criminal-in-hiding, Vautrin; and a naive law student, Eugène de Rastignac. Referred to as 'the father of the realistic novel', Balzac's style in *Le Père Goriot* is influenced by the American novelist James Fenimore Cooper and Scottish writer Walter Scott.

Tristan and Isolde (1857-59): music drama, in three acts by Richard Wagner (1813-1883) to a German libretto by the composer, based largely on the romance by Gottfried von Strassburg. It premiered at the National Theater in Munich on 10 June 1865 with Hans von Bülow conducting. Wagner was a German composer and theorist whose operas and music had a revolutionary influence on the course of Western music, either by extension of his discoveries or reaction against them. The first staged production of a Wagner opera in a Australia was *Lohengrin*, presented by WS Lester at the Victoria theatre (Sydney) in September 1877.

Elizabeth I [the Virgin Queen; Good Queen Bess] (1533-1603): Queen of England (1558–1603) during a period, referred to as the Elizabethan Age, when England asserted itself vigorously as a major European power in politics, commerce, and the arts.

Nerō Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (37BCE–68CE): the last emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Adopted by his great-uncle Claudius, Nero became his heir and successor with the consent of the Praetorian Guard. Nero's rule is usually associated with tyranny and extravagance; his more infamous executions include that of his mother.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519): writer, mathematician, inventor, military engineer, draftsman artist, the epitome of a 'Renaissance man'. The laws of science and nature greatly informed da Vinci's work; art and science intersected perfectly in his sketch 'Vitruvian Man' (1490), a study of proportion it depicts a male figure in two superimposed positions with his arms and legs apart inside both a square and a circle.

Cependant: (French) yet; nevertheless.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1726): English mathematician, astronomer, and physicist widely recognised as a key figure in the scientific revolution. Newton's *Principia* (*Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, (1687)) formulated the laws of motion and universal gravitation that dominated scientists' view of the physical universe for the next three centuries.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901): leading Italian composer of opera in the 19th century whose operas resonated with Italian nationalism in the post-Napoleonic era. Significant works include *Rigoletto* (1851), *Il trovatore* (1853), *La traviata* (1853), *Don Carlos* (1867), *Aida* (1871), *Otello* (1887), and *Falstaff* (1893) and for his *Requiem Mass* (1874).

Édouard Manet (1832-1883): French painter. He was one of the first 19th-century artists to paint scenes of everyday life, and a pivotal figure in the transition from Realism to Impressionism.

Gustave Flaubert (1812-1880): French novelist. Highly influential, he has been considered the leading exponent of 'literary realism'. He is known especially for his debut novel *Madame Bovary* (1857), his *Correspondence*, and his scrupulous devotion to his style and aesthetics.

Sir Thomas Henry Hall Caine (1853-1931): prolific British novelist, dramatist, short story writer, poet and critic, Caine wrote fifteen novels on diverse themes (adultery, divorce, domestic violence, illegitimacy, infanticide, religious bigotry and women's rights). Significant works include the novels *The Bondman* (1890), *The Eternal City* (1902), and *The Prodigal Son* (1904); and his play *Ben-My-Chree* (with Wilson Barrett, (1889)) [presented in Australia by Wilson Barrett's London Company in 1898.] Caine was an international literary celebrity, and the most highly paid novelist of his day.

Bon Dieu!: (French) Good God!

'la correction de la forme est la vertu' [*the correction of form is virtue*]: Cf. Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 'Je trouve la terre aussi belle que le ciel, et je pense que la correction de la forme est la vertu.' [*I find the earth as beautiful as the sky, and I think that the correction of form is virtue.*]

George William Louis Marshall-Hall (1862-1915): British born composer, conductor and professor of music. Marshall-Hall arrived in Melbourne in 1891 to take up the University of Melbourne's new Chair of Music. Tall, dark, bluff-mannered and idealistic, the new professor was not the expected standard organist-pedagogue, but rather a largely self-educated, flesh and blood Bohemian, who believed passionately in Art and 'in God not at all.'

The Woman Tamer
An Episode of Black Eagle Lane

A Play in One Act

To William Moore

Performance History

The Woman Tamer was first performed at the William Moore's second Australian Drama Night at the Turn Verein Hall, Victoria Parade, Melbourne, on Wednesday, 5 October 1910. It was produced by William Moore with the following cast:

CHOPSEY, thief and busker	Mr Tom Skewes
KATIE, his girl	Miss Maisie Maxwell
SMITHY THE LIAR, his cobber	Mr A Douglas Hart
CONSTABLE JONES	Mr Herbert Moroney
BONGO	Mr M S MacNaughton

The Woman Tamer received a season in Adelaide, performed as the final item (or four) at the opening of the Adelaide Literary Theatre's new stage at the Club Rooms [in Grenfell Street] on Saturday 5 August 1911, with the following cast:

CHOPSEY, thief and Busker	Mr Rudolph Koehler
KATIE, his girl	Miss Ivy Stacey
SMITHY THE LIAR, his cobber	Mr TH Nave
CONSTABLE JONES	Mr George Clarke
BONGO	Mr G Howard

The Port Augusta *Dispatch* responded that *The Woman Tamer*

... was a piece of Sydney [sic] low life transferred to the boards, and when we mention the names of Chopsey Ryan, Katie, Bongo and Smithy the Liar, and that the action takes place in Black Eagle Lane, the style of characterisation and talk can be easily imagined.

The acting was appreciated as 'capable and true,' but the slum characters as subject matter was dismissed: 'Norman Lindsay has sketched them by the hundred.'¹ Esson did not attend the season.

There was a reading given at the Socialist Party Christmas Festival week 'that delighted a good audience' on Thursday 17 December 1914. There is no mention of the author's presence.

The parts were interpreted by the following—Katie, Mrs FJ Edmonds; Chopsey Ryan, A Frew; Smithy the Liar, G Ovenden; Constable Jones, J Cane; Bongo, CW Greer.²

When Esson revived *The Woman Tamer* for the Pioneer Players, *The Advocate* found it 'a considerable bit of work, which bodes forth a phase of what the sensational press called "the underworld" of Melbourne.' He was generally complimentary of the cast: 'Miss Moverley ... fitted her part well ... Leo Burke ... was not, perhaps sufficiently spirited ... but gave a conscientious performance ... The part of Smithy the Liar was very successfully taken by Mr Frank T Keon. He made Smithy live.' His reservations came with the dialogue:

Mr Esson's play shows how quickly slang becomes outmoded. Written years ago in the 'argot' that then obtained, a fair part of it is not 'familiar in the mouth' of the 'Chopseys' and the 'Smithys' of to-day.³

¹ The Port Augusta *Dispatch*, 11 August 1911, p. 1

² *The Socialist*, 8 January 1915, p. 2

³ *Advocate*, 2 November 1922, p. 3

The Pioneer Players' production was presented at the Athenaeum Hall, Melbourne, on Wednesday, 26 October 1922 with the following cast:

CHOPSEY, thief and Busker	Mr Leo Burke
KATIE, his girl	Miss Winifred Moverley
SMITHY THE LIAR, his cobber	Mr Frank T Keon
CONSTABLE JONES	Mr J O'Connell
BONGO	Mr George Dawe

There were two other iterations of *The Woman Tamer* during Esson's lifetime, but he was unable to attend at either.

The Adelaide Repertory Theatre Inc. presented the play at The Australia, Angas Street, Adelaide, on 13 August 1930. As reported by *The Advertiser*, The Adelaide Repertory Theatre presented 'Three short plays by Australian authors—*The Woman Tamer* by Louis Esson produced by Charles Gordon; *He, She and I* by Alex Symons, produced by the author; and *The Unfair Sex* by Arthur Gask, produced by TH Nave.' The cast for *The Woman Tamer* included:

CHOPSEY, thief and Busker	Mr Philip Peake
KATIE, his girl	Miss Florence Clement
SMITHY THE LIAR, his cobber	Mr Douglas Deane
CONSTABLE JONES	Mr Harold King
BONGO	Mr Charles Gordon

In addition, Mr S Talbot Smith spoke on 'The Drama of Australia.'⁴

In 1939, the Playwrights' Advisory Board in Sydney—chaired by Leslie Rees—corralled five repertory groups to present a series of one act plays by Australian writers. The evening began with Sydney Tomholt's *Leading Lady* (presented by the Independent Theatre), Dymphna Cusack's *Shallow Cups* (SUDS) ('certainly the best material in the programme'); Louis Esson's *The Woman Tamer* (Bryant's Playhouse), Lionel Shave's *That's Murder* (Sydney Players Club) and Betty Roland's *Morning* (New Theatre League). The proceeds of the entertainment produced by Doris Fitton and presented at the Independent Theatre Clubrooms (175 Pitts Street) on 17 August, were to benefit the Playwrights Advisory Board. The best, according to the *Sun*, 'were *Shallow Cups* and *That's Murder*.'

the former a grim but novel fantasy, impressive in dialogue and theme, the latter a comedy played in appropriate style with Noni Dunne giving a fine performance. *Leading Lady* is a well-written little play. *Morning* was well done, the setting being excellent and the characters well sustained. The play is written with skill and imagination.

Esson's play didn't rate a mention.⁵

Publication 1911

The Woman Tamer was published twice under Esson's direct editorial supervision.

The first was in a volume *Three Short Plays*—'gratefully inscribed to J Ford Paterson'—produced by Fraser & Jenkinson in late 1911; it contained *The Woman Tamer*, *Dead Timber* and *The Sacred Place*. As Robert Henderson Croll's copy—held in the NLV Moir Collection—is personally autographed by Esson, and dated 15 December 1911, it's clear that publication was in process prior to the performance of *Dead timber* (on 13 December, two days earlier) but scheduled to be released

⁴ *The Advertiser*, 13 August 1930, p. 11

⁵ *The Sun*, 20 August 1939, p. 11

to coincide with the production. We have to assume that the published text represents the rehearsal text, or the text prepared for performance and without the benefit of subsequent emendations.

The Lone Hand thought Esson possessed 'daring' in the publication, and found *The Woman Tamer* 'the best of the three'—'a dramatic study of larrikin character in the language of the characters'—and believed that 'all stand the test of reading and are notable as the beginnings of Australian drama in the manner of JM Synge.' (But there is no foundation in the text for this assertion and this was overreach on behalf of the editor Bertram Stevens.)⁶ The other responses to 'reading' the play was generally positive. *The Bulletin* found the 'incident of Black Eagle Lane in the slums of Melbourne' made 'no pretence to romance, but it is a faithful transcript of life, rendered in the vernacular.'⁷ *The Leader* concurred: 'a vivid bit of realism, a chapter from life in the slums ... Mr Esson sacrifices sentiment in his devotion to harsh accuracy.'⁸ Esson was well known to readers of *The International Socialist* and their review offered that *The Woman Tamer* was a delightful creation—a study in psychology with a dip into the philosophy of the socially-derelict world.' The report quoted an angry outburst by Katie

the good-looking young woman of easy morals, [who] tells choosey Ryan, a thief and busker, who is also fat and pessimistic: 'Garn! Yer only fit for work!' And Smith ythe Liar—Chopsey's cobbler—complains; 'It's 'ard to make er livin' now without work.' (Smithy evidently doesn't know as much as some of his 'superiors.') ...⁹

The Herald found Esson's 'acquaintance with criminal speech and manners ... both extensive and peculiar, and his phonetic spelling of local slum dialect ... as unconventional and convincing as Shaw's spelling of Cockney in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*.'¹⁰ *The Socialist* commentary continued in a lengthy, and personal response, by Bernard O'Dowd. 'I am so slenderly equipped for dramatic criticism,' he wrote, 'that I am afraid the editors have acted rather unkindly to Louis Esson in asking me to write an article upon his recently published *Three Short Plays*.'

Possibly because, in callow youth, I became hopelessly saturated with the doctrine of the absolute freedom of the human will, drama has always seemed to me something like a treason to humanity. For it is always, when good, built upon the theory that inevitable consequences follow from human actions, whereas in actual life, so I have believed, there is no consequence, however inevitable in ordinary nature, that is not, in the moral region anyway, capable of modification or destruction by the operation of the will.

O'Dowd goes on to reveal that he failed at his only attempt to write a play: 'I broke all the rules which William Moore told Louis Esson ... were essential to the up-to-date drama, and broke down in the middle of a three-page speech, in which the first and only character was eloquently taking the audience into his confidence about the constitution of the universe and the scope of the play.' Fortunately,

Louis Esson does not make this mistake. His characters speak in revolver shots, brutally, and at the bull's-eye. I doubt if anywhere in recent literature has the minimum limit of terseness been so consistently maintained as in these three plays. Occasionally one felt that, in his zeal, the author got below the threshold, for terseness, as well as exuberance, when gluttonous, becomes vagueness.

⁶ *The Lone Hand*, 1 April 1912

⁷ *The Bulletin*, 11 January 1912, Red Page

⁸ *Leader* (Melbourne), 17 February 1912, p. 25

⁹ *The International Socialist*, 20 January 1912, p. 3

¹⁰ *The Herald*, 28 December 1911, p. 3

Of *The Women Tamer*, he espoused that it 'showed more distinct signs of original dramatic power than any play of local authorship yet presented to Australians' and was 'inclined to think that it will take a high rank among what [he believed] are called 'genre plays.'

Our interest in the comedy itself, however, should not blind readers of *The Socialist* to the fact that, behind *The Woman Tamer*, moves a more fearful tragedy ... Chopsey, Smithy, Katie and Bongo are the ripe and necessary fruits of the competitive Capitalism which, while casting the peals of life to the shiniest, drives the failures to Black Eagle Lane, there to repeat in ghastly imitation of the people who have cast them out, the tragic-comedy of burglary and theft, prostitution, envy, brutality and of uncharitableness. Socialists are often criticised for their lack of humour, but it will be woe to Socialism when we slow the tickling of even Louis Esson's quill-feather to forget for a moment, in our enjoyment of the humorous contortions of damned souls, the fact that the existence Black Eagle Lane, and of the Capitalism that produces it, are such ghastly tragedies, that the co-existence of Christianity with them is a screaming farce. ... Moreover, the existence of such social deformities in our midst is, on its face, a judgment of God against the competitive system, with probably fearful costs against the defendant.

He concluded by declaring his partisanship:

All three plays should be possessed and read by every Socialist with a spare shilling, not only for their fine dramatic power and their photography of important phases of our life her, but because the author is a valued comrade, whose poems and articles in the Socialist Press have been helpful to a very high degree and because of their invaluable, if indirect, bearing on our own Socialist problems.¹¹

Publication 1920

The Woman Tamer was reprinted eight years later, the circumstances related to Vance Palmer by Esson in a letter dated 14 August:

I have had one small stroke of fortune. Henderson, of the Bomb Shop, has accepted for publication my four once-act plays. They will be out in a few months. Henderson publishes a few queer plays at times, but this is his first Australian effort. I wonder could you let any Queensland bookseller know. Henderson has excellent distribution methods for Britain and America, but he doesn't know Australia. I want to help him all I can.¹²

The volume's title was *Dead Timber, and other plays* and, with *Dead timber, The Woman Tamer* and *The Sacred Place*, Esson included a new one act play called *The Drovers*. Esson was excited to be represented in a publication list that included 'Chekhov, Strindberg, Andreyev, Josip Kosor (Serbo-Croatian), Herman Heijermans (Dutch), Georg Kaiser (German, the first translation of any literary work in England since the War), Miles Malleon, and other queer birds' but confided in Vance that Henderson 'wouldn't have done the plays ... if he hadn't known I belonged to the Left.'¹³

Established in the autumn 1907 and situated at 66 Charing Cross Road, London, Francis (Frank) Riddell Henderson's *The Bomb Shop* was notorious for publishing and distributing 'radical Left and Anarchist' writing and modernist literature. Esson's introduction to Henderson would no doubt have come through Thomas Lothian. Lothian's father John came to Australia as a representative of the publishing firm of Walter Scott Publishing; Henderson was the former London representative of

¹¹ 'Louis Esson's Plays', *The Socialist*, 12 January 1912, p. 1

¹² Letter to Vance Palmer, 14 August 1920 in Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Georgian House (1948) p. 23

¹³ William Moore's copy of *Dead Timber, and other play*, autographed by Louis Esson is held by the State Library of NSW,

Walter Scott Publishing. Their other connection was that Esson and Henderson were both Scotts born at Leith. 'The Shop itself is famous,' Esson reported

it has been imitated all over America. You know what a good stock Henderson keeps and what a quaint character he is. He refuses to put anything in the Shop that doesn't have some relationship to modern thought. He has to keep all the reviews, though. Once when I asked for *The Athenaeum*, he glared and fished it out from under a stack of *The New Age*; then handed it over with the bitter comment in his Scots accent: 'There's the noble wurrk!'

What Esson failed to mention was that Hendersons—due to the politically provocative nature of many of its monographs—was basically an outlet for self-published authors. The volume, with some prompting by Vance Palmer, was distributed in Australia by Angus & Robertson.

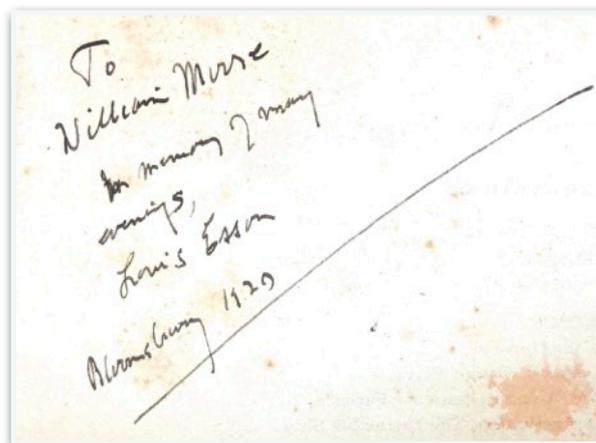
The Australian reviews of the volume began with Harrison Owen who reported that 'Esson's work is always distinctively Australian, and the issue of this book by the Bomb Shop—which has provided English translations of the work of the leading playwrights of practically every European country—constitutes a recognition of the fact that Australia is striving to develop a dramatic literature of her own.'¹⁴ Sydney's *Sunday Times* wrote that

'Esson is one of the Australian writers who have special gifts of originality and distinction. All his work is good and worthy. This little collection of one act plays, most of which were acted in the wolds of Melbourne before the war, is rich in pleasant and effective stuff.' It single out *The Woman Tamer* as 'admirably done.' It went on:

Mr Esson understands the real mind and temper of the Melbourne tough better than either Mr Edward Dyson or Mr Dennis does. ... This is a small country as population goes, and for some time the writers of good Australian plays will have generally to print them abroad because they cannot produce them with profit in Australia. Useless to blame managers for that. There is really no local demand for one act plays of this sort. Repertory players may present them occasionally, and that is all; but the work of repertory players is always very grey. It is a pity that the old fashion of the curtain raiser has gone out. We shall not see many Australian plays of any kind until we have a reasonably big population and the live beginnings of an Australian theatre. The most sympathetic manager is limited by the circumstances and the possibilities.¹⁵

The Socialist thought *The Woman Tamer* 'a picture of crook life in Melbourne' and showed Esson to be 'as great a master of Australian slang as CJ Dennis.'

Socialists will understand these words of Chopsey Bill: We're all thieves e, every bleeding one of us. We're all at the same game as long as we're not found out. We're all taking the mugs down. One bloke does the trick with a silk hat on the Stock Exchange, and a shyster mine. We do it with a jemmy. It's funny, ain't it?¹⁶



A copy of *Dead Timber, and other plays* held by the NSW State Library carries the following inscription:
To William Moore
In memory of many evenings, Louis Esson
Bloomsbury 1920

¹⁴ *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 25 December 1920, p. 6

¹⁵ *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 9 January 1921, p. 9

¹⁶ *The Socialist*, 21 January 1921, p. 1

Despite what he perceived as some 'rather staggering notices,' Esson was more appreciative of another's response.

My great score, which has made me a little giddy, was a letter from Yeats. He says he approves greatly of my 'naturalism,' that I write a vivid dialogue, and that the work reminds him strongly of certain plays that were produced with great success at the Abbey. He cannot judge my powers of construction; but if I have good construction and characterisation I could become a 'powerful and successful' dramatist. But, of course, I may not have that structural power, which is the purely intellectual part of a play. Moore says Yeats loves speech more than any man in the world, and his attitude is exclusively literary. His opinion means more to me than anyone else's, for I have always regard him as the chief priest of the temple of Apollo.¹⁷

Within a week, another letter: 'I must get my boasting over,' Esson wrote to Palmer.

Yeats asked me up to see him and put me up for the night. I landed late afternoon, and he talked for an hour on my plays, theories, etc. before dinner. At dinner he told good stories. After that we talked till past midnight. Next morning he took me into his study, and he was very sympathetic. I then took a walk round the town, had lunch with them, and returned.

He thought more of my little plays than I could possibly have dared to hope. He thought the dialogue excellent, the 'atmosphere' as suggestive as could be. I told him I didn't think much of myself as a 'plotter,' but he said the four little plots were perfect. The only adverse criticism mad was that near the end of *The Woman Tamer* the woman might have pretended to relax to make the end more surprising. He said he thought the element of surprise was necessary in comedy, but not in tragedy. (He doesn't mean 'surprise' in the American magazine-editor's sense.) On the whole, he thought, I might do my best things in tragedy. There it doesn't matter if the end is foreseen, the emotion should carry the interest through. He thought success would come to me some day, though I don't believe that. I mention this not to skite, but to indicate the principle of sound literature.¹⁸

Copy Text

Esson had editorial influence over the two published versions of *The Woman Tamer*: the original published to coincide with its production, in *Three Short Plays*, Fraser & Jenkinson, Melbourne, 1911 (A); and revisions made in *Dead Timber, and other plays*, Hendersons, London, 1920 (B).

There are two issues that present themselves in determining which text best represents Esson's 'true authorial intention.'

Firstly, as already discussed, Text A was a version of the script used in the premiere production on 5 October 1910. Clearly, it contains no emendations nor revisions that might have arisen following the reception of its first performance. While there are a large number of emendations made for Text B (especially spelling and punctuation), the play's structure and intent remains in tact.

As G Thomas Tanselle reminds us, 'when an author publishes successive revised editions of a work, it often happens that whatever authorial revisions are present in the last edition supersede the corresponding readings of the earlier editions—they are indications, that is, of the author's final intention.' But in some cases an author's revisions 'result from external pressure.' Tanselle provides examples—such as 'a publisher's demands,' for instance—that do not therefore point to a new

¹⁷ Letter to Vance Palmer, November 1920 in Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 25

¹⁸ Letter to Vance Palmer, November 1920 in Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. p. 26

'authorial intention.'¹⁹ In the case of *The Woman Tamer*, in a letter to Vance Palmer following publication of Text B, Louis makes a point of thanking him for the

suggestion of changing the phonetics in my dialogue. It was meant for the actor or speaker, but it does no good even in that way, and, of course, is always an eyesore. If the idiom isn't good, impossible spelling won't make it so.²⁰

However, there are issues that militate against taking this attitude as conclusive. Firstly, this volume was specifically prepared for an English readership who may very well have found the idiom of the original (clipped word endings, elisions, phonetic spelling) inaccessible (Louis nonetheless retains the jargon!). What is lost with the revision, however, is the rhythm of the dialogue, the intrinsic idiomatic expression; obvious here in a speech by Smithy the Liar.

TEXT A (1911)

SMITHY. Luck? I don't mark no tickets wif ther Pats. I'll tell yer. We w'z blowin' down ter Serreenter t'other d'y on one o' them B'y boats. I w'z wif ther 'Art an' Arrer Push. Soon's we 'ad a cook at there engines, gorblime, we w'z pinched—five of us—two o' them smart D's nicked us fer bein' suspicious-lookin' kerreckters. (*Relates his anecdote with explanatory gestures.*) We we'z orl 'ooked owt an' 'andcuffed tergether—ther five ov us w'z stood up in er row, blime, we did look a lot o' mugs. We smothered up the darbies, o' corse, an' started wordin' their tarts. We w'z on er good wicket, w'en Pete sez to 'is bit o' fluff: 'Wud yer like to see er real solid braiclet, duckie?' 'Yairs, I wud,' she sez ter Pete. 'Ere ye are, then,' sez Pete, and wif that 'e lifted 'is 'ands an' shook ther braiclets in 'er faice. She did do er bunk. There fireman wanted ter stand us er couple o' bottles o' beer, but ther John sez, 'Now,' ther Cow. Ugh, blime, I ain't got no— luck.

TEXT B (1920)

SMITHY. Luck? I don't mark no tickets wif ther Chows. I'll tell you. We were blowing down to Sorrento t'other day on one of them Bay boats. I was with the Heart and Arrow Push. Soon's we had a cook at the engines, gorblime, we were pinched, five of us—two of them smart D's nicked us for being suspicious looking characters. (*Relates his anecdote with explanatory gestures.*) We were all hooked out, and handcuffed together—the five of us were stood up in a row, blime, we did look a lot o' mugs. We smothered up the darbies, of course, and started wording the tarts. We were on a good wicket, when Pete says to his bit o' fluff, 'Would you like to see a real solid bracelet, duckie?' 'Yes, I would,' she says to Pete, and with that he lifted his hands, and he shook the bracelets in her face. She did do a bunk. The fireman wanted to stand us a couple of bottles of beer, but the John says, 'No,' the cow. Ugh! blime, I ain't got no luck.

The second, and significant problem—also evident in the extract—is editorial inconsistency (*'no tickets wif ther Pats/Chows'; 't'other d'y/day' etc*); Esson's revision and edit was sloppy.

As an editor, it is not my task to 'improve' upon an author's—in this case inadequate—decisions in the revision process, but in this particular case I am conscious of Tanselle's advice that

A careful reading of any piece of writing, whatever its content or approach must—by definition one would have thought—involve consideration of the manner of expression, which is indeed an inextricable part of the content.²¹

Much of the success of the first production lay with Esson's representation of the idiom and the perceived accuracy of his recording of the vocabulary of the slums of Melbourne;

¹⁹ G Thomas Tanselle, 'Texts of Documents and Texts of Works', *Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing*, University of Virginia Press (1991)

²⁰ Letter to Vance Palmer, 1 December 1920, quoted in Sykes, Alrene Sykes, *Five Plays for Stage, Radio and Television*, UQP (1977) p. 15

²¹ Tanselle, *Op. cit.* p. 4

He simply lifted three men and a woman from one quarter, the social underworld, bringing the very atmosphere they lived in with them, and placed them before a foreign company. As a matter of fact such a scene might have been enacted coincidentally in 'real life, within a quarter of a mile from that hall.²²

While the revisions were unquestionably made by the author in Text B (1920) I believe that the reading that best represents the author's 'final intentions' is Text A (1911) and this provides the 'copy text' for this edition (noting all revisions made in B in the apparatus).

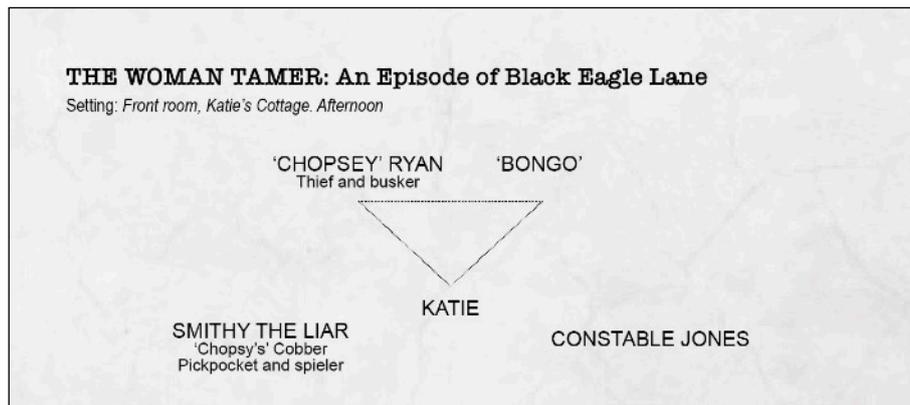
²² *The Herald* (Melbourne), 6 October 1910

Characters

KATIE
'CHOPSEY' RYAN, thief and busker
SMITHY THE LIAR, his cobber
CONSTABLE JONES
'BONGO'

Scene

Front room, Katie's Cottage. Afternoon.



ACT ONE

(Front room of KATIE's cottage. Front door and window open on narrow lane. Another door leads to inner room. A plain table, a horsehair sofa, sideboard, some cheap ornaments etc.)

(KATIE, a good looking young woman, reclining on sofa, smokes a cigarette and looks over a sporting paper. She turns round eagerly, as 'CHOPSEY' RYAN enters.)

(CHOPSEY is fat and lazy, an unsuccessful thief, but a street musician, and a pessimist philosopher. He enters singing, and seems pleased with himself.)

KATIE *(Rising)*. 'Ow's it going?²³

CHOPSEY. You leave it ter me²⁴, little bird.

KATIE. Did yer put up the job with 'Shipmate'?

CHOPSEY. Yer wud like ter know, wudn't yer?²⁵

KATIE. What is it? Jewell'ry?

CHOPSEY. Shu'! Don't blab!²⁶

KATIE. Carn't yer giv er civil answer to er civil question?²⁷

CHOPSEY. Run aw'y, fairy, and cool yer ead.²⁸

(He takes coat off slowly.)

KATIE. Did yer ferret out anythin'?²⁹

CHOPSEY. P'raps.

KATIE. Yer might tell us, Chopsey. Don't be oyster, I won't³⁰ word nobody, not me.

(He sings another line, throwing coat at hooks on wall. It falls. He turns and moves towards sofa.)

Wot's the strength ov it? I've bin waitin' orl afternoon ter 'ear how yer got on.³¹ Don' be a nark'.

CHOPSEY *(On sofa)*. Give it er breeze'.³²

KATIE *(Pleasantly)*. Come on, Chops! Tell us orl about it. Wot's doin'?³³

CHOPSEY. W'y don' yer giv yer tongue arf an 'our orf?³⁴

KATIE. Growl, snarl, y'orter be in yer kennel. Did he take yer on? Wot did 'e s'y? My oath, we want er few bones in ther truck.³⁵

²³ 'Ow's it going?] How's it going? *B.*

²⁴ ter me] to me *B.*

²⁵ Yer would like her know, didn't yer?] You would like to know, wouldn't you? *B.*

²⁶ Shu'! Don' blab!]Shu'! Don't blab. *B.*

²⁷ Carn't yer giv er civil answer to er civil question?] Can't you give a civil answer to a civil question? *B.*

²⁸ Run aw'y, fairy, and cool yer ead.] Run away, fairy, and cool your head. *B.*

²⁹ Did yer ferret out anythin'?] Did you ferret out anything? *B.*

³⁰ Yer might tell us, Chopsey. Don't be oyster, I won't] You might tell us, Chopsey. Don't be oyster. I won't *B.*

³¹ Wot's the strength ov it? I've bin waitin' orl afternoon ter 'ear how yer got on.] What's the strength of it? I've been waiting all afternoon to hear how you get on. *B.*

³² er breeze'] a breeze. *B.*

³³ Chops! Tell us orl about it. Wot's doin'?] Chops. Tell us all about it. What's doing? *B.*

³⁴ W'y don' yer giv yer tongue arf an 'our orf?] Why don't you give your tongue half-an-hour off? *B.*

³⁵ Growl, snarl, y'orter be in yer kennel. Did he take yer on? Wot did 'e s'y? My oath, we want er few bones in ther truck.] Growl, snarl, y'orter be in your kennel. Did he take you on? What did he say? My oath, we want a few bones in the truck. *B.*

CHOPSEY. Put er rope roun it an' drown it!³⁶

KATIE (*Shrilly*). Curse yer, I've got er rite ter know. Ain't I bin keepin' yer?³⁷

CHOPSEY. Blast yer. I know wot I'm doin', don't I!³⁸

KATIE. Ow. You w'z turned down againe, w'z yer! Shipmate wudn't 'ave yer on 'is mind.³⁹

CHOPSEY. Shut your jor! Pick me coat up, an don'⁴⁰ -

KATIE. Look 'ere, I'm gettin' sick o' this. You mess up everythin'.⁴¹

CHOPSEY. Ugh'. It's 'ot.⁴² Don't bustle me. Pick me coat up.

KATIE. I ain't yer⁴³ servant, am I?

CHOPSEY. Pick me coat up, d'yer 'ear⁴⁴ me?

KATIE (*Scornfully*). W'y don't yer git work!⁴⁵ You ain't no decent thief.

CHOPSEY (*Stung*). You know too much, do'nt yer⁴⁶?

KATIE. Fat lot you ever done! I ain't seen yer dive on no red lot. I ain't seen yer stoush no rozzer. I ain't ever 'erd about yer in the '*Erald* for snow-droppin'. Ow now. Not you! You pl'y ther organ.⁴⁷

CHOPSEY. D'yer think I tell wimmin my bis?⁴⁸

KATIE. Y'aint got none. Yer couldn't get a job roastin' peanuts. Yer cudn't orfside in er fourpenny fish joint.⁴⁹

CHOPSEY. Yer carn't kid me. I know wot wimmin is.⁵⁰

KATIE. Yer w'z proud ter git⁵¹ on with me.

CHOPSEY. Gorblime, proud! I cud 'ave 'ad⁵² Fishy Liz.

KATIE. Fishy Liz! Ken she keep er bloke?⁵³

³⁶ Put er rope roun it an' drown it!] Put a rope round it and drown it. *B.*

³⁷ Curse yer, I've got er rite ter know. Ain't I bin keepin' yer?] Curse you, I've got a right to know. Ain't I been keeping you? *B.*

³⁸ Blast yer. I know wot I'm doin', don't I!] Blast you? I know what I'm doing, don't I? *B.*

³⁹ Ow. You w'z turned down againe, w'z yer! Shipmate wudn't 'ave yer on 'is mind.] Oh! You was turned down again, was you! 'Shipmate' wouldn't have you on his mind. *B.*

⁴⁰ jor!] jaw *B.* ; don'] don't *B.*

⁴¹ Look 'ere, I'm gettin' sick o' this. You mess up everythin'.] Look here, I'm getting sick o' this. You mess up everything. *B.*

⁴² Ugh'. It's 'ot.] Ugh! It's hot. *B.*

⁴³ yer/ your *B.*

⁴⁴ d'yer 'ear] d'you hear *B.*

⁴⁵ W'y don't yer git work!] Why don't you get work. *B.*

⁴⁶ do'nt yer] don't you *B.*

⁴⁷ Fat lot you ever done! I ain't seen yer dive on no red lot. I ain't seen yer stoush no rozzer. I ain't ever 'erd about yer in the '*Erald* for snow-droppin'. Ow now. Not you! You pl'y ther organ.] Fat lot you ever done! I ain't seen you dive on no red lot. I ain't seen you stoush no rozzer. I ain't even heard about you in the *Herald* for snow dropping. Oh no! Not you! You play the organ. *B.*

⁴⁸ D'yer think I tell wimmin my bis?] Do you think I tell women my biz? *B.*

⁴⁹ Yer couldn't get a job roastin' peanuts. Yer cudn't orfside in er fourpenny fish joint.] You could'nt get a job roasting peanuts. You couldn't offside in a fourpenny fish-joint. *B.*

⁵⁰ Yer carn't kid me. I know wot wimmin is.] You can't kid me. I know what women is. *B.*

⁵¹ Yer w'z proud ter git] You was proud to get *B.*

⁵² I cud 'ave 'ad] I could have had *B.*

⁵³ Ken she keep er bloke?] Can she keep a bloke? *B.*

CHOPSEY. Y'ain't ther only silver fish in ther⁵⁴ pond.

KATIE. You're orl talk. Bongo' Wilson got nine months for toppin' orf er mob o' Chows with er bottle. 'E passed owt four ov 'em.⁵⁵

CHOPSEY. Yer know I've bin seein' Shipmate, don't yer?⁵⁶

KATIE. Rats! Bongo didn't tork an' skite about it. 'E done it.⁵⁷

CHOPSEY (*Asserting himself*). Look 'ere, pick me⁵⁸ coat up.

KATIE (*Examining him critically*). Wot ken you do? You busk owtside ther pubs—for beer. Ow'—Ye're er boshter with the tarts, ain't yer—singin' yer pritty songs. I ain't seen yer bring in much any'ow. There ain't nothin' in music. I don't flash no silk skirts. I don't drive no motor kar since I took you on. Orl you git aw'y with cudn't keep me in fags.⁵⁹

CHOPSEY. D'you 'ear me? Pick me coat up!⁶⁰

KATIE. Look 'ere, Chopsey Ryan.⁶¹

CHOPSEY. I ain't goin' ter argue ther point with yer. I don't argue with wimmin.⁶²

KATIE. I don't argue with women, ow now, strike me pritty.⁶³

CHOPSEY (*Overwrought*). Oh, gorblime, chaine it up!

KATIE. Why don't yer git work. Work—That's orl yer fit fer.⁶⁴

CHOPSEY. Pick me⁶⁵ coat up.

KATIE. Do yer own dirty werk.⁶⁶

(*CHOPSEY, with cigarette in mouth, rises slowly and takes a step towards KATIE.*)

CHOPSEY. D'yer 'ear me?⁶⁷

KATIE (*Putting stool in front of her*). Yairs, I 'ears yer. Wot aboutt it?⁶⁸

(*CHOPSEY, in moving after her, knocks over stool, while KATIE slips behind table.*)

⁵⁴ Y'ain't ther only silver fish in ther] You aint the only silver fish in the *B*.

⁵⁵ You're orl talk. Bongo' Wilson got nine months for toppin' orf er mob o' Chows with er bottle. 'E passed owt four ov 'em.] You're all talk. Bongo Williams got nine months for topping off a mob o' Chows with a bottle. He passed out four of them. *B*.

⁵⁶ Yer know I've bin seein' Shipmate, don't yer?] You know I've been seeing Shipmate, don't you? *B*.

⁵⁷ tork an' skite about it. 'E done it.] talk and skite about it. He done it. *B*.

⁵⁸ 'ere, pick me] here, pick my *B*.

⁵⁹ Wot ken you do? You busk owtside ther pubs—for beer. Ow'—Ye're er boshter with the tarts, ain't yer—singin' yer pritty songs. I ain't seen yer bring in much any'ow. There ain't nothin' in music. I don't flash no silk skirts. I don't drive no motor kar since I took you on. Orl you git aw'y with cudn't keep me in fags.] What can you do? You busk outside the pubs for beer. Oh, you're booster with the tarts, ain't you, singing your pretty songs. I ain't seen you bring in much anyhow. There ain't nothing in music. I don't flash no silk skirts. I don't drive no motor car since I took you on. All you get away with couldn't keep me in fags. *B*.

⁶⁰ D'you 'ear me? Pick me coat up!] D'you hear me. Pick up my coat! *B*.

⁶¹ Look 'ere, Chopsey Ryan.] Look here, Chopsey Ryan - *B*.

⁶² goin' ter argue ther point with yer.] going to argue the point with you *B*. ; wimmin] women *B*.

⁶³ ow now, strike me pritty.] oh no, strike me pretty! *B*.

⁶⁴ yer git work. Work—That's orl yer fit fer.] Why don't you get work.—That's all you're fit for. *B*.

⁶⁵ me] my *B*.

⁶⁶ Do yer own dirty werk.] Do your own dirty work. *B*.

⁶⁷ D'yer 'ear me?] D'you hear me? *B*.

⁶⁸ Yairs, I 'ears yer. Wot aboutt it?] Yes, I hear you. What about it? *B*.

CHOPSEY. Come 'ere, curse yer!⁶⁹

(KATIE, accepting his challenge, comes from behind table, and boldly faces him.)

KATIE *(In hard voice)*. I'm 'ere, blarst yer. Wot's yer trouble?⁷⁰

CHOPSEY *(Hesitatingly)*. I'll pass yer one ter go on with, if yer⁷¹ don't.

KATIE *(Provokingly)*. What'll yer⁷² do?

(CHOPSEY raises his hand. KATIE involuntarily draws back slightly. CHOPSEY follows her.)

CHOPSEY. I'll—I've er good mind ter throttle yer, d'you 'ear.⁷³

(Grabs hold of her.)

KATIE. Oh! Oh!

CHOPSEY. Ye're squealin' now, are yer?⁷⁴

(Gives her a half-hearted shove. KATIE, with hands before her eyes, pretends to weep.)

Bah! W'y don't yer behave yerself. Yer will nag, nag, at er man. You put me orl in er haze. I didn't want'er 'urt yer.⁷⁵ 'Struth, turn it up.

(KATIE still weeps.)

(Frightened.) Yer brort it on yerself, now, didn't yer? I didn't mean to 'urt yer, I tell yer. I ain't one o' them blokes, Katie.⁷⁶

(KATIE bursts out laughing.)

KATIE *(Mockingly)*. 'Urt me? Yer couldn't 'urt me, yer waster.⁷⁷

(She moves up to door of inner room.)

'Urt—er thing like you -⁷⁸

(She kicks coat.)

Y'ain't over the fence yit. 'I don't argue with wimmen.' Oh, blime'.⁷⁹

(Exit KATIE into the inner room.)

(CHOPSEY picks up coat, and hangs it on hook.)

(KATIE, from inner room, sings a few lines of one of CHOPSEY's songs.)

CHOPSEY. W'y don't yer strangle it right orf?⁸⁰ Ye're murderin' it, any'ow.⁸¹

⁶⁹ Come 'ere, curse yer!] Come here, curse you!

⁷⁰ I'm 'ere, blarst yer. Wot's yer trouble?] I'm here, blast you. What's your trouble? *B.*

⁷¹ yer one ter go on with, if yer] you one to go on with, if you *B.*

⁷² yer] you *B.*

⁷³ I've er good mind ter throttle yer, d'you 'ear.] I've a good mind to thrill you, d'os hear? *B.*

⁷⁴ Ye're squealin' now, are yer?] You're squealing now, are you? *B.*

⁷⁵ W'y don't yer behave yerself. Yer will nag, nag, at er man. You put me orl in er haze. I didn't want'er 'urt yer.] Why don't you behave yourself? You will nag, nag at a man. You put me all in a haze. I didn't want to hurt you. *B.*

⁷⁶ Yer brort it on yerself, now, didn't yer? I didn't mean to 'urt yer, I tell yer. I ain't one o' them blokes, Katie.] You brought it on yourself, now, didn't you? I didn't mean to hurt you, I tell you. I ain't one of them blokes, Katie. *B.*

⁷⁷ 'Urt me? Yer couldn't 'urt me, yer waster.] Hurt me, you couldn't hurt me, you waster. *B.*

⁷⁸ 'Urt—er thing like you -] Hurt—a thing like you - *B.*

⁷⁹ Y'ain't over the fence yit. 'I don't argue with wimmen.' Oh, blime'.] You ain't over the fence yet. I don't argue with women. Oh, blime! *B.*

⁸⁰ right orf?] right off! *B.*

⁸¹ W'y don't yer strangle it right orf? Ye're murderin' it, any'ow.] Why don't you strangle it right off! You're murdering it, anyhow. *B.*

KATIE. Don't be 'asty, Clarence. Yer'll strain yer pritty voice, an' yer wont be able to busk no more ter ther tarts.⁸²

CHOPSEY. Yer give er man ther joes.⁸³

KATIE. 'E ain't very strong since 'e 'ad chicken-pox.⁸⁴

CHOPSEY. Go and sleep it orf⁸⁵.

KATIE. 'E carn't stand excitement. 'E's got a weak 'art.⁸⁶

(KATIE enters humming, with 'Gem' straw hat on, confident and scornful. She picks up her basket.)

CHOPSEY. W'ere are yer goin'?'⁸⁷

KATIE. Don' tork ter me. Er nice sort o' thing you are.⁸⁸

CHOPSEY. Yer brort it on yerself, now, did'nt yer? I don't job wimmin.⁸⁹

KATIE. Ugh. You only make me tired.

CHOPSEY. W'ere are yer goin'?'⁹⁰

KATIE. Yer'll find out soon enuf.⁹¹

CHOPSEY. Hurry up with me⁹² tea.

KATIE. Don' you worry. I'll come back orl rite, bright an' early⁹³ too.

CHOPSEY. Take the acid orf⁹⁴.

KATIE. Yer won't be nervous, be yerself, will yer?⁹⁵

(Exit KATIE, front door.)

CHOPSEY. Get er⁹⁶ move on.

KATIE *(Looking through window)*. Cheer up, Birdie. Sing er little song ter yerself. I'm goin' ter bring yer 'ome⁹⁷ a surprise.

(KATIE goes away.)

⁸² Do'nt be 'asty, Clarence. Yer'll strain yer pritty voice, an' yer wont be able to busk no more ter ther tarts.] Don't be hasty, Clarence. You'll strain your pretty voice, and you won't be able to busk no more to the tarts. *B.*

⁸³ Yer give er man ther joes.] You give a man the joes. *B.*

⁸⁴ 'E ain't very strong since 'e 'ad chicken-pox.] He ain't very strong since he had the measles. *B.*

⁸⁵ orf] off *B.*

⁸⁶ 'E carnt stand excitement. 'E's got a weak 'art.] He can't stand excitement. He's got a weak heart. *B.*

⁸⁷ W'ere are yer goin'?] Where are you going? *B.*

⁸⁸ Don' tork ter me. Er nice sort o' thing you are.] Don't talk to me. A nice sort of thing you are. *B.*

⁸⁹ Yer brort it on yerself, now, did'nt yer? I don't job wimmin.] You brought it on yourself, didn't you? I don't job women. *B.*

⁹⁰ W'ere are yer goin'?] Where are you going? *B.*

⁹¹ Yer'll find out soon enuf.] You'll find out soon enough. *B.*

⁹² me] my *B.*

⁹³ orl rite, bright an' early] all right, bright and early *B.*

⁹⁴ orf] off *B.*

⁹⁵ Yer won't be nervous, be yerself, will yer?] You won't be nervous by yourself, will you?

⁹⁶ er] a *B.*

⁹⁷ Sing er little song ter yerself. I'm goin' ter bring yer 'ome] Sing a little song to yourself. I'm going to bring you home *B.*

CHOPSEY. Don't be all d'y⁹⁸ spruikin'.

(He lies down on the sofa.)

(SMITHY THE LIAR comes to the door, with a couple of rabbits over his shoulder. SMITHY is small, but well-built and agile, keen-eyed, and light fingered; affable, but rather apologetic in voice and bearing. He is a pickpocket and spieler. He has a grey suit, and green hat.)

SMITHY *(At door)*. 'Ow⁹⁹ is it, Chopsey?

CHOPSEY. That you, Smithy?

SMITHY *(Looking down street)*. W'ere's she lobin'?¹⁰⁰

CHOPSEY. No w'ere.¹⁰¹

SMITHY. Ain't she er 'igh¹⁰² stepper?

(SMITHY enters.)

'Ad er barney¹⁰³, Chopsey?

CHOPSEY. 'Tain't nuthin'¹⁰⁴.

SMITHY. Fair dinkum?

CHOPSEY. 'Tain't nuthin', I tell yer. I just put me 'and on 'er.¹⁰⁵

SMITHY. Gorblime, eh?

CHOPSEY. I didn't 'urt her. I ain't one o' them blokes¹⁰⁶, Smithy.

SMITHY. 'Ow¹⁰⁷ did she take it?

CHOPSEY. Al'ri. Me an' Katie's gitting' on splendid. I noo she w'z mine ther first time I ever seen 'er. Look 'ere, Smithy, it's this w'y. I know 'ow ter 'andle 'em. I've ad experience. I've tamed one or two ov the bea^{ts}.¹⁰⁸

SMITHY. I'd sooner tame one o' them¹⁰⁹ tigers down in the Circus.

CHOPSEY. You don' know wimmin. W'en I got on with Katie I reckined I'd be master in me own 'ome.¹¹⁰

SMITHY. I thort it w'z 'er place?¹¹¹

⁹⁸ d'y] day *B*.

⁹⁹ 'Ow] How *B*.

¹⁰⁰ W'ere's she lobin'?] Where's she lobbing? *B*

¹⁰¹ No w'ere.] Nowhere. *B*.

¹⁰² er 'igh] a high *B*.

¹⁰³ 'Ad er barney] Had a barney *B*.

¹⁰⁴ nuthin'] nothing *B*.

¹⁰⁵ nuthin', I tell yer. I just put me 'and on 'er.] nothing, I tell you. I just put my hand on her. *B*.

¹⁰⁶ 'urt her. I ain't one o' them blokes] hurt her. I ain't one of them blokes *B*.

¹⁰⁷ 'Ow] How *B*.

¹⁰⁸ Al'ri. Me an' Katie's gitting' on splendid. I noo she w'z mine ther first time I ever seen 'er. Look 'ere, Smithy, it's this w'y. I know 'ow ter 'andle 'em. I've ad experience. I've tamed one or two ov the bea^{ts}.] All right. Me and Katie's getting on splendid. I knew she was mine the first time I ever seen her. Look here, Smithy, it's this way. I know how to handle 'em. I have had experience. I've tamed one or two of the bea^{ts}. *B*.

¹⁰⁹ o' them] of them *B*.

¹¹⁰ wimmin. W'en I got on with Katie I reckined I'd be master in me own 'ome.] women. When I got on with Katie. I reckoned I'd be master in my own home. *B*.

¹¹¹ I thort it w'z 'er place?] I thought it was her place. *B*.

CHOPSEY. It's mine w'en I'm 'ere, ain't it? You don't wanter murder 'em, yer know. I've got Katie, any'ow, like a fantail. She'll do anythin' for me. Sit down, Smithy; 'ow's things?¹¹²

SMITHY. Pritty slow. Too many Johns. There's still er drop o' beer left, tho'.¹¹³

CHOPSEY. Any luck comin' yer w'y?¹¹⁴

SMITHY. Luck? I don't mark no tickets wif ther Pats. I'll tell yer. We w'z blowin' down ter Serreenter t'other d'y on one o' them B'y boats. I w'z wif ther 'Art an' Arrer Push. Soon's we 'ad a cook at the ingines, gorblime, we w'z pinched—five of us—two o' them smart D's nicked us fer bein' suspicious-lookin' kerreckters.¹¹⁵ (*Relates his anecdote with explanatory gestures.*) We we'z orl 'ooked owt an' 'andcuffed tergether—ther five ov us w'z stood up in er row, blime, we did look a lot o' mugs. We smothered up their darbies, o' corse, an' started wordin' their tarts. We w'z on er good wicket, wen Pete sez to 'is bit o' fluff: 'Wud yer like to see er real solid braiclet, duckie?' 'Yairs, I wud,' she sez ter Pete. 'Ere ye are, then,' sez Pete, and wif that 'e lifted 'is 'ands an' shook ther braiclets in 'er faice. She did do er bunk. Ther fireman wanted ter stand us er couple o' bottles o' beer, but ther John sez, 'Now'—ther Cow. Ugh, blime, I ain't got no—luck.¹¹⁶

CHOPSEY. Werkin'?¹¹⁷

SMITHY. 'Awkin'.¹¹⁸

CHOPSEY. Carn't yer maike yer livin' at ther gaime?¹¹⁹

SMITHY. It's 'ard ter maike er livin' now wifout work.¹²⁰

CHOPSEY. Don't yer be er mug. Wot d'yer get owt ov it?¹²¹

¹¹² It's mine w'en I'm 'ere, ain't it? You dont wanter murder 'em, yer know. I've got Katie, any'ow, like a fantail. She'll do anythin' for me. Sit down, Smithy; 'ow's things?] It's mine when I'm here, ain't it? You don't want to murder them, you know. I've got Katie anyhow, like a fantail. She'll do anything for me. Sit down, Smithy. How's things? *B.*

¹¹³ Pritty slow. Too many Johns. There's still er drop o' beer left, tho'.] Pretty slow. Too many Johns. There's still a drop o' beer left though. *B.*

¹¹⁴ comin' yer w'y] coming your way *B.*

¹¹⁵ I don't mark no tickets wif ther Pats. I'll tell yer. We w'z blowin' down ter Serreenter t'other d'y on one o' them B'y boats. I w'z wif ther 'Art an' Arrer Push. Soon's we 'ad a cook at the ingines, gorblime, we w'z pinched—five of us—two o' them smart D's nicked us fer bein' suspicious-lookin' kerreckters.] I don't mark no tickets with the Chows. I'll tell you. We were blowing down to Sorrento t'other day on one of them Bay boats. I was with the Heart and Annow Push. Soon's we had a cook at the engines, gorblime, we were pinched, five of us—two of them smart D's nicked us for being suspicious looking characters. *B.*

¹¹⁶ We we'z orl 'ooked owt an' 'andcuffed tergether—ther five ov us w'z stood up in er row, blime, we did look a lot o' mugs. We smothered up their darbies, o' corse, an' started wordin' their tarts. We w'z on er good wicket, wen Pete sez to 'is bit o' fluff: 'Wud yer like to see er real solid braiclet, duckie?' 'Yairs, I wud,' she sez ter Pete. 'Ere ye are, then,' sez Pete, and wif that 'e lifted 'is 'ands an' shook ther braiclets in 'er faice. She did do er bunk. Ther fireman wanted ter stand us er couple o' bottles o' beer, but ther John sez, 'Now'—ther Cow. Ugh, blime, I ain't got no— luck.] We were all hooked out, and handcuffed together—the five of us were stood up in a row, blime, we did look a lot o' mugs We smothered up the darbies, of course, and started wording the tarts. We were on a good wicket, when Pete says to his bit o' fluff, 'Would you like to see a real solid bracelet, Duckie?' 'Yes, I would,' she says to Pete, and with that he lifted his hands, and he shook the bracelets in her face. She did do a bunk. The fireman wanted to stand us a couple of bottles of beer, but the John says, 'No,' the cow. Ugh! blime, I ain't got no luck. *B.*

¹¹⁷ Werkin'?] Working? *B.*

¹¹⁸ 'Awkin'.] Hawking. *B.*

¹¹⁹ Carn't yer maike yer livin' at ther gaime?] Can't you make your living at the game? *B.*

¹²⁰ It's 'ard ter maike er livin' now wifout work.] It's hard to make a living now without work. *B.*

¹²¹ Don't yer be er mug. Wot d'yer get owt ov it?] Don't be a mug. What d'you get out of it? *B.*

SMITHY. I'm 'awking for Carlo¹²² on commission.
 CHOPSEY. I'd sooner bring er moon than work fer er dirty¹²³ Dago.
 SMITHY. I don' wanter go up ter ther farm.¹²⁴
 CHOPSEY. I'm gettin' full up. I've bin singin' orl over ther town. They orl like ter 'ear me sing, but they don' sling much inter ther 'at.
 SMITHY. Ther brass don't seem ter¹²⁵ come my way.
 CHOPSEY. I'm goin' ter turn it up. They don't let er busker live. I w'z torkin' with old Shipmate this afternoon. We're orl thieves, 'e sez, ev'ry bleedin' one ov us. We're orl at ther saime game, as long as we aint found owt. We're orl taking ther mugs down. One bloke, 'e sez, dus ther trick with er silk 'at on ther Stock Exchange, and er shyster mine. We do it with er jemmy. It's funny, ain't it?¹²⁶
 SMITHY. Yairs.¹²⁷
 CHOPSEY. We're ther mugs, if we don't git er bit ov our¹²⁸ own back.
 SMITHY. I fell in. Nine months, I done. I w'z dead innercint.¹²⁹
 CHOPSEY. Gerrout, yer liar¹³⁰.
 SMITHY. I w'z dead innercint, they'll orl tell yer that.¹³¹
 CHOPSEY. 'Orl men 'as er rite ter live. 'Onersty m'y be ther best policy in er Two Up School, but it wont keep er busker in shandies. Ugh. Mugs are made ter drink owter¹³² ain't they?
 SMITHY. Yairs.¹³³
 CHOPSEY. Well, drain 'em dry. It don't 'urt me¹³⁴ to do it.
 SMITHY. Blime, I fell in, er bird¹³⁵.

¹²² I'm 'awking for Carlo] I'm hawking for Carlo Rossi *B*.

¹²³ er moon than work fer er dirty] a moon than work for a dirty *B*.

¹²⁴ I don' wanter go up ter ther farm.] I don't want to go up to the farm. *B*.

¹²⁵ Ther brass don't seem ter] The brass don't seem to *B*.

¹²⁶ I'm goin' ter turn it up. They don't let er busker live. I w'z torkin' with old Shipmate this afternoon. We're orl thieves, 'e sez, ev'ry bleedin' one ov us. We're orl at ther saime game, as long as we aint found owt. We're orl taking ther mugs down. One bloke, 'e sez, dus ther trick with er silk 'at on ther Stock Exchange, and er shyster mine. We do it with er jemmy. It's funny, ain't it?] I'm going to turn it up. They won't let a. Busker live. I was talking with old Shipmate this afternoon. We're all thieves, he says, every bleeding one of us. We're all at the same game, as long as we're not found out. We're all taking the mugs down. One bloke, he says, does the trick with a silk hat on the Stock Exchange, and a shyster mine. We do it with a jemmy. It's funny, ain't it? *B*.

¹²⁷ Yairs.] Yes. *B*.

¹²⁸ ther mugs, if we don't git er bit ov our] the mugs, if we don't get a bit of our *B*.

¹²⁹ Nine months, I done. I w'z dead innercint.] Nine months I done. I was dead innocent. *B*.

¹³⁰ yer liar] you liar. *B*.

¹³¹ I w'z dead innercint, they'll orl tell yer that.] I was dead innocent, they'll all tell you that. *B*.

¹³² 'Orl men 'as er rite ter live. 'Onersty m'y be ther best policy in er Two Up School, but it wont keep er busker in shandies. Ugh. Mugs are made ter drink owter] All men have a right to live. Honesty may be the best policy in a Two Up School, but it won't keep a busker in shandies. Ugh! Mugs are made to drink outer, *B*.

¹³³ Yairs.] Yes. *B*.

¹³⁴ drain 'em dry. It don't 'urt me] drain them dry. It don't hurt me *B*.

¹³⁵ er bird] a bird *B*.

CHOPSEY. Wot's the odds? It's er free life. It's better'n bone grubbin' an' washin' bottles, ain't it?

Have yer found out anythin'?¹³⁶

SMITHY. I'm 'avin' er cook roun'.¹³⁷

CHOPSEY. Nuthin' doin'?¹³⁸

SMITHY. Nah, I ain't tumbled ter nothin' yit. I've only bin owt¹³⁹ three weeks.

CHOPSEY (*Quietly and confidently*). Come 'ere, Smithy. I know somethin'.¹⁴⁰

SMITHY. Yairs? 'Ow's er fag, Chopsey!¹⁴¹

(*CHOPSEY gives cigarette. SMITHY lights up.*)

CHOPSEY. Me an' Shipmate torked it over this afternoon. Shipmate don't do 'is block.¹⁴²

SMITHY. 'E's gittin er bit old, tho'.¹⁴³

CHOPSEY. 'E's er shrewd 'ead, 'e is. 'E's ther daddy o' the lot, le me tell yer. We've put up a tidy little job down at St Kilder. We wanter cove with er steady nerve ter 'elp us. Orter¹⁴⁴ suit you, Smithy.

SMITHY. Yairs, but I fell in. I never done er job I did'nt fall for.¹⁴⁵

CHOPSEY. We've got ther strength ov it. It's orl planned be old Shipmate, under the lap. Orl you've got ter do is ter carry it owt.¹⁴⁶

SMITHY. Oh, is that orl? I've only got ter carry it owt?¹⁴⁷

CHOPSEY. Yairs. It's er sweet thing. Yer know ther big 'ouse—ther one with ther green shutters
—¹⁴⁸

(*CONSTABLE JONES passes window. The CONSTABLE is a young, athletic man, tall and strong.*)

SMITHY (*Rising*). Yow! Edge it. 'Ere's big Jones, ther cow.¹⁴⁹

CHOPSEY. Ugh!

¹³⁶ Wot's the odds? It's er free life. It's better'n bone grubbin' an' washin' bottles, ain't it? Have yer found out anythin'?] What's the odds? It's a free life. It's better than bone grubbing and washing bottles, ain't it? Have you found out anything? *B.*

¹³⁷ I'm 'avin' er cook roun'.] I'm having a cook round. *B.*

¹³⁸ Nuthin' doin'?] Nothing doing? *B.*

¹³⁹ Nah, I aint tumbled ter nothin' yit. I've only bin owt] No, I haven't tumbled to nothing yet. I've only been out *B.*

¹⁴⁰ Come 'ere, Smithy. I know somethin'.] Come here, Smithy. I know something. *B.*

¹⁴¹ Yairs? 'Ow's er fag, Chopsey!] Yes? How's a fag, Chopsey? *B.*

¹⁴² Me an' Shipmate torked it over this afternoon. Shipmate dont do 'is block.] Me and Shipmate talked it over this afternoon. Shipmate don't lose his block. *B.*

¹⁴³ 'E's gittin er bit old, tho'.] He's getting a bit old though. *B.*

¹⁴⁴ 'E's er shrewd 'ead, 'e is. 'E's ther daddy o' the lot, le me tell yer. We've put up a tidy little job down at St Kilder. We wanter cove with er steady nerve ter 'elp us. Orter] He's a shrewd head, he is. He's the daddy of the lot, let me tell you. We've put up a tidy little job down at St Kilds. We want a cove with a steady nerve to help us. Ought to *B.*

¹⁴⁵ Yairs, but I fell in. I never done er job I did'nt fall for.] Yes, but I fell in. I never done a job I didn't fall for. *B.*

¹⁴⁶ ther strength ov it. It's orl planned be old Shipmate, under the lap. Orl you've got ter do is ter carry it owt.] the strength of it. It's all planned by old Shipmate, under the lap. All you've got to do is to carry it out. *B.*

¹⁴⁷ Oh, is that orl? I've only got ter carry it owt? Oh, is that all? I've only got to carry it out. *B.*

¹⁴⁸ Yairs. It's er sweet thing. Yer know ther big 'ouse—ther one with ther green shutters—]Yes, It's a sweet thing. You know the big house—the one with the green shutters— *B.*

¹⁴⁹ 'Ere's big Jones, ther cow.] Here's big Jones, the cow. *B.*

(*CONSTABLE looks in at door.*)

SMITHY (*Affably*). Good d'y¹⁵⁰, Mr Jones.

CONSTABLE. Hallo, Chopsey. How is it, Smithy?

(*CONSTABLE enters.*)

SMITHY. Pritty 'ot owtside¹⁵¹, ain't it?

CONSTABLE. Yes. I saw¹⁵² Katie down the street.

CHOPSEY. Did she s'y anythin'¹⁵³?

CONSTABLE. No. I saw her buying a crayfish off the barrow.

CHOPSEY. Ah, she sed she'd bring me 'ome er surprise. Crayfish, eh? I know er bit abowt wimmin, Mr Jones. They're funny, ain't they? It orl depends on 'ow yer treat 'em.¹⁵⁴

CONSTABLE. Been having an argument, Chopsey?

CHOPSEY. Nah, t'ain't nuthin'.¹⁵⁵

CONSTABLE. That's right. Have you heard who's out to-day?

CHOPSEY. Nah, 'oo?¹⁵⁶

CONSTABLE. Bongo Wilson¹⁵⁷.

CHOPSEY. Bongo!¹⁵⁸

CONSTABLE. Yes. Wasn't he on with Katie before?

CHOPSEY. I dunno. Ugh! Ther bloke wot assorlted er blind man?¹⁵⁹

CONSTABLE. Bongo's a tough snag. He can fight a bit, and he'll be pretty fresh after his Air and Exercise.

CHOPSEY. 'Oo sed 'e cud¹⁶⁰ fight?

CONSTABLE. I saw him knock out Bunny Thompson in five rounds at the Cyclorama¹⁶¹.

SMITHY. 'E 'as er¹⁶² terrible solid left.

CONSTABLE. You're right. It got him nine months. You were in with Bongo, weren't you, Smithy?

SMITHY. Yairs¹⁶³, Mr Jones.

CONSTABLE. How did he take it? It was his first stretch in the Jug.

SMITHY. Rotten. I done model with him.

¹⁵⁰ Good d'y] Good day *B*.

¹⁵¹ Pritty 'ot owtside] Pretty hot outside *B*.

¹⁵² Yes. I saw] I saw *B*.

¹⁵³ s'y anythin'] say anything *B*.

¹⁵⁴ she sed she'd bring me 'ome er surprise. Crayfish, eh? I know er bit abowt wimmin, Mr Jones. They're funny, ain't they? It orl depends on 'ow yer treat 'em.] she aid she'd bring me home a surprise. Crayfish, eh? I know a bit about women, Mr Jones. They're funny, ain't they? It all depends on how you treat them. *B*.

¹⁵⁵ Nah, t'ain't nuthin'.] No, 'Tain't nothing. *B*.

¹⁵⁶ Nah, 'oo?] No, who? *B*

¹⁵⁷ Wilson] Williams *B*.

¹⁵⁸ Bongo!] Bongo? *B*

¹⁵⁹ Ther bloke wot assorlted er blind man?] The bloke that assaulted a blind Man? *B*.

¹⁶⁰ 'Oo sed 'e cud] Who said he could *B*.

¹⁶¹ the Cyclorama] the Stadium. *B*.

¹⁶² 'E 'as er] H has a *B*.

¹⁶³ Yairs] Yes *B*.

CONSTABLE. Humph! A bad-tempered gentleman. I've marked him. You'd better watch yourself, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY. Ugh! Wot ken 'e do?¹⁶⁴

CONSTABLE. The tarts'll be dead nuts on him when they know he's out. They pinched you all right, Smithy.

SMITHY. I w'z dead innercint. They'll orl tell yer that.¹⁶⁵

CONSTABLE. How did you fall in?

SMITHY. Got rung inter ther pool, some'ow. I cud'nt drop me bundle, cud I?¹⁶⁶

CONSTABLE. What were you doing in that yard? There was nothing there.

SMITHY. Somethin' pritty good w'z'nt fer orf.¹⁶⁷

CONSTABLE. I see. You would have taken a hand in that, then¹⁶⁸?

SMITHY. Well, Mr Jones, I carn't afford ter miss er chance. It ain't¹⁶⁹ likely.

CONSTABLE. You'll have to get busy soon, Smithy. The Law's strict nowadays.

SMITHY. I've only been out three weeks.

CONSTABLE. You're qualifying for a stiff for the crust.

SMITHY (*Innocently*). Wot 'ave¹⁷⁰ I done, Mr Jones?

CONSTABLE. Nothing that I know of. That's why you'll get it. You're likely to bring a Sixer. I'm warning you.

SMITHY (*With righteous indignation*). Gorblime, Mr Jones, ain't yer seen me 'awkin'¹⁷¹?

CONSTABLE (*Sceptically*). Hawking?

SMITHY. Yairs, Mr Jones. I ain't in smoke. Yer'll see me at four o'clock any mornin', down at ther market, buyin' me rabbits. It ain't fair. That ain't justice. Look 'ere, Mr Jones. (*Showing his hands proudly*.) I'm gittin' blisters on me 'ands.¹⁷²

CONSTABLE (*Unimpressed*). They're more used to picking pockets than skinnin' rabbits.

SMITHY. That's red 'ot—yer carn't book me for ther Vag. Good d'y, Mr Jones, I've got to mend me barrer. (*Casually*.) Yer'll see me any mornin' down at ther markit.¹⁷³ Bye, bye, Chopsey, see yer after.

CHOPSEY. Right-O'.

¹⁶⁴ Wot ken 'e do?] What can he do? *B.*

¹⁶⁵ I w'z dead innercint. They'll orl tell yer that.] I was dead innocent. They'll all tell you that. *B.*

¹⁶⁶ Got rung inter ther pool, some'ow. I cud'nt drop me bundle, cud I?] Got rung into the pool somehow. I couldn't drop my bundle, could I? *B.*

¹⁶⁷ Somethin' pritty good w'z'nt fer orf.] Something pretty good was't far off. *B.*

¹⁶⁸ that, then] that then *B.*

¹⁶⁹ I carnt afford ter miss er chance. It aint] I can't afford to miss a chance. It ain't *B.*

¹⁷⁰ Wot 'ave] What have *B.*

¹⁷¹ yer seen me 'awkin'] you seen me hawking *B.*

¹⁷² Yairs, Mr Jones. I ain't in smoke. Yer'll see me at four o'clock any mornin', down at ther market, buyin' me rabbits. It ain't fair. That aint justice. Look 'ere, Mr Jones. ... I'm gittin' blisters on me 'ands.] Yes, Mr Jones. I ain't in smoke. You'll see me at four o'clock any morning, down at the market, buying my rabbits. It ain't fair. That ain't justice. Look here Mr Jones ... I'm getting blisters on my hands. *B.*

¹⁷³ That's red 'ot—yer carn't book me for ther Vag. Good d'y, Mr Jones, I've got to mend me barrer. ... Yer'll see me any mornin' down at ther markit.] That's red hot. You can't book me for the Vag. Good-day, Mr Jones, I've got to mend my barrow. ... You'll see me any morning down at the market. *B.*

SMITHY. Remember me ter Katie. Tell her I allers loved 'er. (*At door.*) Gorblime Mr Jones, give a man er chance.¹⁷⁴

(*Exit SMITHY THE LIAR, pushing barrow past door and calling: 'Wild rabbi' O!*)

CHOPSEY. Smithy's tryin' to do 'is¹⁷⁵ little bit.

CONSTABLE. What are you doing yourself, Chopsey?

CHOPSEY. Katie's workin'. Doin' er bit o' washin'. I still busk outside ther pubs over ther organ.¹⁷⁶

CONSTABLE. I haven't heard you this week.

CHOPSEY. I got er cold¹⁷⁷. I'm learning a new song, Mr Jones. It's another 'Doreen'. I don't care for comics. They orl tell me I orter stick ter ballads.¹⁷⁸

CONSTABLE. Getting on well together?

CHOPSEY. Yairs, al'ri. I know 'ow ter 'andle wimmin.¹⁷⁹

CONSTABLE. You're a philosopher, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY. Yer wanter be master in yer own 'ome.¹⁸⁰

CONSTABLE. You're a clever man than I am, Chopsey, if you can do that.

CHOPSEY. Yairs, I've tamed one or two ov 'em. Yer don't wanter knock 'em abowt, Mr Jones. Humour 'em. Katie'll do anythin' fer me.¹⁸¹

(*KATIE passes window.*)

CONSTABLE. Hullo! Here's Katie now.

(*KATIE enters proudly, carrying basket.*)

Good day, Katie.

KATIE. Glad ter see yer, Mr Jones. Pritty stuffy in 'ere, ain't it!¹⁸²

(*KATIE puts down basket by sideboard, takes off hat, etc.*)

CONSTABLE. You're looking well, though; what's this, expecting visitors?

KATIE. You never know wot's goin' ter 'appen¹⁸³.

CONSTABLE. That's so. You never can tell. I might happen to drop on Chopsey any day now, to see what he's doing for a living.

KATIE (*Pleasantly*). 'Ope yer do. Good riddence ter¹⁸⁴ bad rubbish.

CONSTABLE. That's a bull's eye for you, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY. I've got 'er beat¹⁸⁵.

¹⁷⁴ Remember me ter Katie. Tell her I allers loved 'er. ... Gorblime Mr Jones, give a man er chance.] Remember me to Katie. Tell her I always love her. ... Gorblime, Mr Jones, give a man a chance. *B.*

¹⁷⁵ tryin' to do 'is] trying to do his *B.*

¹⁷⁶ workin'. Doin' er bit o' washin'. I still busk outside ther pubs over ther organ.] working. Doing a bit o' washing. I still busk outside the pubs over the organ. *B.*

¹⁷⁷ er cold] a cold *B.*

¹⁷⁸ They orl tell me I orter stick ter ballads.] They all tell me I ought to stick to ballads. *B.*

¹⁷⁹ Yairs, al'ri. I know 'ow ter 'andle wimmin.] Yes, all right. I know how to handle women. *B.*

¹⁸⁰ Yer wanter be master in yer own 'ome.] You want to be master in your own home. *B.*

¹⁸¹ Yairs, I've tamed one or two ov 'em. Yer don't wanter knock 'em abowt, Mr Jones. Humour 'em. Katie'll do anythin' fer me.] Yes, I've tamed one or two of 'em. You don't want to knock 'em about, Mr Jones. Humour 'em. Katie'll do anything for m. *B.*

¹⁸² Glad ter see yer, Mr Jones. Pritty stuffy in 'ere, ain't it!] Glad to see you Mr Jones. Pretty stuffy in here, ain't it! *B.*

¹⁸³ wot's goin' ter 'appen] what's going to happen *B.*

¹⁸⁴ 'Ope yer do. Good riddence ter] Hope you do. Good riddance to *B.*

¹⁸⁵ 'er beat] her beat *B.*

CONSTABLE (*Taking out watch*). I'll have to be going now. (*Turning round at door.*) Did you hear anything of old Shipmate, lately?

CHOPSEY. Nah, I ain't 'erd nuthin' ov 'im.¹⁸⁶

CONSTABLE. Well, it's funny I saw you down the street this afternoon with him.

CHOPSEY. Nah, yer never seen me with 'im.¹⁸⁷

CONSTABLE. It's a *Kathleen Mavourneen*, you know. 'It may be for years, or it may be for ever.' You'd better watch yourself. Good day, Katie.

KATIE. Good day, Mr Jones. Look in any time yer passin'. Glad ter see yer.¹⁸⁸

CONSTABLE. Thanks, Katie. Be good! So long, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY. Good d'y¹⁸⁹, Mr Jones.

(*CONSTABLE goes out whistling.*)

That's right. Lay ther tea. I'm 'ungry.¹⁹⁰

(*KATIE is busy at sideboard. She polishes things. She hums a little. She sets down knives, forks etc. She tries two or three different arrangements of the crockery, till her decorative sense is satisfied. In a bowl, in the centre of the table, she places a bunch of boronia. From the basket she takes out a loaf of bread, a piece of cake, a crayfish etc. CHOPSEY's eyes goggle.*)

'Ow is it, Katie? Wot's up? 'Blime, yer've cleaned ther knives. Caike? 'Struth, we are 'Otties. Boronnier? Are you expecting ther gawd mayor fer tea? W'ere did yer pinch ther lovely cray? Ain't 'e bosker? It's liker trip ter ther seaside. It's al'ri, Katie. It's time we 'ad er banquet. Things ain't bin too good with us. 'Ullo, wot's this?¹⁹¹ Beer—glorious!

KATIE. Keep yer 'ands orf¹⁹².

CHOPSEY. Wot. Look 'ere¹⁹³, Katie.

KATIE. Tork ter yer¹⁹⁴ equals.

CHOPSEY (*With feeling*). I'd git lots o' things fer yer, Katie. I want'er git 'em for yer. They don't sling much inter ther 'at fer singin' ter them. I don't forget 'ow¹⁹⁵ you stuck to me.

KATIE. Ah, blow ther froth orf!¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁶ Nah, I ain't 'erd nuthin' ov 'im.] No, I ain't heard nothing of him. *B.*

¹⁸⁷ Nah, yer never seen me with 'im.] No, you never seen me with him. *B.*

¹⁸⁸ yer passin'. Glad ter see yer.] you're passing. Glad to see you. *B.*

¹⁸⁹ Good d'y] Good day *B.*

¹⁹⁰ Lay ther tea. I'm 'ungry.] Lay the tea. I'm hungry. *B.*

¹⁹¹ 'Ow is it, Katie? Wot's up? 'Blime, yer've cleaned ther knives. Caike? 'Struth, we are 'Otties. Boronnier? Are you expecting ther gawd mayor fer tea? W'ere did yer pinch ther lovely cray? Ain't 'e bosker? It's liker trip ter ther seaside. It's al'ri, Katie. It's time we 'ad er banquet. Things ain't bin too good with us. 'Ullo, wot's this?] How is it, Katie? What's up? Blime, you've cleaned the knives. Cake? 'Struth, we are hotties. Boronia? Are you expecting the gawd mayor for tea? Where did you pinch the lovely cray? Ain't he booker? It's like a trip to the seaside. It's all right, Katie. It's time we had a banquet. Things ain't been too good with us. Hullo! What's this? *B.*

¹⁹² yer 'ands orf] your hands off *B.*

¹⁹³ Wot. Look 'ere] What. Look here *B.*

¹⁹⁴ Tork ter yer] Talk to your *B.*

¹⁹⁵ I'd git lots o' things fer yer, Katie. I want'er git 'em for yer. They dont sling much inter ther 'at fer singin' ter them. I don't forget 'ow] I'd get lots o' things for you, Katie. I want to get them for you. They don't sling much into the hat for singing to them. I don't forget how *B.*

¹⁹⁶ ther froth orf!] the froth off. *B.*

CHOPSEY. Strait, I've 'ad er bit o' luck at larst.¹⁹⁷ (*Eyeing table.*)

KATIE. It aint fer you, nor nobody like yer¹⁹⁸.

CHOPSEY. Now, don' start naggin'¹⁹⁹, or I'll -

KATIE. Wot'll yer do? I'm sick o' ther site ov yer²⁰⁰ ugly dial.

CHOPSEY (*Humbly*). Katie, aint we got on well tergether? I've done orl I cud ter 'elp yer. It ain't my forlt.²⁰¹

KATIE. Wot sort o' life ken ther likes o' you give er woman? I made er bloomer wen I took yer on.

Precious little 'appiness I've 'ad in ther world. This ain't the life wot²⁰² I want.

CHOPSEY. I bring yer in orl I git, don't I? I don't git lathered on ther takin's²⁰³, do I?

KATIE. Yer music; that's 'ow I fell in. Ugh, I'm sick o' yer, an' yer music, an' yer buskin', an' yer organ—yairs, an' yer flash clobber, an' yer fringe—an' yer -²⁰⁴

CHOPSEY. Giv's er kiss; come 'ere.²⁰⁵

(*CHOPSEY tries to kiss her. KATIE breaks away.*)

KATIE. Nah, yer don't, me buck. None o' that gaime with me.²⁰⁶

CHOPSEY. Wot ther blazin'!²⁰⁷

KATIE. No liberties from you.

CHOPSEY. Gawd's truth, Katie, wot ther 'ell -²⁰⁸

KATIE. Don't be makin' yer²⁰⁹ tarts jealous.

CHOPSEY. Strike me blind, Katie, you're orf yer nut. Look 'ere -²¹⁰

KATIE. You ain't no proper man. Ye're er ornamint.²¹¹

CHOPSEY. I didn't mean ter 'urt yer²¹². I ain't that sort.

¹⁹⁷ Strait, I've 'ad er bit o' luck at larst.] Straight, I've had a bit of luck at last. *B.*

¹⁹⁸ fer you, nor nobody like yer] for you, nor nobody like you *B.*

¹⁹⁹ Now, don' start naggin'] Now don't start nagging *B.*

²⁰⁰ Wot'll yer do? I'm sick o' ther site ov yer] What'll you do? I'm sick of the sight of your *B.*

²⁰¹ aint we got on well tergether? I've done orl I cud ter 'elp yer. It ain't my forlt.] ain't we got on well together? I've done all I could to help you. It ain't my fault. *B.*

²⁰² Wot sort o' life ken ther likes o' you give er woman? I made er bloomer wen I took yer on. Precious little 'appiness I've 'ad in ther world. This ain't the life wot] What wort 'o life can the likes o' you give a woman? I made a bloomer when I too you on. Precious little happiness I've had in the world. This ain't the life that I want. *B.*

²⁰³ yer in orl I git, don't I? I don git lathered on ther takin's] you in all I get, don't I? I don't get lathered on the takings *B.*

²⁰⁴ Yer music; that's 'ow I fell in. Ugh, I'm sick o' yer, an' yer music, an' yer buskin', an' yer organ—yairs, an' yer flash clobber, an' yer fringe—an' yer -] Your music, that's how I fell in. Ugh! I'm sick o' you, and your music, and your busking, and your organ—yes, and your flash clobber, and your fringe—and your - *B.*

²⁰⁵ Giv's er kiss; come 'ere.] Give's a kiss, come here. *B.*

²⁰⁶ Nah, yer don't, me buck. None o' that gaime with me.] No you don't, my buck. Noe 'o that game with me. *b.*

²⁰⁷ Wot ther blazin'!] What the blazing! *B.*

²⁰⁸ Gawd's truth, Katie, wot ther 'ell -] Gawdstruth, Katie, what the hell - *B.*

²⁰⁹ makin' yer] making your *B.*

²¹⁰ you're orf yer nut. Look 'ere -] you're off your nut. Look here - *B.*

²¹¹ Ye're er ornamint.] You're an ornament. *B.*

²¹² ter 'urt yer] to hurt you *B.*

KATIE. Yer cud'nt 'urt er plate o' 'ot peas.²¹³

CHOPSEY (*With sentiment*). Now don' go crook, Katie. You remember that picnic we 'ad down ther B'y, ther first time I ever seen yer. I never luvud²¹⁴ nobody but you, Gawd strike me dead.

KATIE. Garn, none o' that. That's orl dead an' buried. I'm done with yer, yer smoodger. I ain't goin' ter keep er²¹⁵ fat lazy loafer like you.

CHOPSEY. Blast yer, my luck's turned, I tell yer.²¹⁶

KATIE. Lob orf²¹⁷, now.

CHOPSEY. Don't sling orf. 'Av'nt I 'ad enuf²¹⁸ trouble?

KATIE. It's er shame, ain't it? Get back ter yer organ.²¹⁹

CHOPSEY (*Asserting himself*). I've 'ad enough o' this. I'll taime yer, be cripes²²⁰, I'll -

KATIE (*Witheringly*). You'll taime me, will ye? Garn, yer cud'nt taime w'ite mice²²¹.

CHOPSEY. Wot d'yer²²² mean?

KATIE. This is wot I mean. Git!²²³

CHOPSEY (*Puzzled*). I don' mean ter argue.²²⁴

KATIE. Do'nt. Don' waiste yer time. Yer ken taik e yer clearance from me, now.²²⁵

(*KATIE throws him his coat from hooks.*)

Pack up your duds. Ther furniture's mine, an' ther 'ouse is in my naime.²²⁶

CHOPSEY. It's this w'y²²⁷, Katie -

KATIE. Nah, it ain't. (*Pointing to door.*) It's that w'y.²²⁸

CHOPSEY. Wot²²⁹ d'you mean?

²¹³ Yer cud'nt 'urt er plate o' 'ot peas.] You couldn't hurt a plate o' hot peas. *B.*

²¹⁴ 'ad down ther B'y, ther first time I ever seen yer. I never luvud] had down the Bay, the first time I ever seen you. I never loved *B.*

²¹⁵ Garn, none o' that. That's orl dead an' buried. I'm done with yer, yer smoodger. I ain't goin' ter keep er] Garn! None o' that. That's all dead and buried. I'm done with you, you smoother. I ain't going to keep a *B.*

²¹⁶ Blast yer, my luck's turned, I tell yer.] Blast you, my luck's turned, I tell you. *B.*

²¹⁷ orf] off *B.*

²¹⁸ orf. 'Av'nt I 'ad enuf] off, Katie. Haven't I had enough *B.*

²¹⁹ It's er shame, ain't it? Get back ter yer organ.] It's a shame, ain't it? Get back to your organ. *B.*

²²⁰ 'ad enough o' this. I'll taime yer, be cripes] had enough of this. I'll tame you, by cripes *B.*

²²¹ taime me, will ye? Garn, yer cud'nt taime w'ite mice] tame me, will you? Garn, you couldn't tame white mice *B.*

²²² Wot d'yer] What d'you *B.*

²²³ wot I mean. Git!] what I mean. Get! *B.*

²²⁴ (*Puzzled*). I don' mean ter argue.] I don't mean to argue. *B.*

²²⁵ Do'nt. Don' waiste yer time. Yer ken taik e yer clearance from me, now.] Don't. Don't waste your time. You can take your clearance from me now. *B.*

²²⁶ Ther furniture's mine, an' ther 'ouse is in my naime.] The furniture's mine, and the house is in my name. *B.*

²²⁷ w'y] way *B.*

²²⁸ Nah, it ain't. ... It's that w'y.] No, it aint. ... It's that way. *B.*

²²⁹ Wot] What *B.*

KATIE (*With deadly deliberation*). This is wot I mean. Er better man nor you, or two ov you, is cumin' owt ter d'y.²³⁰

CHOPSEY. Wot? Bongo?²³¹

KATIE. Yairs, Bongo Wilson. It's Gawd's truth. Yer don't like it, don't yer?²³²

CHOPSEY. Look here. I'll giv up buskin, if yer like. I've put up er job²³³ with Shipmate.

KATIE. W'y did'nt yer s'y so²³⁴ before? It's too late now.

CHOPSEY. Giv's er charnse²³⁵, Katie.

KATIE. Yer've 'ad yer charnse. Yer done²³⁶ it in.

CHOPSEY. I've bin so 'appy, Katie, ever since I got on with you. Yer don forget that d'y out at Greensborough, wen yer sed yer luvud me. Gorblime, yer cant forget.²³⁷

KATIE. Y'aint er bad²³⁸ sort, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY. I ain't bin too good ter you, I know. I wanter maike it up. Look, we'll 'ave real bonzer times goin' out together. I'll take yer ter orl ther darnses. I'll—wot?²³⁹

KATIE. It's orl over now. Yer carn't ring ther changes²⁴⁰ on me.

CHOPSEY. Strike me barmey, I did'nt mean ter punch yer²⁴¹, Katie.

KATIE (*Casually*). You punch? Bongo's ther bloke wot ken²⁴² punch!

CHOPSEY. Katie -

KATIE. Nah, yer owter bounds.²⁴³

CHOPSEY (*Facing the position*). So yer wanter giv me ther chuck—me fer—Bongo Wilson?²⁴⁴

KATIE (*With some touch of pity*). Yairs, ye've done yer dash²⁴⁵, Chopsey.

²³⁰ This is wot I mean. Er better man nor you, or two ov you, is cumin' owt ter d'y.] This is what I mean. A better man than you, or two of you, is coming out today. *B.*

²³¹ Wot? Bongo?] What, Bongo? *B.*

²³² Yairs, Bongo Wilson. It's Gawd's truth. Yer don't like it, do'nt yer?] Yes. Bongo Williams. It's gawd's truth. You don't like it, don't you? *B.*

²³³ I'll giv up buskin, if yer like. I've put up er job] I'll give up busking if you like. I've put up a job *B.*

²³⁴ W'y did'nt yer s'y so] Why didn't you say so *B.*

²³⁵ Giv's er charnse] Give's a chance *B.*

²³⁶ Yer've 'ad yer charnse. Yer done] You've had your chance. You done *B.*

²³⁷ I've bin so 'appy, Katie, ever since I got on with you. Yer don forget that d'y out at Greensborough, wen yer sed yer luvud me. Gorblime, yer cant forget.] I've been so happy, Katie, ever since I got on with you. You don't forget that day out at Greensborough, when you said you love me. Gorblime, you can't forget. *B.*

²³⁸ Y'aint er bad] Y'aint a bad *B.*

²³⁹ bin too good ter you, I know. I wanter maike it up. Look, we'll 'ave real bonzer times goin' out together. I'll take yer ter orl ther darnses. I'll—wot?] been too good to you, I know. I want to make it up. Look, we'll have real bonzer times going out together. I'll take you to all the dances. I'll—what? *B.*

²⁴⁰ orl over now. Yer carn't ring ther changes] all over now. You can't ring the changes *B.*

²⁴¹ barmey, I did'nt mean ter punch yer] balmy, I didn't mean to punch you *B.*

²⁴² ther bloke wot ken] the bloke that can *B.*

²⁴³ Nah, yer owter bounds.] No, you're out o' bounds. *B.*

²⁴⁴ So yer wanter giv me ther chuck—me fer—Bongo Wilson?] So you want to give me the chuck—me for—Bongo Williams. *B.*

²⁴⁵ Yairs, ye've done yer dash] Yes, you've done your dash *B.*

CHOPSEY. Bongo—ther²⁴⁶ beer sparrer?

KATIE (*Hardening*). He'll spar you any d'y o' ther²⁴⁷ week.

CHOPSEY. 'E's er bloke wot bashes wimmin!²⁴⁸

KATIE. Yer jealous, ain't yer? Well, me an' Bongo's fixed it up again. 'E'll be 'ere any minit now.²⁴⁹

CHOPSEY. 'S truth, I'll murder yer.²⁵⁰

KATIE (*Mockingly*). Don' git rattled. Y'ain't very strong, yer know.²⁵¹

CHOPSEY (*Making a last appeal*). Listen, Katie. I carn't giv yer up, I love yer, I do. I carn't live without yer. It's lonely on yer pat. Gorblime, I cudn't luv nobody but you—Katie. Me luck's turned, I tell yer. I'll git ther stuff. We'll start orl over againe. We'll 'ave ther bonzer times. We'll be sweet'arts, yairs, jist as we uster to be. (*Moving towards her.*) Yer've bin kiddin' me, Katie. I noo yer didn't mean it.²⁵²

(*A buck's whistle is heard outside.*)

KATIE. 'Ere's²⁵³ Bongo.

(*CHOPSEY stands helpless and perplexed.*)

(*Pointing dramatically to door.*) Git.²⁵⁴

CHOPSEY. Gawdstruth, Katie.²⁵⁵

(*BONGO passes window.*)

KATIE (*Triumphant*). Scarp orf.²⁵⁶

(*BONGO, a powerful, square-set man, dressed in a blue sweater, with cap and black silk muffler, bull-dog jawed, clean shaven, gaol cropped—smiling and confident, comes to door.*)

Come in, Bongo.

(*BONGO enters, silent and masterful. He stares at CHOPSEY.*)

Taike no notice o' 'im. You ain't no busker, are yer Bongo?²⁵⁷ (*To the terror-stricken CHOPSEY who picks up coat and hat.*) Git out, yer cow.²⁵⁸

(*BONGO makes a step towards CHOPSEY. KATIE clutches his arm.*)

²⁴⁶ ther] the *B*.

²⁴⁷ d'y o' ther] day of the *B*.

²⁴⁸ 'E's er bloke wot bashes wimmin!] He's a bloke that bashes women. *B*.

²⁴⁹ Yer jealous, ain't yer? Well, me an' Bongo's fixed it up again. 'E'll be 'ere any minit now.] You're jealous, ain't you? Well, me and Bongo's fixed it up again. He'll be here any minute now. *B*.

²⁵⁰ 'S truth, I'll murder yer.] 'Struth, I'll murder you. *B*.

²⁵¹ Don' git rattled. Y'ain't very strong, yer know.] Don't get rattled. You ain't very strong, you know. *B*.

²⁵² Listen, Katie. I carn't giv yer up, I love yer, I do. I carn't live without yer. It's lonely on yer pat. Gorblime, I cudn't luv nobody but you—Katie. Me luck's turned, I tell yer. I'll git ther stuff. We'll start orl over againe. We'll 'ave ther bonzer times. We'll be sweet'arts, yairs, jist as we uster to be. ... Yer've bin kiddin' me, Katie. I noo yer didn't mean it.] Listen, Katie. I can't give you up. I love you, I do. I can't live without you. It's lonely on your pat. Gorblime, I couldn't love nobody but you, Katie. My luck's turned, I tell you. I'll get the stuff. We'll start all over again. We'll have the bonzer times. We'll be sweethearts, yes, just as we used to be. ... You've been kidding me, Katie. I knew you didn't mean it. *B*.

²⁵³ 'Ere's] Here's *B*.

²⁵⁴ Git.] Get! *B*.

²⁵⁵ Katie.] Katie - *B*.

²⁵⁶ orf] off *B*.

²⁵⁷ Taike no notice o' 'im. You ain't no busker, are yer Bongo?] Take no notice of him. You paint no. busker, are you Bongo? *B*.

²⁵⁸ Git out, yer cow.] Get out, you cow. *B*.

Don't dirty yer 'ands on him, Bongo. ²⁵⁹ (*To CHOPSEY.*) See if yer ken git on²⁶⁰ with Fishy Liz. She's fond o' music.

(*CHOPSEY makes for door, while BONGO fans him out.*)

Blime, ye're lookin' pink. 'Ow'd they treat yer? 'Ave yer got yer punch back, Bongo?²⁶¹ Sit down. (*BONGO takes a seat at table. KATIE puts crayfish on plate, etc.*)

'Ave er bit o' cray, Bongo. Better than 'ominy, eh? We'll stick tergether, Bongo. Wen are yer goin' ter fite in the 'alls? Ain't yer feelin' peckish! This is wot you want.²⁶² (*She produces a jug of beer, and fills large glass.*) 'Ere yer are, Bongo. It'll do yer good. 'Ave your taste first. Ye're ther bloke, Bongo!²⁶³

(*BONGO drains glass, stretches out arms and drags KATIE to him, as the curtain falls.*)

Curtain.

Notes

oyster: (*Slang*) closemouthed or uncommunicative person, especially one who keeps secrets well.

we want er few bones in ther truck [we want a few bones in the truck]—(*Slang*) not a bone in the truck: time-wasting during working hours; nothing achieved, wasting time.

stoush: (*Australian slang*) hit, strike; fight; brawl; fight (someone or something).

rozzer: (*Australian slang*) police officer.

snow-dropping: (*Slang*) robbing a clothes-line (of underwear).

you couldn't offside in a fourpenny fish-joint: like 'roasting peanuts', another menial job required no skills.

boshter: (*Australian slang*) good; excellent.

the tarts: (*Australian slang*) (*derogatory*) prostitute; (*derogatory*) woman deemed to be promiscuous; any woman.

the joes: Cf. Joe Blakes (*Rhyming slang*) shakes; delirium tremens, characterised by trembling, terrifying visual hallucinations, etc., and caused by excessive indulgence in alcohol.

'Gem' straw hat: highly prized straw hat.

Johns: John, John Hop (*Rhyming slang*) (*derogatory*) the cops.

I don't mark no tickets: (*Slang*) to service; do favours.

The Pats: (*Informal*) Irishmen.

the Chows: (*Derogatory*) someone of Chinese origin.

blowing: (*Slang*) to hasten off (usually at the approach of the Law).

down to Sorrento: a township in Victoria, Australia, located on the shores of Port Phillip Bay (The Bay) on the Mornington Peninsula.

Bay boats: By the turn of the century, there were three Port Phillip Bay paddle steamers in operation, the *Ozone*, the *Hygeia* and the *Weeroona*.

the Heart and Arrow Push: *The Argus*, Tuesday 10 March 1908: 'FOUR MEMBERS CHARGED. For some time past the Footscray police have been endeavouring to break up the "Heart and Arrow push," members of which are suspected of a series of depredations in and about that suburb. The ceremonies connected with this combination of youthful larrikins have already been described in *The Argus*, and yesterday four youths, each of whom was tattooed with the insignia of the order, were brought before a children's court at Footscray. Mr W Mitchell, JP, presided over the court, and a charge of stealing 15d. from the Seddon railway station was preferred against four lads named Keen Congdon, Herbert Lowe, Alfred Netherwood, and Albert Ellis. It was stated that the quartette were members of the "heart and arrow push," and that Congdon was the leader of the gang. The police said that a number of coins had been taken through the ticket-office window by means of a stick smeared with birdlime. Upon the parents of the boys entering into sureties for their good behaviour for 12 months, only two of the culprits were punished. Congdon and Ellis were each fined 10/.'

²⁵⁹ Don't dirty yer 'ands on him, Bongo.] Don't dirty your hands on him, Bongo. *B.*

²⁶⁰ See if yer ken git on] See if you can get on *B.*

²⁶¹ Blime, ye're lookin' pink. 'Ow'd they treat yer? 'Ave yer got yer punch back, Bongo?] Blime, you're looking pink. How'd they treat you? Have you got your punch back, Bongo? *B.*

²⁶² 'Ave er bit o' cray, Bongo. Better than 'ominy, eh? We'll stick tergether, Bongo. Wen are yer goin' ter fite in the 'alls? Ain't yer feelin' peckish! This is wot you want.] Have a bit 'o cray, Bongo. Better than hominy, eh? We'll stick together, Bongo. When are you going to fight in the halls? Ain't you feeling peckish? This is what you want. *B.*

²⁶³ 'Ere yer are, Bongo. It'll do yer good. 'Ave your taste first. Ye're ther bloke, Bongo!] Here you are, Bongo. It'll do you good. Have your taste first. You're the bloke, Bongo! *B.*

a cook at the engines: cook (*Rhyming slang*) Captain Cook, look.

gorblime: 'God blind me.' A general exclamation.

we were pinched: (*Underworld slang*) arrested.

D's: (*Abbreviation slang*) police detectives.

nicked us: (*British slang*) to apprehend; arrest.

smothered up: to cover.

the darbies: (*British slang*) handcuffs; manacles.

do a bunk: make a hurried or furtive departure or escape.

Carlo Rossi: 'Smithy the Toff' hawks for Carlo in Esson's 'Smithy the Toff' (*Punch*, 24 May 1906); artist Julian Ashton's father in law was Count Carlo Rossi, a Sardinian diplomat.

bring a moon: spend a month in prison.

Dago: (*Derogatory slang*) person of Italian decent.

the farm: (*Slang*) prison farm.

a jemmy: jimmy (*British slang*) a short steel crowbar used, esp. by burglars, for forcing doors and windows.

in shandies: shandy, short for Shandygaff (*British*) from the mid-1800s referring to beer cut with ginger beer or ginger ale; shandies in Australian are beer mixed with clear lemonade.

a cove: a chap, fellow; manager, boss.

Bongo: a small drum; played with the hands; by extension, to play the bongo; to beat with an irregular rhythm; to hit something rhythmically with the hands is a pugilist. The name may also be a topical in-joke: Alex 'Bongo' Lang was a well known Melbourne footballer, rover for Carlton (Esson's team) and voted by *The Australasian* newspaper as the most 'outstanding player in the VFL.'

a tough snag: (*Slang*) a leader.

'Bunny' Thompson: no reference found; 'Bunny' (*Slang*) inexperienced young man.

the [Fitzroy] Cyclorama/the Stadium: The Little Collins Cyclorama closed in 1896. The Fitzroy version continued until 1906, when the enormous paintings were removed for the last time and destroyed. The circular building on Victoria Parade was thereafter used for a circus, as an athletic club, for boxing matches and even as a cinema, before being demolished in 1928.

in the Jug: (*Slang*) in prison.

a Sixer: a six month prison sentence; also in Australian Rules Football, a goal, worth 6 points—a sixer—is scored when the football is propelled through the goal posts at any height (including above the height of the posts) by way of a kick from the attacking team.

in smoke: (*Slang*) idle; the connotation that someone is gainfully occupied.

red hot: (*Slang*) improper.

the Vag: Vagrancy refers to a transient lifestyle that, whether adopted through necessity or choice, has long been subject to legal regulation. The first Victorian vagrancy law, introduced in 1852, proscribed over 100 different offences, including having no visible lawful means of support, begging, consorting, and occupying public places at night without lawful excuse. In 1876, John Stanley James described the men and women who lived on the banks of the Yarra River as 'vagrants, pure and simple'. This designation, however, obscured the fact that in 19th-century Melbourne it was the aged, ill, poor and unemployed, together with juveniles and prostitutes, who were most likely to be arrested for vagrancy.

'Doreen': Cf. *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, a verse novel by Australian novelist and poet CJ Dennis. The work was first published in book form in 1915 but the first section, *The Stoush O' Day*, was originally published in *The Bulletin* on 1 April 1909. All but two of the remaining chapters were also published in that journal between 1909 and 1915. *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* tells the story of Bill, a larrikin of the Little Lonsdale Street push, who is introduced to a young woman by the name of Doreen. The book chronicles their courtship and marriage, detailing Bill's transformation from a violence-prone gang member to a contented husband and father.

*'I wish't yeh meant it, Bill.' Oh, 'ow me 'eart
Went out to 'er that ev'nin' on the beach.
I knoo she weren't no ordinary tart,
My little peach!
I tell yeh, square an' all, me 'eart stood still
To 'ear 'er say, 'I wish't yeh meant it, Bill.'
To 'ear 'er voice! Its gentle sorter tone,
Like soft dream-music of some Dago band.
An' me all out; an' 'oldin' in me own 'er little 'and.
An' 'ow she blushed! O, strike! it was divine The way she raised 'er shinin' eyes to mine. ...*

Kathleen Mavourneen: a song written in 1837, composed by Frederick Crouch with lyrics by a Mrs Crawford; a 1906 silent short film by Edwin S Porter, produced and distributed by Edison Manufacturing Company was based on the song (which also inspired the play by Dion Boucicault). Irish villager Kathleen is a tenant of Captain Clearfield, who controls local judges and criminals. Her father owes Clearfield a large debt. Terence O'More saves the village from Clearfield, causing a large celebration. 'Mavourneen' is a term of endearment derived from the Irish Gaelic *mo mhuirín*, meaning 'my beloved'

*Kathleen mavourneen! the gray dawn is breaking,
The horn of the hunter is heard on the hill,
The lark from her light wing the bright dew is shaking,
Kathleen Mavourneen, what slumbering still?
(Chorus)
Oh! hast thou forgotten how soon we must sever?
Oh! hast thou forgotten this day we must part,
It may be for years, and it may be forever,
Oh! why art thou silent thou voice of my heart?
It may be for years, and it may be forever,
Then why art thou silent Kathleen mavourneen?*

Greensborough: a suburb of Melbourne, 19 km north-east of the CBD.

on your pat: Pat Malone (*Rhyming slang*) alone, on your own

A buck: buck, a young man, esp. one who is bold, lively, vigorous; in this case, a sentinel set up by Katie to warn her that Bongo was approaching.

Dead Timber

Performance History

The first performance of *Dead Timber* was presented by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre at St Patrick's Hall, Bourke Street, Melbourne on Wednesday 13 December, 1911. It was directed by Gregan McMahon, with the following cast:

A SELECTOR	MR JH Mitchell
JOE	Mr Bruce Henderson
ABE	Mr F Le Leu
WIFE	Mrs Fannie Fowler
MARY	Miss Dorothy Hiscock

<p style="text-align: center;">Programme.</p> <p>MONDAY, TUESDAY and WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4th, 5th and 6th.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"Rosmersholm"</p> <p>A Play in Four Acts by HENRIK IBSEN.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Persons:</p> <p>(In the order of their appearance.) REBECCA WEST - Miss RENE TANSWELL (Living in Rosmer's House) MADAME HELENE - Miss RUBINA WARD (Housekeeper at Rosmersholm) RECTOR KRULL - Mr. HERBERT LEIGH (Rector of Rosmersholm) JOHANNES ROSMER - Mr. LAWRENCE HARDINGE (Retired Parish Clergyman) ULRIC BRENDSEL - Mr. GREGAN McMAHON PETER MORTENSGARD - Mr. JACK FOWLER</p> <p>The action takes place at "Rosmersholm," an old family seat near a small coast town in the West of Norway.</p> <p>Acts I, III and IV - Sitting Room at Rosmersholm Act II - Johannes Rosmer's Study</p> <p>Play Produced by Mr. Gregan McMahon.</p> <p>NOTE—"Rosmersholm" has penetrated more deeply into the soul of human conscience than in any other of his works. He knows each one of his characters down to the last revelation of the brain, down to the ultimate fold of the soul. "Rosmersholm" is Ibsen's most tragic drama. It pictures an ideal and, steadily enough, conducts its stultification upon the destruction of the only possible means thereto. In his operations "Rosmersholm" is the consummate example in modern times of the retrospective method of dramatization of which in recent times the consummate example is the <i>Oedipus Rex</i>.</p> <p>The play will be interpreted by a specially selected cast entrusted by the Institution of Messrs. HERBERT LEIGH and LAWRENCE HARDINGE of the J. C. WILLIAMSON Company.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Programme—continued.</p> <p>FRIDAY, SATURDAY, and MONDAY, DECEMBER 8th, 9th, & 11th.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"Chains"</p> <p>A Play in Four Acts by ELIZABETH BAKER.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Persons:</p> <p>(In the order of their appearance.) LILY WILSON - Miss MAUD JOLLIFFE CHARLEY WILSON - Mr. DONALD ALSOP Mr. TENNANT - Mr. J. B. CUSSEN MAGGIE MASSBY - Miss ISABEL HANDLEY MORTON LESLIE - Mr. MATTHEW DILKROY SYRIL FROST - Miss KATHLEEN GRAHAM PERCY MASSBY - Mr. J. D. KIRK Mr. PENWICK - Mr. KENNETH CROSS Mrs. MASSBY - Miss NILDA LEON Mr. MASSBY - Mr. T. SKEWES WALTER FOSTER - Mr. LEONARD HERTON</p> <p>Acts I, II, and IV - Sitting Room at the Wilsons', 55 Acacia Avenue. Act III - Sitting Room at the Massys', Sunnybank, Hammersmith.</p> <p>Play Produced by Mr. Gregan McMahon.</p> <p>NOTE—"Chains" has been secured for production by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre from Mrs. CHARLES FROST, who made it one of the features of its London Repertory Theatre season. "As a play it may be regarded as the first veritable realistic production of the novel drama. It shows a group of people truthfully without idealization or caricature, or other reference to the convention of the theatre, and at the same time presents a story that is dramatically developed."</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Programme—continued.</p> <p>WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY, DEC. 13th & 14th Four One-Act Plays by Australian Writers.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"The Only Game"</p> <p>By WILLIAM MOORE.</p> <p>A LICENSED PAINTER - Mr. WILLIAM MOORE THE PAINTER'S FRIEND - Mr. J. B. CUSSEN MAID - Miss MURIEL GULPIN THE GIRL WITH THE RED ROSE - Miss LILA HALIBOURN</p> <p>Scene - SMOKE ROOM OF A MODERN MANSION AFTER DINNER.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"Dead Timber"</p> <p>By LOUIS ESSON.</p> <p>A SELECTOR - Mr. J. H. MITCHELL JOE - Mr. BRUCE HENDERSON ABE - Mr. F. LE LEU WIFE - Mrs. FANNIE FOWLER MARY - Miss DOROTHY HISCOCK</p> <p>Scene - ON A SELECTION.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"The Children's Bread"</p> <p>An Extravaganza by ELAMERE YOUNG— A Prologue—A Requiem—A Reprieve.</p> <p>SEBASTIAN BRANBAG - Mr. HERBERT WOODHOUSE (City and Corn Merchant of Melbourne, and in the night-time an Australian Artist) BALAUSTION - Miss A. JACOBY IRIS - (Daughters) Miss PATRICIA McMAHON</p> <p>Scene - BRANBAG'S LIVING ROOM.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"The Sacred Flame"</p> <p>By ALFRED BUCHANAN.</p> <p>HELEN FANE - Miss DOROTHY HISCOCK Mrs. FANE - Miss BERTHA COLLIER JOHN WATKINS - Mr. MAURICE HADDEN AGNES O'CONNOR - Miss CONNIE PRICH ARTHUR - (A Burglar) - Mr. LYLE CHRISTIAN</p> <p>Scene - AT MRS. FANE'S.</p> <p>Plays Produced by Mr. Gregan McMahon.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">CHANGE OF THEATRE.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ST. PATRICK'S HALL.</p> <p>IN response to a widely expressed desire it has been deemed advisable to secure for this and future seasons a Theatre more centrally situated. Of those available St. Patrick's Hall, Bourke St. (with the addition of new stage, the instalment of electric lighting plant and other improvements) seemed most suitable. The acoustics and ventilation are perfect, the seating accommodation compact and comfortable. This change will also allow of an increase in the number of performances and of their being given on consecutive nights. As will be seen from the plan below the Hall is within easy walking distance of all trains and trams.</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">Tickets may now be had:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> By Post, on filling in and forwarding (with Cheque or Money Order) to Gregan McMahon, Oxford Chambers, Bourke Street, the application form annexed. By Personal Application, at the Rooms, Oxford Chambers, Bourke Street; at Allans'; or at the Book Lovers' Library, Collins Street. <p style="text-align: center;">Prices of Admission:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SINGLE SEATS—</p> <p>Front Stalls 4/- Back Stalls 2/6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">COUPON SEASON TICKETS—</p> <p>Set of 6 Front Stalls (available any evening) £1 1/- Set of 6 Back Stalls (available any evening) 12/-</p> <p>By taking a set of 6 Coupon Tickets nearly 20% may be saved.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Box Plan</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AT ALLANS' (COLLINS STREET), MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27TH.</p> <p>The privilege of booking seats is extended to all portions of the house. Every seat is shown on the plan. Owing to the limited capacity of the Hall patrons are advised to reserve their seats in advance.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Third Season.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE MELBOURNE REPERTORY THEATRE</p> <p>Their Excellencies the Governor-General and Lady Denman, have kindly intimated their intention of witnessing the performance of Tuesday, Saturday and Thursday, Dec. 5th, 9th, and 14th.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Melbourne Repertory Theatre</p> <p style="text-align: center;">St. Patrick's Hall BOURKE STREET. (Nearly opposite Menzies' Hotel). DEC. 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th, 11th, 13th & 14th.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Under the Direction of Mr. Gregan McMahon, Repertory Theatre Rooms, Oxford Chambers, Bourke Street. Agent in Europe: Mr. Alfred Worsley, Repertory Theatre, Glasgow.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*Trondet & Cooper, Pty. Ltd. Print.</p>
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Gregan McMahon's Third Season program 1911—SLV

Publication 1911

Three Short Plays, Fraser and Jenkinson, Melbourne—1911. (A)

Dead Timber was published twice under Esson's direct editorial supervision in 1911 and 1920. The first was in a volume *Three Short Plays*—'gratefully inscribed to J Ford Paterson'—produced by Fraser & Jenkinson in late 1911; it also contained *The Woman Tamer* and *The Sacred Place*. As Robert Henderson Croll's copy—held in the NLV Moir Collection—is personally autographed by Esson, and dated 15 December 1911, it's clear that publication was in process prior to the performance of *Dead Timber* (on 13 December, two days earlier) but scheduled to be released to

coincide with the production. We have to assume that the published text represents the rehearsal text, or the text prepared for performance and without the benefit of subsequent emendations.

In his review of the publication for the *Herald* Archibald T Strong believed that the volume contained ‘some of the cleverest literary work recently published in Australia, and should at once be bought and read by everyone interest in the beginnings of our national drama.’ He left audiences who had seen the play to judge its effectiveness but noted that

A bushman who was sitting near me at the performance pronounced the play correct in atmosphere and quite free of ‘howlers’ and bushmen are stern critics of matters of this kind.¹

The International Socialist, thought *Dead Timber* the best of the short plays, ‘build on the tragedy of isolated home life in the bush ... Louis Esson delivers the goods.’² Bernard O’Dowd, in *The Socialist*, was struck by ‘the high quality’ of the play and agreed with a friend, who whispered ‘at the fall of the curtain’ that ‘The high-water mark of Australian drama [was] up to date.’

Its subject matter, sufficient easily for three acts, but crushed pitilessly into one, is the breaking of the spirit of a selector, already cowed by the barrenness of his efforts to get a living from the hungry soil of a Gippsland farm, by the ‘bush,’ and the revelation of the ‘illicit’ pregnancy of his favourite daughter. ... although the play is not one that would be chosen by an immigration agent to bring new victims to sunny Australia, it holds fearfully to the actual facts of life in many parts of our country districts.³

The Leader too felt that Esson had sacrificed ‘sentiment in his devotion to harsh accuracy.’⁴ Further, JD, writing a Letter to the Editor of *The Argus* regretted that the plays ‘show naught but the dark side of human nature and the lowest or most depressing sides of Australian life.’ They made the point:

We often hear it said that ‘Australian literature (especially poetry) is lugubrious;’ therefore, the need to see the bright depicted. If the drama does not lend itself to this completely, at least give us some glimpses of love and sympathy, here and there, in all Australian works. We want to boom Australia, and it is neither creditable to our country, nor elevating to audiences or readers, to find themselves tutored to the slang and low life of the slum, or the horrors of an exceptionally unfortunate out back farm.⁵

Curiously, the volume was listed among the stock of ‘Socialist Literature’ available from the Literature Secretary of the Socialist Party; other works available included *Capital (Volumes II and II)* by Karl Marx, *The Weavers* by Gerhardt Hauptmann and the pamphlet ‘The Child’s Socialist Reader’.

¹ *The Herald*, 28 December 1911 p.3

² *The International Socialist*, 20 January 1912 p.3

³ *The Socialist*, 12 January 1912 p.1

⁴ *Leader*, 17 February 1912 p.25

⁵ *The Argus*, 16 January 1912 p.8

Publication 1920

Dead Timber, and other plays, Hendersons, London—1920. (B)

The second publication was *Dead Timber, and other plays* by Hendersons, prepared while Esson was on an extended stay in London after the War. While this version had the benefit of a rehearsal period and a performance, there are no dramaturgical emendations. As with *The Woman Tamer*, Esson does however make a number of adjustments to the idiom: replacing the clipped words that were signifiers to the perceived working class accent. The revisions tend to dilute the characterisation and the bleak, rural atmosphere.

Following its publication, *The Herald* reported that *Dead Timber and Other Plays* had been ‘favourably reviewed by London critics’ and had ‘attracted the attention of WB Yeats, who invited the dramatist to visit him at his home in Oxford.’

In the course of a long talk, Mr Yeats had much to say not eh possibilities of drama in Australia. He regarded this as a nation which would produce plays peculiarly its own.

‘Plays on national themes will help to unit a nation,’ said Mr Yeats,’ while the cosmopolitan play—for example the triangle drama, husband, wife and lover—will shatter a nation. Not,’ he added, ‘on moral, but artistic grounds. As to the professors of literature who object to national themes, they cannot write themselves. Their colourless correct literary style is the worst of all.’

He insists that every country should have its national drama.

Judging by Esson’s plays, he was quite satisfied that the life and atmosphere of Australia gave a writer a chance to create a drama which would be distinctive.⁶

Meanwhile, *The Daily Standard*, felt that *Dead Timber* was ‘probably as grim a piece of realism as has ever been put not he stage, but it justifies itself by its absolute truth and sincerity. ... From start to finish the play is unrelieved tragedy and though some may think it unduly depressing, its sheer truth stamps it already with the hall-mark of a classic.’⁷

Publication 1934

Fifty One-Act Plays, Gollancz and English, London—1934. (C)

The play was also selected and edited by Constance M Martin for inclusion in an international compendium of one act plays in 1934 (that also included works by Galsworthy, Houseman, Milne, Yeats, Wilde, Pinero, O’Neill and Chekhov). *The Sydney Morning Herald* felt that ‘Australian drama would have been better represented by Louis Esson’s *The Drovers* than by his *Dead Timber*.’⁸ *The Sun* agreed, describing the play as ‘a gloomy melodrama.’⁹

It is clear that this text was based on the Text (B) but with minor adjustments to punctuation and a more consistent approach to idiom.

⁶ *The Herald*, 10 March 1921 p.3

⁷ *Daily Standard*, 1 January 1921 p.2

⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 1934 p.12

⁹ *The Sun*, 21 October 1934 p.18

Copy Text

Three Short Plays, Fraser and Jenkinson, Melbourne—1911. (A)

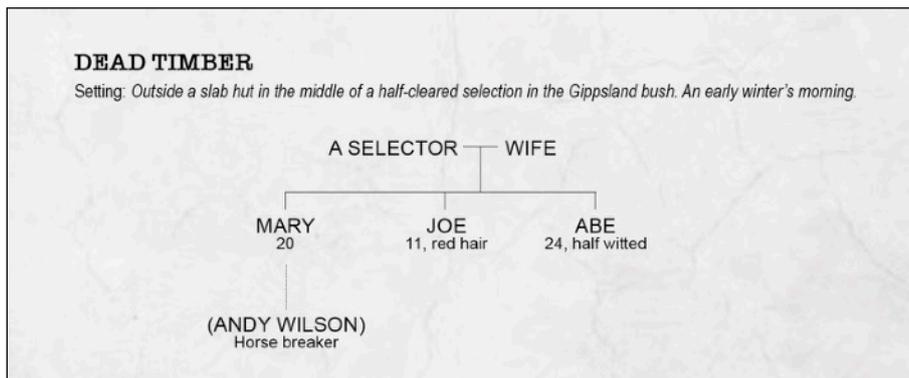
While the revisions were unquestionably made by the author in Text B (1920), I use the same reasoning as I applied to *The Woman Tamer* and believe that the reading that best represents the author's 'final intentions' is Text (A) (1911) and this provides the 'copy text' for this edition (noting all revisions made in (B) and (C) in the apparatus).

Characters

A SELECTOR
JOE
ABE
WIFE
MARY

Setting

Outside a slab hut in the middle of a half-cleared selection in the Gippsland bush.



ACT ONE

(The scene is outside a slab hut in the middle of a half-cleared¹⁰ selection in the Gippsland bush. A form outside hut, with pots, pans, etc. Against hut, a shed with separator. A muddy track, leading to cow-yard¹¹. Logs, stumps etc. In distance a steep hillside, covered with dead trees. An early winter's morning.)

(Enter FARMER with lighted lantern. He moves round, calling:¹²)

FARMER. Cow time! Cow time. Joe! Joe! Abe! Stir your lazy bones there. Roll out, Joe, an' git¹³ the cows in. Things are comin'¹⁴ to a pretty pass when the old man has to be up first up to call you. Cow-time; do you 'ear? Cow-time.¹⁵

JOE *(Within)*. No hurry, Dad. 'Tain't half-past five yit¹⁶.

FARMER. It'll be broad daylight soon.

JOE. No, it ain't.

FARMER. Git out o' that now, an' none o' yer back talk to me.¹⁷

JOE. Ain't I up?

FARMER. I'll show you all who's boss on this 'ere selection.

(Enter JOE, a red-headed boy of eleven.)

Git the milkers in! Don't stand there rubbin' yer eyes.¹⁸

JOE. It's pitch dark.

FARMER. What are yer waitin'¹⁹ for?

JOE. I can't see. 'Ow am I ter²⁰ -

FARMER. Did you 'ear me talkin' ter yer?²¹ Didn't I tell yer to bring in them milkers?

JOE. 'Ow's²² it for the lantern?

FARMER. You don't want no lantern. Be off with you.

JOE *(Whimpering)*. Yes²³ I do. A man can't see his way down to the gully this sort of a mornin'²⁴.

¹⁰ half-cleared] *B*; half cleared *A*.

¹¹ cow-yard] *B*; cow yard *A*.

¹² calling:] *B*; calling - *A*.

¹³ an' git] and get *B*.

¹⁴ comin'] coming *B*.

¹⁵ Cow-time; do yer hear? Cow-time.] Cow time, do you hear? Cow time! *B*.

¹⁶ yit] yet *B*.

¹⁷ Git out o' that now, an' none o' yer back talk to me.] Get out o' that now, and none o' your back talk to me. *B*.

¹⁸ Git the milkers in! Don't stand there rubbin' yer eyes.] Get the milkers in! Don't stand there rubbing your eyes. *B*.

¹⁹ yer waitin'] you waiting *B*.

²⁰ 'Ow am I ter] How am I to *B*.

²¹ 'ear me talkin' ter yer? Didn't I tell yer] hear me talking to you? Didn't I tell you *B*.

²² 'Ow's] How's *B*.

²³ Yes] Yes, *C*.

²⁴ a mornin'] a morning *B*; morning *C*.

FARMER. What are yer grumblin'²⁵ at there? You know where the cows are.
 JOE. I'll be breakin' me leg in er rabbit burrer, that's what I'll be doin'²⁶.
 FARMER. Y'ain't done it yit, an' y' ain't a-goin' to do it this mornin', are yer?²⁷
(Enter ABE, twenty-four years old, but half-witted—²⁸slowly, and sheepishly:²⁹)
 ABE. We'll 'ave more rain ter-day³⁰.
 FARMER *(To JOE)*. Off with you, now. We won't git³¹ the milk separated till dinner time³².
 JOE. You can't ixpect³³ a man to be like er traction ingine³⁴.
 FARMER. Be off, or I'll liven you up.
(JOE whistles for the dogs and goes out.)
 JOE *(Calling)*. Ere, Ben,'ere Ben! Good dorg³⁵!
 FARMER. Yer kin run them steers inter the market ter-day³⁶.
 ABE. Road's³⁷ bogged.
 FARMER. Go an' chuck 'em er³⁸ handful o' hay now. They want freshenin'³⁹ up.
 ABE. I ain't 'ad me mornin'⁴⁰ lunch.
 FARMER. Ain't Mary up yit⁴¹?
 ABE. Naw⁴².
 FARMER. What's she doin'⁴³?
 ABE. Sleepin'⁴⁴.

²⁵ yer grumblin'] you grumbling *B*.

²⁶ breakin' me leg in er rabbit burrer, that's what I'll be doin'] breaking my leg in a rabbit burrow, that's what I'll be doing *B*.

²⁷ yit, an' y' ain't a-goin' to do it this mornin', are yer?] yet, and y'aint a-going to do it this morning, are you? *B*.

²⁸ half-witted -] half-witted; *B*.

²⁹ sheepishly:] *C*; sheepishly - *A*.

³⁰ ter-day] ter day *A*; to-day *B*.

³¹ git] get *B*.

³² dinner time] dinner-time *C*.

³³ ixpect] expect *B*.

³⁴ er traction ingine] a traction engine *B*; a traction-engine *C*.

³⁵ 'Ere, Ben, 'ere Ben! good dorg] 'ere, Ben, 'ere Ben! good dorg *A*; "ere Ben, 'ere Ben! good dog *B*; "Ere, Ben, 'ere, Ben. Good dog *C*.

³⁶ Yer kin run them steers inter the market ter day] You can run them steers into the market to-day *B*.

³⁷ Road's] The roads *B*.

³⁸ an' chuck 'em er] and chuck 'em a *B*.

³⁹ freshenin'] freshening *B*.

⁴⁰ 'ad me mornin'] 'ad my morning *B*; had my morning *C*.

⁴¹ yit] yet *B*.

⁴² Naw] No *B*.

⁴³ doin'] doing *B*.

⁴⁴ Sleepin'.] Gittin' up. *A*; Sleeping. *B*.

FARMER. A nice family I've reared! What are yer sulkin'⁴⁵ at?
 ABE. Let them steers wait till I've 'ad er bite'⁴⁶ o' tucker.
 FARMER. You'll drive me mad, yer mumblin'⁴⁷ idiot.
 ABE. I ain't goin' ter ther markit ter-day⁴⁸.
 FARMER. Yer'll end yer days humpin'⁴⁹ bluey, like an old swaggie, that's what yer'll be doin'⁵⁰.
 Nice sort o' thing fer me son ter⁵¹ come to!
 ABE. The road's bogged.
 FARMER. Be off, now!⁵² Joe'll have the cows in before you're back.
(ABE goes out slowly.)
(Enter WIFE, careworn⁵³ but resigned.)
 WIFE. Has Joe gone for the cows yet?
 FARMER. Yes. And er nice⁵⁴ job I've had ter rouse⁵⁵ him out.
 WIFE. And did you remember to tell Abe to bring up the sick cow? She was lying down under the she-oaks⁵⁶ by the creek when I saw her last night.
 FARMER. I forgot. I can't think o' nothin' this mornin'⁵⁷.
 WIFE. And, Dad, you'd better send Abe to look at the lambs, for I heard the dingoes howling quite close to the house.
 FARMER. I'm losing heart, Mum. Ain't Mary up yit⁵⁸?
 WIFE. Oh, long ago.
 FARMER. Mary was out agen⁵⁹ last night.
 WIFE. Never mind, Dad.
 FARMER. I dunno⁶⁰ what I'm doin' this mornin'⁶¹—What could have sent her out on a night like that, except sin?

⁴⁵ yer sulkin'] you sulking *B*.

⁴⁶ 'ad er bite] had a bite *B*.

⁴⁷ yer mumblin'] you mumbling *B*.

⁴⁸ goin' ter ther markit ter-day] going to the market to-day *B*.

⁴⁹ Yer'll end yer days humpin'] You'll end your days humping *B*.

⁵⁰ yer'll be doin'] you'll be doing *B*.

⁵¹ fer me son ter] for my son to *B*.

⁵² off, now!] off now! *B*; off now. *C*.

⁵³ careworn] *C*; careworn, *A*.

⁵⁴ er nice] a nice *B*.

⁵⁵ ter rouse] to rouse *B*.

⁵⁶ she-oaks] *C*; sheoaks *A*.

⁵⁷ nothin' this mornin'] nothing this morning *B*.

⁵⁸ yit] yet *B*.

⁵⁹ agen] again *B*.

⁶⁰ dunno] don't know *B*.

⁶¹ doin' this mornin' -] doing this morning. *B*.

WIFE. She was only seein'⁶² after the sick cow.

FARMER. The rain poured. There was thunder an' lightning⁶³. The ranges were all lit up. I looked out, and there I seen er big⁶⁴ tree struck by the lightnin'⁶⁵. It was er judgement o' God. Mary'll⁶⁶ be struck dead.

WIFE. I tell you she only went down the paddock to cover up the sick cow.

FARMER. My God! If a girl o' mine brought shame an' ruin⁶⁷ on the family!

WIFE. Dad!

FARMER. I done me⁶⁸ best, Mum.

WIFE. You're not well this mornin'⁶⁹.

FARMER. It's poor land an' 'ard⁷⁰ to make a livin'⁷¹.

WIFE. When we get the new road⁷² things will brighten up. What's Abe doing?

FARMER. I dunno. Me head's spinnin' round.⁷³ ... Things are goin' on behind me back⁷⁴. No good'll come of it. I 'eard somethin'⁷⁵ about that young Andy Wilson, the horse-breaker, who's livin' in a tent be the Magpie⁷⁶.

WIFE. What did you hear?

FARMER. Mary's bin⁷⁷ seen out with him.

WIFE. It's a lonely place for a woman. Girls must have a peep o' pleasure.

FARMER. Pleasure is sin.

WIFE. I'll warn her, Dad. I'll take care Mary comes to no harm.

FARMER. They must be sweet-'earting down ther gully⁷⁸.

WIFE. No, no. You don't know what you're saying.

⁶² seein'] seeing *B*.

⁶³ an' lightning] and lightning *B*.

⁶⁴ er big] a big *B*.

⁶⁵ lightnin'] lightning *B*.

⁶⁶ er judgement o' God. Mary'll] a judgement of God. Mary will *B*.

⁶⁷ an' ruin] and ruin *B*.

⁶⁸ me] my *B*.

⁶⁹ mornin'] morning *B*.

⁷⁰ land an' 'ard] land, and hard *B*.

⁷¹ livin'] living *B*.

⁷² road] road, *C*

⁷³ dunno. Me head's spinnin' round. ...] don't know. My head's spinning round. ... *B*.

⁷⁴ goin' on behind me back] going behind my back *B*.

⁷⁵ No good'll come of it. I 'eard somethin'] No good will come of it. I heard something *B*.

⁷⁶ livin' in a tent be the Magpie] living in a tent by the Magpie River *B*.

⁷⁷ bin] been *B*.

⁷⁸ sweet-'eartin' down ther gully] sweet-'artin' down ther gully *A*; sweet-hearting down in the gully *B*; sweethearting down in the gully *C*.

FARMER. He ain't er respectable hard-workin'⁷⁹ man that wants ter marry an'⁸⁰ settle down. He knocks around the country like a sundowner. ... He'll ruin my girl,⁸¹ he'll ruin her.

(A tinkle of cow-bells.)

WIFE. Do you hear the bells in the scrub?

FARMER. Why did we ever rear er family⁸²?

WIFE. Don't say that, Dad. I bore them for you to be a comfort to you in your old age.

FARMER. Our family ain't no comfort. Look at Joe! He ain't got no respect for me. He'll come to a bad end. Abe's a shingle short. And we've lost Tom and little Sarah. An'⁸³ Mary, my favourite daughter -

WIFE. You're upset, Dad. You mustn't believe the gossip you hear at the market.

FARMER. I'll wait for them to-night. I'll follow Mary down the back paddock. I'll take me⁸⁴ gun. If Andy Wilson comes up⁸⁵ I'll shoot him—as God is my judge—⁸⁶ and I'll shoot myself after.

(Enter MARY at door. She is a young woman of twenty.)

MARY *(At door)*. Lunch's ready.

WIFE. Come in, Dad, and have a cup of tea.

FARMER. You're up at last, are yer? What sort o' time is this to be gittin'⁸⁷ up?

MARY. The cows aren't in yet.

FARMER. You like to lie lazy abed,⁸⁸ and let us do the work.

MARY. I'm tired.

FARMER. What right 'ave⁸⁹ you to be tired? You're a young woman⁹⁰ now, and should be a real help to us all.

MARY. I'm tired of the cows. I'm tired of the bush.

FARMER. You should 'ave bin a lady, that's what you should 'ave bin⁹¹. Poor 'ard-workin'⁹² people like us ain't good enough for the likes o' you⁹³.

WIFE. Come in, Dad.

⁷⁹ er respectable hard-workin'] er respectable hard workin' A; a respectable hard working B; a respectable hard-working C.

⁸⁰ ter marry an'] to marry and B.

⁸¹ girl,] girl; C

⁸² er family] a family B.

⁸³ you] you, C.

⁸⁴ me] my B.

⁸⁵ up] up, C

⁸⁶ him—as God is my judge—] him, as God is my judge, B.

⁸⁷ are yer? What sort o' time is this to be gittin'] are you? What sort of time is this to be getting B.

⁸⁸ abed,] a-bed, B.

⁸⁹ 'ave] have B.

⁹⁰ woman] woman, C

⁹¹ 'ave bin] have been B.

⁹² 'ard-workin'] 'ard workin' A; hard working B; hard-working C.

⁹³ o' you] of you B.

FARMER. Ther education we guv yer, that's what spoilt yer. You don't know when yer're well⁹⁴ off.

MARY. Yes, I do. I'm not well off living in the bush. Oh!⁹⁵ I hate the bush.

(Exit MARY into house.)

WIFE. Come on, Dad.

FARMER. Did yer 'ear what Mary sed? She defied me. Me own family's turned agen me.⁹⁶

(Enter ABE.)

ABE. The crick's flooded.

FARMER. The seed'll be washed away. Everythin' goin'⁹⁷ agen me.

WIFE. Why didn't you bring up the sick cow?

ABE. It's dead. It was all swelled up.

(Sound of bells.)

WIFE. Hurry up, Abe. The cows are in.

FARMER. What are yer starin'⁹⁸ at?

ABE. I ain't going ter take them steers inter ther market ter-day⁹⁹.

(Exit ABE into house.)

FARMER. I'm beat. They're all agen me, every one of them.¹⁰⁰

(Exit FARMER into shed¹⁰¹.)

(Bells tinkling, and JOE calling, 'Gee on¹⁰² Brindle! Here, boy, sool 'em, fetch 'em on. Gee on, Baldy Face! Hey there, Rosie¹⁰³! What are yer doin'¹⁰⁴? Gee on! Gee on!')

(Enter FARMER¹⁰⁵ with cans.)

What's Joe bin¹⁰⁶ up to?

WIFE. It's hard to find the cows in the scrub.

(Enter JOE.)

FARMER. 'Ave yer bin 'avin'¹⁰⁷ another sleep?

⁹⁴ guv yer, that's what spoilt yer. You don't know when ye're well] gave you, that's what spoilt you. You don't know when you're well *B*.

⁹⁵ Oh!] Oh, *B*.

⁹⁶ Did yer 'ear what Mary sed? She defied me. Me own family's turned agen me.] Did you hear what Mary said? She defied me. My own family's turned against me. *B*.

⁹⁷ Everythin' goin'] Everything's going *B*.

⁹⁸ yer starin'] you staring *B*.

⁹⁹ ter take them steers inter ther market ter-day] to take them steers into the market to-day *B*.

¹⁰⁰ They're all agen me, every one of them.] *B*; They're all agen me. I'll get the cans. *A*.

¹⁰¹ into shed] into the shed *B*.

¹⁰² on] on, *C*.

¹⁰³ Hey there, Rosie] Hey there Rosie *B*; Hey there, Rosie *C*.

¹⁰⁴ yer doin'] you doing *B*.

¹⁰⁵ FARMER] FARMER, *B*.

¹⁰⁶ bin] been *B*.

¹⁰⁷ 'Ave yer bin 'avin'] Have you been having *B*.

JOE. The cows 'ave¹⁰⁸ been in the shed for hours. It ain't my fault if they ain't finished before dinner time¹⁰⁹.

WIFE. Go and get a snack, Joe.

FARMER. Be as quick as yer like, an' git a move on down to ther shed¹¹⁰.

JOE. Yer can't¹¹¹ blame me if they ain't done.

(Exit JOE into house¹¹².)

FARMER. I've worked hard, an'¹¹³ tried to bring the family up honest, but I'm gettin' ¹¹⁴old now, an' worn out, an' they don't take no notice o' me¹¹⁵.

WIFE. It'll all come right, Dad. We're getting the place cleared now.

FARMER. It's only half cleared. There's too much rubbish an'¹¹⁶ thick undergrowth. A bare livin'¹¹⁷, that's the best we can hope for.

(Exit FARMER with cans.)

(Enter MARY.)

MARY. Will I chop up some of the meat?

WIFE. Yes.

(MARY takes meat from bran-bag¹¹⁸ hanging above form.)

I'll peel the potatoes.

(They sit down on form outside hut.)

MARY. Isn't it cold and gloomy, Mother!

(Enter ABE.)

ABE. The road's bogged. *(Gets bucket.)*

WIFE. Dad's waiting for you.

ABE. We're goin' to 'ave¹¹⁹ more rain.

(Exit ABE with bucket.)

MARY. Yes. It's¹²⁰ always raining here. The mud's a foot deep when you tramp through it. I hate the dripping trees¹²¹ and the black ranges. Oh, I hate the winter. It's all mud and slush and gloom and misery.

WIFE. We must take what we get and be satisfied.

¹⁰⁸ 'ave] have *B*.

¹⁰⁹ dinner time] dinner-time *C*.

¹¹⁰ yer like, an' git a move on down to ther shed] you like, and get a move on down to the shed *B*.

¹¹¹ Yer can't] You can't *B*.

¹¹² into house] into the house *B*.

¹¹³ an'] and *B*.

¹¹⁴ gettin'] getting *B*.

¹¹⁵ an' they don't take no notice o' me] and they don't take no notice of me *B*.

¹¹⁶ an'] and *B*.

¹¹⁷ livin'] living *B*.

¹¹⁸ bran-bag] bran bag *B*.; bag *C*.

¹¹⁹ goin' to 'ave] going to have *B*.

¹²⁰ Yes. It's] It's *B*.

¹²¹ trees] trees, *B*.

MARY. But it's so lonely here and melancholy,¹²² with the bush all round, and the dreary scrub¹²³ and the dead timber. We're too far from the township.

WIFE. I've got used to the loneliness, Mary. Dad says it's a free life in the bush.

MARY. What freedom do I ever get!¹²⁴ Dad expects me to work day and night, and never go anywhere, or talk to anybody. I can't go on for ever like this. I'm not free. I can't breathe.

WIFE. Dad is angry with you this morning.

MARY. He's always angry with me now. Haven't I done my share of the work?

WIFE. You've been a good girl. Dad's kind-hearted¹²⁵ if he's rough spoken¹²⁶. He's had a lot of trouble clearing the place. He's getting old.

MARY. I'm not frightened of him.¹²⁷

WIFE. He knows you were out last night,¹²⁸ in the rain and thunder. He's worrying about it. Dad's a God-fearing man, and there's been some talk of young Andy Wilson. No, I'm not blaming you, Mary.

MARY. What if there is? I don't want to leave you, Mother. But I want a change—¹²⁹ away from the cows and the muck of the yards¹³⁰. I don't know what I want.¹³¹

WIFE. Don't get such ideas into your silly head.¹³² When do I ever get a change? I haven't had a spell for eleven years. What with milking and churning,¹³³ and washing and scrubbing—¹³⁴ keeping the place in order—yes, and cutting scrub and burning off when it's wanted, and patching and darning for you all—I'm butcher and baker and tailor -

MARY. Yes, Mother, I know. I'm sorry for you. And I'm sorry for Dad. I'm sorry for everybody living in the bush.

WIFE. But what's the use of fretting?
(Enter JOE from house.)
Hurry up, Joe.

JOE. I'm comin'. Give a man er chance¹³⁵ to have a bite.

WIFE. Get your bucket, now.
(JOE gets bucket.)

¹²² lonely here and melancholy,] C; lonely and melancholy here A.

¹²³ scrub] scrub, C.

¹²⁴ get!] get? C.

¹²⁵ kind-hearted] kind hearted B.; kind-hearted C.

¹²⁶ rough spoken] rough-spoken C.

¹²⁷ I'm not frightened of him.] He's too hard on us all. B.

¹²⁸ night,] night B.

¹²⁹ change—] change, B.

¹³⁰ muck of the yards] B.; mucky yards A.

¹³¹ I don't know what I want.] deleted B.

¹³² Don't get such ideas into your silly head.] You mustn't get such ideas. B.

¹³³ churning,] churning B.

¹³⁴ scrubbing—] scrubbing, B.

¹³⁵ I'm comin'. Give a man er chance] I'm coming. Give a man a chance B.

JOE. The old man's as cross as a skewbald this mornin'. I'm gettin' full¹³⁶ up. If he growls at me, I'll clear out.

WIFE. Be quick, Joe.

JOE. I'm goin'¹³⁷, ain't I? They put all the graft on to me.

(Exit JOE with bucket.)

MARY. Why were we brought up here to live in the lonely bush? The hills close us in. You're getting worn out, Mother,¹³⁸ I do want to help you, and Dad's breaking down with hard work and worry. The world isn't all misery like this, is it, Mother?

WIFE. Don't talk like that, Mary. It's¹³⁹ wicked.

MARY. We're all like the dead trees on the hill. I wish the sun would come up.¹⁴⁰

WIFE. What's the matter, Mary.¹⁴¹ Tell Mother. I won't be angry.

MARY. I can't.

WIFE. You were out last night with Andy Wilson?

MARY. Yes.

WIFE. I'm not angry, Mary. But I must warn you. Young girls are easily led astray¹⁴².

MARY. He told me all the places he has seen. He's been up in New South Wales, and Queensland¹⁴³ on the big stations, breaking horses for the rich squatters.

WIFE. Be careful, Mary.

MARY. And he often goes to the city. Isn't the city better than the bush?

WIFE. You mustn't believe what men say. The city's a wicked place,¹⁴⁴ where girls are deceived. It's better in the bush. Here's Abe with the can.

MARY. It's cold. I wish the sun would come up.¹⁴⁵

(Enter ABE with can.)

(The WOMEN go to separator. ABE puts down can. WIFE pours milk into bucket¹⁴⁶ and from bucket¹⁴⁷ into separator. MARY works the machine.)

WIFE. I hope we can get the cream away.¹⁴⁸

ABE. The old man's gruntin'¹⁴⁹ like a pig.

¹³⁶ this mornin'. I'm gettin' full] this morning. I'm getting full *B*.

¹³⁷ goin'] going *B*.

¹³⁸ Mother,] mother. *C*.

¹³⁹ Mary. It's] Mary, it's *B*; Mary. It's *C*.

¹⁴⁰ We're all like the dead trees on the hill. I wish the sun would come up.] We're all like the dead trees on the hill. *B*.

¹⁴¹ Mary.] Mary? *B*.

¹⁴² astray] *C*.; away *A*.

¹⁴³ Queensland] Queensland, *B*.

¹⁴⁴ place,] place *B*.; place, *C*.

¹⁴⁵ It's cold. I wish the sun would come up.] *B*; I'm ready *A*; It's cold, I wish the sun would come up. *C*.

¹⁴⁶ go to separator. ABE puts down can. WIFE pours milk into bucket] go to the separator. APE puts the can down and pours milk into bucket, *B*.

¹⁴⁷ and from bucket] *C*.; and bucket *A*.

¹⁴⁸ I hope ... away.] I hope ... away. What's that, Abe? *B*.

¹⁴⁹ gruntin'] grunting *B*.

(Exit ABE.)

WIFE. You're white, Mary.

MARY. It's nothing.

WIFE. I'll do that, Mary. *(Offering to take her place.)*

MARY. I'm all right, Mother.

WIFE. I don't want to be hard, Mary. I know how lonely it is here, with nobody to see.

MARY. One day passes like another.

WIFE. We'll take a run over to Doran's on Sunday.

MARY. If you like, Mother.

WIFE. And promise you won't see Andy Wilson any more.

MARY. Oh, Mother, I can't. I must see him. I couldn't live if I didn't.

WIFE. I don't trust that man. You mustn't believe the things men say.

MARY. It's too late, Mother.

WIFE. I want to protect you. I'm just warning you, Mary.

MARY. It's too late, Mother.

WIFE. What is that, Mary? You don't mean it -

(WOMEN stare at each other.)

MARY. Oh, don't send me away -¹⁵⁰

(Enter FARMER.)

FARMER. Loafin' agen.¹⁵¹

WIFE. Don't be angry, Dad.

FARMER. Ain't¹⁵² I a right to be angry when me own children turn agen me! ¹⁵³ Everythin's goin'¹⁵⁴ wrong on me. Baldy Face¹⁵⁵ kicked an'¹⁵⁶ broke the leg-rope¹⁵⁷.

WIFE. That's nothing. I'll find you another bit of rope.

MARY. I'll get it.¹⁵⁸

(Exit WIFE into house. MARY is about to follow¹⁵⁹ when he stops her.)

FARMER. I want a word with you,¹⁶⁰ young woman.

MARY. What do you want to know?

FARMER. Weren't you out last night?

MARY. Never mind.

FARMER. You've bin sneakin'¹⁶¹ down to the Myrtle Gully.

¹⁵⁰ away -] away. *B.*

¹⁵¹ Loafin' agen.] Loafing agen? *B.*; Loafin' agen? *C.*

¹⁵² Ain't] Haven't *B.*

¹⁵³ me own children turn agen me!] my own children turn agen me? *B.*

¹⁵⁴ Everythin's goin'] Everything's going *B.*

¹⁵⁵ Baldy Face] Baldy-Face *C.*

¹⁵⁶ an'] and *B.*

¹⁵⁷ leg-rope] leg rope *B.*

¹⁵⁸ I'll get it.] *deleted B.*

¹⁵⁹ into house. *MARY is about to follow] into the house. MARY is about to follow, B.*

¹⁶⁰ you,] you *B.*; you, *C.*

¹⁶¹ bin sneakin'] been sneaking *B.*

MARY. What if I have?¹⁶²

(*The dawn comes up, revealing the hut, the muddy track, and the dead trees on the hill.*)

FARMER. Ain't you ashamed to look me in the face?

MARY. No. I'm not ashamed.

FARMER. You're sweet-'eartin'¹⁶³ with young Andy Wilson. I 'erd¹⁶⁴ tell of it. Deny it if you can.

MARY. No, I won't. I saw Andy last night, if you want to know.

FARMER. He's a fine young feller, ain't he, breakin' horses, an' knockin' about¹⁶⁵ the country, an' tryin' to ruin respectable girls, an' spendin'¹⁶⁶ his money in drink?¹⁶⁷

MARY. Don't you dare to talk like that about Andy Wilson.¹⁶⁸ I won't let you. I'll see him if I like.

FARMER. Don't dare me! I'll watch fer yer¹⁶⁹. I'll shoot him if he brings disgrace on a child o' mine¹⁷⁰. What are yer smilin'¹⁷¹ at?

MARY. He's my man.

FARMER. What do you say?

MARY. He's my man. He loves me. Now you know.¹⁷²

FARMER. Yer're tellin'¹⁷³ me a lie.

MARY. It's the truth. I'm not frightened of you. I'll go away with him if he asks me to.¹⁷⁴

FARMER. You'll be struck dead. You'll burn in Hell fire.¹⁷⁵ Don't laugh at me or I'll -

MARY (*Hysterical*). Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you do. I'll have to go away. Would you keep my child?

FARMER. What do you say?

MARY. You wouldn't keep my child.

FARMER. A child! Lord have mercy on us!

MARY. It's his child.

FARMER. It's a lie—¹⁷⁶ you're lying to me, Mary. Say you're tellin'¹⁷⁷ me a lie. I'll forgive you.

MARY. It's the truth.

¹⁶² have?] C; have. A.

¹⁶³ sweet-'eartin'] sweet-heartin' A.; sweet-hearting B.; sweethearting C.

¹⁶⁴ 'erd] heard B.

¹⁶⁵ feller, ain't he, breakin' horses, an' knockin' about] fellow, aint he, breaking horses, and knocking about B.

¹⁶⁶ an' tryin' to ruin respectable girls, an' spendin'] and trying to ruin respectable girls, and spending B.

¹⁶⁷ drink?] C.; drink. A.

¹⁶⁸ Wilson.] Wilson! C.

¹⁶⁹ fer yer] for you B.

¹⁷⁰ o' mine] of mine B.

¹⁷¹ yer smilin'] you smiling B.

¹⁷² He loves me. Now you know.] *deleted* B.

¹⁷³ Yer're tellin'] You're telling B.

¹⁷⁴ It's the truth. ... asks me to.] It's Andy. He loves me. I'm not afraid. B.

¹⁷⁵ You'll be struck dead. You'll burn in Hell fire.] You'll be struck dead in the wrath of the Lord. ... B.

¹⁷⁶ lie—] C.; lie, A.

¹⁷⁷ tellin'] telling B.

FARMER. God help us! What are you doing here? Out o' this.¹⁷⁸ Git quit o' me¹⁷⁹ sight¹⁸⁰. Take yerself off, an'¹⁸¹ your child o' sin.¹⁸²

MARY. Yes, I'll go.¹⁸³ He'll be in his tent now. He'll take me away.

(Enter WIFE.)

FARMER. Me own daughter; why¹⁸⁴ did I rear her?

WIFE. It's all a mistake, Dad.

MARY. I'll have to go, Mother. I can't stay here.

WIFE. Don't leave us, Mary.

MARY. Dad sent me away. Good-bye, Mother.

WIFE. Dad didn't mean it.

MARY. I wanted to tell you, Mother. I couldn't help it. I can't stay here. I'll have to go. I'm not afraid. I'm a woman now. He'll take me away.¹⁸⁵

(Exit MARY.)

(FARMER sits down, dazed¹⁸⁶, on log.)

WIFE. Come back, Mary. *(She goes to gate, calling to MARY then comes back to FARMER.)* What have you done?

FARMER. I dunno. Me¹⁸⁷ head's cracked.

WIFE. Mary'll come back.

FARMER. I'm beat, Mum. The bush 'as¹⁸⁸ beat me.

WIFE. Mary'll come back. *(Goes to gate and calls 'Mary, come back.')*

FARMER. We'll have to cut down ferns to-day. We can't buy a bag o' chaff in the district.

(His voice and look bring WIFE to him.)

WIFE *(Trying to rouse him)*. Don't look like that. You remember the big bush-fire five years ago, when everything was burnt out—fencing, grass-seed¹⁸⁹, all but the house? We had to put blankets on the roof to save it.

FARMER. I remember. Me left shoulder's bin¹⁹⁰ no good to me since the log fell on it.

WIFE. We started again, Dad.

FARMER. I cleared that there hill three times.

¹⁷⁸ this.] this! C.

¹⁷⁹ me] my B.

¹⁸⁰ sight.] sight! C.

¹⁸¹ yerself off, an'] yerself off an' B.

¹⁸² in.] sin! C.

¹⁸³ Yes, I'll go.] I'm going. B.

¹⁸⁴ Me own daughter; why] My own daughter. Why B.

¹⁸⁵ I'm not afraid. I'm a woman now. He'll take me away] I'm not afraid to be out in the world. I'm more scared here, with the dead trees all around. He'll take me away, somewhere. I'd have to go now. B; I'm not afraid to be out in the world. I'm more scared here, with the dead trees all around. He'll take me away somewhere. I'd have to go now. C.

¹⁸⁶ down, dazed,] C.; down dazed A.

¹⁸⁷ Me] My B.

¹⁸⁸ 'as] has B.

¹⁸⁹ out - fencing, grass-seed] out - fencing and grass-seed B; out, fencing and grass-seed C.

¹⁹⁰ Me left shoulder's bin] My left shoulder's been B.

WIFE. Don't give in now. Everything will come right.

FARMER. Ain't they finished milkin'¹⁹¹?

WIFE. They'll be finished soon.

FARMER (*Rising*¹⁹²). Where's Mary?

WIFE. I'll bring her back. She won't leave us lonely.

FARMER. She's gone; me favourite daughter;¹⁹³ to burn in Hell fire¹⁹⁴, an'¹⁹⁵ her child o' sin¹⁹⁶. I done me best. What am I workin' for? Ther bush 'as broken me up, an' me¹⁹⁷ own family's turned agen me. We won't git much for them steers. I'll track him out an' shoot him. I can't bear disgrace. They're all agen me. I'll git me gun; yes¹⁹⁸, I'll shoot him.

(*Exit FARMER into house.*)

WIFE. What are you doin'¹⁹⁹, Dad? (*She moves after him, then turns and goes up to gate. Calling:*)
Mary! where are you Mary?²⁰⁰

(*A pause.*)

(*A shot heard*²⁰¹ *within house.*)

(*WIFE starts*²⁰², *screams and runs into house.*)

(*Enter JOE. WIFE comes to door.*)

My God—quick; call Mary!²⁰³

JOE. Who fired the gun?

WIFE. Dad.

JOE. What's up with the old man?

WIFE. Dad's shot himself.

JOE. Is he a dead 'un²⁰⁴?

WIFE. Call Mary. Call Abe.²⁰⁵

¹⁹¹ milkin'] milking *B*.

¹⁹² (*Rising*)] *deleted B*.

¹⁹³ gone; me favourite daughter;] gone, me favourite daughter, *B*.

¹⁹⁴ Hell fire] Hellfire *A*.; hellfire *B*; hell fire *C*.

¹⁹⁵ an'] and *B*.

¹⁹⁶ o' sin] of sin *C*.

¹⁹⁷ me best. What am I workin' for? Ther bush 'as broken me up, an' me] my best. What am I working for? The bush has broken me up, and my *B*.

¹⁹⁸ git much for them steers. I'll track him out an' shoot him. I can't bear disgrace. They're all agen me. I'll git me gun; yes] get much for them steers. I'll track him out and shoot him. I can't bear disgrace. They're all agen me. I'll get my gun. Yes *B*.

¹⁹⁹ doin'] doing *B*.

²⁰⁰ 'Mary! where are you Mary?'] 'Mary, where are you, Mary?' *B*.; 'Mary! Where are you, Mary?' *C*.

²⁰¹ shot heard] shot is heard *C*.

²⁰² WIFE starts] WIFE, starts *B*.

²⁰³ My God - quick; call Mary!] My God! - Quick, call Mary! *B*; My God! Quick, call Mary! *C*.

²⁰⁴ a dead 'un] dead *B*.

²⁰⁵ Call Mary. Call Abe.] Call Mary! Call Abe! O! What can we do? God help us all. *B*; Call Mary! Call Abe! Oh, what can we do? God help us all! *C*.

JOE. Abe's no good.²⁰⁶

WIFE. What can we do? God help us all.²⁰⁷

(Enter ABE with bucket.)

ABE. Where's Dad gorn²⁰⁸?

JOE. Shut up, yer²⁰⁹ balmy idiot, don't²¹⁰ yer know the old man's shot hisself?

(JOE enters house.)

WIFE. We're left alone. Mary's gone away. And poor Dad's shot himself. Oh, Abe!²¹¹ shot himself thro'²¹² the head.²¹³

ABE. I ain't goin'²¹⁴ to take them steers inter the markit ter-day²¹⁵.

(WIFE rushes back to house. ABE moves slowly towards shed.)

Curtain.

Notes

Selector: the Victorian Parliament passed Land Acts in 1860, 1862 and 1869, which offered settlers land within defined agricultural areas, this was referred to as 'free selection before survey' of crown land. Settlers—selectors—paid for half of an allotment on selection at a uniform price of £1 per acre and paid rent on the other half for usually seven years. By the end of the period, to obtain title to the land, settlers would have had to pay the balance of the purchase price and make certain improvements.

Gippsland: rural region of Victoria, located in the south-eastern part of state. Originally recognised as part of the indigenous Gunai and Bunurong nations. Before permanent European settlement, the area was visited by sealers and wattle bark gatherers. Samuel Anderson, a Scottish immigrant, agriculturist and explorer, established a squatter agricultural settlement on the Bass River in Gippsland in 1835, the third permanent settlement in Victoria (then called the Port Phillip District). His business partner Robert Massie joined him in 1837. Samuel's brothers Hugh and Thomas arrived at Bass shortly after, where they established a successful farming venture. Further European settlement followed two separate expeditions to the area. Angus McMillan led the first European expedition between 1839 and 1840, naming the area *Caledonia Australis*. He was followed in March 1840 by Polish explorer Paweł Edmund Strzelecki, who unknowingly led his expedition across the same terrain already traversed by McMillan, and gave his own names to many natural landmarks and places. Following these expeditions, the area was officially named 'Gippsland', a name chosen by Strzelecki in honour of the New South Wales Governor, George Gipps, his sponsor.

form: (*British*) a long bench without a back.

winter's morning: the winter months in Australia are June, July, August.

half-witted: Cf. Steele Rudd (Arthur Davis) wrote a series of comic novels on rural life, starting with *On Our Selection* (1899), about Dad, Mother and Dave Rudd of Snake Gully. The Rudds had four acres in Darling Downs, Queensland. There are some similarities in character and plot to the play (1912) including the inclusion of Dad's 'idiot son' Dave.

²⁰⁶ Abe's no good.] *deleted B.*

²⁰⁷ What can we do? God help us all.] *deleted B.*

²⁰⁸ gorn] gone *B.*

²⁰⁹ yer] you *B.*

²¹⁰ idiot, don't] idiot! Don't *C.*

²¹¹ himself. Oh, Abe!] himself. O Abe! A.; himself - O, Abe! *B.*

²¹² thro'] through *B.*

²¹³ head.] head. ... *C.*

²¹⁴ I ain't goin'] (*Staring*). I ain't going *B.*

²¹⁵ inter the markit ter-day] to the market to-day *B.*

traction engine: a traction-engine is a self-propelled steam engine used to move heavy loads on roads, plough ground or to provide power at a chosen location. The name derives from the Latin *tractus*, meaning 'drawn', since the prime function of any traction-engine is to draw a load behind it.

tucker: (*Australian slang*) food.

humpin' bluey: (*Australian slang*) to carrying one's possessions in a swag (a rolled blanket—originally blue) while seeking work; to live the life of a swagman (or swaggie).

The ranges: the Yarra Ranges; particularly the Strzelecki Ranges, also known as the Strzelecki Hills, a low mountain range that is part of the Great Dividing Range, located in the West Gippsland.

the Magpie: no direct map reference found, but a newspaper reference (*The Argus*, 16 August 1905 p.6) suggests a Magpie River and tableland adjacent to the Fumina river near Neerim (in close proximity to Warburton in West Gippsland).

sundowner: swagman who arrives at a homestead at nightfall, too late for work, but obtains shelter for the night.

the scrub: scrub consists of low trees and bushes, especially in an area that has very little rain.

a shingle short: (*Australian slang*) 'A shingle short of a roof.' Be eccentric; mentally disturbed. Cf. 'A sandwich short of a picnic.'

Brindle: a brownish or tawny colour of animal fur, with streaks of another colour.

Baldy Face: a baldface cow or horse has a long white marking down the centre of its face.

the township: Warburton, Dandenong Ranges (76 km east of Melbourne). Toolangi is the closest township to Myrtle Creek in what is now the Wirra Willa State Forest in Gippsland. The name Toolangi is an Aboriginal word meaning tall trees. Toolangi was the home of Esson's friend, the poet CJ Dennis, author of *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*. In his essay 'CJ Dennis (The Sentimental Bloke) In Memorium', Esson recalls meeting 'Den' at *Fasoli's Cafe*, where both were familiar to the 'motley throng' that also included 'EJ Brady, Randolph Bedford, Arthur Streeton, Hans Heysen (over from Adelaide for an exhibition), Hugh McCrae (looking like a young Apollo), Will Dyson (with his biting wit), Furnley Maurice, Hal Gye, Hugh McKay, Doug Hart (humourist and famous larrikin impersonator), Bill Moore (always with a smile and an anecdote), Percy Lindsay (usually a week late)—to recall some names at random—not to mention the number of talented and beautiful women—journalists, actresses and others—who graced the scene—but I wouldn't know much about that aspect of affairs—I was always too shy.'

as cross as a skewbald: skewbald, is a colour pattern of horses; a coat made up of white patches on a non-black base coat, such as chestnut, bay, or any colour besides black coat. I can find no reference for the expression, but surmise that the impression of a skewbald might lead to a description as 'patchy' or 'temperamental.'

the big stations: (*Australian*) a large Australian landholding used for livestock production. cf. Louis lists a number of large and established stations in Northern Territory and Queensland in *The Drovers*: '... Avon, and Eadingly, and Alexandra, and Alroy, and the OT ...'

separator: a device for separating liquids of different specific gravities (such as cream from milk).

the big bush fire five years ago: Bushfires ravaged Gippsland in the summer of 1897–98. The Red Tuesday bushfires took place on 1 February, 1898 in South Gippsland. The fire claimed twelve lives, destroyed over 2,000 buildings and affected about 15,000 people, leaving 2,500 homeless. A total area of 2,600 square kilometres of bushland and farmland was destroyed by the fires. Artist John Longstaff visited Gippsland in February 1898 to view the fires at first hand and collect material for a major picture. *Gippsland, Sunday night, February 20th, 1898* was exhibited in a dramatic installation in his Melbourne studio in August 1898. A row of kerosene-lamp 'footlights' provided the illumination, and the effect was said to be 'lurid and startlingly realistic.' As this was the only significant fire recorded, it would suggest that the *Dead Timber* is set in the winter of 1903.



John Longstaff, *Gippsland, Sunday night*—1898 (National Gallery of Victoria)

The Sacred Place

A Play in One Act

Publication 1911

Fraser and Jenkinson's publication *Three Short Plays* was available in December 1911 (A). Esson used the basic scenario from his 1907 short story of the same name¹ but made a number of adjustments: the number of Indian hawkers was reduced to four, and character names changed (Ala Meer Deen, who cooks chapattis and the senior of the group, is replaced by Said Shah Shereef; his partner Najaf Kan, in the revised version a shop-keeper—'a rich merchant'—and named Munshi Goolam Muhammed; the 'big policeman' is titled Constable Matthews) and Louis included a minister of the Christian faith, Reverend Herbert Jordan.

Esson had final editorial authority over this edition.

The critical responses did not have the benefit of a performance and relied solely on the printed text. *The Leader* referred to *The Sacred Place* as 'a humorous representation of the squad bless of Indian hawkers.' Bernard O'Dowd found the play 'socially, perhaps even politically' more interesting than its dramatic quality, and saw it as a clarion call to Socialists 'who might do worse than get in touch with the finer types of Asiatic sojourners in Australia ... with a view both to getting more of them into our movement, and to ultimate correspondence and friendly co-operation with advanced bodies of political and economic thinkers in their countries.' He otherwise quibbled that 'one of the characters cannot speak English, and his few exclamations [were] not translated.'²

Production

The first performance of *The Sacred Place* was presented at Gregan McMahon's Australian Drama Night on 15 May, 1912 at the Turn Verein Hall, 115 Victoria Parade, Melbourne with the following cast:

SAID SHAH SHEREEF	Mr T Skewes
RAM CHANDRA	Mr A W Foster
ABDULLA	Mr L Wilkie
AKBAR ALMAD	Mr Tom Carter
MAHMUD	Mr Louis McCubbin
REV. HERBERT JORDON	Mr L Arnold
CONSTABLE MATTHEWS	Mr S Macky
MUNSHI GOOLAM MUHAMED	Mr G B Kirk

On what was a wet and miserable Wednesday night in Melbourne, *The Sacred Place* was the curtain raiser on a program that also featured the debut of a new dramatist, novelist and poet Kathleen Watson (Mrs William Decarden)—author of *The Litanies of Life*—her 'small comedy' called *If Youth But Knew*. The performance closed with William Moore's own playlet *The Mysterious Moonlight*.

The evening was something of a farewell to William Moore, who announced his departure for London and 'in the presence of an audience—[including the Prime Minister Mr Fisher]—that almost completely filled the building' he expressed his 'gratitude for the support given to this enterprise.'

Moore wrote in the program,

... The drama night has also a place for music and poetry, and it is hoped that this phase will be expanded. As the movement grows, it may bring out new actors, reciters, and singers, as well as dramatists. The drama night of the future will be an Australian festival of all the arts.

¹ *The Lone Hand* vol. 1 no. 1 May 1907 pg. 48-49

² *The Socialist*, 12 January 1912 p.1

Publication 1920

The Sacred Place was also included in Esson's collection *Dead Timber, and other plays* published by Hendersons in London in 1920 (B). With the benefit of a rehearsal period, performance and reviews, Esson undertook a major rewrite, fundamentally to excise the character of the Rev Herbert Jordan and remove the Christian imperative and refocus the action and the intention. The opening—1200 words—of the relative short sketch of 3600 words (compared to *The Woman Tamer* at 4200 words)—follows the dramaturgical trajectory of the 1912 version, but distributes Jordan's lines amongst Matthews and the other hawkers. The remaining two thirds of the play remain virtually the same.

On its release, the *Sydney Morning Herald* said of the 'small volume' that 'The plays read well; one would imagine that they would act well; there is not much action, but the situations are well contrived and the characters reveal themselves effectively.' Of *The Sacred Place*, it was that theme that caught its attention, but appears to read more into the play than Esson suggests

There is a dramatic moment in *The Sacred place* ... As Muhammed, the Indian shopkeeper, has grown rich he has shed his former ways of thought and life. He is a cosmopolitan who appreciates the delights of Sydney and San Francisco; he has renounced his old faith, and despises the poor hawkers who steadfastly cling to their religion though far from their native land. But when called upon to swear a false oath on the Sacred book in the improvised mosque, he cannot do it. The old beliefs reassert themselves, his faith is restored, and he emerges a humble and devout son of Islam.³

Keith Macartney, writing in *Meanjin* after Esson's death, was one of the few early champions of the play.

A more successful drama of the slums [than *The Woman Tamer*] is found in *The Sacred Place*, a story of Indian hawkers and the power of the Mohammedan faith upon a seeming unbeliever. Though in a sense this play is now a 'period piece,' it is still remarkably interest. Esson knew what he was writing about; the dialogue is both authentic and dramatic, and the situation has the right suspense.⁴

Copy Text

Esson had editorial control of the publication of *Dead timber, and other plays*. The significant revision made between the published text in 1911 (A) and 1920 (B) raises one question of the scholarly editor. As suggested by Tansell:

revisions are sometimes so radical that they alter the nature or conception of a work and in effect produce a new work; in such cases it is probable that the earlier version and the later one are best treated as two separate works, each worthy of a critical edition.⁵

In this particular instance, however, I don't believe that the revisions crucially alters the original conception of the work, but merely 'refines and adjusts' Esson's intentions.

³ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 February 1921

⁴ Keith Macartney, 'Louis Esson and Australian Drama', *Meanjin* (Vol. 6, No. 2) (1947) p. 104

⁵ G Thomas Tanselle, 'Texts of Documents and Texts of Works', *Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing*, University of Virginia Press (1990) p.18

The dramaturgy is enhanced in Text B: Jordan's removal rids the opening of an unnecessary complication of referencing the Christian faith in the Muslim environment; the exposition is more intrinsic to the theme, especially as Muhammed is physically present, agitated, and he has the opportunity to explicitly foreshadow the imminent arrival of the summons by sharing his difficulty with debtors.

It is my opinion that Text B (1920) best represents the playwright's 'final authorial intention' and use it as Copy Text for this edition. Minor variants are represented in the apparatus; the major revision forms part of the Notes.

I have made the judgement with this particular edition to correct Esson's spelling, specifically his errors in transcribing foreign words: crucially, for example, Louis uses the Hindi expression *Pak jagah!* (to refer to 'The Sacred Place'), the literal translation of which is 'culinary place' or kitchen. The accepted and more commonly used expression *Paak Jaga*: *Paak* meaning 'pure/clean'; *Jaga* meaning 'place'. A Mosque in which people gather for pray or a 'prayer room' is a pure place or a sacred place; the pray room would be *Paak Jaga*. Similarly, *Quran* (as opposed to *Koran*) is the more accepted transliteration. Tanselle confirms that an editor

can justifiably make factual corrections in a work of fiction; deciding when they are justified entails literary sensitivity and is one of the responsibilities of the critical editor.⁶

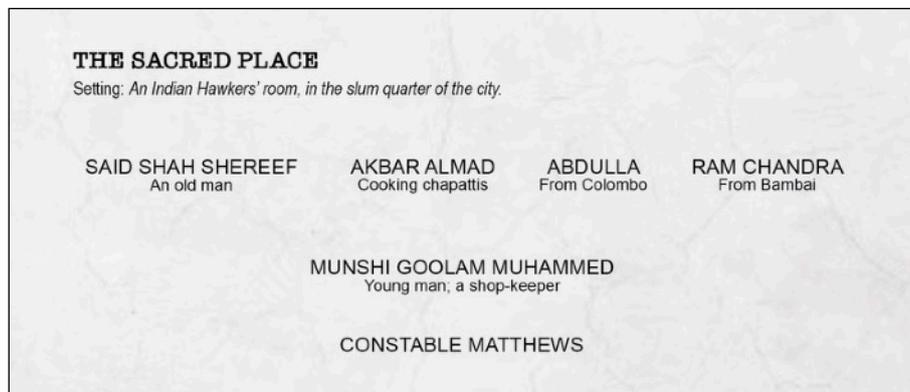
⁶ G Thomas Tanselle, 'External Fact as an Editorial Problem', *Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing*, University of Virginia Press, (1990) pg. 102

Characters

SAID SHAH SHEREEF, Indian Hawker
RAM CHANDRA, Indian Hawker
ABDULLA, Indian Hawker
AKBAR ALMAD, Indian Hawker⁷
CONSTABLE MATTHEWS
MUNSHI GOOLAM MUHAMMED, a shop-keeper

Scene

An INDIAN HAWKERS' room, in the slum quarter of the city.



⁷ AKBAR ALMAD, Indian Hawker] REV. HERBERT JORDAN | AKBAR ALMAD, Indian Hawker A.

ACT ONE

(An INDIAN HAWKERS's room, in the slum quarter of the city. The whitewashed walls are stained and dilapidated looking. One small window overlooks the street.)

(There are two or three chairs; some rugs lying on the floor serve as a couch or bed. There is no covering on the floor. A HAWKER's bundle, tied at the corners, rests against the wall. There is a fireplace, with oven.)

(It is afternoon, but the light is dim.)

(The HAWKERS are dressed in shabby European clothes, but wear turbans, white and red. The SAID SHAH SHEREEF, an old man, who wears a fez, sits on a low chair, near the fireplace. AKBAR ALMAD is cooking chapattis⁸ at the oven. RAM CHANDRA and ABDULLA, smoking narghiles, recline on the rugs.)

(MUNSHI GOOLAM MUHAMMED, a young man, better dressed than the others, walks about nervously. He is ill at ease, gesticulating half apologetically, though his tone is gay and plausible.)

MUHAMMED. So the Fast is over.

SHAH. Yes. The Fast of the Ram'zan is over.

MUHAMMED. Now you eat. Now you smoke. Good.

SHAH. You do not keep the Fast.

MUHAMMED. No. We have only one life. Why should we not enjoy ourselves?

SHAH. You are a rich merchant. You can talk of enjoyment.

MUHAMMED. I have a good shop—that is all.

SHAH. You are rich, Munshi Goolam Muhammed. We are only poor hawkers.

MUHAMMED. But I have debts owing to me. If everybody paid it would be well.

SHAH. We travel over the strange and lonely country. We walk miles and miles in the dust and heat, carrying our bundles. We sleep all night under the trees. Yet we do not complain. We do not envy you.

(AKBAR ALMAD finishes cooking, and puts chapattis on tray.)

AKBAR ALMAD. Will you eat?

MUHAMMED. I have already dined.

RAM CHANDRA. Give me chapattis.

ABDULLA. I have fasted, but I cannot eat yet. I will finish my smoke.

(AKBAR ALMAD sits with the others on couch.)

MUHAMMED. Do not be angry, but I am tired of your old ways. You have made a little Asia in Melbourne.

SHAH. We keep by ourselves. We live in peace.

MUHAMMED. It is not right. You are out of the world. I believe in progress.

SHAH. Where do you find what you call progress?

MUHAMMED. Why, here, everywhere, of course.

SHAH. I cannot see it.

MUHAMMED. This is only the slum quarter ... Ah! the air is stifling. I must smoke. *(Lights cigarette.)*

SHAH. All sorts of people seem to live here. We have Chinese, Sikhs and Syrians in the next street. I had a conversation yesterday with a man from Smyrna—a Christian. We came to the conclusion that our own religion was the best.

ABDULLA *(Looking up)*. Yes, that is so.

⁸ chapattis] chaputties A.; chaputties B.

SHAH. If you believed in it. But you must have faith. Now this is a Christian city. I look round, and what do I see? The 'push' is as lively as ever. Thieves and young 'bucks' hang around the pubs, and unveiled women scream and brawl at the street corners. It is true we live in the slums. But here we see the Christian people without the mask.

MUHAMMED. There are always bad people and good people.

SHAH. That is so, Muhammed. There are bad people who do not live in the slums.

MUHAMMED. Melbourne is a very fine city.

SHAH. But not so fine as Delhi, the city of Akbar.

RAM CHANDRA. I come Bumbai ... *bara shara* ... big place, very fine.

ABDULLA. I come Colombo. Oh, the palms and pearls and the perfumes!

SHAH. We come from different places, but we are all children of God.

RAM CHANDRA. We are Mahomedans.

ABDULLA. Yes, we are all true believers.

MUHAMMED. Bah! You will not learn. You are too old-fashioned. It is all superstition.

SHAH. What do you say, Muhammed?

MUHAMMED. It is superstition ... all your religion. I do not believe one word of it.

SHAH. You think you are very wise, Muhammed. You love your money, and will not make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

MUHAMMED. The pilgrimage! I do not believe in that—all that trouble for nothing.

SHAH. Why stay at home, and live like a dog!

RAM CHANDRA. I go Mecca next year.

SHAH. You will see many wonders. It is good to make the pilgrimage. It is education. There we see different races of people—Arab, Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Indian—we all meet and tell our adventures, and pray together at the holy places, and drink coffee in Mussah bazaar—so our religion teaches. Who travels for money ends as a vagabond, but whoso travels for education becomes a philosopher.

MUHAMMED. I have no time to waste on that. I do not want to see Mecca.

SHAH. Every step towards Mecca blots out a sin.

MUHAMMED. ... I would rather go to Sydney or San Francisco. I like life ... life.

SHAH. That is well. Enjoy yourself, Muhammed, see the world; all religions permit that. You are a young man ... the time for you is not yet. I am getting an old man—the time is close—it is right I think of the wonders of God.

(SHAH goes to back of room. There is a door heavily curtained, and secured with a Yale lock. He draws aside the curtains and opens the door. A little mosque is revealed. On the altar lies a Quran⁹, wrapped in a red cloth. The HAWKERS bow.)

HAWKERS. The Sacred Place! *Paak Jaga! Paak Jaga!*¹⁰

SHAH. Behold our mosque ... the Sacred Place!

RAM CHANDRA. This is where we all come to worship.

SHAH. Here is the *Quran* ... the Sacred Book!

HAWKERS. *Kitab! Kitab!*

ABDULLA. Said Shah Shereef read *Quran*. Arabic. I speak Hindustani.

MUHAMMED. What a curious place for a mosque! I do not understand you. Tell me what is the good of it all?

SHAH. Prayer is a good thing. Prayer is better than sleep.

MUHAMMED. Ah, it would be better if you minded your business.

⁹ Quran] Koran A./B.

¹⁰ Paak Jaga! Paak Jaga] Pal Jagah! Pak Jagah! A./B.

RAM CHANDRA. Said Shah Shereef holds the services. We bear witness to the truth of the Prophet's teaching.

SHAH. You look surprised, Muhammed. We live our own life here. We are nomads, and even in the slums the nomads find their desert.

MUHAMMED. I do not want your desert, no, no!

SHAH. It is sweet in the desert, for there you may learn some of the secrets of God.

MUHAMMED. I am a modern man. I have seen the world. I do not believe what your religion teaches. I do not believe.

SHAH. Mahomedans must have faith. I will tell you a story. Three years ago Abdul Khan lived in this city. He was not a good man. He would smoke, and drink wine, and gamble with cards, and say only midnight prayers.

MUHAMMED. What are midnight prayers?

SHAH. The prayers that nobody says. Only twice a year would he come to our mosque. One day, in front of his house he picked up gold piece. He told lie. He said the gold belonged to him. It was greed. We did not believe him. Then Abdul Khan took the oath on his son's body. Do you know what happened?

MUHAMMED. No.

SHAH. That very night his little boy died. That is the truth, Muhammed. *(To HAWKERS.)* Do you remember Abdul Khan?

HAWKERS. Abdul Khan!

SHAH. He confessed his fault. He became very good man.

MUHAMMED. Bah! That is another superstition.

SHAH. No, that is faith. Many things you can teach us, Muhammed, but you cannot teach us faith. *(SHAH goes to the Quran, and reads silently.)*

MUHAMMED *(To HAWKERS)*. No wonder you remain poor. He has too much power over you. Wait a little! I will show you something. I will show you!

ABDULLA *(Eating)*. I will eat now.

AKBAR ALMAD. Now I will smoke. The Fast is over.

MUHAMMED *(Seeing the bundle in the corner)*. Ah, here are the goods I sent. Have you divided them up?

RAM CHANDRA. Not yet.

ABDULLA. Shah will do what is right. He is a just man.

MUHAMMED *(Nervously)*. No, no. I will show you what justice is. ... It is very hot here. I want air. *(Looks out of window.)* Ah, I see someone.

ABDULLA *(Looking out window)*. It is a policeman. He is coming this way.

MUHAMMED. Yes, I expected him. I must speak with him.

SHAH *(Turning round)*. Your behaviour is very strange. What weight is on your mind?

MUHAMMED *(Excitedly)*. You will soon learn my meaning. *(To SHAH, who is reading.)* I go now Said Shah Shereef. I go, but that is not the end ... not at all. I will show you who is right. *(Exit MUHAMMED.)*

ABDULLA. What does he mean?

SHAH. I do not know. Munshi Goolam Muhammed is very excited.

RAM CHANDRA. He has been gambling, and losing money.

ABDULLA. Why did he come here?

SHAH. I think not for good purpose. No matter. Let us forget him. I will read in the book. *(SHAH reads quietly.)*

(A pause.)

RAM CHANDRA. I go into the far bush to-morrow.

AKBAR ALMAD. Next week I go North.

RAM CHANDRA. I wander three months ... to farm and station, and mining camp. It is a hard life.

I carry my bundle like a heavy load of sins. I live on the road. I sleep under the stars.

AKBAR ALMAD. I do not like the bush. The women have rough voices, and the children throw stones.

RAM CHANDRA. I save money to go back Bumbai. I think of that on the lonely roads ...

Bumbai ... I would sit at café where the beautiful women pass, and watch the pigeons playing round the fountain.

(Silence.)

(Then a knock at the door.)

AKBAR ALMAD. Who is that?

ABDULLA. Polis!

SHAH. One moment.

(He shuts door of mosque, draws curtains, and returns to his chair.)

(Another knock.)

SHAH. Open the door.

(ABDULLA opens door.)

(Enter CONSTABLE MATTHEWS.)

HAWKERS. *Salam!*

CONSTABLE. Good day. I want to see Said Shah Shereef.¹¹

RAM CHANDRA *(Pointing)*. The Said Shah.¹²

CONSTABLE. Are you Said Shah Shereef?

SHAH. Yes. That is my name.

CONSTABLE. I have a bit of business with you.

SHAH. Speak, I listen.

CONSTABLE. I have a summons for you.

(CONSTABLE takes out blue paper.)

HAWKERS. A summons!

SHAH. I do not understand.

CONSTABLE. Here it is.¹³

(He hands the summons to SHAH, who examines it carefully.)

AKBAR ALMAD *(Putting away tray as CONSTABLE approaches)*. Please do not be offended. No alien shadow must fall across the food.¹⁴

SHAH. I am a poor man.

CONSTABLE. That's not my business.

SHAH. I do not read English. What does this paper say?

¹¹ *(An INDIAN HAWKERS's room, in the slum quarter... Good day. I want to see Said Shah Shereef.) see extended emendation in Notes.*

¹² RAM CHANDRA *(Pointing)*. The Said Shah.] *(Muhammed points to Shah who comes forward.)* A.

¹³ HAWKERS. A summons! | SHAH. I do not understand. | CONSTABLE. Here it is.] JORDAN. A summons! | SHAH. A summons! | CONSTABLE. Yes. Here it is. A.

¹⁴ it carefully.) | AKBAR ALMAD *(Putting away tray as CONSTABLE approaches)*. Please do not be offended. No alien shadow must fall across the food.] it carefully. The Hawkers look interested. Akbar Almad puts away the dough balls and watches the proceedings from the fireplace.) A.

CONSTABLE. It is a summons¹⁵ issued by Munshi Goolam Muhammed.¹⁶
 SHAH. Muhammed!
 HAWKERS. Munshi Goolam Muhammed!¹⁷
 SHAH. I do not understand.
 CONSTABLE. It is for £7-16-6 for goods sold and delivered. Muhammed says you haven't paid for them.
 SHAH. I have paid him.
 CONSTABLE. It has nothing to do with me. You must settle the matter between you. The case comes off at Seymour on the 29th.
 (*Enter MUHAMMED excitedly. He stands by CONSTABLE.*)
 MUHAMMED. I summon you, Shah Shereef!
 HAWKERS (*Muttering*). *Ya-hu! Hu-ya!*
 CONSTABLE. There's nothing more I can do. (*Going.*)
 MUHAMMED (*Holds him*). Wait!
 SHAH. Are you afraid, Muhammed?
 MUHAMMED. Afraid. No! Everything will be all right.¹⁸
 SHAH. That is as God wills.
 MUHAMMED. I will have the Law.
 CONSTABLE. It's my firm conviction that all you Asiatics love litigation.
 SHAH. I do not owe Muhammed money.
 CONSTABLE. What do I know about that? I have only to serve the summons.
 SHAH. I say I do not own Muhammed money.
 MUHAMMED. Look! It is written down on the blue paper.
 SHAH. There must be some mistake. Let us have light on the matter.
 ABDULLA. *Tum kharab admi!*
 SHAH. I would speak with you, Munshi Goolam Muhammed.¹⁹
 MUHAMMED. What do you want?
 SHAH. Do you swear I owe you this money?
 MUHAMMED. Yes. I swear.
 SHAH. What is it for?
 MUHAMMED. You buy goods from my shop. I trust you. You owe me the debt.
 RAM CHANDRA. *Tohmat!* It is false.
 SHAH. What goods do you mean?²⁰

¹⁵ I am a poor man. | CONSTABLE. That's not my business. | SHAH. I do not read English. What does this paper say? | CONSTABLE. It is a summons | I am a poor man. | JORDAN. There must be some mistake, constable. I've known Mr Shah for some time. | CONSTABLE. That's not my business. | SHAH. What is this? | CONSTABLE. This is a summons A.

¹⁶ Muhammed.] Muhammed! A.

¹⁷ SHAH. Muhammed! | HAWKERS. Munshi Goolam Muhammed!] ABDULLA. Muhammed! | MUHAMMED. I summon you, Shah Shereef. | AKBAR ALMAD. Ya-hu. Hu-ya. Muhammed! A.

¹⁸ (*Enter MUHAMMED excitedly. ... Everything will be all right.*) JORDAN. Do you have many cases like this, Constable? | CONSTABLE. A fair amount. it's my firm conviction all Asiatics love litigation. | JORDAN. I don't suppose I can do anything. | CONSTABLE. No. I don't know anything about it. I have only to serve the summons. | JORDAN. I must go now. (*To SHAH.*) If there's anything I can do to help you, let me know. Good-day, Mr Shah. | SHAH. Good-day! | JORDAN. I hope everything will be all right. | RAM CHANDRA. *Shabash!* A.

¹⁹ MUHAMMED. I will have the Law. ... Munshi Goolam Muhammed.] (*Exit Rev Jerbert Jordan*) | CONSTABLE. Is there anything more I can do? | SHAH. I do not owe Muhammed money. | *MUHAMMED excitedly*) Look! it is written down on the blue paper. | AKBAR ALMAD. *Tum Kharab admi.* | SHAH. Let us have light on the matter. Munshi Goolam Muhammed! A.

²⁰ What goods do you mean?] What goods? A

MUHAMMED. The silks you buy, and fine soap, and pretty bracelets—what the ladies like.
 CONSTABLE (*Seeing bundle in corner*). Is this the stuff?
 MUHAMMED. Yes; and fine shawls from Kashmir,²¹ soft to the touch.
 SHAH. I paid for all these goods.
 MUHAMMED. No, no. Shah Shereef, you forget it.
 CONSTABLE. It's a funny business. Haven't you got a receipt, or a business book, or something?
 SHAH. We have only one book.
 CONSTABLE. What book is that?
 SHAH. The *Quran*.
 CONSTABLE. Never mind that. Did you buy these things from Muhammed, or not?²²
 SHAH. Yes. I bought them.
 MUHAMMED. You owe me the debt.
 SHAH. You must deal honestly, Muhammed. You must not draw from the poor.
 MUHAMMED. You owe me the debt.
 SHAH. Are you speaking truth, Muhammed?
 MUHAMMED (*Plausibly*). The truth of my story is this.²³ I go the City Court for my licence. I hear the cases. It is justice. The British Law is Justice. The Judge—very good man—he sit on the Bench. I say you owe me the debt. You say you know nothing about it. Well, that is so. We go to the Court. We state our case. The Judge, he will decide between us.²⁴ That is Justice. Am I not speaking right?
 SHAH. No. Munshi Goolam Muhammed, you are a liar.
 MUHAMMED. A liar you say. I defy you.
 AKBAR ALMAD. *Jhuta! Jhuta!*
 SHAH. Your heart is black, Muhammed.
 MUHAMMED. It is an insult.²⁵
 SHAH. I say you are the son of a dog.²⁶
 MUHAMMED. You would humiliate me before this gentleman.
 SHAH. You are the son of a dog.²⁷
 AKBAR ALMAD. *Kutta! Kutta!*
 MUHAMMED. I thrust back the insult in your face.
 (*MUHAMMED rushes at SHAH. The CONSTABLE keeps them apart, the²⁸ HAWKERS gather round muttering.*)
 MUHAMMED (*Shouting*). I summon you.²⁹ I summon you.

²¹ Kashmir,] Kashmir - A.

²² CONSTABLE. Never mind that. Did you buy these things from Muhammed, or not?] CONSTABLE. Did you buy these things from Muhammed? | MUHAMMED I am a merchant. I keep shop. A.

²³ (*Plausibly*). The truth of my story is this.] The truth of my story is this: A.

²⁴ We go to the Court. We state our case. The Judge, he will decide between us.] We go to the Court. The Jaj, he decide between us. A.

²⁵ It is an insult.] *Tum kya bolo*, Shah Shereef! A.

²⁶ dog.] dog! A.

²⁷ dog.] dog! A.

²⁸ The CONSTABLE keeps them apart, the] Constable keeps them apart. The A.

²⁹ (*Shouting*). I summon you.] I summon you. A.

CONSTABLE. That's enough. Keep back there. No disturbance. You can argue the matter out without fighting.

SHAH. I forget myself. This is a holy day. The Gates of Paradise are open. The books of good and evil will be balanced.

MUHAMMED. We shall see in the Court.

SHAH. No. Why should we wait? We shall decide today.³⁰

RAM CHANDRA. *Aaj! Aaj!*³¹

MUHAMMED. How so? How we decide?

SHAH. We shall decide now, Muhammed.

RAM CHANDRA. *Ab hi! Ab hi!*

MUHAMMED. We shall go to Seymour.³²

SHAH. No. Let us go to the Sacred Place!

MUHAMMED. We must ask the Judge to decide between us.³³

SHAH. God will be our Judge. Come—the Sacred Place.

HAWKERS. *Paak jaga! Paak jaga!*³⁴

CONSTABLE. What's all this about?³⁵ What are you going to do?

SHAH. I will show you.

MUHAMMED. I want Justice—the British Law.

SHAH. I want the *Shara*—the Mohammedan Law.

AKBAR ALMAD. *Shara! Shara!*

*(SHAH goes up to the mosque.)*³⁶

SHAH. Here is our mosque—this is the Sacred Place.

(SHAH draws aside curtains and unlocks door again, revealing the little mosque, with the Quran on the altar.)

And this is the *Quran*³⁷—our Sacred Book.

ABDULLA *(To CONSTABLE)*. The *Quran!*

*(SHAH now confronts MUHAMMED, who is very excited.)*³⁸

SHAH. You swear I owe you money?³⁹

MUHAMMED. Yes. I swear it.

SHAH. That is well. How much?

MUHAMMED. It is written on the paper.

³⁰ MUHAMMED. We shall see in the Court. | SHAH. No. Why should we wait? We shall decide today. | MUHAMMED. We go to Court. | SHAH. No. Why should we wait? | MUHAMMED. We decide this month. | SHAH. We shall decide to-day A.

³¹ Aaj! Aaj! | Aj! Aj! A./B.

³² We shall go to Seymour. | We go up Seymour. A.

³³ We must ask the Judge to decide between us. | We must ask the Jaj to decide. A.

³⁴ HAWKERS. *Paak jaga! Paak jaga!* | ABDULLA. Pak jagah! | RAM CHANDRA. Pak jagah! A.

³⁵ What's all this about? | I don't understand, Shah. A.

³⁶ *(SHAH goes up to the mosque.)* | *(Shah goes up to mosque. Muhammed is very excited)* A.

³⁷ *(SHAH draws aside curtains and unlocks door again, revealing the little mosque, with the Quran on the altar.)* | And this is the *Quran* | *(Shah unlocks door and draws aside curtains, revealing mosque with Koran on altar.)* | SHAH. This is the Koran A.

³⁸ *(SHAH now confronts MUHAMMED, who is very excited.)* | *(Shah confronts Muhammed)* A.

³⁹ You swear I owe you money? | You swear I owe you money? Mujhko nawab do! A.

SHAH (*Looking at summons*). Seven pounds ... sixteen shillings ... and sixpence. I will get the money.

(*SHAH gets his purse, takes out money, and slowly counts it.*)⁴⁰

Seven pounds—sixteen shillings and sixpence. ... Here it is. (*Shows money in his hand.*) We will try the case now.⁴¹

MUHAMMED. I want Justice. I want the Law. That is all I ask. Am I not⁴² speaking right, Mr. Matthews?

SHAH. There is no law but the law of the Prophet.

MUHAMMED. You forgot yourself, Shah Shereef. This is English country. Where is the judge?

SHAH. We are Mohammedans. God will be our judge.

(*SHAH returns to mosque.*)

Here is the money. See, I place it on the *Quran*, the Sacred Book. (*Puts money on book.*) I call God to witness I do not owe the money.

(*SHAH looks at MUHAMMED, who has become very nervous.*)

Go, Munshi Goolam Muhammed, if the money is yours, take it. Allah will approve. Go, take the money. And if your deed is right⁴³ you will receive the holy favours. Why do you hesitate?⁴⁴

Take the money—there it lies⁴⁵ before you. But if you act a lie,⁴⁶ Muhammed—if I have paid the debt, God will punish you.⁴⁷ You know the truth of my words. God will punish you.⁴⁸

RAM CHANDRA. It is the Sacred Place.

ABDULLA. *Paak jaga!*

SHAH. God will judge us. Why do you wait, Muhammed? What have you to fear if your cause is just!⁴⁹ Look! There is the money—on the Sacred Book. Go, take it!⁵⁰

(*MUHAMMED moves nervously towards mosque.*)

Will you take the oath on the Sacred Book?

ABDULLA. Abdul Khan!

HAWKERS. Abdul Khan!

SHAH. Remember Abdul Khan! He defied God.

(*MUHAMMED pauses.*)

Go, Munshi Goolam Muhammed, take what is owing to you—but no more. God is watching you.⁵¹

(*MUHAMMED approaches mosque.*)

⁴⁰ (*SHAH gets his purse, takes out money, and slowly counts it.*) [*Shah gets purse and takes out money*] A.

⁴¹ ... Here it is. (*Shows money in his hand.*) We will try the case now.] Here it is. (*Holds money in hand*) We will decide now. A.

⁴² I want the Law. That is all I ask. Am I not] I want the law. Am I not A.

⁴³ And if your deed is right] And if you speak truth A.

⁴⁴ you hesitate?] you hang back? A.

⁴⁵ lies] is A.

⁴⁶ you. But if you act a lie.] you; but if you act a lie, A.

⁴⁷ God will punish you.] you will be struck dead. A.

⁴⁸ God will punish you.] You will be struck dead. Go! A.

⁴⁹ just!] just. A.

⁵⁰ take it!] take it. A.

⁵¹ God is watching you.] God will punish you. A.

I warn you. If you act falsely like a thief and a liar, you will be struck dead, Muhammed. Go!⁵²
(*MUHAMMED draws back and cries out in fear.*)

MUHAMMED. I will be struck dead. I ask pardon of God. I have committed a fault.

SHAH. What do you say, Muhammed?

MUHAMMED. It is the Sacred Place.

ABDULLA. *Paak jaga!*

MUHAMMED. I have lied. I have eaten dirt. You have paid for the goods, Shah Shereef. You do not owe the money.

SHAH. May your heart be cleansed, Muhammed.

(*SHAH goes back to mosque and takes up the money.*)⁵³

(*To CONSTABLE.*) That is the Law of the Prophet.

CONSTABLE. It beats me. Anyway I'm glad you settled it between you. So you won't appear, Muhammed?

(*MUHAMMED shakes his head.*)

I think it will be all right then. Good-day.⁵⁴

MUHAMMED. I go too.

HAWKERS (*Muttering*). *Hu-ya!* Muhammed. *Hu-ya!*

SHAH. All is forgiven. You have faith, Muhammed. You are a true believer. Depart in peace.⁵⁵

(*Exit CONSTABLE followed by MUHAMMED.*)

(*SHAH shuts door of mosque and draws curtains.*)

(*AKBAR ALMAD brings forth tray of food. The HAWKERS sit round the couch together.*)

The Fast of the Ram'zan is over. *La ilahi Illallah!*⁵⁶

HAWKERS. *La ilahi Illallah!*

Curtain.

Emended opening scene (A) (1911)

(*An INDIAN HAWKERS's room, in the slum quarter ... Good day. I want to see Said Shah Shereef.]*
(*HAWKERS' room in the slum quarter. Whitewashed walls, stained and dilapidated. Floor devoid of any covering. A fireplace, rather dirty, with oven. On the floor a bed made of some rugs, two or three chairs, a gin case, etc. Lying on floor, a big hawker's bundle, tied up at the corners. The HAWKERS are sitting round the room. They are dressed in European clothes—shabby and shoddy—but wear turbans, white, red and pink. The SAID SHAH SHEREEF, who wears a fez, is sitting on chair, near*

⁵² If you act falsely like a thief and a liar, you will be struck dead, Muhammed. Go!] If you bear false witness, Muhammed, you will be struck dead. You will be struck dead. A.

⁵³ (*SHAH goes back to mosque and takes up the money.*) | (*SHAH goes back to mosque and takes up the money.*) | AKBAR ALMAD. *Kija bat hai.* A.

⁵⁴ It beats me. Anyway I'm glad you settled it between you. So you won't appear, Muhammed?/(*MUHAMMED shakes his head.*) | I think it will be all right then. Good-day.] It beats me. It's a funny business, anyhow. I'm glad you settled it between you (*To Muhammed*) You won't appear, Muhammed? (*Muhammed shakes head*) (*To Shah*) You needn't appear at Seymour unless you like. I think it will be all right. Good-day. (*He nods to hawkers*) *I'm sorry to have troubled you.* A.

⁵⁵ MUHAMMED. I go too. | HAWKERS (*Muttering*). *Hu-ya!* Muhammed. *Hu-ya!* | SHAH. All is forgiven. You have faith, Muhammed. You are a true believer. Depart in peace.] MUHAMMED. I go too. | ABDULLA. *Hu-ya.* Muhammed! | SHAH *Unko jane do!* A.

⁵⁶ (*SHAH shuts door of mosque and draws curtains.*) | (*AKBAR ALMAD brings forth tray of food. The HAWKERS sit round the couch together.*) The Fast of the Ram'zan is over. *La ilahi Illallah!*] (*Shah shuts door of mosque and draws curtains*) | SHAH *La ilahi Illallah!* A.

fireplace. *ABKAR ALMAD, who speaks no English, is cooking 'chaputties' at oven. RAM CHANDRA and ABDULLA, smoking narghiles, recline on the bed.*
(There is a minute's silence.)
(Then a knock at the door.)

SHAH. Darwaza kholo!
(Another knock. ABDULLA rises and opens door. Enter the REV HERBERT JORDAN, a young parson who is working in the slum district.)
 Salam!

JORDAN. Salam! *(To other HAWKERS.)* Good-day.
 RAM CHANDRA. Good-day.
 JORDAN. Is the fast over?
 SHAH. Yes. The Fast of the Ram'zan is over.
 ABDULLA. We eat. We smoke. We enjoy ourselves.
 JORDAN. Are you cooking there? I will go. No alien shadow must fall across the food. I know that.
 SHAH. No, no. I will be offended. Please sit down, Mr Jordan.
(AKBAR ALMAD goes on cooking.)
 JORDAN. I'm a bit worn out. Thank you. *(Takes chair.)* I just dropped in to tell you, I saw Muhammed outside talking to a policeman.
 SHAH. A policeman!
 JORDAN. Constable Matthews, I think.
 SHAH. I don't know him.
 JORDAN. Mr Muhammed was too busy to notice me. He appeared to be very excited.
 ABDULLA. Muhammed!
 SHAH. Munshi Goolam Muhammed?
 JORDAN. Yes, I think so. He seemed to be making some complaint. Do you know what it could be?
 SHAH. I do not know.
 JORDAN. He was terribly excited. I hope nothing is wrong.
 SHAH. Where was he?
 JORDAN. Oh just round the corner. This is a rowdy neighbourhood. How do you get on, Mr Shah?
 SHAH. We keep by ourselves.
 JORDAN. Are you never worried by the 'push'?
 SHAH. No. We live in peace.
 JORDAN. Sometimes I'm afraid there'll be trouble. Well, I suppose Mr Muhammed would look in and explain.
 SHAH. Muhammed has no trouble. He is a rich merchant. We are poor hawkers.
 JORDAN. Are you all Mahommedans?
 SHAH. Yes. We are Mahommedans.
 JORDAN. This is a curious but interesting quarter. All sorts of people seem to live here. It is a little Asia in Melbourne. There are Chinese, Sikhs, and Syrians in the next street. I had an instructive argument with a man from Smyrna—a Mahommedan. We came to the conclusion that our own religion was the best.
 SHAH. Yes, that is so.
 JORDAN. If you believe in it. Then I mixed with my fellow-Christians—bucks, buskers, and bruisers; Italian musicians and ice-cream makers; nondescript half-castes, and 'guns' out of a job. We did not discuss religion; we discussed horse-racing. 'Jugger' Reynolds gave me a tip—a deadbird.
 SHAH. You do good work, Mr Jordan. You are kind to the poor.
 JORDAN. I've worked here for two months, but I haven't made much impression. The 'push' is as lively as ever. Unlucky thieves still hang about the pubs and women scream and brawl and tear each other's hair. But I'm glad I came. One sees humanity without the mask.
 SHAH. That is so.
 JORDAN. I prefer Little Lon to the Toorak-road. Passion is better than hypocrisy.
 SHAH. There are always bad people and good people.
 JORDAN. Yes, there are strange contrasts in every part of the city.
 SHAH. Melbourne is a very fine city, but not so fine as Delhi.
 JORDAN. Do you come from Delhi?
 SHAH. Yes.
 RAM CHANDRA. I come, Bambai. Bara shara, big place.
 ABDULLA. I come, Kashmir.
 SHAH. We come from different places, but we are all children of God.
 JORDAN. I've been reading some books about India. What a variety of race and religion! It must be a wonderful country.
 RAM CHANDRA. India!
 ABDULLA. Very big place ... very fine.
 JORDAN. I'll go to India some day, not as a missionary. I want to travel and see the world.
 ABDULLA. That is good. Why stay at home and live like a dog!

JORDAN. You Mahommedans are great travellers. Hindus stay at home. I suppose you have made the pilgrimage to Mecca?

SHAH. Yes; I have been to Mecca.

ABDULLA. I been Mecca. (*Pointing to RAM CHANDRA.*) He not been.

RAM CHANDRA. I go Mecca next year.

ABDULLA. *Ham bahut ajaibat dekha.* I saw many wonders.

SHAH. We all try to make the pilgrimage. It is education. We see different races of people—Arab, Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Indian—we all meet, and pray together at the holy places, and drink coffee in Mussah bazaar—so our religion teaches. Who travels for money ends as a vagabond, but whoso travels for education becomes a philosopher.

JORDAN. We haven't time to make pilgrimages.

SHAH. Every step towards Mecca blots out a sin.

JORDAN. Christians used to make pilgrimages, but we are losing faith in religion.

SHAH. The God of the Christian and the God of the Mahommedan—he is the one God. But it is not good you think too much, Mr Jordan. Enjoy yourself—see the world; all religions permit that; do not think too much; you are a young man, the time for you, not yet. I am getting an old man—the time is close—it is right I think of the wonders of God.

JORDAN. You are the true believers. What do you do for a Church?

SHAH. We have our Church.

JORDAN. Really! Where is it? I haven't seen it.

SHAH. It is here.

JORDAN. Here!

RAM CHANDRA. *Yahan!*

SHAH. Yes, here; in this room.

JORDAN. You surprise me.

SHAH. I will show you.

(*SHAH goes to back of room—to a little mosque, boarded up carefully, heavily curtained, and secured with a Yale-lock.*)

This is our mosque—the Sacred Place.

ABDULLA. The Sacred Place! *Pak jagah!*

RAM CHANDRA. *Pak jagah!*

SHAH. This is where we worship.

JORDAN. You have curtains and a Yale-lock. May I look?

SHAH. Yes. Please do not go in.

(*SHAH opens door, and draws aside curtains. A little mosque is revealed. On the altar lies the Koran, wrapped in a red cloth.*)

This is the *Koran*—our Sacred Book.

RAM CHANDRA. *Kitab!*

ABDULLA. Said Shah read *Koran*. Arabic. I speak Hindustani.

SHAH. I hold the services.

JORDAN. It is very wonderful. Thanks, Mr Shah, for showing me. After all, though you adopt many of our customs you remain Asiatics at heart.

(*SHAH shuts door of mosque and returns to chair near fireplace.*)

Change of country doesn't make much difference. You live your own life here.

SHAH. I suppose that is so.

JORDAN. Even in the slums the nomads find their desert.

SHAH. We can pray to God in the desert. We can pray in Rafferty Place.

JORDAN. Christians, I'm afraid, don't pray much in Rafferty Place.

SHAH. Prayer is a good thing. Prayer is better than sleep.

JORDAN. Do you ever find Mahommedans without faith?

SHAH. Mahommedans believe what their religion teaches.

JORDAN. So do Christians, in a way. Does religion influence their life—that is the only test.

SHAH. There are good and bad. God will punish the bad. I will tell you a story. Three years ago Abdul Khan live in this city. He was not a good man. He would smoke and drink wine and say midnight prayers.

JORDAN. What are midnight prayers?

SHAH. The prayers nobody says. Only twice in a year he would come to Church. One day, in front of his house, he picked up a gold piece. He told lie. He said the gold belonged to him. It was greed. We did not believe him. Then Abdul Khan took the oath on his son's body. Do you know what happened?

JORDAN. No.

SHAH. That very night his little boy died. That is the truth, Mr Jordan. (*To HAWKER.*) You remember Abdul Khan?

ABDULLA. Abdul Khan!

SHAH. He confessed his fault. He became very good man.

JORDAN. That is faith. What is any religion without faith?

SHAH. Yes, Mahommedans have faith. Many things you can teach us, you English, but you cannot teach us faith.

ABDULLA. Polis!

(A knock at the door.)

JORDAN. It's Mr Muhammed and the constable.

(ABDULLA opens the door.)

I thought something was wrong.

(Enter CONSTABLE MATTHEWS, followed by MUNSHI GOOLAM MUHAMMED.)

CONSTABLE. Goodday. I want to see Said Shah Shereef.

A.

Notes

Rafferty Place and Discovery Alley: these are not specific locations found on a street map, but rather metaphoric descriptors: Rafferty Place, for example, mentioned by Reverend Jordan (A) ('Christians, I'm afraid, don't pray much in Rafferty Place.') derives from 'Rafferty's Rules', a situation where in the slums there appears to be 'no rules' and Christian would frequent such an area. There was a perception too, that the slums were an 'uncharted world' ripe for 'discovery.' Hawkers did not live permanently in the accommodated in Melbourne, they were there while they replenished their stock and left after a short stay to return to their business travelling into the regions. These so called 'boarding houses' were often shared by a large number of travelling Muslim Hawkers. There was a four-roomed boarding house in McCormack Place, accommodating 2-23 hawkers at any one time who slept on the floor; the rent was 12 shillings per week. This boarding house had a room 3.6m by 6m in the yard which was used as a Mosque (or Sacred Place). There were two other prayer rooms in the area: at 12 Casseldon Place (near the corner of Lonsdale and Spring Street) and 124-126 Young Street, Fitzroy.

chapatti: an unleavened flatbread.

turbans, white and red: *Pugaree* (Hindi) is the usual name for the Indian turban. In Australia most Hawkers wore White Turbans—some work Pink on special occasions; grey, khaki, blue and yellow were worn occasionally. White was considered a Holy Colour because the prophet Muhammad wore a White Turban, but practically, white fabric was more readily available and cheap.

fez: usually associated with Morocco or Turkey and connected to people originating from the Ottoman Empire. As worn by Said Shah Shereef, however, the Fez suggests that he served or had some association with The West India Regiment of the British Army in India who wore the Fez instead of a *pugaree* as part of their dress uniform.

narghiles: an oriental tobacco pipe with a long tube that draws the smoke through water; a hookah.

Sikhs: a 'disciple' or 'learner.' The Sikh religion was founded in Northern India in the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak Dev Ji and is distinct from Islam and Hinduism. Sikhism is monotheistic and stresses the equality of all men and women. Sikhs believe in three basic principles; meditating on the name of God (praying); earning a living by honest means; as well as sharing the fruits of one's labour with others. Sikhism rejects caste and class systems and emphasises service to humanity. Turbans are worn to cover the Sikh's long hair and with respect to God. Sikhs were recorded as being present on the gold fields of Victoria during the time of the Victorian gold rush of the 1850s and 60s. From the 1860s onwards, cameleers, commonly called 'Ghans' were brought to Australia to help explore and



INDIAN HAWKERS
The Illustrated Australian News, 1 May 1891

settle Australia's vast arid interior. While the Ghans consisted mainly of Muslims from Afghanistan and its surrounds, a sizeable minority were Sikhs from Punjab. Towards the end of the 19th century, Indian hawkers, a large number of whom were Sikh, became a common sight in the country regions throughout the country. All hawkers required licenses issued by the state and from the 1890s licenses started to become restricted to British subjects. This denied Afghans, Assyrians and Chinese from renewing their license, giving the Sikhs a monopoly on hawking which they held until the 1930s when new European migrants began to ply the trade. Louis wrote about the Sikhs in his *Lone Hand* articles 'From the Oldest World'; see 'The Golden Temple of the Sikhs, 1 September 1908.

Syrians: a country today in Western Asia, bordering Lebanon to the southwest, the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, and Israel to the southwest. Syria-born immigrants in Victoria were first counted in the 1891 census, when the population was 142. Syria then included the semi-autonomous district of Lebanon, and was part of the Turkish-controlled Ottoman Empire. Early Syrian immigrants may have included Christians persecuted by the Ottomans, people escaping economic hardship caused by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and rural workers devastated by droughts and plagues. The combined population of Syrian and Lebanese settlers in Victoria increased steadily in the early twentieth century, peaking at 401 in 1921. Smithy the Liar has dealings with 'the Syrians' ('Fish an' Chips', *The Bulletin* 16 January 1908) and 'Ganesha' details Syrian lifestyle in 'Round the Corner' (*Lone Hand*, December 1908).

Smyrna: a Greek city dating back to antiquity located at a central and strategic point on the Aegean coast of Anatolia. Greek influence was so strong in the area that the Turks called it 'Smyrna of the infidels' (*Gavur İzmir*). While Turkish sources track the emergence of the term to the 14th century when two separate parts of the city were controlled by two different powers, the upper İzmir being Muslim and the lower part of the city Christian. During the late 19th and early 20th century, the city was an important financial and cultural centre of the Greek world.

Kashmir: the northernmost geographical region of the Indian subcontinent. Cf. Esson's 'Through the Cyber Pass' (*Lone Hand*, 1 March 1908).

Delhi: The third and greatest Mughal emperor, Akbar, moved the capital to Agra, resulting in a decline in the fortunes of Delhi. Delhi passed into the direct control of British Government in 1857 after the Indian Rebellion of 1857. See Esson's 'The Babu and the Black Buck' (*The Adventure*, 18 September 1907); 'From the Oldest World: The Decay of the Delhis' (*Lone Hand*, 1 August 1908).

Colombo: Although the British captured Colombo in 1796, it remained a British military outpost until the Kandyan Kingdom was ceded to them in 1815 and they made Colombo the capital of their newly created crown colony of British Ceylon. Unlike the Portuguese and Dutch before them, whose primary use of Colombo was as a military fort, the British began constructing houses and other civilian structures around the fort, giving rise to the current City of Colombo. See Esson's 'From the Oldest World: Colombo' (*Lone Hand*, 1 June 1908)

Mahomedans [also spelled *Muhammadan*, *Mahommedan*, *Mahommedan* or *Mahometan*]: a term for a follower of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. It is used as both a noun and an adjective, meaning belonging or relating to, either Muhammad or the religion, doctrines, institutions and practices that he established. The word was formerly common in usage, but the terms Muslim and Islamic are more common today.

Mecca [or Makkah]: city in the Hejaz region of Saudi Arabia. The city is located 70 km inland from Jeddah in a narrow valley, and 340 kilometres south of Medina. As the birthplace of Muhammad and the site of Muhammad's first revelation of the *Quran* [*Koran*]. Mecca is regarded as the holiest city in the religion of Islam and a pilgrimage to it known as the Hajj is obligatory for all able Muslims. Mecca is home to the Kaaba, by majority description Islam's holiest site, as well as being the direction of Muslim prayer. Mecca was long ruled by Muhammad's descendants, the sharifs, acting either as independent rulers or as vassals to larger polities. See Esson's 'A Camel Driver' (*The Bulletin*, 25 March 1909)

Mussah bazaar: Mussah, the main thoroughfare at Mecca, contained a number of bazaars. 'Mussah' literally means 'She narrated Hadith'; The Hadith, in Islam, refers to what Muslims believe to be a record of the words, actions, and the silent approval of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

Yale lock: founded as the Yale Lock Manufacturing Co. in Stamford, Connecticut, in 1868 by Henry R. Towne and Linus Yale, Jr., the inventor of the pin tumbler lock.

Koran [Quran] (literally meaning 'the recitation'; also romanized Qur'an): the central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God (*Allah*). It is widely regarded as the finest work in classical Arabic literature. The *Quran* is divided into chapters (*surah* in Arabic), which are then divided into verses (*ayah*). See Esson's 'From the Oldest World: Benares' (*Lone Hand*, 1 October 1908). In *Mother and Son*, old Tom Henderson, the splitter, is a constant reader of the *Koran*.

our mosque: a place of worship for followers of Islam.

Arabic: the *lingua franca* of the Arab world; it is named after the Arabs, a term initially used to describe peoples living from Mesopotamia in the east to the Anti-Lebanon mountains in the west, in northwestern Arabia, and in the Sinai peninsula.

Hindustani: historically also known as Hindavi, Dehlavi and Rekhta, the *lingua franca* of North India and Pakistan. It is an Indo-Aryan language, deriving its base primarily from the Khariboli dialect of Delhi. The language incorporates a large amount of vocabulary from Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. It is a pluricentric language, with two official forms, Modern Standard Hindi and Modern Standard Urdu, which are its standardised registers, and which may be called Hindustani or Hindi-Urdu when taken together.

the Prophet's teaching: Muhammad (c. 570 CE–632 CE) is the prophet and founder of Islam.

summons ... blue paper: Bluey (*Australian slang*), a summons.

No alien shadow must fall across the food: Cf. discussion of Benares, the holy city, 'the soul of Hinduism' in Esson's 'From the Oldest World: Benares', *Lone Hand*, 1 October 1908.

The case comes off at Seymour on the 29th: Seymour Magistrates' Court, located at Tallarook Street, Seymour, a railway township located 104 kilometres north of Melbourne.

Translation

[Note: I am grateful to Crystal Jordan, Historian, Australian Indian Historical Society, for her expertise and assistance; and for clarification of the translations below.]

Expression	Language	Translation
SHAH. Darwaza kholo!	Hindi	Open the door!
SHAH. Salam!	Arabic	Hello! [Peace!]
RAM CHANDRA. ... bara sharar	Bangla	Where I grew up
ABDULLA. Ham bahut ajaibat dekha	Hindi	We saw many strange things.
RAM CHANDRA. Yahan!	Hindi	See here!, Here!
ABDULLA. Paak jaga!	Hindi	Pure/clean place
Cf Muqadas ya pak jaga	Urdu	A sacred place; a consecrated spot
RAM CHANDRA. Kitab !	Urdu	Note this book!
AKBAH ALMAD/HAWKERS. Ya-hu. Hu-ya.	Hinid	<i>Exclamation!</i>
RAM CHANDRA. Shabash!	Hindi	Well done!
AKBAR ALMAD. Tum kharab admi!	Hindi	You're a bad man!
AKBAR ALMAD. Jhuta, Jhuta!	Hindi	Liar, liar!
MUHAMMED. Tum kya bolo, Shah Shereef!	Hindi	It is as you say, Shah Shereef!
AKBAR ALMAD. Kutta! Kutta!	Hindi	Dog! Dog!
RAM CHANDRA. Aaj! Aaj!	Hindi	Now! Today
RAM CHNDRA. Ab hi! Ab hi!	Hindi	Right now! Immediately
SHAH. Mujhko jawab do!	Hindi	Give me answer!
ABDULLA. Hy-ya.	Arabic	<i>A salute.</i>
SHAH. Usko jane do!	Hindi	Let him go!
SHAH. La ilahi Illallah!	Urdu	There is no God but Allah!

The Time is Not Yet Ripe

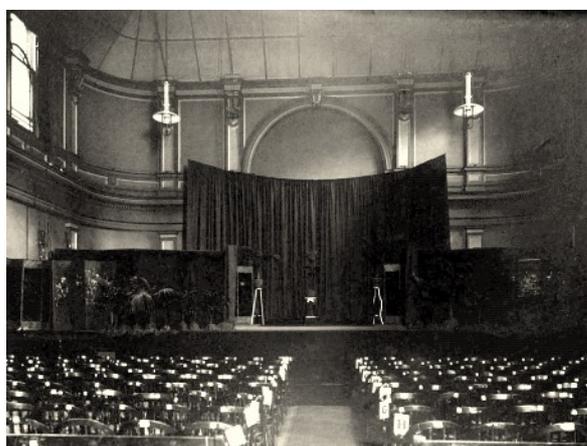
A COMEDY
in Four Acts

To my Mother

Production

The Time is Not Yet Ripe was first performed by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre at Athenaeum Hall, Melbourne, 23 July 1912 under the direction of Gregan McMahon, with the following cast:

SIR JOSEPH QUIVERTON	Thomas Skewes
DORIS	Isabel J Handley
An ENGLISH BUTLER	Anthony Book
SIR HENRY PILLSBURY	Leonard Egerton
LADY PILLSBURY	Rose Seaton
SYDNEY BARRET	Donald Alsop
JOHN K HILL	AS Haybittel
MISS PERKINS	Dorothy Hiscock
OTTO	Clinton Newell
HARRY HOPKINS	Jack Fowler
PETER JENSEN	R Withers
ARTHUR GRAY	E Ross Earle
BERTIE WAINWRIGHT	Mr George Kirk
VIOLET FAULKNER	Miss Lea Halinbourg
A FAT MAN	Mr Thomas Cletus
A CHEEKY YOUTH	Mr Bruce Henderson
A WORKING WOMAN	Miss Bradley
An OLD MAN	W Bregenzer
Electors, citizens etc.	Members of the Victorian Socialists Party



The Athenaeum: Exterior and large hall—<http://www.mahistory.org.au/images/Website/pdf/home/athenaeuminpictures.pdf>

Publication

Neither a manuscript nor a prompt-copy of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* is extant, but within two weeks of the performance Fraser & Jenkinson produced a printed version of the play text. We can be reasonably confident that Esson had control over the final edit of the text, and that it represents his authorial intention at the time. He dedicated the publication of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* to his mother. It is this publication that is used as the copy-text (referred to hereafter as A).

For Esson, the old Fasoli Bohemian loyalties were diminishing in favour of more enduring Socialist ones. Following the less than enthusiastic response to the publication of *Bells and Bees*, his first collection of verse, a decision was made to change publishers. Lothian was in a transition period anyway: he's married in 1912, his father retired and, as part of a rebranding process, formed the company of Thomas C Lothian Pty Ltd. Esson's opportunities were shifting towards the theatre and when the opportunity arose for his *Three Short Plays* to be published in 1911, the project went to Fraser & Jenkinson (with offices at 420 Bourke Street Melbourne). Well known for their support of the Socialist Tom Mann and CH Chomley (including publication of his *The True History of the Kelly Gang of Bushrangers* (1906)), the company celebrated their twentieth anniversary in 1912 and included in their schedule two further Louis Esson works: one, a contemporary Australian play script (*The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*) and, later in the year, another collection of Esson's verse, *Red Gums, and other verses*.¹ *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* was released within two weeks of the performance (in August 1912). *The Herald*, reviewing the publication, suggested (without foundation) that 'Mr Esson possesses the distinction of being the first long Australian comedy originally produced in Australia.'²

Esson attempted, on at least two occasion, to revise the text. The current writer has in his possession two additional copies of the Fraser & Jenkinson published script of *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*. Dr Phillip Parsons, the editor of the Currency Press edition of the play in 1973³ refers to 'two copies, at present in the possession of Mr Hugh Esson [Louis's son]' that 'contain manuscript notes and deletions in the author's hands.' These were subsequently gifted to Dr Parsons who, in turn, made them available to the current author.

The first of these (referred to as B), in Esson's hand in the character list (page 3), replaces 'John K Hill (a Chicago drummer) with 'A Labour MP', but the character's dialogue remains in tact throughout the text. Esson also clarifies the four members of the Crowd (a Fat Man, a Cheeky Youth, a Working Woman and an Old Man) as 'Socialists'. There are scattered excisions (made with single horizontal, vertical and diagonal strokes in black ink; there are passages of dialogue in Act Three scratched through (with a blunt blue pencil), with only occasionally replacement dialogue, word count or ideas in the margins. One significant alteration is the emendation on page 58 ('Act IV' is excised in favour of 'Act V').

The scope of the projected revision of the second script (referred to as C) is evident on the title page when 'A Comedy' is emended, initially to 'A Political Comedy', this in turn is excised in favour of 'A Socialist Comedy'; the four act structure is altered to 'in Five Acts'. Presumably based on the positive response to both the Socialist Club meeting scene (Act Two Scene One) and Miss Perkins' 'Anti-Socialist Committee Room' (Act Two Scene Two), Esson intended to expand each to Act

¹ Fraser & Jenkinson Pty Ltd was formed in 1892 by the partnership of Thomas Jenkinson, former secretary of the Australasian Typographical Union, and John Fraser. Their biggest seller since 1910 was the *Official Guid to Melbourne for the visitor*. Fraser & Jenkinsons were known as the printers of the *Country Women's Association*, *Meanjin*, nearly all the printing for the Trades Council; and for producing the underground copies of Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*.

² 8 August 1912 p.8

³ Louis Esson, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, (Edited by Philip Parsons), The National Theatre series, Currency Press (1973)

Copy Text—Authorial intention

As Dr Parsons points out 'taken together [both scripts B and C] suggest that Esson ... embarked on a revision which could only have resulted in a substantially different play.' He believed that the broad tendency of the revisions seemed 'to be towards a more sober, more ideological tone.' The issue, however, is that no such play emerged, notwithstanding his 'intention.' The question becomes: can any of the suggested revisions be included in the preparation of a scholarly edition? Further, how do we confirm 'authorial intention' when in a number of instances, it is clear that Esson was dissatisfied with the play. In the Currency Press edition, Dr Parsons defined his approach:

An editor ... is confronted in these two copies not only with a mass of material in process of revision, but also with a considerable number of careful alterations and deleting, chiefly affecting individual lines and speeches. The case for accepting these instead of the published text is obviously strong. Yet, these revisions are part of a text Esson never completed and obviously intended to differ substantially from the published version. This latter, on the other hand, while it may not represent Esson's final wishes, does at least represent completely and coherently his wishes in 1912.

To the present editor this latter point has seemed persuasive. Where Esson's revisions seem to lead away from the tone or substance of the published text, they have been rejected. Only when the revision appears to improve on the original in clarity or impact has it been accepted. The result is a text differing marginally from that published by Esson, but which—despite the distaste he came to feel for the play—he may have preferred.

The choices made by Dr Parsons in his edition raises a fundamental question about the approach to the task by the 'literary editor' as opposed to the 'scholarly editor.' In Dr Parson's case, after a determination of all relevant evidence, he *subjectively* decided that certain readings from one text should be combined with those from another and emended the text. He provides variant readings in his apparatus, but he points out

While theatrical effectiveness has been a major consideration in deciding on readings which differs from [Text A] it may be that some of the rejected revisions will commend themselves to the working play director.

G Thomas Tanselle, however, argued that an editor's task is 'not to "improve" upon an author's decisions' but rather an editor's 'judgement' should be directed toward 'the recovery of what the author wrote, not toward an evaluation of the effectiveness of the author's revisions.'⁴

As far as editing drama is concerned, we do necessarily have to make two clear distinctions concerning the concept of 'publication.' Firstly, the recognition that the (usually unpublished) manuscript—the character and dialogue lines; the stage directions; settings etc—used to rehearse a play [what used to be called the 'foul-papers'] are, in theatrical terms, generally 'fluid' documents and not 'the publication,' rather the 'fair-copy' or rehearsal text is 'the pretext to performance'. In the contemporary theatre, a stage manager monitors all changes to the dialogue etc in the 'prompt copy' [or 'fair-copy'] and generally it is this text that is used as 'copy text' for modern print versions. It is the staged performance in a theatre space with a viewing audience regarded as 'the publication.' As Esson pointed out to Vance Palmer in 1921:

I am never anxious to get plays published. A play is meant to be acted, not read. I regard the text only as a musical score. That is why I avoid comment as far as possible. Directions would be purely practical; anything else is, strictly speaking,

⁴ G Thomas Tanselle, *Selected Studies in Bibliography*, Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia (1979) p. 311

illegitimate. Shaw tried to make a play compete with the novel as a book, but it can't be done. The forms are quite different.⁵

Secondly, as the case here with *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, following the production a 'print publication' option emerged as a means of distribution; once in this form editorial theory associated with the concept of 'a work intended for publication' is applied and, in this situation, the job of a scholarly editor, therefore, can be stated as 'the exercise of critical thinking in an effort to determine the final intention of an author with respect to a particular text.'⁶ The rationale for selecting the most reliable 'copy-text' is the one formulated by Ronald B McKerrow⁷ and later Sir Walter Greg.⁸ Greg built on McKerrow's fundamentals, making the distinction between 'the intended words of a text'—what he called 'substantives'—and 'the intended punctuation and spelling (or other formal features) in the text—what he called 'accidentals'. Greg's approach emanated from his work on the Elizabethan drama. Greg argued that 'the most authoritative accidentals tending to be in the author's fair-copy manuscript or in the first edition (the edition closest to the manuscript) and the most authoritative substantives often tending to be in the last edition supervised by the author.'

If a finished manuscript of a text does not survive, the copy-text for a scholarly edition should normally be the text of the earliest extant printed edition based on the missing manuscript, for it can be expected to reproduce more of the characteristics of the manuscript than any edition further removed; variants from later editions which are convincingly shown to be revisions by the author can then be incorporated into this copy-text.⁹

The choice of copy text—that text judged to have 'presumptive authority,' the one to be followed at points where no emendations are made—is therefor the central decision for the critical editor to make. It is this published text that, traditionally, has come to represent the author's intention.

In making the determination of 'copy text' in this case I have to discount Text B as Esson's intentions have not been followed through, a full revision of the text is not made: while the text contains many excisions there is no suggested replacement dialogue; but more compelling is his intention to replace the character of John K Hill (a Chicago drummer) with 'A Labour MP' in the cast list is not acted on at all.

Revisions are sometimes so radical that they alter the nature or conception of a work and in effect produce a new work; in such cases it is probable that the earlier version and the later one are best treated as two separate works, each worthy of a critical edition.¹⁰

For similar reasons, I discount Text C because Esson intends—by emending the cover page to read 'A Socialist comedy'—a completely different form of play: expanding the structure to five acts; and notionally, extending the political discussions in both the committee room scenes. There is inadequate emendation or rewriting to support that process being completed. Further, with the majority of the excisions having removed the focus from Sydney Barrett and Doris Quiverton's

⁵ Letter to Vance Palmer from London, 21 March 1921 in Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. pg.32

⁶ G Thomas Tansell, Op. cit. pg. 29

⁷ Ronald B McKerrow, *Prolegomena for the Oxford Shakespeare: A Study in Editorial Method*, Clarendon Press (1939)

⁸ WW Greg, *The Rational of Copy-Text* (1950-51), Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia

⁹ G Thomas Tansell, Op. cit. pg. 28

¹⁰ G Thomas Tansell, Op. cit. pg. 18

romantic engagement the genre shift suggests Esson's intention is to provide a completely new version of the play. Again, there is no evidence of the work being authoritatively complete.

While Esson, and others, maligned this particular play subsequent to its production, Text A—that published by Fraser & Jenkinson in 1912 under Esson's supervision—is determined to best represent his authorial intention *at the time*.

Author's intentions change over time, however; and although the apparatus of a critical text can record the readings that reflect such changes, the critical text itself can only represent the author's intention as it stood at one particular time.¹¹

As Tansell also reminds us, 'Serious readers will wish to know that the texts in front of them are reliable ones' and in this case, Text A is determined to be the authoritative copy-text.

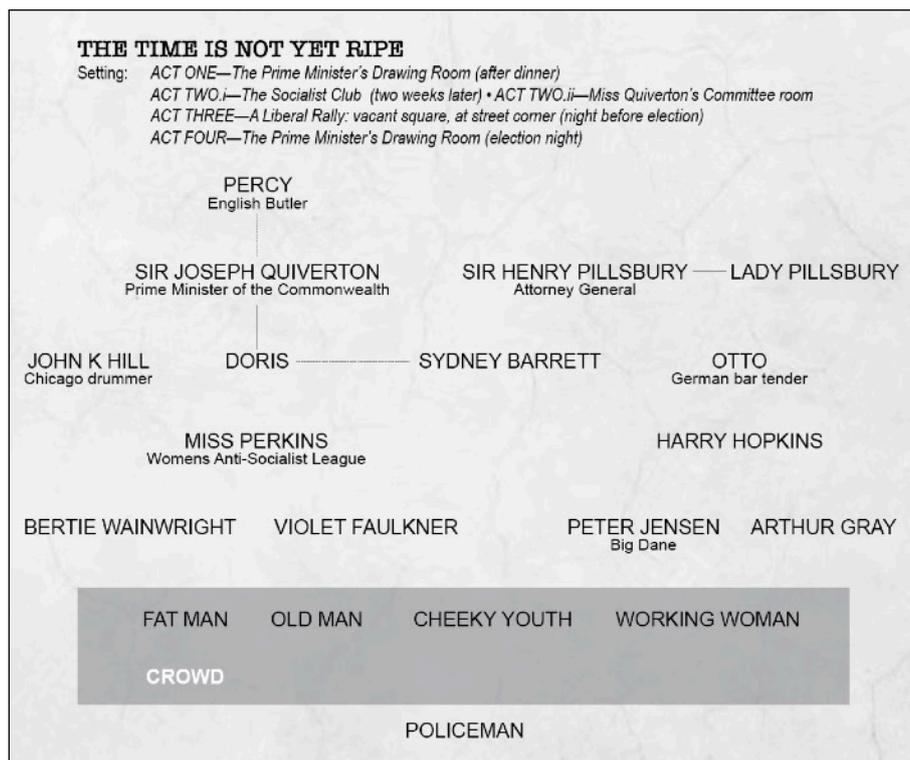
¹¹ G Thomas Tanselle, 'Texts of Documents and Texts of Works', *Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing*, Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia (1990)

Characters

SIR JOSEPH QUIVERTON, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth
 DORIS, his daughter
 AN ENGLISH BUTLER [PERCY]
 SIR HENRY PILLSBURY, Attorney-General
 LADY PILLSBURY
 JOHN K HILL, a Chicago drummer
 SYDNEY BARRETT
 MISS PERKINS, Secretary Anti-Socialist League
 OTTO, of the Socialist Party
 HARRY HOPKINS, of the Socialist Party
 PETER JENSEN, of the Socialist Party
 ARTHUR GRAY, of the Socialist Party
 BERTIE WAINWRIGHT
 VIOLET FAULKNER, BA LLB
 A FAT MAN, in the crowd
 A CHEEKY YOUTH, in the crowd
 A WORKING WOMAN, in the crowd
 AN OLD MAN, in the crowd

Setting

ACT ONE		Sir Joseph Quiverton's Drawing Room.
ACT TWO	Scene One	The Socialist Club. Two weeks later.
	Scene Two	Miss Quiverton's Committee Room
ACT THREE		Vacant square, at street corner. Night before Election.
ACT FOUR		Sir Joseph Quiverton's Drawing Room. Election Night



ACT ONE

(The Prime Minister's Drawing Room. After dinner.)

(Enter SIR JOSEPH QUIVERTON, followed by DORIS.)

SIR JOSEPH. Not another word. I refuse to give the matter further consideration. I tell you, Doris, finally, irrevocably -

DORIS. Listen a moment, Father! You haven't finished your coffee.

SIR JOSEPH. I will not listen. I should have forbidden you to speak. This thing is preposterous, impossible -

DORIS. I know it is difficult for a politician to preserve an open mind.

SIR JOSEPH. At present I am not a politician. I am your father.

DORIS. Why do you raise these technical points! We will sit down quietly and have a little chat on the subject. Shall I bring in your coffee?

SIR JOSEPH. No. And I don't want to debate with my own daughter. I am shocked, Doris, and deeply wounded.

DORIS. Wasn't I right to tell you I was engaged?

SIR JOSEPH. Yes—No! Not to a man like that. Never in all my experience have I heard of such a thing. If you have no self-respect, you might at least think of the dignity of my position.

DORIS. Father!

SIR JOSEPH. Don't answer me. Barrett is a Socialist, a revolutionary Socialist. That is sufficient.

DORIS. He has a big station in the Riverina, and goodness knows how many sheep. I love sheep.

SIR JOSEPH. He proposes to confiscate land and capital.

DORIS. Not his own, Father. Sydney may be a Socialist, and an advanced Atheist, but he is not a philanthropist.

SIR JOSEPH. I thank you for the information. It deeply gratifies me to learn that my prospective son-in-law is not only a revolutionary Socialist, but also an advanced Atheist—a most promising young man, a credit to his country.

DORIS. Father, have I your consent or not?

SIR JOSEPH. My consent, never! I mean to fight the next election on this very issue of Socialism versus Private Enterprise. You know I am no Tory. I am a progressive man, and believe in a policy of progress and reform.

DORIS. Everybody says that before an election.

SIR JOSEPH. Doris, for the sake of the Party, for the sake of the country, for the sake of the Empire—for my sake—you must give up this folly.

DORIS. Love is not folly. Plato says that love is the highest wisdom.

SIR JOSEPH. Plato is wrong. And that's the stuff they want to introduce into the University. Have I no authority left! No, I am the last one to be considered. Now, Doris, children must obey their parents.

DORIS. You are mistaken, Father. In the natural cause of evolution parents must be sacrificed to their children, not children to their parents. It is a law of nature.

SIR JOSEPH. There is such a thing as a moral law, Doris.

DORIS. No, there isn't, Father. That is a popular fallacy. People used to think there was, but there isn't.

SIR JOSEPH. I have always given you your own way, and this is my reward. Don't you realise that the country is in a critical condition? I want you to understand my aims, my policy.

DORIS. I am sorry, Father, but I don't believe in your policy.

SIR JOSEPH. What!

DORIS. I would like to, but I can't.

SIR JOSEPH. You can't?

DORIS. No, Father. Once I used to believe in the things you do, but I have got beyond that stage.

SIR JOSEPH. That is good, very good indeed. I have devoted thirty¹² years of my life to formulating a progressive Liberal policy that has won the confidence of the country, and now my own daughter tells me to my face that she has got beyond it. What is the world coming to!

DORIS. Sydney says the Liberal policy is an anachronism.

SIR JOSEPH. You must put Sydney out of your thoughts. His influence is immoral.

DORIS. Listen, Father!

SIR JOSEPH. Please don't interrupt me! This is a pretty situation for the leader of a great party! What will the Opposition say when it learns that my daughter is engaged to a Socialist, a revolutionary Socialist. I will retire at once. I will give up public life. My day is past. I won't be made a laughing stock by my unscrupulous opponents. And we are on the eve of an election. The country needs my services—so much to do, so little done.

(Enter BUTLER.)

BUTLER. Sir Henry and Lady Pillsbury.

(Enter SIR HENRY and LADY PILLSBURY.)

(Exit BUTLER.)

SIR JOSEPH. Good evening!

DORIS. Delighted you have come!

LADY PILLSBURY. I would have called before only I had a touch of neuralgia.

SIR HENRY. My wife enjoys the most extraordinary bad health.

LADY PILLSBURY. Nerves! Strikes always upset me. I loathe paid agitators.

(They take seats.)

These Salons are sure to have a great educational influence. It is so pleasant to drop in and exchange ideas on the great political problems.

SIR JOSEPH. The educated classes must be organised to protect their rights.

DORIS. What do you think of the bakers' strike, Sir Henry?

SIR HENRY. I can only trust that wise counsels will prevail.

LADY PILLSBURY. Is it going to last for ever?

SIR HENRY. One never knows. One never knows.

LADY PILLSBURY. I refuse to use cake on principle. It is encouraging the bakers.

SIR HENRY. I notice Barrett made another inflammatory speech this afternoon.

LADY PILLSBURY. That is a dangerous man, most dangerous.

SIR HENRY. And he is a Rhodes Scholar, if I remember rightly.

SIR JOSEPH. That makes his conduct all the more uncalled for.

LADY PILLSBURY. I have never met the young man.

DORIS. Mr Barrett holds very advanced views, and that unfits him for fashionable society. He may look in tonight.

SIR JOSEPH. Surely you didn't invite him!

DORIS. I thought it would do him good.

LADY PILLSBURY. How can a squatter be a Socialist, even if he has been educated at Oxford?

SIR JOSEPH. I am not a Spiritualist, Lady Pillsbury. I do not pretend to explain the supernatural.

SIR HENRY *(Airily)*. We are all Socialists now-a-days.

¹² thirty] 30 A

SIR JOSEPH. But Barrett is an extremist, a revolutionary Socialist. At the Wagga Wagga Agricultural Show dinner he said the present land tax was a farce, and should be raised to fifteen shillings¹³ in the pound.

DORIS. Yes, I know. He is inclined to exaggerate a little.

SIR JOSEPH. That is not all. He is setting class against class, and where is it going to end? If our squatters adopt such views, what can be expected from the Trades Unionists?

DORIS. Please don't worry, Father. It is becoming a mannerism. We must convert Mr Barrett.

SIR HENRY. We must always hope for the best.

SIR JOSEPH (*Ready for a long speech*). The situation is grave. Great issues are at stake. What do we see around us—unrest and discontent. We are standing, as it were, at the parting of the ways.

DORIS (*Breaking in*). Bridge or music?

LADY PILLSBURY. You might play something, dear, a little American piece. I have a slight headache.

DORIS. I am so sorry.

(*The LADIES rise.*)

LADY PILLSBURY. It is always a strain listening to intellectual conversation.

(*Exeunt DORIS and LADY PILLSBURY.*)

SIR JOSEPH. How is Lady Pillsbury keeping now?

SIR HENRY. Much better, thanks. She complains only about half her time.

SIR JOSEPH. That Barrett is a violent young man.

SIR HENRY. Indeed he is. I heard a rumour he was going to stand for Parliament.

SIR JOSEPH. What! How! Why!

SIR HENRY. It was only a rumour.

SIR JOSEPH. Standing for Parliament! Ah, well, nothing surprises me now.

(*Enter BUTLER.*)

(*Enter JOHN K HILL.*)

BUTLER. Mr John K Hill.

(*Exit BUTLER.*)

SIR JOSEPH. Sir Henry Pillsbury—our Attorney-General—Mr Hill. Mr Hill is an ambassador of Commerce.

JOHN K HILL. No, Sir, I am a plain man of figures.

SIR JOSEPH. And a maker of nations.

JOHN K HILL. I just financed that little revolution in Uruguay.

SIR HENRY. There usually seems to be trouble in that part of the world.

SIR JOSEPH. And there will be trouble here, too, if the Socialists have their way. This country is on the eve of changes, Mr Hill, startling changes.

JOHN K HILL. You don't say.

SIR JOSEPH. We are moving too fast.

JOHN K HILL. Well, I wouldn't have guessed that now. I am only a visitor, but I was kept waitin' in a hat store yesterday afternoon close on one minute and a half before the young man behind the counter woke up.

SIR HENRY. The new unionism.

JOHN K HILL. Australia's an extraordinary country.

SIR HENRY. This is a holiday trip, I presume.

JOHN K HILL. No, Sir, I never take holidays. I have sert'n propositions to consider. Your Northern Territory interests me. It is virgin soil. I am a missionary—a missionary traveller. I represent a

¹³ fifteen shillings] 15/- A

little Chicago syndicate that wants scope for investment. But I can't advise it to shovel money into a noo country without sert'n concessions.

SIR JOSEPH. Do you propose to establish industries, Mr Hill?

JOHN K HILL, Yes, Sir. That is my business. I want to develop this country, bring it up to time, Americanise it. It has golden possibilities. Take your *bêche-de-mer*—regarded by epicures as superior to turtle—why, it's a beat—it's just crying out to be canned! All we want is freezin' works—and cheap labour—and no public banquet will be complete without it.

SIR HENRY. Our fisheries have so far been somewhat neglected.

JOHN K HILL. And there's your forests of cypress pine, wonderful forests, absolutely goin' to waste. Most valuable timber, Sir, put to its legitimate use—specially adapted for makin' Chinese coffins—they use up quite a number over there in China—10,000 a day, I have the exact figures—unlimited market—easy transit to Hong Kong! Revolution is China's long suit now-a-days, and it's me to deliver the goods. I'm goin' to bring death within the reach of all.

SIR JOSEPH. This country can develop only with the aid of capital. Capital is as necessary as labour. One is the complement of the other.

JOHN K HILL. That's so. But if your Socialist party gains a majority, won't it pass Anti-Trust legislation?

SIR HENRY. It is difficult to say what it would not do.

JOHN K HILL. And nationalise the Chinese coffin monopoly and the canned slug monopoly?

SIR JOSEPH. You can rely on the Government, Mr Hill, to assist you in every way.

JOHN K HILL. Thanks, Sir Joseph. We'll stand or fall together.

(Enter DORIS.)

DORIS. How do you do? Mr Hill and I are old friends.

JOHN K HILL. I'm honoured, Miss Quiverton.

DORIS. And what do you think of Australia now?

JOHN K HILL. You have lots of space, I guess.

DORIS. Our sheep require it. Our population is mostly sheep.

SIR JOSEPH. You forget Mr Hill has not yet seen the country.

DORIS. I hope you will not be disappointed. Australia is still uncultivated nature. Our scenery, of course, is not so smooth and highly finished as the English, but we can hardly expect that in such a young country. Will you make one for a small game?

SIR HENRY. Lady Pillsbury is devoted to Bridge.

(Exeunt SIR HENRY and SIR JOSEPH.)

DORIS. We are all keenly interested in politics. It's the latest thing. There is a Salon almost every week.

JOHN K. HILL. As an American it's all most fascinating to me.

(Enter SYDNEY BARRETT as DORIS shows JOHN K HILL into card-room, and returns. BARRETT advances.)

DORIS. Oh, Syd! What strange garments!

BARRETT. I am a man of the people.

DORIS. How did you get in?

BARRETT. By what you call the tradesmen's entrance. But Doris -

DORIS. You are making yourself positively ridiculous. ... I told Father.

BARRETT. Was he pleased?

DORIS. Pleased! He went off.

BARRETT. I am glad of that. He so seldom does.

(He goes to kiss her.)

DORIS. Wait till I shut the door! I can give you only a few minutes alone.

(She shuts card-room door, and returns. BARRETT embraces her.)

DORIS *(With head on his shoulder)*. Oh, Sydney, this is all I want. No more. *(Puts him away.)* Sit down. Now! ... *(DORIS takes seat.)* Do you admire me immensely?

BARRETT. I do. You are quite perfect. But Doris -

DORIS. But what?

BARRETT. You are still wearing jewellery.

DORIS. One can express oneself in jewellery.

BARRETT. Did I not tell you to discard those pearls?

DORIS. Three times.

BARRETT. Have you never thought of the Ceylon diver who held his breath, and went all naked to the hungry shark?

DORIS. Does he mind? You said once you would feel transcendently happy if I permitted you to die for me.

BARRETT. So I would, in a romantic mood. But, Doris, it is time we had a definite understanding.

You must give up your jewellery and Bridge and Salons and other forms of fashionable frivolity.

DORIS. Does Socialism mean that?

BARRETT. Of course it does.

DORIS. I am not a Socialist, then. I don't believe in it.

BARRETT. You are pursuing an illusory existence. It must end.

DORIS. I wish, Syd, you wouldn't try to reform me. It will be much better for us both if I reform you.

BARRETT. Listen, Doris, you must do as I tell you.

DORIS. You are getting as bad as Father.

BARRETT. What an atmosphere! Bridge and bad politics!

DORIS. Sydney!

BARRETT. Here am I after a four years' absence, returned to my native land, full of a fine enthusiasm, to find the country stagnant, decadent—and the young Australian, with his bright, fresh mind, untrammelled by the traditions of the past—that is the current phrase—repeating all the popular superstitions, from beer to bishops, of his fog-bound ancestors. Australia is an outer suburb of Brixton. That explains its amazing school of architecture. That explains everything. We are unoriginal, therefore uninteresting.

DORIS. We can't help that, can we?

BARRETT. We prate of progress, and what is Australia's chief contribution to civilisation? Frozen mutton and the losing hazard. Can you wonder that I am dissatisfied!

DORIS. You always are.

BARRETT. Every country must have a national ideal. Even England has a national ideal—good form. We have nothing, absolutely nothing. Australia is an empty country. We produce wool and cricketers and factory butter and legislative councillors, but we do not produce ideas. Why, the national intelligence has not yet invented one new drink. Things can't go on like this. But where are our leaders? Look at you worthy father. He certainly seems troubled about many things, but he goes on uttering empty phrases, meaning nothing, suggesting nothing -

DORIS. Yes, I know. Father is very tiresome. But what are you proposing to do?

BARRETT. Everything. I propose change, disorder, revolution. We will have to make a fresh start. I attended the Socialist Congress tonight.

DORIS. That explains your behaviour.

BARRETT. We had a stormy meeting. I was accused of being an intellectual. There was nearly a split in the Party. That shows how earnest we are. We are going to do things. You must give up this empty life, Doris.

DORIS. Don't dare me, Sydney. I might do something rash.

BARRETT. I have no fear. You are not in revolt.

DORIS. Don't tempt me to prove you are wrong.

BARRETT. You don't realise my position. I haven't told you my plans yet. I have something most important to tell you. I decided tonight -

(Enter MISS PERKINS.)

Great Caesar! Who is that?

DORIS. Miss Perkins.

BARRETT. I'm off. I'll tell you my secret later.

DORIS. Mr Barrett—Miss Perkins. Miss Perkins is the energetic secretary of the Women's Anti-Socialist League. Please sit down.

(MISS PERKINS takes chair.)

MISS PERKINS. I have hurried round from the League. The business was most important.

BARRETT *(Escaping)*. Pray, don't let me disturb you.

(Exit BARRETT.)

DORIS *(Tired and languid)*. Was it a pleasant evening?

MISS PERKINS. We had a prolonged discussion. You must help us, Miss Quiverton.

DORIS. I shall be delighted.

MISS PERKINS. I don't know what the country is coming to. The domestic helps have formed a union.

DORIS. I prefer men servants. They are more docile.

MISS PERKINS. They will demand a day at home next. You must assist us, Miss Quiverton.

DORIS. Certainly.

MISS PERKINS. You will promise to stand by the League?

DORIS. I shall promise anything, with pleasure.

(Enter LADY PILLSBURY.)

MISS PERKINS. We have decided on a most momentous step.

LADY PILLSBURY. How are you, Miss Perkins?

MISS PERKINS. Well, I thank you. How are you? We have decided -

LADY PILLSBURY. Bridge is too exciting. Heart! Mr Barrett has arrived. He is wearing a red tie.

MISS PERKINS *(Going ahead)*. The matter was exhaustively discussed by all our ablest speakers. We came to the conclusion that there was only one way to save the country.

LADY PILLSBURY. And what may that be?

MISS PERKINS. Women must take their place in the political arena.

LADY PILLSBURY. You are right, Miss Perkins. We have been kept down for centuries by a man-made law. But we are quite capable of directing the destiny of a great nation. All we need is more opportunity to display our ability. That is why I never allow my husband to make up his mind on any public question till he has first consulted me.

MISS PERKINS. I have an important announcement to make. May I see Sir Joseph?

DORIS *(Going to door)*. Father! Miss Perkins has an important communication to deliver.

(Enter SIR JOSEPH and SIR HENRY, followed later by JOHN K HILL and SYDNEY BARRETT.)

MISS PERKINS. The Committee of the League held its fortnightly meeting this evening, Mrs Jasper Jones occupying the chair. After a short debate, it was decided that it was the duty of every lady in the land to take an active and intelligent interest in the coming elections. ... The time has arrived when women's refining influence should extend over a wider sphere.

SIR HENRY. I incline to that view myself, but we must not go too far.

MISS PERKINS. We must go far enough, Sir Henry, to reach a logical conclusion. The country is in a dreadful condition. Men have not the requisite knowledge to deal adequately with the problem

of social reform. That is women's special province. The morality of the nation is in our keeping. Shall we forsake our trust?

DORIS. No!

LADY PILLSBURY. Certainly not!

MISS PERKINS. I'm glad we agree on that point. Certain names were forwarded for our approval, but after due consideration we came to the conclusion that there was not one man who we could conscientiously support. The League decided that the women of this electorate must be represented by a woman.

(Applause.)

SIR HENRY. It is so difficult to decide on any definite line of action.

MISS PERKINS. Therefore, in the best interests of the country I have been requested to ask Miss Quiverton to stand for Parliament.

(Mild sensation.)

DORIS. Me!

MISS PERKINS. The proposal was carried by acclamation, and with only one dissentient voice.

(Loud applause.)

DORIS. But I don't understand politics.

MISS PERKINS. It is not a question of mere politics. It is a question of morality.

DORIS. Of course, that makes a considerable difference.

LADY PILLSBURY. All the difference, my dear.

DORIS. But please tell me how I can promote the morality of the nation. I should be only too delighted.

MISS PERKINS. By defeating the Socialist candidate.

SIR HENRY. What constituency has been selected for Miss Quiverton?

MISS PERKINS. Wombat.

DORIS. Wombat! That doesn't sound particularly moral.

MISS PERKINS. Oh, yes, it is only the name of a local bird. There is no time for hesitation.

Tomorrow is the last day for nominations. The Socialists are selecting their candidate tonight.

DORIS. Will you give me a few moments to think it over?

MISS PERKINS. Do try to persuade Miss Quiverton to save the country. It is a most anxious time for us all.

(DORIS is surrounded.)

LADY PILLSBURY. It is your duty, my dear, to protect our rights. I would overcome my natural feeling of modesty and contest the seat myself, only my uncertain health could not endure the strain of an election.

SIR HENRY. I opposed votes for women, when the subject was first broached, but I have been converted to the opinion that women have every right to take their place in our legislatures.

LADY PILLSBURY. I converted my husband to that opinion.

SIR JOSEPH. I do not wish to advise you in any way, but I may say that the situation is grave, very grave. We have reached a crisis.

DORIS. What is your advice, Mr Hill? Do you think, as an American, that it is wrong for women to take part in political agitation?

JOHN K HILL. Well, Miss Quiverton, it is a very delicate subject. I know good American citizens negotiating dangerous propositions in order that their elegant wives and daughters might stroll through Rome and Florence, with a calm expression on their face, and the *Beauties* of Ruskin¹⁴

¹⁴ *Beauties* of Ruskin] 'Beauties of Ruskin' A

under their arm, tracin' the influence of Leonardo on Perugino. That, Miss Quiverton, is the American ideal.

DORIS. How chaste and beautiful.

LADY PILLSBURY. We couldn't trust our husbands to that extent.

DORIS. Now, Mr Hill, would you be very shocked if I went into Parliament?

JOHN K HILL. On the contrary, Miss Quiverton. I would leave home at once to live in any country that had the honour to be governed by you.

DORIS (*Bringing him forward*). Mr Barrett. ... As my father observed, we are standing at the parting of the ways.

BARRETT. That is the usual position of a politician.

MISS PERKINS. You have extraordinary personal popularity, Miss Quiverton. You will gain a large sympathetic masculine vote.

DORIS. But -

MISS PERKINS. Oh, you must. You must really. It is a patriotic duty. Think of the state of the country.

DORIS. What do you think of the state of the country, Mr Barrett?

BARRETT (*Affably*). Socialism is still spreading, you know.

MISS PERKINS. You see, Miss Quiverton, Mr Barrett agrees with me.

DORIS. I am glad Mr Barrett agrees with somebody. What are we going to do, then? We must do something, I suppose.

MISS PERKINS. You will have a strong committee to help you.

DORIS. Thanks very much.

MISS PERKINS. I shall attend to all the secretarial work.

DORIS. But -

MISS PERKINS. That will be all right, Miss Quiverton. Leave that entirely to me.

DORIS. Is it State or Federal?

MISS PERKINS. Federal.

BARRETT. Excuse me, are you arranging a sale of gifts?

MISS PERKINS. This is not a bazaar.

DORIS. I have been asked to stand for Parliament.

BARRETT. As a Syndicalist, I presume.

DORIS. I really couldn't say. What is our policy, Miss Perkins?

MISS PERKINS. Social reform.

DORIS. I thought so. We are going to reform Society. You believe in that, I hope.

MISS PERKINS. Purity of the home is our guiding principle. The League has drawn up a complete manifesto.

DORIS. What is the funny name of the constituency?

MISS PERKINS. Wombat.

BARRETT. Wombat!

DORIS. It is a most respectable district.

BARRETT. I trust so. For, curiously enough, I myself am standing for this eminently respectable district of Wombat.

(*Sensation.*)

DORIS. Are you? Why didn't you tell me before?

BARRETT. I was trying to.

DORIS. Oh! that was your great secret.

MISS PERKINS. Miss Quiverton is the Good Woman candidate.

BARRETT. And I am the Bad Man candidate.

DORIS. That is only a personal distinction. Have you any policy?

BARRETT. I have, but it is not so daring as yours. My policy does not propose in any way to vaccinate the community against the complaint called joy. Its tendency, indeed, is distinctly immoral.

SIR HENRY. Shame!

SIR JOSEPH. If you have no moral feelings, you might at least have the decency to -

BARRETT. Excuse me, Sir Joseph, I have no desire to listen to your opinions. I prefer to give you mine.

SIR HENRY. There are ladies present.

BARRETT (*Pleasantly*). I occupy the soap box. You say Socialism will destroy the purity of the home. Of course, it will. That will be one of the chief glories of Socialism. To the devil with the purity of the home! Purity is a disease, and the suburban home is a horror.

JOHN K HILL. Up and away to the woods!

SIR HENRY. I am surprised to hear a young man -

BARRETT. Be calm, Sir Henry. There is no necessity for heated argument. It is our intention simply to overthrow the present form of bourgeois society.

SIR JOSEPH. Silence!

BARRETT. Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to inform you that a Reign of Terror is at hand. But what can you expect! I am standing, you see, in the interests of revolutionary Socialism.

SIR HENRY. Who will vote for you?

MISS PERKING. You won't get in.

BARRETT. But I shall take it as a personal matter if any here present may have the effrontery to cast one such worthless vote in my favour.

SIR JOSEPH. Leave my house, sir.

BARRETT. A new era begins tomorrow. Beware! Yours for the revolution.

(*Exit BARRETT.*)

(*Uproar and babble.*)

ALL (*Talking at once*).

—Now you see our danger.

—Disgraceful.

—This is anarchy.

—Who would have believed it!

DORIS (*To various people*). If you really wish it. Quite a pleasure, I assure you.

MISS PERKINS (*Voice rising above din*). Our first committee meeting to-morrow afternoon, three sharp.

(*General confusion.*)

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene One

(The Socialist Club. A bar, with beer barrel, bottles etc. Two small tables. Framed photographs of Karl Marx on wall.)

(OTTO, a fat, good-natured German, smoking a big pipe, stands behind bar, talking to HARRY HOPKINS, a little dark man bitterly in earnest.)

OTTO. Der strike is gut. It vill spread.

HOPKINS *(Bitterly)*. No. They'll go back to work. They always do.

OTTO. Der vorkers are little children, little children.

HOPKINS. How many know what they are striking for? They would sneak back tomorrow if they dared. Some of them are frightened of being called scabs and blacklegs—that's all. They're not fighting for principles.

OTTO. We need more propaganda—pamphlets, speakers.

HOPKINS. Yes, a million pamphlets, and about 10,000 speakers.

OTTO. Ach, dey not know. Dey not educated to Socialism.

HOPKINS. The people can't be educated. They must be coerced.

OTTO. Ach! my friend!

HOPKINS. They won't become Socialists until their backs are driven against the wall. They must be starved into Socialism. A long drought, and industrial depression—that's what Australia needs. Let the workers feel the pinch. *Then* they'll begin to think, not before. *Then* they'll listen to us, and we'll gather them in, organise them -

OTTO. You have right—right.

HOPKINS. Look here, Otto. This is the country of the satisfied working man. What can you do with people who are satisfied. Do they want the revolution? No, they believe in sane unionism—a fair day's work for a fair day's wages—and amicable relations between labour and capital—amicable relations between employer and employee—amicable relations between the bullock and the whip. What is the doctrine of the Labour party? Arbitration and Conciliation—Compromise—Opportunism.

OTTO. You are too bitter. Der Labour Party much gut does.

HOPKINS. Does Labour attend the International Socialist Congress? No. It sends representatives to Imperial Conferences and Coronations.

OTTO. You should learn to drink. You vill be more cheerful.

HOPKINS. You are too soft, Otto. You would beam benevolently over the guillotine.

OTTO. We must do vot we can do. Propaganda—more propaganda.

HOPKINS. Starvation—more starvation!

OTTO. My friend, vy von't you take one glass beer?

(Enter PETER JENSEN, a big Dane.)

Ach, Peter, vill take one glass beer.

PETER¹⁵. Hasn't Barrett dropped in yet?

OTTO. Not yet.

PETER. He wants to see me. We're beginning to move.

OTTO. Lager?

PETER. Yes. You won't be tempted, Hopkins?

HOPKINS. Beer! Ugh! We're dull and sleepy enough without that.

¹⁵ In the text published by Fraser and Jenkinson, for dialogue purposes, Esson uses surnames for both Harry Hopkins and Arthur Gray and, indeed, Sydney Barrett; but he uses Christian names for Otto and Peter Jensen. Neither Comrades Hopkins nor Gray are ever referred to by their Christian names. I've maintained the convention.

(HOPKINS and PETER sit at table. OTTO brings beer.)

PETER. Here's luck, all the same. ... Well, what's the latest?

HOPKINS. Barrett's another lost leader.

OTTO. No. It is not so.

PETER. I don't think so.

(OTTO returns to back of bar.)

HOPKINS. What does it matter. We trust too much to leaders. Think of Hyde, Jackson, McCallum, they began with Socialism and ended in the Cabinet. Who would trust Barrett?

PETER. I would. He would go to the stake for his principles. You have no faith in humanity.

HOPKINS. Not too much. I believe in Nature. Nature is the greatest revolutionary. Socialism will come, whether we want it or not. It has to come.

PETER. Barrett is young, enthusiastic. He will preach Socialism to the master-class.

HOPKINS. What good will that do? The people must learn to emancipate themselves.

PETER. So. Every man can do his share.

HOPKINS. Barrett's only an intellectual. His enthusiasm will soon burn out.

PETER. What makes you think that?

HOPKINS. There are fifty reasons—his social position, his sheep station, his money, his class training. He's not one of us.

PETER. Some of our best men came from the capitalist class, Marx, Lassalle, Morris, Liebnicht—

HOPKINS. Barrett has no character. And there is another reason—commonplace, but sufficient—a woman.

PETER. Don't talk nonsense. I know all about that.

(Enter ARTHUR GRAY, a tall, dreamy-looking young man.)

HOPKINS. He is going to be married.

PETER. That is no secret.

HOPKINS. To the Prime Minister's daughter—that is a good joke—a society butterfly—a leader of fashion.

PETER. He will convert her.

HOPKINS. Don't you think she will convert him?

PETER. What do you say, Gray?

GRAY. I do not believe that love is degrading. I think love ennobles, spiritualises.

HOPKINS. Is that theosophic?

GRAY. It is the truth.

HOPKINS. And she is standing against him, contesting the same seat. Splendid—He will make us look ridiculous.

PETER. Drop that, Hopkins. We must all support him. It will be a big fight, but we have a chance, yes, we have a chance at last.

HOPKINS. We won't stand. You'll see, he'll draw out at the end.

GRAY. No, no. He will not forsake his ideal.

HOPKINS. My theosophic friend, you care too much for ideals. We must face the facts, the brutal facts. Socialism is a bread and butter problem. We don't want ideals. We want economics. We want -

GRAY. You are wrong, Hopkins. Rationalists are always wrong. Ideals build the future.

HOPKINS *(Bitterly)*. Let us get rid of superstition. Evolution, Science, Machinery—that is the materialist trinity.

GRAY *(Arguing)*. Matter does not exist. It is an illusion. Only spirit exists.

HOPKINS. Don't we stand for the materialist conception?

GRAY. I don't. Marx was wrong.

HOPKINS. Socialism is founded on science.

GRAY. Who said so? I don't believe that man is a machine, that Nature is a machine, and that God Almighty is a mechanical engineer.

HOPKINS. Who cares what you believe? You're a traitor.

GRAY. You're a dogmatist.

HOPKINS. What right have you to be a member of the SFA or the IWW. The PLC's the place for you. You should be expelled.

GRAY. There are many schools of Socialist thought. Why should we chain the Party to a narrow body of dogma! We should find room and welcome for everybody—Marxists, Syndicalists, De Leonites, Labourites, Christian Socialists, Socialists of the Chair, Fabians, Communists, Revisionists, Reformists -

HOPKINS. Go on, go on—everybody except class-conscious Socialists.

PETER. That will do. Socialism is as wide as life. We must not get narrow and dogmatic. We can all do our share.

HOPKINS. Yes—but what do we do! Nothing—You with your ideals and palliatives—you're trying to kill the movement. I'm getting full up of all of you. You're all Moderates. Damn your reforms and damn your parliaments. What's the good of them! We want direct action—propaganda by deeds. Let us blow the system to Hell!

(Exit HOPKINS.)

PETER. Why are little men so bitter?

GRAY. Hopkins has a logical, but very material mind.

PETER. What are you doing there, Otto?

OTTO. I am writing article on der strike. Ach, my English is not gut.

(Enter SYDNEY BARRETT.)

BARRETT. Good day, Comrades. ... The revolutionists at home.

PETER. Yes. We're always fighting among ourselves.

GRAY. The campaign promises well.

BARRETT. I am wondering if it is worth while.

GRAY. Don't say that. Everything is worth while. Every good thought, every right action, is assisting the scheme of the universe.

BARRETT. That sounds very well. Otto, see what's in the barrel. Do you drink beer, Gray? We ought to drink wine, of course. Beer is too Teutonic.

GRAY. No thanks. I must be off. I'm getting some facts for you.

BARRETT. Thanks. Three lagers—long—you'll join us, Otto?

OTTO. Ja, my friend.

(BARRETT sits at table with PETER. OTTO brings beer.)

PETER. Good luck.

(They drink.)

We must organise an active campaign. We have enough speakers. We'll send them all over the electorate. If we do nothing else, we'll spread our propaganda.

OTTO. Ja, dat is so—propaganda.

(OTTO returns to bar and his article.)

PETER. The Labour Party has missed its opportunity. We must teach the people what Socialism means.

BARRETT. Yes.—Something ought to be done. Are you off, Gray?

GRAY. I'll be in the library. You need coaching in economics.

BARRETT. That's true. I'll trust you to supply me with the facts.

PETER. We'll keep the red flag flying.

GRAY. Yes—the flag of the future.

(Exit GRAY.)

BARRETT *(Suddenly)*. Peter, I can't go through with this.

PETER. Why?

BARRETT. I've lost heart. She has failed me.

PETER. She does not understand. How can you expect it?

BARRETT. You understand. You are an aristocrat. Don't deny it. I know.

PETER. Ah, I have forgotten my past. I am a lumper.

BARRETT. I want your advice. You have taught me more than my professors. You know life from both sides.

PETER. Not that. I know society is bad—bad on both sides—and man is bad—but they will become better. I live for the future, not for the past. Socialism is my religion, the only one I have.

BARRETT. What do you think I should do! Hadn't I better give up! I've made a mess of things!

PETER. No! You must go on now. That is the only way.

BARRETT. I can't Peter. I have lost energy.

PETER. You must. Hopkins says you are an intellectual who will desert us. I know better.

BARRETT. I will not desert. The Socialists are right. Sometimes I am troubled with scepticism, but no—the present system can't be palliated—it must be destroyed. What a miserable thing we have made of life! And how splendid life would be, if we were not so prudent.

PETER. You must go on. It will be a good fight.

BARRETT. She'll be in her committee-room this afternoon. I can hardly believe it. And her friends and supporters. Scandal and afternoon tea, and advanced views on surf-bathing. Shall I ever convert her?

PETER. Not till you get married. You must take up a firm position.

BARRETT. Do you think so! It's a quaint conflict, isn't it? Why, we're engaged. It's too absurd. But what am I going to do?

PETER. It will all come right. We trust you. You must expound the Socialist philosophy. All other parties have failed—Conservatives, Liberals, Labourites, there is no difference between them—because they only play the political game. They have no principles, not any. They do not want to lose a steady job, that is all. You would speak for the workers of the world, as a revolutionary, an extremist.

BARRETT. Yes, we want extremists. I'm ready for anything at present. People must believe in Socialism, must desire it—if only they could see it! Why are they so blind!

PETER. We will make a campaign this country has not yet seen.

BARRETT. What can I do, Peter! I am driven both ways, and I don't seem to have any will power.

(Enter HOPKINS.)

HOPKINS. Hullo, Barrett! Have you retired yet?

PETER. He is going to stand.

HOPKINS. I hope you won't get in, then.

BARRETT. Why?

HOPKINS. There is something in the political atmosphere that is unhealthy. I trust no politician. I wouldn't trust myself if I went into Parliament.

BARRETT. Perhaps I will retire.

HOPKINS. Ah, what did I tell you! I knew he wouldn't stand.

BARRETT. What is that?

HOPKINS. I knew you would desert.

BARRETT. Why?

HOPKINS. You are not one of us. You are a rich man.

PETER. Rot.

BARRETT. I can't help that.

HOPKINS. And you don't want to offend the lady. You put sex before Socialism.

PETER. Shut up, Hopkins.

HOPKINS. You're all the same, you intellectuals. You amuse yourself with Socialism—that's all.

You have no real sympathy with the working class. When it comes to the point you throw us over. I knew how it would be.

PETER. You're wrong, Hopkins, Barrett is going to stand.

HOPKINS. Is that true?

BARRETT. Yes. I want to prove, Hopkins, that it isn't the workers who are the greatest revolutionaries. I'll go through this election to the bitter end.

HOPKINS. Do you really mean it!

BARRETT. My campaign begins in earnest now.

HOPKINS. I had doubts.

BARRETT. I want to get into Parliament—to criticise it, to demonstrate its futility.

(Enter ARTHUR GRAY.)

GRAY. What's the row?

BARRETT. We're getting up steam.

GRAY. Here are some figures.

BARRETT. We'll forget the facts.

PETER. Parliament is a good thumping board for propaganda.

BARRETT *(With enthusiasm)*. And I mean to thump hard.

OTTO *(Behind bar)*. Dat is so.

BARRETT. How can anyone oppose Socialism when once it is understood! Everybody must be dissatisfied—the rich as well as the poor. People must desire change—any kind of change.

HOPKINS. And we needn't wait for a majority. Give us a strong fighting minority, and we'll shake capitalism to its rotten foundations.

BARRETT. That is the way to talk. We may be ready now. Nobody can predict precisely when a revolution is at hand.

GRAY. Socialism in our time!

PETER. We'll stir things up!

BARRETT. Yes. This is a No-compromise Campaign. We want only Socialist votes.

PETER. No Non-unionists here.

HOPKINS. We'll give 'em hell upon earth.

BARRETT. You have given me hope and enthusiasm.

OTTO *(Filling glasses)*. We vill drink you ver' gut health.

HOPKINS. Rely on me. I'll talk, or canvass, or stick bills—anything you like.

BARRETT. Thanks.

PETER. It moves—it moves.

(OTTO brings round drinks.)

HOPKINS. We'll have the barricades up yet.

BARRETT. The people may be with us, they've never had a chance yet. We must trust the people.

OTTO. Dat is gut—ver' gut.

PETER (*Lifting glass*). Comrade Barrett!
GRAY. Comrade Barrett!
HOPKINS. The revolution!
OTTO (*Beaming*). Der revolution.
(*MEN drink and thump table.*)

Curtain.

ACT TWO

Scene Two

(*MISS QUIVERTON's Committee Room. Table spread with electoral rolls, books, newspapers, etc. A telephone. Placards on wall.*)

(*BERTIE WAINWRIGHT, an athletic young man, and VIOLET FAULKNER, a serious young lady, are working at table. MISS PERKINS has assumed command.*)

MISS PERKINS (*At 'phone*). Will you see about the printing at once! We'll never get through. ... Yes? It should have been finished yesterday. ... The Polynesian Mission can wait. And send another thousand cards immediately—the 'Purity of the Home' cards. ... Very well then, no mistakes. (*Putting down tube.*) A most unbusinesslike firm. (*Arranging papers etc. at table.*) We must get those letters away at once.

BERTIE. What a pile!

MISS PERKINS. Success depends on system.

BERTIE. How you remember things, Miss Perkins.

MISS PERKINS. Business is simply a matter of detail. It is a masculine superstition to suppose that women lose their heads at moments of excitement. There are 250 letters to post. And I require three typewritten copies of our address to factory girls.

BERTIE. Is that my job?

VIOLET. I'll attend to that, Miss Perkins.

BERTIE. I don't know much about these things, honour bright.

MISS PERKINS. It is not necessary to emphasise the obvious, Mr Wainwright. Your duties will be clearly defined.

BERTIE. Thanks. I'm awfully glad to be of service, but I don't get much time for cricket.

VIOLET. You are still interested in cricket, Mr Wainwright?

BERTIE. Rather. I've just been selected for the Victorian Eleven.

VIOLET. The Australian ideal of technical education.

MISS PERKINS (*Bustling round*). I think that finishes the correspondence. I forgot. Please write out an advertisement for our Town Hall Meeting. I am talking on Ideal Domestic Service among our farmers' daughters.

BERTIE. Certainly. What have I got to say?

MISS PERKINS. I do not expect a literary composition, Mr Wainwright. A plain statement that I am going to speak will suffice.

BERTIE. Oh yes, of course. Are you going now?

MISS PERKINS. I shall return shortly. I must run round to the League to look over our manifesto.

BERTIE. Is there any message for Miss Quiverton?

MISS PERKINS. Tell Miss Quiverton we are doing splendidly. There is no need for her to worry. I shall attend to all the details. I'll take those letters myself. (*Picks up pile.*) Men always forget to post letters. Good-day.

VIOLET. Good afternoon.

BERTIE. Good afternoon.

(Exit MISS PERKINS.)

Isn't an election good sport. It will be jolly fine if Miss Quiverton wins.

VIOLET. I am greatly perturbed. Doris is so wilful.

BERTIE. By jove, it is funny for people who are engaged to oppose each other on political principles.

VIOLET. I am afraid I do not possess your subtle sense of humour, Mr Wainwright. I must inform you that the engagement is going to be broken off.

BERTIE. I thought it would. I went to school with Syd.

VIOLET. So I have heard.

BERTIE. He was eccentric then, always reading and studying. He won all the prizes.

VIOLET. Indeed! There are even graver charges against Mr Barrett than that.

BERTIE. I suppose you are interested in law and politics. The pater wanted me to do law. He said it was a training for the mind. But I never had much time for study.

VIOLET. I had time for nothing else.

BERTIE. I never learned anything at school.

VIOLET. Your frankness is very engaging, Mr Wainwright.

BERTIE. Cricket is the only subject I can talk intelligently about. They say I have the makings of a good left-hand bowler. I can swerve two and a half inches from the leg.

VIOLET. After all, physical culture was the Greek ideal.

BERTIE. I don't know, Miss Faulkner. I didn't do Greek. I did Latin instead. Latin was compulsory.

(Enter DORIS.)

DORIS. Good-day! Been having an interesting chat?

VIOLET. Very. Mr Wainwright has been telling me all about his studies.

BERTIE. Miss Perkins said to tell you we were all doing splendidly.

DORIS. Thanks, Bertie. I was sure you would. It's so good of you to help us like this. What in the world have you got there!

BERTIE. The new cards—'Purity of the Home.'

DORIS. Miss Perkins is an ideal secretary. I don't know what I would do without her. I haven't to think at all.

BERTIE *(Rising)*. I'll have to hurry round with this ad. Will you want me again this afternoon?

VIOLET. No, thank you.

BERTIE. I want half an hour at the nets. We're playing New South Wales next week.

DORIS. I'll be there to watch your famous swerve.

BERTIE. I mightn't come off, you know. I can only do it with a new ball. I'll put a card in my hat for luck. Good-bye!

(Exit BERTIE.)

VIOLET. I like Mr Wainwright very much. He has a child soul.

DORIS *(Suddenly)*. I won't, Vi. I can't go on.

VIOLET. You must.

DORIS. I was forced into it. I didn't mean to stand against Sydney. What will he think of me! He hasn't written for a whole week.

VIOLET. Mr Barrett is a Socialist. He has no sense whatever of either his moral or political responsibility.

DORIS. Politics means more to him than they do to me.

VIOLET. No, no, darling.

DORIS. They do. He has ideals. He told me he had. He wants to destroy everything.

VIOLET. Yes—that is too true. That is the difference between you. He will only destroy, while you will build up.

DORIS. No, I won't. I don't want to.

VIOLET. Socialism may be a beautiful dream, but it is contrary to human nature. History and Biology both teach us that men are not equal.

DORIS. I don't care. You haven't been in love, Vi.

VIOLET. I don't believe in love. It is the frailest and most fleeting of all human emotions.

DORIS. I won't give Sydney up. I can't live without him.

VIOLET. You must, darling. A suffragette said that man was only a biological necessity.

DORIS. Oh Vi, I don't want argument. I want sympathy.

VIOLET. You are in love only because for centuries that was woman's sole occupation. Now she realises that she has a mission and an individual life of her own. You must break off the engagement at once.

DORIS. Oh Vi!

VIOLET. You must, dearest. Think of your life work.

DORIS. How can I tell Sydney! He will be so angry.

VIOLET. You must be brave, Doris.

DORIS. Everything is so confused. I don't know what to do.

(Enter SIR JOSEPH QUIVERTON.)

SIR JOSEPH. The strike is spreading. Never in the history of the Commonwealth have we experienced such a condition of industrial unrest.

DORIS. You are a confirmed pessimist, Father.

SIR JOSEPH. Not at all. That is a popular illusion regarding my true character. I am really a cheerful man. I always try to look on the bright side of things, but when there is no bright side how can I be expected to look on it.

VIOLET. We are making progress, Sir Joseph.

SIR JOSEPH. I hope you have a good grip on the situation.

DORIS. I find the technical terms rather confusing. What is the real meaning of the Referendum.

SIR JOSEPH. A vote of the whole people.

DORIS. I thought that was all arranged by the Caucus.

VIOLET. No, no, Doris. You must get clear ideas on those subjects.

DORIS. It's no use. You are a lawyer, but I could never understand Political Economy.

VIOLET. You must read *Hansard*.

DORIS. I was told it would spoil my style.

(Enter LADY PILLSBURY.)

LADY PILLSBURY. Good afternoon. I can only stay a few moments.

DORIS. Please sit down. You must be tired.

LADY PILLSBURY. Yes, dear. I am always tired.

DORIS. You need a change in the country.

LADY PILLSBURY. I loathe the country. The food is so monotonous. I have some important news.

SIR JOSEPH. Yes?

LADY PILLSBURY. That man Johnson's retiring, so Sir Henry has secured a walk-over.

SIR JOSEPH. That makes our prospects look brighter.

LADY PILLSBURY. I don't know what he can do, but he may be able to help you on the platform. I shall see that he is very brief. My husband is such a tedious speaker.

(Enter JOHN K HILL.)

JOHN K HILL. I hope I don't intrude.

DORIS. Rolls may be inspected within.

LADY PILLSBURY. We are sowing the seed.

DORIS (*Giving card*). My card, Mr Hill.

JOHN K HILL. Miss Quiverton, you are an Australian Joan of Arc.

DORIS. Oh, thank you.

JOHN K HILL. I saw your photo in the *Australasian*. I have sent it abroad to my friends.

DORIS. That is what one usually does with the *Australasian*.

SIR JOSEPH. Must you really go, Lady Pillsbury.

LADY PILLSBURY. Yes, really. I have such a lot to do. I am arranging that we shall all wear white rosettes to defy the blood red banners of the Socialists. Politics absorbs so much attention that I have no time to attend to mere domestic details. For the last week I have left Sir Henry entirely in the hands of the maids.

DORIS. Poor Sir Henry.

LADY PILLSBURY. I am the one to be studied, my dear. (*Rising*.) No, I must go. Being President of four Leagues, I am fighting Socialism in many quarters. Good afternoon.

JOHN K HILL. Warmest congratulations to Sir Henry.

(*Exit LADY PILLSBURY.*)

I received a wire from Chicago to-day. 'Go ahead with the coffins,' it said.

DORIS. And will you?

JOHN K HILL. We are depending on you, Miss Quiverton, to save the industry. That is the only solution of the Chinese question. Here is the latest *Socialist*.

VIOLET. A wicked paper.

JOHN K HILL. 'Organ of revolution.' 'Voice of discontent.'

SIR JOSEPH. It is the employers now-a-days who have most cause for discontent. The word of a reputable merchant is no longer accepted.

JOHN K HILL. It contains an article by that young man, Sydney Barrett. He is blowin' out more hot air.

DORIS. Do tell me what he has been saying.

JOHN K HILL (*Reading*). I have marked sert'n passages. 'Listen to this Chinese proverb on the Class War:- "I am the rice; thou art the water; how can there be peace between us?" Every strike is right. Every strike is morally justifiable. There is no immorality save defeat. There can be no amicable relations between Labor and Capital, between Right and Wrong, till every employer is eliminated—' Eliminated.

SIR JOSEPH. Haven't I passed Wages Boards for the settlement of industrial disputes!

DORIS. 'The Boards reduce the men's wages, do they not, and Arbitration is resorted to to imprison those who raise objections.'

SIR JOSEPH. Who said that?

DORIS. Mr Barrett.

SIR JOSEPH. The man's an agitator, a red-flagger, a Yarra-banker.

JOHN K HILL (*Impressively*). That is not the finish. He goes on to propose, what do you think?

VIOLET. What?

JOHN K HILL. Repudiation of the National Debt.

VIOLET. Repudiation.

SIR JOSEPH. Confiscation! The issue, in every sense of the word, is a vital one. May I see the paper for a moment?

(*Examines article.*)

VIOLET. Speaking as a lawyer, Mr Hill, I should say that article was seditious.

JOHN K HILL. I guess it is. And we're up against it, good and hard. What are we goin' to do about it?

SIR JOSEPH. If things come to the worst steps will be taken to enforce the *Strike Coercion Act*. I will abolish Trial by Jury to expedite justice. I will prohibit demonstrations on the Yarra bank. What more can a moderate man do?

JOHN K HILL. Can't Barrett be arrested?

DORIS. Arrested!

SIR JOSEPH. Desperate cases require desperate remedies.

VIOLET. I think we should use diplomacy. There are more women than men in the electorate. If we work conscientiously, Mr Barrett will be defeated.

JOHN K HILL. I want to help. What can I do? Gee, you'll need conveyances for your supporters. I'll hire every car in town.

VIOLET. What a bright idea!

JOHN K HILL. Motors, taxis, cabs, lorries, perambulators—every vehicle that runs on wheels. We'll make our opponents walk.

VIOLET. Splendid!

JOHN K HILL. I'll beat it to the battlefield, and remember in the bright lexicon of youth there is no such word as fail.

SIR JOSEPH. I'll go with you, Mr Hill. I must interview the Commissioner of Police.

(Exeunt SIR JOSEPH QUIVERTON and JOHN K HILL, talking earnestly.)

DORIS. Father threatens to put Sydney in prison. It's an outrage.

VIOLET. That is not your father's intention.

DORIS. If he attempts to, I'll join the Socialists.

VIOLET. You can't retire now if you wanted to. Think of the scandal.

DORIS. Things are worse than ever, much worse.

VIOLET. You are still attracted towards that man.

DORIS. Why must I give Sydney up?

VIOLET. Mr Barrett wants to provoke what is described as the Class War. He would abolish the rights of property. Oh Doris, think of the poor people he would ruin. He would take away their hard-earned savings, and divide them among the unemployed. It is terrible to think of the consequences. There might be bloodshed.

DORIS. Why don't you help me, Vi!

VIOLET. It is a noble mission you have undertaken. I'm proud of you. We'll have a quiet talk, dear.

DORIS. I'm so tired and miserable.

(Ring at 'phone.)

Bother! *(Goes to 'phone.)* Hullo, hullo. ... Yes. ... Oh Sydney! Why haven't you written? ... What do you say? Am I going on? I'm fighting for the home I haven't got. ... Yes, yes. You may call if you are good. I'll be here, in the Committee Room. Violet won't mind. ... At once? Now? Are you coming now? ... Of course. Nobody will be here. Good-bye—yours, for the established order. *(Puts down 'phone.)* It's Syd. He's at the Socialist Club. He's coming round here.

VIOLET. You should refuse to see him.

DORIS. I want a few minutes alone.

VIOLET. You must be firm, Doris. Remember, all is over between you.

DORIS. You are too intellectual. It's not fair.

VIOLET. Your duty is clear. You must not listen to his excuses or be beguiled by specious arguments. Now is your opportunity. Tell him the truth.

DORIS. How can I hurt him like that?

VIOLET. Duty first, Doris. Promise you will give him up.

DORIS. Oh Violet.

VIOLET. You are setting an example to the English-speaking race. You are an instrument in the hands of a higher power.

DORIS. Miss Perkins seems to be the higher power.

VIOLET. Doris!

(Enter MISS PERKINS.)

MISS PERKINS. Do you know we are going to have a band for our Town Hall meeting! The 'White Rose Troubadours' have offered to play without remuneration. Here is a copy of our manifesto.

DORIS. It looks very nice, indeed. But haven't we sent out enough?

MISS PERKINS. We must flood the electorate with instructive literature. Has Mr Wainwright taken round the advertisement?

VIOLET. Yes.

MISS PERKINS. We expect an immense crowd. Our series of addresses to business women has made our good work widely know.

DORIS. I can't speak in public.

MISS PERKINS. I shall address the meeting. You may be indisposed.

DORIS. Thanks. I shall be.

MISS PERKINS. 'The Good Woman's Rally'—Do you like that heading?

VIOLET. It is effective.

DORIS *(Looking over manifesto)*. What is this? 'Curfew Bell'—do I believe in that?

MISS PERKINS. Certainly.

DORIS. What are these clauses? 'Anti-Cigarette Crusade!' 'Abolition of mixed bathing!' 'The proper lighting of our parks and gardens!' I don't think we should spoil our gardens with unromantic illuminations.

MISS PERKINS. It is all part of our general crusade against vice. We are concentrating all our energies on Social Reform.

DORIS. Are we opposed to all forms of pleasure?

MISS PERKINS. That is what the public demands.

DORIS. I seem to be frightfully strict. Don't you think things will be a little dull if I am returned?

MISS PERKINS. That is our objective. I hope I have forgotten nothing.

VIOLET. So far everything is most satisfactory. Will you have afternoon tea with me, Miss Perkins?

MISS PERKINS. I think we'll have time for a fruit salad.

DORIS. Excuse me, I will rest a little.

VIOLET. Remember what I told you, Doris.—Promise!

DORIS. I promise, Vi. I want a few minutes to study the manifesto.

MISS PERKINS. Don't worry, Miss Quiverton. I feel confident you will achieve a triumphant victory.

VIOLET *(Kissing DORIS)*. It's all for the best, Doris.

(Exeunt VIOLET and MISS PERKINS.)

(DORIS throws down manifesto, and sits in reflective attitude.)

(Enter SYDNEY BARRETT.)

DORIS. Oh! Come in Syd. Nobody is here.

(BARRETT walks round nervously.)

What is the matter, Syd? You are pale.

BARRETT. Why did God create the world?

DORIS. How do I know?

BARRETT. I have something to say to you.

DORIS. Sydney!

BARRETT. Yes!

DORIS. Aren't you going to kiss me?
BARRETT. No.
DORIS. Everybody is away.
BARRETT. I am not ashamed of kissing you before people. It is for higher reasons I refrain.
DORIS. Don't be so restless. What is the matter with you?
BARRETT. This country, if you wish to know, is on the verge of a revolution.
DORIS (*Languidly*). So I have heard.
BARRETT. This is no time for idle gossip. This is no time for political platitudes. I am forgetting my duty. When I am with you, Doris, I usually forget my duty.
DORIS. Why do you wear those perpetual red ties? They don't suit you a bit.
BARRETT. Why are you opposing me? I suppose you have some motive.
DORIS. If you only knew, Sydney! Why won't you give up this political dissipation?
BARRETT. You cannot rise to my ideal.
DORIS (*Anxiously*). You will be put in prison.
BARRETT. Why not?
DORIS. What is the good of being a martyr for nothing!
BARRETT. What do you propose?
DORIS. I don't know. I don't want to hurt you. I can't tell you.
BARRETT. I want you to explain, Doris. Promise you will be brave.
DORIS. Yes, Syd! What is it?
BARRETT. This is not a hasty decision. I have not trusted to the inspiration of the moment.
DORIS. Don't look so serious! I can't bear any more. I have been worried all morning with people calling, and telephoning, and manifestoes. Mr Hill has talked about coffins. Lady Pillsbury had another sick headache. Miss Perkins has made me approve a Curfew Bell in the interests of morality. Violet has said I am setting an example to the English-speaking race. And Father has assured me, three times at least, that the issue in every sense of the word is a vital one. I can't go on like this. I want a little peace.
BARRETT. Not peace, but a sword. Won't you realise the importance of the position? What do you think all these strikes are for? In a period like this one must be on one side or the other. Doris, Doris, this is a cause that demands all sacrifices. The people are with us. We must trust the people. Why have you so little faith?
DORIS. Violet says, Oh—I can't tell you the truth.
BARRETT. I have something to say to you.
DORIS. You said that before.
BARRETT. I know I have a habit of repeating myself—one of my qualifications for a political career. Doris, will you give up this frivolous opposition and work for the Cause?
DORIS. Violet says I am working for a cause.
BARRETT. I hope I have been fair to you. Oh Doris, I love you—but I cannot marry you. Forgive me!
DORIS. You know, Sydney, I have a generous nature. I have been thinking of you. How can you possibly live without me?
BARRETT. This action is imperative. You do not understand my mission. Considering your environment it is hardly to be expected that you would. I do not blame you. I am before my time.
DORIS. Everything is very satisfactory then.
BARRETT. Satisfactory? Why? How?
DORIS. I had just decided that I could not possibly marry you.
BARRETT. Do you mean that?
DORIS. Yes. I didn't know how to tell you. I hope I have not spoilt your life.

BARRETT. This is an extraordinary situation.

DORIS. Henceforth it is a duel between us.

BARRETT. Australia must choose between your ideal and mine.

DORIS. You are sure to lose.

BARRETT. I am not on trial. It is Australia that is on trial.

DORIS. I am sure you will be disappointed. People don't believe in poets and martyrs and heroes and prophets. They belong to the past.

BARRETT. Doris, do you imagine that anybody will vote for you?

DORIS. Of course they will. They are so stupid. Why, people even vote for father.

BARRETT. I forgot that.

DORIS. We must not judge him too harshly. He bears the burden of Empire.

BARRETT. There is no more to be said. Good-bye.

DORIS. Good-bye, Sydney. One kiss.

(He kisses her.)

Don't say it is to be our last.

(She holds him.)

BARRETT *(Breaking away)*. I am in earnest. People are waiting for a man like me.

(He makes for door.)

DORIS. Sydney!

(He returns.)

One more kiss!

BARRETT. No, no. I dare not.

DORIS. Just one.

BARRETT. No. You are the Good Woman candidate. Good-bye.

(Exit BARRETT, hastily.)

DORIS *(Rushing after him)*. Sydney, come back. I don't want to be a good woman.

(She breaks down.)

Curtain.

ACT THREE

(Vacant square, at street corner. Night before election.)

(A Liberal rally. Motor car used as platform. The usual election CROWD.)

FAT MAN. Speak up.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Get a move on!

MISS PERKINS *(Concluding her address)*. ... We are fighting for Social Reform and the Purity of the Home. There are our banners.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Are you in favour of hobble skirts?

MISS PERKINS. I am not in favour of small boys smoking cigarettes.

(Laughter.)

The prohibition of tobacco and alcohol would make you a better man. ... It is time women took their proper place in our National Assembly.

(Cheers.)

In Finland and Norway women have asserted their right to legislate as well as vote. I am informed that in Denmark, women act in the capacity of police constables.

(Laughter.)

Why should Australia lag behind Europe? We will show tomorrow what we can do. I ask every man and woman who values home life to vote for and support Miss Quiverton—the Good Woman candidate.

(Cheers.)

SIR HENRY. Lady Pillsbury will now address the meeting.

(MISS PERKINS sits down. LADY PILLSBURY steps forward.)

FAT MAN. What price the hat?

CHEEKY YOUTH. Are you going down the Bay on Sunday?

BERTIE. Give the lady a chance.

CHEEKY YOUTH. That's Bertie Wainwright.

FAT MAN. What ho! Bertie.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Who got one for ninety-seven?

(Laughter.)

BERTIE. Have a bit of sense.

FAT MAN. Played, Bertie. Hit him to leg.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Don't be like the 'googlies.'

SIR HENRY. I appeal to the British sense of fair play.

FAT MAN. Sit down, you loafer.

WORKING WOMAN. That's her 'usband.

FAT MAN. He looks like it.

BERTIE. Be sports now, be sports!

FAT MAN. Give the old lady a chance!

(Cheers.)

LADY PILLSBURY. Ladies and gentlemen -

FAT MAN. There ain't none here.

LADY PILLSBURY. I made a mistake. Some of you are not gentlemen -

(Hurrah! Hurrah!)

It is indeed time women took their proper place in the government of the country.

WORKING WOMAN. Go home and mind the baby.

FAT MAN. She hasn't got one.

LADY PILLSBURY. Women have been kept down in the past and have had no opportunity -

WORKING WOMAN. Fancy listenin' to that all day.

CHEEKY YOUTH. And she's never been kissed.

(Laughter.)

LADY PILLSBURY *(Excitedly)*. You are afraid to listen to me. You are cowards. You don't want to hear the truth.

FAT MAN. Are you in favour of a tax on bachelors?

(Laughter.)

LADY PILLSBURY. The Socialists will destroy the home. They will take your children away.

WORKING WOMAN. I wish they would take mine.

(Laughter.)

LADY PILLSBURY. They will divide everything among themselves. They won't leave a roof to our heads.

CHEEKY YOUTH. We'll sleep in the park.

LADY PILLSBURY *(Losing her head)*. We will carry this election in spite of the hooligans. That's what you are—hooligans.

WORKING WOMAN. Who are you? Don't you talk to me. I'm as good as you. Have you ever worked for your livin'?

FAT MAN. Keep goin', old woman.

CHEEKY YOUTH. You're doin' well.

LADY PILLSBURY. Have you no sense of chivalry? Have you no respect for your wives.

CHEEKY YOUTH. You ain't my wife, Fanny.

WORKING WOMAN. Speak to your 'usband. 'E's used to it.

FAT MAN. Sit down! Sit down!

LADY PILLSBURY. Your conduct is disgraceful—disgraceful. I am ashamed of you—hooligans.

FAT MAN. Where's the candidate?

(LADY PILLSBURY retires, exhausted. Cheers and laughter.)

MISS PERKINS. There are other speakers to follow.

FAT MAN. Bring on the candidate.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Come on, Doris.

FAT MAN. Doris, Doris. That's a pretty name.

MISS PERKINS *(Businesslike)*. As the Prime Minister has to leave us to address his supporters in the Town Hall, I will call on him now to make a few remarks. No doubt you are all anxious to hear him.

CHEEKY YOUTH. No, no.

FAT MAN. Bring Doris on.

MISS PERKINS. At great personal inconvenience Sir Joseph Quiverton consented to be present at our meeting to-night. I ask you to give him a patient hearing.

(SIR JOSEPH rises, bows to LADIES, and faces the CROWD.)

The Prime Minister.

(Cheers and groans.)

SIR JOSEPH. Lady Pillsbury, ladies and gentlemen—when I look round on this great gathering, representing all classes of the community -

FAT MAN. Loafer! Loafer! Git work!

SIR JOSEPH. When I look round on such a gathering as is assembled here to-night I feel that it is the duty of all patriotic parties to sink minor differences—to forget past grievances, parochial jealousies—and, standing shoulder to shoulder, to take a broad national outlook.

CROWD. Hear! Hear!

SIR JOSEPH. Our policy—the policy of the Great Liberal Party -

(Cheers and groans.)

It took a great deal to bring us together, but now we are together it will take a great deal to separate us -

FAT MAN. Traitor! Judas! Judas!

SIR JOSEPH. The Liberals and Conservatives fused without the sacrifice of a single principle -

FAT MAN. You never had any—Judas!

SIR JOSEPH. Our policy is to keep in full step with the progress of the country. I am a progressive man, and a warm friend of all legitimate reform.

FAT MAN. You turned your coat, Joe.

OLD MAN. Hear! Hear!

SIR JOSEPH. But I have no sympathy with visionary ideals—chasing rainbows or the *Aurora Borealis* -

CHEEKY YOUTH. Why don't you spell it?

SIR JOSEPH. You should attend a night school, young man.

(Laughter.)

I am a plain practical man -

CHEEKY YOUTH. You're a wowser.

FAT MAN. Wowser! Wowser!

CHEEKY YOUTH. Who tried to stop Tatt's?

FAT MAN. Joseph the Wowser.

(Laughter.)

SIR JOSEPH. Wowser, my friends, I am proud of the title. What you call Wowserism stands for all that is highest and noblest in the life of the community.

(Laughter and cheers.)

We must solve in a practical manner the problems of to-day. The next generation will have its own problems to solve. Of course, the Liberal proposals will evolve and expand -

FAT MAN. Talk politics.

CHEEKY YOUTH. You're a Wowser.

FAT MAN. Talk politics.

SIR JOSEPH. Yes. I will talk politics, and in the teeth of opposition, I repeat that as long as I am entrusted with the leadership of this great Party, I mean to continue in the sphere of practical legislation.

(Cheers.)

OLD MAN. He's an orator. You can't deny that.

SIR JOSEPH. Practical legislation—that is our motto. But we must be careful not to do harm. We are a debtor, not a creditor nation, and cannot afford to do anything that would penalise us in regard to our loans. The financial problem -

CHEEKY YOUTH. Why don't you pay your butcher's bill?

(Laughter.)

SIR JOSEPH. The situation is grave, and we must act in a statesmanlike manner. Confidence—confidence, that is what we seek to inspire both at home and abroad.

OLD MAN. He ain't beat yet. Go in, Joe, give it to 'em.

SIR JOSEPH. For twenty-six years I have held my seat in Parliament, and during that period I have never broken a single pledge.

OLD MAN. Hear! Hear!

SIR JOSEPH. I stand before the electors pointing confidently to my past career as the fearless champion of progress and reform—the Farmer's Friend—the unswerving advocate of democratic legislation.

FAT MAN. Are you in favour of a barbed wire fence round Port Philip to keep out the barracuda?

SIR JOSEPH. Who are our opponents? Men of straw.

(Laughter.)

What have they ever done for Labour?

FAT MAN. You never done a day's work in your life.

SIR JOSEPH. I have fought for more work for all—higher wages for all—and general prosperity to Australian men and women.

(Cheers.)

OLD MAN. You're a statesman, Joe. They don't like it.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Shut up.

SIR JOSEPH. This election is a turning point in the history of the Commonwealth. We are standing, as it were, at the parting of the ways. Will this great country make for progress or re-action? That is the question before us. The answer depends on you.

FAT MAN. Yes—No. No—Yes.

CHEEKY YOUTH. What are you talking about, Joe?

(Enter HARRY HOPKINS and ARTHUR GRAY. They take prominent positions near car.)

SIR JOSEPH. If the Socialists gain a majority -

HOPKINS. They will.

SIR JOSEPH. I have no fear of the results—I trust the people—I said *if* -

(Laughter.)

confidence in Australia will be shaken. No prudent man would dare to invest. What would be the result of such an election? I will tell you. Capital will be driven out of the country.

HOPKINS. You've said that before.

FAT MAN. Give your daughter a show.

(Laughter.)

WORKING WOMAN. Come on, Doris. Don't be bashful!

BERTIE. Don't you know how to be sports?

CHEEKY YOUTH. Bertie made a blob. Clean bowled.

SIR JOSEPH. As I stand before you to-night in the proud position of leader of a great Party -

CHEEKY YOUTH. Turn it up, Joe.

FAT MAN. You're gettin' stale.

SIR JOSEPH. Regarding our Imperial responsibilities -

FAT MAN. Now, boys, all together.

(The CROWD sing 'Old John Brown'.)

Old Joe's body lies a-mouldering,

Old Joe's body lies a-mouldering,

Old Joe's body lies a-mouldering in the grave

But his talk goes marching on.

(Cheers and laughter.)

His talk goes marching on.

SIR JOSEPH. Regarding our Imperial responsibilities -

CROWD *(Shouting).*

Old Joe's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,

But his talk goes marching on.

FAT MAN. Poor old Joe.

CHEEKY YOUTH. You're a has-been.

LADY PILLSBURY *(Coming forward)*. Shame on you! Do you call yourselves men?

CHEEKY YOUTH. 'Ow is it, birdie?

WORKING WOMAN. Go 'ome to your 'usband.

FAT MAN. Put Doris on. Come on, Doris. We've bin waitin' all night for you.

BERTIE. Play the game there. Be sports.

SIR JOSEPH. I urge on the electors the necessity of casting an intelligent vote to-morrow. The eyes of the Empire are upon us.

HOPKINS. I want to ask the speaker a question.

FAT MAN. Get on the car.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Play us a tune, Bertie.

SIR JOSEPH. Certainly, I will answer any intelligent question.

(Cheers.)

HOPKINS. There are two thousand men on strike -

SIR JOSEPH. I can't hear you. Come up here.

(Cheers as HOPKINS steps on to the car.)

HOPKINS *(On car)*. There are two thousand bakers on strike.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Who told you?

HOPKINS. Do you propose to nationalise the bread industry?

SIR JOSEPH. My policy is to carry out the wishes of the people.

(Cheers.)

HOPKINS. Will you nationalise bread?

SIR JOSEPH. Man does not live by bread alone.

(Cheers.)

GRAY. That's no answer. That's no answer.

SIR JOSEPH. It is a big subject, my young friend. I would not like to commit myself to a positive answer. That is a question for sociologists.

HOPKINS. You can't. You don't know how.

SIR JOSEPH. I didn't say I was against it.

HOPKINS. Bosh!

SIR JOSEPH. When you are twenty years older -

HOPKINS. Will you give us Government bread?

FAT MAN. And free beer!

(Laughter.)

SIR JOSEPH. You are a Socialist, I believe.

HOPKINS. I am.

SIR JOSEPH. So am I—but a safe Socialist.

(Cheers.)

HOPKINS *(Getting down from car)*. I don't want to hear any more flap-doodle.

FAT MAN. You're right there.

HOPKINS. You're only a bluff. You know nothing about Socialism.

SIR JOSEPH. Your question is irrelevant. The nationalisation of bread does not come within the sphere of practical politics.

(Cheers.)

OLD MAN. You had him there, Joe.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Put your head in a bag.

SIR JOSEPH. Does any other gentleman wish to ask a question?

(GRAY goes up to car.)

If not, we will now pass on to more practical matters. History teaches us that we must beware of hasty legislation -

GRAY *(On car)*. I would like to ask a question.

(Cheers.)

SIR JOSEPH. I refuse to be harassed by frivolous interruptions.

GRAY. If you don't know how to answer it -

SIR JOSEPH. What is it?

GRAY. Will you give a bonus to babies?

SIR JOSEPH. I have no time to go into that matter to-night. I have another important meeting to address.

HOPKINS. You don't know anything about it.

FAT MAN. Loafer!

SIR JOSEPH. We should teach our children to be self-reliant, to depend on themselves, not on the State.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Throw in your marble, Joe.

SIR JOSEPH. The time is not yet ripe for the full consideration of such subjects. We must deal in a sound practical manner with questions affecting the welfare of the people. The Liberal Party represents all classes without fear or favour, and exists for the equal benefit of all.

(Cheers.)

GRAY *(Retiring from car)*. He knows no better.

SIR JOSEPH. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your patient hearing, and, in conclusion, urge on you the necessity of casting an intelligent vote to-morrow in favour of the Liberal and Progressive candidates.

(Cheers.)

(SIR JOSEPH sits down. SIR HENRY steps forward.)

SIR HENRY. I have much pleasure in proposing a vote of confidence in Miss Quiverton—the Good Woman candidate.

BERTIE. I second that. Miss Quiverton's a good sport.

MISS PERKINS. All in favour signify the same in the usual manner.

(Hands go up.)

Against.—Carried.

BERTIE. Three cheers for Miss Quiverton.

(Three cheers are given.)

Tiger.

(Another cheer.)

MISS PERKINS. I thank you on behalf of the candidate for your attendance here to-night.

FAT MAN. Where's Doris?

CHEEKY YOUTH. We want to hear Doris.

WORKING WOMAN. Is Doris deaf and dumb?

FAT MAN. Come on Doris.

MISS PERKINS *(Sharply)*. Miss Quiverton is indisposed. The meeting is now closed. Be sure to vote for the Good Woman candidate.

(Cheers.)

(BERTIE winds up car. JOHN K HILL toots on horn. The CHEEKY YOUTH gives advice. At last the car moves off amid cheers.)

CHEEKY YOUTH. They're off.

FAT MAN. Good-bye, Dorry. Why don't yer raffle ther car!

CHEEKY YOUTH. Good-bye, Fanny. See you later.

WORKING WOMAN. Go 'ome to yer 'usband.

BERTIE *(Waving banner)*. Vote for the Good Woman candidate.

(As the PARTY drives away, there is a fight in the CROWD. A POLICEMAN interferes and takes off one of the MEN. The CROWD follows him. When the BAND is heard, the PEOPLE return.)

OLD MAN. Old Joe ain't done yet. He's an old war horse, 'e is, you can't deny that.

FAT MAN. He's a gas bag.

OLD MAN. They've left a flag behind.

HOPKINS. Tear it down.

GRAY. Don't go yet. Barrett is going to speak here. He'll give you some straight talk. He's a Socialist.

WORKING WOMAN. This 'ere Socialry may be all right for them wot 'as nuthin', but it ain't no use for the likes of us.

OLD MAN. I ain't no Socialist.

HOPKINS. You're an old blitherer. *(To CROWD.)* Hold on there.

OLD MAN. Don't talk to me like that, young feller.

WORKING WOMAN. I never 'erd sich tork in all me life. It makes me tired.

HOPKINS. Don't go yet. The fun's going to begin.

(BAND heard approaching.)

Hallo! Here they come.

GRAY. Barrett's coming.

WORKING WOMAN. Who are they?

GRAY. The Socialists.

FAT MAN. What is it? The Salvation Army.

(A straggling SOCIALIST procession, headed by BARRETT, PETER JENSEN, and OTTO appears, with BAND and banners—'Workers of the world unite!' 'Revolution!' 'Industrial unionism!' They enter singing 'Raise Your Standard, Brother.')

SOCIALISTS. *Raise your standard, brother, higher, still, and higher*

Let the thought of justice all your deeds inspire.

Let your eyes be kindled with a love-lit fire.

(Chorus.)

Virtue for our armour, justice for our sword,

Human love our master, human love our lord -

So shall we be marching, fighting in accord.

(Cheers. SOCIALISTS take up position and put up flags.)

PETER. Where's the soap box? You can speak here.

OTTO. Vorkers of the vorld unite!

PETER. Comrade Barrett will now address the meeting.

HOPKINS. We haven't got motor cars, but the soap box will do for us.

PETER. Go on Syd! Comrade Barrett!

OTTO. Comrade Barrett!

(BARRETT gets on soap box. Cheers from \SOCIALISTS.)

BARRETT. Comrades, I didn't hear the Prime Minister, but I'm sure he talked platitudes.

OLD MAN. He's a better man than you. He talks politics.

BARRETT. It is not my intention to talk politics. I don't believe in politics.

FAT MAN. Give us your program.

BARRETT. I haven't got one. I believe in all the things you are too stupid to understand.

OLD MAN. Do you believe in Immigration?

BARRETT. No, why bring in agricultural labourers. Haven't we sufficient dullness of our own! Australia doesn't need workers—it needs idlers—it needs Egyptologists, and Biblical critics, metaphysicians and Italian tenors, and it needs them very badly.

FAT MAN. Talk sense.

OLD MAN. You don't represent the working men.

BARRETT. Of course I don't. That's why they should vote for me. Remember it is not your business to teach me—the proletariat is always the most Conservative element in Society—it is my business to teach you.

FAT MAN. Are you in favour of free beer?

(Laughter.)

BARRETT. I've told you till I'm tired that Socialism, properly understood, means much more than an economic change of Society.

OLD MAN. Talk practical politics.

BARRETT. Haven't you had enough of practical politics? What does your practical man do? He establishes a jam factory or opens a coal mine. What is the good of that? We can do without coal, and nobody wants jam. Or he irrigates a splendid desert for the production of lucerne and dried apricots. And you applaud him for it—fools! Why, the curse of this country, and every other country, is the plain practical common sense man with his low standards and narrow outlook. We want poets, dreamers, builders of ideals. The national need is a thoroughly unpractical man.

OLD MAN. You're mad.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Get your head read!

BARRETT. Take the Prime Minister—Australia's noblest son.

(Laughter.)

He alleges he is bursting to reform things—the tote, the tariff—Bible reading in State Schools—the regulation of the sale of matches—anything, everything, nothing—when the time is ripe. He would promise to reform the Kingdom of Heaven when the time is ripe. But it never is.

(Cheers.)

The practical man assures us, with enthusiasm, that the time is not yet ripe for any kind of change. I tell you the time is ripe. It has been ripe for centuries. And our politicians are ripe too—not to say rotten.

(Laughter.)

FAT MAN. Why don't you join the Labor Party?

BARRETT. I am an extremist. All your leaders have failed because they have tried to please you by getting down to your own level. I don't want to please you. Therefore, I am the man you should support. ... 'All things flow,' said Heraclitus of old, and our party stands for the philosophy of change.

CHEEKY YOUTH. Get your hair cut.

WORKING WOMAN. Go home to your mother, sonny.

FAT MAN. Do you believe in a State Bank?

BARRETT. No. I don't believe in anything. It's a waste of time talking to you people. If you are too ignorant to understand the new philosophy, don't vote for me. I don't want your votes. And I tell you now, I will never open a bazaar for you. I'll never send a subscription to your local cricket club. I won't find your foolish sons jobs. I won't do anything for you at all. That is my policy.

(Cheers.)

I believe in bread and the circus, especially the circus. That is why I advocate a National Theatre for the production of unpopular plays. But I don't suppose you are interested in my views.

FAT MAN. No! No!

CHEEKY YOUTH. Go on, Willy.

BARRETT. Well, then, I believe in compulsory Greek in schools and universities. I believe in open-air cafes, where one could drink wine and meet one's friends, and listen to stringed quartets. I believe in picnics and festivals, a two-hours' working day, and in the abolition of all useless

machinery ... I believe a million a year should be expended on Art ... And I favour the suppression of daily newspapers, picture-shows, ANA debates, feminine fiction, pony-racing, pleasant Sunday afternoons, and all other forms of popular amusement. Does that touch the great heart of the people?

FAT MAN. No. You won't get in.

BARRETT. I've talked for a month to large and unintelligent audiences, but agitation wearies me. However, if you believe in change, vote for me to-morrow—but if you are contented with things as they are—don't.

(BARRETT sits down. Cheers.)

PETER. I move a vote of confidence in Comrade Sydney Barrett—the only revolutionary Socialist.

GRAY. I second that.

HOPKINS. All in favour of the Socialist candidate raise their hands?

(Hands go up.)

The black-livered scoundrels against him put up their hands! The motion is carried.

(Cheers. The SOCIALISTS make a demonstration.)

(The red flag is waved. Cheers etc.)

HOPKINS. 'The Red Flag'.

PETER. 'The Red Flag'.

(The SOCIALISTS sing lustily, 'The Red Flag'.)

BARRETT. Don't sing that damned thing again.

SOCIALISTS. *The people's flag is deepest red,
It shrouded oft our martyred dead.
And ere their limbs grew still or cold
Their heart's blood dyed its ev'ry fold.*

HOPKINS. Let her go. All together.

SOCIALISTS. *Then raise the scarlet standard high!
Within its shade we'll live and die.
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the Red Flag flying here.*

Curtain.

ACT FOUR

(SIR JOSEPH QUIVERTON's Drawing Room. Election Night.)

SIR JOSEPH *(At 'phone)*. What is that? ... Don't shout. Articulate more distinctly. ... The Prime Minister's speaking. Any further returns? ... What is causing the delay? ... Have I won? W-o-n. ... Done. Who is done? ... Doubtful. Everything is doubtful. I am doubtful. You are doubtful. The immortality of the soul is doubtful. ...

(Enter BUTLER.)

Curse these Swedish machines! Why can't we have British. ... Hillo. I can't hear you. ... Ring up at once, if you hear anything. ... Very well, then— *(Throwing down the tube.)* The results are still delayed. This suspense is frightful.

BUTLER. Are you safe, Sir Joseph?

SIR JOSEPH. Not yet. It is a close contest.

BUTLER. After all you've done for them, Sir. You have given the people too much already, and yet they're not satisfied.

SIR JOSEPH. This is the first time I have been seriously opposed for twenty-three years. The people are certainly forgetting their best friends.

BUTLER. This could never happen in England, Sir. The lower orders know their place.

SIR JOSEPH. I have done my best. It is unbecoming a public man to do more. What an election night! Momentous issues are at stake. The eyes of the Empire are upon us. *(Sitting down exhausted.)* What will they say in England?

BUTLER. England is strong enough to be sympathetic. Look at our good work in India, in Egypt, in Ireland. It speaks for itself. We have the knack of government, of administration—just a knack, Sir. It is largely a matter of birth.

SIR JOSEPH. You are a true Britisher, Percy.

BUTLER. Yes, Sir. I was born and bred in Birmingham. *(With superiority.)* Australia is a young country. It has no hereditary aristocracy. We should assist you, Sir, with more of our best public men. Australia needs more English advisers, more officers, more clergymen, more governors.

SIR JOSEPH. You might arrange the supper room, some of my friends will arrive soon.

BUTLER. Yes, Sir. I have iced the champagne.

(Cheers outside.)

SIR JOSEPH. What is that?

BUTLER. *Vox populi.*

(They go to window.)

There are some people in the street. They are cheering Miss Quiverton. I see her car.

SIR JOSEPH. I am restless to-night. Keep the car! I will go round to the newspaper office. There must be some results through.

BUTLER. Yes, Sir. You are a statesman, Sir Joseph. If there were more men of your stamp in public life, democratic legislation would never have been heard of.

(Exit BUTLER.)

(Enter DORIS.)

DORIS. Who's winning, Father?

SIR JOSEPH. The returns are incomplete. Have you any news?

DORIS. Crowds are waiting round the newspaper offices, cheering and hooting. It is like a Test Match. The Socialists must be doing well. There are red flags everywhere, and noisy processions with bands playing the *Marseillaise*. It is quite thrilling.

SIR JOSEPH. I must know how we stand. I will return as quickly as possible.

(Exit SIR JOSEPH.)

(Enter BUTLER.)

DORIS. Are we going to win, Percy?

BUTLER. I don't know, Miss. The lower orders vote in this country.

DORIS. Yes, that causes the delay; it wastes such a lot of time counting their votes.

BUTLER. They don't deserve to vote. If I had the authority I would take it away from them.

DORIS. Yes, indeed.

BUTLER. Australia is the only country in the world where the peasantry make the laws. Won't you sit down, Miss?

DORIS. I'm too excited. An election is just thrilling. I had every car in the city painted red, white and blue with dear little Union Jacks, rushing my supporters to the poll.

BUTLER. I voted this morning, Miss. I am opposed to every form of Socialism.

DORIS. We are opposed to everything—that is the reason of our success.

(Enter BERTIE WAINWRIGHT.)

BUTLER. I am decorating the supper table, Miss.

(Exit BUTLER.)

DORIS. Isn't an election too thrilling!

BERTIE. By Jove, this is a hummer. I think we're going strong. There's a crowd collecting outside.

(Cheers and groans outside.)

DORIS. What is that?

(They rush to window.)

BERTIE. It looks like a riot.

DORIS. The Socialists must be somewhere about.

BERTIE. Hullo! Here's a bit of fun. They're chasing somebody. It's a fight. I must be in this. ... There he goes ... he's jumping the fence—well done—why, it's Syd.

DORIS *(Screaming)*. Quick, Bertie, don't let him get hurt.

BERTIE *(Rushing to rescue)*. Hold on, there, I'm coming.

(Exit BERTIE.)

(Cheers, groans etc., outside.)

(Enter BARRETT through window, with coat torn etc.)

BARRETT. Pardon my haste. I climbed the wall.

DORIS. Oh, Syd!

BARRETT. I was recognised—there's fame. Bertie rescued me from the patriots.

DORIS. There is blood on you—Oh, Syd! Are you hurt?

BARRETT. The secret of a happy life is to live dangerously.

(He staggers a little. DORIS holds him and puts him on lounge.)

(Enter BERTIE.)

BERTIE. How is it, Syd?

BARRETT. Thanks, Bertie. You are not a philosopher, but you are a man of action.

DORIS. Tell me what happened. No—no—don't talk. You mustn't talk.

BARRETT. It is always a pleasure to me to talk. ... I was attacked by a very sanguinary body of men, in high collars—it looked like a soft-goods' brigade. They were flapping flags and playing *Rule Britannia*. It displeased me.

DORIS. Get some bandages. Please be quick.

BERTIE. I'll fix him. I've played football before today.

(Exit BERTIE.)

DORIS. I am sorry, Syd.

BARRETT. There is no cause for anxiety. It seems as if responsible government is going to be restored.

(Enter BUTLER.)

BUTLER. There's a Socialist here, Miss.

DORIS. Never mind. He is still a man.

(Enter BERTIE, with cloth.)

BARRETT. Is that toga for me?

DORIS. Hush!

BUTLER. Is there anything I can do, Miss?

DORIS. No, thanks, Percy.

(Exit BUTLER.)

(DORIS and BERTIE bandage BARRETT.)

BARRETT. It's nothing at all.

BERTIE. Who's in the lead?

DORIS. There's some delay—will you run down to the city and find out what's going on?

BERTIE. With pleasure. I have six cars outside—are you sure you will be all right, Syd?

BARRETT. Yes, thanks.

BERTIE. I won't be long.

DORIS. Don't hurry, Bertie.

(Exit BERTIE.)

Oh, Syd!

(He draws her to him and kisses her.)

BARRETT. The fate of all reformers. St John was right. The world hates everything that is good.

DORIS. Are you comfortable there?

BARRETT. Perfectly.

DORIS. I have missed you a lot.

BARRETT. I had to see you to-night. I had to tell you this election won't make any difference. The world of politics is well lost for love.

DORIS. Men are nobler than women, I think.

BARRETT. I am not noble. I have deceived you. You thought I was a strong man. Women love strength, even brute strength—a Neolithic taste. But I am not strong. I am weak.

DORIS. You mustn't say that.

BARRETT. I admit it. In the old days, when we lived in caves, did not the hunters go forth and slay the bear! That was man's work. It is still man's work. Women demand that he shall go forth and conquer—even on the Stock Exchange. I am not a conqueror. I cannot slay the bear.

DORIS. I don't want you to.

BARRETT. Yes, you do. You want to love a strong man. You want to be ruled, dominated.

DORIS. No, I don't. You forget I am emancipated.

BARRETT. You do. All women do. They love men of action, conquerors, heroes.

DORIS. You always had absurd notions regarding women.

BARRETT. Why did you love me? Wasn't it for my ideas, my brilliant ideas?

DORIS. No. I don't care for your ideas, not apart from you. Ideas are like fashions—they soon change. Men change their ideas as women change their hats. I don't love you because you are a communist, or a pragmatist, or an Atheist, or a Post-Impressionist. I don't love your ideas. I love you, Sydney.

BARRETT. That is all I wanted to know.

(They embrace.)

(Enter SIR JOSEPH QUIVERTON.)

SIR JOSEPH. No news. The wires have been cut. ... To whom do I owe the honour of this visit?

BARRETT. To your supporters. They chased me over the back wall.

SIR JOSEPH. It is Mr Barrett.—Leave my house, sir.

BARRETT (*Trying to rise*). I am afraid I can't. And it is not your house, Sir Joseph. I am abolishing private property.

DORIS. Mr Barrett is my guest.

SIR JOSEPH. The crowd has gone away. You will be comparatively safe.

DORIS. Mr Barrett is wounded. Don't rise, Syd. You need rest.

BARRETT. I don't need rest. I need action. We all do.

DORIS. I thought you were giving up politics to devote all your attention to me.

SIR JOSEPH. What could Mr Barrett do in Parliament?

BARRETT. Destroy it. What else is there to do with Parliament? To create one must destroy.

SIR JOSEPH (*Huskily*). We have universal suffrage. I oppose it, but we have it. Parliament represents the people.

BARRETT. Pardon me, Sir Joseph. Parliament does not represent the people. Parliament represents the stupidity of the people. That is the foundation of representative government.

SIR JOSEPH. I am a progressive man. I have always believed in a policy of progress and reform, but Utopian Socialism does not come within the sphere of practical politics. When the time is ripe -

DORIS. But it never is, is it, Father?

SIR JOSEPH. I am a safe Socialist. History, my young friend, has a habit of repeating itself.

BARRETT. History may be a record of crimes and blunders, but I am not cynical enough to believe that History will every repeat *you*, Sir Joseph.

(*Enter BUTLER.*)

BUTLER. Mr John K Hill.

(*Enter JOHN K. HILL. Exit BUTLER.*)

JOHN K HILL. Good evening. Are the numbers up?

SIR JOSEPH. We expect word every minute.

JOHN K HILL. This country is swifter than I thought. Reminds me of Uruguay.

DORIS. You know Mr Barrett?

JOHN K HILL. I have heard of him.

(*Enter BUTLER with torn Union Jack.*)

BUTLER. The grand old flag, Sir. It was just brought round. It must have blown over.

SIR JOSEPH. Thanks, Percy.

BUTLER. It was torn during a discussion, Sir.

(*SIR JOSEPH takes it up reverently.*)

It was a common hawker who brought the flag.

BARRETT. The Bottle Accumulators' Union—loyal to the flag.

(*Exit BUTLER.*)

SIR JOSEPH. 'Tis only a bit of bunting -

BARRETT. Made in Germany, probably.

(*SIR JOSEPH hangs up flag.*)

(*Enter BUTLER.*)

BUTLER. Sir Henry and Lady Pillsbury.

(*Enter SIR HENRY and LADY PILLSBURY.*)

LADY PILLSBURY. How are you, Doris? I can't breathe for excitement. I have been ill all day.

JOHN K HILL. How do we stand now?

SIR JOSEPH. It is impossible to obtain reliable information. This morning I felt certain of victory.

Now my confidence is shaken.

SIR HENRY. Elections are always uncertain.

(Enter BUTLER, with wire.)

BUTLER. Wire, Sir.

(Blare of trumpets.)

LADY PILLSBURY. What is that hideous noise? I loathe the cornet.

BUTLER. Some of our supporters have returned with a band.

(Exit BUTLER.)

SIR JOSEPH *(Reading telegram)*. 'Returned. Immense majority.' ... Thank God, I have done my duty.

(He sits down. He is warmly congratulated.)

Thank you.

(Enter BUTLER.)

BUTLER. More wires, Sir ... Congratulations, Sir Joseph.

SIR JOSEPH. Thanks, thanks.

BUTLER. Now, Sir, you have 'em in your power. You must be firm, Sir. In my opinion, speaking as an Englishman, you should call out the military and shoot the paid agitators. May I take the liberty of inviting the servants to a glass of wine—I seldom touch Australian wine myself, we will drink your health, Sir Joseph. You have risen from the ranks—estate agent to Prime Minister.

(Exit BUTLER.)

SIR JOSEPH *(Reading telegrams)*. The Liberals are winning—winning all along the line.

(They crowd round.)

(SIR JOSEPH tears one open after another.)

Crabbe returned—easy victory ... He will checkmate the extremists. Smith ... Muddle ... level headed man. Victoria—big Liberal majority. New South Wales—Liberal victory assured. The people have returned to their senses. There has been some mistake. Where are the Socialists now?

(Shouts, cheers, trumpets etc.)

BARRETT *(Rushing to window)*. In revolt—the proletariat in revolt.

(‘Rule Britannia’ is played. BARRETT stops and addresses COMPANY.)

The masses still think Imperially.

SIR JOSEPH. The people don't want changes.

BARRETT *(Dramatically)*. No, the people fail, but the Cause goes on. *(He returns to lounge.)*

DORIS. Isn't it time I was returned?

SIR JOSEPH. Yes, yes. I will have to return thanks at the Town Hall.

DORIS. You must see, Father, this delay never occurs again.

(The COMPANY is talking excitedly.)

SIR JOSEPH. The patriotism of the great dailies is most commendable. I shall recommend the editors for Birthday Honours.

JOHN K HILL. This election will be historic. It has profound significance.

SIR HENRY. 'Tis not in mortals to command success.

LADY PILLSBURY. Our homes are safe.

JOHN K HILL. Australia's a most extraordinary country.

DORIS. Do you like Australia now, Mr Hill?

JOHN K HILL. We're goin' right ahead.

DORIS. You finance in continents, I know.

JOHN K HILL *(Spreading himself)*. Early business trainin'. When I was a strugglin' young man in Chicago—my own home town, where pleasant faced cows stand in silvery streams—I turned over a thousand dollars every consecutive mornin', just to give me an appetite for lunch.

LADY PILLSBURY. You seem to live a fast life, Mr Hill.

JOHN K. HILL. The doctor's orders, Lady Pillsbury.

(Enter VIOLET.)

VIOLET. Doris ... darling ... returned ... returned at the head of the poll.

(She falls into DORIS's arms, breathless.)

(People crowd round DORIS with congratulations. All excited.)

I can't speak.

DORIS. There must be some mistake.

BARRETT. Not at all. The public never makes a mistake.

DORIS. Are you quite sure, Violet?

VIOLET. Yes, an overwhelming victory.

DORIS. Responsible government will now be restored.

LADY PILLSBURY. I cannot condole with you, Mr Barrett. I think your defeat will be the salvation of the country.

BARRETT. Thank you, Lady Pillsbury.

LADY PILLSBURY. It shows what women can do if they are only given the opportunity.

JOHN K HILL *(Stepping forward)*. I think the influence of women should permeate every phase of political life, and purify, and elevate it. Australia—this virgin continent—is now represented by a refined young lady like Miss Quiverton. I congratulate you. As an American, I can only say I hope and trust my country will soon take its place in this forward movement.

(Enter BERTIE.)

BERTIE *(Shouting)*. We're in—hurrah! Three cheers for Miss Quiverton.

(Cheers given.)

(Exuberantly.) I feel I could step out and hit the googlies clean out of the ground.

DORIS. Thank you, Bertie.

JOHN K HILL. I'll send a marconigram to Chicago right off. I'll have to get busy right here, or it's time Little Willie came off the roads.

BERTIE. Can you stand a shock, Syd?

BARRETT. That is what I need. It would be a new sensation in this city.

BERTIE *(To COMPANY)*. Mr Barrett has lost his deposit.

LADY PILLSBURY. What a veritable triumph!

BERTIE. And serves you jolly well right. Miss Quiverton wins by an eight thousand majority. You only got one hundred and seven votes.

BARRETT. A hundred intelligent people in one electorate!—There is hope of the country still.

(Enter MISS PERKINS, unemotional and businesslike.)

MISS PERKINS. Congratulations, Miss Quiverton. Everything has been most satisfactory.

DORIS. Our success is almost entirely due to the Woman's League.

MISS PERKINS. All parties have worked well.

DORIS. It is very wonderful, but I think I shall have to resign my seat.

MISS PERKINS. Good gracious, why?

DORIS. I don't think I would care for politics every day. I prefer to keep it as a hobby.

LADY PILLSBURY. You mustn't think of it, my dear.

VIOLET. You are too emotional, Doris. You have an impetuous nature.

DORIS *(Sweetly)*. I mean I could not do the position justice.

LADY PILLSBURY. But Mr Barrett might stand again and bring on the Class War.

BARRETT. I am tired of politics, too. Who can lead, if there is nobody to follow?

DORIS. I have no intention of resigning in favour of Mr Barrett. I do not think Mr Barrett is a fit and proper person to represent this constituency. I hope rather you will take my place, Miss Perkins.

MISS PERKINS. Thank you, Miss Quiverton, if you desire it. It may be difficult to arrange.

(Enter BUTLER.)

BUTLER. Supper is served, Sir.

SIR JOSEPH. Ladies and gentlemen, may I ask you to take a glass of wine in honour of the occasion?

DORIS. I am sure you are all dying for supper. It has been a most nerve-racking day.

SIR JOSEPH. I am proud of Australia to-night.

(Exeunt JOHN K HILL and LADY PILLSBURY, SIR HENRY and MISS PERKINS, BERTIE and VIOLET.)

Will you join us, Mr Barrett? On such a night as this, political antagonisms are forgotten.

BARRETT *(Rising)*. Thank you, Sir Joseph.

DORIS. In a few moments, Father. I have something to say to Mr Barrett.

SIR JOSEPH. We await your pleasure.

(Exit SIR JOSEPH, followed by BUTLER.)

BARRETT. My dreams and reality have not harmonised.

DORIS. Never mind, Sydney

BARRETT. I am tired of the proletariat, tired of Australia, Australia is too British, the proletariat is too conservative.

DORIS. I told you people would not vote for you. You are too clever.

BARRETT. It is quite impossible to create a revolution in this country. The people don't desire it.

They wouldn't recognise it if they saw it.

DORIS. Of course not. Didn't I tell you that all along?

BARRETT. Our people are contented with things as they are. They have no ideas, no aspirations.

South America is a more interesting country to live in than Australia. Less Saxon, more Spanish.

The blood is hotter there, things happen. Nothing will ever happen here.

DORIS. Do you always want to stir up strife, Syd?

BARRETT. Life is conflict. Love is conflict. *(Embracing her.)*

DORIS. They will hear you inside.

BARRETT *(Releasing her)*. Do you think the masses desire freedom, joy, splendour? Do you think they want to overthrow society?

DORIS *(Firmly)*. I do not. They don't want anything. They want to be left alone. People don't like being disturbed.

BARRETT. An election is held. Politicians babble. Newspapers warn. The nation votes. What happens? Nothing. Things remain exactly the same as they were. And are the people—the enlightened democracy—disgusted with that? No, they cheer, they actually cheer. They wave penny flags, and some blow through a cheap cornet. Why, they rejoice at stagnation, they revel in it.

DORIS. We won't bother about them any more.

BARRETT. Damn the Democracy! I am happy to-night. I am free. I can laugh and love and live.

(Embraces her again.)

DORIS. I prefer you like that ... Syd. I have you now. You are all mine ... Tell me!

BARRETT. Yes, we are alone in the world.

(Great uproar; trumpets, cheers, etc.)

They are cheering the revolution that wasn't.

(Enter BERTIE, followed by VIOLET, MISS PERKINS, LADY PILLSBURY, and JOHN K HILL at short intervals. A little later, SIR HENRY and SIR JOSEPH.)

BERTIE *(Running to window)*. What a crowd outside!

VIOLET. And the flags!

LADY PILLSBURY. It's like a French *fête*.

(Cries of 'Liberalism!' 'Quiverton!' 'Pillsbury!' 'The Good Woman candidate!')

DORIS. The band is out of tune.

BARRETT. Democracy is always out of tune.

(Enter BUTLER.)

BUTLER. There's a big crowd below, Sir. They are trying to get into the garden. Shall I let them in?
It's a special occasion.

SIR JOSEPH. Certainly, Percy, certainly.

JOHN K HILL. It's me for the swamps—me for the tall timber.

BUTLER. It has been a most satisfactory election after all. As you eloquently expressed it, Sir Joseph, we have escaped from the arms of the vultures. The crisis is past. I shall sleep to-night, Sir.

(Exit BUTLER.)

DORIS. Father, Sydney and I are engaged again.

SIR JOSEPH *(Excitedly)*. I congratulate you both on your choice. *(Goes away.)*

DORIS. Where shall we go for our honeymoon?

BARRETT. Somewhere abroad.

DORIS. I know, Japan.

BARRETT. I want to see a democratic country, a free country.

JOHN K HILL. The United States, sir.

VIOLET. France, I suppose.

BARRETT. No. A revolutionary country.

JOHN K HILL. I recommend Uruguay. That's rapid.

BARRETT. No. Let us go to England.

(Cheers etc., grow louder. Enter BUTLER.)

BUTLER. The people want a few words from you, Sir.

BARRETT. I'll speak first.

DORIS. No, Syd. You will speak afterwards on my behalf.

(SIR JOSEPH makes slowly for window.)

SIR JOSEPH. The people expect a few words from me. I have nothing prepared.

(Great cheering, as he goes to window, and stands on chair. The PEOPLE group round him. BUTLER stands at his side with flag.)

SIR JOSEPH *(Addressing CROWD below in oratorical style)*. Ladies and gentlemen—This is the proudest moment of my life. The Great Liberal Party has succeeded in restoring responsible government on the broad platform of progress and reform.

CROWD. Loafer! Wowser!

SIR JOSEPH. I thank the people of this great Commonwealth—and the public spirited Press—

CROWD. Smoodger!

SIR JOSEPH. For their patriotic support during this great battle for political liberty—

(Cheers.)

and in placing us in the proud position we occupy to-night.

(Cheers—then a slight lull.)

BARRETT *(Cheerfully)*. Those are the people I was trying to emancipate.

DORIS. The time is not yet ripe, Sydney.

SIR JOSEPH. I mean to continue in the future as I have in the past. The time is not yet ripe—the time is not yet ripe -
(*Great cheering, trumpets, uproar, etc. BUTLER waves flag. BARRETT holds head in his hands.*)

Curtain.

Notes

ACT ONE

Setting: At the time of performance, Melbourne continued to serve as the temporary national capital and there was no official residence for the Prime Minister. Alfred Deakin, the last Liberal Prime Minister in office—replaced by Labor's Andrew Fisher in April 1910—lived at his private home *Llanarth*, at 400 Walsh Street, South Yarra overlooking the river during his three terms.

revolutionary socialist [revolutionary socialism]: socialist tendencies that subscribe to the doctrine that social revolution is necessary in order to affect structural changes to society. More specifically, it is the view that revolution is a necessary precondition for a transition from capitalism to socialism. cf. Louis Esson, 'Eight Hours Day', *The Socialist*, 28 April 1911.

the Riverina [from the Spanish *riverine* (between two rivers); in use as early as 1857]: agricultural region of south-western New South Wales, bordered on the south by the state of Victoria and on the east by the Great Dividing Range; Wagga Wagga, Albury and Griffith are major centres in the region. Esson's mother and her third husband James Gibb moved to the Riverina in 1906.

He proposes to confiscate land and capital [Collectivism]: political system in which a country's land and industry are owned and managed by a government or by all of its citizens together; Collectivism was an important part of Marxist–Leninist ideology in the Soviet Union. The irony is that Barrett is himself a wealthy land-owner.

this very issue of Socialism versus Private Enterprise: Socialism and Capitalism are opposing schools of thought in economics. The central arguments are about economic equality and the role of government. Socialists believe economic inequality is bad for society, and the government is responsible for reducing it via programs that benefit the poor (eg free public education, free or subsidised healthcare, social security for the elderly, higher taxes on the rich). On the other hand, capitalists believe that the government does not use economic resources as efficiently as private enterprise, and therefore society is better off with the free market determining economic winners and losers. Cf. Esson's essays: 'Parliament', *The Socialist*, 31 March 1911; 'The Factory', *The Socialist*, 14 April 1911; 'Eight Hours Day', *The Socialist*, 28 April 1911; and 'Socialism and Dogma', *The Socialist*, 8 March 1912.

Tory [Toryism]: political philosophy based on a British version of traditionalism and conservatism—Louis referred to 'the old-fashioned Tory Unionism'—which upholds the supremacy of social order as it has evolved throughout history. 'God, King and Country' is the mantra: Tories generally advocate monarchism; are usually of a high church Anglican religious heritage; and are opposed to the liberalism of the Whig faction. In Britain, the Tory political faction originated with the Cavaliers during the English Civil War.

Plato says that love is the highest wisdom.: A slight misreading of Plato: in the *Symposium* (c.385–370 BCE) Socrates is presented as a lover of wisdom (*sophia*); Plato presents the love of wisdom as the highest form of love. Esson referred to Plato extensively, in his prose particularly, more often than not in relation to Sydney: 'Along all the wide, merry streets should be open-air cafes where one might lunch, or sitting round little white tables, with a bottle of wine, and overlooking the Harbour—always the Harbour—listen to stringed instruments, and have time for Plato and the Peaks of Song.' 'The Essential Sydney', *Australasia*, 9 May 1907.

so much to do, so little done.: 'so little done, so much to do' quoted by Cecil Rhodes on the day of his death. Cf. Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam* AHH (1850) canto 73

*So many worlds, so much to do,
So little done, such things to be.*

It was Padric Colum who encouraged Esson to read Tennyson (see 'Three for Ireland', *Bookfellow*, February 1912).

Rhodes Scholar: international postgraduate award for students to study at the University of Oxford, named for the British mining magnate and South African politician Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902). The goals were to promote civic-minded leadership among 'young colonists' with 'moral force of character and instincts to lead' for 'the furtherance of the British Empire, for the bringing of the whole uncivilised world under British rule, for the recovery of the United States, for the making the Anglo-Saxon race but one Empire.'

squatter: Squatting in Australian history referred to someone who occupied a large tract of Crown land in order to graze livestock. Initially often having no legal rights to the land, they gained its usage by being the first (and often the only) settlers in the area. Eventually, the term *squatocracy*, a play on 'aristocracy,' developed to refer to some of these squatters. Esson referred to 'squatters' derisively: 'Some cockie or squatter's sure to come along and tell yer ye've no right to shoot on his lake, pretending' it's private property wen it aint.' 'The Duck Shooter', *The Weekly times*, 27 December 1913.

bakers' strike: 'According to the arrangement made at their meeting on Saturday night, members of the Operative Bakers' Union yesterday gave notice to their employers that, unless a promise is given this week that the wages board rate of 1/1½ (£2/14/-per week) is paid from the beginning of next week, instead of the old rate ... £2/10/- per week), which was fixed by Mr Justice Hoed in the Appeal Court, they will not resume work.' (*Argus*, 24, September, 1907). The dispute would continue intermittently until August, 1910. Esson writes about the Bakers Strike in 'The Right to Strike', *The Socialist*, 17 March 1911.

Wagga Wagga: a major regional centre in the Riverina region of New South Wales. The original inhabitants of the Wagga Wagga region were the Wiradjuri people. In 1829, Charles Sturt became the first European explorer to visit the future site of the city. Squatters arrived soon after. The town, positioned on the site of a ford across the Murrumbidgee was surveyed and gazetted as a village in 1849.

Agricultural Show: The first Wagga Wagga Show was held on 21 November 1864. Attractions at the show were cattle, sheep and horse exhibitions and prizes were awarded. The Wagga Wagga Show Society originally operated under Murrumbidgee Pastoral & Agricultural Association.

Trades Unionists: A trade union or trades union, is an organization of workers who have come together to achieve common goals such as protecting the integrity of its trade, improving safety standards, achieving higher pay and benefits such as health care and retirement, increasing the number of employees an employer assigns to complete the work, and better working conditions. The origins of trade unions can be traced back to 18th century Britain, where the rapid expansion of industrial society then taking place, drew women, children, rural workers and immigrants into the work force in large numbers and in new roles. 'The aim of true Unionism,' Esson wrote in 'Eight Hours Day', 'we may inform the oracle of the *Age*, is the complete overthrow of the Capitalist system, but Trade Unionism is not the craft Unionism that carries its banner on Eight Hours' Day.'

that little revolution in Uruguay: The New Australia Co-operative Settlement Association, known in short as the New Australia Movement, was founded by William Lane in 1892. Lane was a prominent figure in the Australian labour movement and had founded Australia's first labour newspaper—the *Queensland Worker* in 1890. A split in the Australian labour movement between those who went on to form the Australian Labor Party spurred Lane's intent to found a socialist utopia outside Australia. There was conflict amongst the settlers from the beginning over prohibition of alcohol, relations with the locals and Lane's leadership, 'I can't help feeling that the movement cannot result in success if that incompetent man Lane continues to mismanage so utterly as he has done up to the present,' wrote colonist Tom Westwood. Problems intensified after a second group of colonists arrived in 1894. Dissension caused a rift in the colony and in May 1894, Lane and 58 others left New Australia to found Cosme, a new colony 72 kilometres farther south. Eventually New Australia was dissolved as a cooperative by the government of Paraguay, and each settler was given their own piece of land.

bêche-de-mer: (*French*) sea cucumber; harvested in both Western Australia and Queensland.

long suit: outstanding personal quality or achievement.

Anti-Trust legislation [or competition law]: exists to promote and ensure the freedom and competitiveness of markets, by discouraging any practice or market structure that would reduce competition in the market.

Ceylon diver: ie Ceylon pearl-diver; or 'skin-diver', the pioneers in Ceylon who dove from pearls, sometimes to dangerous depths, before the invention of diving equipment. The pearl beds of South India and Ceylon constituted one of the two major sources of pearls in the world, rivalled in size only by that of Hainan. The pearls fished from the Gulf of Mannar were also considered among the best in the world and fetched a high price in Europe. The exploitation of pearl fisheries continued during the Dutch and the British colonial rule. The British earned considerable revenue from pearls of Ceylon, eg from March 1828 to May 1837 alone £227,131 were credited as revenue into the Ceylon Treasury on account of the pearl fisheries. Cf. Esson's story 'The Pearl of Torres' published in the American magazine *Adventure*, 18 June 1918.

Frozen mutton: The pioneers of the frozen meat industry in Australia were James Harrison—who invented the world's first commercial ice-making plant (1873) and exhibit at the Melbourne Exhibition—and Thomas Mort—who financed experiments to develop refrigeration machinery suitable for use in ships, trains and cold-storage depots (1875). A review by W Weddel and Co into the frozen meat trade in 1911 noted 'the greatly increased supply of frozen mutton from Australia, which was more than double that of the previous year; while the increase was from 461,902 carcasses in 1905 to 2,733,148 carcasses in 1910.' In 'Nationality in Art' (*The Bulletin*, 1 February 1923) Esson wrote: 'The Irish writers, who belonged to a small country themselves, were more sympathetic with Australian aspirations than the English, who were politely sceptical about anything more important than frozen mutton ever coming out of one of their own colonies.'

losing hazard: (*Billiards*) the pocketing of the cue ball off another ball.

Women's Anti-Socialist League: Cf. The Australian Women's National League (AWNL), an Australian political lobby group established in 1904 who acted in many ways like a political party, with an extensive branch network and the capability to run its own candidates. It was a conservative organisation with four key declared objectives: Loyalty to the Throne; To counteract Socialist tendencies; To educate the Women of Victoria to realise their political responsibilities; and, To Safeguard the Interests of the Home, Women and Children. The AWNL was supported in its foundation by the Victorian Employers' Federation and by employer bodies in other states, but it quickly became independent from those male dominated groups, and formed an anti-socialist alliance with the Farmer's League in 1905. The group aimed to espouse anti-socialist ideas to Australian women who had been given the right to vote in Australian federal elections in 1902. Leading Melbourne establishment figure Janet, Lady Clarke, held a meeting at her home in August 1903 to discuss the formation of such a conservative women's movement. Months later in March 1904, Lady Clarke's sister Eva Hughes organised a meeting at the Melbourne Town Hall. It elected a provisional committee and elected Lady Clarke as its inaugural president. On 25 October 1907 the League conducted the first Pan-Australian Conference of Anti-Socialist Women's Organisations. The League played an important role in achieving women's suffrage throughout Australia. By 1908, it had 10,000 members in Victoria alone, and helped convince the male conservative members of parliament that women voters would not necessarily be left-wing in disposition. In 1909, Lady Clarke died and was succeeded as President by her sister who stayed in charge until 1922. Andrew Fisher described the lobby group in 1912 as 'fierce and unceasing' in their political demands ... So far—singlehanded—I have beat them and kept them at bay, but how long can this last?'

The domestic helps have formed a union: As reported in the *Argus* (5 February 1897) the inaugural meeting of the Domestic Servants' Union was held on 4 February, 1897 in the old council chamber of the Trades Hall, 'Mr Barrett MLA in the chair, and Mr S Barker assisting. There were twenty-three members of the union present.' It was the beginning of a movement: as recently as March, 1912 (as reported by the *Sydney Morning Herald*) 'A Domestic servants' Union has been formed at Barcaldine on similar lines to those recently formed in Longreach, Winton, and Charleville, as a result of a meeting of hotel-keepers having raised the rates for board.'

wearing a red tie: in politics, a red flag is predominantly a symbol of socialism and communism; it has been associated with left-wing politics since the French Revolution (1789–99). Socialists adopted the symbol during the Revolutions of 1848 and it became a symbol of communism as a result of its use by the Paris Commune of 1871.

Beauties of Ruskin: John Ruskin (1819–1900), leading English art critic of the Victorian era, as well as an art patron, draughtsman, water colourist, prominent social thinker and philanthropist. He wrote on subjects as varied as geology, architecture, myth, ornithology, literature, education, botany and political economy. In the second volume of *Modern Painters* Ruskin advanced his theocentric system of aesthetics by which he hoped to explain the nature and demonstrate the importance of beauty. Beauty, he wrote,

is either the record of conscience, written in things external, or it is the symbolising of Divine attributes in matter, or it is the felicity of living things, or the perfect fulfilment of their duties and functions. In all cases it is

something Divine; either the approving voice of God, the glorious symbol of Him, the evidence of His kind presence, or the obedience to His will by Him induced and supported.

the influence of Leonardo on Perugino: Pietro Perugino (c1446/1452–1523), born Pietro Vannucci; Italian painter of the Umbrian school, who developed some of the qualities that found classic expression in the High Renaissance. According to Vasari, he apprenticed in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio alongside Leonardo da Vinci, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Lorenzo di Credi, Filippino Lippi and others. Piero della Francesca is thought to have taught him perspective form. Raphael was his most famous pupil.

Syndicalist [Syndicalism]: a proposed economic system, considered a replacement for capitalism. It suggested that workers, industries, and organisations be systematised into confederations or syndicates. It is 'a system of economic organisation in which industries are owned and managed by the workers.' For adherents, labour unions are the potential means of both overcoming economic aristocracy and running society in the interest of informed and skilled majorities, through union democracy.

Purity is a disease, and the suburban home is a horror: Cf. 'The suburban home must be destroyed. It stands for all that is dull and cowardly and depressing in modern life. It endeavours to eliminate the element of danger in human affairs. But without danger there can be no joy, no ecstasy, no spiritual adventures. The suburban home is a blasphemy. It denies life. Young men it would save from wine, and young women from love. But love and wine are eternal verities. They are moral. The suburban home is deplorably immoral. ... Purity is a disease, and the home is a horror.' 'The Suburban Home' by Louis Esson, *The Socialist*, 21 April, 1911.

Reign of Terror [or The Terror (*French: la Terreur*): label given by some historians to a period during the French Revolution. Several historians consider the 'reign of terror' to have begun in 1793, placing the starting date at either 5 September, June or March (birth of the Revolutionary Tribunal), while some consider it to have begun in September 1792 (September Massacres), or even July 1789 (when the first beheadings took place), but there is a general consensus that it ended with the fall of Robespierre in July 1794. Between June 1793 and the end of July 1794, there were 16,594 official death sentences in France, of which 2,639 were in Paris.

ACT TWO—Scene One

scabs: (*Derog.*) a person who refuses to strike or join a trade union or who takes the place of a striking worker; originally 'an unpleasant person.'

blacklegs: (*British*) person who continues working when fellow workers are on strike; origins appears to refer to strikebreakers in the coal mining industry would would refrain from washing their legs which would give away that they had been working.

Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864): German-Jewish jurist, philosopher, socialist and political activist. Lassalle is best remembered as the initiator of international-style socialism in Germany.

William Morris (1834–1896): British textile designer, poet, novelist, translator, and socialist activist associated with the British Arts and Crafts Movement. Morris raged against the ugliness and injustice of capitalist society. Capitalism is the word he used, as opposed to 'industrial society' or 'the modern world', after he read and embraced the writings of Karl Marx (and became a Marxist) in the 1880s. In his prose, Esson refers to Morris—an early associate of WB Yeats—as 'a seer' and 'a prophet'; see 'Socialism and Dogma', *The Socialist*, 8 March 1912; 'Something With a Cow in it' *The Bulletin*, 5 November 1914; 'Poets In Parliament' *The Bulletin*, 9 December, 1922; and 'The Legend of Art in Australia' ms.

Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919): German socialist and a co-founder, with Rosa Luxemburg, of the Spartacist League and the Communist Party of Germany.

SFA: Socialist Federation of Australasia. According to their manifesto (15 February 1908) their objective was 'the socialisation of the Means of Production, Distribution and Exchange.' The concluding paragraph reads:

The workers of Australia must, without delay, take up their position along with the organised class-conscious workers of all other countries. There is no escape from the baneful effects of Capitalism short of its complete overthrow, and this can only be achieved by the class-conscious industrial and political strength of the Working Class.

The Socialist Federation of Australasia therefore, CALLS UPON ALL WORKERS TO FORTHWITH IDENTIFY THEMSELVES WITH THE EXISTING SOCIALIST ORGANISATIONS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE STATES, and to work unceasingly for the complete overthrow of the Capitalist system, and for the emancipation of their class from wage slavery.

IWW: The Industrial Workers of the World; an international labor union that was founded in 1905 in Chicago, Illinois in the United States of America. The union combines general unionism with industrial unionism, as it is a general union whose members: referred to as 'Wobblies'—are further organised within the industry of their employment. The philosophy and tactics of the IWW are described as 'revolutionary industrial unionism', with ties to both socialist and anarchist labour movements.

The PLC: Political Labor Council. While struggling to balance an uneasy alliance of trade unionists and progressive social reformers during the 1890s, the political labor movement in Victoria underwent several changes of name. It was called the Progressive Political League between 1891 and 1894, the United Labor and Liberal Party of Victoria from June 1894, the United Labor Party from 1896 and the Political Labor Council of Victoria from 1901; before becoming the Victorian Branch of the Australian Labor Party.

De Leonites: followers of Daniel De Leon (1852–1914), American newspaper editor, socialist, politician, Marxist theoretician, and trade union organiser. He is regarded as the forefather of the idea of revolutionary industrial unionism and was the leading figure in the Socialist Labor Party of America from 1890 until the time of his death.

Christian Socialists: early in the 19th century, the French philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon expounded a 'new Christianity' primarily concerned with the plight of the poor. Saint-Simonians believed that the keynote of social development would be a spirit of association, with religion as the dominating force, that would gradually supplant the prevailing spirit of egotism and antagonism in society. They advocated (among other things) that inheritance rights be abolished so that capital could leave the hands of self-seeking capitalists and be placed at society's disposal. The Saint-Simonians imagined this and other related actions would effectively end the exploitation of the poor. The term 'Christian Socialism' was first appropriated by a group of British men including Frederick Denison Maurice, novelist Charles Kingsley, John Malcolm Ludlow, and others, who founded a movement that took shape in England immediately after the failure of the Chartist agitation of 1848. Cf. The Rev James Morell in Bernard Shaw's *Candida* is a Christian Socialist.

Socialists of the Chair: The historical school of economics was an approach to academic economics and to public administration that emerged in the 19th century in Germany. The school held that history was the key source of knowledge about human actions and economic matters, since economics was culture-specific, and hence not generalisable over space and time. The school rejected the universal validity of economic theorems. They saw economics as resulting from careful empirical and historical analysis instead of from logic and mathematics. The school also preferred reality, historical, political, and social, as well as economic, to mathematical modelling. Most members of the school were also *Sozialpolitiker* (social policy advocates)—concerned

with social reform and improved conditions for the common man during a period of heavy industrialization. They were more disparagingly referred to as *Kathedersozialisten*, rendered in English as 'socialists of the chair'—or 'armchair revolutionaries'—due to their positions as academics.

Fabians [The Fabian Society]: socialist society founded in 1884 in London, having as its goal the establishment of a democratic socialist state in Great Britain. The Fabians put their faith in evolutionary socialism rather than in revolution. High profile Fabians included George Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant, Graham Wallas, Sidney and Beatrice Webb.

Communists [Communism (from Latin *communis*, 'common', 'universal')]: the philosophical, social, political and economic ideology and movement whose ultimate goal is the establishment of the communist society, which is a socioeconomic order structured upon the common ownership of the means of production and the absence of social classes, money and the state.

Revisionists [Revisionism]: the revision of an accepted, usually long-standing view, theory, or doctrine, especially a revision of historical events and movements; a recurrent tendency within the Communist movement to revise Marxist theory in such a way as to provide justification for a retreat from the revolutionary to the reformist position.

Reformists: within the socialist movement, 'reformism' is the view that gradual changes through existing institutions can eventually lead to fundamental changes in a society's political and economic systems.

Moderates: voters who describe themselves as 'centrist' often mean that they are 'moderate' in their political views, advocating neither extreme left-wing politics nor right-wing politics.

Teutonic: of—or thought to be typical of—the groups of people in northwestern Europe of German origin.

surf-bathing: Until the 1850s, sea bathing was not generally considered acceptable in Australia. In Melbourne, the St Kilda Sea Baths were opened in 1860, and provided separate sections for men and women undercover. Swimming from the open beach was prohibited during daylight hours, but due to the heatwave in 1908, open bathing in daylight hours was permitted in Hobson's Bay. The prohibition of Sunday bathing was first challenged in 1912 by the Open Sea Bathers' League who dared to enter the water and were not arrested.

capitalism: economic ideology and system based on private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit. Characteristics central to capitalism include private property, capital accumulation, waged labour, voluntary exchange, a price system and competitive markets. In a capitalist market economy, decision-making and investment are determined by the owners of the factories of production in financial and capital markets, whereas prices and the distribution of goods are mainly determined by competition in the market.

ACT TWO—Scene Two

Polynesian Mission: The Seven Day Adventists undertook a Central Polynesia Mission in 1908 (Tonga, Samoa and Fiji).

honour bright: (*Brit. school slang*) on my honour.

Victorian Eleven: in 1891–92 the Earl of Sheffield was in Australia as the promoter of the English team led by WG Grace. The tour included three Tests played in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. At the conclusion of the tour, Lord Sheffield donated £150 to the New South Wales Cricket Association to fund a trophy for an annual tournament of intercolonial cricket in Australia. The three colonies of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia were already playing each other in *ad-hoc* matches. The new tournament commenced in the summer of 1892–93, mandating home and away fixtures between each colony each season. The three teams competed for the Sheffield Shield, named after its benefactor. The Victoria cricket team (or the Victorian Eleven), which first played in 1851, represented the state of Victoria in the Sheffield Shield first-class competition. Esson wrote on football for Melbourne *Punch*, but didn't give much space to cricket apart from the poem 'Hail and Farewell' (*Heart of the Rose*, 1907) about the change over season from winter to spring sport.

suffragette: a member of an activist women's organisations in the early 20th century who, under the banner 'Votes for Women', fought for the right to vote in public elections, known as 'women's suffrage'. The term refers in particular to members of the British Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a women-only movement founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst, which engaged in direct action and civil disobedience. In 1906, a reporter writing in the *Daily Mail* coined the term 'suffragette' for the WSPU, from 'suffragist', to belittle the women advocating women's suffrage. The militants embraced the new name, adopting it for use as the title of the newspaper published by the WSPU.

man was only a biological necessity: no know source, but Cf. anthropologist Margaret Mead was using the same joke fifty years later: 'Fathers are biological necessities, but social accidents.' (*A Cultural Anthropologists Approach to Maternal Deprivation* (1962))

the Commonwealth: The Australian colonies, all of which had Westminster-style representative institutions by 1890, became one nation on 1 January 1901 at which time the Commonwealth of Australia, with a federal structure, was established.

Hansard: the traditional name of the transcripts of Parliamentary Debates in Britain and many Commonwealth countries including Australia. It is named after Thomas Curson Hansard (1776–1833), a London printer and publisher, who was the first official printer to the parliament at Westminster.

Johnson's retiring: possibly William Elliot Johnson (1862–1932).

a walk-over: To gain an easy or uncontested victory.

The Australasian: a weekly newspaper, launched in 1864.

Strike Coercion Act: 'The Coercion Act' was the serious nickname given to the amendments made to the *Industrial Disputes Act* by the Wade Government in NSW in 1909. Charles Wade (1863–1922) was then Premier of New South Wales. Under the 1908 Act, there was provision for a penalty of £1,000 for a strike, lockout or anyone instigating them. There was also a prison sentence of two months against individual strikers. Under Wade's proposed amendments in 1909, there was a provision for twelve months gaol for anyone promoting or participating in a strike in any industry which could be defined as producing a 'necessary commodity', including coal mining. And a senior police officer could forcibly enter any place where it was suspected that a strike meeting was being held.

demonstrations on the Yarra bank: both the north and south banks of the Yarra River east of Princes Bridge have at different times been the site of a peoples' forum, often compared to London's Hyde Park and Sydney's Domain. Prior to the 1890 maritime strike, Queens Wharf had been a casual labour market and gathering place for unionists. In 1889 the Melbourne Harbour Trust prohibited meetings at the wharves, and Dr William Maloney, elected to the Legislative Assembly for West Melbourne on behalf of the Workingmen's Political League, recommended that some piece of land near Princes Bridge be reserved as a site for public meetings. Alfred Deakin suggested Flinders Park as a possible location, but although occasional public gatherings were held there in the 1890s, the river's south bank (near the present-day Alexandra Gardens) was favoured by 'Yarra Bankers' for regular Sunday afternoon forums and as the destination of processions on May Day. In 1907 meetings were allowed for the last time on an area to

the west of the new Queen Victoria Memorial and on the old Wirth's Circus site. Fearful of damage to the newly landscaped south bank, the Minister of Public Works ordered subsequent gatherings to take place in Flinders Park on the north side.

the Class War [frequently referred to as 'class warfare' or 'class struggle']: the tension or antagonism which exists in society due to competing socioeconomic interests and desires between people of different classes. The view that the class struggle provides the lever for radical social change for the majority is central to the work of Karl Marx and the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.

ACT THREE

hobble skirts: woman's skirt with a narrow enough hem to significantly impede the wearer's stride; it was a short-lived fashion trend that peaked between 1908 and 1914.

In Finland and Norway women have asserted their right to legislate as well as vote: *The Parliament Act* (1906) established the unicameral parliament of Finland and both women and men were given the right to vote and stand for election. Thus Finnish women became the first in the world to have unrestricted rights both to vote and to stand for parliament. The introduction of women suffrage in Norway took place in 1913 and in Denmark in 1915.

I am informed that in Denmark, women act in the capacity of police constables: The first policewoman in Germany was recruited in 1903 (Henrietta Arendt). In 1908, the first three women: Agda Hallin, Maria Andersson and Erica Ström, was employed in the Swedish Police Authority in Stockholm upon the request of the Swedish National Council of Women. The first female police officer in the USA appeared in 1910, and the first in England just a few years later. Lillian May Armfield was the first Australian, joining the Force in Sydney in 1915.

down the Bay: Port Phillip Bay; also commonly referred to (locally) as just The Bay.

googlies (googly): (*Cricket*) an off break bowled with an apparent leg-break action; a cricket ball bowled as if to break one way that actually breaks in the opposite way.

Liberal Party (*Politics*) [aka the Commonwealth Liberal Party (CLP), the Deakin–Cook Party, The Fusion, or the Deakinite Liberal Party]: political movement active in Australia from 1909 to 1917. The CLP came about as a result of a merger between the two non-Labor parties, the Protectionist Party and the Anti-Socialist Party (formerly Free Trade Party) which most of their MPs accepted. The CLP is the earliest direct ancestor of the current Liberal Party of Australia.

Conservatives: (*Politics*) right wing; favouring free enterprise, private ownership, and socially conservative ideas.

turned your coat: Cf. turncoat, a person who deserts one party or cause in order to join an opposing one.

Aurora Borealis: the *Aurora Borealis* (*Northern Lights*) and *Aurora Australis* (*Southern Lights*) are visual phenomenon, the result of electrons colliding with the upper reaches of Earth's atmosphere. Cf. Esson's poem 'Kelly in Greece', *The Bulletin*, 18 January, 1906.

Tatt's: The history of Tattersall's in Australia can be traced back to George Adams in 1881. Adams moved from England at the age of sixteen and worked in many positions including publican, stockbroker and baker. In 1881, working as a publican in Sydney, Adams took bets on horses which could be considered the start of the gambling company. However, the company started a serious lottery when Adams moved to Hobart in 1895 a move supported by the Tasmanian Government. He set up his first operation there and eventually the company developed in other states.

The Farmer's Friend: Throughout the nineteenth century in Britain the Conservative Party was frequently and justifiably referred to as the 'farmer's friend'. Eighteenth-century Tories had been proud of their 'country' politics, and their early nineteenth-century successors introduced and for thirty years defended those most obvious symbols of government support for the farming community, the Corn Laws.

barracuda [The Australian barracuda, arrow barracuda, Australian sea pike, sea pike, snook, or shortfin barracuda]: large, predatory ray-finned salt-water fish known for its fearsome appearance and ferocious behaviour. Distributed along the south coast of Australia and along the east coast to Victoria and Tasmania it prefers cooler inshore waters.

a blob: (*Cricket*) clean bowled.

Tiger: (*US, colloquial*) A kind of growl or screech, after cheering.

The Salvation Army [nicknamed 'The Salvos' in Australia]: an evangelical Christian church known for its charity work. It began operating in Australia in September 1880, when Edward Saunders and John Gore led the first Salvation Army meeting from the back of a greengrocer's cart in Adelaide's Botanic Park.

ANA debates: The Australian Natives' Association (ANA) was a mutual society founded in Melbourne in April 1871 as the Victorian Natives' Association. Its membership was restricted to white men born in Australia, and consisted mainly of energetic middle-class men aged under 50—a perfect base for a forward-looking, idealistic movement such as federation.' In 1880 the ANA committed itself to the federation of the Australian colonies, and provided much of the organisational and financial support for the Federation Leagues which led the campaign, particularly in Victoria. At a time when many prominent figures and influential newspapers were against Federation, members of the Association held to their faith in the cause, rallying support through public meetings and debates. It avoided party politics, but they soon adopted the rising liberal politician and ANA member Alfred Deakin as their candidate for leadership of the federal movement. With federation achieved in 1901, the ANA withdrew from political activity, although it continued patriotic activity such as promoting the observance of Australia Day. Other nationalistic issues supported by the ANA included afforestation, an Australian-made goods policy, water conservation, Aboriginal welfare, the celebration of proper and meaningful citizenship ceremonies following the increased levels of migration after World War II, and the adoption of the wattle as the national floral emblem in 1912.

ACT FOUR

Swedish machines: Lars Magnus Ericsson began his association with telephones in his youth as an instrument maker. He worked for a firm that made telegraph equipment for the Swedish government agency Telegrafverket. In 1876, at the age of thirty, he started a telegraph repair shop with help from his friend Carl Johan Andersson in central Stockholm and repaired foreign-made telephones. In 1878 Ericsson began making and selling his own telephone equipment. His telephones were not technically innovative. In 1878 he made an agreement to supply telephones and switchboards to Sweden's first telecommunications operating company, Stockholms Allmänna Telefonaktiebolag. Also in 1878, local telephone importer Numa Peterson hired Ericsson to adjust some telephones from the Bell Telephone Company.

La Marseillaise: the national anthem of France. The song was written in 1792 by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle in Strasbourg after the declaration of war by France against Austria, and was originally titled '*Chant de guerre pour l'Armée du Rhin*' ('War Song for the Rhine Army'). Listed as No. 3 in the Socialist Party Song Book

Ye sons of freedom, wake to glory!

Hark! hark! what myriads bid you rise!

Our children, wives, and grandsires hoary,

Behold their tears and hear their cries -

a hummer: (*Colloq.*) a person or thing that is remarkable, wonderful,

Rule Britannia: British patriotic song, originating from the poem 'Rule, Britannia' by James Thomson and set to music by Thomas Arne in 1740.

Birthday Honours: King's/Queen's Birthday Honours is, in some Commonwealth realms, the marking of the reigning monarch's official birthday by granting various individuals appointment into national or dynastic orders or the award of decorations and medals. Honours have been awarded on the sovereign's birthday since at least 1860, during the reign of Queen Victoria. The birthday of her successor, King Edward VII (r1901–1910), fell on 9 November 1901. After 1908, the monarch's official birthday in the United Kingdom was moved to the first, second, or third Saturday in June.

marconigram: a message sent via radio; from the name of Guglielmo Marconi (1874-1937), Italian inventor and electrical engineer known for his pioneering work on long-distance radio transmission and for his development of Marconi's law and a radio telegraph system. He is usually credited as the inventor of radio.

it's time Little Willie came off the roads: Cf. English journalist, lyricist and poet Harry Graham (1874–1936). A writer of humorous verse in a style of grotesquerie and black humour his most notorious are the *Ruthless Rhymes* that involved *Little Willie*, a poetic personification of youthful mischief (including gruesome acts of violence with indifferent or cheerfully inappropriate responses). The earliest was included among the *Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes* published in 1898 under Graham's pen name Col. D.Streamer (while he was serving in the Coldstream Guards). The most common format of these poems was a four lines in trochaic tetrameter.

Little Willie, full of glee,

Put radium in grandma's tea.

Now he thinks it quite a lark

To see her shining in the dark.

The Battler
(Diggers' Rest)
(The Fossicker)

A Comedy, in Three Acts

Performance History

The Battler was first performed on 18 May 1922 by the Pioneer Players at the The Playhouse, Melbourne, with the following cast:

TERRIBLE MICK	Thomas (Tom) Skewes
ANDREW	Charles H Row
JACK CONROY	J O'Connell
SAM CLARKE	Leo Burke
WATTY	Frank Keon
CLARA	Hilda Bull [aka Hilda Esson]
BILLY	Charles Doherty
BELLA	Hettie Feuerman
MRS JONES	Irene Appleton
MRS SMITH	Eileen O'Keefe
GEORGE OGILVIE	George Dawe
Stage Manager	J Beresford Fowler



Tom Skewes as Terrible Mick in *The Battler* by Fred Ward (1900-1990)—*The Bulletin*, 13 Julv. 1922

Copy Text

One only manuscript (*A*), typed in Hilda's distinctive format, with corrections in Esson's hand in both black ink and pencil (*B*), is housed in the Campbell Howard Collection, Dixson Library, University of New England. The manuscript is undated.

There are some additional vertical strokes in pencil in Esson's hand which strike out blocks of the text, but the removal of the affected lines disrupts the dialogue and suggests that they could be indicators of a proposed reworking of the section. I leave the lines in tact and note the possible excision in the emendation.

This title page of the text has undergone significant modification.

The original typed page (*A*) has the following, centred:

THE BATTLER
A Comedy, in Three Acts
By Louis Esson.

A 50x80mm piece of paper is pasted over:

THE DIGGERS' REST
A Comedy, in Three Acts.
By Louis Esson.

The title is further emended by scoring out in blue pencil to read:

DIGGERS' REST
A Comedy, in Three Acts.
By Louis Esson.

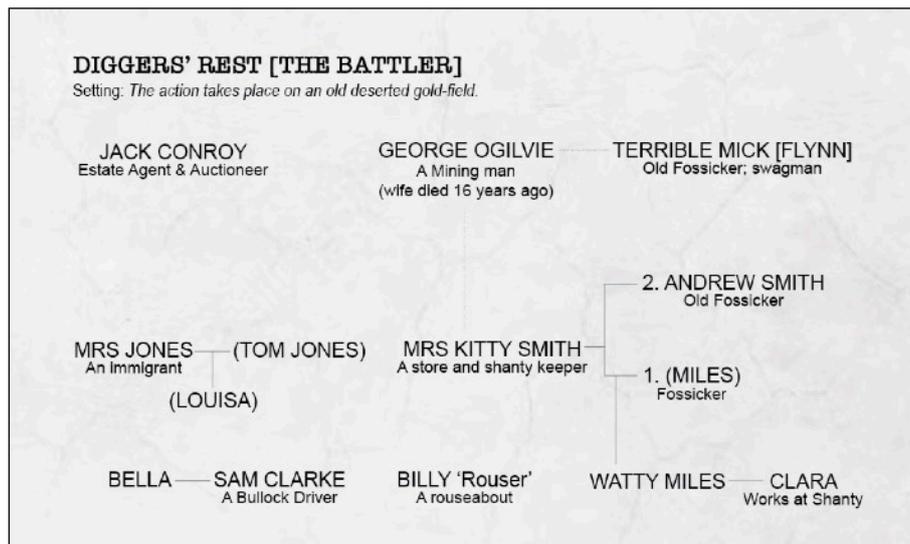
As the play received its premiere with the title *The Battler*, this draft—*Diggers' Rest*—may again suggest an attempt at a major revision after 1922.
All emendations are noted.

Characters

TERRIBLE MICK, old fossicker
ANDREW, old fossicker
JACK CONROY, Estate Agent and auctioneer
SAM CLARKE, a bullock driver
WATTY, Mrs Smith's son
CLARA, a girl working at the shanty
BILLY ('ROUSER'), a rouseabout
BELLA, Sam's wife
MRS JONES, an immigrant
MRS SMITH, the store and shanty keeper
GEORGE OGILVIE, a mining man

Scene

The action takes place on an old deserted gold-field.



ACT ONE

(The Diggers' Rest is a big, old-fashioned, ramshackle shanty, built in¹ the roaring days of the gold-fields. Its glory has departed, but it just faintly remembers² its romantic past. There are still a few old fossickers left, finding gold in small quantities; but the district nowadays is less concerned with gold than with fruit growing and farming. It is a picturesque place in the bush, with hills and gullies all round, and a merry little creek.)

(Along the Right, is the front of the shanty. It has three entrances: one to the bar, (down R.); the second to the central building, the hotel, (R.C.) and the third to the post-office and store (up R.). An old sign, 'The Diggers' Rest', appears over the front door.)

(A low verandah runs along part of the building, from bar to main entrance. On it is placed a long form.)

(In front of the shanty is an open space of worn grass. Two or three paths are defined. A fallen³ log is⁴ used as a seat.)

(At the Left are a rough three-rail fence and shed. Behind these are the stables, fowl yard etc., which are suggested, but not seen.)

(Across the back stage, behind a white painted fence and open gate, runs the main road. It is little more than a bush track, lined by tall straggling gum-trees.)

(Above is a bright blue summer's sky.)

(It is early afternoon.)

(TWO OLD MEN are sitting on the verandah form. ANDREW, who retains his Scots accent, is deaf and asthmatic. Despite the heat he has a tartan muffler round his neck. 'TERRIBLE' MICK is an old fossicker living in a hut by the creek, likes to argue and make complaints, but he is happy enough in his own way, and still capable of a song and a jig.)

MICK. Summer dust's coming.

ANDREW. Oo aye.

MICK. Clouds of it along the track.

ANDREW. Oo aye, oo aye.

MICK. By gosh, it'll be a hot and blazing summer.

(ANDREW coughs.)

ANDREW. It's an awfu' thing, asthma. Sometimes it comes on at nicht, and I canna breathe, and hae to be propped up on pillows.

MICK. Lucky for you you have a good wife to look after you.

ANDREW. A guid pipe?

MICK *(Shouting)*. A good wife!

ANDREW. I was ower auld tae marry, I'm thinking. It's na me ain hoose, and I hae nae family o' me ain. It mak's a' the difference.

(Enter CONROY.)

CONROY. No sigh of the coach—late as usual. This is a God-forsaken hole, no business, no progress, no enterprise. People are tired, too tired to pay their rents. And what sort of rents do I collect—five shillings here, seven and six there, not worth picking up—and then they can't pay them. It's time we had a new population, people with some go in them.

¹ *built in*] *built fifty years ago* A.

² *faintly remembers*] *remembers* A.

³ *defined. A fallen*] *defined. There is an old plum-tree, (L.) under which is a form. A fallen* A.

⁴ *log is*] *log also is* A.

(CONROY goes to look for coach.)

MICK. This place ain't what it used to be. It's all fruit-growing and cockie-farming. Where are the old diggers now!

ANDREW. It's quiet here the noo.

MICK. It's quiet enough, God bless you, and you mark my words, Andy,⁵ it'll never be any different.

CONROY *(Returning)*. The coach is an hour late. How can you expect progress in a place like this. That's what I've said all along.

(Exit CONROY, into bar.)

ANDREW. But I daurna' complain. It might be waur.

MICK *(Rising and looking round)*. There ain't no signs o' rain. God bless you, we're in for a drought.

ANDREW. I hae me meat, and a guid bed, and a roof abin me heid, sae what mair can an auld man want.

(Enter SAM, through gate.)

SAM. 'Day, Mick. 'Day, Oldest!

MICK. Hot out, I'm thinking.

SAM. Yes, it's hot.

MICK. Any sign o' the coach along the road?

SAM. I haven't seen it.

ANDREW. Oo aye.

SAM. What brings you in at this time o' day?

MICK. I want some flour, a stick o' baccy -

SAM. How are you getting on in your old bark humpy?

MICK. I'm just fossicking round.

SAM. Got any nuggets hid away?

ANDREW. Oo aye.

(ANDREW chuckles, MICK glares at him.)⁶

SAM. In a hole under the chimney?

MICK. The gold's played out, I tell you.

ANDREW. There's gowd aboot here yet, in they auld cricks and gullies.

MICK. Gold!

ANDREW. There's mair gowd yet then has e'er been ta'en oot.

MICK. Gold! In these old gullies!

ANDREW. Tons o't, if ye can only find it.

(Enter WATTY, from bar.)

WATTY. Hallo, Sam, what's the game?

SAM. You know well enough. The wife's keen on it.

WATTY. Building the new church?

SAM. They're all doing something. Rogers gave the land, quarter of an acre, and some have given the timber, and others are doing the carting, and I'm giving them a bit o' me time.

WATTY. That's a new game for you, Sam, on a Saturday afternoon.

SAM. It's all for a good cause. Can I borrow that big saw you've got?

WATTY. Right-O, Sam, it'll be in the store-room.

(Exit SAM, into store.)

⁵ words, Andy,] words, A.

⁶ *(ANDREW chuckles, MICK glares at him.)*] not in A.

MICK. I remember a good story.

(WATTY turns away and whittles stick.)

When me and young Geordie Ogilvie were working together in White Horse Gully. Do you mind Geordie Ogilvie?

ANDREW. Oo aye, I'll be better in the morning.

MICK. We were up to all sorts of games then. Once we were partners, and were just cleaning up our claim before we left it. Well, one evening, when it was getting late, Geordie was still working down the hole while I was waiting on top. 'Hurry up, Geordie,' sez I, 'I want to get home for my tea.' 'Hold on!' he called back, 'I've struck a patch. Do you think I'm going to knock off, when I'm picking up these little shining bits like tatties!' With that he kept throwing up a heap o' little golden nuggets. 'I don't care,' sez I, 'I can't wait. Are you coming?' 'No, I'm not,' sez he. 'Then,' sez I, 'I'll sell the blarsted hole.' A crowd of diggers were gathered round by this time, and a couple of new chums yelled out what would I take for it. 'Fifty pounds!' 'Right!' they said, and handed over the money. 'Come now, Geordie,' I cried, 'I've sold the hole.' Geordie came up and started to swear, and the new chums hopped down the hole. They worked there for a fortnight, and do you know, Andy, they never even found a spec. ... We were full o' tricks in those days, Geordie Ogilvie and me.

ANDREW. I canna stand the North Wind. It catches me here.

MICK. By gum, you're hard o' hearing.

ANDREW. I maun get ben the hoose. It's an awfu' thing, asthma. *(Rises and walks off.)*

MICK. You're and old schemer, aren't you, Andrew?

ANDREW. What's that you're saying?

MICK. I'm saying you're only an old schemer.

ANDREW *(Nodding genially)*. Oo aye, oo aye! *(Exit ANDREW, behind store.)*

MICK. Did you hear that! God bless you, he's as deaf as a poker.

(Enter CLARA, from hotel.)

CLARA. No sign o' the coach?

WATTY. It must have fallen off the bridge.

CLARA. None o' your joking now.

WATTY. Bella's got Sam on the job this time.

CLARA. My word, she's made a difference in him since they got married. Sam used to be a great sport, but he's quite respectable now.

WATTY. It makes you careful, don't it?

CLARA. All girls ain't like Bella.

WATTY. Anyway, she's a fine handsome-looking woman.

CLARA. She ain't bad-looking, and she spends a lot on clothes, but I don't know if I'd call her handsome.

WATTY. She's a brunette.

CLARA. I suppose that's the style you admire. It wouldn't do no harm if you had somebody to keep you up to the mark.

(Enter SAM, from store.)

WATTY. That's right, Sam. Keep a-going. It's fine exercise, sawing wood.

CLARA. How's Bella, she hasn't been round for a long time.

SAM. She's complaining of the heat, but she'll be down this afternoon for the mail. *(Sits.)*

WATTY. It's not often you see a bullock-driver helping to build a church.

SAM. I'd sooner be driving bullocks than serving out pots o' beer.

WATTY. You'll be able to give them a sermon, Sam, instead of using your fancy language.

CLARA. Pay no attention to him, Sam! He's always joking.

(Enter ROUSER, from store.)

ROUSER. Here's the file you were looking for, Sam.

SAM. I don't want it. The saw's sharp enough, ain't it?

ROUSER. It ought to be. We don't use it much.

(WATTY and ROUSER advise SAM.)

SAM. I'll make it do me. You know how it was last Saturday. They were all chopping Pimpey. One bloke had a gammy leg and another said he had blood pressure. But you should've seen 'em at feed time, especially that bloke with blood pressure.⁷

WATTY. This game should just suit you, Sam. All you want are strong arms and a light head.

SAM. Shut up!⁸ Perhaps I may as well take the file. It might come in handy.

ROUSER. I'd rather use the axe than the saw.

SAM. It all comes to the same thing. Graft's graft, however you do it. How's your old man, Billy?

ROUSER. Back in the bush somewhere, rabbiting. Plenty rabbits about.

(Reads book.)

WATTY. You'd better put an edge on it, Sam. You want to make it easy for yourself. *(Pointing to ROUSER.)* Billy's not over-exerting himself.

CLARA. I've got to work just the same.

WATTY. You always look fresh and cool, Clara.

CLARA. Wish you meant it!

SAM. I hear you've been down to town, Watty?

CLARA. Yes, and fine times he had, too, going to the races and the pictures shows, and making love to every girl he met.

WATTY. Not me, I'm the innocent one, I am.

CLARA. Oh, I like your innocence!

SAM. How'd it strike you, Watty?

WATTY. Melbourne's not a bad little town. Those jackeroos are not much good in the bush, but they can slip over the pavement all right.

SAM. But what took your fancy most?

WATTY. This is without the word or a lie. It was right in the centre of the city, in Swanson Street—they've got water running up and down the window of a butcher's shop.

ROUSER, Gawdstruth!⁹

CLARA. You'd better look lively, Billy. Mrs Smith'll be after you if she sees you hanging about.

ROUSER. Plenty o' time before the coach comes.

WATTY. They tried to sell me a diamond ring in the Eastern Market. They said it was diamonds.

CLARA. Did you buy it?

WATTY *(Knowingly)*. I'm the mug.

(CLARA laughs loudly.)

MRS SMITH *(Calling)*. Clara!

CLARA. Coming!

WATTY. They give me credit for nothing, but I'd like to see how they'd get on if I took another holiday.

CLARA. I like that. Anybody would think you did everything.

MRS SMITH. Clara, Clara!

⁷ You know how ... with blood pressure.] *not in A.*

⁸ Shut up!] Shut up. *A.*

⁹ WATTY. Melbourne's not ... ROUSER. Gawdstruth!] *these lines tentatively scored through by, what I recognize to be, Hilda's hand.*

CLARA (*Calling*). Coming, Mrs Smith ... coming!

(*Exit CLARA, into hotel.*)

WATTY. What have you got there, Billy?

ROUSER. *The Mare with the Silver Hoof*—You can have a lend of it if you like when I'm done. It puts you up to a few points about racing. It's a regular eye-opener.

WATTY. I reckon *Lord Charles* ought to about win the Steeple to-day.

ROUSER. I've got five bob on *Thunderbolt*. Give me a steady old horse and a good stayer.

WATTY. Bloome, it ought to be drawing a dray. What do you say, Sam?

SAM. I'm not backing anything. I've given up sport.¹⁰

MICK (*Rising*). I've been dozing. ... Watty!

WATTY. What do you want, Terrible?

MICK. Could you get me a bag o' flour—some tea and sugar, a stick o' baccy -

WATTY. Right-Oh, Mick. ... You're always wanting something. Come on!

(*Exeunt MICK, and WATTY, into store.*)

SAM (*Rising, putting down saw, and stretching*). It's hot. I don't feel like hard graft today.

ROUSER. Clara's a grand girl—she can do anything—ride, milk, cook, dance—we had a dance last week. I was playing my mouth organ¹¹ part of the time. You should have seen Clara—kept going all night, never missed a dance, and next morning she was up before six, as fresh as paint.

SAM. You're struck on Clara, Billy.

ROUSER. Any bloke would be lucky to get her. She's a great¹² milker, and a great hand at rearing chickens; and at the last show she got first prize for her butter. My word, she'd¹³ make a grand wife for a farmer, if a man only had a little piece o' ground of his own.

SAM. It seems to me she's setting her cap at Watty.

ROUSER. He'll own the pub some day. I've got no chance.

SAM. Clara's like Mrs O'Brien's cow—she give you a good bucket of milk, and then kicks it over with her heels. Now Bella's different, Bella -

(*Enter CONROY, from bar.*)

CONROY. The coach is an hour late.

ROUSER. What's all the fuss about? It's always an hour late, ain't it?

CONROY. As long as I can remember the coach has never been up to time. It's a disgrace to the district.

(*SAM sees BELLA and hurries back.*)

ROUSER. It hardly pays to run the coach, what with the hard going and the price of horse-feed, and there are no visitors, even at Christmas.

(*Enter BELLA, with basket, and MRS JONES with flour-bag, through gate.*)

CONROY. It's time we had a Progress Association¹⁴. Good day, Mrs Clarke, good day, Mrs Jones. This is our busy day.

BELLA. Good day. (*To SAM.*) I thought you were round at the church hours ago.

(*SAM makes noise on saw.*)

(*MRS JONES sits down.*)

SAM. I've been sharpening the saw.

¹⁰ ROUSER. The Mare ... I've given up sport.] *these lines tentatively scored through, by an unrecognisable hand.*

¹¹ mouth organ] *I retain the text of A, unable to decipher the emendation in Esson's hand.*

¹² great] good A.

¹³ My word, she'd] She'd A.

¹⁴ Progress Association] progress association A.

BELLA. They're all round there now, helping. It looks bad to be late. What will the Minister say!

SAM. I don't suppose he'll use bad language.

BELLA. I'm ashamed of you, Sam, to suggest such a thing. He's a Wesleyan Methodist.

CONROY. What's the use of me having a weekly auction! I'm selling everything from a bag of onions to a spring cart, but you only sit on the fence, like a lot of old crows¹⁵, and never make a bid.

(Enter CLARA, from hotel.)

CLARA. Hot out, ain't it!¹⁶ I suppose you find it a bit lonely up there on the farm, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES. It gives me the blues; and I'm awful scared at night when Tom's away.

CONROY. There's nothing to be afraid of, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES. I've seen some queer creatures passing.

ROUSER. There's only one mad bloke round here. He's the butcher's¹⁷ boy. I've heard him preaching to the pigs and singing hymns to the trees, yes, and one day I heard him reading the burial service over a slaughtered bullock.¹⁸

CLARA. Stop that, Billy! You know Mrs Clarke don't like it.

CONROY *(Coming down)*. What this place needs is Irrigation.

ROUSER. Irrigation!

SAM. I'd be satisfied if they mended the roads. The ruts get deeper every year. It takes a good man to get through in the winter time.

CONROY. What can you expect! I had the Shire engineer up, but he could do nothing. Every little cockie wanted his own road and culvert attended to first. It's no use, they won't adopt a go-ahead policy. *(Exit CONROY, into bar.)*

BELLA *(Leaning across, to SAM)*. Aren't you ready yet, Sam?

SAM. It's a tricky job sharpening a saw. *(Makes noise.)*

BELLA. It's not fair. People have come from all round the district to help. They've been working for hours, everybody except you.¹⁹

SAM. What about that bloke with blood pressure.

BELLA. You know we want the church finished Sunday.²⁰

SAM. Anyone would think you owned the blooming church.

(BELLA turns.)

MRS JONES. The agent²¹ at home told us that if we came out to the bush we²² could own our own land, but we're no better off. We have to pay just the same. And Tom says he'd rather give the money to the squire than the government. It's a funny sort of government you have here, taking every penny to themselves.

¹⁵ you only sit on the fence, like a lot of old crows] you sit on the fence, like crows A.

¹⁶ ain't it!] ain't it? A.

¹⁷ butcher's] butcher A.

¹⁸ ROUSER. There's only ... a slaughtered bullock.]A. *these lines tentatively scored through in Esson's hand; if excised, however the sense of the conversation is lost.*

¹⁹ except you.] except you. You know we want the church finished to-day. A.

²⁰ What about ... finished Sunday.] *not in A.*

²¹ The agent] the Immigration agent A.

²² out to the bush we] out we A.

ROUSER. Irrigation! The land's patchy round here like everywhere else. On one side of the creek there's good black solid—easily grow twelve tons of potatoes to the acre, and on the other side it wouldn't feed a wallaby.

(Enter WATTY, from store.)

WATTY. What do you think o' this, now! An old swaggie came along yesterday. 'Good day, man,' says he, 'can you give me a drink o' water? God bless your cows, I'm that hungry I don't know where to sleep tonight.'

CLARA. Go on with you!

WATTY. How are the raspberries, Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES. Tom's planting out another twenty rows. We're getting fivepence farthing a pound from the factory; but they're not like the English fruit, they haven't the flavour.²³

ROUSER. In my opinion there's nothing much in small fruit.

WATTY. It pays all right if you grow the raspberries, and the raspberry-pickers, at the same time.

CLARA *(Shocked)*. Oh, isn't he terrible!

MRS JONES. There's no grass, only that horrible scrub, and those ferns and wattles. I like grass, good green grass, like we used to have in the old country. You don't see much grass around here.

CLARA. You've struck a dry season, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES. It's not like the old country. I've been out here for eighteen months, but I don't know if I'll ever get used to it.²⁴

SAM. It's mar-velious what we do get used to.

BELLA *(Rising)*. How much longer are you going to be?

SAM *(Rising slowly)*. I'm ready. It ought to be sharp enough now.

WATTY. It'll be a bit of training for you, Sam.

SAM. You're getting too damned funny.

BELLA. Don't behave like a lot of heathens!

SAM. I'd better²⁵ get round to the church.

BELLA. Hurry up, Sam!

SAM. I'm going, ain't I? You don't expect me to jump the blooming fence²⁶. *(Exit SAM, through gate, with saw.)*

WATTY *(Calling after him)*. It's all for a good cause.

CLARA. Don't mind him, Bella! He's always joking.

MRS JONES *(Brushing off flies)*. Oh, bother the flies! They're biting something dreadful to-day. The flies and the mosquitoes and the rabbits and the snakes—this place is alive with pests.

CLARA. I wouldn't worry about little things like that, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES. I've got to worry over everything. Nothing goes right with us. Our tank's nearly dry, and the beetles have eaten all the cabbages.

ROUSER. The Pommies are no good for this country.²⁷ I think I'll get round to the stables.

WATTY. Don't rush it, Billy!

CLARA. Stop that! ... Watty, I want to tell you something.

(ROUSER moves away.)

²³ Tom's ... the flavour.] *these lines tentatively scored through by, what I recognize to be, Hilda's hand.*

²⁴ What do you think ... ever get used to it.] *A. Esson uses a single vertical pencil line in the left hand margin for ten lines, then a diagonal line through the remainder; the marks are tentative and suggests questionable material.*

²⁵ I'd better] I think I'll A.

²⁶ the blooming fence] the fence A.

²⁷ The Pommies are no good for this country.] *not in A.*

ROUSER (*Turning*). Do you want any more stove wood, Clara?

CLARA (*Peevishly*). I don't know. Haven't we got enough.

ROUSER. I'll cut another cord if you like. (*Moves off.*)

CLARA. All right.

ROUSER (*Turning again*). This place is pretty slow. They only have a dance once a month, and then some of 'em don't turn up.

(*Exit ROUSER, to stables.*)

BELLA. How's Mrs Smith been keeping?

WATTY. Mother's not as young as she used to be.

CLARA. She's taking things easy. She's lying down this afternoon.

MRS SMITH (*Calling*). Clara!

CLARA. Oh, she's up again.

MRS SMITH (*At door*). Clara!

CLARA (*Crossing*). You'll stay for a cup o' tea, won't you?

(*Enter MRS SMITH, from hotel.*)

MRS SMITH. Clara!

CLARA. I thought you were lying down, Mrs Smith.

MRS SMITH. A nice chance I have to lie down with everything to attend to myself. Is that corn beef on, Clara?

CLARA. Of course it is, hours ago. I put it on myself.

(*Exit CLARA.*)

WATTY. I wonder what's happened to the coach. I can't make it out. (*Goes to look.*)

MRS SMITH. All well at home?

MRS JONES. Louisa's had a touch of the croup lately.

MRS SMITH. You should give her plenty of cod liver oil.

MRS JONES. It's the climate. The seasons are all changed. It's summer when it ought to be winter, and winter when it ought to be summer. The illnesses I've had since I came to live in the bush. I could keep you all day talking about them. Once I strained my heart—clean out of its socket.

BELLA. How did you do that Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES. Yawning, just yawning.

(*WATTY returns.*)

WATTY. It must have had an accident.

(*BELLA and MRS JONES rise.*)

MRS JONES. I'm waiting for the English mail.

BELLA. I could do with a few things, Mrs Smith. I'm making a new dress for the church social.

MRS SMITH. Clara will be in the store.

MRS JONES. I hope I get a letter. My sister-in-law's expecting a new baby. There's always a bit of news from the old country.

(*Exit MRS JONES and BELLA into store.*)

MRS SMITH. Do you know, Watty, I planted that tree myself.

WATTY. I don't give much shade now.

MRS SMITH. It's like the rest of us. It's beginning to fade.

WATTY. Things have to run their course.

MRS SMITH. You would hardly believe what a wonderful place this was in the early days.

WATTY. You're always thinking of the early days²⁸.

²⁸ early days.] early days, mum. A.

MRS SMITH. I liked the gold-fields.²⁹ I was never happy away. There were some fine men on the diggings, Watty, your father—and Mick Flynn—and there was Geordie Ogilvie -

WATTY. Geordie Ogilvie.

MRS SMITH. Many a fortune³⁰ he made and threw away. But he would always get his way in the end. I believe he's a rich man in Western Australia now.

WATTY. I've often heard you speak of him.

MRS SMITH. He was that strong, too. Once I seen him lift a twelve stone man on a shovel, and hold him straight out ... like that. ... You don't see men like that nowadays.

WATTY. You still remember the diggings, Mum.

MRS SMITH. Indeed I do, Watty. ... What fun we used to have. Ah, the early days, the early days!

(Enter ROUSER, from stables.)

WATTY. Back again, Billy?

ROUSER. My oath!

WATTY. You look excited. What's the news?

ROUSER. There's a hawker here, just come along the road.

WATTY. Who is it?

ROUSER. Some old bloke. I don't know him from a sheet of bark.

WATTY. What does he want?

ROUSER. He says he's going to have a sale outside the shanty.

WATTY. He is, is he?

ROUSER. So he says.

MRS SMITH. A hawker! I don't know if we want that sort about the place.

ROUSER. He says he's going to stay, and you'll all be glad to see him.

MRS SMITH. I'm sure I don't want to see him. *(Rises.)* I'll go inside.

WATTY. That's right, Mum. You take a rest this afternoon.

ROUSER. He's got hold of Sam.

WATTY. Bella will have something to say about that.

MRS SMITH. What do I want with him and his sale! *(Exit MRS SMITH, into hotel.)*

ROUSER. I suppose we'll have to put him up.

WATTY. I suppose so.

ROUSER. I've taken his horse out. ... Eh, hold on there, Sam. I'll give you a hand. *(Exit ROUSER, through gate.)*

(WATTY crosses to bar door.)

WATTY *(Speaking through door)*. A circus is coming to town.

(Enter MICK, ANDREW, and CONROY from bar.³¹)

MICK. God bless my heart and soul!

CONROY. Is it the coach at last?

(MICK and ANDREW sit on form.)

(Enter CLARA, BELLA and MRS JONES.)

CLARA. What's up, Watty?

WATTY. Something new. Just you wait.

CLARA. It's only one of his jokes.

²⁹ I liked the gold-fields.] MRS SMITH. Indeed I am, Watty. ... There were some fine men on the diggings. What fun we used to have. Ah, the early days, the early days! I liked the gold-fields. A.

³⁰ Many a fortune] He was a character. Many a fortune A.

³¹ CONROY from bar.] CONROY. A.

(Enter SAM and ROUSER, with box. Then enter OGILVIE, with hawker's tray strapped in front of him.)

OGILVIE. Roll up, roll up, the great sale is about to begin. *(To SAM and ROUSER.)* That'll be all right there. ... Where are all the people!

CLARA. Who is it?

WATTY. I dunno ... never seen him before.

CONROY. Perhaps it's one of those quack doctors.

MRS JONES. I hope he has a cure for rheumatics.

OGILVIE. Here I am, come all the way from Melbourne. It's hard to get things in the country, so I³² expect to do a lot of business here. Don't run away, girls! Wait till I unpack this box³³. *(Takes things from box.)*

BELLA *(Spying SAM)*. What are you doing here?

SAM. Hush, Bella, hush!

BELLA. Why aren't you at the church?

SAM. I'll tell you later. It's a secret.

BELLA. It's disgraceful of you.

OGILVIE. I'm the very man you've all been waiting for. You³⁴ don't seem excited about it. Eh, don't lean back there, holding up the fence! Come a bit closer! I'm not an Indian hawker coming to the bush to frighten the farmers' wives.

MRS JONES. I know that kind—they're worse than the gipsies.

OGILVIE. I've come a long way, but here I am at last. I've heard a lot about this place. Isn't this a famous old diggings?

CLARA. Go on with you!

(MICK turns his back and cuts a plug of tobacco. WOMEN gossip and giggle. CLARA leans over fence and throws something to fowls.)

OGILVIE. And³⁵ this is the old Diggers' Rest!

CONROY. There's the name over the door.

OGILVIE. What's that name ... Mrs Smith?

WATTY. That's right.

OGILVIE. Does Mrs Smith keep the hotel?

WATTY. Yes.

OGILVIE. I thought it might be Mrs Miles.

WATTY. Mother used to be Mrs Miles.

OGILVIE. I thought so.³⁶

WATTY. Yes. But mother's Mrs Smith now.

CONROY *(Pointing to ANDREW)*. There's her husband. He's the second.

OGILVIE. Anyway this is the right place.

CONROY. Have you been here before?³⁷

³² country, so I] country. ... I A.

³³ this box] the box A.

³⁴ for. You] for, but you A.

³⁵ And] But A.

³⁶ so.] so. ... So you're a Miles. A.

³⁷ CONROY. Have you been here before?] MICK. Have you been here before A.

OGILVIE. Yes. ... I've been here before. ... It was a lively place then with lively people. It looks a bit quiet now. Come on³⁸ ladies and gentlemen. I'm holding a special sale. ... Everything will be sold without reserve.

CONROY. I'm an auctioneer myself, but there's never anybody here to bid.

OGILVIE. But you don't get a chance like this every day. I've something for everybody. I've ties, handkerchiefs, blouses, all the latest fashions, dungarees, waterproofs, shawls, ribbons, laces—fancy shirts, you can take your pick. ... Here's an accordion for anybody that can play it, and mouth organ too ... football jerseys for the boys, hats and coats for the men—and as for the girls, I've rings for their fingers, bracelets for their wrists, powder for their cheeks, combs for their hair. Come now, bid what you like—I'm easily pleased. ... Speak up. ... I'm obliged to sell out.

CLARA (*Turning from fowls*). What's that?

OGILVIE. I can't waste time. Here you are, look at this, a lovely blouse, latest Melbourne style—suit any lady. Bid up there. Give me a start. Look at it—there's something for the belle of the ball.

WATTY. Ten bob.

(*They laugh.*)

OGILVIE. I'm offered ten bob. It's a dress good enough for the Melbourne Cup.

MRS JONES (*Bidding*). Twelve shillings.

SAM. And sixpence.

OGILVIE. Twelve and six—going at twelve and six ... going ... going ...

ROUSER (*Bidding*). Five bob.

OGILVIE (*Tossing blouse to ROUSER*). It's yours, lad, the lowest bidder.

ROUSER. Well I'm blown.

CLARA. The lowest bidder! I don't³⁹ understand it. There must be a trick somewhere.

WATTY (*Coming forward*). What are you going to do with that, Billy?

BELLA. It will be a nice present for your sweetheart.

ROUSER. It's for you, Clara.

CLARA (*Turning away*). Oh, go on!

ROUSER. It ought to suit you. You'll have it, won't you?

CLARA. Thanks, Billy.

(*WATTY goes to cart and rings bell, CLARA shows blouse to women. ROUSER stands DL between CONROY and SAM, who chaff him.*)

WATTY (*Ringing bell*). Roll up, roll up!

CLARA. Just look at Watty. Ain't he a card!

OGILVIE. A beautiful pair of moleskins. Now, what do you think of this. Don't go to sleep. You're the rummest customers I've ever seen. Bid up, there, you old fossickers, you hayseeds, you stringy-bark cockatoos!

(*Enter MRS SMITH, from hotel.*)

MRS SMITH. What's all this!

WATTY. Here's Mother.⁴⁰

OGILVIE. Good day, Mrs Miles. ... I mean Mrs Smith.

MRS SMITH. Who are you?

CONROY. It's only an old hawker.

³⁸ quiet now. Come on] quiet now. But never mind that. Come on A.

³⁹ The lowest bidder! I don't] I don't A.

⁴⁰ MRS SMITH. What's all this! / WATTY. Here's mother.] WATTY (*Returning*). Here's mother. / MRS SMITH. What's all this! A.

(He joins BELLA. SAM slips past BELLA, up stage.)

OGILVIE (*Holding up moleskins*). Bid up, bid up. ... I don't see much change in the old place.

MICK. This place ain't going ahead—it's going back, and I'll stick to my opinion.

OGILVIE. What's your name.

WATTY. Michael Flynn.

OGILVIE. 'Terrible' Mick—I know you.

MICK. I ain't going to be put down like that.

OGILVIE. Weren't you the lad who knocked out *The Game Chicken* in Red Shirt Gully?

MICK. God bless my heart and soul! (*Advances.*)

OGILVIE. Am I right?

MICK. That were forty years ago.

OGILVIE. Yes, time passes⁴¹. ... Can anyone tell me what's become of Teddy Brown⁴² who used to play the fiddle?

MICK. God bless you⁴³, he's dead long ago.

OGILVIE. And Molly Byrne? She used to live here.

MRS SMITH. She married big Hughie O'Neill, and they've got six grown-up children.⁴⁴

OGILVIE. Poor little Molly! ... And there was little Jimmie Cornish, he found a mine about here.⁴⁵

WATTY. That was before my time.

MICK. *The Crown Jewels* mine!

OGILVIE. Yes, that's it.

MRS SMITH. I thought everybody had forgotten it.

MICK. About that mine—what I say is this -

OGILVIE. Still fond of an argument, Mick?

MICK. Now look here, I ain't a-going -

OGILVIE. You haven't changed much after all.

WATTY. He knows you all right, Terrible.

MRS SMITH. Who can it be?

WATTY. I don't know.

OGILVIE. I don't suppose any of you remember Geordie Ogilvie!

MICK. Geordie Ogilvie.⁴⁶

MRS SMITH. He's a great man in Western Australia now.⁴⁷

OGILVIE. A great man!⁴⁸ Who would have thought that!

MRS SMITH. I knew him on the diggings. He was a character.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Yes, time passes] Time passes A.

⁴² Teddy Brown] little Teddy Brown A.

⁴³ you] us A.

⁴⁴ MRS SMITH. She married big Hughie ... children.] MICK. She married big Hughie ... children. A.

⁴⁵ mine about here.] mine about here. I can't think of its name. A.

⁴⁶ Geordie Ogilvie.] *not in A.*

⁴⁷ He's a great man in Western Australia now.] Geordie Ogilvie! He was a character. Many a fortune he made and threw away, but I believe he's a rich man in Western Australia now. A.

⁴⁸ A great man!] *not in A.*

⁴⁹ I knew him on the diggings. He was a character.] He was that strong, too. Once I seen him lift a twelve stone man on a shovel, and hold him straight out like that. You don't see men like that nowadays. A.

OGILVIE. Didn't he go prospecting with Jimmie Cornish on Crown Hill?⁵⁰

MRS SMITH. You seem to know something about this district.

OGILVIE. I know more than you think. If you're not careful I'll be telling some of your family secrets. Who was the girl that danced on the table when they struck the reef?

MRS SMITH. That was a story. I never did no such⁵¹ thing.

OGILVIE. I thought it was you. (*Holding up moleskins.*) Come on now, we must get on with the sale. Who'll make me an offer?

WATTY. Ten bob again.

SAM. Nine bob.

OGILVIE. Nine bob ... nine bob. ... I'm offered nine bob -⁵²

MICK (*Excitedly*). But what's the use of talking! The old bush school has gone. It's gone. I tell you. We never have a jig to the fiddle, or a jamboree, and bless my heart, you can travel for six months through the bush, and never see a stand-up fight.

OGILVIE (*Throwing moleskins*). They're yours, Mick.

ROUSER (*Bidding too late*).⁵³ Five bob!

MICK. Well, I'm dashed.

ROUSER. I was a bit slow thinking.

WATTY. If they greyhound hadn't stopped to scratch himself, he would have caught the hare.
(*CLARA laughs.*)

OGILVIE (*Pointing to ANDREW*). Lord! He's sleeping again.

MRS SMITH (*Shaking him*). Wake up!
(*Pause.*)
(*ANDREW coughs.*)

MICK (*Returning*). Is that you, Andrew, coughing away there like an old sheep?

ANDREW. Oo aye, oo aye.
(*They laugh.*)

MRS SMITH. He's getting old, now.

OGILVIE (*Holding up brooch*). Poor old Andrew! But look at this. Here's a beautiful pearl brooch. It's a lovely⁵⁴ thing—would just suit Mrs Smith.

MRS SMITH (*Advancing*). Who are you? You're no stranger.

OGILVIE. I'm a traveler having a look at the country. It's a pretty little place you have here, with the creek running through the gully, and the hills at the back. There used to be gold about here, too. ... Don't you know me?

MRS SMITH. There's a bit of sun in my eyes. Come over here, and let me look⁵⁵ at you.
(*OGILVIE comes forward.*)

OGILVIE. Don't you know me, Kitty?

MRS SMITH. It's not ... no ... it can't be ...

⁵⁰ Didn't he go ... Crown Hill?] He just missed the Crown Jewels roof. But never mind him! A.

⁵¹ did no such] did such A.

⁵² Nine bob ... nine bob. ... I'm offered nine bob -] *not in A.*

⁵³ (*Bidding too late*)] *not in A.*

⁵⁴ brooch. It's a lovely] brooch. These pearls were picked up by my own lugger in Torres Straits, and the gold was found in Kalgoorlie. I found it myself. You don't seem to believe me. I can't help that. Anyway, it's a lovely A. Cf 'The Pearls of Torres', Esson's short story published in the American magazine *Adventure*, concerns a pearl diver, with his 'own lugger in Torres Straits [sic].! A.

⁵⁵ me look] me have a look A.

OGILVIE. Yes.

MRS SMITH. You're not Geordie Ogilvie?

OGILVIE. Yes. (*Shakes hand.*)

MRS SMITH. Handsome Geordie!

MICK. God bless my soul!

OGILVIE. And you didn't know me, Kitty. Fancy my old sweetheart not know me!

MRS SMITH. It was a long time ago.

OGILVIE (*Fastens on brooch*). How does that look? I'm real glad to see you, Kitty.

(*SAM joins BELLA.*)⁵⁶

MRS SMITH. My son, Watty.

OGILVIE (*Shaking hands*). I knew your father on the diggings.

WATTY. I've often heard mother speak of you, Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE. How do you like the place, Watty?

WATTY. It's not too bad. There's a pub and store, a Mechanics' Institute, and a blacksmith's shop—quite a big place.

(*ANDREW coughs.*)

MRS SMITH (*Shaking ANDREW*). This is my husband, Andrew.

OGILVIE. How are you,⁵⁷ old man?

ANDREW. It's the asthma. But I daurna' complain. It might be waur.

MICK. By gum⁵⁸, Geordie, you've changed a bit.

OGILVIE. I've been away a long time, and you'll have to tell me everything that's happened.

MICK. There ain't no *Crown Jewels* now.

MRS SMITH. Don't be gossiping there!⁵⁹

OGILVIE. I'm real glad to be back. It's not often old mates meet like this. We'll drink to the good old days.

MRS SMITH. Open the bar, Watty!

MICK. You never see a jig no more.

OGILVIE. What's that!⁶⁰ You never see a jig, don't you! Just watch me!⁶¹

(*OGILVIE does a few steps of a jig. All crowd round him. MEN applaud. MRS JONES stands on seat. ROUSER plays mouth organ.*)

ALL. Keep it going!⁶²

—Well done, Geordie!

—Hurrah!

OGILVIE (*Stopping after a flourish.*) There you are, the old original jig, 'Mr O'Flaherty's Trip to Paris'.

MRS SMITH. Those were the days Geordie.

OGILVIE. Those were the roaring days. Plenty of gold and cock-fighting, and dancing girls in every corner saloon. ... You're all with me. This is a free house. Come along, all of you.

⁵⁶ (*SAM joins BELLA.*)] not in A.

⁵⁷ you,] you A.

⁵⁸ By gum] And I didn't know you! By gum A.

⁵⁹ there!] there. A.

⁶⁰ that!] that. A.

⁶¹ me!] me. A.

⁶² going!] going. A.

(Exeunt omnes into bar, except SAM and BELLA.)

BELLA. Where are you going?

SAM. He asked us all in. It don't look well to refuse. He's a good old sport.

BELLA. It's no use me speaking. You never listen to a word I say.

SAM. What do you want me to do, Bella?

BELLA. Nothing. Do as you like. Break your promise to me. Never mind the church. Go into the bar.

SAM. No, I won't.

BELLA. Oh, Sam!

SAM. Anything for a quiet life.

BELLA. It's all for your own good.

SAM. I know that, Bella. We'll go now. I hope they haven't finished.

(Enter WATTY, followed by CLARA.)

WATTY. Where are you off to, Sam?

SAM. We're going round to the Church.

(Enter ROUSER, with bag of oats from store.)

ROUSER. The coach is in.

WATTY. Only an hour and seventeen minutes late, putting up a record.

CLARA *(Laughing)*. Stop that!

WATTY. Did Joe tell you who won the Steeple?

ROUSER. Lord Charles.

WATTY. It was a cert. Just my luck—I didn't back him.

ROUSER. Thunderbolt broke his neck at the stone wall. I think⁶³ I'll get round to the stables. The horses will want a good feed.⁶⁴

(Exit ROUSER, to stables⁶⁵.)

BELLA. Come on, Sam!⁶⁶

WATTY. Won't you stay, Sam? They're telling yarns in the bar, and Mr Ogilvie's going to give us a song.

SAM. Go to blazes!⁶⁷

(Exeunt SAM and BELLA, through gate.)

CLARA. Things are looking up to-day.

WATTY. My oath. Do you know Mr Ogilvie used to be a great man here in the early days?

CLARA. He must be pretty rich.

WATTY. Why, he's one of the biggest men in the country. He owns a mine in Western Australia—a gold mine.

CLARA. None of your joking now!⁶⁸

MRS SMITH *(At door)*. Clara!

CLARA. All right, Mrs Smith.

(Enter MRS SMITH.)

⁶³ stone wall. I think] stone wall. I'm not complaining. I think A.

⁶⁴ good feed.] good feed. I'll be back in a minute. A.

⁶⁵ to stables] through fence A.

⁶⁶ Sam!] Sam. A.

⁶⁷ blazes!] blazes. A.

⁶⁸ now!] now. A.

MRS SMITH. Clara, have you put that corn beef on?⁶⁹

CLARA. Of course I have— hours ago.

MRS SMITH. Hurry up with the tea, Clara!⁷⁰

CLARA. It's nearly ready. (*Exit CLARA into hotel.*)

MRS SMITH. Isn't Geordie a character, Watty, coming up like that! He bought the things from a hawker on the road, and he's giving them away for presents.

WATTY. My word!

MRS SMITH. He just wanted another look at the old place.

(Sound of laughter from the bar.)

Hear them!⁷¹ It's too wonderful.

(Enter OGILVIE. He stands on steps with mug in hand, MICK and ANDREW behind.)

OGILVIE. Won't you join us, Kitty?

MRS SMITH. To think you're back again!

OGILVIE. Of course I am, and now we'll⁷² shake things up, with old mates, old yarns, old bush songs -

MRS SMITH. Ah, Geordie, it's just like the early days.

Curtain.

⁶⁹ beef on?] beef on. A.

⁷⁰ Clara!] Clara. A.

⁷¹ Hear them!] *not in A.*

⁷² Of course I am, and now we'll] Come on, and we'll A.

ACT TWO

(The same; outside The Diggers' Rest.)

MRS SMITH. You haven't changed, Geordie.

OGILVIE. I mean to see this through.

MRS SMITH. But you must rest a bit.

OGILVIE. Rest, with the gold in sight!

MRS SMITH. The gold!

OGILVIE. Yes, it's gold, Kitty, gold!

MRS SMITH. That beats all.

OGILVIE. There's nothing surprising in that.⁷³ Many a big mine's been found on an old diggings.

MRS SMITH. You're a wonder, Geordie.

OGILVIE. Things were slow in the West—I've big interests there, and they'll turn up trumps yet, but I didn't wait for developments. I came over right away. Now we'll see what happens.

MRS SMITH. You're working too hard.

OGILVIE. I've put in a good day, but it was well worth it.

MRS SMITH. But it's too hot. You look tired out. Just take it easy this afternoon.

OGILVIE. I've never spared myself. I've battled all my life, but I've enjoyed it too. I always liked a good fight. ...⁷⁴

MRS SMITH. Look at you, now—your clothes all stained with clay and dripping wet! You're just as reckless as ever. *(She holds up wool.)* Wait till I finish these. They will keep you dry.

OGILVIE *(Looking)*. You can't buy these in the shops.

MRS SMITH. It's the best wool, and I'm a good knitter.⁷⁵

(Enter MICK, with swag and billy.)

OGILVIE. Any luck, Mick?

MICK. I've knocked off for a bit. I'm taking to the track again.

MRS SMITH. I can't stop you, I suppose.

MICK. I must have a look round.

MRS SMITH. You will go your own way.⁷⁶

MICK. I've locked up my old bark humpy. *(Puts down swag.)* I mustn't forget the matches. *(Exit MICK, into store.)*

OGILVIE. Well, Kitty, it must be forty years since I was here last.

MRS SMITH. Aye, a good forty, well I mind those days.

OGILVIE. Plenty of business then, not like to-day with only a few poor old fossickers left.

MRS SMITH. The diggers stretched half way across the road here, waiting their turn for a drink. Do you know I used to take a hundred and forty pounds⁷⁷ across the bar on a Saturday night!

OGILVIE. Those were the days of gold!

MRS SMITH. And the tents ... *(Rising.)* stretched out as far as you could see—all round there—no wonder it was called Canvas Town, the whole place looked like a big white sheet.

OGILVIE *(Pointing across)*. That was *Babylon* over there, wasn't it?

⁷³ There's nothing surprising in that.] *not in A.*

⁷⁴ you're working too hard. ... a good fight. ...] *A. scored through by two vertical pencil strokes, left.*

⁷⁵ *(Looking)*. You can't ... a good knitter.] *A. scored through by a single diagonal pencil stroke, centre.*

⁷⁶ You will go your own way.] *It's no use me speaking then. A.*

⁷⁷ a hundred and forty pounds] *£140 B.; £100 A.*

MRS SMITH. Yes, that⁷⁸ was *Babylon*. ... There's only a few old Chinamen left. ... And sometimes I would be busy all day, standing at that little window there, buying gold. (*Sits down.*) And there were the bushrangers, too ...

OGILVIE. Brave devils they were, some of them, and not so black as they're painted.

MRS SMITH. Do you mind how Red Dan held up the Mail Coach, robbed the passengers, and dashed away to the back ranges?

OGILVIE. I do. And I saw Red Dan afterwards hanged at the Melbourne Gaol.⁷⁹

MRS SMITH. But the diggers were fine men, fond of their fun and a cockfight on Sundays, but gentlemen and nice spoken before me. You don't see men like that nowadays.

OGILVIE. I remember it all, just like yesterday. Times have changed.⁸⁰ We had all sorts on the diggings, what a swarm! Chinese and Poles, Californians with scarves and sombreros, sailor men in dungarees run away from their ships, Lascar coolies and negroes, Johnny Raws from Piccadilly, with eyeglass and pegtop trousers—the blackfellows with 'possum rugs over their shoulders—pugilists, brokers, Vandemonian pickpockets—the troopers riding past, and the diggers with green veils and pockets full of gold. You can't forget sights like that. And the life—there was no such roaring life anywhere in the whole wide world! You remember the heads bobbing up and down from the lucky holes, the flags flying, the creak off the windlasses, and the rattle of the cradles—it was good to be alive then. Every man had a chance to make his fortune. A spirit of adventure was in the air, and we all set out for Eldorado. And we were young then, with no regrets, and full of hope for the future. ... But it's all gone now. Times have changed, Kitty.⁸¹

MRS SMITH. Yes, indeed, times have changed. There are no fine men now, only the old people are left.

OGILVIE. Don't say that. I'm only sixty-seven, and except for a touch of gout⁸² I feel as fit as the best of them.

MRS SMITH. We can't all be like you, full of strength and energy.

OGILVIE. So you've kept the place all these years?

MRS SMITH. I went away once after Miles died for nearly ten years. But I had to come back to the gold-fields, and now I've bought the place, though it's only a tumble-down old shanty at the edge of the world.

OGILVIE. Gold's a will o' the wisp. I've seen a township rise in a night, and another fade in a day. Look at Koolgardie! It's a dead city in the desert, and the camel teams pass through the empty streets. But there's gold in the west still, and in the east too, for a matter of that. I'm a prospector, Kitty, and east or west, bush or desert, I've got to follow the gold.⁸³

(*Enter WATTY, with mail.*)

WATTY. The mail and a wire, Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE. There may be news from the West.

MRS SMITH. You've done enough for to-day. You must save your strength.

OGILVIE. Perhaps I will take a spell this afternoon. (*Exit OGILVIE.*)

⁷⁸ Yes, that] That A.

⁷⁹ Brave devils ... the Melbourne gaol.] A. *tentatively scored through by a single diagonal pencil stroke, centre.*

⁸⁰ Times have changed.] *not in A.*

⁸¹ I remember ... changed, Kitty.] A. *tentatively scored through by single vertical, then diagonal stroke, centre. Notes in margin, underlined, undecipherable.*

⁸² gout] the gout A.

⁸³ Gold's a will ... to follow the gold.] A. *tentatively scored through by a single vertical line, left.*

WATTY. It's bad news, mother.

MRS SMITH. Dear me! I'm sorry to hear that.

WATTY. You know that mine in Western Australia ... the *Southern Cross*, the shares have dropped to almost nothing.

MRS SMITH. Poor Geordie.

WATTY. He's the biggest shareholder.⁸⁴ He'll be ruined.

MRS SMITH. Ah, the gold, Watty, it comes and it goes.

(Enter MICK and ANDREW.)

MICK. Geordie Ogilvie may be a good miner, but he don't know this district.

WATTY. Off again, Mick?

MICK. I'm going to Ferny Creek.

WATTY. Business, I suppose.

(ANDREW chuckles and coughs. MICK glares at him.)

MRS SMITH. There's a lot to do in this place, and I like to see to everything myself. Good-bye, Mick, remember you're always welcome at the old *Diggers' Rest*.

MICK. When I'm on the track I says⁸⁵ to myself you'll be all right Mickie when you get to Mrs Smith's—always sure of a good meal⁸⁶, a good drink, and a hearty welcome.⁸⁷

(Exit MRS SMITH.)

(MICK takes his swag from form, and sits on it as he tells his story.)

I remember a story of two old mates who went out prospecting together. They tramped on till they were dog-tired, and one of them lay down under a tree, and he wouldn't budge no further for all the gold in Bendigo. But his mate was more dogged, and tramped on through the dust and heat, while the lazy man went off to sleep. Bye and bye he woke up and turned round, and started pulling up the grass—just like this. Something glittering caught his eye. He pulled up the roots, and there, a few inches below the surface, was a nest of golden nuggets. His mate came back, dusty and worn out. No luck, says he, not a scrap. You lazy cow, what are you grinning at? 'Look here,' says his mate, pointing to the nuggets, 'what d'you think o' that?' They were sold afterwards for five hundred and fifty pounds in the city of Melbourne. ... You see it's not always the battler that fortune favours!

(Pause.)

(MICK packs swag.)

(Enter OGILVIE, at back, with dish.)

This place is played out. There are only a few poor old Chows left, puddling in the creeks and working over the tailings, and they're too old and weak to get away. They grow a patch of vegetables and that keeps them. They can live on anything, Chows!

WATTY. Mickie's never been the same since he was bitten by the snake.

MICK. I've gone spec-ing in the creeks and prospecting in the hills year in and year out, but you don't pick up nuggets like potatoes any more.

ANDREW. Nae one gies ony attention te me.⁸⁸

MICK. You'll have to sing dumb when I'm talking. There's nothing in chasing the pennyweight no more. I appeal to you, Geordie what have you seen in this district?

⁸⁴ He's the biggest shareholder.] All his fortune was in it. A.

⁸⁵ says] always says A.

⁸⁶ good meal] meal A.

⁸⁷ Geordie Ogilvie ... a hearty welcome.] A. tentatively scored through by a single vertical stroke, left.

⁸⁸ I've gone ... attention te me.] A. tentatively scored through by a single vertical stroke, left.

OGILVIE. Well, in the first place, I've seen gullies and gum trees, and old men blathering on the pub verandah.

MICK. By gosh, that's a good 'un.

OGILVIE. I've seen pot-holes and mullock heaps, shafts filled with stagnant water, and laughing jackasses perched on rotten poppet heads.

ANDREW. Oo aye, oo aye.

OGILVIE. And I've seen you've all been asleep for the last thirty years.

MICK. That's right. We haven't found payable gold for nigh on thirty years. But what's the use of talking! ... I must be making a start.

*(Rises and takes up swag.)*⁸⁹

WATTY. Have you everything you want?

MICK. I'm all right.

OGILVIE. But that's not the whole story. I've seen other things too.

MICK. So long Andy, you old schemer.

(Exit ANDREW, into store.)

I'll be back again. God bless everybody.

*(Exit MICK, through*⁹⁰ *gate.)*

OGILVIE. Look at that. Drift ... drift!⁹¹

WATTY. He's always knocking round the country with his old swag and billy.

OGILVIE. I think I'll have another look at the mine.

WATTY. Not to-day again?

OGILVIE. I must. I've had a stroke of bad luck.

WATTY. From the west?

OGILVIE *(Quietly)*. Yes! It's all in a miner's life. That *Southern Cross* was a wild cat. Never mind, it's not the first fortune I've lost.

WATTY. The shares may rise again.

OGILVIE. Damn the *Southern Cross*. I'll think no more about it.

WATTY. You can't always believe the reports.

OGILVIE. All sorts of stories will be going round, saying I'm a ruined man. Don't you believe them.

I'm not done yet. I've something else, and not far from here either.

WATTY. I'm glad the prospects are good.

OGILVIE. Don't you believe me?

WATTY. Yes, Mr Ogilvie. I believe you.

OGILVIE *(Challenging him)*. Perhaps you think I'm mad?

WATTY. No, Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE *(Cantankerously)*. I've got the gold-fever, you think. Very well my young man, I'll tell you nothing more about it.

WATTY. I was just thinking -

OGILVIE. Your mother believes in me.

WATTY. She told me she did.⁹²

OGILVIE. She knows gold.

WATTY. My word she does.

⁸⁹ That's right. ... *takes up swag.*)] A. tentatively scored through by a single diagonal stroke, centre.

⁹⁰ *through*] *thro'* A.

⁹¹ that. Drift ... drift] that. drift, . drift A.

⁹² She told me she did.] A. tentatively scored through by a single horizontal stroke.

OGILVIE. Because I've failed in the west you've lost faith in me. That's the way of the world.

WATTY. It's not fair to say that.⁹³

OGILVIE. You think you're very clever trying to humour the old man. (*Laughs.*) What do I care for your opinion! I'll go my own way to the end.

WATTY. Haven't I got my shares?

OGILVIE (*Muttering*). This is a big thing.

WATTY. And I don't mean to sell either.

OGILVIE (*Softening*). That's right. You stick to me, Watty, and I'll make your fortune, and Sam's too.

WATTY. Is Sam working well?

OGILVIE. He is that. And why shouldn't he! It's a chance of his life. (*Taking out quartz*⁹⁴.) Do you see that? Not bad stone.⁹⁵ There's plenty more where that came from. Don't tell anybody. If we're not careful there'll be another rush. Why this may turn out one of the richest gold fields in the country. ... I'm off to the mine.

WATTY. Not now.

OGILVIE. I know what I'm doing. Nothing ever baulked me yet. (*Holds up dish.*) Here's the old dish. Do you remember all the gold glinting in you, and the shining nuggets we found? They think we're both getting battered and played out. We'll show them. ... I've lost one fortune but I've found another. (*Moves off.*)

WATTY. I thought you were taking a rest this afternoon.

OGILVIE. It's gold, I tell you, gold! (*Exit OGILVIE.*)

(*Enter CLARA, with kerosene tin full of scraps.*)

WATTY. My word he's game, as game as Ned Kelly.

CLARA (*Crossing*). Chuck. ... Chuck!

WATTY. What have you got there? (*Sits on fence.*)

CLARA. Only some scraps for the fowls.

WATTY (*Leaning over fence*). Those fowls do nothing but eat.

CLARA. They're laying pretty well now.

WATTY. That's 'cause eggs are cheap.

CLARA (*Throwing scraps*). Chook, chook!

WATTY. That old red rooster will choke himself.

CLARA. Oh, go on! (*Emptying tin.*) That ought to do them. (*Picks up tin and moves away.*)

WATTY. I'll take the tin. (*Gets off fence.*)

CLARA. No, you won't.

(*Slight struggle, and CLARA moves off.*)

WATTY. What's the hurry?

CLARA. I've got work to do.

WATTY. Women are like chestnut horses. They either go till they drop, or they don't go at all.

CLARA. You're the one to talk.

(*Pause.*)

WATTY. I say, Clara -

CLARA (*Turning*). What is it? (*Puts down tin.*)

WATTY. I like that new blouse you've got on.

⁹³ to say that.] to say that. ^ The caret mark, in pencil, at this point would appear to suggest the need for some clarification of the argument but Esson fails to supply any.

⁹⁴ quartz] little bottle A.

⁹⁵ Not bad stone.] Rough gold. A.

CLARA. The one Mr Ogilvie brought.

WATTY. It suits your style of beauty, Clara.

CLARA. Wish you meant it!

WATTY. You don't know what's going to happen here.

CLARA. Nothing much every happens, does it?

WATTY. There used to be a big mine here⁹⁶—*The Crown Jewels*—they lost the reef years ago, but Mr Ogilvie's after it again. (*Takes out shares.*) Look, I've got shares.

(*CLARA leans over.*)

There may be a fortune in it.

CLARA. I suppose you'll be thinking of getting married then.

WATTY. Do I look like it?

CLARA. To one of them city girls you're always writing to.

WATTY. I don't know if I want to give up my freedom.

CLARA. Wait till you meet the right sort of girl.

WATTY. She'll have to be pretty cute to catch me napping.

CLARA (*Nudging him*). Go on with you!

(*Pause. WATTY wanders round then turns.*)

WATTY. There's a big mob o' parrots flying past.

CLARA (*Swinging round*). Oh. ... They'll dig their beaks into Mrs Jones' fruit.

WATTY. My word!

(*Pause. They watch them pass.*)

(*CLARA moves towards WATTY.*)

CLARA. I haven't told you yet.

WATTY (*Turning round*). What?

CLARA. I may be leaving next week.

WATTY. Give us a chance, Clara.

CLARA. The strawberry season's starting, and they want me at home.

WATTY (*Earnestly*). I don't know what the place would be like without you.

CLARA (*Moving off*). A lot you care whether I'm here or not.

WATTY. You know I do, Clara. ... But you're not going, are you?

CLARA (*Turning*). I may have to.

(*Pause.*)

WATTY (*Wiping forehead*). Pretty hot out to-day!

CLARA. Yes.

WATTY. The crops are looking a bit dried up.

CLARA. Yes.

WATTY. But the strawberries are doing well.

CLARA. Yes.

(*Pause.*)

(*Then enter ROUSER, with halter.*)

WATTY. Horse hunting, Billy?

ROUSER. I'm after old *Dodger*. He's a caution, that old horse. You can't keep him in a paddock. I put him in last night, and he opened the blooming gate and let himself out.

WATTY. He won't go far.

ROUSER. He'll be down Ironbark Gully. That's his beat.

WATTY. Haven't seen your old man lately.

⁹⁶ mine here] mine A.

ROUSER. Haven't seen him myself. He'll be on the booze. As soon as he gets a few quid in his pockets he's up the wattles.

CLARA. Why aren't you out prospecting, Billy, like the rest of them? You might be finding a fortune.

ROUSER. Gold's a gamble. Give me the land. Farming's slow, but it's safe. I've got my eye on a little piece of ground, about forty acres, it would grow lucerne down by the creek. A man could make a living with a few cows and pigs, and my word they keep you going.

WATTY. But there's nothing like gold to sent the place ahead.

ROUSER. This place is pretty slow. I hope they all turn up to the dance to-night⁹⁷. It'll be a full moon.

CLARA. You're always thinking of the dances, Billy. What girl are you after now?

ROUSER. I ain't after nobody, not me. I think I'll get after the old horse. *(Moves away slowly.)*

WATTY. Don't hurry, Billy!⁹⁸

ROUSER *(Returns)*. Could you do with a new clothes prop in the morning.

CLARA. I don't know.

ROUSER. I'll cut you one down by the creek.

CLARA. Very well.

ROUSER. And I'll mix the pollard for the fowls if you like. I'd do anything for you, Clara.

CLARA. Wish you meant it.

ROUSER. Straight I would. *(Exit ROUSER.)*

WATTY. He's off at last.

CLARA. Yes.

WATTY. But you're not going to leave us, are you Clara?

CLARA. It ain't my fault if I do. You know I don't want to.

WATTY. Mother's getting a bit old now, and she needs somebody to help her.

CLARA. I know that.

WATTY. You've always been like one of the family. I remember when we were at school.

CLARA *(Laughing)*. You don't remember me at school -

WATTY. Yes, I do. You were the prettiest girl in the class.

CLARA. And you were the cheekiest boy. You were always playing tricks on the teacher.

WATTY. You had a lot of fluffy hair⁹⁹ flying all round -

CLARA. It's not so thick as it used to be. I've gone off since then.

WATTY. I wouldn't say that, Clara.

CLARA. Can you wonder at it, with all the hard work I've had?

WATTY. I think you're better looking now than ever. *(Puts arm round her.)*

CLARA. You just say that.

(Enter SAM, crying 'Gold, gold!')

(They break away. CLARA goes for tin.)

WATTY. Where have you been, Sam, falling down a hole?

SAM. It's gold, Watty. I reckon we're on a cert.¹⁰⁰

WATTY. You've got the gold fever, Sam.

CLARA. You're all after the gold. What does Bella think of it?

⁹⁷ to-night] on Tuesday A.

⁹⁸ Don't hurry, Billy!] Yes I would if I were you. A.

⁹⁹ fluffy hair] fluffy ginger hair A.

¹⁰⁰ I reckon we're on a cert.] *not in A.*

SAM. She was against me at first; but she knows I did the right thing helping Ogilvie.
 WATTY. She's a woman of sense, is Bella.
 CLARA. You don't deserve a good wife. You're too flighty.
 MRS SMITH (*Calling*). Clara!
 CLARA. There you are—I never get a minute to myself.
 (*Exit CLARA.*)
 SAM. It's warm work. I think I deserve a long sleeve.
 WATTY. I'll have one with you. It needs something to lay the dust.¹⁰¹
 (*Exeunt SAM, and WATTY, into bar.*)
 (*Enter BELLA. She looks round, walks to bar door and sees SAM, then turns away.*)
 (*Enter SAM.*)
 BELLA (*Seeing SAM*). Oh!¹⁰²
 SAM. Hallo, Bella!
 BELLA. It's you!
 SAM. I didn't expect to see you here.
 BELLA. I can see that. (*Indignantly.*) Oh, Sam!
 SAM. What's up?
 BELLA. You know how it was before.
 SAM. Before what?
 BELLA. Our marriage, of course.¹⁰³ You were always mad after sport, running races and jumping over hurdles ... and you know what that lead to.
 SAM. What did it lead to?
 BELLA. Drinking and gambling and losing your money.
 SAM. I don't know about that. I sometimes had a pot with the boys, but I always kept myself in form. My record speak for itself.
 BELLA. You should be ashamed to mention it, instead of taking a pride in it.
 SAM. I cleared the bar at six feet two at the Benalla¹⁰⁴ Sports. That's not a bad high jump. And I could pretty well do it now.
 BELLA. I know what that boasting means. You've been drinking again.
 SAM. No, I haven't. I've been working at the mine all day.
 BELLA. This gold will be the ruin of you.
 SAM. I've been working hard, I haven't had a bet for months, cards, dice, billiards—I never look at them. I don't drink, I've been careful with my language, and I've helped to build the new church. What more do you want!
 BELLA. You're letting everything go to pieces. You've refused two good contracts, and the bullocks are eating their heads off.
 SAM. A spell will do them no harm.
 BELLA. You don't care what happens. You're mad after that gold.
 SAM. There may be a fortune in that mine.
 BELLA. A fine fortune there'll be.
 SAM. It's all for you, Bella. I want to lift you out of this, and give you the best of everything.

¹⁰¹ It's warm work ... lay the dust.] A. tentatively scored through by a single diagonal stroke, centre.

¹⁰² Oh!] Oh. (*Turns then walks off.*) A.

¹⁰³ marriage, of course.] marriage. A.

¹⁰⁴ Benalla] Shepparton A.

BELLA. A lot you care about me. (*Pretends to weep.*)¹⁰⁵

SAM. Don't take on like that, Bella.

BELLA. I don't believe it will ever come to anything.

SAM. It might be a great mine. ... I must be off now.

BELLA. Stop, Sam.

SAM. What?

BELLA. Don't go down any more.

SAM. I must.

BELLA. Come home, come away from that mine.

SAM. I can't give up now.

BELLA. Very well, I've done all I can. Some day perhaps you'll be sorry—when it's too late.

SAM. What can I do?

BELLA (*Holding him*). Don't go, Sam!

SAM (*Getting free*). I must. ... It's gold, Bella, gold! (*Exit SAM.*)

BELLA. Oh, Sam!¹⁰⁶

(*Enter CLARA.*)

CLARA. What is it, Bella?

BELLA. Sam.

CLARA. It's not serious.

BELLA. Look at the way he's carrying on.

CLARA. They're all interested in the mine. Watty says it may be a big thing.¹⁰⁷ You never know with gold.

BELLA. I hate the gold. He never takes me anywhere now. This is too dull for me; but he won't give up the mine. It's the first time he ever refused me anything.

(*Enter WATTY.*)

(*Hardening.*) I know what to do.

WATTY. I've never seen Sam graft so hard before.

BELLA. I've had enough of this - you hear of nothing, from morning till night, but reefs¹⁰⁸, and shafts and leads and outcrops. I'm tired of it.¹⁰⁹ (*Rises.*) I'm going away.

CLARA. You wouldn't do that, Bella.

BELLA. I'm going right away. I'm going home to dad.

WATTY. Sam's a good sort, you know.

BELLA. I've got time to catch the coach. I've done my best to keep him straight. (*Indignant.*) I've been patient, but he doesn't care. I'll leave him to himself. I'm determined. And I'll never come back to him.

(*She goes off, followed, by CLARA.*)

CLARA. Give him another chance, Bella.

BELLA. No, I can't. I must go.¹¹⁰ And I never want to see him again, never.

(*Exit BELLA, dramatically.*)

¹⁰⁵ (*Pretends to weep.*)] *not in A.*

¹⁰⁶ Oh, Sam!] (*Sits down weeping*). Oh, Sam! *A.*

¹⁰⁷ They're all interested in the mine. Watty says it may be a big thing.] *not in A.*

¹⁰⁸ I've had enough of this - you hear of nothing, from morning till night, but reefs,] I'm tired of hearing about reefs *A.*

¹⁰⁹ I'm tired of it.] *not in A.*

¹¹⁰ I must go.] Good-bye, I must go. *A.*

WATTY. Poor old Sam.

CLARA. You always take the man's part.

WATTY. It's her foreign blood. I believe her grandfather was an Italian.

(Enter CONROY.)

CONROY. Is Mrs Smith in?

WATTY. Yes.

CONROY. I've just had a great offer for the shanty.

WATTY. I don't know if mother wants to sell.

CONROY. You must use your influence with her, Watty. This is no life for you. You ought to be on the land.

WATTY. I was always used to an active life.

CONROY. You don't call standing behind the bar an active life. You should take your coat off, Watty. When I was a young man I was never afraid to take my coat off. That's the way to get on. ... This is a good proposition.

WATTY. What do you say, Clara?

CLARA. I'm sure I don't know.

CONROY. I must have a serious talk with Mrs Smith. Her interests will be safe in my hands.

Remember what I've said. Don't get into a rut. Take your coat off! *(Exit CONROY, into hotel.)*

WATTY. I wouldn't advise mother to sell the place as long as she's got you to help her.

CLARA. You don't care whether I'm here or not.

WATTY. It's not fair to say that, Clara. You know I do.

CLARA. I never know when you're serious.

WATTY. Clara! *(Goes to her.)*

CLARA. That'll do.

WATTY. Everything might be different now. We couldn't get on without you. You'll stay, won't you?

I say, Clara—*(Holds and tries to kiss her.)*¹¹¹

(Enter ROUSER. He leans over fence. They break away.)

ROUSER. That was a horrible murder down Ironbark Gully. You know her—the sea-captain's daughter, her who married the blooming Quang when her husband died. Well, last night they got quarrelling, and she stuck a knife into the Quang, and when the trooper broke in, there he was in a pool of blood, and she was lying on the floor in the horrors.

WATTY. She was a fine looking woman not so long ago.

CLARA. A nice thing she was, drinking brandy and marrying a Chinaman.

ROUSER *(Getting through the fence)*. The trooper just told me about it. *(Moves off.)* I suppose it'll be in all the papers tomorrow.

WATTY *(Curtly)*. Of course it will. ... Now Clara ...

ROUSER *(Turning)*. There ain't too many sensations in this district. It needs something to liven it up. *(Exit ROUSER, into store)*¹¹².

*(Enter CONROY, and MRS SMITH, from hotel)*¹¹³.

MRS SMITH. No, I couldn't ... I couldn't do it.

CONROY. It's a great opportunity.

MRS SMITH. I couldn't part with the old place after all these years.

¹¹¹ I never know ... *(Holds and tries to kiss her.)*] not in A.

¹¹² ROUSER, into store] ROUSER. A.

¹¹³ MRS SMITH, from hotel.] MRS SMITH. A.

CONROY. You could pay off the mortgages and invest a good sum at seven and a half per cent.¹¹⁴

What do you say, Watty?

WATTY. Seven and a half per cent. Is that per annum? I've forgotten my arithmetic ...¹¹⁵

MRS SMITH. I haven't the heart to part with it. There's not the business there used to be, that's true, but it has so many memories.

(Enter ANDREW.¹¹⁶)

ANDREW. It's warm the day, but I mauna' complain.

WATTY. You see how it is, Clara!¹¹⁷

CLARA. I know nothing about it.

ANDREW. Ah weel, if it wasna' for the asthma I'd be doon at the crik mysel'. Ye can laugh, but mony's the braw specks I've foond in Pennyweight Crik. But I'm getting auld noo, and I canna shake the dish nae mair.

MRS SMITH. No. I couldn't part with it. I'm too old to change.

(Enter OGILVIE, exultantly.)

Back again Geordie! What is it? You look excited.¹¹⁸

OGILVIE. We've struck the gold.

MRS SMITH. Struck the gold!¹¹⁹

WATTY. True?

OGILVIE. It is true. We've found the reef, and it's rich, as rich as I've ever seen. What do you say to that!

MRS SMITH. They've found the reef.¹²⁰

ANDREW. Oo aye, oo aye ...¹²¹

OGILVIE. Won't they stare, the croakers, when they see my report. You can never trust a mine, they say. Nobody knows what lies before the pick. By gosh, they'll know soon enough now!

CONROY. My congratulations, Mr Ogilvie. It will be a great thing for the district.

OGILVIE. I haven't had fifty years mining experience for nothing.

CONROY. The gold ought to make property valuable.

WATTY. I'm in this too.

OGILVIE. You're all getting¹²² interested now. I don't wonder at it. It's gold.

MRS SMITH. Sit down here.

OGILVIE (*Laughing*). Anyone would think I was an old man. ... (*Sits.*) You all remember *The Crown Jewels* mine. It was forty years ago when Jimmy Cornish and I went up on the Crown Hill prospecting together. We found a few outcrops, only little things they were, but they panned

¹¹⁴ You could pay off the mortgages and invest a good sum at seven and a half per cent.] You could pay off the mortgages and invest a good sum at 7½ per cent. *B.*; You could pay off the mortgages and invest all the money at 7½ per cent. *B.*; *not in A.*

¹¹⁵ Seven and a half per cent. Is that per annum? I've forgotten my arithmetic ...] 7½ per cent. Is that per annum? I've forgotten my arithmetic. *B.*; 7½ per cent. Is that per annum? I've forgotten my sums. *B.*; Mother knows best. *A.*

¹¹⁶ ANDREW.] ANDREW, *sits on form.* *A.*

¹¹⁷ Clara!] Clara. *A.*

¹¹⁸ Back again Geordie! What is it? You look excited.] *not in A.*

¹¹⁹ Struck the gold!] *not in A.*

¹²⁰ They've found the reef.] *not in A.*

¹²¹ oo aye ...] oo aye ... (*He goes off to sleep.*) *A.*

¹²² You're all getting] You're getting *A.*

out a nice tail of fine gold. Jimmy pegged out a claim half way up the Hill—I pegged out mine on a decent little show lower down, near the creek. I worked for a while with a hand windlass and a bucket down to about fifty feet, and made a decent wad out of it, till the soakage from the creek got too heavy—we couldn't deal with it in those days—so I left her. Six months afterwards Jimmy struck *The Crown Jewels Reef* at a depth of a hundred and twenty feet, and sold a company for a handsome figure. What a wonderful run they had! The reef was twelve feet wide and averaged thirty pennyweights to the ton.

MRS SMITH. That was a great mine. There's been nothing like it since -

OGILVIE. Years afterwards, when I was in the west, I happened to pick up a report, and noticed they had lost the reef—cut right off¹²³ by a fault she was, and they could never pick her up again, although they put out prospecting drives and cross cuts in all directions. A characteristic feature of the lode was the small leaders or off shoots which branched off as leader veins and outcropped on the surface. They searched for those indicators on the east side of the fault, but without any luck.

(ANDREW goes over.)

ANDREW. I mind it weel. Naebody could ever find the reef. *(Draws line on ground.)* Yon's the crik ... the reef was running this way -

WATTY. And that's where it blew out, I suppose.

OGILVIE. Now my old show was on the east side of Jimmie's claim, and I wondered why they'd missed it. It worried me for years, and at last I had to have a look for¹²⁴ myself.

MRS SMITH. So that's why you came back to the old diggings.

ANDREW *(Sitting down)*. Oo aye, oo aye.

CONROY. And you've found the reef?

OGILVIE. Yes, the old *Crown Jewels Reef*. I soon saw what had happened. My claim had been used as the battery site, and the old working had been covered up by the tailings. We soon had the shaft unwatered and sunk on the vein down to a hundred and thirty feet. The prospects looked good and we followed her down on the underlie. That was the exciting time; but in another fifteen feet we came on solid stone.

WATTY *(Taking out shares)*. Hurrah, hurrah!

CLARA. Behave yourself.

OGILVIE. It's the reef all right, and if it's anything like the original we'll get two ounces to the ton.

WATTY. Good-O! I'll be back in a jiffy. *(Exit WATTY, into bar.)*¹²⁵

OGILVIE. You'll be a rich woman yet, Kitty, dressing in your silks and satins.

MRS SMITH. You just say that to please me.

OGILVIE. I'm glad Watty's in it.

MRS SMITH. He's full of tricks, but he has a heart of gold.

OGILVIE. That's a good character. Do you think he deserves it, Clara?

CLARA. I don't know, Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE. Perhaps you'll find out when you're married.

CLARA. Oh, Mr Ogilvie!

OGILVIE. It's no use being shy. There's no escape for a fine looking girl like you.

CLARA. I've never thought of such a thing.

OGILVIE. All the boys in the place are after you. I can see that. And I don't blame them either.

(Rises.) If I were only a few years younger myself, Clara -

¹²³ cut right off] cut off A.

¹²⁴ look for] look A.

¹²⁵ *(Exit WATTY, into bar.)*] not in A.

(Enter WATTY from bar, with glass.)

WATTY. Try this, Mr Ogilvie—Scotch!

OGILVIE *(After drinking)*. That's the stuff. You can have all your champagne and bubbly waters. ...

You'll be able to get married now.

WATTY. Me! I'm the green grasshopper.

CLARA *(Laughing)*. Go on with you.

WATTY *(To CLARA)*. Are you going to the dance to-night¹²⁶?

CLARA. I haven't got a partner.

WATTY. I'll drive you across.

CLARA. I didn't know you cared for dances.

WATTY. I'm getting reckless. You'll come, won't you?

OGILVIE. I like young people to have their fun. Give him a chance Clara.

(Enter SAM.)

SAM. We've struck the gold.

WATTY. Well done, Sam.

SAM. It's mar-velious! It'll go three ounces to the ton.¹²⁷

OGILVIE. I knew Sam would stick to it.

SAM. It's a regular jeweller's window.

CONROY. We needn't sell now, Mrs Smith. We'll cut up the land ourselves.

MRS SMITH. I'm too dazed to think.

CONROY. There'll be a scramble to get one of the blocks. You leave it to me.¹²⁸ I'll soon draw up a scheme. *(Exit CONROY.)*

OGILVIE. No more bullock driving now. You'll be a mine manager some day, Sam.

SAM. Won't Bella be pleased?

OGILVIE. You must give her a little surprise. Why not buy her a nice buggy, and take her to the races.

(A pause.)

SAM. What's the matter?

WATTY. Nothing.

SAM. Anything wrong?

WATTY. No.

SAM. What are you all staring at?

CLARA. It's Bella.

SAM. What about Bella?

CLARA. She's gone.

SAM. Gone ... gone where?

CLARA. To her dad's place.

SAM. I don't believe it.

*(Pause.)*¹²⁹

ANDREW *(Muttering)*. The reef was running this way, east and west -

(Enter MRS JONES.)

MRS JONES. Have you heard the news?

¹²⁶ to-night] on Tuesday A.

¹²⁷ three ounces to the ton.] five ounces to the dish. A.

¹²⁸ me.] me, Mrs Smith. A.

¹²⁹ *(Pause.)*] not in A.

SAM. What?

MRS JONES. Mrs Clarke's left the district.

ANDREW. Oo aye, oo aye. (*He dozes off.*)

SAM. What's the joke?

MRS JONES. She caught the coach, and she's having her things sent after her.

SAM. It's only a tale.¹³⁰

WATTY. Buck up, Sam.

OGILVIE. What does it matter! Women are queer cattle. My wife was just the same, always trying to thwart me. (*Slaps SAM on shoulder.*) Don't give way, man. Let her go! Wait till the mine's in full swing, and the shares begin to boom. Gold's a wonderful thing. She'll be back.

SAM. Not Bella. It's all my own fault, chasing the gold. What's a fortune to me now. (*Moves off.*)

WATTY (*Trying to stop him*). Hold on, Sam¹³¹.

SAM. I've lost Bella through it. (*SAM sits on log and lights cigarette.*) Oh, curse the gold!

OGILVIE. You must all be in this. I've something better for you than cockie farming, milking your cows and driving in a¹³² few pigs to market.

MRS JONES. Everybody's excited. What's it all about?

CLARA. They've found a big reef.

WATTY. My word, and it's hitting us all up in different ways.

OGILVIE. There'll be chances for us all, a golden future.

MRS SMITH. Oh, the Roaring Days, are they coming again?

OGILVIE. They're coming again. Why, you young people, you don't know you're alive. It's a time something happened to stir you up. Wait till the mine's in full swing, with the creak of the windlass, the throb of the battery, the smoke of the smelter, the rumble of the ore-trucks—that's worth working for, eh? What made this country? It was the gold. That brought settlers from the ends of the earth, and the right sort, too. There used to be life here on the old diggings, and believe me, there'll¹³³ be life here again. (*To WATTY.*) Watty¹³⁴, I've got to send off a pile of telegrams. I'll keep things moving. (*Walks to door.*)

MRS SMITH (*Rising and shaking fist at him*). Don't talk about it. I won't be able to sleep to-night.

OGILVIE (*Turning at door*). It's gold, I tell you, gold.

Curtain.

¹³⁰ It's only a tale.] It's not fair. A.

¹³¹ on, Sam] on. A.

¹³² driving in a] driving a A.

¹³³ and believe me, there'll] and there'll A.

¹³⁴ Watty] Here Watty A.

ACT THREE

(The same; outside The Diggers' Rest.)

(ROUSER is on steps painting. MICK, with swag on ground watching. ANDREW on log.)

MICK. Gold bless my heart and soul.

ROUSER. I'm painting the new sign.

MICK. Great holy snakes and lizards.

ROUSER. I mixed my own colours, and I'm painting it all myself. It only needs the finishing touch. I'm not too bad on the lettering.

MICK. What's that? ... *(Reading.)* 'The Com—mer—cial ... Hotel.'

ROUSER. That's plain enough. It's *The Commercial Hotel* now.

MICK. God speed the crows. ... So it's good-bye to the old *Diggers' Rest*.

ROUSER. They thought they'd better make a fresh start and give it a new name. There've been a lot of changes since you were round last. The place has been going ahead something wonderful. It's the gold mine.

MICK. I see they've got a lot of new miners up. I passed them just now coming down the track. They ain't the sort I'm used to. I like fossicking round with my old tin dish, but mining nowadays is different. They chips a bit o' the reef and crushes it in the dolly pot. It's all machinery and noise and bustle, and hard work for regular wages. That don't suit me. I like to be my own boss, and knock off whenever I feels inclined -

ROUSER. We've got to make the best of it, Mick. ... It's a new life altogether.

(MICK goes to ANDREW.)

MICK. Dozing, Andrew?

ANDREW. Oo aye, oo aye.

MICK. I see they've been making a lot of changes here.

ANDREW. I daurna' complain. It might be waur.

MICK. I dunno what to make of it. Everything's getting upside down.

ROUSER. I got into a fight to-day with one of them new miners. It was a put-up job, too. Do you know he was a pro and used to fight in the Stadium. They think they know too much. I landed him one, and knocked him clean out. They did look surprised. Some of 'em said I ought to take up the game, but I don't care for fighting. I'd rather be on the land.¹³⁵

(Enter CLARA.)

CLARA. Why didn't you clean the pipes when you laid the beer on this morning?

ROUSER. Bloome, I forgot.

CLARA. Some of the miners were complaining the beer was muddy. You ought to know by now. ... And why didn't you put those ferns where I told you.

ROUSER. I was painting the new sign.

CLARA. Ain't you finished yet? *(Turns to ANDREW.)* I wish you wouldn't be sitting here all day. It don't look well.

ANDREW. I'll be all recht in a meenit.

MICK. How's Andrew been keeping?

¹³⁵ ROUSER. I got into a fight ... on the land] ROUSER. Some of them new miners think they know too much because they come from big cities like Stawell and Ballarat. I got into a fight to-day about a little argument over a kelppie [undecipherable]. Sam was my second. You're an old boxer Mick and you'll understand the point we worked. Sam shouted out "hit him in the ribs, Billy" but instead when he was guarding his body I landed him one on the chin where he didn't expect it, a real beauty, and that was the end of it. They did look surprised. It was a put up job for the block I knocked out was a pro. Rough-house Barnes who used to fight in the halls in Melbourne. A Stuart cove came up and offered to pay all my expenses if I'd go to town and start training. He said I had a natural gift and might be a champion at the game, but I don't care much for fighting. I'd sooner be on the land. A; emendation on separate piece of paper, pasted over original text.

CLARA. All he does now is sleep and cough.

ANDREW. It's lang ere the de'il dess at the dyke side.

CLARA. We can't always have him hanging about. We're doing a big business, and there's other people to study.

MICK. I'm getting a bit spun out myself.

CLARA. You ought to give up fossicking.

MICK. Give it up! God bless you, I'm putting in a Long Tom down in the creek to-morrow.

CLARA. It would be better for everybody if you took the old age pension.

MICK. A man never knows what he'll come to in this world.¹³⁶ I was a swell when I was a young fellow—used to ride a fifty guinea nag, and sport a gold-mounted riding whip. But I could never keep anything ... they all went, the money first, then the horse, then the whip with the gold nob. I kept that to the last. I've lit my pipe with a five-pound note, and now I'm finishing my days as an old fossicker. That's the way it goes. And look¹³⁷ at Andrew—he was a braw laddie too—but it all ends in a bent back and an asthmatic cough on the chest.

(Enter WATTY.)

WATTY. Hullo, Terrible! What do you think o' this? When I was marking just now an old josser got so excited he started chalking the jigger instead of his cue.

CLARA. Haven't you got the mail ready?

WATTY. Not yet. ... He just kept on rubbing, and then do you know what he did? ... He played the blooming red.

CLARA. Can't you think o' nothing without being told!

(Pause.)

WATTY *(Looking hurt, and then turns aside)*. Is that a rooster you're painting Billy?

ROUSER. No.

WATTY. What is it, then?

ROUSER. Nothing. ... It's only a bit of an ornament.

WATTY. My word, Billy, you should have been a painter.

ROUSER. I was thinking about it, but I'd rather be on the land.

CLARA. Ain't you done yet?

ROUSER. I'm getting along ... slowly.

CLARA. You're slow enough. *(To WATTY.)* They want you in the saloon.

WATTY. I'm the billiard marker. I suppose a couple o' mugs want a hundred up.

(Exit WATTY, into bar.)

CLARA. Some of 'em think they're still in the old shanty.

(ANDREW rises.)

ANDREW. It's the asthma. ... But I daurna' complain. The gowd's aboot here yet, in thy auld cricks and gullies. *(Exit ANDREW, through stable gate.)*

CLARA. He's always mumbling away like that to himself.

MICK. I remember a good story when I was on Alexandra -

CLARA. I can't stay here all day listening to your yabber yabber. If you want a feed you can go round to the back. *(CLARA kicks swag, and exits to hotel.)*

MICK. Dang it, I'm up the crick again.

ROUSER *(Coming down from steps)*. That ought to strike the eye. *(Puts ladder away.)*

MICK. You'd hardly know the old place.

¹³⁶ A man never knows what he'll come to in this world.] *not in A.*

¹³⁷ And look] Look A.

ROUSER. It does make a difference since they've called it *The Commercial Hotel*. We're doing everything in style. The telephone's on now, and we've bought a billiard table and a gramophone

MICK. God bless our cows!

ROUSER. But we ain't half finished yet. We're going to have gas, real gas, hot¹³⁸ and cold baths, marble-top tables, an ice chest, and all sorts of improvements. Mrs Miles sees to that.

MICK. Mrs Miles! Do you mean Clara?

ROUSER. Yes. They were married last week.

MICK. This place ain't what it used to be.

ROUSER. It is different. ... Everybody's too busy to have any time for a bit of fun and sport. We never even have a game of euchre in the evenings.

MICK. God bless my soul.

ROUSER. It's a new life altogether. I had my eye on a little piece of ground, but when they got married, and the place started to go ahead I didn't like to leave them in the lurch.

MICK. Clara's getting hard. She used to be a good-hearted girl.

ROUSER. I noticed myself she don't laugh at Watty's little jokes no more.

(Enter CLARA.)

CLARA *(Taking up ferns)*. I suppose I'll have to do it myself.

ROUSER *(Takes up pot and brushes)*. That job's done.

CLARA. About time too.

ROUSER. Come on, Mick

(They move off.)

CLARA. Haven't you unpacked that box yet? It's the gas. We want it fixed for to-night.

ROUSER. I'll have it ready. *(Moves off.)*

CLARA. And did you remember that bag for No. 17?

ROUSER. That'll be all right, Mrs Miles, just you leave it to me.

(Exit MICK and ROUSER, through¹³⁹ stable gate.)

(Enter MRS SMITH, in black silk dress.)

CLARA. Those commercial travellers keep us going.

MRS SMITH. I hardly know where I am with all this bustle and excitement.

CLARA. But they're good drinkers and free with their money.

MRS SMITH *(Looking at ferns)*. We're getting quite genteel. *(Sits on chair.)*

CLARA *(Showing catalogue)*. I've just had this catalogue from town. There's everything you can think of—good enough for Government House. Look at the baths, they're all marble. We ought to have one.

MRS SMITH. We couldn't afford that.

CLARA. And see this—ain't it lovely—a bedroom suit, with wardrobe, dressing chest with large bevelled edge adjustable toilet mirror; marble-top washstand, with towel rail attached. This handsome suit, finished rich brown antique oak, style Louis Quinze, usual price thirty-three guineas, offered at twenty-one guineas.' If the shares go up I'll have it.

(Enter OGILVIE from hotel singing song.)

OGILVIE. I feel as fit as a two-year old. I'm ashamed how young I feel. I haven't a care in the world.

MRS SMITH. It's been a warm summer.

¹³⁸ gas, real gas, hot] gas, hot A.

¹³⁹ through] thro' A.

OGILVIE. But it's fresh now. You can't beat this weather, clear and crisp. ... Everything's looking well.

CLARA. The shares were quoted at seventy pounds yesterday.

OGILVIE. They'll cause a bigger flutter than that yet. They're rising every day. They'll reach a hundred and more by the end of the week.

CLARA. A hundred pounds!

OGILVIE. Perhaps a thousand. This is a gold mine ... not your tin or copper or silver-lead.

CLARA. There's plenty to do, with the miners about, and the travellers and agents coming up with every coach ... it keeps us all on the go.

OGILVIE. That's the thing for a young couple.

(Exit CLARA.)

OGILVIE. Let me see you. *(Examines MRS SMITH's dress.)* You're quite a picture in that black silk.

MRS SMITH *(Rising)*. It's rather old-fashioned, but -

OGILVIE. You know what suits you, Kitty. I've never seen you look better.

MRS SMITH *(Showing it off)*. Do you think it hangs well?

OGILVIE. It's just right.

(Enter ANDREW, from stable gate. He walks slowly across stage into store.)

MRS SMITH. And it's not too showy?

OGILVIE. Not for you, Kitty. ... I don't wonder at you marrying again—but I didn't think it would be Andrew.

MRS SMITH. He's a quiet man, isn't he now. *(Sits down again.)* It was this way. There was a lot to do about the place, with nobody to help me but Watty. Andrew had to give up mining on account of his asthma, and one day he came round to see if he could make himself useful. There's a power of work on a place like this, what with the bar and store, the post-office and the Registry for Births and Deaths, beside the farm on the hill, so I gave him a job at a pound a week and his tucker. He was a powerful worker before the asthma took him, and never a one to talk or interfere. After a time I got used to seeing him about the place, so I says to myself one day, 'Old woman, you might do worse than marry Andrew.' That's how it came about. ... Andrew only costs me his tucker now.

OGILVIE *(Laughing)*. You will have your joke, Kitty.

MRS SMITH. We get on very well together for¹⁴⁰ old people.

OGILVIE. My wife died sixteen years ago.

MRS SMITH. But you have your family.

OGILVIE. They belong to a different generation. They don't understand me. They wanted me to retire, just like the wife did. They even tried to stop me coming over here. But I always go my own track.

MRS SMITH. You were always the strong one. Nobody could ever stand against you.

OGILVIE. I think I've done¹⁴¹ something for the old place. ... This is where I made my first start. My word, I've had my ups and downs since then. I'll never forget the day I went into the *Salmon Inn* at Berwick-On-Tweed. Somebody was reading from a newspaper about the nuggets of gold discovered in Australia. I was only a lad, but I came out by the next boat. ... The old diggings—that was life if you like! I used to stand up to my waist in water day after day, and never feel the cold. And I've¹⁴² been mining ever since. I was a rich man when the Boom burst, then I lost everything; but I went to the west, made a fortune and sunk it all in *The Southern Cross*. It seems

¹⁴⁰ well together for] well for A.

¹⁴¹ I think I've done] I'm glad I came. I think I've done A.

¹⁴² And I've] I've A.

like a miracle, but I've made another fortune. It's *The Crown Jewels* reef again.¹⁴³ I'm back on the diggings. The years between seem to have slipped away. Nothing has changed. It's the same creek, it's the same George Ogilvie.

MRS SMITH. The things¹⁴⁴ I've seen, and to think the gold was here all the time.

OGILVIE. It's not for myself. I don't want the money. I could live as happy as Larry in any old hut beside the creek. (*Sings another few bars.*)

(*Enter WATTY.*)

WATTY. Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE. Yes.

WATTY. I think you're wanted at the mine.

OGILVIE. Can't they do anything without me. I suppose I'll have to go round.

(*MRS SMITH rises.*)

MRS SMITH. I was thinking of taking a drive this afternoon to have a look at a little property I have.

OGILVIE. It's worth keeping. It was gold that made this country. There's nothing like gold. Just wait a bit and there'll be a fine story to tell.

(*Walks to hotel with MRS SMITH, and then goes off through gate, singing an old bush song.*)

(*Exit MRS SMITH, into hotel.*)

(*Enter SAM, through fence.*)

SAM. I've bought a new team of bullocks.

WATTY. I thought you were gold mining.

SAM. I wish the devil had flown away with the first man who ever washed a dish of dirt in this creek.

WATTY. What did you give for them.

SAM. Three hundred pounds ...

(*WATTY whistles.*)

with the gear thrown in. It was a bargain. You should see the leader, *Nimble*—he's active, kindly and lively, and red, my favourite colour. But they're all beauties, not too big. Big bullocks are all right for slow people on the farm, but their weight kills them on the road.¹⁴⁵

WATTY. There's nothing like a gold mine to¹⁴⁶ send the place ahead.

SAM. I'm done with it. I don't blame, Bella. I've been little better than a drunkard and a gambler.

WATTY. Bella likes a bit of fun herself.

SAM. But she knows where to stop. I brought it all on myself. When a man has a wife like that he ought to treat her right.

(*Enter MICK, from stables.*)

MICK. There's too many changes round here to suit me. (*Sits on log down Left.*)

WATTY. Clara hasn't left me, yet.

SAM. How long have you been married?

¹⁴³ It's the Crown Jewels reef again.] I can't believe I'm an old man. A.

¹⁴⁴ things] changes A.

¹⁴⁵ Three hundred pounds ... on the road.] A. tentatively scored through by a single vertical stroke, left.

¹⁴⁶ like a gold mine to] like gold to A.

WATTY. Over a week. It was this way.¹⁴⁷ We went to the dance together, and Clara was the best-looking girl in the room. They'll all say that. And we drove home in the moonlight ... that was the finish. And then we got¹⁴⁸ married ... but we haven't had our honeymoon yet.

(Enter CONROY, with bills.)

CONROY. It's all right, boys. I'll get the railway here yet.

SAM. That's no good to me ... what about my bullocks?

CONROY. I've interviewed every Cabinet Minister; but they all tried to put me off. It's their business to find the money. It's time we had a better type of man in Parliament.

(Enter MRS JONES, through gate.)

WATTY. How do you like the cool change, Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES. It's too dry. I was always used to plenty of rain.

CONROY *(Putting up bills)*. These'll show we mean business.

MRS JONES. I've been very poorly lately. I would have seen the doctor, but he's too far away. If he comes up he just looks at you, and charges you five pound—and then he sends you off to the hospital. Half a crown it was in the old country; we all clubbed together and we could have him whenever we liked, whether we were ill or not,¹⁴⁹ it was all in our subscription.

CONROY. We haven't had a land sale for years. It's right into my hands. I've drawn up the plans, and the bills will be all over the country to-morrow.

MICK. In my experience as soon as the railway comes to a place it goes back. It only means more rates and taxes.

WATTY. Never mind, Mickie. You won't have to pay them.

MRS JONES. My brothers at home used to work down a mine.

WATTY *(Surprised)*. Was it gold?

MRS JONES. No, coal.¹⁵⁰

MICK. I'll stick to my opinion even if I'm wrong.

MRS JONES. It's all gold, here, but it's poor land for potatoes. *(Exit MRS JONES.)*

CONROY *(Showing WATTY round)*. We'll have a great subdivisional sale. There's the place for the bank, when the streets are laid out, and over there we'll put up a row of miners' cottages. ... It only wants advertising. Of course we'll keep the corner blocks ourselves.

(Enter CLARA, excitedly.)

CLARA. Have you hear the latest! We've just had a 'phone message through. The shares were quoted to-day at eighty-five pounds.

WATTY. A fifteen pound rise. They keep on jumping every day.

CLARA. How many have you, Sam?

SAM. None. I sold out!

WATTY. You sold out!

SAM. I was disgusted with the mine, and disgusted with myself, so I sold out at sixty and bought a new team of bullocks.

WATTY. You sold at sixty and they'll reach the hundred this week. I refused seventy myself. But I'm playing a waiting game. ... I'm the mug!

(Enter ROUSER, with gas plant, from stable.)

ROUSER. Here's the gas.

¹⁴⁷ It was this way.] *not in A.*

¹⁴⁸ And then we got] We got *A.*

¹⁴⁹ whether we were ill or not,] *not in A.*

¹⁵⁰ Never mind ... No, coal.] *A. tentatively scored through by a single vertical stroke, left.*

CLARA. The plant came up to-day. This'll be the generator. Be careful.

WATTY. It ain't marked poison, is it?

CLARA. I hope we can use it to-night.

ROUSER. I've read the directions. I'll soon put it on.

CLARA. It's acetylene gas.

MICK. God bless you, it'll explode,¹⁵¹ and blow the blasted roof off.

CLARA. Some people always want to keep things back.

ROUSER. I'll fix it, and we'll light it up to-night. That'll show them flash miners. *(Exit ROUSER, into hotel.)*

CONROY. We ought to celebrate the great gold discovery.

CLARA. Do you think the Boom's going to last.

CONROY. Of course it is. It's only just beginning. I'll use my influence and bring the people here.¹⁵²

WATTY. You don't know how high the shares will go.
(Enter OGILVIE, through gate. He is outwardly calm.)
Good news, Mr Ogilvie. The shares are up to eighty-five pounds.

OGILVIE. I'll light my pipe. I think I deserve a smoke. *(Lights pipe and sits down.)*

CONROY. Anything new, Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE. Nothing to interest you, Mr Conroy.

CONROY. Do you know they've just asked me to stand for Parliament.

WATTY. I didn't hear that.

CONROY. I'm well known all round—don't see how I can get out of it. It needs a progressive man to represent this district.
(Exit CONROY.)

WATTY. He's all talk, but I don't suppose he'll be much worse than most of them.

CLARA *(Cheerfully)*. Have you been down to the mine, Mr Ogilvie?

OGILVIE. Yes. There wasn't much to do.

CLARA. I wonder what the shares will be to-morrow.

OGILVIE. Tomorrow! There'll be a lively scene on 'Change, I fancy.

WATTY. How are they getting on?

OGILVIE. Down at the mine?

WATTY. Yes.

OGILVIE. They've stopped for a bit.

WATTY. How's that?

OGILVIE. There was water in the mine.

WATTY. That's not serious. They'll soon get the water out.

OGILVIE *(Quizzically)*. I don't know about that.

WATTY. What's wrong, then?

OGILVIE. Do you want to know what's wrong? ... It's rather amusing. The mine was flooded ...¹⁵³

WATTY. Yes.

OGILVIE. And we've just found that the flood was pouring in from old workings.

MICK. God bless my soul!

WATTY. From old workings?

¹⁵¹ explode,] explode A.

¹⁵² people here.] people here, believe me. A.

¹⁵³ They've stopped ... mine was flooded ...] A. tentatively scored through by a single vertical stroke, left.

OGILVIE. That's the funny part about it. It would never pay to get the water out, and anyway, there's no more gold!

WATTY. What are you saying? No more gold!

OGILVIE. We came on a fault again. The reef stopped suddenly, and in looking for it we broke right through on to an old prospecting drive from *The Crown Jewels* mine. The water poured in slowly at first, but now she's up to the mouth of the shaft. The mine's finished.

SAM. That's a lesson to us.

(Enter MRS SMITH. WATTY whispers to her.)

OGILVIE. We've got to face it. It's a real crash.

MRS SMITH. It can't be true.

OGILVIE. It's too true, Kitty. Fancy losing that damned reef again.

MRS SMITH. Don't think about it.

OGILVIE. This was the last chance. There's no hope on the other side of the creek. We'll never see *The Crown Jewels* reef again.

MICK. It was a queer reef, that, from the very first.¹⁵⁴

MRS SMITH. Oh, what changes I've seen in this place.

OGILVIE. I'm getting a bit old to stand these shocks, but I'm strong yet, and I don't lose heart.

MRS SMITH. None of us can go on forever.

WATTY. You might sink another shaft.

OGILVIE. You can sink the shaft down to Hell if you like, but you'll never find the gold.

MRS SMITH. I won't go for a drive this afternoon.

OGILVIE. We're not upset so easily, Kitty.

MRS SMITH. I'm sorry about it—not for my own sake.

OGILVIE. My family would have the laugh on me if they knew, but I'll say nothing about it.

MICK. It's a funny world, Geordie.

OGILVIE. I can't complain about it. I've been through the mill, but I've had my fun too. I took it as I went along.

WATTY. We'll have a drink anyway.

CLARA *(To MRS SMITH as they go out)*. Watty lost some money, too. We won't be able to buy that suite.

MRS SMITH. Never mind that ... it's a pity. He is such a fine man.¹⁵⁵

(Exeunt CLARA, and MRS SMITH.)

WATTY. You'll join us, won't you, Sam?

SAM. I'm not taking any.

WATTY. Be a sport.

SAM. I'd better not.

MICK. It's tricky country, Geordie—God bless my heart.

OGILVIE. You have to expect these things with gold. It's all the turn of the lucky wheel.

(Exeunt OMNES, into bar, except SAM.)

(SAM walks to fence. As he is about to go through enter BELLA, through gate.)

(SAM comes forward.)

BELLA. Sam!

SAM. Bella. *(He approaches, she keeps her dignity.)* Back again?

BELLA. You see I am.

(Pause.)

¹⁵⁴ It was a queer reef, that, from the very first.] It's trick country, Geordie. A.

¹⁵⁵ He is such a fine man.] He was such a great man. A.

SAM. Did you have a good trip?
 BELLA. No.
 SAM. Did you go to the races?¹⁵⁶
 BELLA. No.
 SAM. All well at home, I hope?
 BELLA. Yes. ... What have you been doing?
 SAM. I dunno.
 BELLA. I didn't find you at home.
 SAM. If I'd known you were coming -
 BELLA. I just thought I'd take a run up.
 SAM. You're staying for good, aren't you?
 BELLA. I don't know. It depends.
 SAM (*Righteously*). I'm taking out the team again.
 BELLA. Are you?
 SAM. I've a couple of good contracts, carting timber for the new sawmills in the mountains.
 BELLA. I thought you were gold-mining.
 SAM. No more gold-mining for me.
 BELLA. But you bought shares.
 SAM. Five original only—but haven't you heard the news?
 BELLA. No.
 SAM. There's no gold at all—the mine's a duffer.
 BELLA. So you lost your money as I said you would.
 SAM. No. ... I sold out.
 BELLA. What did you get?
 SAM. I only paid five pounds, and I sold out for three hundred. I took the risk you know.
 BELLA. Three hundred pounds!¹⁵⁷
 SAM. I bought a new team of bullocks. You should see the leader, he's well named *Nimble*. He could climb a tree, and he jumps like a deer.
 BELLA. And did you sell out for my sake?
 SAM. Yes. When you went away I knew you were right, Bella. I was to blame for everything. But I made up my mind there'd be no more speculation for me, so I sold out and did all I could to make it up.¹⁵⁸
 (*Enter WATTY, excitedly.*)
 WATTY. Have you heard the news? Mr Ogilvie's had another stroke of luck.
 SAM. None of your jokes, now.
 WATTY. Straight—it's a great mine.
 SAM. Not our mine?
 WATTY. No. ... That one in¹⁵⁹ Western Australia. *The Southern Cross* is a Boom. He'll be a millionaire.
 (*Enter CLARA, from store.*)
 CLARA. It's true. ... They've found gold in the West.
 SAM. Mar-velious.

¹⁵⁶ BELLA. No./SAM. Did you got to the races.] *not in A.*

¹⁵⁷ Three hundred pounds.] Where's the money? *A.*

¹⁵⁸ make it up.] make up. *A.*

¹⁵⁹ That one in] It's in *A.*

CLARA. Hullo, Bella, so you're back again!¹⁶⁰

BELLA. I heard all about what great goings on there were. I got a lovely account of your wedding.

(CLARA shows ring.)

It is a nice ring. It's something like¹⁶¹ the one Sam gave me.

(They compare rings.)

(Enter CONROY, at the gate.)

CONROY. What's this I hear! The mine's closed down!

WATTY. It was bad luck.

CONROY. So there's no gold at all.

WATTY. No. They lost the reef, cut off by a fault again.¹⁶²

CONROY. This is a nice state of things, boom and burst, and no money for anybody.

WATTY. But they've struck the gold over in the west.

CONROY. In the west ... that's no good to me.

(Enter OGILVIE, in triumph from bar.)

OGILVIE. They've struck the reef—at two hundred feet. It's rich and running north and south. The expert says there's gold ahead for another fifty years.

WATTY. I thought it would all come right.

OGILVIE. I'm a rich man again. You can't buy the shares. It's a real gold-mine. I never did any good with tin or silver-lead, and once I had a sapphire mine. It came to nothing at all, but I was always lucky with the gold. ... When does the coach start?

WATTY. In a few minutes.

OGILVIE. I must catch it. I've only to throw a few things into¹⁶³ the bag. Tell them to wait a minute.

They want me over at once. *(Exit OGILVIE.)*

WATTY. He's a great old battler, isn't he?

SAM. Mar-velious!

CONROY. He's all right, but what about me!

WATTY. It was worth the risk.

SAM. Anyhow it did nobody no harm.

CONROY. No harm! We can't have the sale now, and there's no chance of getting the railway.

Everybody will clear out, and the place will be as slow¹⁶⁴ as it was before.

WATTY. It can't be helped.

SAM. We got along all right without the mine¹⁶⁵, and we'll get along now.

CONROY. All my work goes for nothing. *(Pulls down bills.)* That's finished. I'm damned if I'll bother any more about the place. *(Exit CONROY, through gate.)*

BELLA. I'm glad Sam's out of it.

CLARA. That's the end of the miners and the commercials. I don't know what we're going to do.

(Enter ROUSER, from hotel.)

ROUSER. It's that gas.

CLARA. What's wrong?

¹⁶⁰ so you're back again!] you're back again. A.

¹⁶¹ something like] like A.

¹⁶² reef, cut off by a fault again.] reef. A.

¹⁶³ into] in A.

¹⁶⁴ slow] dead A.

¹⁶⁵ without the mine] before A.

ROUSER. I was fixing it, but I think it's escaped.

WATTY. You're a champion, Billy.

ROUSER. It's no good. The blooming thing won't work. I'm too busy to mend it. (*Exit ROUSER, into stable.*)

CLARA. It's terrible. Everything's going wrong.

WATTY. I never had any luck. Once I bought a pet kangaroo, and then the damned thing wouldn't hop.

CLARA. Go on.

(*Enter MRS SMITH, exultantly.*)

MRS SMITH. Geordie Ogilvie's won again. There's nobody like him.

WATTY. He's catching the coach in a minute.

MRS SMITH. That's just like him. Help him with his things, Watty.

WATTY. Come on, Sam.

(*Exeunt WATTY, and SAM.*)

MRS SMITH. Off again—that's Geordie Ogilvie for you.

CLARA. D'you see, Bella's back.

BELLA. I had to come back. I couldn't trust Sam by himself.

CLARA. He hasn't touched a drop since you left.

BELLA. But you never know what a man like that might do.

MRS SMITH. You're too hard on him, Bella.

BELLA. I'm not hard, Mrs Smith. I want to have a good time, too. But Sam's so careless, he's easily led astray. Do you know our church social -

(*Enter ROUSER.*)

ROUSER. The horses are in. (*Exit ROUSER.*)

MRS SMITH. I wonder has he forgotten anything.

(*Enter MICK and ANDREW.*)

MICK. It's gold, Andrew.

ANDREW. Oo aye, oo aye.

MICK. Over in the west—a big gold-mine. Well, I'm danged!

MRS SMITH (*Rising*). I must see for myself. (*Exit MRS SMITH.*)¹⁶⁶

ANDREW. I'm ower auld tae fash about it. I hae me meat, and a guid bed, and a roof abin me heid -

CLARA. They're coming!

(*Enter SAM, with heavy bag.*)

BELLA. That's too heavy for you, Sam.

SAM. I haven't lost my form, yet.

(*Enter WATTY.*)

WATTY. This way, Mr Ogilvie.

(*Enter OGILVIE, with coat, handbag etc.*)

OGILVIE. I'm off. Good-bye, all.

BELLA/CLARA. Good-bye, Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE. I'm wanted over there. It's gold!

CLARA. I hope you have a pleasant journey.

(*Enter MRS SMITH, with scarf.*)

(*Enter MRS JONES, from store.*)

MRS SMITH. You won't forget us now you're high up in the world.

OGILVIE. No. I won't forget the old *Diggers' Rest*.

¹⁶⁶ (*Exit MRS SMITH.*) not in A.

WATTY. Wait a jiff!¹⁶⁷ (*Exit WATTY, into bar.*)

MRS SMITH (*Putting scarf round OGILVIE's neck.*) Take this, Geordie. I've knitted it myself.

OGILVIE. You're too good to me.

MRS SMITH. We were all glad to see you. It was just like the early days.

OGILVIE. The early days! Ah, Kitty, we can't bring back the past. Life's always changing.

(*Enter WATTY, with flask.*)

WATTY. Put this in your pocket, Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE. A flask! Thanks for everything. I've had a great time.

MRS SMITH. It made me feel young again.

OGILVIE (*To MICK*). Good-bye, old mate. We're the last of the old school.

(*Enter ROUSER.*)

ROUSER. The coach is waiting. (*Exit ROUSER.*)

CLARA. Haven't you got the mail ready? Hurry up.

(*Exit WATTY, into store.*)

OGILVIE. I must go. I'm wanted at the mine. Good luck to you all.

WOMEN. Good-bye. Pleasant journey.

MRS SMITH. Wrap yourself up well. It's cold driving.

(*Enter WATTY, with mail bag.*)

WATTY. This way, Mr Ogilvie.

OGILVIE. Good-bye. It's the gold. I've got to follow the gold.

OMNES. Good-bye.

—Pleasant journey.

—Hurrah!

(*Exit OGILVIE, followed by SAM, WATTY, ANDREW, MICK, through gate. WOMEN wave handkerchiefs.*)

CLARA (*Returning*). He's gone.

MRS SMITH. It's been an exciting day for us all.

MRS JONES. I'll be getting home now, Mrs Smith. I'm afraid of the bush in the dark.¹⁶⁸

MRS SMITH. How's Louisa?

MRS JONES. She's just had a touch of German measles.

MRS SMITH. You give her plenty of cod liver oil.

MRS JONES. It's the climate. There's too much sunshine. It was different in the old country. (*Exit*

MRS JONES, through gate.)

CLARA. You'd better lie down, Mum.

MRS SMITH. Perhaps I will.

(*Enter WATTY, from stables.*)

WATTY. He's gone.

MRS SMITH. Did you ever hear the like! He comes up pretending to be an old hawker, and he goes off like a millionaire. And that's Geordie Ogilvie. He was always a wonderful man. You don't see men like that nowadays.

(*Enter ROUSER and SAM.*)

ROUSER. The coach is off.

MRS SMITH. It was strange to see him back again.

WATTY. He's a battler.

BELLA. It's our church social to-morrow.

¹⁶⁷ Wait a jiff! I'll be back in a second. A.

¹⁶⁸ I'm afraid of the bush in the dark.] It's dark. A.

SAM. I won't be there.

BELLA. You must, Sam.

SAM. I'll be away in the mountains.

BELLA. They're sure to ask me to sing, and they're such nice people.

SAM. I wouldn't take the risk. I don't want to be led into temptation.

CLARA (*To ROUSER*). You'd better put back the old sign, Billy.

ROUSER. *The Diggers' Rest?*

CLARA. Yes. It's not *The Commercial Hotel* now.

ROUSER. Well, if the gold's gone, we've got the land. That won't hop off. (*ROUSER changes signs.*)

BELLA. Come on, Sam. We must get home.

SAM. I'm taking out the new team to-morrow.

(*Exeunt SAM, and BELLA, through*¹⁶⁹ *gate.*)

CLARA. Isn't it quiet again now?

MRS SMITH. We'll all be happy together. (*To WATTY*.) You've got a good wife, Watty.

WATTY. I don't think I made a mistake, eh Clara?

(*CLARA laughs.*)

It'll be like old times again.

CLARA. It was a bit upsetting. My nerves were all on edge.

MRS SMITH (*Rising, dreamily*). He's gone. I hardly know what's happened. But it's all passed now, just like a dream. (*Exit MRS SMITH, into hotel.*)

WATTY. We'll be able to take our honeymoon now.

CLARA. I don't know if I could trust you in town.

WATTY. I'm the innocent one, I am.

CLARA (*Laughing*). Don't make we laugh.

WATTY. I like to hear you laughing, Clara.

(*Enter ANDREW and MICK.*)

MICK. But what's the use of talking. You mark my words -

ANDREW. Oo aye.

(*They cross together.*)

CLARA. You'll stay to tea, won't you, Mick?

MICK (*Looks surprised*). What—do you mean it.

WATTY. And we'll have a little game of euchre to-night. What do you say to that, Billy?

ROUSER. I'm on.

CLARA. You keep your eye on him, Billy. He's too sharp at the cards.

(*OLD MEN sit on form. ROUSER comes down from ladder.*)

ROUSER. I haven't touched my mouth organ for weeks¹⁷⁰!

CLARA (*Whirling round*). That's right, Billy. You can give us a tune to-night. ... You'd better take these [ferns] away too.

ROUSER. They do look a bit flash. (*Removes ferns.*)

CLARA. I'd better light the lamp. (*Lights lamp.*) We'll send that gas back.

ROUSER. He was a great old battler. It never came to nothing—but he shook things up when he was here. (*Exit ROUSER.*)

WATTY (*Taking out shares*). And yesterday I could have sold out at a big profit.

CLARA. But you didn't.

¹⁶⁹ through] thro A.

¹⁷⁰ weeks] months A. Emended by Hilda, scoring out typed text with a line of xs.

WATTY. No.
 CLARA. You're the mug, Watty. (*Laughs.*)
 WATTY. So I am.
 (*Pause.*)
 CLARA. But it don't matter. It's *The Diggers' Rest* again. I like the look of that old lamp. It's nice to see it when you're coming home through the bush.¹⁷¹
 MICK. You mark my words, Andy.
 ANDREW. Oo aye.
 MICK. I told you the gold was played out. (*Rises and walks away.*)
 WATTY. But I've got you, Clara.
 CLARA. We've come through a bit.
 WATTY. That's all over, now. You're looking a treat.
 CLARA. Wish you mean it!
 WATTY. So I do. But no more moonlight dances for me!
 CLARA. Go on with you. (*Moves off.*)
 WATTY. Give's a kiss, Clara.¹⁷²
 CLARA. I've got to get the tea. (*Runs off laughing.*)
 WATTY. Eh, hold on, Clara.
 (*Exit CLARA, followed by WATTY.*)
 MICK (*Returning to form*).¹⁷³ I remember a good story.
 ANDREW (*Pointing vaguely*). There's gowd aboot here yet, in they auld cricks and gullies.
 MICK (*Arguing*). Gold - in these old gullies.
 ANDREW. Oo aye.
 MICK. It were forty-five years ago, at the back of the hill there¹⁷⁴, when me and Geordie Ogilvie -

Curtain.

Notes

This place ain't what it used to be. It's all fruit-growing and cockie-farming. Where are the old diggers now!: Cf. 'Holes in the Ground', *The Bulletin*, 1 March 1906; 'The Fossicker', *The Weekly Times*, 12 December 1912; and 'The Old Fossicker's Lament', *The Bulletin*, 6 October 1914.

White Horse Gully: On 30 March 1855, *The Mount Alexander Mail* reported: 'The North Western Diggings. ... Many persons are at present located on Specimen Hill, Spring Gully, where a store is about to be opened. Most of them are engaged in erecting puddling machines for the winter. Wattle and Dinah Flats and White Horse Gully have now a considerable fixed population. ... The Dascombe nugget, of 330 oz, sold in London for £1500, was unearthed in White Horse Gully, on the Bendigo fields.'

North Wind: Cf. Frederick McCubbin, *The North Wind* (c.1888)

Swanson Street ('they've got water running up and down the window of a butcher's shop'): the famous H Hearne, Pork Butcher, 19 Swanston Street, Melbourne.

the Eastern Market: a 'general market', also known as 'Paddys Market', operated from 1847—one of the three markets established in Melbourne in the 1840s—on a two-acre site on the corner of Bourke and Stephen—later Exhibition—streets.

The Mare with the Silver Hoof: novel by Bob Allen, published by NSW Bookstall Company, 1911. Based in Sydney, NSW Bookstall Company operated a chain of news-agencies throughout the state. It was notable as a publisher of

¹⁷¹ It's nice to see it when you're coming home through the bush.] *not in A.*

¹⁷² Give's a kiss, Clara.] Wait a minute, Clara. Let's give you a kiss. *A.*

¹⁷³ (*Returning to form*)] *not in A.*

¹⁷⁴ at the back of the hill there] in that old gully *A.*

inexpensive paperback books which were written, illustrated, published and printed in Australia, and sold to commuters at railway stations.

I reckon Lord Charles ought to about win the Steeple': A steeplechase is a distance horse race in which competitors are required to jump diverse fence and ditch obstacles. The jumping season in Australia normally took place from March until September. Horses used for steeplechasing are primarily former flat racing horses, rather than horses specifically bred for jumping. The Grand Annual, which has the most fences of any steeplechase in the world, is held in May at Warrnambool. The Grand Annual was first run in 1872. It was known as the Warrnambool Handicap Steeple until 1877, the Grand National Steeple from 1878 until 1881, the Warrnambool Handicap Steeple again until 1894, and the Grand Annual Steeple since 1895. 'Lord Charles' comes in fifth in a VRC Grand National Steeplechase meeting at Flemington, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 July 1896.

Thunderbolt: Frederick Wordsworth Ward (1835-25 May 1870), better known by the self-styled pseudonym of Captain Thunderbolt, was an Australian bushranger renowned for escaping from Cockatoo Island, and also for his reputation as the 'gentleman bushranger' and his lengthy survival (being the longest roaming bushranger in Australian history). Thunderbolt was known to attend country race meetings and take note of the winners that he would later rob.

hard graft: (*British slang*) hard work.

Wesleyan Methodist: the name used by the majority Methodist movement in Great Britain following its split from the Church of England after the death of John Wesley and the appearance of parallel Methodist movements. The word 'Wesleyan' was added to the title to differentiate it from the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, founded by George Whitefield who, like Wesley and his brother Charles, had been a member of the Holy Club in Oxford to which the (originally derogatory) epithet 'Methodist' was first applied, and from the Primitive Methodist movement, which separated from the Wesleyans in 1807. Cf. Esson's 'Drifts', *The Bulletin*, 16 December 1909; 'Methodist Curst', *The Bulletin*, 16 December 1909; and 'Weekenders', *The Bulletin*, 24 November 1921; in 'The Fossicker', Esson refers to a Methodist Church as the only church in Golden Gully.

Irrigation: The first schemes for irrigation commenced in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Goulburn Weir, constructed from 1887 to 1891, was the first major diversion structure built for irrigation development in Australia. A major drought in Victoria from 1877 to 1884 prompted Alfred Deakin, then a minister in the State Government and chairman of a Royal Commission on water supply to visit the irrigation areas of California. There he met the Canadian brothers George and William Chaffey who had worked on irrigation schemes in California. In 1886 the Chaffey brothers came to Australia and selected a derelict sheep station covering 1,000 km² at Mildura as the site for their first irrigation settlement. They signed an agreement with the Victorian government to spend at least £300,000 on permanent improvements at Mildura in the next twenty years. Esson is fascinated by the irrigation in India, mentioning the system numerous times in his *Lone Hand* despatches while travelling across the Continent in 1908.

good black soil: vertisol is a soil in which there is a high content of expansive clay known as montmorillonite that forms deep cracks in drier seasons or years. Vertisol typically forms from highly basic rocks, such as basalt, in climates that are seasonally humid or subject to erratic droughts and floods, or that impede drainage. Esson mentions the 'Black Soil Plains' in 'With Sheep to Bitter Springs', *The Bulletin*, 23 August 1917.

fivepence farthing: British penny; **penny**, bronze coin and monetary unit equal to one hundredth of a pound. The British **farthing** (¼d) coin, from 'fourthing', was a unit of currency of one quarter of a penny, or 1/960 of a pound sterling. It was minted in bronze, and replaced the earlier copper farthing. It was used during the reign of six monarchs: from Victoria to Elizabeth II, ceasing to be legal tender in 1960.

The Pommies: (*Australian slang; derog.*) British people; possibly rhyming slang: pomigranate, 'immigrant'.

hawker's tray: Indian or Afghan hawkers, or travelling salesmen, carried their wares on a tray (supported by a strap work around their necks).

football jerseys for the boys: Australian Rules football was established in Victoria in 1859; a Guernsey, or 'jumper', is the usual term to describe the type of shirt worn by Aussie rules footballers. It's an unusual term for Esson to use, given his two years spent as a football commentator for the Melbourne *Punch* (under the byline 'Center') in 1905-06.

the Melbourne Cup: a thoroughbred horse race established in 1861 in Melbourne, run annually on the first Tuesday in November. In 'Delia's Philosophy', Esson observed that in the Slum Quarter of Melbourne, 'On Melbourne Cup night the whole street was lit up,' and they 'kept the fun going aka night.' In 'Elegy' he also noted that 'The Cup is not the race I knew./... Into the past, I scarcely view/Your ladies on the lawn.'

rummest: superlative form of 'rum'; curious—beyond or deviating from the usual or expected.

That were forty years ago: *Diggers' Rest* notionally takes place circa 1900, with the gold boom 'forty years ago' in the late 1850s or early 1860s. This is consistent with Esson's verse and prose concerning the old diggings; the suggestion that the location of the play is around Ararat, where the peak of the rush was in April 1857.

a jamboree: a large celebration or party, typically a lavish and boisterous one.

Mechanics' Institute: educational establishments; originally formed to provide adult education, particularly in technical subjects, to working men.

He owns a mine in Western Australia—a gold mine.: In the latter part of the nineteenth century, discoveries of gold at a number of locations in Western Australia caused large influxes of prospectors from overseas and interstate. Significant finds included: Halls Creek (1885) found by Charles Hall and Jack Slattery, triggering the 'Kimberley gold rush'; near Southern Cross (1887), found by the party of Harry Francis Anstey; the 'Yilgarn gold rush'; Cue (1891), found by Michael Fitzgerald, Edward Heffernan and Tom Cue; the 'Murchison gold rush'; Coolgardie (1892), by Arthur Bailey and William Ford; and Kalgoorlie (1893), by Patrick 'Paddy' Hannan, Tom Flanagan and Dan Shea. A small rush at Nundamurrah Pool, on the Greenough River, near Mullewa, east of Geraldton occurred in August 1893.

ACT TWO

Canvas Town: tent settlement.

Lascar coolies: A **lascar** was a sailor or militiaman from South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Arab world, and other territories located to the east of the Cape of Good Hope, who were employed on European ships from the 16th century until the middle of the 20th century; a **coolie** is an unskilled native labourer.

the diggers with green veils: flies were a constant menace on the diggings and the digger's veil, made from coarse green gauze, was a first line of defence.

will-o'-the-wisp: an atmospheric ghost light seen by travellers at night, especially over bogs, swamps, or marshes. It resembles a flickering lamp and is said to recede if approached, drawing travellers from the safe paths.

Koolgardie: **Coolgardie** is a small town in Western Australia, 558 kilometres east of the state capital, Perth. The town was founded in 1892, when gold was discovered in the area. In 1898, Coolgardie was the third largest town in the colony, with an estimated population of 5,008. At its peak, 700 mining companies based in Coolgardie were registered with the London Stock Exchange.

old Chows: (*Colloq. derog.*) old Chinamen.

puddling: the means of breaking up clay ground containing gold; in the first rushes, this was done in a squat wooden drum, by adding water and agitating the clay with a shovel.

tailings: the mining process generates two byproducts 1. Waste Rock: rock that is non-mineralised, or mineralised rock which contains insufficient gold to process economically. 2. Tailings: the slurry that remains once the gold and silver have been extracted from the crushed ore.

wild cat: to prospect in an area not known to be productive.

quartz: a mineral, known as 'fools gold'.

as game as Ned Kelly: (*Australian, coll.*) audaciously bold.

Ironbark Gully: Tarnagulla, a gold mining town in central Victoria, 183 kilometres north west of the state capital, Melbourne. European settlement in the area began with the taking up of Tarnagulla station in the 1840s. Gold was first found in the area in 1852 by prospectors on their way to the Korong goldfields near Wedderburn. The discovery led to a gold rush as more than 5,000 miners made their way to the diggings. The settlement created by these miners was first at known as Sandy Creek and was renamed Tarnagulla, after the station in 1860. Later settlement focused on agriculture with sheep raising and wheat growing established in the area. A sawmill was established at nearby Bullabul Creek in 1863, and the railway from Dunolly reached Tarnagulla in 1888.

a long sleevever: (*obsolete*) a measure of beer, equal to about three-quarters of a pint.

Benalla Sports; a small city located on the Broken River in the High Country north-eastern region of Victoria, about 212 kilometres north east of Melbourne. Sheparton: a city located on the floodplain of the Goulburn River in northern Victoria, approximately 181 kilometres north-northeast of Melbourne. Louis Esson's widowed mother Mary Jane retired to Sheparton.

Quang: primarily a Vietnamese boy's name, but used derogatorily to refer to anyone of Asian appearance.

Pennyweight Crik [Creek]: near Ballarat.

the Roaring Days: Cf. poem by Henry Lawson, 'The Roaring Days'.

ACT THREE

Commercial Hotel: hotels specifically catering for Commercial, or travelling, salesmen.

the Stadium: RL 'Snowy' Baker, Sydney sportsman and boxing promoter, built the West Melbourne Stadium on swampy land at 300 Dudley Street in 1912 (opening just in time for the Mehegan-Wells fight of 3 November 1913). Baker sold the venue to John Wren in 1915. This appears to be anachronistic given the play is set in the 1890s.

a Long Tom: a device shaped like a long trough, used in the alluvial mining of gold. Its use evolved as an extended version of the rocker in the mid 1800s and its broad application took off during the California Gold Rush. The Long Tom featured a long washing box with a perforated screen to catch larger-sized rocks and debris, and under the screen, a riffle or sluice board to trap gold.

a braw laddie: (*Scot. and North England.*) a good looking or finely dressed boy; dressed in a splendid or gaudy fashion.

an old jossor: (*British, colloq.*) a man, typically an old man or one regarded with some contempt. Cf. James Joyce, 'The Encounter' in *Dubliners*, a story about two young boys, the narrator and Mahony, and the man they encounter whom Mahony calls 'a queer old jossor.'

the jigger: the sieve used in sorting or separating ore.

yabber yabber: (*Australian pidgin, from a source in the Pama-Nyungan language of south east Australia*) casual talk; chatter.

The telephone's on now: as early as 1877, WJ Thomas of the Geelong Customs House experimented with home-made telephones and successfully linked houses in his locality. By means of his telephones and wire, Thomas arranged for the transmission from one house to another of music as well as conversation. Social gatherings were arranged to try the telephone, which helped in testing and also provided a novel form of entertainment. Later, Thomas transmitted over longer distances, using a telegraph line between Geelong and Melbourne and between Geelong and Queenscliff. The first test between Geelong and Queenscliff took place on the evening of 9 January 1878. Some of the contributions were heard clearly, notably a vocal rendition of 'Yankee Doodle' at the Geelong end of the line, and 'Genevieve' at the Queenscliff end. What appears to have been the first installation of a regular commercial telephone service in Australia came into operation on 2 January 1878. This was in Melbourne. It linked the head office of hardware importers Messrs McLean Bros. & Rigg in Elizabeth Street with their Spencer Street store — about 1.2 km away. The telephones used were made by a local man — JS Edwards. In February 1878, successful experiments were

carried out between Melbourne and Ballarat (115 km) using telephones made by a Mr Challon of the Central Telegraph Office, Melbourne. The Victorian Post Office report for 1878 had this to say about the exciting developments in local telephony: 'The branch establishments of several business places in Melbourne and the suburbs are now connected with their head offices by means of telephones. The great drawback to the utility of these instruments when first introduced was the difficulty of calling the attention of the person desired to be spoken to. This has been overcome by the attachment of signal bells to the wire, and the use of the telephones for business purposes has proved to be a great convenience. The greatest length of wire on which telephones are at present regularly employed is about 5 miles (8 km).'

Commercial travellers: travelling sales representatives. In Adelaide in 1866 a group of Commercial Travellers met to discuss how to overcome the various difficulties they were experiencing in conducting their business, especially the poor quality country roads and hotel accommodation. This was the first organized group of commercial travellers in Australia. In 1874 the C.T.A. was incorporated, being the first in Australia. Until 1891 they met at well-known HOTELS and CLUBS in Adelaide. The first President was Mr. W. Thurston. The founding members of the Association comprised of leaders in South Australian business, sales and commerce. In 1895 The United CTA of Australia was founded to affiliate interstate clubs and associations.

tucker: (*Australian, colloq.*) food.

Salmon Inn at Berwick-On-Tweed: Berwick is the northernmost town in England (only 56km from Edinburgh where Louis was born); a civil parish in Northumberland, sited immediately to the north of the Tweed estuary and just south of the Anglo-Scottish border. There exists an establishment called the Salmon Inn.

the new sawmills in the mountains: Cf. Tarnagulla

a duffer: (*Australian, colloq.*) an unproductive mine.

Mother and Son

A Play, in Three Acts

First Performance

Mother and Son was first performed by the Pioneer Players, Melbourne, at Melbourne Temperance Hall¹ in June 1923. It was produced by George Dawe with the following cast:

MRS LIND	Miss Alice Crowther
HARRY	Mr Leo Burke
PETER	Dr Stewart Macky
TOM HENDERSON	Mr George Dawe
PEGGY DAWSON	Miss Irene Appleton
TED	Mr Reg Moyle
JIM BLAKE	Mr Charles Doherty
EMMA	Mrs Hilda Esson
Properties etc	Richard Hoopell (Dick) Long

This was preceded by *The Voice of the People*, a one-act comedy by New Zealander Alan Mulgan.



Pioneer Players: Alice Crowther and Hilda Esson

Publication

The Southern Cross and Other Plays, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne (1946).

Copy Text

The only surviving text is that published by Esson's widow, Dr Hilda Bull, three years following his death in *The Southern Cross and Other Plays*, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne (1946).

¹ The Temperance Hall, 172-74 Russell Street, Melbourne, dates back to the 1850's and in 1934 became the Imperial Theatre operated by Sir Benjamin Fuller. The Imperial became the Savoy in 1939.

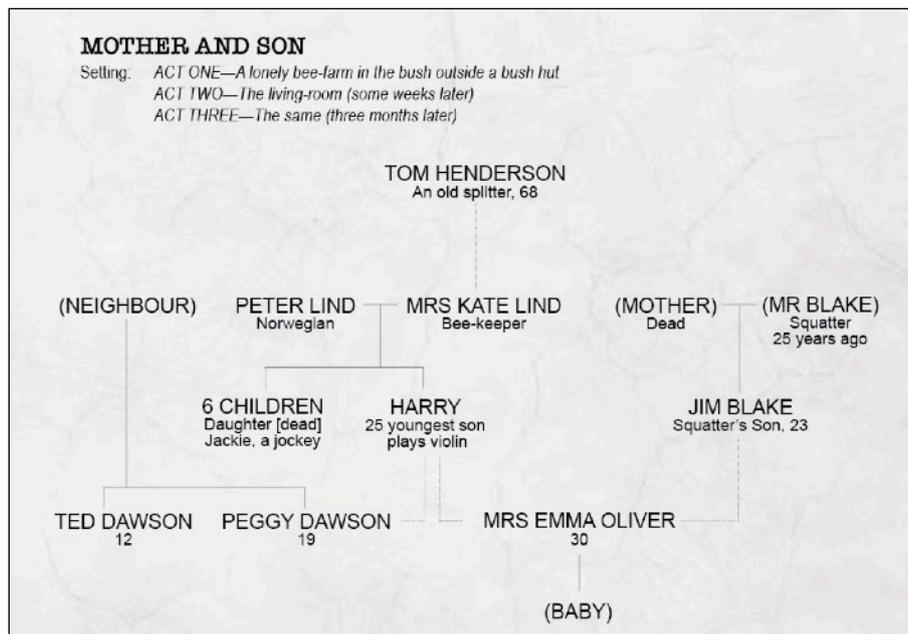
Characters

MRS LIND, an old woman, a bee-keeper
HARRY, her youngest son, aged twenty-five
PETER, her husband, an old Norwegian
TOM HENDERSON, an old splitter
PEGGY DAWSON, a girl of nineteen
TED, her brother, aged twelve
JIM BLAKE, a squatter's son, twenty-three
EMMA, a woman of thirty

Setting

The action takes place on a lonely bee-farm in the Wimmera District of Victoria.

ACT ONE Outside a bush hut.
ACT TWO The living-room, some weeks later.
ACT THREE The same. Three months later.



ACT ONE

(The scene is set on a lonely bee-farm in the bush, little more than a clearing in the forest. Everything is wild and primitive. There are hills in the distance, big trees all round, and logs and stumps scattered about. At the Back is a rough fence, with slip-rails, across a track leading from the hut into the bush. On the Left is the front of the homestead—a wooden hut, with a rough porch and a bench along the outside wall. Further up Left, a few hives can be seen. Down Right is an open shed; inside can be seen a small boat, with two guns near it. It is a warm afternoon in autumn.)

(MRS LIND comes out from behind the hives. She is middle-aged and tall, with weather-beaten skin, greying hair, strong features and keen dark eyes. She has lived in the bush all her life, and shared all its experiences, good luck and bad, births, deaths, floods, droughts and all the hazards of life in this remote and lonely spot. She can be genial or bitter, and is fiercely protective of her frail old husband and her wayward youngest son, the last of her children left to her.)

MRS LIND *(Calling)*. Harry! Harry!

HARRY *(Outside)*. In a minute. *(He comes from inside the shed and stands at the entrance. He is a young, good-looking, rather sensitive type of bushman, with something intense and reckless in his speech and manner.)* What do you want?

MRS LIND. I've been looking for you everywhere.

HARRY. I wasn't far away. *(He stoops and hides a sheepskin that he has been carrying behind the boat.)*

MRS LIND. What are you doing. What have you got there?

HARRY. That's my business.

MRS LIND. Let me see. *(She goes across and looks.)* Oh, my God!

HARRY. It's nothing to do with you, Mother.

MRS LIND *(Angrily)*. A sheepskin!

HARRY. Well, what about it?

MRS LIND. Where did that come from?

HARRY. It don't matter.

MRS LIND. You stole it, Harry! I've long had my suspicions. I know what you've been up to. Where did you get that sheep?

HARRY. It's not worth bothering about. *(He wanders over to slip-rails.)*

MRS LIND. Don't try to deceive me! ... I know all about it.

HARRY. What's the odds, anyway!

MRS LIND *(Fossicking it out)*. There's the brand. Harry, you stole that sheep from Blake's.

HARRY. You know what old Blake is. He informed on me when I was duck-shooting, and I don't forget it. They weren't his lakes, either.

MRS LIND. You mustn't be revengeful, Harry.

HARRY. We hadn't much in the house.

MRS LIND. We could do without.

HARRY. Johnny-cakes and honey! We need a bit o' mutton sometimes.

MRS LIND. You'll be found out. You'll be sent to gaol. You'll bring disgrace on us all.

HARRY. That won't trouble me. I don't give a curse what people say.

MRS LIND. What has made you like this, restless and defiant? It's the fiddle. Your good looks and the fiddle will be the ruin of you yet.

HARRY. I'm good enough for a splitter's camp, or a drunken shearers' dance; but I can't play. How could I with hands like these and living in the bush!

MRS LIND. My God, what are you coming to! You're a bitter young man. You seem to have a grudge against life.

HARRY. Life's as you find it, mother.

MRS LIND. Have a care, Harry! I've heard tell of young fellows who start brooding and cursing everything when they get into trouble—and the end has been a pistol shot, or a leaning tree, with two saddle straps buckled together ... fine young fellows, too!

HARRY. Who's brooding! Don't talk like that, mother. I'm not a fool.

MRS LIND. Hush! Here's Dad.

(PETER wanders in from the back of the house. He has been a big powerful man, but is stooped and frail now.)

PETER. It's time to milk the cow. That's about all I can do now.

MRS LIND. Don't hurry, Peter.

PETER. No fear of that. My days are done. I'm not the man I used to be, not by half.

MRS LIND. Take it easy. Just remember your heart's not too good.

PETER. It'll last a bit yet. Where have you been, Harry?

HARRY. Just knocking round.

PETER. That's all right for a young fellow. No more knocking round for me. *(PETER goes into shed, Right.)*

HARRY. Nobody knows what comes next in this world. *(He sits down moodily on bench and rolls a cigarette.)*

MRS LIND. You've been drinking again.

HARRY. Only a few glasses with the boys. It's the wine at the shanty.

MRS LIND. It's that fiddle takes you there, and you get excited, and then you drink too much. You can't cheat me, Harry. I know where you've been and how you've been spending your evenings. Fine goings on, weren't they!

HARRY *(Looking up quickly)*. What do you know?

MRS LIND. I know everything. What about that twenty pounds at the store.

HARRY. Twenty pounds!

MRS LIND *(Scolding)*. What do you say to that!

(PETER comes back with bucket in hand and chaff bag over his shoulder.)

PETER. Were you calling?

MRS LIND. No.

PETER. What's the matter?

MRS LIND. Nothing.

PETER *(Slyly, to HARRY)*. I bet you've been up to the township again, young man. Well, I'll get after the old cow.

MRS LIND. She won't be far away.

PETER. No, she'll be about somewhere, after the cotton bush, and the young wattle.

MRS LIND. Don't hurry up the hill, Peter!

PETER. I'm all right. I can get up the hill yet.

(PETER goes off, calling to the cow—'Coom along, coom along!')

MRS LIND. Your father must never know. We'll have to pay off a few shillings a week. The store will have to trust me.

HARRY. I don't owe the store anything.

MRS LIND. Don't tell lies! The bill was run up in your name by that woman you were going with.

HARRY. What woman?

MRS LIND. That Mrs Oliver.

HARRY. Emma? She didn't tell me.

MRS LIND. Twenty pounds for stores, and there's a lot down for whiskey. You've been having high times together.

HARRY. I was a fool, mother. But she's left the district now.

MRS LIND. When you got your hand poisoned, and couldn't give her any more money, she left you. Isn't that true?

HARRY. I dunno.

MRS LIND. The cheek of her. I went to see her one day, and she ordered me out of the house.

HARRY. You're not responsible, anyway.

MRS LIND. A notorious creature, she was, going from shanty to shanty and ruining the young men. I know her history.

HARRY. That's only talk. She wasn't as bad as that.

MRS LIND. But we'll have to pay the bill. And wherever the money's to come from ... that's what I want to know.

HARRY. I'll fix it somehow. But what's it matter. It's all over, I tell you.

MRS LIND (*Attacking him angrily*). That's your way, letting everything drift. Here have I been slaving from morning till night, while you lie about and brood, or go off to the township and get drunk on their raw wine. Fine company you keep, too. You can see your father's breaking up—and me, you leave me here to work when I ought to be resting. But you're too lazy to budge. ... Where's the wood for to-night?

HARRY. What a tongue you've got.

MRS LIND. It was a fine excuse, your bad hand. ... Never mind, I'll chop it myself. I've made sacrifices for you, and all you do in return is to steal a sheep, and keep company with a bad woman.

HARRY. Lord, you don't forget to let me know about it.

MRS LIND. You're not a good man, Harry.

HARRY. I never said I was. Hang it all—(*Getting up and crossing to shed.*) I can't stop listening to your randy. I've got to get this sheep away.

MRS LIND. But if the trooper passes. ...

HARRY. I know what I'm doing. I'll bury it. I was going to hide the skin in a tree; but that's too risky. The blasted dogs would sniff it out.

MRS LIND. Be careful, Harry! A boundary rider might turn up and catch you on the way.

HARRY (*Wrapping skin in old piece of sacking*). I'm not going far—just by the red-gum pool. I'll bury it there, and arrange the loam and clay natural-like, just as it always was. If you throw the clay about and what's on top ought to be below, 'Hallo,' says somebody, 'What's this!' A bushman misses nothing. He'll dig a hole until he comes on something ... a sheep ... or maybe, a man ... I've heard of such cases. (*He moves off with sheepskin.*)

MRS LIND (*Calling after him*). You're a wild boy, Harry. You're a wild boy.

(*HARRY goes down through the bush behind the shed. MRS LIND watches him go out. She picks up her gloves and veil from the bench, and then goes behind hives to work at the bees.*)

(*TOM HENDERSON, an old swaggie, roughly dressed, with a straggly, grey beard and twinkling eyes, comes along the track and through the slip-rails, carrying his swag and billy. He is a lively old man, who has spent all his life on the track and has his own quaint philosophy.*)

TOM (*Coming through the slip-rails*). Anybody in? (*Pause.*) Is anybody at home?

MRS LIND (*Outside*). Who's there?

TOM. It's me! How are you?

MRS LIND (*Outside*). What do you want here?

(*MRS LIND walks on, still in her gloves and veil, from behind the hives.*)

TOM (*Genially*). Good day, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND (*Shortly*). I'm busy.

TOM. I thought I'd pass this way and see how you're getting on.

MRS LIND (*Roughly*). That's right. Tramp all over the place and scare the bees.

TOM (*Surprised*). Don't you know me?

MRS LIND (*Lifting veil*). It's you, is it?

TOM. It's only old Tom.

MRS LIND. H'm! I thought you were an old traveller. I've plenty o' that kind passing the door, I can tell you, and teamsters too, and rowdy shearers making for the Western sheds. And sometimes there's big ugly Indian hawkers, with turbans on their heads, and big calico bundles over their shoulders. That's not a pleasant sight for a lonely woman.

TOM. They're good men, those Indians and Afghans ... as good as we are. They're Mohammedans.

MRS LIND. I don't care what they are. ... What do you want ... meat to buy, or meat to cadge?

TOM (*Laughing*). Well, I didn't expect a welcome like that, Mrs Lind, from an old friend. I thought I'd hear a kind word spoken.

MRS LIND. I haven't many to spare, and precious little sympathy you'll get from me.

TOM. Don't be too hard, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. Wouldn't a life like mine make any woman hard! The old man's getting too weak to work, and I hardly ever see my son ... he's always back in the bush somewhere—duck-shooting along the lakes, or going off shearing or droving ... I've got all the cares of the place on my head.

TOM (*Looking round*). I see you've got a lot more hives over there.

MRS LIND. Yes, I'm beginning to get a start. And fine work it is on a hot day, going through all those hives, wheeling in the boxes and extracting the honey, and getting stung for your pains by the angry bees.

TOM. It's a nice, quiet life, anyway.

MRS LIND. Quiet! ... it is that ... left all day by yourself ... for weeks at a stretch ... with the old man laid up in bed, and my son away on his travels ... and nobody to talk to but the pigs and the parrots.

TOM. I thought Harry was with you.

MRS LIND. Yes, I've got Harry ... but he'll be off soon ... it's too dull for him here; he has such high spirits. ... He's a fine boy. (*She smiles and goes on in a more friendly tone.*) Sit down, won't you? I'm glad to see you, Tom. I ought to be—you're my oldest friend.

TOM (*Putting down swag and billy*). We've know each other a long time.

MRS LIND. I know I worry over things and get cross-grained and crabby. I've had a lot of trouble lately ... there's too much to do for an old woman; but when Harry's at home everything looks brighter. He's my last—he's all I've got to live for.

TOM (*Lighting his pipe*). He's a young man, now. Does he still play the fiddle?

MRS LIND. Yes, he's always been fond of the fiddle. You remember that old man camped down by the lake? He gave it to him when he was a little boy, and taught him to play. It's queer how he took to it. It seemed to come natural to him.

TOM. Many the dances I've had to Harry's playing. ... There's no one to touch him in these parts.

MRS LIND. I hope he'll settle down soon, and then I'd be satisfied.

TOM. A home's comfortable, and I always liked children; but I could never settle.

(*PETER comes in with bucket.*)

PETER. She's only giving half a bucket now.

MRS LIND. Here's an old friend to see you.

PETER. How are you, Tom? Still jogging along?

TOM. That's right, Peter, I run cunning now ... the young fellows call me an old 'morganer' ...
(*Chuckling.*) I split the trees that have been felled and condemned by the other splitters, or blown over by the wind.

PETER. Old age makes us all cunning. I've had to give up hard work.

TOM (*Gaily*). Who's talking about old age! I'm a young fellow yet. I'm only sixty-eight. A year ago I could run and jump. I could do a day's work if I'm put to it, mount the spring-board and fell a tree, drive a team o' bullocks ... or do a bit of piece-picking at the shearing—they don't like to give me a pen, though I think I could shear my eighty or ninety yet.

PETER. Where have you come from, Tom?

TOM. I've been outback into the real bush, far away from your little cockie towns and farms. ... It's free there, and you go where you like, and think your own thoughts, and live your own life ... just like the Arabs in the desert.

MRS LIND. Aren't you a disgrace, now, an old man without a roof above your head, wandering up and down the world till the end of your days!

TOM. I've no land, no family, no cares ... nothing.

MRS LIND. No family, no cares! I've borne seven children and buried two. How do you expect to end your days with nobody to look after you?

TOM. Like enough I'll die under a tree, like many a good man afore me.

MRS LIND. Under a tree! I ought to scold you, but there's too much to do. I'll take this. (*She picks up the bucket and goes into house.*)

TOM (*Rising*). I'm settling myself at last. I'm doing a bit o' fencing for old Blake.

PETER. I don't suppose you'll be there long. Never mind, Tom. Sit down and rest your weary bones, as the saying is.

(*He takes out his pipe, and the OLD MEN sit on logs and smoke.*)

TOM. You would think this district was too near the border of the Big Desert to be good for farming and grazing.

PETER. There's good land, and some folk are making a fortune with their wool and wheat. Look at old Blake! He's a rich squatter now. But I missed my chance, and I have to be content in my old age with a bee-farm.

TOM. The timber's a bit stunted round here compared with Gippsland.

PETER. It's the first green timber the hot winds strike.

(*A pause.*)

TOM.... The *Koran* says ...

PETER. What's the *Koran*?

TOM. It's a book. ... Mohammed made it ... he was an Arab camel-driver.

PETER. I've never had time for reading.

TOM. You need something with you on the lonely track. I used to read Gibbon. ... *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—that's history—it lasted me three years ... but I like the *Koran* better than Gibbon. I've been reading it for five years now, and I know it nearly all off by heart. Once I had an argument with a blasted Afghan hawker about his own damned religion. I knew more about it than he did. 'You're wrong there, Abdull!' says I, and then I told him what the *Koran* said. He did stare. I beat him that time, Peter, my oath I did!

PETER. I don't go in much for religion, but about them trees ...

TOM. What about 'em?

PETER. There may be some fair-sized logs in Gippsland, but when I was on the Upper Murray ...

TOM. The trees I was thinking about. ...

(*Shouts in the distance. Then PEGGY and TED are seen coming along the track carrying two kerosene tins, axe, ladder, smoker, ropes etc. PEGGY is a young bush girl, innocent and eager,*

attractive in her youth and vitality. She is fair and freckled, with fine eyes, straight and honest-looking. TED is the typical lively bush-boy. Their clothes are torn, and they are laughing and shouting with excitement.)

PEGGY (*Shouting*). Here we are!

TED (*Shouting*). We've boxed the brood!

PEGGY. We're back, Mrs Lind.

PETER. Hallo, Peggy. My word, Ted, you're in a mess. You'll catch it.

PEGGY. Hallo Mr. Lind! Oh, what a lovely day we've had.

PETER. Bee-hunting?

TED. My oath.

(MRS LIND comes in quickly.)

MRS LIND. What's all this! What's the excitement!

PEGGY. We've had a splendid day out in the bush.

MRS LIND. Good gracious! What have you been doing?

TED (*Putting axe and ladder in shed*). We've got something for you.

PEGGY. Come and look, Mrs Lind. *(She is busy with the tins and boxes they have put down by the hives.)* Oh, the stings! They were that wild!

MRS LIND. Gracious me, look at your clothes! Come here, Peggy, you're all torn to ribbons.

TED. Crumbs! So am I!

MRS LIND. You too! There'll be a lot of mending and patching to do.

TED. We had to crawl through the scrub. I'm all cut and bleeding with the needle-wood and prickly-bush.

PEGGY. The scrub was that thick, it closed all around you, and you were tripped up by the supple-jack, and you couldn't see the sun.

TED. I had to keep calling out to see where Peggy was.

PEGGY. I seen a mob of emus.

TED. I seen a lot of wild pigs.

PEGGY. I seen them first.

TED. No, you didn't. I seen them when I was up the ladder.

MRS LIND. Don't scream! Never mind what you seen. Where's this swarm?

TED (*Picking up one of the tins*). Here it is.

PEGGY. We were that careful ... we never broke the comb, or drowned the bees or nothing. That's the wrong tin! That's the wax and honey. ... Here's the brood, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. And you've done all that for me? You're good children.

TED. I found the bee-tree.

PEGGY. Well, if you did, I found the queen.

TED. I chopped out the hollow of the tree.

PEGGY. You wouldn't have got her only for me.

TED. Yes, I would.

PEGGY. You wouldn't. The queen's hard to find, I can tell you. I put my finger into the comb, and there she was trying to hide in the hollow of the tree. She was the very last of the whole swarm; but I spotted her, the beauty. See here, she's in the little wire cage.

TED. Cripes! They did buzz and sting when I was up the tree.

PEGGY. We covered them up with honeysuckle till they all found the queen ... we had to wait for a few hours before we could box them.

TOM. That must be grand sport, bee-hunting in the Murra-Murra.

PEGGY. It was lovely.

TED. You could sniff the honey half a mile off.

PEGGY. Who'll give me a hand with the swarm?

TOM. I'm your man, Peggy.

PETER (*Picking up tin of honey*). I'll take this round to the honey-house.

(He carries it round to back of house. TOM takes up another tin with the bees, while PEGGY takes smoker etc.)

MRS LIND. If you're going among the bees you'd better take the gloves. *(She offers gloves.)*

TOM. I don't want no gloves. Bees never sting me.

TED. Crikey! They go for me all right.

PEGGY. Come on. We won't be long.

MRS LIND. You'll have to stay for tea. You can't go home till I mend your clothes.

(PEGGY and TOM go behind the hives. TED runs after them, then returns quickly and looks round.)

TED. There's somebody riding up to the gate.

MRS LIND. Who is it?

TED. It's young Jim Blake.

MRS LIND. Are you sure?

TED. My oath! I'd know that horse anywhere—bay mare with a switch tail. What does he want?

MRS LIND. How do I know.

TED (*Anxiously*). He ain't after nobody, is he?

MRS LIND. No.

TED. I didn't steal no fruit lately. I ain't done nothing. Straight wire! Here he comes. Don't tell him you seen me. *(He sneaks off behind the trees.)*

(JIM BLAKE, a squatter's son, comes to the slip-rails. He is a red-headed young man, good-natured, but hot-tempered. He is strong and active, with the easy movements of the athlete. He is dressed in riding costume, leggings etc.)

JIM. Good-day, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. Is that you, Jim? You look warm.

JIM. It's a dusty road.

MRS LIND. Won't you come in?

JIM. I can't stop. I just want to see Harry.

MRS LIND. He's not here.

JIM. That's funny. I saw him not long ago. Where has he gone?

MRS LIND. I don't know. What do you want?

JIM. I'd rather not tell you, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. Anyone would think something was up, you're looking that solemn.

JIM (*Hesitating*). I don't want to trouble you but it is serious. Harry's not playing the game.

MRS LIND. What do you mean by that?

JIM. The old man was complaining about it, and I don't blame him this time. Mutton's mutton, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. Don't I know it! They charge anything in the township.

JIM. Harry gets it cheaper than that.

MRS LIND. You mustn't say that. I won't put up with it.

JIM. It's the truth.

MRS LIND. Wait a bit. I'll prove that we buy our mutton. I'll show you the butcher's bill. *(She goes into the house.)*

(JIM looks round, walks to the shed, and examines the boats and guns. HARRY comes back. He is excited at seeing JIM.)

HARRY. What are you doing here?

JIM. I'm looking for something.

HARRY (*Hotly*). You won't find it, so you'd better take yourself off as quick as you like.

JIM. We've lost some sheep lately.

HARRY. I'm not one of your boundary-riders.

JIM. You were seen round the Five Mile paddock. It's a dangerous game, Harry.

HARRY (*Mocking*). Why didn't you bring the Sergeant!

JIM. I'll see for myself.

HARRY. You think you can do as you like because you're a squatter's son.

JIM. I'll take you on at anything.

HARRY. You're father's only a flaming miser, though he does own Ellimatta Station. He's the meanest squatter in the Wimmera.

JIM. Who says so?

HARRY. You can name everybody from here to Horsham. They all say he goes round the paddocks and picks up the wool from the barbed wire fences the sheep have rubbed against.

JIM. He's got a lot of valuable sheep, and he won't have thieves hanging about.

HARRY. I know he has some good sheep.

JIM. And we'd like to know where you get yours.

HARRY. I'm not particular. The nearest paddock and the fattest sheep does me.

JIM. If it's not sheep-stealing, it's poaching. (*JIM looks at guns.*) What's this—two guns in the boat?

HARRY. That's right. You're allowed two guns. And God sent the ducks. He didn't say how you were to get them.

JIM. You were caught last year, my smart lad, and you lost your licence for the season.

HARRY. There are always informers about.

JIM. And this gun looks a long way over-weight—another of your tricks.

HARRY. You must think I'm green.

JIM (*Takes up gun*). Anyway, I'll get it weighed.

HARRY. Drop that!

JIM. I'll take it with me.

(*JIM walks off with gun. HARRY takes up the other and points it.*)

HARRY. You won't be going far, Jim.

(*MRS LIND comes back with bill in hand.*)

MRS LIND. Oh, my God! What are you doing! Have you both gone mad?

HARRY. You'd better put that gun back in the boat.

(*JIM puts down gun.*)

JIM. You were caught before, and you'll be caught again.

MRS LIND. Be quiet! Dad couldn't stand another shock. ... Put down that gun, Harry.

(*HARRY puts down gun.*)

What are you two quarrelling about?

JIM. It's not my fault, Mrs Lind. (*Puts gun back.*)

MRS LIND. Look—here's our butcher's bill. That shows we bought a sheep just the other week.

HARRY. Don't make a song about it.

MRS LIND. You can see for yourself, Jim. It's all a mistake.

JIM. I'm afraid not. Everybody knows that Harry's a sheep-stealer and poacher.

HARRY (*Fiercely*). You clear out now. Aren't you satisfied?

JIM (*Threatening*). This won't be the end of it.

MRS LIND. Hold your tongue, Jim. We're as good as the Blakes. Your father's a hard man. Look at the way he treated Harry!

HARRY. I'm not afraid of him. Let him do what he likes. I don't care a damn. *(He goes off angrily into the house.)*

MRS LIND *(Looks after him anxiously, then turns to JIM)*. Now look here, Jim. I remember when your father started; and many's the time he's had help from us. But when the drought came he went against us, and bought Peter out. The rain came then, and that made him. That was twenty-five years ago. He's got richer every year, and we've got poorer. He's a big man now; but I don't suppose he ever told you that story.

JIM. I know nothing about it—it was before I was born. We're neighbours, Mrs Lind, and I don't want any bad blood between us.

MRS LIND. Dear me, everything was different when your mother was alive.

JIM. I don't forget how you nursed her when she was ill.

MRS LIND. We were like sisters ... and then ... ah well, it's no good dwelling on that. There's been wrong on both sides.

(HARRY's violin is heard.)

JIM. My oath, he can play, can't he! Harry's different from the ordinary run.

MRS LIND. He'll be better now. It's a good sign when he takes up his fiddle.

JIM. I'll say nothing about it this time.

MRS LIND. That's right, Jim. Harry's not been himself lately.

JIM. I know that. It's for your sake, Mrs Lind. *(Turns to go.)*

MRS LIND. Won't you stay, Jim?

JIM. I must get along. You might ask Harry if he'll come up next Saturday, just to show there's no ill-feeling. We're giving a shearers' ball, and there's nobody can play like Harry.

MRS LIND. I'll ask him. He likes playing for the shearers.

JIM. We were at school together, and we've always been good mates. I hope he'll come. Tell him I said so.

MRS LIND *(Shaking hands)*. Good-bye, Jim.

JIM. It'll be all right, Mrs Lind. I know how things are. I'll pitch the old man a bit of a tale. *(He goes off.)*

(TED comes warily from behind a tree.)

TED. He's off. He didn't spot me, the cow.

MRS LIND. Nobody wants to harm you, Ted.

(HARRY stands at the door.)

TED. Hallo, Harry!

HARRY. Hallo, Nipper.

TED. Me and Peggy's been bee-hunting in the bush. We brought home a swarm for Mrs Lind. I found the bee-tree. I got a few blasted stings. So did Peggy.

HARRY. Where is she?

TED. Fixing them up. Old Tom Henderson's here, too. I had to climb a tree and draw up the axe with a rope ... and then chop off a limb. That's the time they're lively. Peggy had the smoker. You ought to see her. She's got all her clothes torn, and we're staying for tea. *(Calling.)* Eh, Peggy, Harry's here!

HARRY. It's all right, Ted.

TED. I'll get her ... Peggy! Peggy!

(TED runs behind the hives.)

MRS LIND *(Sitting down wearily)*. It's not right, Harry, the way you've been treating Peggy.

HARRY. I was drinking too much.

MRS LIND. It's not right. You've never been near the Dawson's. Anybody'd think they'd done something to offend you.

HARRY. I couldn't go round there.

MRS LIND. What will the neighbours say! Everybody thought you were going to marry Peggy. She's a fine girl, the finest in the Wimmera. ... You're so wayward, I'm never sure of you. *(She rises and puts her hand on his shoulder.)* You'll pull up, son. This could be made a fine place yet—not a rich farm, but as good as anybody could need. Peggy would help you. ... She'd make you a good wife.

HARRY. I don't want to marry—not now.

MRS LIND. You're a young man yet, with all the world before you.
(PEGGY comes in shyly.)

PEGGY. Hallo!

HARRY. Hallo!

PEGGY. We've had a grand day bee-hunting in the bush ... the air's full of wild honey. You can smell it!

HARRY. It's the south wind coming up and blowing across the green timber.

PEGGY. You're quite a stranger, Harry.

MRS LIND. We've has such a lot to do about the place.

PEGGY. Mother was asking when you were coming round to give us a tune on the fiddle.

MRS LIND *(Excusing him)*. It was his bad hand, Peggy.

PEGGY. I hope it's better now.

MRS LIND. Tea'll be ready soon. Don't run away. *(She goes into the house.)*

PEGGY *(Hesitating)*. Is anything wrong?

HARRY. I've been a bit off-colour lately.

PEGGY. You'll come round soon, won't you? We could have a dance. When will you?

HARRY. As soon as I come back.

PEGGY. You're not going away?

HARRY. I'm off to the lakes, Peggy.

PEGGY. The duck lakes? When are you starting?

HARRY. To-morrow.

PEGGY. Why?

HARRY. I've had another row with the Blakes. It was my fault this time—just a bit of devilment, but I must get away from here. I've been making a fool of myself, fighting everything and getting the worst of it. I'll have to make a fresh start. *(Goes to boat.)* I've got to get away.

PEGGY. That's a nice boat; but ain't it small!

HARRY. I make my own boat, and it gets smaller every year.

PEGGY *(Sitting on a log)*. I hardly ever see you now.

HARRY. Everything will be different when I get back.

PEGGY. Don't be too long, Harry.

HARRY. I'll soon get around the lakes.

PEGGY. Which way are you going?

HARRY *(Sitting beside her and drawing plan on ground with stick)*. I'll start here, Peggy, at the Bogong, and across to Wash-to-morrow Swamp, and the Muddy Scotchman—you should see its high reeds and dead drowned timber ...

PEGGY. It must be wonderful along those lakes.

HARRY. This next one's the Champion; it's never been known to rise or fall, wet winter or dry summer. Then I'll go over there, to Boorooopki, and clear all the small lakes to Jaki Jaki on the borders of South Australia.

PEGGY *(Pointing on ground)*. What's that mark?

HARRY. That's Mount Arapilies ... I'll pass round there to Mitre Lake and get over to Grass Flat. It's a queer place, Peggy, with limestone edges on the south, mallee scrub on the north, and a fringe of paper trees growing all round.

PEGGY. My word, I'd like to see it.

HARRY. I'll get a big bag at Muddy Swamp, near the border of the Big Desert—it's alive with black duck, speckled duck, teal and widgeon. And then I'll make for the Win Win, and travel south by the Boundary Swamp and the Leg o' Mutton, and finish the round on the Darigon, on the Wimmera River.

PEGGY. I wish I could go with you! I'd help you, Harry.

HARRY. It'd be your job to look after the wagon.

PEGGY. What fun we'd have, all alone, you and me, Harry.

HARRY. It's not all fun, stretched out in a cramped position steering the boat, with the sun burning your back, when, suddenly, you make a splash, and up they rise, damn them, twelve feet at the first jump, and fly off.

PEGGY. I want to be in it, too.

HARRY. You have to look out. There are always informers about, nosing round your boat and guns.

PEGGY. I'd keep an eye on the squatters' men for you. That'd be great sport.

HARRY. I'll be careful. I want to make a big cheque this time. *(He stands up.)*

PEGGY. Oh, that don't matter ... *(Gently.)* I'll wait for you, Harry.

(Pause.)

HARRY *(Looking out)*. It's strange out there on the lonely lakes, with the reeds swishing, and the water-lilies, and the moon rising over the dull, grey sheets of water. ... It's music to me. I can't explain it; but I want to play the fiddle. *(He gives a little laugh.)*

(Pause. TOM and PETER come in.)

HARRY. Good-day, Tom. Off again?

(PEGGY, more confident now, goes over and joins HARRY.)

TOM. I'm not going far this time. I've taken a job, and I'm camping down by the river. *(He takes up swag and billy.)*

PETER. Are you there, mother?

(MRS LIND comes out of the house.)

MRS LIND. You're not going already, are you Tom?

TOM. I want to fix camp. I'll be round any time for a yarn.

PETER. I'll see you to the slip-rails, Tom.

TOM. I'm getting quite respectable in my old age.

PETER *(Chuckling)*. I wouldn't trust you, Tom.

TOM. It all depends. I can tell you this ...

(PETER goes with TOM to slip-rails.)

TOM *(Leaning over slip-rails)*. I can always take to the track again. I've friends everywhere, glory be to Allah. Ain't good news or a bright story worth a pannikin o' flour and a junk o' salt beef! Don't worry over me. I'm always happy on the track.

(TOM wanders off and PETER returns.)

MRS LIND. He's got no family. He can do what he likes.

PETER. He was always a queer one, was Tom.

MRS LIND. No family, no cares! ... How's the world to go on in that way, that's what I want to know!

(MRS LIND and PETER go into the house.)

PEGGY (*Unusually aware of the beauty of the evening and the sounds of the bush*). Hear the butcher bird! Isn't it a pretty note? And there's the magpie ... and the grey thrush—all the birds are singing.

HARRY (*Exuberantly*). We'll be all right, Peggy. I feel free again. I could fight a wild bull.

PEGGY (*Eagerly*). We'll have a place in the bush some day, won't we? We only need a little bark hut. I'll look after the house and milk the cows, and do the cooking; and you can go fishing and shooting and play the violin, and do lots o' things. Won't it be lovely, Harry, you and me, living in a place of our own!

HARRY. It'll be a new world. ... But I must get away, first, away to the lakes.

PEGGY (*Slipping her arm through his*). Harry!

HARRY (*Gaily*). Yes?

PEGGY. Let me try the boat. I want to see it in the water.

HARRY (*Going to boat*). We'll go down to the pool, then.

PEGGY (*Laughing*). I won't fall out. Come on, Harry.

(They go off into the bush, carrying the boat. Pause. MRS LIND looks out.)

MRS LIND (*At door*). Coo-ee! Coo-ee!

(TED comes from hives.)

TED. What's up?

MRS LIND. Tea's ready. Where's Peggy?

TED. She's with Harry.

MRS LIND. Fancy them going off like that!

TED (*Calling*). Eh, Peggy!

MRS LIND. Never mind. Get in for your tea.

(TED goes into the house. The glow of sunset filters through the trees as MRS LIND walks a little way and calls.)

MRS LIND. Harry! Coo-ee! Harry!

Curtain.

ACT TWO

(The scene is the living room of the cottage. At the back Right-hand corner is a porch, with door leading outside. In the porch are some old coats hanging up, a bench on which are lanterns, ropes etc., and under the bench, logs and twigs for the fire. A bed is placed beneath the window in the back wall and a stool near it.)

(On the left wall is a large fireplace, with a rough shelf over it. There is a low colonial oven, and a bright fire is burning. A big chair is turned towards the fire, and there is a sofa a little higher up. On the opposite wall there is a kitchen dresser with cups, plates, glasses, and near the dresser a table with a lamp, and two chairs. Below the dresser, a door leading to the rest of the house.)

(It is an evening of rain and storm.)

(PETER is lying in the bed, which has been brought into the sitting room. The old splitter, TOM, smokes quietly in the chair by the fire, reading his Koran. PEGGY and MRS LIND are moving round quietly.)

PEGGY *(Bringing logs from the porch and putting them by the fire)*. Oh, what a night! It's a terrible storm, roaring through the bush.

MRS LIND. God help all those who are out in it.

PEGGY. Harry can't come now.

MRS LIND. He'll come. I know he'll come.

PEGGY *(Going to her)*. Won't you lie down now?

MRS LIND. I couldn't sleep.

PEGGY *(Leading her over)*. Just lie down on the sofa here.

MRS LIND. There's no hope, Peggy. That's what the doctor said. Oh, my poor man, poor Peter.

PEGGY. You must try to rest. You can't go on like this. You've hardly had your clothes off for two weeks.

(PETER moves in bed.)

MRS LIND *(Turning back)*. He's stirring. *(She goes to him.)* How are you, Dad?

PETER. It's this lingering. I'm wearing you all out.

PEGGY *(At fire)*. I made some chicken broth. Will he take a few mouthfuls?

MRS LIND *(Crossing to her)*. I don't know, Peggy. It's the breathing. It got quicker and quicker and deeper and deeper ... till he was gasping, and then he lay still. ... Once his breathing stopped altogether, and we thought he was gone.

PEGGY. It's all ready. *(She takes saucepan off the fire.)*

TOM *(Reading slowly)*. 'Every good act is charity; your smiling in your brother's face; your putting a wanderer on the right road; your giving water to the thirsty, is charity.'

(PEGGY fills a bowl at the dresser, and gives it to MRS LIND.)

MRS LIND *(Taking bowl)*. Try some of the broth, Peter.

PETER *(Faintly)*. I can't eat.

MRS LIND. It's your favourite. You'll pull up yet.

PETER. What's the use of pretending any more! I'm going. I know it. I can't last out the week.

MRS LIND. The doctor says you just strained your heart.

PETER. Like enough.

MRS LIND. You should have given up before. I warned you about climbing the hill.

PETER. If it wasn't the heart, it would have been something else.

(PETER takes a few spoonfuls of the broth. TOM looks round.)

TOM. It's a good book, the *Koran*.

PEGGY *(Softly)*. He's very low, Tom.

TOM. Don't say that. (*He rises and goes to PETER.*) How are you, Peter?

PETER (*Looking up*). I hope you'll give me a good funeral, with a nice red-gum coffin.

TOM. I've taken out a few old gums in my time.

PETER (*With a quiet chuckle*). One of 'em would come in useful now.

TOM. That's a good 'un, Peter.
(*The OLD MEN laugh.*)

MRS LIND. Sit down here, Tom. You're old cronies. But don't get talking too much.
(*TOM takes stool. MRS LIND goes and sits at fireplace with PEGGY.*)

MRS LIND. He's sinking fast, and I'll be left lonely.

PEGGY. You've got Harry.

MRS LIND. Yes, I'll have Harry. Poor boy, he doesn't know.

PEGGY. Is he coming home to-night?

MRS LIND. I've expected him the last two days. The flood must have kept him back; but he'll come in time. He must come. (*She rises and says softly but intensely, as though calling.*) Harry! Come back! Come back!

TOM. I say, Peter.
(*MRS LIND looks round at the TWO OLD MEN, smiles quietly and sits by the fire again.*)

PETER. What is it?

TOM. Do you believe in the after life?

PETER. You've got me beat there, Tom.

TOM. This is what the *Koran* says.

PETER. I've never thought about it. One at a time's good fishing.

TOM. Listen here. ... Damn it, I've lost the place.
(*He reads, and PETER drops off to sleep.*)
*And when the Heavens shall be stripped away like a skin,
And when Hell shall be made to blaze,
And when Paradise shall be brought near,
Every soul shall know what it has done.*

PEGGY (*Standing by the fire, her face turned away*). It's a good job that Mrs Oliver left the district.

MRS LIND. It is that. She was a bad character.

PEGGY (*Slowly*). What did Harry say about it?

MRS LIND (*Defensively*). Harry! What had he to do with Mrs Oliver!

PEGGY (*Timidly*). I didn't like to ask him, but ... (*Hesitating.*) People were saying he was up at her place every night.

MRS LIND. Who told you that story?

PEGGY. Some of the neighbours, Mrs Lind. They all said he'd been drinking and keeping company with that woman.

MRS LIND (*Dismissing it*). You know what kind of neighbours we have in this district, and all the gossip that goes round.

PEGGY (*Staunchly*). I didn't believe a word of it.

MRS LIND. He was running a bit wild at one time, that was all. But people do talk, to be sure!
(*PEGGY looks at her for a moment, then takes bowl and cups from the table and goes out.*)
(*Pause.*)

TOM (*Coming over*). He's dropped off again.

MRS LIND. That's a blessing.

TOM (*Standing by the fire, leaning on the corner of the mantelpiece*). Peter and I were among the first in these parts. Only an old splitter came through before us.

MRS LIND. When I first came up, I sat on the top of a bundle on the bullock wagon. There were no made roads, only bush tracks. On one side of the track the bullocks would strike against a tree, and on the other side fall into a hole.

TOM. You're getting settled and cultivated now.

MRS LIND. All night you could hear the howling of wild dogs.

TOM. It was different then.

MRS LIND. Do you remember, Tom, the old bakehouse we had, with the oven cut out of the side of the hill?

TOM. What a memory you have, Mrs Lind! But do you remember that day I asked you to marry me?

MRS LIND (*Laughing a little*). You were only joking. You were never the one to marry and settle down.

TOM. A long-haired mate suits some; but it's better to be free, it's better on the track.

(*There is a knock. MRS LIND goes to the door. It is JIM BLAKE.*)

JIM. Good-night!

MRS LIND. Come in, Jim!

JIM (*Looking round quietly*). How is he?

MRS LIND. Very feeble.

JIM. I'm sorry to hear that.

MRS LIND. It was good of you to come on a night like this.

JIM. Not at all. I thought I might be able to do something for you.

MRS LIND. I'm glad you called. There's been enough bad feeling between our families in the past.

JIM. That's nothing. We're friends when trouble comes.

MRS LIND. The rain's still pouring in torrents.

JIM. Droughts or floods, it's a great country. We only got three inches of rain last year; and now there's a cyclone tearing up the gum-trees, and blowing the roofs off the houses. And I bet there are boats rowing down the main street of Warracknabeal.

PEGGY (*Coming in a putting clean cups and bowls on the dresser*). Hullo, Jim! We're waiting for Harry!

JIM. He'll get through. He's a bushman.

(*PEGGY picks up fiddle-case in corner.*)

PEGGY. Here's Harry's fiddle.

MRS LIND. He wouldn't take it this time.

JIM. It's not often he leaves his fiddle behind.

MRS LIND. No. But he thought it might lead him into mischief. ... Poor boy, he never had his chance.

PEGGY (*Dreamily*). Harry's a beautiful player.

MRS LIND. We're only rough people. I don't know where the music came from. It's strange.

PEGGY. It's a wild night to be out.

MRS LIND (*Starting*). What's that!

(*TOM rises and comes over.*)

JIM. Nothing!

MRS LIND. I thought I heard somebody. ... Listen!

TOM. I'll have a look. (*He lays his book on the table, picks up a coat, and goes out.*)

PEGGY. It might be a branch cracking.

MRS LIND. I thought it was Harry.

JIM (*At the porch, looking through the half-open door*). There's nobody there, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. The storm's come up, fiercer than ever.

(There is a crashing sound outside. They listen.)

PEGGY. What's that?

JIM. The culvert's washed away.

PEGGY. The noise will wake him.

JIM. Hear that!

PEGGY. What?

JIM. It's a big tree going to fall. ... Wait! ... There it goes!

(There is a tearing, cracking sound, then the crash of a falling tree.)

PEGGY. Isn't it terrible!

JIM. The house is safe.

(PETER stirs.)

PETER. What was that?

MRS LIND. It's all right, Dad. A big tree just fell.

PETER. It's a great flood. I can hear the creeks roaring, and the wind lashing the trees.

(TOM comes to the back door.)

TOM *(Calling)*. Quick!

JIM. What's wrong?

TOM. The cow ... it's in the creek.

JIM. We'll soon get her out.

TOM. Where's a rope?

PEGGY. I'll get you one.

TOM. Come on. We're just in time.

JIM. Bring the lantern, Peggy.

MRS LIND *(To OLD MAN)*. It's the cow, Peter.

JIM. Hurry up!

(JIM and PEGGY get coats and oil-skins from behind the door; find ropes etc., light lantern, and follow TOM quickly. MRS LIND goes to bedside and sits beside PETER.)

PETER. I can't help. It's hard lines.

MRS LIND. Don't think about it.

PETER. I've been no damn good to you lately.

MRS LIND. You've done your share of hard work.

PETER. I think I've earned a spell.

MRS LIND. We've come through a lot.

PETER. We might have got on to better land; but that old devil Blake was too cunning for me.

MRS LIND *(Loyally)*. I don't envy him, the old scoundrel!

PETER. I don't mind going, Kate; but I don't like to leave you with all the work of the place and no one to help you.

MRS LIND. I'll have Harry.

PETER. He's young yet, and as wild as they make 'em.

MRS LIND. He's had the worst of it. We were better off when the others were young. Harry's had the hardest work ever since he was a boy. He was brought up in our rough times, Dad.

PETER. If only he were fixed up, I'd feel easier.

MRS LIND. He'll soon make a start, never fear.

(A short pause. The OLD PEOPLE ponder their long life together.)

PETER. It was pretty rough country when we started; just thick scrub, and big timber.

MRS LIND. I liked it from the very first.

PETER *(With a faint chuckle)*. ... You were a good-looking young woman, Kate.

MRS LIND. Don't remind me.

PETER. None of your family's a patch on you.

MRS LIND. That's only your fancy, Peter.

PETER. I'd like to have seen you better off, and spending your last days in comfort.

MRS LIND. We can't complain, Peter.

PETER. We've had a big life together.

MRS LIND. You know, it's forty years and more since we lost our first child.

PETER. I hardly remember.

MRS LIND. It was when you had that accident, in the splitters' camp, and had to be taken to town. I was the only woman there. I wasn't expecting the baby so soon, and one night Tom had to go thirty miles to fetch an old bush-woman. Next morning the little mite was born; but she only lived an hour. What was it all for! ... I couldn't save her. Then you came back, Peter, and I showed you where she was lying ... don't you remember ... under a big tree, without a stone or name. I've had six children since, but I still think of her, lying out in the lonely bush; but the trees have grown so thick, I'll never see her little place again.

PETER. We've had good children, Kate.

MRS LIND. I'd like them round me; but they're doing well, and we should be thankful for that.

PETER. You've been a good mother, Kate.

MRS LIND. It's only Harry. (*Wondering.*) Somehow, he's different from the rest of us ... better or worse, I hardly know ...

PETER. He's young yet. He'll settle down.

MRS LIND. Yes ... when he comes back he'll marry Peggy, and then I'll have no more to think about. My work will be done.

PETER. I've been lucky, Kate. It'd have been a poor life without you.

MRS LIND. You must lie quiet now.

PETER. I'm getting a bit drowsy. (*He dozes off again.*)

MRS LIND. Rest, Peter, rest! (*She bends over him and fixes the bed.*)

(*PEGGY comes through the door, and puts the lantern on bench.*)

PEGGY. We've got the cow.

MRS LIND. That's good, Peggy.

PEGGY. She was stuck in the creek, in the mud. We tied a rope to the wattle tree. It took the three of us to pull her out.

(*She takes off her wet coat, then goes to the fire, shivering a little. JIM and TOM come back. They throw their coats down on the bench.*)

JIM. We were just in time.

PEGGY. Is she all right?

TOM. We've wrapped her up warm, and put her in the shed.

MRS LIND (*Putting out bottle of whiskey from cupboard*). You'll need something. Just help yourselves.

PEGGY (*Going over and putting out glasses and jug of water for them on the dresser*). We can't expect Harry on a night like this.

(*TOM and JIM fill their glasses at the dresser.*)

JIM. He's a bushman, I tell you.

MRS LIND. You'd better lie down, Peggy. You're tired.

PEGGY (*Wearily*). I think I'll have to.

MRS LIND. You're a good girl. You've been a great help to me.

PEGGY. Call me if he comes.

MRS LIND. Yes. I promise.

(*PEGGY goes out door, down Right.*)

JIM (*Filling glass for MRS LIND*). Try this, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. It may help to make me sleep. (*She sits by the fire.*)

TOM (*Looking at PETER*). He's sleeping. ... Sleep is a good thing. That's what the *Koran* says.
(*He and JIM stand talking and drinking by the dresser.*)

JIM. How are things, Tom?

TOM. My camp was washed away in the flood. It don't matter. I'm not meant to have anything. I once had a little house, but it was burned down. It don't matter. I'm thinking of getting out back.

JIM. There's some pretty good country round here.

TOM. It used to be good country, but it's getting settled now. ... Soon it will be all cultivated—cockie's country ... the fences are going up all over the damn place ... there's too much civilisation.

MRS LIND (*Looking over*). You're a queer one, Tom.

TOM. I don't know. Too much civilisation ... I don't want to see it. I'll be getting farther back, over the border.

JIM. Into the hot dry desert country, don't I know it!

TOM. The Arabs live in the desert, and they're happier than we are.

JIM. I know what the back country's like.

TOM. It must be like Arabia. You look round and see the plains and the blue sky, the sky and the plains, stretching far away, and you just tramp on and on, and there's nothing there, nothing at all, only freedom.

JIM. And one day you'll lose the track, and there'll be no water, or perhaps a myall's spear will find you, and you'll die under a tree, nobody knows where.

TOM. Like enough; but that's an easy end. (*Crosses to bed, looks at PETER, then picks up his book and sits at table reading.*)

JIM (*Pouring another drink*). I want a bit of life before I go.

MRS LIND. What's that! (*Goes to door.*)

JIM. I can hear somebody.

MRS LIND. It's Harry!

(*HARRY and EMMA come in.*)

(*HARRY comes into the room. EMMA stays in porch hesitatingly. She is a slight, dark woman, about thirty, with a brilliant colour, and delicate features. She leans against door, exhausted.*)

HARRY. Mother! (*He takes her in his arms.*)

MRS LIND. Harry!

HARRY. I've done well ... plenty of ducks and a good cheque. (*Looks round.*) What is it? Dad?

MRS LIND. Yes. He's been very ill.

HARRY. I didn't know.

MRS LIND. There's no hope, Harry. He can't last very long.

HARRY. Why was I away? Poor dad!

MRS LIND. Thank God, you got back in time.

(*HARRY goes and looks at his father. EMMA is standing just inside the door, and seems to hesitate about entering.*)

MRS LIND (*Going up to EMMA*). Who are you?

EMMA. Don't you know me?

MRS LIND (*Grimly*). It's you, is it? I know you only too well. What are you doing here?

EMMA. Harry asked me to come.

MRS LIND. Harry!

EMMA. Yes.

MRS LIND. I never expected to see you again.

EMMA (*Gasping*). We were caught in the storm.

MRS LIND. Well ... you can come in till it's over.

EMMA. I'm dripping like a fountain.

MRS LIND. Go over to the fire, then.

(EMMA walks in, swaying a little, and goes to fire. JIM follows her over and MRS LIND stands behind TOM.)

EMMA (*Putting her hands to the blaze*). I'm freezing.

JIM (*Throwing logs on fire*). That ought to blaze it up. (*He gets her a drink.*) How are you, Emma?

EMMA. Have I met you before?

JIM. Yes. But I don't suppose you remember me.

EMMA (*Hesitating*). I saw so many faces in the shanty. I'm a bit bewildered.

MRS LIND (*Comes over, looks disapprovingly at them, and then says grudgingly*). You'll have to stay till the storm's over. (*Crosses to other side.*)

(HARRY leaves bedside and joins MRS LIND and TOM.)

TOM. Well, where did you spring from?

HARRY. I'm just back from the lakes.

TOM. Peter and I were good mates.

HARRY. I know, Tom.

TOM. Bear up, Harry. It's nature. You can't go agin nature. We've all got to go, and we make too much damn fuss about it.

JIM. Harry!

HARRY (*Crossing to them*). It's you, Jim.

EMMA (*Brightening*). I know you now. You're Jim Blake.

HARRY (*To EMMA*). His father owns Ellimatta Station.

EMMA. I've met some lively boys from there.

JIM. Some of our shearers, I suppose.

EMMA (*With a challenging glance*). You needn't mention them. You were lively enough yourself, Jim.

JIM. We were always glad to see you, Emma.

EMMA. What do you say, Harry?

HARRY. You ought to know. ... Emma still sings and plays.

JIM. Are you coming back here, if it's a fair question?

EMMA (*Lightly*). Perhaps! Who knows!

MRS LIND (*Looking across*). Be quiet! You can see there's trouble in the house.

(HARRY leaves them and goes to porch, taking off his overcoat. He is wearing blue dungarees; there are no arms to his coat, and the waistcoat is torn to tatters.)

MRS LIND. ... It's terrible. But we can't do anything to-night.

HARRY. I see you've still got that old Arab book, Tom.

TOM. My word ... I take it everywhere with me.

HARRY. Are you staying on at Ellimatta?

TOM. No. I can't settle. Now Peter's going there's nothing to hold me here. I'll be getting out back again.

(PEGGY comes in from door Right.)

PEGGY. It's Harry! What funny clothes!

HARRY. Hullo, Peggy! This is for the ducks. I want to look natural like, so when I get near them they'll say to themselves: 'Hallo, what's that! Oh, it's all right, that's not a man, it's only a log.'

Ducks are very shy. (He puts on coat that hangs behind door.)

MRS LIND. I knew he'd come to-night.

PEGGY. It's wonderful.

MRS LIND. I knew he'd come in time.

HARRY (*Returning*). The whole country's flooded.

PEGGY. I'm glad you've come back.

HARRY. I didn't know Dad was ill.

PEGGY (*Eagerly*). We've been waiting and waiting for you. You won't leave us again, will you, Harry?

HARRY. No.

PEGGY. I hope your dad'll pull through. (*Sees EMMA.*) Who's that?

HARRY. Hush!

PEGGY (*Insistently*). Who is it?

MRS LIND (*Coming up and putting her arm round PEGGY's shoulders*). I don't know what we would have done without Peggy. She's worked day and night.

HARRY (*A little confused*). We were trying to get through to the township; but the floods were too much for us. ... We've been driving for hours in the rain ...

MRS LIND. Don't talk about it. You look done up, Harry. Go and take a drop of whiskey.

(*HARRY takes whiskey and goes over to fire.*)

TOM (*Looking up, slowly*). The fate of every man is bound about his neck.

PEGGY (*As the situation dawns on her*). I know who it is. It's that woman!

MRS LIND. What woman?

PEGGY (*Bitterly*). That Mrs Oliver.

EMMA (*Rising angrily*). Don't talk about me like that.

MRS LIND. Hush! Don't make a fuss. Remember where you are.

(*PEGGY turns, uncertain whether to go or stay.*)

EMMA. I'll go if I'm not wanted. (*She reels and is about to fall, when HARRY supports her.*)

HARRY. You can't, Emma. You're too faint to move.

EMMA. It's only a shivering fit.

(*HARRY puts her on sofa.*)

MRS LIND (*Going to PEGGY, trying to keep the peace*). Whatever can we do! We can't turn her out on a night like this.

PEGGY (*Abruptly*). How did he meet her?

MRS LIND. Hush, Peggy, you don't understand.

PEGGY (*Trying to control her agitation*). I thought he was coming back to me.

EMMA (*Trying to rise*). I won't stay here.

HARRY. Don't get excited.

MRS LIND (*Turning away from PEGGY, uncertainly*). I don't know what to do. ... She can have my room to-night.

PEGGY (*Coming forward protesting*). You're always taking other people's burdens on your back.

EMMA. Who's that?

JIM. That's Peggy Dawson.

EMMA. What are you staring at me for?

PEGGY (*Scornfully*). I don't want to know you. (*Turns away.*)

EMMA. Who is this little cow girl?

(*Pause.*)

MRS LIND. It's like a doom on us.

(*Pause.*)

TOM (*Looking up from his book*). As to the Infidels, their works are like the Mirage of the desert. ...

HARRY (*Moving away from EMMA, softly*). The mirage of the desert!

JIM. What are you talking about, Tom?

TOM. I've often seen the mirage—out on the big plains.

PEGGY (*Facing HARRY, strongly*). I know all about her.

HARRY. Peggy!

PEGGY. It's true ... all the stories they told me.

HARRY (*Uncomfortably*). Hush, Peggy!

EMMA (*Angrily*). Don't answer her, Harry. What right have you to talk? Do you think I came here to -

MRS LIND. Hush, he's waking. Hush! You're all too noisy.

(*MRS LIND and HARRY go over to bed. PEGGY slowly takes chair by TOM at the table. EMMA is on the sofa, and JIM by the fire.*)

MRS LIND. Dad!

PETER. Yes.

MRS LIND (*Bending over him*). It's Harry!

HARRY (*Moved*). Oh, Dad!

PETER. Good shooting, Harry?

(*HARRY nods.*)

Once I knew all those lakes.

HARRY. How are you, Dad?

PETER. Not too bad. ... I'd like another look out.

HARRY. Can we lift him, Mother?

MRS LIND. Yes. Quiet, Peter. How is that? (*They lift him carefully.*) Pull up the blind.

(*HARRY draws aside the blind. Moonlight outside.*)

PETER (*Looking out*). The moon's shining.

HARRY. The storm's over.

PETER. I can see ... that's all granite there, where the moon strikes it ... many the times I've been across there ... all over those hills.

MRS LIND (*Fixing pillow*). I'll turn the pillow.

HARRY (*Lifting him*). Easy, Dad.

PETER. It's hard to see those hills for the last time. (*They lay him back on the bed.*)

MRS LIND. Are you comfortable, Peter?

PETER. Yes.

MRS LIND. I'll get you something. (*Goes to table, and fills glasses.*)

PETER (*Quietly*). You'll have to pull up now, Harry.

HARRY. All right, Dad.

PETER (*Quizzically*). Don't be a young fool, and get yourself into any more trouble. ... Ah, well, it's not for me to talk to you. I was a hard doer myself in my young days. I know what young fellows are.

(*MRS LIND comes over with drink.*)

MRS LIND. Here, Peter, take this.

PETER (*Making an effort*). Why not! It's my philosophy, if you've to die, you might as well die drunk as sober. ... Where's yours?

MRS LIND. Very well. (*She brings glass for herself.*)

PETER (*Drinks*). We've had some pleasant cracks together, Kate, in the winter evenings, with a good glass to cheer us, and the mallee roots blazing on the fire.

MRS LIND (*Holds glass for him*). Just another sip. (*Takes glass away.*)

PETER (*Drowsily*). I've had a good life. (*Dozes off again.*)

MRS LIND. He's sleeping. (*Wraps clothes around him.*) Hush!

JIM. I won't disturb him. I'll slip away quiet.

MRS LIND (*To PEGGY*). You'd better go off to bed, Peggy.

PEGGY. I don't know what to do. (*She goes out slowly.*)

JIM. Good-night, all.

MRS LIND. Thanks for your help, Jim.

JIM. That's all right.

TOM (*Going over to bed*). A man's true wealth hereafter is the good he has done in this world to his fellow-men. (*At bedside, solemnly.*) Good-night, old man!

MRS LIND. Good-night, Tom. (*She see them off, then turns down lamp.*) We'll have to manage somehow. (*She goes out door Right.*)

(*EMMA gets up slowly and walks to fireplace. HARRY follows her.*)

EMMA (*Turning*). I'm still dripping. Just look at me. It's a wonder we weren't drowned, crossing that creek.

HARRY. We had to take the risk. One thing, you're game, Emma.

EMMA. I thought I was gone once. You just caught me in time, Harry. What a night we've come through!

HARRY. When I went into that wayside shanty, I never dreamt of finding you there.

EMMA. I was glad to get away. ... But why did you bring me here!

HARRY. I had to get home.

EMMA. I'm sorry I came. I didn't expect an illness in the house.

HARRY. Neither did I ... I wonder why we had to meet again.

(*EMMA turns and smiles at him.*)

I'd made a round of the lakes; and coming back through the dark I saw the lights of the shanty. ... I had to go in.

EMMA. You came at the right time. I'd had enough of that horrible place, and the men who made love to me—dull, ugly, stupid men, who could only drink and play cards, and boast about how many sheep they shore. I meant to get away anyhow.

HARRY. I felt safe till I saw you again.

EMMA. It might be different next time. You were only a boy, Harry.

HARRY. I'm a man now.

EMMA. I did something for you, then.

HARRY. There's no chance for me.

EMMA. It's no good brooding over things. I've had a bitter enough fight. I wasn't always a barmaid in the back country. I was well off once, and travelled, and liked good things; and then my husband went off and left me stranded. I've had to knock round for years. ... Can you wonder I've got coarse and reckless! I've had a dreadful life; but I never despair.

HARRY. Neither do I! But what can I do?

EMMA. How often have we planned to go away, up to the opal-fields, and Sydney or Brisbane?

HARRY. Yes. ... But how can I!

EMMA. A man can do anything if he wants to. You should demand more from life than this, even if you have to suffer for it. What about your fiddle?

HARRY. Yes. ... If I've got to play the damned fiddle I should play it, not hang around here. ... But if I can't play it, it's different.

EMMA. You ought to know yourself.

HARRY. I suppose so. ... I could play as a child, and even compose a little. I used to practise eight hours a day for weeks at a time. But it's too late. I might get a job in an orchestra, but I'm not even sure about that. I may be no good at all.

EMMA. You'll have your chance. When once we get away, we'll have lots of music, and ...

HARRY. It's no use talking about it now. I've got to stay on.

EMMA. It's such a waste!

HARRY. There's no escape. Poor Dad's going, and I wouldn't leave Mother. She's done enough for me.

EMMA (*Rising*). It won't do. Nobody can live for anybody else. You'd go mad, or shoot yourself.

HARRY. Don't, Emma.

(*EMMA walks away.*)

It's Mother. She's got a stronger will than I have. I never could stand up to her.

EMMA (*Returning*). The storm's clearing. ... Perhaps you're right. I had no idea things would be like this. I'll be off in the morning.

HARRY (*Touching her*). Your cheeks are flushed, Emma! Are you feverish?

EMMA. It's nothing much.

HARRY (*With sudden passion*). We're both reckless. I've lost my head. I always do with you.

EMMA. It was a mad thing for us to run off together again.

HARRY. What does it matter! Look at your hair; it's all wet and tangled. (*Puts his hand on her hair.*)

EMMA. Don't, Harry!

HARRY. Emma!

EMMA (*Puts her hands on his shoulders*). Oh, Harry, wasn't it worth the risk? Why shouldn't we have some happiness in life. You want me, Harry, don't you?

(*They embrace and kiss.*)

(*PEGGY comes in and sees them.*)

PEGGY. Oh! (*She stands for a moment, struggling to control herself.*)

HARRY (*Turning round*). Peggy!

(*MRS LIND comes in.*)

MRS LIND. I've fixed up your room.

EMMA. Thank you.

MRS LIND. This way. (*She takes her to the door.*)

EMMA. Good-night, Harry. (*She goes out.*)

MRS LIND. What's the matter, Peggy?

PEGGY (*With determination*). I'm going home.

MRS LIND. You said you were staying the night.

PEGGY. I couldn't ... not in the same house.

MRS LIND (*To HARRY*). Why did you bring that woman?

PEGGY. Harry don't want me. I'm going.

MRS LIND (*Trying to hold her*). You can't.

PEGGY (*Half crying*). He wants her. ... Oh, let me get away!

MRS LIND. But the creek's flooded. You might be drowned.

PEGGY (*Wildly, breaking away*). I don't care. (*She puts on a coat and goes out quickly.*)

MRS LIND (*Sadly*). You'll break my heart, Harry. But it doesn't matter for me ... I'm thinking of you. I'm afraid, Harry.

HARRY. I couldn't help it, Mother.

MRS LIND. I've only you left, Harry.

HARRY. What good have I ever been to you! (*Throws himself down in chair by fire.*)

MRS LIND (*Her hand on his shoulder*). Tell me! (*She sits on the sofa nearby.*)

HARRY. I was coming straight home; but at the turn of the track I went into a wayside shanty, just by chance, and Emma was there. She was ill, and wanted to get away, and ...

MRS LIND. No good can come of it, Harry.

HARRY. We were driving to the township when we got caught in the storm. (*Hesitating.*) It's hard to explain. It's not all as bad as you think.

MRS LIND. My God ... what will be the end of it!

HARRY. I don't know, but ... I'm dazed ... it was the storm and the flood ...

MRS LIND. Are you going to marry that woman?

HARRY. I can't ... she has a husband somewhere ... he was no good, either. She's not to blame for that.

MRS LIND. We'll have to do something, but I can't think to-night.

(*HARRY goes over to the bed.*)

I'm sorry for you, my son.

(*Pause. HARRY leans over bed, and then comes back to his MOTHER.*)

HARRY (*Softly*). Mother! (*He takes her in his arms.*)

MRS LIND. Has it happened?

HARRY. Yes ... it's all over.

MRS LIND. All over!

HARRY. He just faded away. It was a quiet end, Mother.

MRS LIND. It was what he deserved. (*Goes over to bed.*) He was always a quiet and gentle man.

(*She looks at him and says with quiet intensity.*) You're safe now, Peter. I'm glad I'm here to see you safe.

(*Pause.*)

HARRY. You can rest now, Mother.

MRS LIND. Yes, I can rest. My life is nearly done.

(*Pause. HARRY goes to the window and looks out.*)

HARRY. It's a beautiful night. The moon's shining and the sky is as clear as if there had never been any storm or sorrow. ... Poor Dad!

(*HARRY turns and walks to his MOTHER, who goes to meet him.*)

MRS LIND (*Holding him*). Oh, Harry! I'll stay by you too. ... I've only you now, Harry!

Curtain.

ACT THREE

(The same as Act Two, three months later. The bed has been removed, and the sofa placed in front of the fireplace, the arm-chair near, a little higher up. MRS LIND is at table kneading dough. EMMA reclines listlessly on the sofa. There is an atmosphere of irritation and hostility between the TWO WOMEN. EMMA rises, and looks through the window.)

MRS LIND *(Kneading dough)*. He hasn't come yet?

EMMA *(Looking out window)*. No. *(Returning.)* I suppose he's drinking and fiddling in the shanty.

MRS LIND. You know very well he went to the store to bring some medicine for me.

EMMA. What are you making a song about! He's always late now.

MRS LIND. Here, Emma, the dough's ready.

EMMA *(Ungraciously coming over)*. Oh, you want me to make it up! How many loaves do you want?

MRS LIND *(Putting things away in cupboard)*. We won't bake again this week—about six or seven.

EMMA. I don't blame him. It's dull. *(EMMA moulds loaves, and puts them on oven shelf.)*

MRS LIND. Three months you've been here—three bitter months. This is the reward I get for all my labour.

EMMA. And mine, too.

MRS LIND. Yours! What have you to complain about?

EMMA. Nothing at all.

MRS LIND. What are you doing there?

EMMA. I'm trying to make a twist.

MRS LIND *(Tartly)*. We don't want any fancy notions. A good plain loaf does us.

(Pause.)

(The WOMEN mould bread. MRS LIND gives a start.)

MRS LIND. Do you hear that?

EMMA. No.

MRS LIND *(Intently)*. I thought I heard a strange cry.

EMMA. You gave me quite a start, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. I'm scared of something, I don't know what. Perhaps it's only the mopoke ...

EMMA. You'd better lie down for a while. You're looking worn out.

MRS LIND. I can't sleep till Harry's home. I'm not well to-night. But he's bringing me some good medicine.

EMMA. It's no use waiting up for Harry.

MRS LIND. You're very anxious to get rid of me.

EMMA. Have it your own way. He can't be long now.

MRS LIND *(With contempt)*. You're not waiting for Harry.

(EMMA laughs.)

You're waiting for Jim Blake.

EMMA *(Carelessly)*. What makes you think that?

MRS LIND. I can see things.

EMMA *(Lightly)*. You must have second sight, Mrs Lind, as I've been told before.

MRS LIND. You can laugh; but maybe I have. I remember, one day when Peter went off to Horsham; he'd a drop o' drink, and I thought I saw him fall out of the buggy. I could see the very spot. I told Harry where to go, and there he was, thrown out of the buggy, just as I said. Harry'll tell you about it. I can hardly understand it myself. Sometimes I see things too clear. ... Isn't Jim Blake coming to meet you to-night?

EMMA. You're wandering in your mind, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. I know your kind. You can't look at a man without wanting to get hold of him.

EMMA. I don't say I am now, but I used to be attractive to men.

MRS LIND. That's a nice character to have.

EMMA. It hasn't helped me much.

MRS LIND. Why did you ever come here? You've only brought destruction with you. Harry's lost.
My boy's lost!

EMMA. You don't understand him. You're as much to blame as I am.

MRS LIND. He takes no interest in the place now.

EMMA. He was never meant for a bushman. He's different—that's all there is about it. He has a streak of something, maybe genius—just a streak—and it's been nothing but a curse to him. It's a great privilege to be born without brains.

MRS LIND. He's wrecked his own life, and other lives, too ... mine—but that doesn't matter—and Peggy's.

EMMA. Peggy! She's only a bush girl who'll soon forget him.

MRS LIND. You're inhuman.

EMMA. Harry must be free. What has he to do with drudges, however good they may be!

MRS LIND. Harry was going to marry Peggy Dawson.

EMMA. Why didn't he, then?

MRS LIND. That's a fine thing for you to say. You led him away.

EMMA. You're always cursing at us. Why don't you clear out and leave us alone!

MRS LIND. I'll stay in my own home.

EMMA. It's a hell of a life!

MRS LIND. You've brought him to this. Harry may have to get a job at the station. He's a proud boy, and we were as good as the Blakes till you dragged us down.

EMMA. I've heard all that before ... (*With a slight sneer.*) I know you're a wonderful woman, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND (*Weary, a little wandering*). Sometimes I think I am myself. Once I drove a mob o' turkeys sixty or seventy miles by myself through the scrub ... I'm wandering ... I don't know what I'm saying.

EMMA (*Putting loaves on shelf*). These loaves are plain enough.

MRS LIND. Don't crowd them all together. Give them room to rise.

EMMA (*Impatiently*). Don't be so fussy over nothing. I've never baked bread before.

MRS LIND. Put the shelf in front of the fire.

EMMA. Will that do you?

MRS LIND. And don't forget to keep the fire up, or they won't rise.

(*EMMA puts shelf of loaves in front of fire.*)

EMMA. I know you've made a lot of sacrifices.

MRS LIND (*Wearily*). Labour and struggle, that's been all our life! I want to keep things together for whoever comes after me.

EMMA (*Muttering*). A devil of a lot there is to keep together.

MRS LIND. What?

EMMA. Little thanks you'll get for that.

MRS LIND. No matter. You only think of your own pleasure, like a cat. I don't live for myself; but I've had a good life.

EMMA (*Sitting on sofa*). I'm glad you think so. (*Moodily.*) Children don't always bring happiness.

MRS LIND. That's true.

EMMA. My husband left me as soon as the boy was born.

MRS LIND. I never heard that. Where is your baby?

EMMA. He died, and anyway, he's better out of it.

MRS LIND. Why don't you go back to your husband?

EMMA. I never want to see him again.

MRS LIND. Where is he now?

EMMA. I don't know, and I don't care.

MRS LIND. I'm coming to the end of my strength. I'm up at five, before it's light, and have to get the lantern to look for the cow, and sometimes it wanders off and I have to chase it. And then I have to feed the fowls and pigs and watch the hives -

EMMA. And what's the good of it all?

MRS LIND. Here's somebody. ... It's Jim Blake.

(JIM BLAKE comes into porch.)

JIM. Good-night! I just dropped in to see Harry.

MRS LIND. He's at the township.

JIM. He said he'd be home to-night.

EMMA. He must be back soon.

MRS LIND *(At table)*. Look at the mess we're in. The work's always behindhand. *(MRS LIND goes out with pasteboard and mixing bowl.)*

JIM. She's looking a bit queer, isn't she?

EMMA *(Indifferently)*. She's always like that.

JIM. Does she know anything?

EMMA. How could she! It's only suspicion.

JIM. Are you ready?

EMMA *(Slowly)*. I don't know.

JIM. You said you'd come. I've arranged everything.

EMMA. I don't dare.

JIM. You must. What are you scared about?

EMMA. He's a strange man, is Harry. You don't know what he would do. He might follow and kill me.

JIM. I'll look after you, Emma. You'll be safe with me.

EMMA. I don't know why I'm hesitating.

JIM. You want to get away from here. This is no life for a woman like you.

EMMA. No ... I don't belong here, among these cockie-farmers. It's the dullest place I've ever been in. Anyway, there was some life and excitement on the opal-fields.

JIM *(Cheerfully)*. Plenty o' life! That's what I want, too.

EMMA. You're young, Jim. I've traveled a lot and know the world. I'm beginning to feel old.

JIM. Not a bit of it. You're looking as fresh as a peach, Emma.

(Tries to kiss her, but she draws back.)

EMMA. Not just now, Jim.

JIM. You don't care for Harry, do you?

EMMA. No.

JIM. Did you ever, straight and all?

EMMA. Perhaps ... I don't know. He was different from other men I've met. I'm sure he has a streak of something, but it's no good to him.

JIM. He can play. I'm not saying he can't.

EMMA. He'll never do anything ... and I'm tired of him now.

JIM. I don't wonder at it. He's not a bad chap, but he's too moody for a young fellow. You never know when you've got him.

EMMA. I might get tired of you too, Jim.

JIM. Spare the crows, Emma! Not so fast! Give a man a chance.

EMMA. Very well, you'll have your chance, but I advise you make the best of it ... I'm telling you the truth. I've no need to, but you might as well know.

JIM. You can't play that game on me.

EMMA. It's not a man's money I want. It's ... why should a woman have only one lover ...

JIM. It won't be like that with us.

EMMA. I think it will. ... Our time will be short. ... Well, we won't try to look too far into the future.

JIM. All right! We'll give it a fly. I'm a sport. We'll have some fun while it lasts.

EMMA. That's all we're sure of.

(HARRY's violin is heard outside. They pause.)

JIM. Hullo!

EMMA. That's his violin. ... It sound well through the bush.

JIM. I've got the trap ready, with a good horse between the shafts.

EMMA. When does the train start?

JIM. Two in the morning. We'll give ourselves plenty of time. It's a twenty-mile drive.

EMMA. I'm ready any minute.

JIM. I'll find a chance to slip out and see that everything's right.

EMMA. My bag's in the shed. You can pick it up later. I haven't much to carry.

JIM. It doesn't matter. I've got the money to give us a good time. Isn't it marvellous. We'll be off to Melbourne to-night.

EMMA. It's years since I've seen a big city.

JIM. I'm a bit nervous myself. *(Boisterously.)* Just think of it—we're off to Melbourne!

EMMA. Hush! Here he comes.

(HARRY comes in and puts his fiddle down on the table.)

HARRY. Hullo! It's brilliant outside. I've been with some of the boys.

JIM. You're doing well, Harry.

HARRY. How's Mother?

EMMA. Tired-looking. She won't take a spell till she's forced to.

JIM. We heard you playing coming along.

EMMA. What were you playing, Harry?

HARRY. A bit of the Beethoven *Concerto*—marvellous! *(Then in different tone.)* But you wouldn't understand ...

EMMA. Am I such a fool?

HARRY. No. It's not that. What can any of us know about it! It's outside our world.

EMMA *(At table, picking up violin)*. It's a lovely instrument.

HARRY. That old fiddle's sounded in shearing sheds and boundary riders' huts, in wayside shanties, and in splitters' camps, all through the Wimmera. I got it from old Rongetti.

EMMA. I remember that name ... Rongetti.

HARRY. He was a famous player in his day, so I've been told. But he took too much laudanum and, God knows why, drifted into the back country. I was just a kid when he came here. He was a broken-down man when I first met him, and he died in an old shepherd's weatherboard hut. That was the only master I ever had.

(MRS LIND enters.)

MRS LIND. Harry!

HARRY *(Without looking round)*. Hullo, Mother! When he was dying, he gave me his fiddle. *(With gestures.)* 'Ah, you 'ave ze technique!' he said. *(He sways a little.)*

MRS LIND. Drinking again?

HARRY. Why not! I'm a famous player, too, in my own way ... I'm only joking Mother. I can't play.
My hands are getting too rough, and I've had no proper training.

EMMA. It's your own fault, Harry.

HARRY. I know that. I'm not blaming anybody. I'm still good enough for a bullock-drivers' spree.

MRS LIND (*Irritated*). Be quiet, Harry. You're getting too excited. (*She sits by the fire.*)

HARRY (*Going over to her*). Mother, I've some news for you. Old Tom Henderson's dead.

MRS LIND. Tom Henderson!

HARRY. The trooper came and told me. He was found outback, only last week, lying under a tree.

MRS LIND. Poor Tom! And he's gone, too!

HARRY. He wandered off the track, so he rolled out his swag, and just went off to sleep. A boundary-rider found him. He had that old book by his side, the *Koran*.

MRS LIND. I've known Tom all my life. Once he asked me to marry him ... that was long ago ... but I knew he was never meant to marry and settle down.

JIM. His troubles are over now.

HARRY. Under a tree! He said he would never die in a bed. He was a character. I saw him going off the last time with his old swag and billy. He wanted to end up like that.

MRS LIND. He was always a wanderer; but who can blame him. He had no family, no cares.
(*Pause.*)
Listen!

EMMA. What is it?

MRS LIND (*Rising*). It's that cry again. ... Didn't anybody hear it?

JIM. I heard nothing.

EMMA. No more did I.

MRS LIND. It's strange.

EMMA (*Exchanging glances with JIM*). It wasn't your horse, was it Jim?

JIM. My horse is quiet; but I'll have a look to make sure. (*JIM goes out.*)

MRS LIND (*Looking out the window*). That's where Peter's lying ... and that's where I want to be.

HARRY. You're a strong woman yet.

MRS LIND. But I'm getting weaker. Did you bring the medicine, Harry?

HARRY. Damn it, no!

MRS LIND. Why didn't you bring it?

HARRY. I told Syd George to leave it at the store, and then I forgot to call.

MRS LIND. You forgot it!

HARRY. Hang it all—I can't think of everything. I was playing at the shanty.

MRS LIND. That's all you care about me. I've had those shooting pains again. And you leave me with that woman of yours when I'm sick and exhausted.

HARRY. I didn't know you wanted it that badly.

MRS LIND. It's only old age. I don't ask for much, but I could do with a little sympathy before I die.

HARRY. I'll go back if you like. I can knock them up.

MRS LIND. I can do without. I don't want your help. I can manage to the end.

EMMA. Oh, cut it out! You're always at it now.

HARRY. Mind your own damn business.

EMMA. Pooh! I'm sure I don't want to interfere.

MRS LIND. What a house you've made, Harry! It's your own folly. What would your father have said!

EMMA. For the love of God, leave me alone! I can't bear it any more.

MRS LIND. I don't trust that woman of yours.

EMMA. Mrs Lind always had a dead set on me.

MRS LIND. She's carrying on with someone else. If you're blind, I'm not.

HARRY. Don't, mother.

EMMA. Let her say what she likes.

MRS LIND. It was a black day for Harry when he saw you, and a blacker when he brought you to this house.

EMMA. God knows, I didn't want to stay.

MRS LIND. There's nothing but noise and drinking and quarrelling and bad thoughts. ... The place is neglected and going to pieces.

EMMA. Blame me for everything.

MRS LIND. We're left alone. All the neighbours shun us.

EMMA. Let them, for all I care!

MRS LIND. People keep away as if there was a plague on the house. Mrs Dawson never comes near now, or any of them -

EMMA. Give it a rest. I don't want to see them—a pack of gossiping old frumps.

HARRY. Let's have a drink, Emma; we're all on edge to-night.

(EMMA goes to dresser and gets bottle and glasses, which she sets on table.)

EMMA. Here you are!

HARRY *(Filling glass)*. Take this, Mother.

MRS LIND. No. I'll leave you to yourselves.

EMMA *(At fire)*. The fire's going down. The bread will be spoilt, damn it.

MRS LIND. It's a sin to be so careless! You're poor pitiful creatures, that's what you are, and I'm tired of the lot of you. *(MRS LIND goes out.)*

EMMA. What a temper she's got, for an old woman who ought to be thinking of her grave.

HARRY. Don't talk like that about my mother.

EMMA. I'll say what I like!

HARRY. Look at the house. You don't care what it's like. Mother can't do everything.

EMMA. Your troubles. You're down at the township most of your time.

HARRY. I'm glad to get out of it.

EMMA. You can go off and get drunk with the boys, but I've got to stay here and drudge. No one can say I haven't worked, if that's anything. ... Oh, blast it, I've had enough of it.

HARRY. What's the matter with you?

EMMA. I can't stand it any more.

HARRY. What the devil did you expect?

EMMA. If we'd only gone away as we meant to ...

HARRY. It might have been just the same.

EMMA. But I shouldn't have stayed on here. Your mother was right. I thought I could do something for you—help you; but I've been no good to you after all.

HARRY. Don't be a fool, Emma. ... Your hair's coming down. *(Goes to touch it.)*

EMMA. Go away!

HARRY. I'll fix it.

EMMA. Go away, I tell you. I'll fix it myself. *(Fixes her hair.)*

HARRY. You growl every time I come near you.

EMMA. I can't help it. You're drunk.

HARRY. You used to like me doing it once.

EMMA. That was a long time ago.

HARRY. Two months.

EMMA. That's a long time.

HARRY. What are you driving at?

EMMA. Do you want to know? ... *(Bitterly.)* Well, I'm tired of you.

HARRY. We're quits then.

EMMA. That's something.

(Pause.)

HARRY. But it doesn't matter, Emma. You can't go away.

EMMA. Why not?

HARRY. Hang it all, we can't break now.

EMMA. It's hell. I can't stand it.

HARRY. My God, if you go -

EMMA. What?

HARRY. ... I might kill you.

EMMA. I'm not frightened, Harry.

HARRY. I didn't mean that. I'm a bit drunk.

EMMA. That's all right for you, but how long am I going to put up with it!

HARRY. Things are bad enough, but it would be terrible to have another smash. That would be the stone end of everything.

EMMA *(Rising)*. It might be better if you never saw me again.

HARRY. Never mind what's happened. *(Puts hands on her shoulders.)* You've got to stay, hear that! It don't matter a damn, we've got to go through with it.

EMMA. Don't touch me!

HARRY. You can't leave now, Emma. *(Holds her.)*

EMMA *(Struggling)*. Let go!

HARRY. What's the good of always fighting!

(JIM comes back.)

JIM. He's all right now. ... What's up?

HARRY *(Still holding EMMA)*. We've got to stick together.

EMMA *(Breaking)*. Your mother's a hard woman, and she's got a bitter tongue.

HARRY. She's a better woman than you are.

JIM *(Coming over)*. Steady, Harry. That's not the way to talk.

EMMA. He may be right. I'm a bad character, sure enough—a criminal.

HARRY. Oh, hang! What does that matter! I could be called a criminal for that matter of that.

EMMA. You!

HARRY. You know I lost my licence, and Jim said I was a sheep-stealer and poacher.

JIM. Forget it.

EMMA. That's nothing to boast about. ... I don't mean things like that. ... I poisoned my husband. ... Don't stare! I was tired of him, and one night I put something into his wine. It didn't kill him, though. I wish it had.

HARRY. I don't believe it. It's only a tale. You talk like that to make yourself look interesting.

JIM. What's the good of fighting about it!

EMMA. We all have our devils.

JIM. Come on! Drink up! *(Fills glasses.)* Forget you troubles!

(He hands glasses to EMMA and HARRY, and then drinks and puts down his own glass.)

That's good stuff. *(Talking noisily.)* The night is young! On with the dance!

HARRY. Shut up, Jim. I'm tired of your loud talk.

JIM. You needn't growl about it. What are we going to do?

HARRY. Any damn thing you like.

JIM. Let's have a little gamble.

HARRY. I'm on. (*Gets dice from mantelpiece.*) Here are the dice. Let's try our luck.

(*HARRY and JIM sit at table. EMMA watches them.*)

EMMA. Do you believe in luck?

HARRY. Sometimes.

EMMA. I mean with the dice.

JIM. I'm lucky when I don't touch them.

HARRY. Come on, Jim. ... Here's the stakes.

(*Puts money on table. JIM does the same.*)

Shake!

JIM. You start.

(*They throw dice at table. EMMA sits on sofa before fireplace. As they play, she hums a few bars of a ballad.*)

HARRY. Beat that!

JIM. Right!

(*JIM wins.*)

HARRY. Come on again!

JIM. I'm your man!

(*Wins again.*)

HARRY. My luck's out. ... What's that you're humming, Emma?

EMMA. Only an old ballad.

HARRY. That's a melancholy sort of tune.

JIM. Shake, Harry! High, wide and level, that's the style!

(*They play, JIM usually winning.*)

HARRY. That's yours, Jim.

EMMA. I can't sing now. Once I could; but I lost my voice. Nothing lasts long in this world.

HARRY (*Rising*). Damn it!

JIM (*Also rising*). I'm the winner. (*Picks up money.*) I've won a fiver.

HARRY. I never threw worse in my life. These dice are made of the devil's bones.

JIM. It's all luck.

HARRY. Give me my revenge, Jim.

JIM. It's time to stop, Harry.

HARRY. That's what the winner always says.

JIM. Don't get angry. I can't stand a bad loser.

HARRY. Play or not, as you like!

JIM. Do you think I'm afraid?

HARRY. Come on, then. Double stakes.

JIM. Right-oh! You're a plunger, Harry.

EMMA (*Fills HARRY's glass*). Try this! It'll steady your nerves. I haven't been five years in a shanty for nothing.

HARRY (*Throwing*). Beat that!

JIM. Too high for me, Harry.

(*EMMA leans over table, and hums a livelier air.*)

That's better. That's got life in it. Give me plenty of life!

HARRY. It's mine again.

JIM. Shake 'em up!

HARRY (*Winning again*). The luck's changed.

JIM. Unlucky at play, lucky at love, as the saying is ... I'll give you best, Harry ... (*Rises.*)

EMMA. How do you stand now?

JIM. Harry's the winner.

HARRY (*Sleepily*). I can't stand a bad loser.

EMMA. You look tired. Lie down here.

(*Puts HARRY on sofa.*)

(*To JIM.*) It won't hurt him. There's no dope in it. (*Puts money in heap.*) There's his money.

JIM. Are you ready?

EMMA. Yes.

JIM. We'd better start. Is everything in the trap?

EMMA. Yes. Be very quiet. (*Stands over HARRY on sofa.*) Good-bye, Harry! Everything comes to an end ... I'll turn down the lamp. (*Turns down lamp.*)

JIM (*Putting his arm round EMMA and leading her to the door*). We're off to Melbourne town!

EMMA. Hush! Come on, Jim!

(*They go out.*)

(*Then MRS LIND comes in, lights lamp, and gently rouses HARRY.*)

MRS LIND. Harry!

HARRY (*Drowsily*). I'm all right.

MRS LIND. Were you sleeping?

HARRY. Yes. (*Looking round vaguely.*) Where are they?

MRS LIND. They've gone.

HARRY. Gone ... where?

MRS LIND. To Melbourne, I should think.

HARRY (*Sitting up and looking round*). I don't believe it.

MRS LIND. You innocent! They've gone away together.

HARRY (*Vaguely*). We were throwing dice.

MRS LIND. She's taken all her things. ... I knew it. What are you surprised at? She left you before.

HARRY. What were we doing?

MRS LIND. Gambling. There's the money on the table.

HARRY (*Sitting with his head in his hands*). Never mind.

MRS LIND. Harry, you're well rid of that woman.

HARRY. She was up against things, too.

MRS LIND. Perhaps she was. But I'm not going into that. Thank God, that's all over.

HARRY. I don't care. I'm dog tired of everything going. (*HARRY walks vaguely about.*)

MRS LIND. What are you staring at?

HARRY. Things look dim and dazzly to me ... as they look to a man with sandy blight.

MRS LIND. Sit down, Harry, and light your pipe.

HARRY. I think I will. (*Lights pipe.*)

MRS LIND. That's right. You want a quiet smoke.

HARRY. ... It's a queer world, Mother.

(*HARRY lies back on sofa and MRS LIND sits in the chair by the fire.*)

MRS LIND. It's just like long ago, when we were alone together beside the fire, and you would play the fiddle, or I would tell you some old stories -

HARRY. I always like hearing your stories, Mother.

MRS LIND. I once knew a lot of stories. I've seen such a lot of life, Harry. I remember not long after we'd settled in the Wimmera ... there was a big drought on ...

HARRY. Tell me about it.

MRS LIND. The stock were dying, and we didn't know what to do for water. ... Are you all right, Harry?

HARRY. Go on, Mother, I'm listening.

MRS LIND. Then, one day, when everything was scorched up and -

(TED opens the door of the porch.)

TED *(Calling)*. Hallo!

MRS LIND. Come in.

TED. Oh, Mrs Lind! I've got something for you.

MRS LIND. For me? *(Goes to meet him and takes parcel.)*

TED. It's the medicine. It was at the store, all made up; but Harry forgot to call.

MRS LIND. Thanks, Ted. *(Excusing him.)* He was so tired. ... And how are you getting on.

TED. Not too bad. I'm going to be a horse-dealer when I grow up.

MRS LIND. A horse-dealer!

TED. Horses is my game. The cockie can keep his old cows. It's all messing about cows—wouldn't suit me. I've seen too much of it.

MRS LIND. That's just like my Jackie—poor little fellow—he was mad on horses. I didn't like him to be a jockey; but he was a great little rider.

TED. I want to own racehorses and train 'em myself. ... I must be off. I've got Peggy waiting down the track.

MRS LIND. Have you? I want to see her.

TED. She wouldn't come in, Mrs Lind. You know what girls are.

MRS LIND. I must see her, Ted. It's important. Tell her I want her, that's a good boy.

TED. All right, Mrs Lind. I'll get her. I won't be a jiffy.

(TED runs out quickly.)

HARRY. I'm still a bit dazed.

MRS LIND. It's Peggy.

HARRY. Peggy!

MRS LIND. I'll be glad to see her again. She's a fine girl.

HARRY. It's a funny thing, mother; but I seem to bring bad luck to everybody.

MRS LIND. It's not your fault, son.

HARRY. It must be. You'd be better off without me.

MRS LIND. Mind, now, you're not to run off any more.

HARRY. Don't worry, mother. I'll find a way out.

MRS LIND *(Humouring him)*. You'll be playing your violin in Melbourne or Sydney.

HARRY. I don't wish for that. The music's here, mother. *(He buries his head in his hands.)*

MRS LIND. You were always a strange boy.

HARRY. I'm twenty-six now, and I've always been struggling for something. The mirage of the desert, as old Tom said. I suppose I wanted more than I could get.

MRS LIND. I'm a fighter, too, and I can face anything if I'm put to it.

HARRY. You mustn't make any more sacrifices for me. I won't let you. *(He gets up.)*

MRS LIND. Where are you going?

HARRY. For a ride.

MRS LIND. What an idea—at this time of night!

HARRY. I must do something. Where's the bridle?

MRS LIND. You're not going after that woman!

HARRY. No. No. That's over.

MRS LIND. I'm glad of that. But where are you going?

HARRY. Anywhere. I'll shake the old nag up. I'll ride till my head's clear again.

MRS LIND. Don't do anything rash, Harry.

HARRY. I must have a break. It'll be good for me. Good-night, Mother. *(Kisses her.)*

MRS LIND. Wait a minute, Harry. They're coming.

HARRY. I must be alone for a bit. I'll ride all night ... anywhere ... away from everything, away from myself. It's all right, Mother. You can't beat a good gallop. It's wonderful riding through the bush at night.

(HARRY goes out. MRS LIND starts to clear table, when PEGGY and TED come in.)

PEGGY *(Looking round, hesitating)*. Oh, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND. Come in! I've wonderful news, Peggy. That woman's gone.

PEGGY. Gone!

MRS LIND. She went off with Jim Blake. We're rid of her at last.

PEGGY *(Bitterly)*. Why did she ever come here!

MRS LIND. Never mind that. We'll have lots to do. Everything's neglected. Just look at that bread! It should have been baked hours ago.

(Puts shelf in oven.)

(Coming Back.) I've often thought of going away, but how could I leave him like that! I was determined that woman wouldn't get the best of me.

PEGGY. I don't understand.

MRS LIND. It wasn't all Harry's fault. He's come through a lot, poor boy.

PEGGY. Where is he?

MRS LIND. He's gone for a ride through the bush—he just wants to forget things.

PEGGY. It's not fair. We were going to have a place of our own.

MRS LIND. This'll be your place, Peggy. I always wanted it for you and Harry.

PEGGY. Oh, don't talk about it, Mrs Lind. It can't ever be that now.

MRS LIND. Of course it can. Don't be a foolish girl. Come over here and see what I've got for you.

(Takes PEGGY to cupboard.) ... Just some bits of china and silver spoons ...

PEGGY. It's good of you ... but, I couldn't take them.

MRS LIND. You must, Peggy. *(Goes to chest.)* And I'll show you something else. It was my grandmother's shawl ... it's a hundred years old ... it's real silk ... it came from India. *(Puts it round her.)* It does suit you.

TED. My word, Peggy, you are coming out in blossom.

MRS LIND. Don't look so solemn. Listen, Peggy. Think of the fun we'll have at your wedding.

TED. My word, we could fix up the old barn.

MRS LIND *(Laughing)*. What do you say to that! Don't be shy, Peggy. We'll have a real jolly wedding. We'll ask everybody, and we'll have fiddling and dancing. ... *(She pauses, listening.)* Did you hear that?

PEGGY. No.

MRS LIND. I've heard it three times to-night. ... What can it mean!

PEGGY. It's only a mopoke. ... Go and see, Ted.

TED. I can't hear it. *(TED goes out.)*

PEGGY. Don't be frightened, Mrs Lind.

MRS LIND *(Returning)*. It was just a dread ... but I won't think of it! ... I knew it would all come all right.

PEGGY. I believed him last time; but look what happened.

MRS LIND. It wasn't his fault, Peggy. Now tell me. You love him, don't you?

PEGGY. Yes. I'll always love him.

MRS LIND. And you can forgive him? ... You must.

PEGGY. I can forgive him ... but ...

MRS LIND *(Putting her hand on her shoulder)*. That's all that matters, Peggy. *(Moving round, tidying.)* This won't be a bad little place to start with. We'll soon fix things up. I'll help you, Peggy.

PEGGY (*Responding a little to her mood*). I wish I knew more about bees.

MRS LIND. I'll teach you to extract the honey. Bees won't sting if you don't smoke them too much. That frightens them, and then they'll sting.

PEGGY. The yellow box is blossoming, and there's manna in the red gums.

MRS LIND. We expect a big honey flow. It's a splendid season. The bees are busy now - and you should see the parrots! How greedy they are—that shows there is plenty of blossom.

(*Pause.*)

PEGGY (*Doubtfully*). If only ... oh, Mrs Lind! It would be wonderful.

MRS LIND. I wouldn't mind leaving them. I could go off and see my other children. I'd stir them up—and spoil their children, too. You'd all be settled, and I wouldn't have another care in the world.

PEGGY (*Putting her in big chair*). You must have a rest. You've done everything. I wish I could—
(*TED comes in door. He is very distressed. PEGGY goes to him.*)

TED (*Choking*). I can't tell you. ... It's Harry.

PEGGY. Harry!

TED. It's terrible!

PEGGY. Is it an accident?

TED. I heard the dog barking, and I went down the hill to look. ... I seen him lying there in the moonlight.

MRS LIND (*Getting up*). What are you saying?

TED. The horse must have fallen trying to jump the creek. ... They're both killed. (*Breaks down.*)

PEGGY. Harry ... killed!

MRS LIND. I knew it. Oh, I knew it.

TED. It's a dangerous jump, that, even in the daytime.

MRS LIND (*Still and intense*). I couldn't save my first child. ... She died as soon as she was born ... and I couldn't save my last.

PEGGY (*Sobbing*). Harry! Harry!

MRS LIND (*Slowly, sinking into her chair*). He was a strange boy. ... I tried hard, but I couldn't save him ... I couldn't save him.

Curtain.

Notes

ACT ONE

Wimmera: region, west-central Victoria, immediately east of the South Australian border. Thomas Mitchell first surveyed the area in 1836 and named it for an Aboriginal term meaning boomerang, throwing stick, or spear thrower.

bush: (*Dutch, bosch*) The term used in Australia at least as early as 1801. On 17 April 1803, it appeared as a noun in the *Sydney Gazette*, and by 1820 had replaced the English 'woods' and 'forest' in general usage. In 1826, it was already being given a wider meaning to describe the country in general outside Sydney (James Atkinson, *An Account of the State of Agriculture and Graxing in New South Wales*). By 1833 WH Breton (*Excursions in New South Wales*) suggested that 'Bush' is the term commonly used for the country *per se*: 'he resides in the Bush,' implies that a person does not reside in, or very near, a town.

Johnny-cakes: Similar to damper, but closer in size to a scone; made of flour, water and salt, and cooked either in coals or a pan. Cf. Johnny, (*British slang*) man or boy.

shanty: a small, crudely built shack; in Australia, an unlicensed hotel or vendor of alcohol.

the township: possibly Horsham.

randy: (*Scottish*) Lacking any sense of propriety; recklessness.

boundary rider: a person employed to maintain the outer fences of a cattle or sheep station.

the Western sheds: ie Shearing sheds in the Wimmera.

hawker: a vendor of merchandise, such as drapery, that can be easily transported. In the very beginning of hawking in Victoria, men of many nationalities participated in this type of business, but somehow the wiry Indian hawker seemed to predominate. Cf. Esson's *The Sacred Place*

Mohammedan: archaic term for Muslim, a follower of the religion of Islam.

cadge: (*Australian slang*) impose on another's generosity, also borrow without intent to repay.

Droving: driving livestock (especially cattle) to market.

fiddle: violin. In 'Irish Memories and Australian Hopes' Esson recalled Irish playwright JM Synge who 'spent his summers in the Aran Islands on the west of Ireland, living with the people and making his notes, fishing with them and playing his fiddle to their jigs and reels.' Esson also mentions that he saw one of Padraic Colum's early plays, *The Fiddler's House*, which had been 'selected with the early plays of Yeats and Synge for performance in London as one of the representative examples of the new Irish drama.'

'morganer': Cf. Louis Esson, 'The Timber Getters', *The Weekly Times*, 30 December 1911: 'There are certain splitters, wise old battlers, who never fell a tree at all. For years they follow up what are known as "Morganers," that is, trees that have been felled by other splitters or blown over by the winds. There are "Morgansers" in every calling, and in the bush there is always room for the ancient battler with a sense of humour and a simple philosophy.'

the spring-board: a platform fixed to the side of a tree and used by an arborist when working at some height from the ground.

I could shear my eighty or ninety yet: Cf. Legendary shearer, Jackie Howe, set a blade shearing record on 10 October, 1892, using hand operated blade shears; he took the wool off 321 sheep in just seven hours and 40 minutes, at Alice Downs Station near Blackall.

the Big Desert: An arid area of sandstone ridges, sand dunes, mallee scrub and heath located north of Kaniva, close to the border with South Australia,

squatter: In Australian history, a squatter was either a free settler or ex-convict, who occupied a large tract of Crown land in order to graze livestock. Often having no legal rights to the land, they gained its usage by being the first Europeans in the area. In the colony of Victoria, the 1860 *Land Act* allowed free selection of Crown land, including that occupied by pastoral leases. Eventually, the term *Squattocracy*, a play on 'aristocracy', developed to refer to some of these squatters.

Koran: Literally 'the recitation' the *Koran* (or Qur'an) is the central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God (*Allah*). It is widely regarded as the finest work in classical Arabic literature. The Qur'an is divided into chapters (*surah* in Arabic), which are then divided into verses (*ayah*). Muslims believe that the Qur'an was verbally revealed by God to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel gradually over a period of approximately twenty-three years, beginning on 22 December 609 CE, when Muhammad was forty, and concluding in 632, the year of his death.

Gibbon. ... *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: six volume history of Rome from 98-1590 by Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) published between 1776-1789.

Upper Murray: The Murray River begins its course among the high mountain peaks of Mount Kosciusko and Mount Jagungal in the Snowy Mountains, and marks the border between NSW and Victoria; it is a rugged and mountainous catchment that supports vast areas of wilderness and important alpine habitats.

We've boxed the brood!: The brood box is usually the first box, that contains the queen bee and the brood (ie the eggs, larvae and pupae of honeybees).

the needle-wood and prickly-bush ... supple-jack: Australian native shrubs.

bee-hunting in the Murra-Murra: Louis Esson, 'Bee Hunting in the Murra-Murra', *Bulletin*, 15 August, 1907.

crikey: (*Australian slang*) An expression of astonishment; a mild oath.

bay mare with a switch tail: a bay mare is a female horse that has a brown or dark brown coat with black points on the legs, face, and mane.

Straight wire!: (*Australian slang*) candid, frank, truthful.

mutton: flesh of a mature sheep .

Ellimatta Station: Cf. The *Daily Advertiser* (Wagga Wagga) reports on 23 December 1932 that Ellimatta station [on the Big Spring Pullitop Road], 'of 1662 acres, with a frontage to the Mumimibidgee Haver and Adjungbilly Creek, near Gundagai, has changed hands at a satisfactory price, passing from Mr Gregory Quilter to Mr DW Byan.'

green: immature, unsophisticated or gullible. Cf. William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 'My salad days,/When I was green in judgment ...' 1.v

the drought ... twenty-five years ago: The drought that devastated eastern Australia from 1895-1903 (and even longer in some regions) is the most widely recognised in Australia's European history, its importance even meriting three capitalised names—the Long Drought, the Great Drought and the Federation Drought. The reputation is deserved since that prolonged period of below-average rain was the most severe to that point in Australia's European history.

the smoker: the device beekeepers use to puff smoke into hives to calm the bees before inspection.

the lakes: the lakes and wetlands of the Western Wimmera; Cf.

HARRY. I'll start here, Peggy, at the Bogong, and across to Wash-to-morrow Swamp, and the Muddy Scotchman—you should see its high reeds and dead drowned timber...this next one's the Champion; it's never been known to rise or fall, wet winter or dry summer. Then I'll go over there, to Boorookpi, and clear all the small lakes to Jaki Jaki on the borders of South Australia. ... That's Mount Arapilies ... I'll pass round there to Mitre Lake and get over to Grass Flat. It's a queer place, Peggy, with limestone edges on the south, mallee scrub on the north, and a fringe of paper trees growing all round. I'll get a big bag at Muddy Swamp, near the border of the Big Desert - it's alive with black duck, speckled duck, teal and widgeon. And then I'll make for the Win Win, and travel south by the Boundary Swamp and the Leg o' Mutton, and finish the round on the Darigon, on the Wimmera River.

pannikin: small metal cup or pan.

a junk [o' salt beef]: old rope, hence, worthless stuff or rubbish; salted preserved meat, usually used on long voyages.

ACT TWO

old splitter: a labourer who splits or cuts timber; Cf. Esson's poem 'The Splitter' (*Bells and Bees*).

'Every good act is charity; your smiling in your brother's face; you putting a wanderer on the right road; your giving water to the thirsty, is charity.': quote from the *Koran*—

Every good act is charity. Your smiling in your brother's face, is charity; an exhortation of your fellow-man to virtuous deeds, is equal to alms-giving; your putting a wanderer in the right road, is charity, your assisting the blind, is charity; your removing stones, and thorns, and other obstructions from the road, is charity; your giving water to the thirsty, is charity. A man's true wealth hereafter, is the good he does in this world to his fellow-man. When he dies, people will say, 'What property has he left behind him?' But the angels will ask, 'What good deeds has he sent before him.'

Warracknabeal: A wheat-belt town, situated on the banks of the Yarriambiack Creek, 330 km north-west of Melbourne, in the northern Wimmera and southern Mallee districts. 'Warracknabeal' is an indigenous Wotjobaluk expression meaning 'place of big gums shading the water hole'.

culvert: a structure that allows water to flow under a road.

cockie [farmer]: (*Australian slang*; abbreviation of 'cockatoo') Small farmers; among bushmen synonymous with everything poor and mean; though cockie covers every settle under the status of squatter, it more especially applies to the small selectors who hold from forty up to one hundred and fifty acres of land. In Australian slang or vernacular speech, a person who is assigned to keep watch while others undertake clandestine or illegal activities, particularly gambling, may be referred to as a 'cockatoo'. Proprietors of small agricultural undertakings are often jocularly or slightly disparagingly referred to as 'cocky farmers'.

a myall: An Aboriginal living in a traditional tribal way, outside European civilisation; in 1798 David Collins [*An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*] suggested that 'My-yal' designated a stranger, noting that the word had reference to sight [Mi, the eye]; (*Colloq.*) wild or uncivilised.

'The fate of every man is bound about his neck.': The Prophet Mohammad, *Koran*, 17:13

'As to the Infidels [unbelievers], their works are like the Mirage of the desert. ...': The Prophet Mohammad, *Koran*, 24:38.

cracks: cutting or witty remarks.

the opal-fields: White Cliffs is a small town in outback New South Wales. White Cliffs is around 255 km northeast of Broken Hill. The town was established in the late 19th century when opal was discovered. Opal has been mined ever since. The first Australian opal was found 20 years before in Queensland in 1872, when a party of kangaroo hunters were operating in the White Cliffs area. One of them, who had left the party to track down a wounded kangaroo over some low stony hills, picked up a pretty stone which appealed to him. When taking back the stone, they suspected it could be opal which the local jeweller confirmed. He advised to get as much opal as possible since this could be more profitable than kangaroo hunting. When the group filed a claim, opal had not yet been listed under gemstones, and it was decided to file the claim under the *Gold Mining Act*. Other fields include Coober Pedy, Andamooka and Nettleton's Hill (named after Charles Nettleton who discovered the opals in the district in 1902; later changed to Lightnight Ridge). Cf. the setting for Frank Brown's and Louis Esson's short play *Mates*.

You'd go mad, or shoot yourself.: Cf. Esson's advice from Yeats and Synge.

Act Three

Horsham: Located on the Wimmera River, Horsham was a town approximately 300 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. Named by original settler James Monckton Darlot after the town of Horsham in England. It grew throughout the latter 19th and early 20th century as a centre of Western Victoria's wheat and wool industry.

trap: light, two-wheeled carriage.

train: Lubeck was the junction of the main Melbourne to Adelaide line, and Bolangum the branch line. The birth of the town was closely associated with the arrival of the railway. The main line was extended from Stawell to Murtoa through Lubeck in 1878, and the railway station opened in February 1879.

the Beethoven Concerto: Violin Concerto in D major Op 61.

Rongetti: no reference.

laudanum: A tincture of opium; any medicine of which opium is the main ingredient.

plunger: someone who acts recklessly, impetuously.

I didn't like him to be a jockey: Cf. horse racing and jockeys in Esson's *The Bride of Gospel Place* and *Mates*.

yarn: (*Australian slang*) A conversation with a narrative element, especially an exchange of experiences; story, tale; reminiscence.

cow: (*colloq.*) anything disagreeable or deserving vilification; the more intense form is 'a fair cow.'

cripes: (*colloq.*) expression of astonishment, surprise; a mild oath.

cronies: (*colloq.*) friends or companions.

dope: (*colloq.*) any narcotic that produces numbness and stupor.

jiffy: (*colloq.*) a very short time.

nipper: (*colloq.*) a young child.

randy: [Scot.] lacking any sense of propriety; reckless; rude.

run: a tract of land for grazing; a sheep or cattle station; the station as distinct from the homestead; according to REN Twopeny in *Town Life in Australia* (1883) 'A run is the least improved kind of land used for sheep, but the word is used almost alternatively with "station", which denotes an improved run.'

sandy blight: name given to trachoma or any kind of conjunctivitis, when the eyes smart as though filled with sand.

scrub: a remote place; anywhere remote from civilisation; the country as opposed to the city.

shanty: a public house, especially unlicensed; a 'sly grog shop.'

sliprails: poles or rails slipped into grooves or wire loops to serve as a removable gate.

spare the crow: Cf. draw the crow: attract undesirable, unwelcome attention or criticism; receive the worst part of a bargain, allocation etc.

a spell: a short period of rest.

The Bride of Gospel Place

A Play, in Four Acts

Affectionately Inscribed to
William Moore

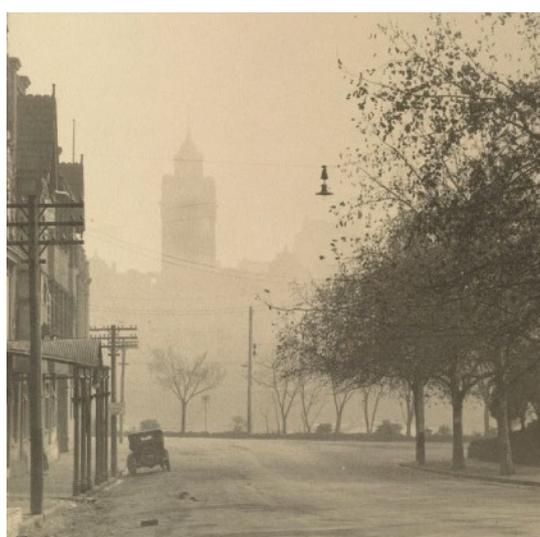
Performance History

The premier of *The Bride of Gospel Place*, took place at The Playhouse, Melbourne, on a very wet Wednesday 9 June, 1926:¹ 'After a week's perfect weather, there was an unexpected and heavy downpour of rain' in the hour before the performance. Produced by Leo Burke, the production was presented by The Pioneer Players with the following cast:

JOE, a waiter	Jack Nutchay
'BUSH' REYNOLDS, a pugilist	Leo Burke
SPIRO, a Greek restaurant keeper	James Bowden
'THE MASTER', an articulated clerk	Charles Dougherty
A CABMAN	Stand Brumby
A YOUNG DOCTOR	Bryce Dunning
A MEDICAL STUDENT	Frank Goddard
'VANITY FAIR'	Violet Groves
'MILKY' DAVIS, a confidence man	Reg Moyle
RENIE	Hilda Esson
CONSTABLE DOBSON	J O'Connell
'SMITHY THE LIAR', a thief	Frank T Keon
OLIVE, known as 'The Bride'	Maisie Bennett
BILL, Renie's husband	J Maloney
MADAME DELIA, a fortune teller	Ruby May
SUZETTE	Ivy Thomson
A NURSE	Violet Groves
A BALLET GIRL	Ivy Thomson
A CHARWOMAN	Irene Appleton

The majority of the very large cast were seasoned ensemble members of the Pioneer Players, including Irene Appleton, Ruby May, Charles Doherty, Bryce, Dunning, Frank T Keon, Reg Moyle, J O'Connell and Louis' wife Hilda Bull; Leo Burke did double duty acting in the pivotal role of 'Bush' Reynolds and as the director. New faces to the Pioneers included Maisie Bennett as 'The Bride'; with Ivy Thomson (doubling Suzette and the Ballet Girl) and Violet Groves (doubling Vanity Fair and the Nurse).

The Playhouse had been used by the Pioneer Players in 1923. Formerly the Snowden Cinema in Aikman Street, South Melbourne, the venue was converted into a 770 theatre (with stalls and dress circle) as the home for Gregan McMahon's Melbourne Repertory Theatre company in 1916.



Above: Gregan McMahon's Playhouse Theatre, June 1916. Right: Playhouse Theatre, c.1922. Looking North to Flinders Street Station, down Aikman Street, from City Road, South Melbourne, near Melbourne Glaciarium. The Playhouse and the Alexandra Mansions can be seen on the left hand side of the street. (Photographer: Robert Gibson State Library of Victoria)

¹ Program held by the Fryer Library, University of Queensland

'On the whole,' Esson wrote to Vance Palmer the week after the opening (15 June), 'we did very well.' The rain hampered door sales, 'but the bookings had been good, much better than ever before.'

... The house was almost full, except the balcony, and the show went over not so badly. It was a slow start as usual, not a laugh coming till page 5. We had only two breaks, Joe going out for a plate and not returning, but Frank as Smithy covered it up cleverly ... The second was that the curtain in Act III fell on the screen.

The first act, that on paper seemed the liveliest, made the least effect. But I was lucky in most of the characters. The outstanding successes were Frank as Smithy and Irene Appleton as the Charwoman. But equally good in character were Ruby May, Hilda and Reg O'Connell as the policeman, and Bryce Dunning and Violet Groves (doctor and nurse). The beautiful Ivy did quite well in a difficult and artificial part. We had decent programmes and good music, but we hadn't made proper arrangements for the front of the house and the ushering was poor. Still it was a decent show.

Responding to the single performance, *The Argus* reminded the reader that The Pioneer Players used 'a non-professional cast' but 'there was good work.' *The Age* believed that 'Easily the best performance ... was that of Mr Frank T Keon as Smithy the Liar, an underworld crook of humorous phrase and a deep sense of his own righteousness.' It continued:

Mr Keon handled the part faultlessly, and created much mirth. Miss Maisie Bennett did excellent work in the exacting part of Olive [The Bride], and Mr Leo Burke took good care of the part of Bush Reynolds, which he treated with restraint. Mrs Esson was a convincing Renie, a fickle wife who lives the high lights, and Miss Ruby May made a splendid Madame Delia. Mr Charles Dougherty repeated his Repertory success as the Master, and Mr Reg Moyle was a confidence man whom any magistrate would sentence without the option. Mr J O'Connell was a good constable.²

The review concluded with the observation that 'a large audience was pleased with the merits of the play and the performance.' Music for the evening—including the Overture from Mozart's *Le Nozze de Figaro*—by the Isobel Langlands Trio³.

Of the play itself, while *The Argus* respected Esson's 'effort at a fresh beginning in the attempt to provide Australian drama ... he has not yet reached a quite successful stage art of his own [compared to the naturalism of the Chekhov] ... but the play contains much that is interesting, and very much that is true.'

He has put put real life and real characters on the stage, and if one says that some of the curtains are not 'effective'—well, there can be something beyond what is usually regarded as stage effect; nearer the truth, and deeper.

'Mr Esson may not yet reach it.' The review concluded, but 'In the present play he has glimpsed it. Most of the characters are people of sordid life in the "underworld," but they are truthfully presented, without the scales being manipulated either for or against them, and there are points of faithfulness and sacrifice that do something towards redeeming the best of them.' It was the playwright's verisimilitude that either drew dramaturgical praise or moral condemnation for sordid lives presented. '*The Bride of Gospel Place* is describe as a realistic play, in four acts, of the Melbourne underworld,' commented the *Australasian* in its favour, highlighting that 'The objects of the Pioneer Players are the presentation of original plays interpreting aspects of Australian life and

² *The Age*, 10 June 1926

³ Isobel Langlands (violin), Charles Tuckwell (piano), and Mr A Demarez (cello).

character and the development of a natural school of acting and production.⁴ On the other hand, they noted that

The characters are from the 'underworld'—and that is not necessarily a recommendation—but it is clearly an Australian 'underworld,' not anything copied from over seas.

They also pointed out a common difficulty with the dramaturgy, suggesting that Esson had

avoided conventional stage method and climax, and has not followed the principle of making everything said or done contribute to the movement of the play. Some of his people give sketches of their history two or three times, and there are other points that have nothing to do with movement or action.

'But,' it hastened to add, 'it is all true—the characters, their sayings, their accents, their points of view.' *The Bride of Gospel Place* in concluded 'may not be a play in the ordinary sense, but it is a lifelike series of episodes.'

Table Talk argued that Esson had 'made several attempts to writ the true Australian play, for which we are all waiting, but in his latest effort ... he has abandoned Australian atmosphere, and deals with the cosmopolitanism of the underworld.'

It is an undoubtedly worthy piece of work, and in dramatic construction, in the handling of the dialogue, and the stage sense, shows an advance upon the author's previous efforts. Its sordid character will, however, militate against its presentation upon any professional stage.

There is some comedy relief, but it is not exactly incidental to the action of the play, being drawn in by outside characters, except in the one case of Madame Delia, the good hearted fortune teller, in which role Ruby May did good work.

Underlying all is tragedy, and the sordidness that rarely appeals. It is strange that in his plays Louis Esson does not seem able to break away from the sordid side of life.⁵

Ultimately, however, they felt that 'this play would show to greater advantage with proper stage mounting, and more experienced interpretation, for the roles have possibilities which for the most part were not touched on this occasion.'

The most keenly observed notice came from *The Australian Worker* who found the production 'a triumph in its grip and truth.' Further, Lionel Lynx was

bound to say that *The Bride* impressed me not as 'an album of sketches (*Bulletin* critic), but as a unified plot, ruthless in its movement from beginning to end with a place for everything (within its ambit) and everything in its place, possibly marred in one respect—the repentant respectability of its climax (thought the author may justly retort that the underworld is nothing if not Respectable.)

He found the characterisation was 'stupendously well done as writing, and it says much for the Players that it was very finely interpreted by skilful exponents ... One could see a group of them feeling that they had in hand a mission as much as a part.' He noted that the production 'raised a large, rather selected audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm,' but questioned 'all the trouble and expense for a one night performance!' Running on his publication's theme, he asked

why such a play could not be sent to the chief centres of the Commonwealth by Government, as something important enough to be pronounced upon as a

⁴ *The Australasian*, 5 June 1926

⁵ EJC, *Table Talk*, 17 June 1926

developmental enterprise. Consider all the expensive commissions we run on economic issues and our barrenness of expenditure or effort in relation to literature!⁶

The Adelaide *News* believed that Esson failed to hit the dramatic value,' and wondered if anyone was ever going to write 'a great Australian play?'

Without doubt Louis has the rare gift of being able to put flesh and blood types upon the stage, but the trouble is that he doesn't know what to do with them when he gets them there. ... With the superior attitude of certain modern intellectuals, he despises stage technique, with the result that his curtains and climaxes are always missing fire.⁷

There was, nonetheless, 'plenty of interesting material in *the Bride of Gospel Place* ... All it needs is a good stage producer with no high fangled notions, to knock it into shape.'

The logistics of mounting the production was a concern for Esson and he complained to Vance Palmer:

At the finish we had everything to do. Nobody did a solitary thing. Entertainment tax, rehearsals, printing (programmes, tickets and dodgers), scenery, Glen's props (hundreds of them) and furniture, carting to and from the Playhouse, music, publicity—Hilda and I, especially Hilda, did the lot. The Playhouse people were decent, and the men behind were really expert on scenes and props. When we started, vaguely and tentatively, the company wanted to get busy, and before we knew where we were everything was to be all right. Leo proposed a business meeting of a few men, but we never had it, so we were left with the business. We had to pay every bill and were made responsible for everything. There was never time to get things sorted out. The last few weeks were a whirl and placed as we were we had to go through. Hilda managed everything in the most marvellous way. We did everything well, and yet expenses were kept in reason. When the ticket-sellers weigh in, the expenses will be practically covered. When it's all over I expect we'll be about a fiver down, which is not worth mentioning in the circumstances. Without the rain, we would have been a fiver up. A second performance might have been successful, but the risk wasn't worth while. We have been extraordinarily lucky. If things had gone wrong, as they might have, we could have been £40 out.

Esson felt the pressure and confided that as far as the Pioneer Players' next season was concerned 'it won't be my play. I don't want the company to bust, for it is getting better. Leo [Burke] certainly did good work in getting a good company together. He and Frank [Brown] will be along tomorrow night to discuss future plans.' As it turned out, *The Bride of Gospel Place* was the final production mounted by the organisation.

Publication

Following the production in 1926, Esson took some of the criticism of the play to heart and was sufficiently enthusiastic about the reception of the play to continue to work on it. In her introduction to the published version of the play, following Esson's death, his wife Hilda wrote:

The vivid, gay, reckless life of Melbourne's underworld, which he captured in *The Woman Tamer*, his first play, and in his verses, 'Brogan's Lane' and 'Back ter Little Lon', is again the setting for ... *The Bride of Gospel Place*. This was produced in 1926 by the Pioneer Players, a company founded in collaboration with Vance Palmer and Stewart Macky in 1922. This production gave the opportunity for revision. Its conception belongs to a very early period, when Louis and Will Dyson found

⁶ Lionel Lynx, *The Australian Worker*, 30 June 1926

⁷ *News* (Adelaide), 16 June 1926

inspiration in the dark byways of city life for their sketches in the *Lone Hand*. It was completed much later, when Louis re-visited their old haunts with Robert Dower, later Superintendent of the CIB who not only acted as guide, but contributed a wealth of stories and character sketches culled from his long association and sympathy with these people.⁸

Will Dyson (1880-1938)—who was married to Norman Lindsay's sister Ruby—was a caricaturist and illustrator for *The Bulletin* and the Melbourne *Herald*, amongst other publications. Esson and Dyson were friends and professional colleagues and both regular patrons of *Fasoli's*. Dyson illustrated 'Ganesh's' *Lone Hand* sketch 'Round The Corner'. I suspect Hilda, however, meant to refer to William Moore, who first introduced Esson to both Constable Dower and the back lanes off Lonsdale Street. Robert John Dower (1882-1947) joined the force in January 1904, serving at the Russell Street station, he was a foot constable when he chaperoned the two journalists on his beat. (Apart from a brief period in the Wimmera and six months at Sale, Dower's service had always been at Russel Street.⁹)

The 'revisions' were immediate. 'I learned a lot from rehearsals and the performance,' Esson wrote to Vance Palmer a few days after the performance.

... Better strategy in Act I will make all the difference. The fact that the actors showed up the weak spots (good playing sometimes can disguise a weakness) was to my advantage. Acts II, III and IV all went well, I believe, and require only slight alterations.¹⁰

He was still working on the play four years later, sending a copy of the revised script to William Moore, the tone suggests that there may have been a future production destined for Sydney:

... Curiously enough, Hilda thought you would like the play, as it is simply a presentation of the life and characters we first saw together. 'Smithy' was the bird we had a few words with on that memorable night. Renie also turned up that night. All the characters are more or less from models and the phrases used have all been actually spoken. The main theme is direct from life ... In the first version the characters were rougher than they are now; but I hope they were not essentially truer.

As to presentation. The chief point is not to make caricatures. They don't want to be overdressed or overacted. The more truthful they seem the more effective as types they will be. In the first act there are certain minor characters who don't appear again. The intention is to suggest a big night at the restaurant, something to be remembered. I let a few drop out so as not to make the structure too stiff. This may be an error; but the simplest way out is not to make too much of the passing characters, except Spiro, who represents the whole show, but to do everything possible to attract attention to Lily, 'The Bride'. Bush has to carry the first scenes. So his dialogue wants to be exact, more than say ... or the football talk of the Cabbie. The point is through all the turmoil they have to be strong enough to emerge as chief characters. It isn't easy; for there must be no strain and the life of the restaurant must go on merrily.

I don't think there is much difficulty in Act Two. Delia's talk is merely all direct from life; ... she has her own dignity and a rough philosophy, keeping a watchful eye over her girls.

The hospital scene wants to be efficient technically. A doctor or medical student might cast his eye over the setting. I think I have mentioned all the essential props. Most important is that there should be no suggestion of callousness on the part of the

⁸ Hilda Esson, 'Introduction', *The Southern Cross, and other plays*, Robertson & Mullens (1946)

⁹ Dow was promoted from Senior Constable to Second-Class Sergeant in October in 1929; a decade later, having spent time as Gippsland District Superintendent at Sale, he was appointed as Chief of the Criminal Investigations Branch in Victoria.

¹⁰ 15 June 1926

nurse or doctor. On the contrary they should seem very efficient. To the audience the Bride's cause should be most important; but to the doctor and nurse it is only one of many and they couldn't possibly be over sentimental about it. But they can be workmanlike and capable. The minor cases, the ballet girl and washerwoman, are authentic. Hilda made a special visit for 'cases' and I picked these two, which were almost ready made.

I don't think there is any special difficulty about Act IV. Most of the characters would be quieter than usual, a little reserved in speech and movement. Bush can't express his feelings; but without being maudlin, he wants to show that he had been deeply touched.

I'm glad you liked the curtains. They didn't work effective in the last version; but I saw no reason to change them. It all depends how they are done, especially the doctor's curtain in Act III.

It is very good of you indeed to show so much interest in *The Bride*. You know the types—it is the same life as you depicted in some of your sketches. I don't know if the Sydney types are different. Anyway I know you can do all the exposition necessary.¹¹

Later, the same year, Esson provides an update:

... I've greatly improved *The Bride*. The characters and scenes are the same; but I've strengthened the two chief characters and made the whole thing much more dramatic. This play is dedicated to you if you'll accept it. ¹²

Clearly, the play had undergone multiple changes prior to Esson's death and the version subsequently edited and published by Hilda in 1946. Most of the literary responses to the collection saw the volume as 'a memorial' and Hilda's inclusion of 'tributes' by friends—such as Vance Palmer, Frank Davison, EJ Brady and Katharine Susannah Prichard—designed it as such. The reviews of *The Bride of Gospel Place*, were interested and supportive of Louis Esson's achievements, but their tone is patronising; there was a sense that the theatre and dramaturgy had moved on.

The Argus noted that the situation 'deals with people of the Melbourne underworld or its fringe.,' but took issue with the idiom and tone.

The slang here and there seems a little anachronistic (I may be wrong); the heroine a little too sloppily sympathised. But I doubt whether anyone could see some of the best scenes really bell acted and remain dry-eyed. That may seem a sentimental criterion; but you can apply it to Shakespeare or the greeks without going too far astray. There's something wrong with you if you shed no tears over Cordelia or Antigone.¹³

The Herald felt that *The Bride of Gospel Place* belonged 'in spirit, at least, to a much earlier period.'

Esson had the esteem of his peers, but not much more in the way of worldly success as a playwright. He wrote at a time when the opportunities for production were even fewer than they are now.

Esson was a gentle and kindly man, as his friends her emphasise, and his character is manifest in his work. He strove for an honest picture of Australia, and a warm understanding and a generous heart inform his writing.

¹¹ 15 June 1930, Fryer Library UQ 42/14

¹² c. 1930 La Trobe MS12156

¹³ *The Argus*, 29 June 1946

The Bride of Gospel Place, an excursion on the seamy sider of Melbourne Life, and presumably an accurate picture of the underworld fringe of the day, is an excellent example both of Esson's observation and of his charity.¹⁴

The Age thought the play, 'which deals with love and loyalties among the Melbourne underworld, was a 'more mature play, the dialogue more skilfully handed, the argot of the underworld authentic.' But balked at the 'unreality' of the principal characters 'Bush, the young pugilist-thief, and Lily, the frail but lovely street girl.'

The touch of melodrama at the end, when Bush, learning of her death, determines to win his fight with Black Peter by way of self-vindication for his ill-treatment of Lily the Bride, almost ruins the play.¹⁵

Out of his home town, *The Sydney Morning Herald* felt that the volume did not show '[Louis Esson] at his best' and argued that

The one-act play will not stretch into the four-act play; and Esson had no say in the variety of ways in which a play, as distinguished from its people, can speak, about the low characters of Little Lon in the four act *Bride of Gospel Place*, played in 1926, than he had said in the one act *Woman Tamer*, played in 1910.

They also took issue with Louis' language and the use of slang, noting Hilda's believe that 'His work gives an authentic and valuable record of that period. ... Its authenticity may ever be a reproach. Perhaps he disciplined himself too rigidly sacrificing everything to fidelity of impression.' The critic found her word 'fair'

Both about his use of idiom and slang (his plays read like a slang dictionary) and about the discipline he put on his imagination; his integrity keeps him from seeming to patronise the poor, as CJ Dennis patronises the poor; but it also keep him from the rounded characterisations of Dennis.¹⁶

The Southern Cross (Adelaide) dismissed the play entirely as dealing 'with some not very important characters and their not very important doings in the Melbourne underworld' and a story 'not worth telling.'¹⁷ *The Advertiser*, on the other hand found the play showed Esson's 'gentle understanding and pity for those who live ... in the dark and desperate by ways of city life.'¹⁸ The Melbourne *Advocate*, meanwhile, to come full circle, praised 'Just a little drama and tragedy of life in the [slum] quarters' as 'gripping in that "vivid dialogue" that Yeats speaks about, a dialogue that faithfully mirrors the people.

It is particularly remarkable for its use of the Australian idiom—which Yeats possibly could not appreciate—but which to an Australian rings true. I doubt if I have ever seen it used with such effect elsewhere. Its power lies in its complete naturalness, without any touch of affectation, and it rises up from the page and infuses the characters with life and colour even when the play is read by the fireside or strap-having in a tram.¹⁹

¹⁴ *Herald* (Melbourne) 25 May 1946

¹⁵ *The Age*, 1 June 1946

¹⁶ R McC, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1946

¹⁷ *The Southern Cross*, 23 August 1946

¹⁸ *The Advertiser*, 11 May 1946

¹⁹ *The Advocate* (Melbourne), 14 August 1946

Copy Text

There is no extant manuscript of *The Bride of Gospel Place*. The only version of the play that survives is that published by Esson's wife Hilda following his death. The copy text refers to this publication: Dr. Hilda Bush (Ed.), *Louis Esson, The Southern Cross and Other Plays*, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne, 1946, (A.)

Tanselle refers to 'the intended meaning of a text' and the editor's role 'establishing the text as intended by the author.' The question for the current editor is, how reliable is this published text, especially in the absence of any other? As we're aware that there was significant revision of the script over a number of years, any information gleaned from the reviews of the production are unhelpful. Tanselle suggests that

the Scholarly editor makes corrections or emendations on the basis of the one he judges most likely to have been the author's intended meaning.²⁰

As far as Hilda's edition is concerned, we need to be aware that her decisions in compiling the published text—as a testimonial—were based on what *she* judged to be the most likely to have been Esson's intentions with the play. Philip Gaskell notes that 'a work of literature that is intended to be communicated primarily by spoken performance rather than by a written text characteristically goes through three textual stages.

There is first the script [the author's original script, in Esson's case hand written and, after 1913, typed and proofed by his wife Hilda], the written version of what was originally intended to be said. Second, there is the performance text [a recording of an actual performance], what is actually said in one or more performances. And third, there is the reading text, the version subsequently published by the author as a record of what might or should have been said.²¹

Hugh Esson (Esson's son with Hilda) revealed to JD Hainsworth by letter in 1982 that

All the typing was done by Hilda on a portable Remington and later a Corona. She was a self-taught typist as the scripts attest. Louis always used a very soft pencil (4B).²²

As we become aware from later manuscripts (such as *Diggers' Rest* and *The Southern Cross*) there was a fairly fluid methodology established between Esson's handwritten drafts, typed (and often corrected and emended) by Hilda, and the revisions clearly acknowledged and accepted by Esson and he progressed to a new version. I feel sufficiently comfortable in the judgement that Hilda's edition is a reliable rendering of Esson's authorial intention for *The Bride of Gospel Place*.

²⁰ Quoted in Walsh, Marcus, *Shakespeare, Milton and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing*, CUP (1997) p. 18

²¹ Philip Gaskell, 'Night and Day: the Development of a Play Text', in Jerome J McGann, *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation*, University of Chicago (1985) p.162

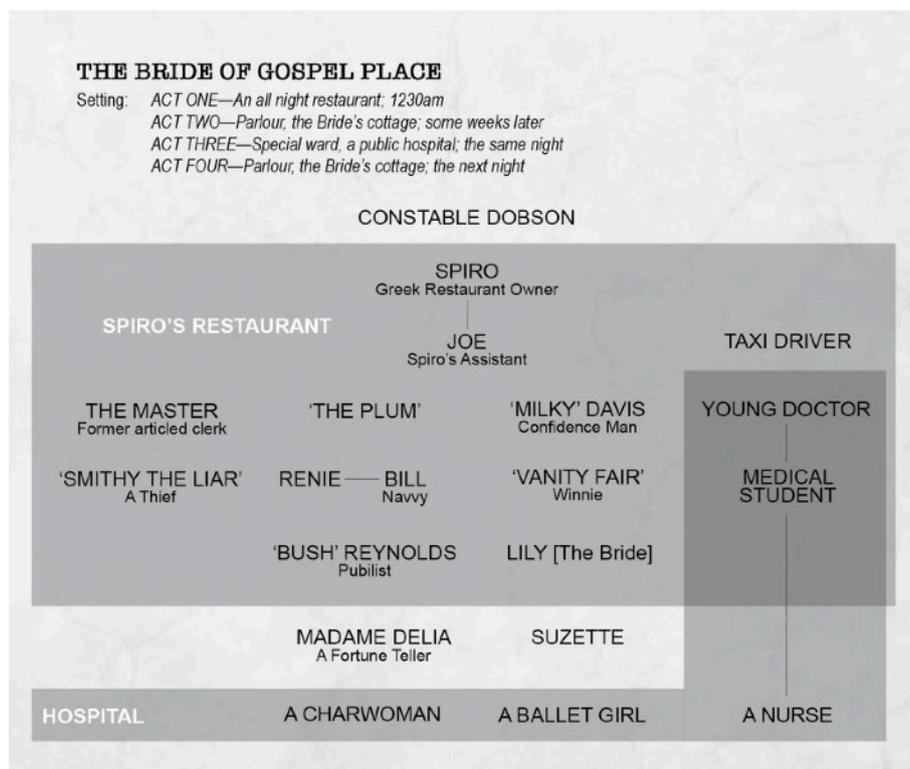
²² Hugh Esson to Professor JD Hainsworth, 18 November 1982—Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

Characters, in order of appearance

'THE MASTER', formerly an articled clerk
 SPIRO, Greek restaurant keeper
 'BUSH' REYNOLDS, a pugilist
 JOE, SPIRO's assistant
 A TAXI-DRIVER
 A YOUNG DOCTOR
 A MEDICAL STUDENT
 'VANITY FAIR'
 'MILKY' DAVIS, a confidence man
 RENIE
 CONSTABLE DOBSON
 'SMITHY THE LIAR', a thief
 LILY, known as 'THE BRIDE'
 BILL, RENIE's husband
 MADAME DELIA, a fortune-teller
 SUZETTE
 A NURSE
 A BALLET GIRL
 A CHARWOMAN

Scenes

ACT ONE	An all-night restaurant.
ACT TWO	Parlour, the Bride's cottage. Some weeks later.
ACT THREE	Special ward. A public hospital. The same night.
ACT FOUR	Parlour. The Bride's cottage. The next night



ACT ONE

(An all-night restaurant in Melbourne. On the right, up-stage, is a counter on which are plates, baking-dishes, knives and forks, bottles of sauce etc. Behind the counter is an open fireplace. In the room are four small, rough tables, with chairs. The front door is at Centre of the back wall, and on the Left a large window, looking on to the street. At Left Centre is a door, leading to a private room, where there is a radio. The walls are kalsomined, and decorated with pictures of The Parthenon, and battle pieces of fighting between the Greeks and the Turks.)

(SPIRO is cooking at the fireplace, flourishing a frying-pan. He is a small, dark, stockily-built Greek of about fifty, with a fierce black moustache.)

(JOE, his assistant, stands in front of the counter, with a towel over his arm. BUSH and THE MASTER are at a table, down Right. BUSH is a powerful athletic young man in a sweater. THE MASTER is an older man, seedy-looking and shabbily dressed. The TAXI-DRIVER sits at a table, up-stage, Left Centre, reading a newspaper.)

THE MASTER. Things are quiet to-night, Spiro.

SPIRO *(Behind counter)*. It's only half-past twelve.

THE MASTER. It's time some of the talent looked in.

BUSH *(Calling)*. A cup of coffee, Joe!

JOE. Right-oh! *(Goes to table with cups.)* What sort of form are you in, 'Bush'?

BUSH *(Lifting his arm)*. Just a ball o' muscle.

THE MASTER. He was never better during the whole course of a brief but brilliant career.

TAXI-DRIVER *(Turning round eagerly)*. You're not the fighter, are you?

BUSH *(Nodding)*. Yes.

THE MASTER *(Rising)*. Here in this corner is Bush Reynolds—the famous middle-weight.

JOE *(Going back to counter)*. The bloke with the terrible punch!

BUSH. Shut up!

TAXI-DRIVER. They say Black Peter's pretty tough, don't they?

BUSH. Newspaper talk ... because he won a few scraps in America. I tell you if that coon'll stand up and fight, I'll put him out in three rounds.

TAXI-DRIVER. I wish you the best of luck.

(There is a little scuffling outside, a burst of laughter, and MILKY DAVIS proudly ushers in RENIE, a lively showily-dressed girl, recently married, who is re-visiting her old haunts. MILKY is a confidence man, smartly-dressed and smooth in manner - hence the nickname.)

MILKY. Come on, Renie. You'll be right with me.

RENIE *(Gaily, waving her hand)*. Hallo there, everybody!

THE MASTER *(Surprised)*. Is that you, Renie?

RENIE. Who did you think it was, my ghost! ... How is it, Bush?

BUSH. Good-O. *(He lights cigarette.)*

(SPIRO comes from behind counter and bows.)

RENIE. Good-night, Spiro.

SPIRO. Ah, it's like old times, seeing you back again.

MILKY. Sit down, Renie. What are you having?

(MILKY and RENIE take seats at table Left Centre above door to private room.)

RENIE. Fish and chips.

MILKY. The same here.

SPIRO. A-Right-O! They're sizzling hot.

(SPIRO retires behind counter to get the fish.)

RENIE *(To the COMPANY)*. I'm off the chain to-night.

THE MASTER. Bill'll be after you, won't he, when he finds you gone?

RENIE. I don't care.

THE MASTER. I remember him last time, throwing furniture about and smashing the window. It took three Johns to run him in.

MILKY. Forget him. He won't try them tricks on me.

THE MASTER. When he drinks he's a terror to fight.

MILKY (*Slightly uneasy*). Do you think I'm frightened of him! I'll stiffen him if he comes interfering with me. It makes me tired, this sort o' talk. Anybody would think he was a fighting man, like Bush, and he's only a lumper on the wharves. Curse Bill! I'll show him if he comes round, the great big ugly lumbering -

RENIE (*With dignity*). Stop that, Milky. I won't hear nothing against him. Anyhow, Bill's my husband.

(*JOE brings plates etc.*)

JOE (*Setting table*). Here y'are!

RENIE (*Friendly with everybody*). How are you getting along, Joe?

JOE. Still battling. (*JOE returns to counter.*)

MILKY. How is it, Renie? (*Pulls her about.*)

RENIE. Don't! That's enough of it. (*Pushes him off.*)

MILKY. What's wrong?

RENIE. Nothin'! (*Eating.*) These chips ain't no harm.

MILKY (*Calling out*). Eh, Spiro!

SPIRO. What-a you want?

MILKY. Two cup-a da coff'. (*They all laugh.*)

(*SPIRO comes from behind counter, excited and gesticulating.*)

SPIRO. Listen to me, young fellow. (*Tapping MILKY on shoulder.*) You go somewhere else.

MILKY. Eh!

SPIRO (*Impressively*). I don't serve thief.

MILKY (*Rising*). Hear the Dago talking to me.

SPIRO (*Excitedly*). I ain't no Dago. I'm Greek.

MILKY. Shut the gate—he's bolted!

SPIRO. I'm Greek—Greek!

TAXI-DRIVER (*Joining in*). Keep you hair on, Spiro.

SPIRO (*Turning on him*). No cheek now, or out you go, quick and lively.

(*A YOUNG DOCTOR and MEDICAL STUDENT, in evening dress but a bit merry, stand in the entrance.*)

SPIRO (*Fiercely*). Out you go! (*Turning and smiling again.*) Oh, good-night, gentlemen. (*Bows elaborately.*)

DOCTOR. We want some supper. Have you a private room?

STUDENT (*Drunk*). It's immaterial to me.

DOCTOR (*Looking at watch*). It's getting late. It doesn't matter, though. We'll get a taxi.

SPIRO (*At private room door*). This way, gentlemen.

STUDENT. It's immaterial to me.

DOCTOR. You're shot. Come on. Supper will sober you up.

(*SPIRO shows the DOCTOR and STUDENT into private room.*)

MILKY. What's stung Spiro?

THE MASTER. If you call him a Dago he goes off like a packet of crackers.

(*SPIRO comes back from private room.*)

SPIRO. This is a respectable restaurant, let me tell you. Everybody drops in here—doctors, actors, journalists—when they're making a night of it. See those young fellows—they're students at the University. I don't think of the money—*(With sweeping gesture.)* that's nothing to me. I know my customers.

THE MASTER. Nobody's disputing it.

SPIRO *(Excitedly)*. I've travelled the world over—fighting the Turks—pearl-fishing in Torres Straits—buying opium in Singapore -

THE MASTER. Yes, you could do it, Spiro.

TAXI-DRIVER *(Turning round)*. Eh, Spiro—bet you 'arf a quid the Turk-a-da-loll' beat-a da steak-a da oyst'.

SPIRO. You only joke. We win every time. Look—*(Showing arm.)* see the scar? That's where I was wounded. Turks! Bah! No good to me. *(Returns behind counter.)*

(TAXI-DRIVER rises and crosses to counter.)

TAXI-DRIVER. What's the damage? *(Pulling out money.)* I've just been fanning myself to see if I'd a tray bit. *(Pays SPIRO. To COMPANY.)* Be good!

(TAXI-DRIVER goes out, with comic wave of the hand.)

THE MASTER. How's the game, Milky?

MILKY. All serene.

THE MASTER. You're looking pretty flash. Dope peddling?

MILKY. Don't try to be funny.

THE MASTER. Plenty of mugs about?

MILKY. Yes. I've had a good week. I'm showing Renie round.

RENIE. That's right. I ain't goin' back. I'm sick of it. It's terrible slow at home—nothin' to see, nothin' to do, nowhere to go. That ain't no life. You might as well be dead as live like a respectable married woman. Bill's out all day—workin'—and it's hard work lumping big heavy loads into the ships - and he's tired and done up when he comes home at night, and he's got nothin' much to say, except when he's had a few pots at the pub. I'm all day on me own. Blime, I hate cookin' and cleanin' up! I've got no cobbors down Ports. Them workin' women ain't my class. We don't hit it. You should see 'em turn up their noses if I smoke a fag at the front door. *(She gets up, laughing defiantly.)* What do I care what they think! I couldn't stick it no longer. I must 'ave some excitement, or I can't live. I had to come back. There's some lights about here, and some fun. I'm feeling bright and lively already, and I'm going to stay up all night to celebrate it.

(MILKY puts his arm round her, drags her to him.)

MILKY. That's right, Renie. I'll look after you. I promise you a good time.

(VANITY FAIR comes in. She wears a frayed fur coat, and carries a handbag and umbrella.)

VANITY FAIR *(Looking back through the door)*. The taxi can wait.

SPIRO. What-a you want!

THE MASTER. It's Vanity Fair.

VANITY FAIR *(Looking scornfully round the room)*. Who are these people? I can't dine here. *(She goes to door of private room.)*

SPIRO *(Rushing after her)*. Eh, you can't go in there.

VANITY FAIR. Bring the menu, *garçon!*

SPIRO. The room's engaged.

VANITY FAIR. And ice the champagne! I'm a lady.

SPIRO *(Trying to stop her)*. That's enough. I won't have it.

(The DOCTOR opens the door and looks out.)

(To VANITY FAIR.) Come away, now.

VANITY FAIR (*To DOCTOR*). Good evening, Claude.

DOCTOR. Good evening.

VANITY FAIR. I'm Winnie Fair. The boys all call me 'Vanity' Fair.

SPIRO. Out of this you go.

DOCTOR. It's all right, Spiro. Let her in if she likes.

VANITY FAIR. I'm a lady, English, you know.

SPIRO. Now, behave yourself. (*He retires behind counter.*)

VANITY FAIR (*To DOCTOR*). Did I see you at the Opera to-night?

(She slips her arm through his and goes into private room. JOE follows them, carrying tray and supper dishes.)

JOE. Vanity Fair's got a couple o' lambs. (*He goes into private room.*)

THE MASTER. She's a decent girl when she's off the drink. See how she dresses—fur coat, umbrella, handbag. She thinks she's seeing life.

BUSH. You know every blooming sheelah in the town. They don't trouble me, none of 'em.

(JOE comes back, grinning.)

JOE (*Passing*). The girl who took the wrong turning! Don't she put on dog. (*Imitating VANITY FAIR.*) I'm a blooming lady, I am, gorblime! (*Returns to counter.*)

THE MASTER (*Admiringly to BUSH*). So you're the real pro. now, Bush.

BUSH. It's better than workin' in a foundry.

THE MASTER. I wish I could have been a fighter. But I was the weed of the litter.

BUSH. I've never got near the big money yet.

THE MASTER. But you're in the news.

BUSH (*Cynically*). It's all right when you're winning; but see how the crowd'll turn on you—it's hosannas to-day, and crucify him to-morrow.

THE MASTER. You've nothing to growl about. You're the famous boxer; that's what the women like.

BUSH. Women!

THE MASTER (*Resignedly*). I'm too fond of them—that's my misfortune. I treat them well and hand over my earnings, when I've got any; but they always clear out and tell me they're been kidding to me all the time.

BUSH. What can you expect! Be like me, and leave 'em alone.

THE MASTER. It's been many a good man's downfall—slow horses and fast women.

(SMITHY THE LIAR makes an entrance and stands, waiting to be recognized. SMITHY is small, but well-built, a common thief, voluble and plausible in manner. He is roughly dressed.)

MILKY. Hallo, Smithy. How goes it?

SMITHY (*With gesture of mock despair*). 'Umpy blanky doo!

MILKY. Still wheeling an ice-cream cart for Musso?

SMITH. It keeps you off the crust, anyhow.

MILKY. I wouldn't work for a Dago.

SPIRO (*Leaning over counter*). Dago every bit as good as larrikin!

SMITHY (*Going to counter*). I'll have short soup, and duck and fowl.

SPIRO (*Angrily*). This ain't no Chow joint.

JOE. What's yours, Smithy?

SMITHY. The same old—sausages and mash. (*Goes to BUSH's table.*) Have you struck form, Bush?

BUSH. Shut up!

(SMITHY sits at table occupied before by TAXI-DRIVER.)

RENIE. Have you been out long, Smithy?

SMITHY. Na! I just done a turn over a red lot.

RENIE. Better luck next time.

SMITHY. I'm thinking o' clearing out o' here—to the north-west coast.

MILKY. The north-west coast of Fitzroy.

(JOE brings SMITHY's plate and returns to counter.)

SMITHY *(Telling his story with explanatory gestures)*. I'll tell you how it was. It was just a bit o' rotten bad luck. I was walking down the Arcade, when up comes a lady with a *pogue* in her hand, holding it out like this, see -

THE MASTER. Look out. Here's the John.

(SMITHY sits down again quickly.)

(Pause.)

(CONSTABLE DOBSON looks in.)

CONSTABLE *(At door)*. Good-night, Spiro.

SPIRO. Good-night, Mr Dobson.

CONSTABLE *(At door)*. How's biz?

SPIRO. Business verra poor.

THE MASTER. It's the same tale everywhere. It's hard to make an honest living.

CONSTABLE. It would be. *(He takes a few steps into room, looking round casually.)*

SPIRO. I wish another fleet would come—I don't give a damn if it's American, British or Japanese—last time I took twenty pounds in one night.

CONSTABLE *(Pointing to picture of Parthenon on wall)*. What's that building?

SPIRO *(Proudly)*. That's the *Parthenon*—no build like that now—verra nice.

CONSTABLE. That's quite right. *(He takes out a note-book.)*

SPIRO. They talk about the Dago, Mr Dobson. Alexander the Great was a Dago—Greek, like me.

Yes, he was the greatest general in the world. Didn't he take Constantinople from the Turks!

CONSTABLE. That's ancient history, Spiro. *(Replaces notebook.)* Good-night—must go—got to meet the Senior.

(He goes out, after a quiet glance round.)

(SMITHY watches him anxiously as he goes out, then exclaims indignantly.)

SMITHY. What's the skull-cracker doing round here!

THE MASTER. Didn't you see him take out his note-book. I suppose he's booking somebody for the vag.

RENIE. He's a swine. He'd lock up his own father.

SMITHY. He should have been choked as a child.

MILKY *(Rising)*. He thinks he's a smart Alec; but I'll teach him some finer points of the game.

RENIE. Sit down. Why should we worry! I'm just back and I want to enjoy myself.

(Pause.)

(A fair and very pretty, but delicate-looking girl, in a fluffy white dress, comes in hesitatingly. It is LILY, known as 'The Bride'.)

THE MASTER *(To BUSH)*. It's 'The Bride'.

BUSH *(Indifferently.)* Don't know her.

RENIE. It's Lily. *(Goes and kisses her affectionately.)* How are you, Lil?

LILY. Not too Jazzy.

RENIE. Cold out, isn't it?

LILY. Too right, it is.

RENIE. Come and join us. *(Returns to MILKY.)* You want to have some fun before you die.

LILY *(Shakes her head)*. Don't let me spoil it! *(Goes to table Left Centre below door, and sits by herself.)* I just want a cup o' coffee, Joe.

SMITHY (*Calling*). I say, Lil!

LILY (*Without looking up*). What's your trouble?

SMITHY. Are you goin' down the Bay on Sunday?

LILY. Shut up, you fool. I'm tired.

(*JOE puts cup of coffee on table.*)

JOE. Coffee, Lil. (*Returns to counter.*)

LILY. I'll take your word for it. (*She sips coffee slowly.*)

THE MASTER (*To BUSH*). She's what I call a real beauty—fair hair and curls and a lovely complexion—the perfect honey blonde.

BUSH (*Lighting cigarette*). I don't give a curse.

THE MASTER. And she usually wears a fluffy white dress. That's why they call her The Bride.

(*VANITY FAIR sails in from private room.*)

VANITY FAIR. I wish you'd learn to serve a decent supper ... Murray cod—gummy shark!

SPIRO (*From behind counter*). That'll do.

VANITY FAIR. I'm used to the Carlton and the Ritz.

SPIRO (*Trying to persuade her*). You'd better go home now.

VANITY FAIR. My home's in London, Park Lane. (*She takes out mirror, lip-stick and powder-puff.*)

SMITHY (*Waving hand*). How is it, Vanity?

VANITY FAIR (*Looking at him disdainfully*). I don't know you. (*She applies her beauty aids, then puts them back in bag.*)

SPIRO. Go on, there's a good girl.

(*DOCTOR and STUDENT follow VANITY in.*)

DOCTOR (*Paying SPIRO*). Is that right?

SPIRO. Thank you verra much.

VANITY FAIR. I suppose there's a taxi somewhere about. Good-night, boys.

DOCTOR. Wait a minute. You're not going without us, are you? (*Tries to take her arm.*)

VANITY FAIR (*Pushing him away*). Don't! I don't like to be touched. (*She goes out quickly.*)

SPIRO. I won't 'ave 'er comin' 'round 'ere. No good to me.

DOCTOR. She's gone. She's had supper, and now she leaves us without a word.

STUDENT. It's immaterial to me.

(*TAXI-DRIVER puts his head through the doorway.*)

TAXI-DRIVER. Taxi, sir?

DOCTOR. Right you are.

TAXI-DRIVER. Where to?

DOCTOR. We'll get round to the Club. Good-night, Spiro.

SPIRO. Good-night, gentlemen.

DOCTOR (*To STUDENT*). Come on, now.

STUDENT. It's absolutely immaterial to me.

(*The DOCTOR and TAXI-DRIVER lead him out.*)

SPIRO. They're both gentlemen, medical students.

RENIE. Strike me pink, we are getting flash.

SPIRO. Remember, I won't stand no nonsense. (*Returns to fireplace.*)

RENIE (*Brightly*). How are you getting on, Lil?

LILY. I'm not feeling too clever. (*Coughs.*)

RENIE (*Going to her*). What's wrong, Lil? You've still got that cough.

LILY. It wouldn't be me without it. I seem to be getting ready for the boneyard.

RENIE. Oh, don't think o' the cemetery. There's plenty there already.

LILY. I suppose they were just like us, once.

RENIE (Brightly). Well, anyhow, they've had their spin. And we're getting ours now.

LILY. A swell spin it is.

RENIE. What sort o' time did you have in Sydney?

LILY. Don't ask me, Renie.

RENIE. I didn't know.

LILY (*Almost in tears*). I thought everybody knew.

RENIE. Don't, Lil.

LILY. I was a fool to go. They can keep their beautiful harbour, and the ruddy Bridge, too.

RENIE. Never mind, Lil. You'll be all right. (*Returns to own table.*)

LILY. It was my own fault. But it don't matter now—it don't matter a continental. (*She slowly sips coffee.*)

(*An OLD MAN passes window outside.*)

SMITHY. There's 'The Plum'.

THE MASTER. Where?

SMITHY. He just passed the window. What's the game?

THE MASTER. Leave it to me. (*THE MASTER slips out.*)

SMITHY (*Calling over*). Come here, Lily. I want to whisper something.

LILY. Leave me alone.

BUSH (*Angrily rising*). Don't you know she's tired?

SMITHY. Gorblime, what are you growling at?

BUSH. I'll stop your jaw in a minute.

(*SMITHY subsides. BUSH, who has been furtively watching her all the time, crosses to LILY's table.*)

LILY. I've been a bit off colour. Don't mind me.

BUSH (*Bashfully*). You're The Bride.

LILY. That's what they call me. But I'm no oil painting.

BUSH (*Taking chair beside her*). You'll soon be in the pink again.

LILY. Not me ... I'm over twenty ... too old!

BUSH. That's what they said about me. I'm twenty-four.

LILY. You're Bush Reynolds.

BUSH. You've guessed it.

LILY (*Pertly*). The coming champion.

BUSH. Don't sling off. Who knows!

LILY. It would be a shame if you were stopped on the way—arrested for loitering!

(*They laugh.*)

MILKY. You're making him bashful.

RENIE. We'll all be there, barracking for Bush.

BUSH (*To LILY*). You'd be a smart little doxy to cheer on a bloke.

LILY. You ain't going to fight that big black man, are you?

BUSH. Do you think I'm frightened of him! I'll give him an exhibition of science.

LILY. What are you doing here? I though you'd be in strict training.

BUSH. A man wants a break sometimes. But this is my last night out. No more fags, no more lush, no more knocking around. (*Banging hand on table.*) I'll cut it out, cut it right out.

(*Pause.*)

SMITHY (*Rising*). When they got me into the Court, the Beak says: 'Ah, that's Smithy the Liar, ain't it? I know him—very clever with his hands!'

MILKY. Give it a rest, Smithy.

SMITHY (*Injured*). I was only telling you how I fell in.

BUSH (*To LILY*). It's good of you to take such an interest in me.

LILY. Do I?

BUSH. How about supper?

LILY. I couldn't touch anything.

BUSH. You must have something. How about some oysters?

LILY. All right, if you insist. (*BUSH rises and goes to counter.*)

BUSH. A big plate, Spiro.

SPIRO. Right-O! (*Gets plate of oysters.*)

BUSH (*Pointing round wall*). See those pictures on the wall—that's Spiro fighting the Turks.

(*Laughter.*)

SPIRO (*Giving him plate*). Sydney rocks, just fresh opened.

(*BUSH takes plate to LILY and sits beside her.*)

BUSH. You try these.

LILY. Good-O! (*Trying one.*) Just what the doctor ordered.

RENIE (*Waving her hand to her*). We're having a little party to-night.

(*Pause.*)

BILL (*Shouting outside the door*). Where's Renie?

RENIE (*Jumping up quickly*). Gawdstruth, it's Bill.

MILKY (*Rising*). Hell!

RENIE (*Alarmed*). Look out, Milky, it's me husband.

SMITHY. Scarp!

SPIRO. Skip into the back room.

RENIE. Quick, he'll murder you.

MILKY. Blarst him!

(*RENIE and MILKY slip into private room. BILL stumbles in, drunk and dazed. His is a big navy.*)

BILL. I want me wife.

(*SPIRO leaps over counter.*)

SPIRO. She's not here.

BILL (*Shouting*). Where are you, Renie?

SPIRO. Don't make a row in my place.

BILL. Come back, Renie, or I'll kill you.

(*SPIRO and JOE try to hold him. BILL breaks loose and turns on them.*)

BILL. And you, too—I'm ready. You can all come on!

JOE (*Soothingly*). It's all right, Bill. Renie ain't here.

BILL. She's cleared out again. I'll drag her back. Let's in here. (*Makes for door of private room.*)

SPIRO. You can't go in there. It's engaged.

BILL. Where's Renie?

JOE. We never seen her, Bill.

SPIRO. The Constable's outside. I'll call him in.

BILL (*Shouting*). Call him in! Glad to see him. I'll fight him. I've fought every John in the city. It took six of 'em to hold me down. Don't come near. I'm dangerous.

SMITHY (*Getting out of the way*). Blime, he's a terror.

BILL. Give me back my wife, or I'll wreck the bloody joint.

SPIRO. Will you go quiet?

BILL. I want Renie. She's deserted me. I'll break your furniture, I'll smash your windows. (*Takes bottle from pocket.*) I'm ready for you. Come on! I'll bottle you off!

BUSH. That'll do. I'll pass him one in a minute.

LILY. Be careful, Bush.

BILL. Where's me wife?

BUSH. Get out o' this. I'll chuck you out meself, you big mug!

(BUSH rushes at BILL.)

BILL *(Struggling)*. I'll kill somebody.

BUSH. I've got him. Out you go!

(BUSH, after a struggle, puts BILL outside, SPIRO following.)

LILY. Isn't he terribly strong!

SMITHY. Bush! He's a pro.

(BUSH and SPIRO come back triumphant.)

SMITHY. How was it, Bush?

BUSH. Dead easy. He was wide open.

SPIRO. I won't have no rows here. I take care this place is properly conducted.

SMITHY *(At private door)*. It's all right. He's gone.

(MILKY and RENIE creep back.)

MILKY. Is he gone?

SMITHY. Yes. He won't be back to-night. *(Admiringly.)* Bush gave him all he wanted.

RENIE. I haven't finished my supper.

(They sit again at tables.)

BUSH *(Frankly)*. You know, I've never thought much of women, straight.

LILY. And I don't think too much of men.

BUSH. What do you know about 'em?

LILY. A bit too much. Men are all the same. Give 'em what they want, and the rest o' the time they don't know whether you're alive or dead.

BUSH. Oh, give us a chance.

LILY. Why pick on me?

BUSH. You're different.

LILY. So are you. I just love big strong men. *(Laughs mockingly.)*

BUSH. You mustn't laugh at a bloke.

LILY. You've got the wrong number, Bush.

BUSH. I'll play the game.

LILY. It wasn't like that last time. *(Sighs, and then laughs.)* But what's the good o' murmuring!

BUSH *(Earnestly)*. I want you, Lil.

LILY. You don't mean it.

BUSH. Straight I do.

LILY. It's too late now, anyhow. *(Half breaks down.)*

BUSH. What's up, Lil?

LILY. You don't know what I've come through. I'm about finished.

BUSH. I won't have that. You're right out on your own, Lil.

LILY. You don't hardly know me.

BUSH. Don't I just! I want you, Lil. I can't do without you.

LILY *(Looking up surprised)*. Are you sure, Bush?

BUSH. Dead sure. How about it?

LILY. What?

BUSH *(Taking her hand)*. Is it a go?

LILY. Me and you?

BUSH *(Excitedly)*. I'll do anything for you. I'll go out and stoush a cop if you like, or jump over the bridge -

LILY (*Emotionally shaken*). You don't mean that, Bush.

BUSH. Like hell, I do. Tell me, Lil. Is it a go?

LILY (*Yielding*). You've got me doped, Bush. I suppose I'll wake up soon.

BUSH (*Rising*). We haven't started yet. Things are getting slow. We'll hit 'em up. (*Shouting.*) Eh, Spiro!

SPIRO. What!

BUSH. Can you get us a dozen beer?

SPIRO. It's a bit risky. The John's outside.

BUSH (*Slapping him on shoulder*). Be a sport, Spiro.

SPIRO. I'll see what I can do.

(SPIRO and JOE go out.)

MILKY. Good on you, Bush.

BUSH. We'll make a night of it.

(SPIRO and JOE come back with bottles.)

SPIRO. Not too much row. I don't want to be brought up and fined.

MILKY. We won't play up at the barrier.

(Glasses are filled and handed round.)

(THE MASTER returns.)

THE MASTER. I've fixed it with The Plum. (*Looking round amazed.*) What's all this!

MILKY. Bush came to light, and we're going to celebrate.

BUSH. Yes. We want some music.

MILKY. Right. I'll turn on the radio. (*He goes into private room.*)

SPIRO (*Fussy*). Not too much noise.

SMITHY (*Holding up glass*). Here's another kind love, Lily.

BUSH. We won't be long now.

(Music from next room.)

RENIE. Ain't the music lovely!

BUSH (*To company*). Fill 'em up. We'll have a hit at the tired bowling.

(Re-enter MILKY.)

RENIE. How about a dance? (*Does a few twirls.*)

MILKY. That's the style, Renie, pretty to watch. (*Takes hold of her.*) We'll shove off.

BUSH. Lil!

LILY. Yes?

BUSH. Won't you come at it?

LILY. If you say so ... We'll dance too, Bush.

(Revels. MILKY and RENIE dance, LILY and BUSH. SMITHY and JOE dance together. JOE stops and SMITHY does some steps by himself. THE MASTER looks on. SPIRO leans over the counter, watching. The couples swing round to the music.)

RENIE. Ain't it lovely! I could dance all night.

MILKY. I've got the dough. We'll keep things moving.

(MILKY and RENIE swing past.)

BUSH. I'll chuck my job. I've got something better on.

LILY. I'm getting dizzy in the head.

(They swing past.)

RENIE (*Returning again*). Bill nearly spoilt our blooming dance.

(They swing past. BUSH and LILY return. They stop dancing.)

BUSH. Come here. You're looking a treat to-night.

LILY. I'm out o' breath.

BUSH (*Holding her*). You can't get away. You're mine now.

(*Kisses her fiercely. Laughter, noise etc. Then CONSTABLE DOBSON walks in and looks round the room. Silence.*)

CONSTABLE. What a happy family—the old firm.

SMITHY. Good-night, Mr Dobson.

CONSTABLE. Good-night, Smithy. You're looking well.

SMITHY. Feeling well—plenty o' open-air treatment, pushing the barrer, you know, living next to nature -

CONSTABLE. Come here a minute. (*Takes SMITHY aside.*) I've got a little bit of paper in my pocket for you.

SMITHY. What for?

CONSTABLE. I'm going to arrest you on a charge of house-breaking at Mordialloc.

SMITHY. Gawdstruth, I know nothin' about it. I'm as innercint as you are, Mr Dobson. I was round 'ere on the night. Give a man a chance!

CONSTABLE. We'll argue the point outside.

SMITHY. Look here, Mr Dobson, I'll give you my dying oath I've never been near the place since last Boxing Day when the talent went down to the seaside for a picnic.

CONSTABLE. Anyhow, fingerprints can't lie. We found some on the window-sill.

SMITHY. Gorblyme, they might be anybody's. That ain't evidence.

MILKY. Fingerprints! The jury turned the last charge up.

CONSTABLE. You know a lot about it, Milky. The last two juries you stood before didn't turn you up!

SMITHY. What do you think o' this - juggin' a man on bloody fingerprints ... Talk about Justice -

(*CONSTABLE and SMITHY go to door.*)

CONSTABLE (*Seeing bottles*). What's all this, Spiro?

SPIRO. It's nothing to do with me.

CONSTABLE. We'll see later. Come along, Smithy.

SMITHY (*Indignantly*). It's another frame-up. Look 'ere, I swear by the *Book of Truth* -

RENIE (*Cheekily*). Good-night, Constable.

SMITHY. I was never near the flamin' place. I'm innccercint, gorblyme!

(*CONSTABLE leads out SMITHY, loudly protesting.*)

BUSH. It's all in the game. Fill you glasses. (*Boisterously.*) Straight down the centre, no short passes, boots and all!

RENIE (*Embracing LILY*). It's been a great night, Lil.

LILY. I hope we don't finish up in the giggle-house.

BUSH (*Shouting*). Eh, Spiro, you must join us, and you too, Joe.

(*SPIRO and JOE fill glasses.*)

I've got something to tell you.

THE MASTER. What's the idea?

BUSH. Me and Lil—we've fixed things up.

MILKY. Good on you, Bush.

THE MASTER. There's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream.

BUSH (*Exultantly*). Lily's on with me. It's all on the square. (*Lifting her on table.*) Get on the table, Lil. I want to show 'em.

LILY (*On table*). It looks like we're both going to fall in for something.

BUSH (*Proudly*). This is my girl! Is she any good!

(*Cheers and toasts.*)

OMNES. Good luck!

—Bush!
—The Bride!
—Hurrah!

Curtain.

ACT TWO

(Parlour of the BRIDE's cottage. Some weeks later. A small, shabbily furnished room, recently brightened up. It contains a sideboard, horsehair sofa, an arm-chair, and other chairs. In the centre of the room is a round table with a dark cloth.)

(A door, back, leads to street. On the same wall is a window, with curtains of white muslin. Another door, Left, leads to inner room.)

(It is early afternoon.)

(LILY is lying restlessly on sofa. She looks tired, nervous and despondent. She gets up wearily, rubs her eyes, and goes to window, where she stands a few minutes looking out on the street. She seems disappointed, turns round and crosses to table. She fidgets about, and then goes to a corner of the room, gets a broom and aimlessly sweeps a little. She stops, sighs deeply, and puts back broom. Next, she slowly goes to mantelpiece, and takes and lights a cigarette. Again she looks vaguely around the room, and at last returns to sofa, where she sits huddled up in bewilderment and despair. Her face is drawn and anxious-looking.)

(BUSH opens the door, and comes in quietly. He is nervous and excited.)

LILY *(Starting up with cry)*. Bush!

BUSH. Lil!

LILY *(Throwing away cigarette and rushing to him)*. You've come back ... Gawd, I thought you'd gone and left me. *(Cries.)*

BUSH *(Soothing her)*. It's all right, Lil. Don't cry.

LILY. You've been out all night, the whole night long. Where have you been?

BUSH *(Throwing hat on table)*. That's a secret.

LILY. Were you on the booze?

BUSH. No.

LILY. Were you out with another girl?

BUSH. No. You're on the wrong track, Lil.

LILY. What was it then?

BUSH. Business.

LILY. Why didn't you tell me?

BUSH. I don't tell women everything. *(Stretches himself on sofa.)* Oh, I'm tired, Lil.

LILY. So am I ... I've been up all night, looking everywhere for you. I dropped in at Spiro's.

BUSH *(Sharply)*. What! That was a fool of a thing to do.

LILY. I dunno what I was doing. I was nearly balmy.

BUSH. They'll all be wondering what was wrong.

LILY. I didn't say anything.

BUSH. Lucky for you. 'Struth, I'm done up. Have you got any beer?

LILY. Yes. *(She goes to sideboard, takes out and opens a bottle of beer, and crosses with it and mug to BUSH.)* What about your training?

BUSH *(Filling mug)*. I know what I'm doing. *(Takes a long drink and puts down empty mug.)* That saved my life.

LILY *(Slowly)*. I thought ... it must be the end for me. My gawd, I couldn't have gone on.

BUSH *(Sitting up)*. Look here, Lil, don't you trust me?

LILY. Yes. But it's past lunchtime. What have you been doing?

BUSH *(Holding up hand)*. Stop!

LILY. You've no right to treat me like that. Are you tired o' me already?

BUSH. Don't be a fool!

LILY. Well, I don't blame you. I'm not worth much. *(Coughs.)*

BUSH. You're the pick of the bunch. But I don't like that cough you've got.

LILY. Blast it, I suppose I've been smoking too much. But it don't matter a damn now. I told you I'd be no good to you.

BUSH. What's the matter with you, Lil?

(LILY takes chair beside table, and speaks without looking at BUSH.)

LILY. You dunno what I've been through.

BUSH (*Puzzled*). Over in Sydney, you mean?

LILY. Yes.

BUSH. It's over now. Why worry?

LILY. I've got to tell you, Bush. It was all my own fault. I went over with a bloke to Sydney. He had a pub, but it was mortgaged, and he had to pay it off. One night he told me the tale that he was in trouble; he'd lost all his money at the races. I suppose I must have cared, for I lent him all I had—I had a little bit o' money then. He's doin' a good business now. But when things got goin' again, he chucked me for another girl, a barmaid. That's how it was. He took all I had, and then, one night, he turned me out in the street.

BUSH (*Sullenly*). We'll try to forget it. (*Takes bottle and fills mug.*)

LILY (*Pertly*). That's the sad story of my young life.

BUSH (*After draining and putting down mug*). It won't be like that this time.

LILY. What good am I to anybody now! It sort of took the pep out of me.

BUSH. You'll be right with me.

LILY. I'm losing my serve. I thought I was getting my clearance ticket again.

BUSH. It ain't like that at all, Lil.

LILY. I don't seem to be the sparkling success anticipated. (*Rises from chair.*) You've said, often enough, you wouldn't trust a woman. I ain't likely to be the one to change you.

BUSH. You know it don't pay to have gossiping women around.

LILY. Why are you always blowin' out about women?

BUSH (*Vehemently*). Trust a woman, not me! Where do the demons get their information? They know where to go. It's always the women that put the men away. They can't help blabbing, if a man swings for it.

LILY (*Turning on him fiercely*). No matter what I've done, you've no call to say that to me.

BUSH (*Surprised*). I don't mean you, Lil.

LILY. What the hell do you mean?

BUSH. You ain't like the rest of them. I always want you about.

LILY (*Softening*). And yet you go and leave me without saying a word.

BUSH. I'll explain later.

LILY (*Suddenly remembering her appearance*). Oh, Bush, I've been up all night. Gawd, I must look a fright. (*She takes a comb from bag, shakes down her hair, and arranges it in front of mirror over the mantelpiece.*) Is that better?

BUSH. You've the loveliest golden curls in the world. Come here, Lil.

LILY. What's the mystery?

BUSH (*Taking ring from pocket*). I've got something for you.

LILY. For me?

BUSH. It's just a little ring I bought to-day.

LILY (*Bewildered*). A ring!

BUSH (*Showing ring*). Look!

LILY (*Going to him*). Oh, what a beaut!

BUSH. Do you like it?

LILY. It's marvellous. What a pretty emerald, and they're real diamonds.

BUSH. I got it from an old friend, a jewel expert.

LILY. Straight!

BUSH. It's as good as money in the bank. *(Pulling her down on his knee, and putting on ring.)* It just fits this little finger, Lil.

LILY. What are you goin' to do with it, Bush?

BUSH. It's for my girl.

LILY *(Laughing)*. Which one?

BUSH. There's only the one in it.

LILY. You don't mean it for me?

BUSH. You're my girl. I'll smother you with kisses. *(He takes her in his arms and kisses her fiercely.)*

LILY *(Panting)*. That'll do, Bush! *(She rises and stands at table.)* My word, you're a champ!

BUSH *(Rising)*. Not yet.

LILY. You might soon be.

BUSH. You're keen on that fight, Lil.

LILY. It means a terrible lot to me. It'll show 'em if I'm any good to you or not.

BUSH. Black Peter's no mug. But his straight-up style oughter just suit me.

LILY. I'll have to look after you and cook you good meals, and keep you up to the mark. Wouldn't it be great if you won!

BUSH *(Above himself)*. I'm bound to win. I'm younger than he is and faster and cleverer—so how can I lose! *(Shadow-sparring round room.)* That's how I'll deal with the coon. *(Pause.)* When I've done with him he'll be in dreamland, hearin' the little birdies warblin' in the sky.

LILY. But you mustn't slip on your training.

BUSH. No chance. The heads say I'd be pretty good if I stuck to the game. But I've got something better worth while.

LILY. You don't mean your old job?

BUSH. In the foundry? Not on your life. I've come into a bit o' money.

LILY *(Surprised)*. What?

BUSH. It wasn't a ticket in Tatt's.

LILY. Oh, it's from the Stadium! But I didn't think you got your cut till after the fight.

BUSH *(Slowly and almost unwillingly)*. I'll tell you something, Lil, under the lap. I'm more than a pug.

LILY. That's your game now, ain't it?

BUSH. I take every fight I can get, but that's to keep the demons off the track. Haven't you seen the papers? *(Takes newspaper from pocket, and throws it on table.)*

LILY. No. I was too worried to bother about it.

BUSH. Look at the big headlines!

LILY *(Taking up paper)*. It's a scare all right.

BUSH. My oath, it is.

LILY. 'Daring Safe Robbery!'

BUSH. That's the stuff. *(Pointing to place.)* Just read that little bit. *(BUSH lights a cigarette, and goes and lies on sofa.)*

LILY *(Reading slowly)*. 'The safe was in a small room by itself. When the owner returned he was surprised to find the house had been broken into, and the door of the safe completely blown away. The jewellery was gone. The noise of the explosion did not arouse the neighbours, as the thieves had taken elaborate precautions. They had dragged into the room a large quantity of bedding with which they padded the safe. Consequently the sound of the explosion was

deadened, and what noise was made was not likely to attract notice. The robbery is evidently the work of experienced cracksmen.'

BUSH. The house was next to a church—that was a help.

LILY (*Putting down paper*). What do you know about it?

BUSH (*Airily*). I know a lot.

LILY. You do! What?

BUSH (*Seriously*). I know all about it.

LILY (*Bewildered*). All about it!

BUSH (*Nodding his head*). Yes.

LILY (*Frightened*). My God, Bush, were you in it?

BUSH (*Confidently*). Yes. And there was nobody else. I played a lone hand.

LILY. You did it all on your own?

BUSH. It was my first real job, and I planned and carried it out myself.

LILY (*Looking at ring*). Oh, Bush, the ring!

BUSH. What about it?

LILY. Didn't you get it from the swag?

BUSH. No. I'm not such a goat as that. I bought it at a jeweller's, I told you. I've got the receipt in my pocket.

LILY. I was scared someone might recognize it. Can I wear it, then?

BUSH. Of course you can. You can show it to anybody you like.

(*LILY crosses and looks out window.*)

LILY (*Giving a little cry*). Oh!

BUSH (*Rising*). What's wrong?

LILY. I saw Dobson passing.

BUSH. I don't give a curse.

LILY (*Returning*). I'm frightened, Bush.

BUSH. That's no good. I won't have a jib round the place.

LILY. But the D.'s will be on the track. (*Holding him.*) Don't let them get you, Bush.

BUSH. They've nothing to go on. Nobody knows I ever done a job. I never told a soul but you.

LILY. Square and all?

BUSH. My oath! But not a word to the mob, Lil, not a single word. Some of them might have their suspicious, but they know nothing. (*Sternly.*) Now you watch yourself.

LILY. Don't bully me. Good God, Bush, you don't think I'd give you away?

BUSH. I've told you everything, Lil. I had to get rid of the swag, and cover my tracks—not an easy job. That's why I was so late; but I've come home a winner.

LILY (*Laughing*). And me thinking you'd chucked me.

BUSH. And fancy you waiting and worryin' like that—for me. (*Laughs too.*)

LILY. That's how it is, Bush.

BUSH (*Taking her in his arms*). Is it true, Lil?

LILY. Too true.

BUSH (*Proudly*). I never fancied myself as a lady's man. How do you think we're goin'?

LILY. Good. I thought I was finished; but this is the best time I've ever had. You won't leave me again, Bush?

BUSH. Never.

LILY. It's been so excitin' with you. It's worth everything.

BUSH. I want you to be at your top, Lil. They all say I kidnapped you.

LILY. Funny, ain't it! I've never lived before.

BUSH. We're livin' now. (*Breaking away.*) I'll have to get round to the gym—must put in an appearance. I'm too tired to train. I'll say I've sprained me wrist.

LILY. You want a long sleep, Bush.

BUSH. I've earned it. But I'll be right to-morrow—jumpin' out of my skin.

LILY. Come here, Bush.

BUSH (*Going to her*). What is it now?

LILY. Kiss me, kiss me!

(*BUSH and LILY kiss.*)

BUSH (*With passion*). That's the way. Dope a man with kisses, and then you can do as you like with him.

LILY. Don't you like the dope?

BUSH. My oath, I do! I'm a glutton for punishment. (*Kisses her again.*) You're a trimmer, Lil. (*He dances round the room, sparring, then stops, takes up his hat, and goes to door.*)

LILY (*Mockingly*). No fancy business to-night, Bush.

BUSH. I won't be long. (*Turning at door.*) Lil, I love you like hell!

(*LILY goes to window, and waits till BUSH passes out of sight. She returns to table, smiling, and picks up newspaper. She shakes a little and appears nervous; but she smiles again as she puts paper away in drawer. She sits on sofa, not, as at first, tired and unhappy, but alert and lively-looking. A knock on the door.*)

DELIA (*Looking through door*). Hallo, there!

LILY (*Starting up*). Hullo!

DELIA. It's only Delia.

LILY. Come in.

(*DELIA, an elderly woman, massive in figure, strong-featured, sturdy, dressed in black silk, comes in with SUZETTE, vivacious French girl.*)

DELIA. This is a surprise visit. I just had to see how you're getting on. This is Suzette.

LILY (*Kissing her*). How are you?

SUZETTE. So you are Ze Bride!

LILY. That's what they call me.

DELIA. She always looked so pretty, with her fair hair and white dress, just like a bride.

LILY (*Laughing*). Give us a go, Delia! Won't you sit down?

(*DELIA and SUZETTE take seats.*)

DELIA (*Looking round*). It's a nice little crib you've go. Everything in the garden's blooming.

(*LILY gives a little start.*)

You look nervy, Lil. What is it?

LILY. Nothing. (*Going to door.*) I haven't much to offer you.

DELIA. We didn't come for that.

(*LILY goes into side room.*)

Now, isn't she a little peach?

SUZETTE. *Charmante.*

DELIA. It's a pity she's so delicate; got weak lungs, I think.

SUZETTE. Ah—the consumption! It gets you if you are not verree careful!

DELIA. She had a pretty bad run at one time—got drinking a bit, and not caring a hoot. I thought she was going to the pack. Sleeping in cold cells was no good for her health.

SUZETTE. Ah—but that is not for her!

DELIA. She's been a different kid since she met Bush. I've had a lot of experience with men and women in my time; but I'll own up, I never expected this to happen.

(*LILY comes back carrying tray, with bottle of gin, water jug, three glasses, and a tin of biscuits.*)

What's this, Lil—gin!

LILY (*Putting tray on table*). It's all I've got. Bush is off it altogether. Help yourself, Delia.

(*DELIA pours gin into glasses.*)

DELIA (*Offering glass*). Suzette?

SUZETTE. *Merci*—no, thank you.

DELIA (*Handing her glass*). Lil?

LILY. Just a little one. (*Puts water with it.*)

DELIA (*Filling her own glass*). Mother's ruin! (*Adds a little water.*) Good luck! (*Drains and puts down glass.*)

(*SUZETTE rises, and walks across room, displaying her slim figure.*)

SUZETTE. Would you think it! I 'ave twenty-seven year. The time pass, but I am verree careful. Zat is 'ow I conserve my condition. Sometimes I take one verree little glass *vin*—no more—nevaire.

DELIA. There's a model for you, Lil.

LILY. I was always told French girls were terrible swift.

DELIA (*Jocularly*). We're not all fast workers like you.

(*SUZETTE laughs and sits down.*)

It's a marvel to me how you ever got hold of Bush. But there's many a little surprise done up in small packets.

LILY. You can see for yourself how it is.

DELI. Good for you, Lil. Anyway, you've got him where you want him.

LILY (*Jokingly*). Oh, he's easy to me. (*Shaping up like a boxer.*) I treat him rough and tell him nothing. (*Pretends to stagger round room.*)

DELIA. Anything special doing?

LILY. Not in this tiny part.

DELIA. What do you think of that Toorak job?

LILY (*Starting back*). What?

DELIA. Haven't you heard?

LILY (*White-faced*). No.

DELIA. The big safe robbery last night. It was a smart piece of work.

LILY. I haven't seen the paper.

DELIA. The Johns are poking round everywhere on the off chance of hearing something.

LILY. Are they?

DELIA. Too right. But there's not a woman down our way that's in the know.

LILY. Are you sure of that, Delia?

DELIA. I can generally make a pretty shrewd guess who's likely to be on a job, but I'm beat myself this time.

(*A knock on the front door. LILY staggers and clutches the table.*)

What's wrong, Lil?

LILY. It gave me a start.

RENIE (*Opening door*). It's me.

LILY (*Relieved*). Come in, Renie.

(*RENIE, dressed in her showiest, comes in full of excitement.*)

RENIE (*Dramatically*). I'm going back!

DELIA. Back—where?

RENI. Home.

DELIA. True?

RENIE. It's all settled. I'm going back—this very day. Don't try to put me off.

DELIA (*Lightly*). I thought Milky would be out soon. He only brought a couple o' moons.

RENIE (*Contemptuously*). I don't care ... (*Snapping her fingers.*) that—for Milky Davis. He can do a stretch for all I care. Bill treated me different. He gave me plenty o' money and took nothing from me—don't you forget it.

LILY. Sit down, Rene.

RENIE (*Tempted*). I can't wait. I'm going back to my husband, and home, sweet home.

LILY. We won't keep you. But you must have a taste before you go.

(*RENIE takes a seat.*)

(*Giving her a glass of gin.*) Here you are, Renie.

RENIE. Cheerio! (*Drinks and puts down glass.*) I'll just have a fag before I go. (*Takes out packet of cigarettes, and lights one.*) Have one, Lil?

LILY (*Taking cigarette*). I'm trying to give 'em up, but I can't do it.

(*RENIE lights LILY's cigarette.*)

RENIE (*Seeing ring*). Oh, what a lovely fawnie!

LILY (*Showing it*). Pretty, ain't it!

DELIA. Emeralds and diamonds, my word!

LILY. Bush gave me that to-day.

DELIA. Fancy Bush, the woman-hater, coming to light like that.

RENIE. You Never know what a man'll do.

LILY. Bush ain't the holy terror you all try to make out.

DELIA (*After drinking*). It seems to me life's only a circus.

RENIE. You never know your luck.

LILY. Luck! I don't want to risk mine.

DELIA (*Beamingly*). Get the cards, Lil. I'll tell your fortunes.

(*LILY gets pack of cards at sideboard and throws it on table.*)

LILY. Here's a pack of cards.

DELIA (*Going to table*). I've seen some funny things with the cards. (*DELIA deals out a few cards in front of her and looks carefully at them.*) Pick a card, Suzette.

(*SUZETTE picks a card.*)

Let me see it. You're going on a long journey by water to get money.

SUZETTE (*Laughing*). Zat is ze past, not ze future.

DELIA. It means money, Suzette.

SUZETTE. Money. *Oui, madame*. I come to zis country for ze gold. They say to me, 'Suzette, we want nice pretty girl for good position in Perth in ze confectionnaire shop. Soon you marry big rich man with mine of gold.' We will make of that the supposition. I voyage to the Golden West. Ah, where is ze gold? Zut! It is all gone. I stay one, two, three year—*parbleu!* It is all in ze life! I stay; but it was not in ze confectionnaire shop.

LILY (*Sympathetically*). I know. We all fall in one way or another, Suzette.

DELIA. Now, Renie, it's your turn. Pick a card. (*DELIA deals a few cards.*) I see by the cards you are going on a train journey to meet someone.

RENIE (*Excited*). Dinkum?

DELIA. I've got the information straight from the stable. He's a tall, dark man.

RENIE (*Impressed*). Tall and dark—blime, that must be Bill!

DELIA. Don't you worry. He'll be all right.

RENIE. Do the cards tell you that?

DELIA. The cards don't lie.

RENIE. Good-oh! They'll do me!

DELIA. Come on, Lily, you pick a card.

LILY. I'm frightened. (*She picks a card—the Ace of Spades.*)

DELIA (*Quietly*). Pick another, Lil. That's no good.

LILY (*Laughing*). Don't tell my fortune then.

RENIE. It's a bit o' fun.

LILY. I don't want to know the future.

RENIE (*Picking up LILY's card*). It's the Ace of Spades. What does that mean?

DELIA. Hush, Renie. It don't matter.

(*There is a knock at the door and THE MASTER looks in.*)

THE MASTER. Good day. What are you doing here?

SUZETTE. Madame's telling our fortunes.

THE MASTER. I hope they're good. (*Walking down to the table.*) Haven't you heard the news, Delia?

DELIA. No.

THE MASTER. The Plum's dead.

DELIA. The Plum—dead!

THE MASTER. They found him last night down Brogan's. He died this morning at the hospital.

DELIA (*Turning ace over*). That's a strange thing, isn't it? The cards told us. We just turned up the Ace of Spades. That means a death.

THE MASTER. He was the daddy of the lot, The Plum. He was too old to carry out a job; but he was a champion putter-up. He should have been a financier. Yet, after all, he was working on the wharves last month, and he died without a bean.

DELIA. The Plum—a pauper!

SUZETTE. Zat is ze English character. The French—quite different. Did you not know Monsieur²³ Gustave, the famous wrestler, the fencer—you must 'ear of 'im in ze West? Well, I tell it you. Monsieur grow old—'air come grey, 'e could not wrestle no more. 'E was gentleman; 'e not stoop to 'ard work, no, no! 'E spent fast, 'is life long, and where was ze money? Gone! 'E not 'ave but twenty pounds left in ze world. So one night Monsieur invite 'is friends to fine French diner—champagne, liqueur, cigar. Farewell diner 'e call it - 'e make very good night. Eh, bien, 'e light cigar, and go 'ome to 'is room, 'e pack clothes neat, make all *comme il faut*. *Alors!*—'e go quiet to bed, take up revolver, so—and blow ze brains out. *C'est fini—fini!*

THE MASTER (*Picking up cards*). It takes some courage, though. Come on, Delia. Tell my fortune. I'd like to know. I wonder if there's a girl in it.

(*SMITHY puts his head through the door.*)

SMITHY. Hullo! What's the oil!

THE MASTER. The best olive. How about you, Smithy?

SMITHY. I've got no luck. I land on the wrong leg every time.

THE MASTER. You were lucky to get off the last charge.

SMITHY (*Defensively*). No luck about it. I was dead innercint. You should have seen me mount the peter and back-chat the ziffs.

THE MASTER. Working?

SMITHY (*Disgusted*). I put in a few days at the boot factory. Talk about a sweater! It was head down from coat-off to stagger-home. I chucked the bleeding sweater last week.

RENIE (*Rising*). I must get home now.

DELIA. Renie's going back.

RENIE. Ports ain't too bad.

SMITHY. It's all right down the pier on a summer's night. That's the place for wording the tarts.

RENIE. I wonder what I can take home for tea.

²³ Monsieur] Mons. A.

DELIA. What about a nice cray?

RENIE. Yes! I'd like to give a real treat. Good-bye. (*Kisses the WOMEN.*)

LILY. Good-bye, Renie.

(*THE MASTER and SMITHY follow her to the door.*)

RENIE. I'm off the razzle-dazzle. I'm going home to Bill!

(*She goes out with a final flourish.*)

SUZETTE. Every year I make 'oliday. I am ze lady. I voyage. I live in good 'otel. *Alors!* I go concert, theatre. I pass ze men—pooh—zat is ze vay, *n'est-ce-pas?*

THE MASTER. They won't have me—none of them that I want.

SMITHY. Shut up! Here's the John!

(*CONSTABLE DOBSON knocks, then strolls in, looking round casually.*)

DELIA. Good day, Constable.

CONSTABLE. Good day. Any sensations round your way, Delia?

DELIA. Sensations! We're about the slowest part of the city. We can't raise a female burglar.

SMITH. This ain't the murder zone, Mr Dobson.

CONSTABLE. I've noticed you among the talent lately. It's about time you did a bit or work.

SMITHY (*With injured innocence*). Gawdstruth, I'm always working.

CONSTABLE. We'll know all about that in a week's time, if you're still here.

SMITHY (*Cocky and defiant*). You can't book me for the vag. (*Showing some money.*) See 'ere, there's the coin I've earned. I beat you before, and I'll beat you again. The bloody maize ain't growing yet that'll make hominy for me. (*He makes for the door and turns.*) Bye, bye, Lily. If Bush wants a sparring partner, I'll be there. (*He goes out quickly.*)

CONSTABLE (*Con conversationally*). There's been a lot of robberies and violent crimes lately.

THE MASTER. It's the busy season, gunmen's week.

CONSTABLE. They're having a good run, but we'll track 'em down. There's always something that gives them away. Take that job in Adelaide. Everything was carefully planned and well carried out. They got away with the stuff, and didn't leave a mark on the safe. But this is the funny part: it was a Saturday and Sunday job, and they took refreshments with them, sandwiches and a couple of bottles of beer. They wore the gloves, of course. Well, on opening a bottle, one of them forgot the gloves, and finger-prints were found on the neck of the bottle. That was all. But they got the man, and then the gang was arrested and convicted. They're doing a stretch now.

DELIA. But you ain't always as smart as that. You don't find out everything.

CONSTABLE. You think the police are a lot of mugs. But make no error. We can get the crooks when we want them

THE MASTER. You needn't mention Adelaide. What about our own Toorak job!

CONSTABLE. Give us time. That looks a simple one.

DELIA. Any finger-prints, Constable?

CONSTABLE. Not so far. We don't jump at every clue.

LILY. What job was that?

CONSTABLE. Surely you've heard about it, Lily.

LILY. Heard about what?

CONSTABLE. The big safe robbery at Toorak.

LILY (*Nervously*). Oh!

CONSTABLE. It was only last night. (*Going to her.*) You look worried, Lil.

LILY (*Laughing*). Not me. I was up a bit late last night, that's all.

CONSTABLE (*Noticing her ring*). That's a nice ring you've got. Will you let me see it?

LILY (*Showing it boldly*). It's a present from Bush.

CONSTABLE. He didn't make a fool of you. How's he doing?

LILY. Going strong. He never missed a day all last week, not even Sunday afternoon.

CONSTABLE. Sunday? Bush was out training last Sunday afternoon?

LILY. Yes. He's terrible keen to win this fight.

CONSTABLE. I'm glad you told me, Lily.

LILY (*Anxiously*). What?

(*CONSTABLE goes slowly to door.*)

CONSTABLE. If he's as keen as that, I'll have a bit on him myself.

DELIA. Good day, Constable.

CONSTABLE (*At door*). If you happen to hear anything, you might let me know.

(*They watch him as he goes out.*)

DELIA (*With a sigh of relief*). He's gone at last!

LILY. I wonder what he's after.

SMITHY. You can't trust these friendly-looking cops. You get talking, and then you might tell them things before you know.

LILY (*Off her guard for a moment*). I'll be careful.

DELIA (*Looking at her*). You, Lil!

THE MASTER. Safety first—that's the slogan. The talent all come to me for advice. I used to be an articulated clerk, you know, until I got into trouble. I put them up to the points of law and the best lines of defence. If the facts are against them, there's always a chance on a technical point. I've helped to get a lot of them off. That's how I got the nick-name of the Master.

LILY (*Confidently*). It ain't likely we'll be striking trouble.

THE MASTER. You never know. If there's anything I can do, don't forget to tell me. It would be combining business with pleasure. So long! (*He goes out.*)

DELIA (*Rising*). We must be moving too.

LILY (*Going with them to the door*). Good-bye, Delia. Come again, Suzette.

SUZETTE (*Kissing her*). *Bon soir*, Ze Bride.

DELIA (*Kissing her*). I'm so glad you're on a good wicket, and Bush, too.

(*They go out.*)

(*LILY puts bottle and glasses away, singing to herself as she tidies the room. BUSH comes in, shuts the door firmly and has a good look round to see that nobody is about.*)

LILY (*Going to him eagerly*). Bush!

BUSH (*Fiercely*). My God, I'm through with you.

LILY. Me!

BUSH. Dobson stopped me up the lane just now. What did you tell him?

LILY (*Startled*). I—I dunno.

BUSH. Why the hell did he come at me like that! Nobody knows anything but you.

LILY (*Indignantly*). Do you think I'd tell the rozzers anything?

BUSH. He asked me where I was last night.

LILY. I said you were training.

BUSH. Damn you, why can't you keep your mouth shut! You've been drinking again.

LILY. No, I wasn't. We were only talking.

BUSH. Too true you were. You must 'ave blabbed and put me away.

LILY (*Dropping on sofa*). God, I never breathed a word about it.

BUSH. Damn women; damn them all! You never know what they're up to. They'll do for you one way or another.

LILY (*Gasping*). You must be mad, or I am.

BUSH. They'll learn no more for you, my lady. I'll clear out. I'll hit things up before they get me.

LILY (*Rising*). Gawdstruth, what are you doing?

BUSH (*Grimly*). Never mind. We're finished now.

LILY (*Desperately*). You've a blind spot. Come here, Bush.

BUSH. You don't bluff me no more.

LILY (*Trying to hold him*). Bush! Bush!

BUSH (*Pushing her off*). Let go! By God I'll -

LILY (*Crying and clinging to him*). Don't leave me, Bush.

BUSH. You—you—I'll do for you, you devil! (*He shakes her off angrily, striking her a blow as she falls.*) It's your own fault, damn you. You've settled both of us.

(*LILY rises, staggers, then falls helplessly on the sofa. BUSH goes over and looks at her. He then takes his hat, and goes out quickly.*)

Curtain.

ACT THREE

(Special ward, a public hospital. The same night. The door is in back wall. There are three beds. LILY's is on the Left across stage. The two others, placed up and down stage, are close together, Right Centre, with the usual hospital locker between them. In one lies the WASHERWOMAN propped upon pillows, dozing. She is small and frail, worn out with years of hard work. She is touchingly grateful for any kindness, a new experience in her bitter, lonely struggle for bare existence.)

(The BALLET GIRL has passed her first youth. Her hair is fair and frizzed and her make-up obvious. She is thin, excitable, hard to control. Her legs are drawn up in a spasm, and she can't move them. She is in a frenzy of anger and fear at her condition.)

(There are two screens—one at the top of LILY's bed, pulled half-way down, another behind the BALLET GIRL's. A white enamel table, and on it a white enamel basin and towels, down stage Right. Two chairs.)

(A NURSE, in uniform, at table, entering up LILY's chart. The other two charts hang at head of beds. NURSE rises and hangs chart over LILY's head. LILY is sleeping.)

BALLET GIRL *(Sitting up in bed)*. Eh, how much longer am I to lie here?

NURSE. Hush! Don't make a noise. She's sleeping.

BALLET GIRL. I want something to eat. I'm used to late suppers.

NURSE. Hush! Please don't disturb her. You know how ill she is.

BALLET GIRL *(Impatiently)*. And what about me! A lot you care! Send out and get some supper. I want oysters, and a bottle of wine.

NURSE. Be quiet, please.

BALLET GIRL. I'm no pauper. I can pay for it.

WASHERWOMAN *(Sitting up)*. How's Lily?

NURSE. Just the same.

WASHERWOMAN. Poor dearie!

BALLET GIRL *(Trying to be gay)*. It's all right. We're going to have a nice little supper—oysters, and a bottle of wine—claret; you'll have some with me.

WASHERWOMAN. Oysters!

BALLET GIRL *(To NURSE)*. You can send out for them.

WASHERWOMAN. I never tasted oysters. I dunno if I'd like 'em.

BALLET GIRL. Never tasted oysters! I used to have them every night.

NURSE. Please don't talk so loud. Lily's sleeping.

WASHERWOMAN. We'll be very quiet, Miss.

NURSE. The doctor will be round soon.

BALLET GIRL *(Angry)*. The young doctor, is it? He's a bright specimen, ain't he! What do I care for him, or for you, either!

NURSE. Don't make so much noise, or I'll have to report you to Sister.

BALLET GIRL. You're all schemers. You see and get them oysters.

(NURSE goes out.)

Schemers! I'll soon let 'em know who's who!

WASHERWOMAN *(Patiently)*. I think they're all very kind.

BALLET GIRL. They're paid for it.

WASHERWOMAN. Yes—very, very kind.

BALLET GIRL. How are you to-night, Mrs McGuinness?

WASHERWOMAN. I'm better now, my dear. I may be leaving to-morrow.

BALLET GIRL. Lucky for you. God knows when they'll let me out.

WASHERWOMAN (*Dreamily*). I don't want to leave. It's so pleasant in here—on a nice bed, and with good food—and you haven't to get up in the morning with a long day's work in front of you.

BALLET GIRL. What do you work at, Mrs McGuinness?

WASHERWOMAN. I'm a charwoman. People are so kind, I've always plenty of work to do. I don't complain, so long as I have me strength.

BALLET GIRL. I wouldn't work—not me; nothing like that!

WASHERWOMAN. You're not used to it, me dear. I've always been able to work, but the doctor says I've had a break-down. I was washing, and all of a sudden I got a terrible pain—it hurt me when I breathed—then I got little shivering fits, and I began to burn all over, and couldn't go on with me washing. I hardly know what happened next; but I found meself in here, and the doctor says I'm nearly better, and everybody's been very kind, very, very kind -

BALLET GIRL. I've been on the stage since I was four years old. I'm a professional dancer—I've been on all me life, except for a year or two when I was first married. Me husband always wanted me to give it up, but I couldn't. He'll get his own way now.

WASHERWOMAN. Did you like dancing, me dear?

BALLET GIRL (*Excited*). I've always danced! It's not the dancing, it's the life I liked—plenty of excitement—the lights in the theatre, and the applause, and the young men you meet with whips of cash. It's a gay life, Mrs McGuinness; but I always kept me head.

WASHERWOMAN. Fancy that—dancing and dancing -

BALLET GIRL (*Bitterly*). I don't know what happened to me. I found I was losing the use of me limbs—I couldn't do the work, and I had to give up at last ... And then, I couldn't even walk.

WASHERWOMAN. Poor dear!

BALLET GIRL. They brought me in here, but they can't do nothing. I'm sick of lying here like a lump of wood. It's frightful!

(*NURSE comes in, followed by the DOCTOR, a young man wearing a long white coat, with a stethoscope sticking out of his right-hand pocket. NURSE goes up and looks at LILY.*)

DOCTOR. She's a remarkably pretty girl. I fancy I've seen her before, somewhere.

NURSE (*Smiling*). At one of your night haunts?

DOCTOR. Did you give her the morphia?

NURSE. Yes.

DOCTOR. That's right. Was the cough troublesome?

NURSE. It was pretty bad.

DOCTOR. Has she taken any food?

NURSE. Just a little. Would you like to see her diet chart?

DOCTOR. Thanks.

(*NURSE goes and gets chart.*)

I won't disturb her if she's sleeping.

BALLET GIRL (*Calling across the ward, impatiently*). Look here, young man, why can't you do something? I've been lying here long enough.

DOCTOR. I'll be with you in a minute.

(*NURSE brings chart.*)

(*Looking at chart.*) You've been giving her brandy every four hours?

NURSE. Yes.

DOCTOR. That's all right.

BALLET GIRL (*Calling again*). Brandy, is it? What about my claret?

NURSE. Hush! Here's the doctor to see you.

(*DOCTOR goes to BALLET GIRL's bed.*)

DOCTOR. How are you to-night?

BALLET GIRL (*Sullenly*). You can see how I am.

DOCTOR (*Examining her*). Let's have a look.

BALLET GIRL. Call yourself a doctor! Here I've been lying for two months, and I'm getting worse.

NURSE. Keep quiet, please.

BALLET GIRL. It's terrible. Look how my knees are drawn up. They'll be up to my chin next.

WASHERWOMAN (*Sitting up*). Will I be going soon, Mister?

DOCTOR. To-morrow, I think, Mrs McGuinness.

WASHERWOMAN. When will I be ready for work?

DOCTOR. You want a rest for a week or two.

WASHERWOMAN. I dunno if I can wait all that time.

DOCTOR. Is there nobody at home to look after you?

WASHERWOMAN. Only my husband.

DOCTOR. Won't he do?

WASHERWOMAN (*Resignedly*). No, mister, he's no good. I've been married to him for thirty years, and I've had to work all the time, scrubbing and washing. He's done nothing but knock me about, and swallowing all my earnings.

BALLET GIRL. Oh, the brute!

WASHERWOMAN. It can't be helped.

BALLET GIRL. What a brute! How did you stand it! Why didn't you run away from him?

WASHERWOMAN. I did, my dear; I've run away a dozen times, but it was never no good. He always run after me and brought me back.

DOCTOR. Wouldn't you like to sleep now?

WASHERWOMAN. Yes, mister, I'm always glad of a good sleep.

DOCTOR. Are you quite comfortable?

WASHERWOMAN. I'm beautiful—everybody's so kind—I could sleep forever.

BALLET GIRL. When am I getting out?

DOCTOR. I couldn't say yet.

BALLET GIRL. This life's no good to me. I want to get back to the theatre.

NURSE. Won't you try to get to sleep?

BALLET GIRL (*Impatiently*). I don't want no twilight sleep. I'm used to staying up late at night -

NURSE. You must rest now. It's for your own good.

BALLET GIRL (*Becoming excited*). I don't want to rest. I want to get away from here. I want to get back to the theatre, I tell you; I want to dance -

NURSE. Hush! Keep quiet, and don't disturb the other patients.

BALLET GIRL (*Angrily*). Blast you, I want to dance!

(*NURSE puts screen at the side of the bed. DOCTOR and NURSE go to table.*)

NURSE. What do you make of it?

DOCTOR. She'll never dance again.

NURSE. What is it?

DOCTOR. Peters thought at first it was a case of hysteria. You know his weakness for psychoneuroses. I put her under chloroform and she was just the same. I knew she wasn't shamming. He admitted yesterday that I was right. Then he suggested it was an occupation spasm, like writer's cramp—she's been dancing since she was a child, you know; but in my opinion, it's a case of tetany -

NURSE. Tetany?

DOCTOR. And probably of parathyroid origin.

(*LILY turns in bed and just hears the last words.*)

LILY (*Sitting up*). Eh, wait a bit! I want to back that both ways! (*Drops back again.*)

(NURSE goes over to LILY's bed, and returns.)

NURSE. She's sleeping again.

DOCTOR. I'll just have a look. *(Washes hands in basin.)*

NURSE. We're still short-handed. Nurse Smith is down with influenza.

DOCTOR. You've been kept going then?

NURSE. I've had a hard week. We've got six pneumonias -

DOCTOR. You're off to-morrow, aren't you?

NURSE. Yes.

DOCTOR. I wasn't sure, but I got tickets for the concert. Can you come?

NURSE. Thanks, I'd like to.

DOCTOR. It ought to be an interesting programme. They're playing some of those queer new things. Anything doing, Nan?

NURSE. Did you hear what happened last night?

DOCTOR. No.

NURSE. A taxi came up with a couple of men singing at the top of their voices. They were driven up to Casualty. Dr Purves thought it was a couple of drunks; but do you know who it was—Arthur and Possum! They'd been having a night out. I saw them creeping upstairs—carrying their shoes in their hands; but they kept on singing at the top of their voices.

DOCTOR *(Laughs)*. You've managed to keep it quiet.

NURSE. For Goodness' sake, don't say anything about it.

DOCTOR. Not a word. But I'm getting a bit jealous of Possum.

NURSE. Nonsense. I hardly ever see him, or any of the other residents.

DOCTOR *(Taking her arm)*. Are you sure, Nan?

(LILY stirs.)

NURSE. Don't. She's stirring.

DOCTOR. I'm ready.

NURSE. Would you like to have a look at her?

DOCTOR. Yes. But I won't pull her about to-night.

(DOCTOR and NURSE got to LILY's bed.)

NURSE *(Arranging bed)*. That's right.

DOCTOR. Good-night, Lily. How are you?

LILY. I must have been dozing.

DOCTOR *(Feeling her pulse)*. How's the breathing?

LILY. Not too good. I want to sit up.

DOCTOR *(To NURSE)*. You might get her another pillow.

(NURSE brings pillow, and fixes up LILY.)

NURSE. Is that better?

LILY. Yes.

DOCTOR. Lie very quiet. Do you feel any easier?

LILY. A bit ... But I won't get better, will I?

DOCTOR. Hush! No pain now?

LILY. No. It's gone.

DOCTOR. That's good.

(DELIA stands at the door of the ward. NURSE sees her.)

NURSE. There's somebody at the door. *(Goes to door.)* What do you want?

DELIA. Is Lily here?

NURSE. Yes. But she's very ill.

DELIA. Sister told me to come along and I could see her.

NURSE. Just a minute. The doctor's with her.

DELIA. I'm an old friend.

NURSE. What name?

DELIA. Just tell her Delia's here.

(NURSE returns to DOCTOR.)

NURSE *(To DOCTOR)*. There's somebody to see her—an old woman. Can we let her in?

DOCTOR. Yes, of course. It won't make any difference.

NURSE *(To LILY)*. There's somebody to see you, Lily.

LILY *(Eagerly)*. Is it Bush?

NURSE. It's Delia.

LILY *(Mechanically)*. Delia.

NURSE. Would you like her to come in?

LILY. Yes.

(NURSE returns to door, and brings down DELIA.)

DOCTOR *(To NURSE)*. Don't let them talk too much ... I'll be back if you want me. I'll just have a look at Ward 15.

(He goes out.)

NURSE *(To DELIA)*. She's over there.

DELIA. Poor little Lily!

NURSE. Don't excite her.

DELIA. I'll be careful. *(Goes to bed.)*

LILY. Hullo, Delia!

DELIA *(Kissing her)*. How are you, dear?

NURSE. I'll leave you for a little. Just sit quietly by her. She's pretty bad. *(She leaves them.)*

DELIA *(Sitting by the bed)*. Are you feeling bad?

LILY. No. I don't seem to feel anything now.

DELIA. I just heard to-night you were in here. I had to come round and see you. How was it, Lil?

LILY *(Anxiously)*. Haven't you heard anything?

DELIA. Not a word. What was it between you, dear?

LILY. It wasn't nothing at all. It was just a rotten mistake.

DELIA. His mistake.

LILY *(Staunchly)*. You know how hot-headed he is. Bush never meant to hurt me. It was my weak chest.

(Short pause.)

DELIA. It's pity I didn't stay a little longer. But they soon found you, Lil, and brought you in. It was the best thing. You ain't treated too bad in here.

(Short pause.)

LILY *(Softly)*. Delia!

DELIA. Yes, dear. What is it?

LILY. I think I'm taking the count.

DELIA. No, no. You're only a bit weak.

LILY. It's no good, Delia. I've got to toss in the towel.

DELIA. You'll get better, Lil.

LILY *(With conviction)*. No hope. It isn't an even money bet. If I could only see Bush, just once more, I wouldn't mind much.

DELIA. I wonder where he's got to!

LILY. I'm sure he'd come if he knew. *(With a faint smile.)* Anyway, I think we made the best of it while the going was good.

DELIA. I'll tell him, Lil.

LILY (*Dreamily*). I remember the first time we met—it was at Spiro's. Some of the mob were there, and we had a lovely night. (*Livening up a little.*) I was feeling pretty crook, but Bush took a fancy to me, and we had oysters, and then we had a dance, and I was so excited I dunno what happened! (*Sinking back.*) That's how it begun. And see how it's all ended up!

DELIA (*Cheerily*). When you come out, Lily, we'll have another good night at Spiro's. I'll shout!
(*NURSE comes in.*)

NURSE (*To DELIA*). There's someone who must see Lily.

DELIA (*Rising*). I won't be in the way.

NURSE (*Taking her behind screen*). Would you mind waiting here for a few minutes?

(*DELIA goes behind screen.*)

(*The DOCTOR bring in CONSTABLE DOBSON.*)

DOCTOR. You know she's pretty bad. She can't talk much.

CONSTABLE. I must see her a minute.

DOCTOR. Don't keep her long.

CONSTABLE. I suppose there's no hope, doctor?

DOCTOR. None whatever. She's very low now.

CONSTABLE. I want her dying declaration.

NURSE. Do you need me for anything?

DOCTOR. I think we'll give her a thirtieth of strychnine.

NURSE. Very well. (*NURSE goes to get it.*)

DOCTOR. She's dying of consumption.

CONSTABLE. I thought it was an accident case.

DOCTOR. I believe she did come in with an injury that brought on a haemorrhage.

(*NURSE returns carrying small tray, with kidney-dish, syringe, cotton-wool swabs, and spirit in little basins.*)

We'll just give you a little prick. You won't mind that, will you?

LILY. I'm game, Doc.

DOCTOR. It will make you feel better ...

(*He gives the injection.*)

There now, it's all over. Here's someone to see you.

(*To CONSTABLE.*) Be as quick as you can.

CONSTABLE. All right, doctor.

DOCTOR (*To NURSE*). I'll be in the next ward. Call me if I'm needed. (*He goes out.*)

(*CONSTABLE takes off his helmet, and sits beside the bed. NURSE stands beside LILY.*)

CONSTABLE. Good-night, Lily.

(*Weak, but on her guard, LILY covers her nervousness with a little pert air, but watches every word carefully.*)

LILY. Who are you?

CONSTABLE. Don't you know me?

LILY. It's the constable. Hurrah!

CONSTABLE. Your name is Lily Webb?

LILY. Right.

CONSTABLE. Where do you live?

LILY. You ought to know.

CONSTABLE. Gospel Place?

LILY. Right again.

CONSTABLE. Are you very ill?

LILY. Too true.
CONSTABLE. Have you any hope of recovery?
LILY (*Lightly*). You never know; but I don't fancy my chance.
CONSTABLE. I've been told Bush put you in this condition.
LILY. Bush?
CONSTABLE. I've come, Lily, to see if there's anything you'd like to say.
LILY (*With a shade of contempt*). You've got a nerve, coming here. You deserve a medal.
CONSTABLE. Now tell me about it. It might get somebody off a serious charge.
LILY (*Ironically*). I beg your pardon.
CONSTABLE. What has Bush been doing?
LILY. Bush! Training, of course.
CONSTABLE. Wasn't he often out at night?
LILY. Not likely. He couldn't afford no razzle-dazzle. He's got to keep fit.
CONSTABLE. You had no suspicions about him?
LILY. No. Bush ain't no mystery man.
CONSTABLE. That's what I wanted to know. Don't be anxious, Lily. So you had no secrets.
LILY. No.
CONSTABLE. Are you sure?
LILY. He always told me everything.
CONSTABLE. Where did he get his money? He seemed to have plenty. Look at the ring he gave you.
LILY. Now you're getting your fine work in.
CONSTABLE. He was only working in a foundry before he took up prize-fighting.
LILY. Keep going, old sport. You're a trier.
CONSTABLE. How did he get it?
LILY. He had a good win at the races.
CONSTABLE. I didn't know Bush was a racing man.
LILY. There's heaps of things you don't know, Constable.
CONSTABLE. Maybe there is, but I must know this, Lily. Wasn't Bush with you when you got your injuries?
LILY. What are you driving at?
NURSE (*Fixing pillows*). Won't that do? She's very tired, poor girl ... I'll fix your pillows.
CONSTABLE. I won't keep you a minute. Just try to remember what happened. I heard that Bush hit you out.
LILY (*Fighting hard over her weakness*). Isn't that the dizzy limit!
CONSTABLE. Tell the truth, Lily. What led up to the quarrel?
LILY. I dunno. You've got hold of the wrong end of the string.
CONSTABLE. Why were you brought to the hospital?
LILY. I forget. It was an accident.
CONSTABLE. How did you get these bruises? Didn't Bush hit you? Speak up.
LILY (*Pertly*). Someone's been pitching you a tale. Try to forget it.
CONSTABLE (*Taking out notebook*). Don't be frightened. Just tell me ... how did you get the mark on your chest?
LILY. If you must know, I fell down.
CONSTABLE. Wasn't it Bush?
LILY. No. I slipped and fell, and I must have knocked myself on the edge of the sofa.
CONSTABLE. Will you swear that Bush never hit you?
LILY (*Very firmly*). I'll give you my dying oath Bush never laid a hand on me.

CONSTABLE. Is there any other statement you would like to make?

LILY (*Gasping a little*). Don't try to be funny. I've got no more to say.

CONSTABLE. If you don't want to tell me anything, it can't be helped. Good-night. I know my way out. (*He goes away.*)

NURSE. That's all over now, Lily.

(*DELIA comes from behind screen.*)

DELIA. Good on you, Lil.

LILY (*Shakily*). Gawdst Ruth, why was he pokin' round! I might have said anything.

NURSE. I think I'll get her some brandy. (*She goes out.*)

DELIA. The coast is clear.

LILY (*Anxiously*). Did I give anything away?

DELIA. Not a thing.

LILY. They won't get him, will they? I don't care what happens as long as he's safe.

DELIA. Don't be afraid, little girl.

LILY (*Strongly, making a last effort*). What's the use o' juggin' a fine strong man like Bush, for the sake of a girl like me!

(*Pause.*)

Delia!

DELIA. I'm here.

LILY. I want you to see Bush and give him something. (*Takes off ring and gives it to DELIA.*) It's the fawnie.

DELIA (*Taking it*). The ring Bush gave you. Ain't it pretty?

LILY. I want him to have it. He'll know then how it was, and everything will be all right.

(*NURSE comes over with brandy in a medicine glass.*)

NURSE. Here's your brandy.

LILY. I think I deserve it. (*After drinking.*) Good-oh!

NURSE. How are you, Lily?

LILY. I'm feeling a bit better, I think.

DELIA. That's the style, Lil.

LILY (*Firmly*). I've been a lucky girl. You were right, Delia. Luck's a fortune.

NURSE. Let her have a rest now. She needs it, I'm sure.

LILY. Delia!

DELIA. Yes, dear.

LILY (*Eagerly*). Tell Bush from me, to train hard and go steady on the lush. I want him to win that fight.

DELIA. Right-oh!

NURSE. I'll fix you up. (*NURSE arranges bed.*)

DELIA. Good-bye, dear. (*Kisses her, and moves away.*)

(*NURSE takes away pillow, and helps LILY to lie down.*)

LILY (*Waving her hand to DELIA*). It was a bonzer old time while it lasted. (*She lies down.*)

NURSE (*Following DELIA to door*). She's had the best advice. Everything possible has been done.

DELIA (*To NURSE.*) We used to call her The Bride—she was a lovely-looking kid—'The Bride of Gospel Place'.

(*They go out.*)

(*Pause.*)

(*BALLET GIRL sits up in bed and looks round. She touches WASHERWOMAN.*)

BALLET GIRL. Mrs McGuinness!

WASHERWOMAN. Yes, dearie!

BALLET GIRL. What about supper?

WASHERWOMAN. I dunno. I'm leaving to-morrow. One nice lady's promised me two days' washing and ironing in the week. Wasn't I lucky to get it?

BALLET GIRL. That wouldn't suit me, Mrs McGuinness.

WASHERWOMAN (*Patiently*). You have to make the best of things with a husband like mine, who hardly ever brings home a shilling.

(*NURSE comes in, crosses to LILY and looks at her. Pause. Then she takes screens and puts them right round LILY's bed.*)

BALLET GIRL. Where's my oysters?

NURSE. Be quiet, please.

BALLET GIRL. What are you putting the screens around for?

NURSE. Hush! It's Lily.

BALLET GIRL. What's wrong?

NURSE. It's the end.

BALLET GIRL (*Awed*). Poor little girl! Isn't it awful, Mrs McGuinness?

WASHERWOMAN (*Sitting up*). What is it?

BALLET GIRL. It's Lily. She's gone.

WASHERWOMAN. Poor dearie! Ah, well, all her troubles are over.

(*DOCTOR looks in the door.*)

NURSE (*Walking towards him*). It's happened.

DOCTOR. What?

NURSE. Lily. She went out a few minutes ago.

DOCTOR. Did she go quietly?

NURSE. Yes. Very quietly.

(*DOCTOR goes behind screens. Pause. Then he returns.*)

DOCTOR. I knew she couldn't last long.

(*Pause.*)

NURSE (*Wearily*). This is the end of my night duty. I've had two months of it.

DOCTOR. You need a change. Is it all right for to-morrow?

NURSE. Yes. I think so.

DOCTOR. We'll have a good night. (*Taking her hand.*) And we'll go somewhere for supper afterwards, won't we?

NURSE. If you like.

DOCTOR. Good-night, Nan. (*He goes to door and turns.*) By the way, when did it happen?

NURSE (*Looking at watch*). 9.25.

Curtain.

ACT FOUR

(Same as ACT TWO. The BRIDE's parlour. The next night. Any gay objects have been removed.

There are a few white flowers on table. Everything is quiet, and the blinds are drawn.)

DELIA *(At sideboard)*. There's some beer, and a bottle of whiskey. You never know who'll be dropping in.

THE MASTER. It was lucky you were here to arrange things.

DELIA. It ain't the first funeral I've managed. No word of Bush yet?

THE MASTER. I haven't heard.

DELIA. What the hell is he doing? Where can he have got to?

THE MASTER. I don't know. He said nothing to me.

DELIA. Didn't he drop a hint or anything?

THE MASTER. You bet he didn't.

DELIA. And you're his cobbler.

THE MASTER. Yes. But he always went his own way without telling me. He's a bloke like that.

DELIA *(Sits on chair)*. I'm a bit done up.

THE MASTER *(Going to her)*. What is it?

DELIA. I'm just a bit faint.

THE MASTER. You want a breath of air. *(Opens window.)* How's that?

DELIA. That's better. *(She rises and looks out.)* There's a quang at the window opposite. He just lifted his head. He's a great opium-smoker.

THE MASTER *(Over her shoulder)*. There's some of the mob. They're standing at the corner pub.

DELIA. This used to be a great place for fights with the rozzers; but it'll be quiet to-night. *(Eagerly.)* Look, is that Bush?

THE MASTER. Where?

DELIA. Coming down the lane.

THE MASTER. No-no - that's not his walk.

DELIA. He must come soon.

THE MASTER. He can't know about Lil. *(He shuts window.)*

DELIA. She was a lovely little thing, and a good sport, too. But she never had a chance!

THE MASTER. It was just bad luck.

DELIA. What else could you expect in this old hard-boiled town! *(Returns to chair.)*

(MILKY and SMITHY open the door quietly.)

MILKY *(At door)*. Hullo! Can we come in?

DELIA. Yes. Come in, but don't make a noise.

MILKY. How did it happen?

DELIA. It just happened.

SMITH. Gorblime, it must have been sudden. When did she peg out?

DELIA. Yesterday night.

MILKY. In the hospital?

DELIA. Yes. We brought her home to-day.

SMITH. Blime!

MILKY. Stiff luck! She was only a kid.

THE MASTER. It may have been a wrong decision, but it's not use disputing it. She was given out.

SMITHY. Where's Bush? Gorblime, don't he know about it?

THE MASTER. Not yet. *(A soft knock at the door.)*

DELIA. Who's that! Open the door, someone.

(MILKY opens door. RENIE stands there with a big bunch of flowers in her hands.)

MILKY. It's only Renie.

DELIA. Come inside, Renie.

RENIE (*Crying*). Poor Lily! Poor little Lil!

DELIA. It's all over now.

RENIE. I just heard of it. I came round at once. I had to come.

DELIA. Don't cry, dear.

RENIE. Lily gone. I can't believe it.

DELIA (*Touching flowers*). Oh, what lovely flowers!

RENIE (*Brightening*). Do you like 'em?

DELIA. They were just what we wanted.

MILKY. What's this about Bush? There's been a lot of rumours going round. Why ain't he here?

THE MASTER. He's away.

SMITHY. In smoke?

MILKY. I don't accuse him of anything. I only want to know.

THE MASTER. I believe he's gone into the country to get a bit of weight off, wood-chopping or something.

DELIA. We expect him back any minute. That's why we kept the funeral till to-morrow.

RENIE (*Excitedly*). I was there when she first met Bush. It was at Spiro's. We had a dance and Bill came looking for me. There was a bit of a mix-up, but it was a bonzer night we had.

DELIA. You know, she's been ailing a long while. She had weak lungs and a terrible bad cough, and sleeping sometimes in cold cells didn't help. I was frightened something would happen.

THE MASTER (*Going to door*). I'll be back in a jiff. I'm just dodging round the corner.

DELIA. Where are you off to?

THE MASTER. Only to Spiro's. I'm taking up a little collection - for the funeral expenses. I'll catch some of the mob there.

(*He goes out.*)

RENIE. Delia!

DELIA. What is it?

RENIE. Can't I see her, just for a minute?

DELIA. Of course, dear. Where's your flowers, Renie?

RENIE (*Finding them*). Here they are. Poor Lil was a good cobber of mine, and I don't forget it.

DELIA. You mustn't cry. Come with me.

(*DELIA and RENIE go quietly into inner room.*)

SMITHY. How's a fag, Milky?

MILKY (*Handing him a packet*). Take one. Fancy Rene back again.

SMITHY. Yeh.

MILKY (*Casually*). She's not worth bothering about. You never know when you've got her.

SMITH (*Looking round*). The place looks all right ... And it's a bonzer coffin. Must be costing Delia a bit.

MILKY. She can afford it. I'm nearly broke.

SMITHY. Same here. Whenever I have a quid somebody claims it.

MILKY. There won't be much doing till Caulfield.

SMITHY (*Wronged again*). They won't give a man a bloody go. Getting a job's like finding gold in the old days.

MILKY. We'll have a spot, boy.

(*MILKY gets whiskey and fills glasses.*)

SMITHY (*With glass*). What do you know?

MILKY. For the Valley?

SMITHY. Yeh.

MILKY (*Mysteriously*). *Demosthenes*.

SMITHY. I wouldn't back it. It's like murdering two bob.

MILKY (*Confidently*). It's a good thing. They told me at the stable.

SMITHY. Blime, they must have been keeping him.

MILKY. Too right they have.

SMITHY. Gawdstruth, if he gets home, it'll cause some moaning.

(DELIA brings RENIE back. Both are very moved.)

RENIE. Don't she look beautiful. Poor little Lily! *(Starts to cry.)*

MILKY (*Offering cigarette*). Have a fag, Rene.

(RENIE takes cigarette and lights it.)

RENIE. We had some good old times together.

(A knock. MILKY opens door to let in CONSTABLE DOBSON.)

CONSTABLE. Good-night.

DELIA. Good-night, Constable.

CONSTABLE. I knew Lily. Can I see her?

DELIA. Yes. She's in here.

(DELIA takes him to door of room.)

CONSTABLE. Can I go in?

DELIA. Yes. But you might show a bit of respect for the dead, Mr Dobson, by taking off your helmet.

CONSTABLE (*Removing helmet*). Sorry, Delia.

(CONSTABLE and DELIA go into room.)

MILKY. He's not such a bad sort, after all.

SMITHY. He's a bit officious sometimes. He arrested me once when I was dead innercint.

(THE MASTER returns.)

MILKY. How did you get on?

THE MASTER. Not too bad. I collected a quid from Spiro.

SMITHY. Blime! I thought he had snakes in his pocket.

THE MASTER. Five bob from Joe, and about thirty bob from the rest of the mob. *(Counts out money.)*

MILKY. Pass the dipper round here. *(Throws money in hat.)* Every little helps.

RENIE (*Looking for purse*). Where's my purse? ... Here it is. *(RENIE puts money in hat.)*

THE MASTER. I thank you. You're next, Smithy.

SMITHY. I haven't been working lately. I've got half a dollar left. *(Puts money in hat.)*

(CONSTABLE and DELIA come back.)

CONSTABLE. She looks white, doesn't she!

DELIA. She was always pale.

CONSTABLE. She was a nice-looking girl

DELIA. We used to call her The Bride.

CONSTABLE. When's the funeral?

DELIA. To-morrow afternoon.

THE MASTER. I've just taken round the hat to help the expenses.

CONSTABLE. I knew The Bride. Take this from me. *(Gives money to THE MASTER.)*

DELIA. A quiet beat to-night, Constable?

CONSTABLE. Wonderful for this part of the world.

DELIA. I took good care o' that. There won't be no rows or blaspheming or nothing round her to-night. I want everything carried out right and proper.

CONSTABLE (*Going out*). Well, good-night.

DELIA. Good-night, Constable.

(*To them all.*) Now, you can see for yourselves how things stand. It ain't Bush. He don't want him on any charge.

THE MASTER. Well, I think I've earned a drink.

(*The MEN open bottles and hand round glasses.*)

(*Philosophically.*) It's dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

SMITHY (*Fatuously*). Well, you couldn't have anything fairer than that.

RENIE. Lil stuck to Bush all right.

DELIA. It's surprising what a woman will do for a man. You can talk and talk, but you might as well save your breath. If she likes him she won't see a fault in him.

THE MASTER. You ought to know, Delia. You've see a bit.

DELIA (*Sitting down with her glass and her memories*). Too right I have ... We were poor people, and I got into trouble when I was a girl. The old man chucked me out, and where could I go! I came to this life, and I've seen it through. Believe me—this used to be the liveliest part of the town. On Cup nights the streets were lit up like a fair and we kept the fun going all night. Things are different now. I've been a fighter—nobody could put me down—but some of the girls laugh at me behind my back, and call me an old miser. They're mostly feather-heads, and when they're old, what will they be like then! Poor little Lil. Sometimes I think she's better out of it.

(*A step is heard outside.*)

RENIE (*Starting*). What's that?

DELIA (*Rising*). I heard somebody.

(*The door opens. BUSH stands there.*)

It's Bush. (*She goes up to him and takes his hand.*)

BUSH (*Looking round vaguely*). What's all this?

DELIA. Quiet, Bush.

BUSH. Whose party?

DELIA. Hush, now.

BUSH. Where's Lil. Where is she?

DELIA. Don't you know?

BUSH. What's wrong? You don't mean -

DELIA (*To THE MASTER*). Try to get them away! He's dazed. Better leave him alone.

BUSH. Tell me the truth, Delia. Where's Lily?

DELIA (*Taking his arm*). Come in here, Bush. Come with me.

(*DELIA takes BUSH's arm and leads him into side room.*)

THE MASTER. Remember to-morrow afternoon.

SMITHY. We'll be there.

RENIE. I'll get Bill to take me. Poor Lily!

THE MASTER. The cortege moves off at two sharp.

RENIE. I'm goin' home now. Bill'll be waiting for me.

MILKY. I'll put you on the tram, Rene.

RENIE (*Ignoring him*). Don't worry! I know my way.

(*She goes out, followed by MILKY. THE MASTER watches them go, and then crosses to side room. He glances into it for a moment, and returns.*)

THE MASTER. We'll slip off now.

SMITHY. I bet he's feelin' all in.

THE MASTER. He looks a bit queer. He'll be better on his own.

SMITHY. Yeh.

THE MASTER. Come on. We'll see him to-morrow.

SMITHY. Gorbline!

(They go out quietly.)

(DELIA and BUSH come back.)

BUSH *(Walking round in despair)*. What have I done!

DELIA. Be quiet, Bush. It wasn't you.

BUSH. Not me!

DELIA. I was with her at the hospital. She gave them her dying oath it was an accident.

BUSH. She told them a bloody lie.

DELIA. It was the consumption.

BUSH. But I hit her, Delia, the very last time we were together -

DELIA. I knew you'd given her a knock; but that wasn't it. Don't the doctors know! They shifted her from the surgical ward into a special ward. Why weren't you back in time?

BUSH *(Gruffly)*. I've been dodging the rozzers. I told her a secret, and then I thought she'd given me away.

DELIA. You fool! Lil wasn't the one to squeal.

BUSH *(Slowly)*. Do you know it was me done that Toorak job?

DELIA. My Gawd, Bush, I never guessed that.

BUSH. That was the secret!

DELI. Can you beat it! Dobson knew nothing, but he was always throwing out feelers. I wondered why she was so scared. He put the hard word on her; but she won on points. You'd never have guessed she'd so much nerve.

BUSH. Why in hell did she do it for me!

DELIA. She believed in you, Bush.

BUSH. In me—after how I'd treated her. Gawdstruth, I must have been crazy. *(Moves towards door.)* I know what I'll do.

DELIA. Where are you going?

BUSH. I'll give myself up and be done with it.

DELIA. Come here, Bush.

BUSH. I don't care. I'll tell everything.

DELIA. Sit down and be quiet.

(He drops into chair.)

That's no good to anybody. *(DELIA gets him a whiskey.)* Here, take this. *(Hands him glass.)*

BUSH. I can't say I did it just to give her a good time.

DELIA. That don't matter now.

BUSH *(After drinking)*. What can I do! Nothing. It's too late.

DELIA. Lil was game, anyhow.

BUSH. I didn't mean it, Delia.

DELIA. And don't a woman know! See, Bush, I've got something for you.

BUSH. I don't want anything.

DELIA. It's from Lily. Look at this. *(Gives him ring.)*

BUSH. The fawnie.

DELIA. She wanted you to keep it for her sake.

BUSH *(Taking it)*. Yes. She's my girl. She was mine when she was living, and she's mine now.

DELIA. Wasn't she a lovely kid!

BUSH. My oath she was. I'd never seen anyone like her, and I never will again.

DELIA *(Putting her hand on his shoulder)*. Pull yourself together.

BUSH *(Rising)*. I'll never get over it, Delia. I'm settled.

DELIA. Don't take it like that. Lil never squibbed it.
 BUSH. What can I do!
 DELIA (*Putting on her hat*). One thing you can do. You can keep straight and beat Black Peter.
 BUSH. What's the good of that! Damn the fight. I'd like to burst up the whole bloody show. (*Moves helplessly about.*)
 DELIA (*Slowly*). Lily wanted you to win that fight. It was her last wish.
 BUSH (*Trying his muscles*). I will, then. I'll win it for her.
 DELIA (*Putting arm on his shoulder*). Good on you, Bush.
 (*Pause.*)
 BUSH. What can I live for now!
 DELIA. Think of your girl, and be a man, for her sake.
 BUSH. I'll try.
 DELIA. Don't let a life like that be wasted. Do something—for Lil.
 BUSH (*Bewildered, but pulling himself together*). I will.
 DELIA. Good-night, boy.
 (*DELIA goes slowly to door.*)
 BUSH (*Fervently*). By God, I will—I'll give her everything I've got.
 (*DELIA waves to him as she goes out.*)
 (*Alone, crossing to room.*) Lil! Lil!

Curtain.

Notes

ACT ONE

The Parthenon: a former temple, on the Athenian Acropolis, Greece, dedicated to the goddess Athena, whom the people of Athens considered their patron.

the University: Melbourne University (now University of Melbourne) was established by Hugh Childers, the Auditor-General and Finance Minister, in his first Budget Speech on 4 November 1852, who set aside a sum of £10,000 for the establishment of a university. The foundation stone was laid on 3 July 1854, and on the same day the foundation stone for the State Library. Classes commenced in 1855 with three professors and sixteen students; of this body of students, only four graduated. The original buildings were officially opened by the Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Victoria, Sir Charles Hotham, on 3 October 1855.

cobbers: (*Australian, informal*) mates; friends.

'Vanity' Fair: Cf. *Vanity Fair* (1847–48) a satirical novel by William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863); Thackeray himself took the title from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, a Dissenter allegory first published in 1678. In that work, 'Vanity Fair' refers to a stop along the pilgrim's route: a never-ending fair held in a town called Vanity, which is meant to represent man's sinful attachment to worldly things.

at the Opera to-night: There was no opera season given in Melbourne in 1926; in September 1925 The Victorian Opera Company presented Planquette's *Rip Van Winkle* at the Playhouse; Esson had the opportunity to see Dame Nellie Melba performed Mimi in *La Boheme* at His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne in April/May 1924.

larrikin: (*Australian, slang*) a boisterous, often badly behaved young man; a person with apparent disregard for convention; a maverick. This term originated about 1850–51 in the Galway brogue of a Melbourne police sergeant, John Staunton, when describing before a magistrate youths larking ('larr a kin') in the streets. Previously known as Tom and Jerryites (cant for frequenters of low drinking houses) or in Sydney from the 1830s as 'cabbage tree mobs or cabbageites, larrikins manifested 'colonial boy' behaviour ranging from the prankish and irreverent to obscene language, larceny, hurling stones with and without shanghais, brawling, drunkenness and assault.'

I just done a turn: (*criminal slang*) spent time in gaol.

a red lot: (*criminal slang*) a gold watch (and chain).

the Arcade: possibly the Royal Arcade (that connects Bourke Street to Little Collins Street; opened in 1870) or Block Arcade (opened in 1893, it connects Collins Street at the south end to Elizabeth Street on the west).

a pogue: (*slang*) a purse.

I wish another fleet would come: 'Australia Welcomes American Fleet' reported the *Examiner*, 24 July 1925:

Strengthening the friendship between the peoples and widening and deepening their mutual understanding, the visit of the United States Fleet to Australia, has been marked by an enthusiasm and spontaneous cordiality that will remain as memorable features of an historic occasion. Simultaneously, Melbourne and Sydney have extended to the squadrons of Admiral Coontz's great Armada, receptions expressive in marked degree of the sentiments of friendship and goodwill borne by the people of the Commonwealth of Australia, towards the representatives of the great republic across the Pacific. The entry of the might battleships into Hobson's Bay [Thursday, 24 July] and Sydney Harbour provided a most impressive spectacle, and the sojourn of the American visitors was commenced under the most happy auspices.

Didn't he take Constantinople from the Turks!: Fall of Constantinople, (May 29, 1453); conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmed II of the Ottoman Empire. The dwindling Byzantine Empire came to an end when the Ottomans breached Constantinople's ancient land wall after besieging the city for 55 days. Mehmed surrounded Constantinople from land and sea while employing cannon to maintain a constant barrage of the city's formidable walls. The fall of the city removed what was once a powerful defence for Christian Europe against Muslim invasion, allowing for uninterrupted Ottoman expansion into eastern Europe.

Murray cod: large Australian predatory freshwater fish, named after the Murray River.

gummy shark: a slender, grey shark with white spots along the body and flat, plate-like teeth for crushing its prey; also known as the Australian smooth hound, flake, and smooth dog-shark.

I'm used to the Carlton and the Ritz: While Vanity may be referring to Melbourne hotels (The Carlton Hotel, located on Lonsdale Street or the Ritz in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda), she is more likely referring to the famous luxury Ritz and Carlton Hotels in London—located in Piccadilly and 3 Birkenhead St respectively—that were regularly referenced in *The Argus*.

Park Lane: Park Lane is a major road in the City of Westminster, in Central London. It runs from Hyde Park Corner in the south to Marble Arch in the north; it separates Hyde Park to the west from Mayfair to the east.

a continental: a small amount.

the Beak: (*slang*) a magistrate; judge.

Sydney Rocks: Sydney Rock Oysters.

navvy: (*British*) short form of navigator; applied to describe a labourer employed in the excavation and construction of a road, railway, or canal.

Mordialloc: a suburb in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 24 km south-east of Melbourne's central business district. The name is derived from the term *moordy yallock* which originated from the Aboriginal language Boonwurrung, which is listed in some sources as meaning 'muddy creek,' and in others as 'little sea.'

fingerprints can't lie: Sir Edward Henry devised a workable classification system and published his book *Classification and Uses of Fingerprints* in 1900. In 1901, Henry was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Police at New Scotland Yard and began to introduce his fingerprint system into that institution. By the end of that year, the Fingerprint Office at New Scotland Yard was fully functional, the first British court conviction by fingerprints being obtained in 1902. By 1912 the system was being used by the Police Force in Australia.

juggin': juggling (*slang*) to put in gaol; imprisonment.

the giggle-house: (*Australian, informal*) psychiatric hospital.

ACT TWO

a ticket in Tatt's: The history of Tattersall's can be traced back to George Adams in 1881. Adams moved to Australia from England at the age of 16 and worked in many positions including publican, stockbroker and baker. In 1881 Adams who worked as a publican in Sydney took bets on horses which could be considered the start of the gambling company. However, the company started a serious lottery when Adams moved to Hobart in 1895 a move supported by the Tasmanian Government. He set up his first operation there and eventually the company grew/developed in other states.

the Stadium: RL 'Snowy' Baker, Sydney sportsman and boxing promoter, built the West Melbourne Stadium on swampy land at 300 Dudley Street in 1912 (opening just in time for the Mehegan-Wells fight of 3 November 1913). Baker sold the venue to John Wren in 1915.

newspaper: Newspapers published in Melbourne at the time included *The Herald*, *The Argus*, *The Age* and *The Sun News-Pictorial*.

dope: (*Australian, slang*) intoxicate.

a trimmer: (*nautical*) to adjust (the sails or yards) with reference to the direction of the wind and the course of the ship; to pursue a neutral or cautious policy between parties.

a couple o' moons: (*slang*) a couple of months

gold ... in Perth: In the latter part of the nineteenth century, discoveries of gold at a number of locations in Western Australia caused large influxes of prospectors from overseas and interstate, and classic gold rushes. Significant finds included: Halls Creek in 1885, found by Charles Hall and Jack Slattery. (Triggered the 'Kimberley gold rush'); Near Southern Cross in 1887, found by the party of Harry Francis Anstey (The 'Yilgarn gold rush'); Cue in 1891, found by Michael Fitzgerald, Edward Heffernan and Tom Cue. (The 'Murchison gold rush'); Coolgardie in 1892, by Arthur Bailey and William Ford; Kalgoorlie in 1893, by Patrick 'Paddy' Hannan, Tom Flanagan and Dan Shea.

parbleu: (*French; interjection*) Certainly! Good Lord!; of course!

Ace of Spades ... Death: the Ace of Spades is traditionally the highest and most valued card in the deck of playing cards; it also known as the Spadille and Death Card. Cf. In Alexander Pushkin's short story, *The Queen of Spades* (1833), the protagonist Hermann bets his entire savings on the Ace of Spades while gambling at Chekalinsky's salon; he's been duped by the old Countess, and is dealt the Queen of Spades.

Brogan's: Brogans Lane was an infamous track off Little Bourke Street. It was not named, or at least was unnamed on maps, in 1895 and 1915, but was occupied by cabinetmakers Ah Jawl and Ah Tawt in 1900. Police records state that a Mary Wilson was charged with vagrancy in Brogan's Lane on 9 December 1892. Wilson had accosted a young girl, Mary Glew, and taken her into Brogan's Lane where 'a bunch of larrikins' were loitering. Luckily, a man named Fisher then living in Little Bourke Street knew that Wilson was 'a bad character' and called the police. *The Argus* report of this incident affirmed that Brogan's Lane was 'inhabited by the lowest classes'. Cf. Esson's poem 'Brogan's Lane'.

comme il faut: (*French*) in the proper way; properly.

n'est-ce pas: (*French*) Literally, "is it not?"; now then!

C'est fini—fini!: (*French*) it's over.

the Peter: (*Australian, informal*) safe or cashbox; the witness box in a courtroom.

back-chat: (*British, informal*) Rude or cheeky remarks made in reply to someone in authority.

the ziffs; (*Australian, slang*) the 'beards' ; men in authority.

Bon soir: (*French*) Good evening.

ACT THREE

A public hospital—The 'Melbourne Lying-In Hospital and Infirmary for Diseases of Women and Children' opened its doors to the poorest and most needy women in 1856, less than two decades after the official foundation of Melbourne (1837). The Lying-in Hospital was the second hospital established (the first was the Melbourne Hospital). First located in a leased terrace house in Albert St, Eastern Hill (East Melbourne)—close to where the Victorian Parliament now stands, the hospital's establishment was achieved by a committee of women, led by Mrs Frances Perry (the wife of the then Anglican bishop of Melbourne) and two doctors, Dr Richard Tracy and Dr John Maund. Two years later, the hospital moved to a site in Carlton with financial support from private benefactors and a colonial government cashed up from goldfields taxes. In 1884, its title was simplified to the Women's Hospital.

tetany: a condition marked by intermittent muscular spasms, caused by malfunction of the parathyroid glands and a consequent deficiency of calcium.

parathyroid: a gland next to the thyroid which secretes a hormone (*parathyroid hormone*) that regulates calcium levels in a person's body.

a thirtieth [of a grain]: (*medicine*) a dose; though no longer recommended, grains are still used occasionally in medicine as part of the apothecaries' system, especially in prescriptions for older medicines such as aspirin or phenobarbital. For example, the dosage of a standard 325 mg tablet of aspirin is sometimes given as 5 grains.

strychnine: a bitter and highly poisonous compound obtained from *nux vomica* and related plants. An alkaloid, it has occasionally been used as a stimulant.

fawnie/fawney: (*British, slang 19th century*) phoney, fake; 'finger ring'.

ACT FOUR

cobber: (*Australian, informal*) a companion or friend (often used as a form of address between men).

the Valley: Moonee Valley Racecourse, a horse-racing track in Moonee Ponds, a suburb six kilometres north-west of Melbourne CBD.

Caulfield: Caulfield Racecourse, a horse-racing track, commonly known as 'The Heath' by local racegoers, located eight kilometres south east of Melbourne CBD.

a quid: (*British, informal*) one pound sterling; currency.

five bob: (*British, informal*) five shillings; coin.

dipper: hat; Cf. 'to dip one's lid' (*Australian, slang*) to raise one's hat as a greeting.

On Cup night: The Melbourne Cup: Seventeen horses contested the first Melbourne Cup on Thursday 7 November 1861, racing for the modest prize of 710 gold sovereigns (£710) cash and a hand-beaten gold watch, winner takes all. Frederick Standish, member of the Victorian Turf Club and steward on the day of the first Cup, was credited with forming the idea to hold a horse race and calling it the 'Melbourne Cup'. The event is held annually on the first Tuesday in November and is known locally as 'the race that stops a nation.'

the tram: The first electric tram in Melbourne was built in 1889 by the Box Hill and Doncaster Tramway Company Limited—an enterprise formed by a group of land developers—and ran from Box Hill railway station along what is now Station Street and Tram Road to Doncaster, using equipment left over from the Centennial International Exhibition of 1888 at the Royal Exhibition Building. The venture was marred with disputes and operational problems, and ultimately failed, with the service ceasing in 1896. After this venture failed, electric trams returned on 5 May 1906, with the opening of the Victorian Railways Electric Street Railway Electric Street Railway from St Kilda to Brighton, and was followed on 11 October 1906 with the opening of the North Melbourne Electric Tramway & Lighting Company (NMETL) system, which opened two lines from the cable tram terminus at Flemington Bridge to Essendon and Saltwater River. The Victorian Railways line came about when Sir Thomas Bent became Premier. A corrupt politician and leading land boomer, he stood to benefit from construction of the line, through the increased value of his large land holdings in the area, and pushed through the legislation to enable the building of the line by the VR in 1904. The VR tram was called a 'Street Railway' and was built using the Victorian Railways 5ft 3in (1,600mm) broad gauge instead of the cable tramway standard gauge of 4ft 8½in (1,435mm), and connected it with the St Kilda railway station, to allow trams to be moved along the St Kilda railway line for servicing at Jolimont Yard. The line was

opened in two stages, from St Kilda railway station to Middle Brighton on 5 May 1906 and to Brighton Beach terminus on 22 December 1906. A fire at the Elwood tram depot on 7 March 1907 destroyed the depot and all the trams. Services resumed on 17 March 1907 using four C-class trams and three D-class trams from Sydney, which were altered to run on VR trucks salvaged from the fire. These trams sufficed until Newport Workshops built 14 new trams. VR opened a second, standard gauge, electric tramway from Sandringham railway station to Black Rock on 10 March 1919, it was extended to Beaumaris on 2 September 1926. The service was withdrawn on 5 November 1956 and replaced with buses.

Australia Felix

A Comedy in One Scene

Copy Text

One only manuscript of *Australia Felix* is extant and is housed in the Campbell Howard Collection at the Dixon Library at the University of New England.

The Manuscript is typed on quarto (single side) in Hilda Esson's regular format: character list and scene description on separate pages in red ink following the title page; character names are upper case and also typed in red, as is the pagination placed on the top of the page and centred (pagination begins on the first page of dialogue); dialogue and stage directions typed in black.

The manuscript has been much worked over, but there are three clear and separate attempts at emendation.

The original typed manuscript (A) pursues the subtitle 'A Comedy in One Scene', and represents Hilda's typed impression of a first, (presumably) handwritten draft by Esson. Esson corrects the manuscript (B) and makes a number of small cuts and emendations using black ink. A major reworking (C), with a large number of excisions, occurs at what I suggest follows a reading of the script—the character of Gavan is underlined in blue pencil and the extant manuscript appears to have Esson assume this role for the reading—where the subtitle is scored out in blue pencil and amended above, in Esson's hand: 'A Dialogue'. A further edit (D) is in Hilda's handwriting: she has also retyped the title page which reads: 'AUSTRALIA FELIX/ A DIALOGUE/BY/LOUIS ESSON.' She scores out dialogue using double vertical, single diagonal or wavy horizontal lines, making emendations in her unmistakable handwriting.

The large number of excisions and revision inherent in C and D; the change in the subtitle; and the active involvement of Hilda in the rewriting process suggests a significant change in intention on Esson's behalf but, the current editor believes, insufficient to constitute 'a new version.'

The draft was written in Melbourne in late 1925. Esson's biographer, Peter Fitzpatrick, suggests that the play was written at Mallacoota in 1924 and that the intimate discussion between Stuart and Helen about 'their love was omitted from the final script because it seemed too mawkish, or perhaps it was simply too private.' But I choose, however, to rely on the original draft (A) as the copy text, providing all variants. Apart from providing a more satisfying and personally reflective dramaturgy, it more effectively adheres to the genre of political comedy (both parliamentary and matrimonial) as indicated in the original intention.

Esson's detailed reference to the Federal Election—the first under compulsory voting—and other references suggests, the date of writing *Australia Felix* as no earlier than November 1925; more likely later, 1928.

Performance History

Australia Felix was first performed on January 3 1991 by the Griffin Theatre Company at the Stable Theatre, Sydney. It was directed by Ken Boucher with the following cast:

MICHAEL GAVAN	Bryan Marshall
STUART GRAHAM	David McCubbin
HELEN	Julia MacDougal
DICK	Leon Teague
WILLIE	Daniel Wyllie
Voice of HARDING	Frank Lloyd

Characters

MICHAEL GAVAN, a writer and politician, about fifty-five

STUART GRAHAM, a young painter

HELEN, his wife

DICK, a bushman, about thirty

WILLIE, Gavan's son, about twenty.

[Voice of HARDING]

Setting

A camp site in far Eastern Gippsland, overlooking the Southern Ocean.



ACT ONE

(GAVAN's permanent camp, a lonely but picturesque spot in far Eastern Gippsland, overlooking the Southern Ocean. It is a big, well-fitted up tent, opening on to a long verandah.)

(It is a warm, calm and beautiful summer's evening.)

(Inside the tent—that is wide open—seated at the rough solid table are GAVAN, STUART, and HELEN finishing their evening meal, oysters and black duck.)

(GAVAN is a man of fifty-five, six feet in height, active and powerful, with many red streaks in his hair and beard. He has an open shirt, leggings and riding breeches. STUART is carelessly dressed in black¹ shirt and grey slacks. HELEN looks attractive in² short dark skirt and light blouse with short sleeves.)

(Getting their guns and about to leave, are DICK, a typical bushman, with old trousers and leggings, leather belt and old jersey, and WILLIE, GAVAN's son, with grey pants, leggings and dark blue shirt.)

GAVAN *(To BOYS)*. Have a mug of tea before you go.

DICK. Right-O!

HELEN. How are the ducks, Dick?

DICK. They're still coming in.

HELEN. Where are you off to-night?

DICK. Swanny Lake.

GAVAN. It's only a stone's throw from here.

DICK. We'd better get over before it's dark.

(They gulp down mugs of tea, and get their guns and cartridges.)

GAVAN. Have you got plenty of cartridges?

WILLIE. Don't you worry, Dad. I've borrowed some of yours.

HELEN. I wish you'd take me duck-shooting one of these nights Dick.

DICK. Any time you like, Mrs Graham.

GAVAN. You won't starve. There's plenty natural food round here.

STUART. Natural food! It's safe as far as I'm concerned.

HELEN. I wouldn't trust him with a gun, but he might learn to catch some fish³. I caught some lovely snapper⁴.

DICK. I'll get you a better line. You could catch twice as many.

HELEN. Stuart fancies himself as a bushman, because he wears a black shirt like a Fascist⁵ and shaves only twice a week.

STUART. You're the sport⁶.

GAVAN. You can't go down Bourke Street and shoot a brace of ducks. You might be able to shoot an alderman, but there seems to be some regulation against it, God knows why!⁷

¹ *black*] open *D*.

² *HELEN looks attractive in*] *HELEN* in *D*.

³ *some fish*] *fish* *D*.

⁴ *some lovely snapper.*] a lovely schnapper *A*.

⁵ *wears a black shirt like a Fascist*] *lives in a tent* *D*.

⁶ *sport*] *sporting member* *D*.

⁷ *it, God knows why!*] *it. C.*; *it, God knows why!* *D*.

HELEN. What do you think of the election, boys?⁸

DICK. It won't affect us much in these parts.

HELEN. You're a great patriot, Dick. Something new and unexpected might happen.⁹ I hope we get the results to-night.

GAVIN. Have you fixed up the wireless?¹⁰

WILLIE. Yes. It'll work all right if there are no storms. We got the last Tests.

GAVAN. We're not quite savage, you see. Willie's got a wireless set, so we get the news of the great world.¹¹

HELEN. What a lot of murders there are in Melbourne!

GAVAN. People must do something.¹²

WILLIE (*Going to door*). We won't be long.

HELEN (*Waving to BOYS*). Good luck.

DICK (*Slowly*). We may get a few.

(*Exeunt DICK and WILLIE.*)

GAVAN (*Banging table*). It's rough, as I told you—there's no table cloth and there's only tin plates and pannikins—but I feel I belong here, and not to a respectable home in South Yarra.

HELEN. Oysters—and black duck—what more do you want than that!

STUART. There's a good chef at the *Cafe Soufflé*¹³.

HELEN. I wish you would forget Paris, Stuart.¹⁴

GAVAN. I'm glad to get away from the city. I'm always happier in the bush. I'm used to irregular¹⁵ outlines—Melbourne is all straight lines and right angles—straight streets, straight tram lines, straight railway lines, straight, narrow lives—damn it all, I've¹⁶ always said town people were living¹⁷ like wombats in electric-lit burrows.

STUART. We're safe¹⁸ here—about a hundred miles from everywhere.

GAVAN. I told you it would be primitive. Is your tent all right?

HELEN. It's splendid ... better than a house.

GAVAN. I've spent half my life under canvas, and I think it's the best half. Another piece of duck, Helen?

HELEN. No, thanks.

GAVAN. Bring you seat out here.

(*They rise from table, and walk out on to verandah.*)

What do you think of it. We're looking right over on the Pacific.

⁸ What do you think of the election, boys?] I'm terribly excited! How do you think the elections will go, boys? C.

⁹ new and unexpected might happen.] new and marvellous and unexpected might happen and you're not interested! C.

¹⁰ wireless?] wireless Willie? C.

¹¹ world.] world, for what it's worth. C.

¹² What a lot ... something.] scored out C.

¹³ *Cafe Soufflé*] *Cafe Soufflet* A.

¹⁴ There's a good chef ... Stuart.] scored out D.

¹⁵ irregular] rugged C.

¹⁶ all, I've] B; all. I've A.

¹⁷ town people were living] the people there were living C.

¹⁸ safe] free enough C.

HELEN. It's too beautiful¹⁹! I can't believe it, the bush and the Pacific.

GAVAN (*In a low voice*). Australia! How I have loved this Australia! A chair, Helen?

HELEN. I'll take a cushion, and sit on the floor. (*She reclines²⁰ on cushion, leaning against post.*)²¹

GAVAN (*Before sitting down*). Look over there—it was along that shore, some miles down the coast, that Captain Cook first sighted Australia. He saw the smoke rise from some blackfellows' camps. There used to be a lot of blackfellows then. I wonder what they thought about it.

(*GAVAN sits between STUART and HELEN on an old, long cane chair. STUART has a deck chair.*)

HELEN. I'm extraordinarily ignorant of Australian history.²²

GAVAN. And I wonder what Cook thought of his discovery.

STUART. In my opinion, Australia hasn't been discovered yet. That's a job in store for our writers and artists. Captain Cook discovered only the outline.

GAVAN. By God, you're right, Stuart. People have never realised²³ what a great country they have.

STUART. I met a man the other day in the train, when travelling through the bush; as wonderful country as I've ever seen—waiting to be painted.²⁴ 'Scenic country, picnic²⁵ country!' he observed in his low quiet voice, for my benefit. 'Gum-leaves!' he said slowly, 'Can you believe people come here to pick²⁶ gum-leaves! If²⁷ they were cherries—but gum-leaves!²⁸—strange, wonderful.' It was poor country, and in his opinion it needed a good bush-fire to clear off all that rubbish. Rubbish! That was what the bush meant to him.²⁹ Could you imagine a Highlander talking like that of his heather³⁰ hills? But there's the Australian for you. If the land is no good for feeding cows or pigs, he cares nothing for it.³¹

GAVAN. We're still in the pioneering stage. You can hardly expect a cockie farmer to look at nature with the eye of an artist.³²

HELEN. Perhaps we've had a bad tradition. Our parents may be to blame for that. They were aliens, but³³ how they hated this country, they really hated it. They hated the natives, white as well as black, they seemed to be a bad lot in those days, mostly convicts, bushrangers and working-men. And how they hated the bush! Everything was wrong. The birds had no song, the blossoms no

¹⁹ too beautiful] beautiful C.

²⁰ reclines] sits C.

²¹ I'll take ... post.]) scored out D.

²² I'm ... history] scored out D.

²³ realised] imagined D.

²⁴ I met a man ... painted.] scored out C.

²⁵ picnic] B; pioneer A.

²⁶ people come here to pick] people pick C.

²⁷ If] Now if C.

²⁸ he observed ... leaves!"] scored out C.

²⁹ That was what the bush meant to him.] scored out C.

³⁰ heather] heath heather A.

³¹ But there's ... for it.] scored out C.

³² I met ... eye of an artist.] scored out C; scored out D.

³³ but] and C.

scent. They saw no beauty anywhere. Australia was a desert. What could young Australians do with parents like that!

STUART. 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!'

GAVAN. Well, that is one reason why many Australians are so casual, so indifferent. Cut off from the rest of the world, they had nothing in which they could believe. And they believed in nothing. So they drifted, and are still drifting, drifting.³⁴

STUART. Well, boy, what are you going to do about it!

GAVAN. It seems simple enough. This is a new country, with new conditions, and it requires a policy of its own.³⁵ We can do as we like, but we never originate anything, not even a drink or a cheese.³⁶ We borrow ideas, as we borrow money, from London or sometimes New York³⁷. We prefer to live at second hand. Imperialism or Bolshevism, it comes to the same thing. Most of our institutions are alien to the spirit of the country. They could never have developed naturally from the conditions of of own life.³⁸ It's all wrong. It's ridiculous. We need an entirely different system of values.

STUART. I agree.

GAVAN. Well³⁹—they can't put Harding back.⁴⁰ I'm not an optimist, but I believe there is a limit to man's⁴¹ stupidity. Everybody must know what a blight he is. Yes, it's⁴² good-bye Harding at last.

STUART. I was told he was a typical Australian, a proletarian who rose from the ranks, rabbit-trapper to Prime Minister, or something like that.

GAVAN. That's not a rise, it's a fall. A rabbit destroys pests—Harding breeds them.

HELEN. Perhaps we'll hear good news to-night. It may be the dawn of a new era.

STUART (*Looking out*). Sunset is no less beautiful. Look over there—that's impressionism for you—just as good as Turner. I must paint it.

HELEN. Why don't you?

STUART. It's these damned elections. You've all been talking politics, the corporate state, bourgeois ideology, planned production, dialectical materialism, art as a weapon of the toiling masses -

HELEN. We've done nothing of the kind.

STUART. The tempo's terrific. I'm a painter, and how⁴³ can I work in an atmosphere like that! I'm a painter, and believe me, art existed before Karl Marx, and will survive both the Fascist and Communist parties.⁴⁴

³⁴ Well, that is one ... drifting.] We're still in the pioneering stage. You can hardly expect a cockie farmer to look at nature with the eye of an artist. *C*.

³⁵ conditions, and it ... own.] conditions. *D*.

³⁶ not even a drink, or a cheese.] *B*.; not even a drink. *A*.; not a drink, or a cheese. *C*.; *scored out D*.

³⁷ or sometimes New York] or New York *D*.

³⁸ Imperialism ... our own life.] *scored out C*.

³⁹ Well] (*Pause*.)/ GAVAN (Slowly). Well *D*.

⁴⁰ Harding back.] Harding and his Liberals back into office! They can't. *D*.

⁴¹ man's] human *D*.

⁴² it's] *B*.; it is *A*.

⁴³ terrific. I'm a painter, and how] *B*.; terrific. How *A*.

⁴⁴ I'm a painter ... Communist parties.] *scored out C*.

HELEN. We're saying nothing against art.⁴⁵ We've been trying⁴⁶ to encourage you. Art, as the society lady remarked, perhaps, is as important as mines or sheep.⁴⁷

STUART. Thanks for your kindly sentiment.⁴⁸

GAVAN. This is Saturday night. It isn't often I have the honour of receiving such highly civilised visitors in my barbaric tent. (*He produces a bottle of whiskey, three glasses, and a jug of water.*) We must celebrate this historic event.

HELEN. Let's hope for the best.⁴⁹

GAVAN. I'm sorry I've no wine, Helen. Can't drink it myself, gives me a headache. There's something Dago and decadent about wine. Whiskey's better. This has the right Celtic glamour. Steady, Stuart, don't drown the miller.

STUART. Here's to the next revolution!

GAVAN (*Draining glass at one gulp*). Better luck this time!

HELEN. Never mind the revolution. Look⁵⁰ over there! Isn't it wonderful!

STUART. Didn't I tell you I'm going to paint it?⁵¹

GAVAN. You people have travelled a lot. But have you ever seen anything more beautiful than that!

HELEN. No, no. We have a beautiful country.

GAVAN. We could do wonderful things if we liked, but at present we've lost inspiration.⁵²

HELEN (*Looking out*). I wonder what it will be like in fifty years.

GAVAN. Fifty years! Anything might happen in fifty years. I sometimes wonder if we're going to hold it. And damn it, do we deserve to hold it!

STUART. It depends on what sort of people we become.

GAVAN. Japan is a great and growing power. White Australia—I wonder.⁵³

HELEN. But this country may be more important than its people. It would be just as strange and wonderful whether your silly debates in Parliament were delivered in English or Japanese.⁵⁴

GAVAN. Give it to Japan.⁵⁵ I'd give nobody an inch, not an inch if I could help it. I've loved this country all my life. I don't think anybody ever loved it more than I have. But we must have effective occupation. We want people, twenty millions, fifty millions.

STUART. And all Britishers! Millions and millions of Britishers!

HELEN. It's an appalling prospect.

⁴⁵ We're saying ... art.] *scored out C.*

⁴⁶ We've been trying | *B.*; We're trying *A.*

⁴⁷ you. Art, as the society lady remarked, is as important as mine or sheep.] *B.*; you, like your Society lady who gracefully conceded that art, perhaps, was as important as mines or sheep. *A.*; you. *D.*

⁴⁸ Thanks for ... sentiment.] *scored out D.*

⁴⁹ Let's hope ... best.] *scored out D.*

⁵⁰ Never mind the revolution. Look] The revolution! But look *D.*

⁵¹ Didn't ... paint it?] *scored out D.*

⁵² No, no. ... lost inspiration.] *scored out C.*

⁵³ Japan is a great and growing power. White Australia - I wonder.] (*Meditating.*) Japan is a great and browning power - I wonder. *C.*; *scored out D.*

⁵⁴ It would ... Japanese.] *scored out D.*

⁵⁵ Give it to Japan.] *scored out D.*

STUART. Why not a few Dagos sprinkled about—to add a note of colour, wine in straw-covered bottles—mandolins—*fritto misto*⁵⁶—and some Germans too. They're Nordic.⁵⁷ They would improve our music, and they certainly can brew good beer. But if we're all Britishers—Anglo-Saxons -

HELEN. Perhaps it's better as it is—with nobody at all.⁵⁸

(Pause.)⁵⁹

GAVAN. Did you hear that?

STUART. No. What was it?

GAVAN. It must have been the boys shooting.

HELEN. I hope they'll get a bag.

GAVAN. If there's any about Dick'll get them. He's a real bushman. He always knows where the ducks are.

HELEN. Think of all the turmoil we've been making. It doesn't seem so important now. The bush is so much bigger.

GAVAN. It seems incredible that Australia should again make a fool of itself in the eyes of the world. But we still seem to have the provincial outlook.

HELEN. International, they call it nowadays.

STUART. It's the same thing. People love anything vague and abstract it saves thought. Now painting is a concrete art -

HELEN. We'll hear your aesthetics later, Stuart. You're as bad as Karl Marx or John Knox when you get going.⁶⁰

GAVAN. Wait a minute. I'll show you something. I've got some old papers about somewhere. Help yourself.

(Exit GAVAN, into tent.)

STUART. He's a remarkable man, no doubt about it.

HELEN. What stories they used to tell about him ...

STUART. He's a bit of a contradiction. In some moods he's a wild Irishman, in others a quiet bush Australian.

HELEN. He's bitter and disillusioned enough, but he's still loyal to his friends and his ideas.⁶¹

STUART. He's pitched his camp in the right place, a painter's paradise.

HELEN. Isn't it glorious, living in a tent.

STUART. It is, with you.

HELEN. There it is, glimmering whitely among the trees.

STUART. There's something primitive and nomadic about it. Maybe it stirs some ancestral memory.

HELEN. But isn't it strange we should be here together?

STUART. Life's always an adventure with you. The first⁶² time I saw you I thought it was bound to happen.

HELEN. We've been married nearly seven years, remember.

⁵⁶ *fritto misto*] *fritto misso A.*

⁵⁷ Germans too. They're Nordic.] Bavarians too. *D.*

⁵⁸ Perhaps ... nobody at all.] *scored out D.*

⁵⁹ (Pause.)] (Pause.)/(A far away shot is heard.) *D.*

⁶⁰ He always knows ... when you get going.] *scored out C.*

⁶¹ He's a bit of a contradiction ... and his ideas.] *scored out C.*

⁶² Life's always an adventure with you. The first] *B.*; The first *A.*

STUART. A long time for a love affair. And you're not tired of me yet? I must have said everything I've got to say.

HELEN. I felt instinctively life would always be an adventure with you.

STUART. I didn't know I had such a romantic appeal. What about your old admirer, Howard Ellis?

HELEN. You're jealous of him. I'm sure he would never have brought me to this.

STUART. It's charming of you to put it like that. Flinders Lane is his spiritual home.⁶³

HELEN. It's great fun here, swimming and riding and pulling a boat, and wading for oysters in the mud.

STUART. I suppose we both ought to live like savages.

HELEN. Why not! It's a wonderful, magical place. I've never known such mornings—with the first sight of the Pacific, and the smell of eucalyptus in the air, and the fresh challenging cry of the magpies.

STUART. You're looking well on it anyway.

HELEN. I'm getting like a blackfellow. I'm terribly sunburnt⁶⁴, and I don't burn well. That's the worst of being a Nordic. Look at my arms.

STUART. Whatever the colour scheme may be they're good in form. But a man shouldn't make love to his own wife. It isn't done in these psychological days.

HELEN. I only wish we had our piano. I wonder how it would sound in the bush.

STUART. Gavan has a gramophone.⁶⁵

HELEN. Please don't let Willie⁶⁶ turn it on. Wireless is bad enough.⁶⁷

STUART. Think if we were in London to-night. We might have gone to a theatre, or the Holborn Empire, or to Bert's studio⁶⁸ in Chelsea for a talk,⁶⁹ or walked past Leicester Square to Piccadilly Circus to see the lights in the streets and the varied crowds, and⁷⁰ perhaps finished up with a *bock* in the *Café Royal*.

HELEN. There you go. When you were in London you wanted to be back in the bush, and now you're here I really believe you'd rather be in London or Paris. Wherever you are you always want to be somewhere else.

STUART. That's my idealism.⁷¹

HELEN. I'm glad Gavan asked us to camp here. You ought to work well and we'll have a wonderful year.

(Enter GAVAN, with a big scrap book.)

GAVAN *(Putting down book)*. Here's some old junk I've kept, I hardly know why. I wonder will you be interested in it.

HELEN. What is your guilty secret?

GAVAN. My past.

⁶³ The first time ... his spiritual home.] *scored out C.*

⁶⁴ I'm terribly sunburnt] *B.*; I'm sunburnt badly *A.*

⁶⁵ Gavan has a gramophone.] *B.*; *not in A.*

⁶⁶ Willie] *B.*; him *A.*

⁶⁷ Gavan has ... bad enough.] *scored out C.*

⁶⁸ Bert's studio] Leon's studio *C.*

⁶⁹ Chelsea for a talk.] *Chealsea, C.*

⁷⁰ Piccadilly Circus to see ... crowds, and] Piccadilly Circus, and *C.*

⁷¹ Isn't it glorious ... my idealism.] *scored out D.*

HELEN. How many pasts?

GAVAN. I suppose it's natural to women to conceive a man's history only as a series of love affairs. I'm sorry to disappoint you, Helen. They're only old papers, articles, photos ... memoranda—a little secret history long forgotten. Where's the bottle? Fill your glasses. (*Fills his glass and tosses it off.*) I always take it neat.

STUART. You Irish are bad drinkers.

GAVAN. But you must admit we're good triers. (*Opens book.*) There are some queer old things in this book. It's the past, the romantic past. It's strange how the past should always⁷² seems romantic.

STUART (*Looking at photos*). Who are these heroes?⁷³ They look very solemn.

GAVAN. Our early leaders, standard bearers, soldiers in the army for the liberation of humanity. There's little Harding with his first whiskers.

HELEN. Not our Harding!

GAVAN. The same. He was a fiery little man, and one of our fiercest soap-box orators.

HELEN (*Laughing*). So this is the great Harding!

GAVAN. Just for a handful of boodle he left us. Poor little Harding. We thought he had the soul of a prophet. It turned out to be the soul of an earthworm.

HELEN (*Looking at book*). Is that a photo⁷⁴ of you?

GAVAN. That handsome young fellow, looking like Dan O'Connell—yes, that was Michael Gavan ... Michael Gavan thirty years ago. Do you think I've changed a bit? (*Takes a glass of whiskey.*) When I see you, Stuart, I think of my own youth. My future's behind me, and your past is still before⁷⁵ you. You're the new generation. It's up to you. But will it be any different! Will things ever be any different! Evolution, revolution, what the devil does it mean!⁷⁶

HELEN (*Looking at book*⁷⁷). This looks interesting and exciting.⁷⁸

GAVAN. I'm fifty-five, and I've failed. Failed! Everything has gone *phut*.⁷⁹ Before I was twenty I thought I could do anything—just like you, Stuart. When we used to meet, a number of wild young men in back rooms and at street corners, we had our great plans for the future. There were all sorts among us, poets and creators, Irish, Germans, Dagos, lumpers from the wharf, college men, shearers, nondescripts. We had all night sittings. We dreamed dreams. But we were not pacifists, like you people. We wanted action. We delivered fiery speeches, we organised groups. We controlled two newspapers.⁸⁰ I edited one myself. Soon we became a power in the land. Sydney was out headquarters, but we put our faith and hope in the bush.⁸¹ There would be a great movement throughout the bush. It might come any day. We just live for it. Those big brown

⁷² past should always] past should C.

⁷³ heroes?] B.; heroes. A.

⁷⁴ photo] portrait D.

⁷⁵ before] in front of D.

⁷⁶ But will it be ... does it mean!] The struggle is still on, and it's up to you. D.; The struggle is still on, and you can't run away from it. D.

⁷⁷ book] STUART D.

⁷⁸ (Looking at book). This ... exciting.] scored out D.

⁷⁹ failed. Failed! ... *phut*.] got to sort things out. D.

⁸⁰ groups. We controlled two newspapers.] groups, we controlled newspapers, - B.

⁸¹ bush.] bush, - B.

lanky men, shearers and drovers, silent, slow, stoical, akin to the bush that bred them, with its dry sunlight and limitless spaces, they were the real Australians, we thought. And now most of them are little cockies with motor-cars, thinking they're big cockies.⁸² But in those days we felt they would surprise the world. That was Henry Lawson's creed. And there was the old *Bulletin*, with poems, stories, cartoons, articles and everything Australian in outlook.⁸³ We were all striving, you see, to create a national sentiment. Does that seem old-fashioned nonsense to you? Here we were with a new country, a rich and beautiful country and boundless possibilities, a fresh sheet, an untouched canvas, a block of marble waiting for the hand of the sculptor. *Australia Felix!* A whole continent, fresh and unspoiled without history, its soul unstained with blood, surely to God we could do something with it. How we worked, day and night, studied, organised, fought for our ideal⁸⁴. We meant more than the mere formation⁸⁵ of another political party. We thought we stood above all parties.⁸⁶ When I look back, I see the faces of eager young men, and of older men too, and when I think of what has become of most of them, I have to laugh. I have to laugh at myself.⁸⁷ What has been the result of our energy and enthusiasm? What has become of our leaders!⁸⁸ We have some of them with us still,⁸⁹ respectable old gentlemen with soft seats in Parliament, in Unions,⁹⁰ at Board meetings, in newspaper offices. Some have gone to London for a knighthood or High Commissionership. Not once or twice in our colonial story, the path to Brixton was the path to glory. And there's little Harding, still going strong -

HELEN (*Looking into scrap-book and laughing*). Fancy Harding in that gallery. He certainly has evolved.

GAVAN. He was not exceptional. We have produced a number of patriots like Harding.

HELEN. We'll know his fate to-night.

GAVAN. I wonder⁹¹ were we mad, just hare-brained illusionists⁹²! Can you credit it, we really intended to make Australia a nation. Yes, we had the audacity to believe that we could create a new Hellenic democracy⁹³.

STUART. Hellenic democracy! It looks like it.⁹⁴

GAVAN. Have another whiskey. (*Fills his glass.*) I can't take it like you, sipping it as if it were wine.

HELEN. Hullo! Here are the boys.

(*Enter DICK and WILLIE, with ducks.*)

⁸² And now ... cockies.] *scored out D.*

⁸³ But in those days ... outlook.] *scored out C.*

⁸⁴ ideal] ideas *D.*

⁸⁵ the formation] the mere formation *B.*

⁸⁶ We meant ... parties.] (*Short pause.*) *D.*

⁸⁷ When I look back ... myself.] *deleted B.*

⁸⁸ What has been ... leaders!] But now, look what has happened to our leaders! *D.*

⁸⁹ We have some ... still,] A few have stuck - but the others, *D.*

⁹⁰ in unions,] *scored out D.*

⁹¹ I wonder] I sometimes wonder *D.*

⁹² illusionists] enthusiasts *C.*

⁹³ Hellenic democracy] democracy *D.*

⁹⁴ Hellenic ... like it.] A new democracy. And I still think we can do it. *D.*

How did you get on?
 DICK (*Throwing down ducks*). We got a few.
 HELEN. Ten. It's a pity there should be all this killing. Good!⁹⁵ What lovely colours their feathers have.
 STUART. They⁹⁶ would make a good still life.
 DICK (*Generously*). Willie got half of them.
 (*They put away their guns.*)
 GAVAN. Have a drink, Dick?
 DICK (*Filling glass*). Here's to everybody. ... The ducks are still coming in.⁹⁷
 GAVAN. What about the wireless, Willie?
 WILLIE. I'll fix it in a minute. (*Arranges apparatus on table.*)
 DICK. I don't think I'll wait to-night. I'd better get home.
 GAVAN. Great Caesar! Don't you want to hear the results?
 DICK. I don't go much on politics.
 WILLIE (*Bringing over a pair of ducks*). This pair's for Mrs Graham.
 HELEN. For me!
 WILLIE. A present from Dick.
 HELEN. Thanks, Dick. I think I can manage a roast.
 STUART. Do you remember the pressed duck at the *Tour d'Argile*?
 GAVAN. You must watch her, Stuart, or she'll be running off with one of these bushmen.
 STUART. I thought Helen's type of beauty was too sophisticated for that. I had no idea it would be a success in the bush.
 HELEN. Don't be too sure. Women may be as uncertain as racehorses or politicians^{98, 99}
 WILLIE (*Working at wireless*). It's tuned up. Something's coming through.
 GAVAN. Listen!
 WIRELESS VOICE. ... The Government has a substantial lead in all States.
 GAVAN. Ye Gods! What's that?
 VOICE. ... We feel assured of a working majority in both houses. I am immensely pleased with the results of the poll ...
 GAVAN. That's Harding's voice ... my old friend Harding.
 VOICE. The great Liberal Party has succeeded in restoring responsible government on the broad platform of progress and reform. The cause of democracy has been triumphantly vindicated. ...
 HELEN. I suppose¹⁰⁰ you're pleased, Dick, that law and order have been restored.
 DICK (*Grinning*).¹⁰¹ I dunno. We can do pretty much as we like round here.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Ten. It's a pity there should be all this killing. Good!] B; Ten. Good! A; It's a pity there should be all this killing. C.

⁹⁶ They] B.; It A.

⁹⁷ The ducks are still coming in.] The ducks are still coming in./WILLIE. We'd have got more if we'd better cartridges./ DICK. I was trying a new brand, but it was a failure./WILLIE. I wouldn't get 'em again, Dad. *deleted* B.

⁹⁸ as racehorses or politicians] B.; as politicians A.

⁹⁹ (*Bringing over a pair of ducks*). This ... politicians.] *scored out* D.

¹⁰⁰ I suppose] It's incredible. I suppose D.

¹⁰¹ (*Grinning*)] B.; *not in* A.

¹⁰² We can do ... here.] We don't go much on law and order in these parts. D.

GAVAN. That's Dick's idea of the situation.¹⁰³

VOICE. I thank the people of the Commonwealth, and the public-spirited Press, for their patriotic support during this great battle for political liberty, and in placing us in the proud position we occupy to-night. ...

GAVAN. Cut the old fool off. Tell him to go to bed!

WILLIE. I'll turn him down a bit.

GAVAN. To hell¹⁰⁴ with him, and bad cess to him!

STUART. What price the revolution now!¹⁰⁵

GAVAN. It's the same old story. I should have known. An election is held. Politicians babble. Newspapers pour forth their usual flood of platitudes. And then the nation votes, it is the compulsory, massed vote of the whole people.¹⁰⁶ And what happens? Nothing. Nothing at all. Things remain exactly as they were. And are the people, the so-called educated and enlightened democracy perturbed by that! By no means. They rejoice in it. They cheer, they actually cheer, all this damned undiluted futility.¹⁰⁷

HELEN. Perhaps they don't know what they want.

GAVAN. They don't want anything. That's their trouble.

STUART. You talk about revolution; but isn't this a complete and perfect revolution, simply a turn of the wheel!

HELEN. It's more like a contest between nature and the [elections].¹⁰⁸

GAVAN. We'll try again, Willie.

WILLIE. Right-Oh! (*Again, fixes wireless.*)¹⁰⁹

VOICE. Two great parties have united without the sacrifice of a single principle.

HELEN. I shouldn't be surprised if it's¹¹⁰ still Harding speaking.¹¹¹

GAVAN. Oh, help! (*Gets whiskey bottle and fills glasses.*) I can't stand it. (*Hands HELEN, STUART and DICK glasses.*) Just a *deoch an doris*.

DICK (*Finishing his drink*). I must be off.

HELEN. What do you think of it all, Dick?

DICK (*Slowly*). I'm not bothering. It won't make much difference to the fish and ducks. (*Takes up gun and a pair of ducks.*) So long.¹¹²
(*Exit DICK.*)

VOICE. ... We mean to continue in the future as we have in the past and carry out the policy which the entire people of this great country have so enthusiastically endorsed¹¹³ ...

¹⁰³ That's ... situation.] *scored out C.*

¹⁰⁴ hell] *bed B.*

¹⁰⁵ What price ... now!] *scored out D.*

¹⁰⁶ votes, it is the ... whole people.] *votes. D.*

¹⁰⁷ Nothing at all. ... undiluted futility.] *It's all our faults. Yours Stuart, mine - every one of us. D.*

¹⁰⁸ but isn't this a complete and perfect revolution, ... between nature and the elections.] *B; but isn't the complete and perfect revolution, simply the turning of a wheel? A.*

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps they ... Right-Oh! (*Again fixes wireless.*)] *scored out D.*

¹¹⁰ it's] *B.; it isn't A.*

¹¹¹ I shouldn't ... speaking.] *scored out D.*

¹¹² (*Finishing his drink.*) I must ... So long.] *scored out D.*

¹¹³ country have so enthusiastically endorsed] *B.; country endorsed A.*

GAVAN. Can this be the voice of Australia!¹¹⁴

HELEN. Never mind. Look out there—the bush and the ocean. Maybe Dick's right about it. What does it matter?

VOICE. ... Regarding our financial responsibilities ...

GAVAN. Good old Harding.¹¹⁵

(They all laugh, holding up their glasses.)

GAVAN/HELEN/STUART. *Australia Felix!*¹¹⁶

Curtain.

Notes

Australia Felix—(Latin) *Fortunate Australia*; an early name given to lush pasture in parts of western Victoria explored in 1836 by surveyor Thomas Mitchel on his third expedition.

Easter Gippsland: extends from the western watershed of the Mitchell and Thomson River catchments east and north of Eastern Victoria, to the New South Wales border. Major towns include, from west to east, Bairnsdale, Paynesville, Lakes Entrance, Orbost and Mallacoota. Mallacoota is an isolated coastal area about 65km south of Eden (just north of the Victorian boarder). Up until 1922 the only access to Mallacoota was by bridle track or boat. Cf. Louis Esson's verse: 'Gippsland Cattle', 'Wild Cattle', 'Swimming Cattle', 'The White Crane' and 'The Southern Ocean'.

the elections: Cf. Stanley Bruce: The Federal Coalition under Stanley Bruce earned a second term (despite Labor gaining 8 seats) in the election held in 1928. Bruce defeated Billy Hughes in the election held in 1925.

the Tests: Marylebone Cricket Club organised the England cricket team's tour of Australia in the 1924–25 season. Australia won the Ashes series 4–1.

murders in Melbourne: In the afternoon of January 1924, thirty-year-old Norman Alfred List, at the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, opened fired with a .44 repeating rifle, shooting five people, killing three and injuring two. He was unknown to the victims; his aim was incredibly accurate and the entire massacre was over within five minutes. Most of the victims were unaware of the killer and no alarm was raised until the shooting had finished. List threw the rifle into the bushes, jumped a fence and disappeared. His body was discovered two weeks later in the scrub at Pakenam, a victim of apparent suicide.

it was along that shore, some miles down the coast, that Captain Cook first sighted Australia. He saw the smoke rise from some blackfellows' camps.: 'I have named it Point Hicks, because Lieutenant Hicks was the first who discovered this Land.' Thus James Cook described the first sighting of the Australian East Coast from the deck of the *Endeavour* early in the morning (6 am) of what he believed to be Thursday, 19 April 1770.

cockie farmer: (*colloq.*) Among bushmen a 'cockie' is synonymous with everything poor and mean; from the contempt of the grazier or the stockman for those who scratch the earth. A cockatoo farmer, usually with an overtone of disparagement (from the sometimes wretched existence led by the cockatoo) arose from his exploitation of hired help

to look at nature with the eye of an artist: Cf. Esson's 'Sanity in Literature'.

imperialism: a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonisation, by use of military force, or other means.

Bolshevism: the Communist form of government adopted in Russia following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

impressionism: a 19th-century art movement characterised by relatively small, thin, yet visible brush strokes, open composition, emphasis on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities (often accentuating the effects of the passage of time), ordinary subject matter, inclusion of *movement* as a crucial element of human perception and experience, and unusual visual angles. Impressionism originated with a group of Paris-based artists whose independent exhibitions brought them to prominence during the 1870s. During the 1880s a group of artists in Australia—principally Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Charles Conder—established painting camps on what were then the outskirts of Melbourne. They aimed for 'truth to nature' and worked in the open air, sketching quickly, applying their paint rapidly and capturing instantaneous impressions. The resulting oil sketches, which they considered to be finished works of art, were exhibited in their groundbreaking '9 by 5 Impression Exhibition', held in Melbourne in August 1889.

¹¹⁴ Can this be the voice of Australia!] (*Cutting off.*) I won't believe it. That is not the voice of Australia. *D.*

¹¹⁵ Never mind. ... Harding.] No it's not. Here's to the future. *D.*

¹¹⁶ *Australia Felix!*] GAVAN. *AustraliaFelix/ HELEN/STUART. Australia Felix! D.*

Turner: Joseph Mallord William Turner [JMW Turner] (1775-1851), English Romantic painter, printmaker and water colourist, known for his brilliant, expressive colourisation, imaginative landscapes and turbulent, often violent marine paintings.

the corporate state: a state governed by representatives not of geographical areas but of vocational corporations of the employers and employees in each trade, profession, or industry.

bourgeois ideology: in Marxist philosophy the bourgeoisie is the social class that came to own the means of production during modern industrialisation and whose societal concerns are the value of property and the preservation of capital, to ensure the perpetuation of their economic supremacy in society.

dialectical materialism: the Marxist theory (adopted as the official philosophy of the Soviet communists) that political and historical events result from the conflict of social forces and are interpretable as a series of contradictions and their solutions. The conflict is seen as caused by material needs.

Karl Marx: Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), revolutionary, sociologist, historian, and economist. He published (with Friedrich Engels) *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (1848)—commonly known as *The Communist Manifesto*—the most celebrated pamphlet in the history of the socialist movement. He also was the author of the movement's most important book, *Das Kapital*. These writings and others by Marx and Engels form the basis of the body of thought and belief known as Marxism.

Fascist [Party]: The National **Fascist Party** (Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF) was an Italian political party, created by Benito Mussolini as the political expression of fascism (previously represented by groups known as Fasci), a form of radical authoritarian nationalism, characterised by dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition, and control of industry and commerce.

Communist [Party]: a political party that advocates the application of the social and economic principles of communism through state policy. The name originates from the 1848 tract Manifesto of the Communist Party by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Dago: (*derog.*) person of Latin origins; any foreign person.

Celtic glamour: Cf. the 'Celtic Renaissance' or known otherwise as 'the Celtic Glamour' or 'the Celtic Gift'; a multifaceted and loosely defined movement which saw a renewed interest in aspects of the cultures of the Six Celtic Nations or, more broadly, a general and even romanticised idea of Irish, Manx, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh languages, as well as their associated forms of literature and art, and promoting education and political movements that support language rights in each respective nation. Although the revival was complex and multifaceted, occurring across many fields and in various countries in Northwest Europe, its best known incarnation is probably the Irish Literary Revival. Here, Irish writers including William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, 'AE' Russell, Edward Martyn and Edward Plunkett (Lord Dunsany) stimulated a new appreciation of traditional Irish literature and Irish poetry in the late 19th and early 20th century.

don't drown the miller: '*Dinna croon the miller*', cf. 'Don't drown the miller's eye,' don't put too much water to flour when mixing the dough; 'don't put too much water in the whiskey.'

Japan is a great and growing power.: Cf. Esson's collections of articles 'From the Oldest World' published in *Lone Hand* in 1908.

White Australia: The White Australia Policy describes Australia's early approach to immigration which favoured applicants from certain countries. The first Act of Parliament passed after Federation was the *Immigration Restriction Act (1901)*, better known as the 'White Australia Policy'. The intention was to promote an homogenous population similar to that in Britain. Under 'White Australia' only Europeans, and then mainly northern Europeans, could immigrate to Australia. The main method prescribed by the legislation for the administration of the Policy was a dictation test of fifty words in length. If a person failed the test, they were refused entry into Australia or, if they were already here, imprisoned for six months and generally ordered to leave. After 1909 no person passed the Dictation Test.

We want people, twenty millions, fifty millions.: The population of Australia in 1924 was 5,811,145.

fritto misto: roughly translates as 'mixed fry', it encompasses all sorts of fried foods: meats such as sweetbreads, vegetables, and even desserts. But in Venice the term almost always applies to the city's justly famous *frutti di mare* (fruits of the sea).

John Knox: (c. 1513–1572), Scottish minister, theologian, and writer who was a leader of the country's Reformation. He is the founder, and set the austere moral tone, of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

We've been married nearly seven years: Cf. Esson married Hilda Wager Bull on 15 December, 1913. The ceremony was conducted by Dr Charles Strong of the Australian Church. Frederick Sinclair was witness for Esson.

Flinders Lane: A Melbourne lane way that runs east-west from Spring Street to Spencer Street in-between Flinders and Collins Streets. Originally laid out as part of the Hoddle Grid in 1837, the laneway, being close to wharves and Railway Station, was once the centre of Melbourne's garment trade, and home to many Jewish migrant businesses.

The Holborn Empire: Built on the site of Weston's Music Hall (1857), the Holborn Empire Theatre opened on 29 January 1906 as a vaudeville house with a variety programme that included Ruffell's Bioscope as one of the acts. The theatre was under the direction of Walter Gibbons, followed by Charles Gulliver. Films were being screened as part of the program by 1914. It came under the an independent company known as Holborn Empire Ltd. in 1925.

Bert's [Leon's] studio in Chelsea: Esson may, in the first instance be referring to his friend Leon Brodzky [aka Spencer Brodney]; in the emendation 'Bert' may allude to Australian journalist Albert Dorrington (1874-1953).

Leicester Square to Piccadilly Circus to see the lights in the streets: Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus are both tube stations of London's Underground; the walking distance between stations is roughly five hundred metres. Piccadilly Circus is a road junction and public space of London's West End that connects Regent Street with

Piccadilly. In this context, a circus, from the Latin word meaning 'circle', is a round open space at a street junction. The Circus is known for the Shaftesbury memorial fountain and statue.

bock: a strong, dark German beer; or hock??

Café Royal: restaurant and meeting place on London's Regent Street, conceived and established by Daniel Nicholas Thévenon (anglicised his name to Daniel Nicols) in 1865.

Dan O'Connell: Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847), often referred to as 'The Liberator' or 'The Emancipator', was an Irish political leader in the first half of the 19th century. He campaigned for Catholic emancipation—including the right for Catholics to sit in the Westminster Parliament, denied for over 100 years—and repeal of the *Act of Union* which combined Great Britain and Ireland. Throughout his career in Irish politics, O'Connell was able to gain a large following among the Irish masses in support of him and his Catholic Association. O'Connell's main strategy was one of political reformism, working within the parliamentary structures of the British state in Ireland and forming an alliance of convenience with the Whigs. More radical elements broke with O'Connell to found the Young Ireland movement.

I'm fifty-five: EJ Brady, born in 1869, was fifty-five in 1924.

But in those days we felt [the shearers] would surprise the world. That was Henry Lawson's creed.: Henry Lawson spent time with Brady at Mallacoota. Cf. Esson's 'Henry Lawson's Camp', *The Christmas Aussie*, 1925.

The Bulletin: Australian magazine first published in Sydney on 31 January 1880. The publication's focus was politics and business, with some literary content, and editions were often accompanied by cartoons and other illustrations.

Tour d'Argile: (*French*) Clay tower [no reference]; cf. *La Tour d'Argent* [Silver Tower] *Restaurant*, an historic restaurant in the 5th arrondissement of Paris; it dates back to at least 1824.

cess: (in *Scotland, Ireland, and India*) a tax or levy; The term is a shortened form of 'assess'

deoch an doris: a last drink before parting. cf. *A Wee Deoch-an-Doris* (1911)—words by Gerald Grafton and Harry Lauder; music by Harry Lauder—

There's a good old Scottish custom that has stood the test of time.

It's a custom that's been carried out in ev'ry land and clime.

Where brother Scots foregather

It's aye the usual thing.

For just before they say 'Good Nicht,' they fill their cups and sing;

'Just a wee deoch-an-doris ...'

Shipwreck

A Play, in Four Acts

To Hilda

Copy Text

A typed manuscript (*A*) of *Shipwreck* is held in the Campbell Howard Collection, Dixon Library, New England University. It is typed in Hilda's familiar format. The document contains corrections and alterations in pencil (*B*) in Esson's familiar hand. There is an inscription 'To Hilda' on the verso of the title page. A small pencil sketch plan of Stumpy's bar-room (also by Esson) is added underneath the scene description.

An additional, incomplete, manuscript (*C*) is also held in the Campbell Howard Collection; it is a typed revision based on both (*A*) and (*B*). A large number of emendations (dialogue, stage directions and particularly punctuation) appear to be Hilda's reworking of the text in the process of typing; I've noted these variants.

The current text is based on (*B*), reliant on Esson's direct connection with proofing and editing (noting that the progress of these revisions does not extend into Act Four).

Characters

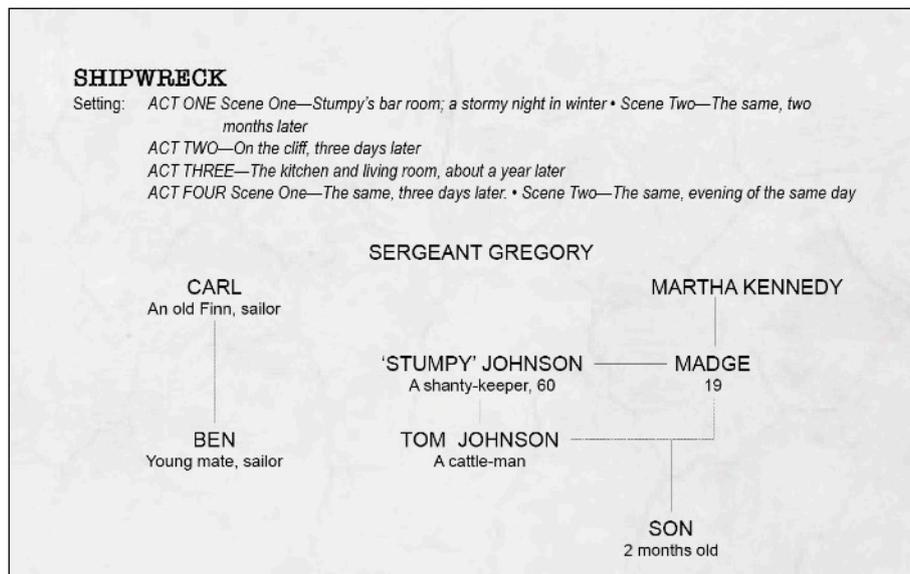
'STUMPY' JOHNSON, a shanty-keeper
TOM, his son, a cattle-man
CARL, an old Finn, sailor
BEN, his young mate, sailor
SERGEANT GREGORY
MARTHA KENNEDY
MADGE, her daughter

Setting

The action takes place at 'STUMPY' JOHNSON's old shanty, at Shipwreck, a remote and lonely spot on a high cliff, overlooking the Southern Ocean.
Late Nineteenth Century.

Act Division

ACT ONE	Scene One	Stumpy's bar-room. A stormy night in winter.
	Scene Two	The same. Two months later.
ACT TWO		On the cliff. Three days later.
ACT THREE		The kitchen and living-room. About a year later.
ACT FOUR	Scene One	The same. Three days later.
	Scene Two	The same. Evening of the same day.



ACT ONE

Scene One

(STUMPY's bar-room. It is a roughly-built, but quaint and picturesque room, made something like a ship's cabin, and filled with old pieces of furniture, tapestry and odds and ends picked up from wreckage.)

(At the Right, is a small bar counter; behind which there are¹ shelves with bottles and glasses. At the back is the entrance door, now closed, of dark heavy carved wood, and to the Left of it a window, both overlooking the sea. On the Left wall is an old bunk with some rough blankets thrown on it, and a door below it which leads to other rooms. There is an old table with a lighted lamp, a bench and chairs².)

(It is a stormy night in winter, with thunder and lightning which flashes through the window in the darkened room.)

(MARTHA KENNEDY, a middle-aged, worn, but³ hard-looking woman, is sitting at the table, sewing by the lamp. Her daughter, MADGE, an attractive and high-spirited bush girl⁴ of nineteen, bewildered with her strange surroundings, stands at window, watching the storm.)

MADGE *(Turning and uttering a scream⁵)*. Oh! Let⁶ me get away!

MOTHER. What's wrong, Madge?

MADGE. Oh, it's⁷ terrible. I've never seen such an angry sea. Hear the waves beatin' up,⁸ and dashing on the cliff!

MOTHER. You must expect storms at this time of year⁹.

MADGE. There's sheet lightning¹⁰ and forked lightning after it.

(A thunder clap.)

And the thunder's just over our heads¹¹. It's awful!

MOTHER. Surely you're not scared at a bit o' thunder and lightning.

MADGE. Shipwreck's¹² a terrible place. There seems to be a curse over everything.

MOTHER. Don't get nery, Madge. It don't matter about the storm.¹³ We're safe enough.

¹ *which there are] which are C.*

² *a bench and chairs] and chairs C.*

³ *worn, but] worn and C.*

⁴ *bush girl] girl C.*

⁵ *and uttering a scream] with a cry C.*

⁶ *Oh! Let] Oh, let C.*

⁷ *Oh! It's] It's C.*

⁸ *up,] up C.*

⁹ *of year] of the year C.*

¹⁰ *sheet lightning] sheet lightning, C.*

¹¹ *our heads] us A.*

¹² *Shipwreck's] (Shuddering). Shipwreck's C.*

¹³ *It don't matter about the storm.] The storm don't matter. C.*

MADGE (*Going to her mother*). Why¹⁴ did you bring me here! I feel anything can¹⁵ happen.
MOTHER. Nothing very dreadful's going to happen.
MADGE. I'm frightened, frightened of everything.
MOTHER. It's only a bit wild and strange at first, with nothin' but¹⁶ the bush and the ocean.
MADGE. It's too lonely. It gives me the creeps. There's nobody about for miles—only Stumpy.¹⁷
MOTHER. Stumpy's¹⁸ a wonderful man. He's like a king of the whole district¹⁹. He²⁰ built it all up, made it himself.²¹ He can do as he likes here.
MADGE. I want to get away. What²² can I do!
MOTHER. Come here, Madge, and listen to me.
MADGE (*Wildly*). No, no, no! I won't listen.
MOTHER. Calm yourself, girl.
MADGE (*Distractedly*). I won't do it, I won't!
MOTHER. You're too excitable²³. Listen a moment, Madge. I want to talk sensible to you.
MADGE (*Fiercely*). You want me to marry him. I know.²⁴ You're trying to force me.²⁵
MOTHER. I know what's best. You're only young. But²⁶ I'm up in the ways of the world. Stumpy'll make you a real good husband.
MADGE. He's too old, and ⁻²⁷
MOTHER. He's²⁸ got the strength and energy of a young man.
MADGE. No, no. I'd rather die.²⁹
MOTHER. You've got a lot of silly notions in her head. What good were any of the young men that came round to see you? No good at all. They were only after their own amusement.
MADGE. How could I marry Stumpy! I can't bear him near me.

¹⁴ Why] Oh, why C.

¹⁵ can] could C.

¹⁶ but] round but C.

¹⁷ miles—only Stumpy.] miles, nobody ... only Stumpy. C.

¹⁸ Stumpy's] And what's the matter with that. Stumpy's C.

¹⁹ district] place A.

²⁰ He] He's C.

²¹ up, made it himself.] up himself. C.

²² What] My God, what C.

²³ excitable] excited A.

²⁴ I know.] *not in A.*; I know! C.

²⁵ force me.] force me! C.

²⁶ young. But] a young girl. But A.; young; but C.

²⁷ and -] and ... C.

²⁸ He's] That's nothing. He's C.

²⁹ No, no. I'd rather die.] No, no! I'd rather die! C.

MOTHER. There's not a girl in the district that wouldn't jump at the chance. He's a strong man, and he's not finished yet.³⁰ You should hear all about the³¹ things he's done, and the stories they tell of him;³² everybody knows about Stumpy.

MADGE. I hate him.

MOTHER. And he's rich. He's got a lot o' good land he took up in the early days, and boats and a bullock-team, and this big shanty—it's the only one for miles round, and there's a lot to³³ be made in the fishin' season—and a pile o' money in the bank. If you marry him, Madge, we'll have no more trouble.

MADGE. I can't, mother, I can't!³⁴

MOTHER. He's promised to give you everythin'³⁵ you want, and leave everythin' to you in³⁶ his Will.

MADGE. I don't want his money. I want to get away, and never see him again.

MOTHER. Don't let silly fancies spoil your whole life.³⁷ What's goin' to happen to us if you don't marry him! You know your³⁸ father left us nothin', only his debts.³⁹ We were sold out without a penny.⁴⁰ Things would have been desperate if Stumpy hadn't come along. He's madly in love with you.⁴¹

MADGE. Oh, don't say that,⁴² Mother. He terrifies⁴³ me.

MOTHER. He's mad about you, and he was never a man to bother much about women. There's many a one that's tried to catch him, but he would have none of 'em, only you. You're a lucky girl, Madge.⁴⁴

MADGE. You want me to marry Stumpy, so you'll get his money yourself.⁴⁵

MOTHER. And why not! What can we do without money! I'm gettin' old and lined with the worries I've had. You don't expect me to start strugglin' all over again!

³⁰ finished yet.] done yet, by a long way. C.

³¹ all about the] all the A.

³² You should hear all about the things he's done, and the stories they tell of him;] You should hear the stories they tell of him; C.

³³ lot to] lot o' money to C.

³⁴ can't!] can't. C.

³⁵ everythin'] everything C.

³⁶ leave everythin' to you in] leave you the whole lot in C.

³⁷ Don't let silly fancies spoil your whole life.] Don't spoil your whole life with silly fancies. C.

³⁸ You know your] Your A.

³⁹ only his debts.] only mortgage and debts. C.

⁴⁰ out without a penny.] out, and didn't get a penny. C.

⁴¹ He's madly in love with you.] *brackets perhaps indicate a questionable passage; but no excision is actually made. B.; excised C.*

⁴² Oh, don't say that,] O, don't, C.

⁴³ terrifies] frightens A.

⁴⁴ Madge.] Madge, if you only knew it. C.

⁴⁵ get his money yourself.] get plenty of his money. A.; get some of his money yourself. C.

MADGE. Help me, Mother. Can't we get away⁴⁶ from here?

MOTHER. Now Madge, don't carry on like a child⁴⁷! You don't know what the world is. You hardly know you're born yet. I've been through it, and it's a hard struggle, especially for a woman. Try to be sensible⁴⁸. If you've got money,⁴⁹ you're free, and you can do what you like. ... Stumpy'll make you a good husband, never fear.

MADGE. You shouldn't have brought me here. You shouldn't have let him see me.

MOTHER. He's mad about you, Madge, ragin' mad. He can't keep his eyes off you, and they're blazin' when they look at you.⁵⁰ I've been watchin' him. You've got him all right, girl.⁵¹
(More claps of thunder.)

MADGE *(Looking through the window)*. Oh, the storm's as fierce as ever. I wish the thunder'd pass.

MOTHER. It don't sound so close now.

MADGE. What'll happen to the ships at sea?⁵²

MOTHER. You're in a bad mood⁵³ to-night, Madge. But⁵⁴ I don't wonder. We've had hard times⁵⁵ since your father died; but I know everythin' will⁵⁶ come out right for us both.

MADGE. We're on the very edge of the cliff. We might be blown away. I'm frightened, I'm frightened⁵⁷ of the sea to-night.

(Enter STUMPY.)

(He is a man over⁵⁸ sixty, with a wooden leg; but he gives the impression of a man in his prime, for he is powerfully built, and still vigorous and active. He is quiet⁵⁹ in speech and movements, but there is a suggestion of something queer and sinister in all he does, emphasised by his short, harsh laugh. He has a strange, unkept appearance, with long matted hair, and a straggling, greyish beard. STUMPY, as he is called⁶⁰, is a great bushman and seaman, a formidable personality. He is roughly dressed in blue trousers and faded⁶¹ blue shirt.)

STUMPY. Don't be frightened, Madge. I'm here to take care of you.

MADGE. You!

⁴⁶ get away] escape A.

⁴⁷ child] foolish young girl A.

⁴⁸ be sensible] have sense C.

⁴⁹ money,] money C.

⁵⁰ He can't keep his eyes off you, and they're blazin' when they look at you.] His eyes are blazin' when he looks at you, and he can't keep them off you. C.

⁵¹ I've been watchin' him. You've got him all right, girl.] You've got him all right, girl. I've been watchin' him. A.

⁵² sea?] sea! C.

⁵³ in a bad mood] strange A.

⁵⁴ Madge. But] Madge; but C.

⁵⁵ hard times] sad time A.; a hard time C.

⁵⁶ everythin' will] everything'll C.

⁵⁷ frightened, I'm frightened] frightened C.

⁵⁸ over] of over C.

⁵⁹ quiet] usually quiet C.

⁶⁰ called] called from his wooden leg C.

⁶¹ faded] a faded C.

STUMPY. Nothin's ever goin' to hurt my Madge. The sea can rage like hell if it likes, but it won't get you. Stumpy wouldn't let it.

MOTHER. She's scared⁶² of the storm to-night, and the thunder and lightnin'.

STUMPY. I like a good ragin' storm. It puts vigour into a man, like strong whiskey.

MADGE (*Rushing to MOTHER*). Oh, take me away, Mother. Take me away!

MOTHER (*Trying to soothe her*). Hush, Madge.⁶³

STUMPY. Don't you like Shipwreck, good old Shipwreck!⁶⁴ (*Picks up⁶⁵ telescope and goes to window.*) It's the highest point we're on. (*Looking through telescope.*)⁶⁶ You've got a grand view through this when it's light over the bar, and all along the coast. It's a champion lookout. (*Returns.*)⁶⁷ That makes it all the safer. Nobody can get near without me seeing them. (*Shows glass to MOTHER.*)⁶⁸

MOTHER. I bet this glass has done some good work for you.

STUMPY (*Putting it away*). Aye, Missus, especially when the revenue men were⁶⁹ about.

MOTHER. You're a wild one, Stumpy.

STUMPY. They say it takes a young devil to make an old saint. Look at me,⁷⁰ now! I've spent most of my life about here, and I want nothin' better. It's rough, but I don't mind facing⁷¹ the elements. (*To MADGE.*) You're just a bit strange at first, but⁷² you'll soon get to like the⁷³ old place.

MOTHER. Isn't it a funny old room, Madge? He's made it somethin' like the cabin of a ship.

STUMPY. That's natural enough. It's built mostly out o' wreckage, just driftwood thrown up on the beach. There's a few odds and ends I picked up in the old days, they belonged to nobody—pieces⁷⁴ of furniture and tapestry and things. Look at that door—it's cedar—and see the carving on it.⁷⁵ I got that from an old wreck.

MOTHER. You haven't done so badly out of the wrecks⁷⁶, I see.

STUMPY. I haven't missed one yet. (*Chuckles.*) But it was different in the old days. There were more wrecks then, and it took a long time to get the news through.

⁶² She's scared] She's just a bit scared C.

⁶³ Madge.] Madge! C.

⁶⁴ Shipwreck!] Shipwreck? C.

⁶⁵ *Picks up*] takes A.

⁶⁶ (*Looking through telescope*)] deleted B.

⁶⁷ (*Picks up telescope and goes to window.*) It's the highest point we're on. (*Looking through telescope.*) You've got a grand view through this when it's light over the bar, and all along the coast. It's a champion lookout. (*Returns.*)] It's the highest point we're on. (*Picks up telescope, and indicates window.*) You've got a grand view through this when't it's light over the bar, and all along the coast. It's a champion lookout. (*Chuckles.*) C.

⁶⁸ (*Shows glass to MOTHER.*)] C; not in A or B.

⁶⁹ were] used to be C.

⁷⁰ me,] me C.

⁷¹ facing] facin' C.

⁷² first, but] first, my dear; but C.

⁷³ the] this A.

⁷⁴ days, they belonged to nobody - pieces] days - they belonged to nobody, pieces C.

⁷⁵ it.] it! C.

⁷⁶ the wrecks] wrecks C.

MOTHER. Lucky enough for you, you were never caught.⁷⁷

STUMPY. I was up to all the tricks. But the biggest wreck I ever seen was just below the cliff there.

I was only a kid at the time. But I don't forget that one.⁷⁸ It was a queer sight broken⁷⁹ spars floatin' round, and drowned bodies thrown up on the shore for weeks after. The *City O' Liverpool*, she was called, a full-rigged sailin' ship, crowded with immigrants. There were hundreds on board when she went down. They were comin' out from the old country to settle on the land. They brought everythin' with them, furniture and tools and building material, and sheep and cattle too. They were goin' to be big squatters, or somethin'; but⁸⁰ it's a deceptive⁸¹ world. They never settled on the land at all. They had to be satisfied with the salt water.⁸²

MADGE. Oh, don't talk about it!⁸³

STUMPY. It's a funny story. (*Chuckles.*)⁸⁴ They'd been six long months at sea. You'd have thought the worst was over. They were in sight o' land, the⁸⁵ Promised Land—that's what they called it in those days. She was a fine big ship;⁸⁶ and didn't she look a pretty sight, all sail set, and bowling saucy-like along the coast! And then a sudden storm came up, a howling gale it was, worse than to-night, and she was driven on the rocks and smashed to bits. You can see the very spot from here. That's how this place first came to be called Shipwreck, after that old wreck.

MOTHER. I can well believe it. It's a treacherous coast.

STUMPY. It's⁸⁷ fifty years and more since the *City O' Liverpool* went to the bottom of the sea. And there's been many a good ship went down since. It's well named Shipwreck. There's always been a lot of wrecks along this coast.⁸⁸

MADGE. Oh, I⁸⁹ can see the ship now, and people drownin'. It'll haunt me.

STUMPY. You mustn't⁹⁰ lose any sleep over that, Madge. It all happened years before you were born. Speakin' for myself, I've no grudge against the sea.

MOTHER. It's been a good friend to you, Stumpy. You've got a fine place, and plenty o' land and money.

STUMPY. It's all for you, Madge, everythin' I've got's for you, after we get married.⁹¹

⁷⁷ caught.] caught! C.

⁷⁸ one.] one! C.

⁷⁹ sight broken] sight ... broken C.

⁸⁰ somethin'; but] somethin'. But C.

⁸¹ deceptive] *word underline B. (suggesting, perhaps, that another word was sought?);* deceitful C.

⁸² water.] water. (*Chuckles.*) C.

⁸³ Oh, don't talk about it!] C.; O, don't talk about it! B.; O, don't tell me! A.

⁸⁴ (*Chuckles.*)] *excised* C.

⁸⁵ land, the] land - the C.

⁸⁶ ship;] ship, C.

⁸⁷ It's] It must be A.

⁸⁸ There's always been a lot of wrecks along this coast.] Listen to the sea! She gets them all right. C.

⁸⁹ Oh, I] Don't talk about it! I A.; Oh, don't! I C.

⁹⁰ mustn't] needn't C.

⁹¹ married.] married. /(*MADGE turns to the window, watching the storm.*) C.

MOTHER (*Quietly to STUMPY*).⁹² What about your son, Tom?
 STUMPY. To hell with Tom! I've disowned him.
 MADGE. I hate the place!⁹³ I hate it!⁹⁴
 MOTHER. Don't be foolish, Madge. You're upsetting yourself over nothing.
 STUMPY (*Laughingly*). I like a young girl with spirit.
 MOTHER. Come here. Stumpy wants to talk to you.
 STUMPY. I've got a kick in me yet, for all my damned old wooden leg.⁹⁵
 MOTHER. Make⁹⁶ no mistake, Madge. Stumpy's⁹⁷ as strong as a bull, and as clever in the bush as a blackfellow. And you should see him in his little skiff.⁹⁸
 STUMPY. This old spar ain't as bad as you might think. It don't handicap me much.⁹⁹ I've had it for thirty years, and it's just as good as the other.¹⁰⁰ It was a simple thing—a tree fell on it when I was splitting. Lucky it wasn't broken above the knee.¹⁰¹
 MADGE. Oh, it's horrible!
 STUMPY. Come here, Madge. I won't hurt you.
 MADGE. No, no.¹⁰²
 STUMPY (*Going over to her*). You'll be safe with Stumpy. I want you, Madge.
 MADGE (*Drawing away*). Don't come near me, don't!¹⁰³
 MOTHER. Just leave her alone a minute¹⁰⁴. She'll come to her senses.
 MADGE. I don't want to see you or speak to you.¹⁰⁵ I want to get away.
 (*Exit MADGE wildly.*)
 MOTHER. She's a bit scared. She's only a girl, you know, just turned nineteen.
 STUMPY (*Chuckling*). That's how I like 'em, young and fresh and frisky, and with a bit o' vice in 'em.¹⁰⁶
 MOTHER. She's been scared ever since we've been here. It's such a lonely and weird kind o' place.
 STUMPY. She'll quieten down, and we'll get on famously.
 MOTHER. You'll be good to her, Stumpy?

⁹² (*Quietly to STUMPY*)] *not in A.*

⁹³ I hate the place!] (*Turning*). I hate the place! *C.*

⁹⁴ I hate it!] *not in A.*

⁹⁵ I've got a kick in me yet, for all my damned old wooden leg.] For all my damned old wooden leg, I've got a kick in me yet. *A.*

⁹⁶ Make] That you have, Stumpy. (*To MADGE.*) Make *C.*

⁹⁷ Stumpy's] He's *C.*

⁹⁸ skiff.] skiff! *C.*

⁹⁹ It don't handicap me much.] *excised C.*

¹⁰⁰ years, and it's just as good as the other.] years, and it's never stopped me doin' what I wanted to! *C.*

¹⁰¹ knee.] knee! *C.*

¹⁰² No, no.] No! No! *C.*

¹⁰³ me, don't!] me ... don't! *C.*

¹⁰⁴ minute] while *C.*

¹⁰⁵ see you or speak to you.] see you. *A.*; see you, I don't want to be near you! *C.*

¹⁰⁶ frisky, and with a bit o' vice in 'em.] frisky, with a bit o' vice in them. *C.*

STUMPY. My oath, you¹⁰⁷ couldn't believe how I want her. I'm mad to hold her in my arms.

(He goes to bar, gets bottle, two glasses and jug of water; puts them on table, and pours drinks.)

MOTHER. Sometimes I wonder if I should let you have her.

STUMPY. You're a sensible woman, Martha. I can talk straight to you. We'll drink to it.

(They drink during scene.¹⁰⁸)

Madge thinks I'm too old, and she doesn't like this wooden leg;¹⁰⁹ but I'll show her I'm as good as any o' the young 'uns. And I've got the money to pay for everything.

MOTHER. I've done my best for you, but she's an obstinate girl.

STUMPY. It'll be a fight to get her—that's what I want. I don't like your soft and gentle ones—no life in 'em. Madge is just my kind. I'm hard to please,¹¹⁰ but I always get what I want in the end.

MOTHER. I've tried hard to get her to marry you, don't forget.

STUMPY. I'll see you don't lose by it. You can trust me for that, if for nothing more.

MOTHER. I may be wrong, but I done it for the best.

STUMPY. I know what you've done, bringing Madge here, and I want to treat you fair and square. I'm givin' you £1,000 the day we're married.

MOTHER. I'll go away then and leave you alone. I might go to Melbourne or Sydney. I've had enough o' the bush.

STUMPY. And I'll try to allow you two or three pounds a week. You can do what you like then.

MOTHER. I'm afraid¹¹¹ I'm too old and worn out to enjoy it.

STUMPY. Not a bit of it, Martha. You'll be a livin' on the fat of the land. I can't wait no longer. I must have her. I got the licence a week ago.¹¹²

MOTHER. You've got a good head for business, Stumpy.

STUMPY. We'll have to go to Eden to get married. We can get there in about three days.

MOTHER. We couldn't travel in this terrible weather.

STUMPY. Not on the sea, but I'll find a track through the bush. We'll get there. I was brought up among blackfellows, and they taught me a few things. *(Chuckles.)*

MOTHER. I'll be glad when it's¹¹³ all settled.

STUMPY. I've waited weeks¹¹⁴ for this. I dunno how I've been so patient, with Madge about the place all the time; but I couldn't hold out no more.

(Enter MADGE¹¹⁵ hesitatingly.)

MOTHER. Come in, Madge. We've just fixed things up.

STUMPY. Don't be bashful. Your mother says it's all right. We're going to Eden to get married.

MADGE. Married!

STUMPY. We're starting to-morrow, first thing in the morning. I'll see you through.

MOTHER. That's the best we can do.

¹⁰⁷ oath, you] oath! You C.

¹⁰⁸ scene.] scene together. C.

¹⁰⁹ leg;] leg, C.

¹¹⁰ please,] please; C.

¹¹¹ I'm afraid] I suppose A.

¹¹² I got the licence a week ago.] I've got the license. A.

¹¹³ it's] we're A.

¹¹⁴ waited weeks] waited a full week A.

¹¹⁵ MADGE] MADGE, C.

STUMPY (*Exultingly*). Wait till we're married, Madge! I'll be a new man. You won't know old Stumpy. We'll have a big spree when we come back, dozens of oysters, and fish¹¹⁶ and black duck, and rum and whiskey—only me and you, Madge. We don't want no company. We'll have Shipwreck all to ourselves. I feel as fit as a fiddle. I'll have to learn to dance a jig.¹¹⁷

MOTHER. I'd better get a few things together.

MADGE. Don't leave me, Mother.¹¹⁸

STUMPY. We must have everythin' shipshape.

MOTHER. I'm tired out.¹¹⁹ It's a long journey, and I must have a bit of¹²⁰ sleep.

(*Exit MOTHER.*)

(*Pause.*)¹²¹

(*STUMPY*¹²² looks at *MADGE* with eager eyes. She draws back, as he advances clumsily.)

STUMPY. I've got you now, Madge.

MADGE. For God's sake, let me go.¹²³

STUMPY. You won't get away from me. I love you too much. I wouldn't lose you for all the pearls in the sea.

(*Storm rages*¹²⁴ with thunder and lightning.)

It's a grand storm, ragin' on the sea, and tearin' through the bush. Don't be frightened, little girl. I'm here to look after¹²⁵ you.

(*STUMPY* takes hold of her.)

MADGE (*Struggling*). Oh, don't touch me! (*Breaks away.*)

STUMPY. I always¹²⁶ get what I want. But there's some would defy me, is there! (*Goes after her.*)

MADGE. Go away. I'd rather throw myself over the cliff.

(*STUMPY* again holds her.)

STUMPY. No, no, my beauty. Struggle as hard as you can. You can't get away.¹²⁷ I'm stronger than you. I can hold you with one hand. When I was a few years younger I could throw the biggest man in the country. And I've got a strong arm yet. Come on, my darling, see how I can lift you!

(*Holds her up.*)

(*STUMPY* laughs as *MADGE* struggles.)

Oh, you little devil, kicking and fighting and scratching -

(*Puts her down again.*)

You're not broken in yet. I like you all the better for that.

¹¹⁶ fish] fish, C.

¹¹⁷ jig.] jig! C.

¹¹⁸ Don't leave me, Mother.] (*Despairingly*). Mother, what have you done! (*As MOTHER gets up.*) Don't leave me! C.

¹¹⁹ I'm tired.] (*As she goes out*). I'm tired. C.

¹²⁰ of] o' C.

¹²¹ (*Pause.*)] (*MADGE* turns to follow her; but *STUMPY* stands in her way. *Pause.*) C.

¹²² *STUMPY*] He C

¹²³ go.] go! C.

¹²⁴ rages] rages again, C.

¹²⁵ look after] hold A.

¹²⁶ I always] I can always A.

¹²⁷ away.] away! C.

MADGE (*More faintly*). Let me go. Let me go!

STUMPY. I'll never let you go. You're far too precious. You've got to like me, Madge. I'll make you.

(*MADGE half faints in his arms.*¹²⁸)

What's the matter, girl! Too tired to struggle any more! No¹²⁹ one can defy Stumpy. I'm boss here. And¹³⁰ I've got you. (*Laughs exultantly.*) I've got you, and I'll have you for ever and ever. You'll never get away from me. See, I'm holding you now, and kissing you.¹³¹ ... (*Kisses her madly.*) You're mine now. Oh, Madge, my precious, my beauty ...¹³²

Curtain.

ACT ONE

Scene Two

(*The same. Two months later.*)

(*CARL, a jolly old Finn, and BEN, a lively young man have just arrived with stores¹³³ in CARL's cutter. They wear oilskins and gum-boots. CARL is singing in a deep thick voice, as they put down against the wall, a bag of flour and a bag of sugar.*)

(*STUMPY is behind the bar,¹³⁴ serving drinks.*)

(*The door at the back is open, and the light, of late afternoon, slowly fades on a calm sea.*)¹³⁵

CARL/BEN (*Singing*).

Go,¹³⁶ she must, or go to blazes,

Blow, my bully boys, blow!

Shout the good old cutter's praises

Blow, my bully boys, blow!

(*CARL and BEN throw bags against the wall.*)

STUMPY (*Leaning over the bar*). Go it, Carl, you've got a voice like a fog-horn.

CARL. Plow, my pully boys, plow!

BEN (*Going to bar*). How's the rum, Stumpy?

STUMPY (*Filling glasses*). It's the real thing, fifty percent over-proof. You won't find better liquor than this along the coast.

BEN (*Taking drinks to table*). You can't beat Stumpy for mixing rot-gut. It goes right down to the gizzard.

(*The MEN drink.*)

¹²⁸ arms.] arms. He drags her down on the bunk beside him. C.

¹²⁹ more! No] more! You're helpless now. No A.

¹³⁰ here. And] here ... and C.

¹³¹ and kissing you.] and kissing and caressing and kissing you. A/C.

¹³² Oh, Madge, my precious, my beauty ...] Oh, Madge, my precious, my beauty! C.; O, Madge precious, my beauty ... B.; O, my precious little Madge, my beauty ... A.

¹³³ stores] stores, C.

¹³⁴ bar,] bar C.

¹³⁵ (*The door at the back ... on a calm sea.*)] C.; not in A.

¹³⁶ Go,] Go C.

STUMPY. You're a fine seaman, Carl, two weeks late, frightened by¹³⁷ a little breeze, and a few white caps on the waves.

CARL (*Beamingly*). Ve make tam gut trip, eh Ben?

BEN. We were only swamped once, and stuck in the sand for a couple of hours.

CARL. Ay know dis coast, every vind and dide¹³⁸. (*Showing bags.*) Here you are, vun pag flour, vun pag sugar -

STUMPY. You've brought everything I ordered?

CARL. Every tam ting.

STUMPY. You didn't forget the cartridges, I hope?

CARL. No tam fear.¹³⁹

BEN. It's all right, Stumpy. We've got all your stores out on the jetty.

CARL. I pring everybody's stores in my liddle cutter. Vot would you do mitout ole Carl?

BEN. Fill 'em up again, Stumpy.

(*STUMPY fills glasses.*)

CARL. I show you my new cutter—der *Helsingfors*—gut liddle poat¹⁴⁰.

BEN (*Drinking*). Good luck!

CARL (*Singing*).

*Der seas is deep, der seas is vide,
Der tead man¹⁴¹ he goes overside,
Sing rally, ri-a-rally!*

BEN (*Shouting*).

*Sing rally, ri-a-rally!*¹⁴²

CARL (*Putting glass on counter*). That's tam gut rum, Stumpy.

STUMPY (*Laughing*). Grog always tastes better when you've paid no duty on it.

CARL. It vos some derrible veather along dis coast, der vorst Ay've seen vor years.

BEN. Another bit o' luck for Stumpy.¹⁴³

STUMPY. The *Lass O' Gowrie* goin' down, you mean?

BEN. It was near here where she was dashed on the rocks.

STUMPY. Don't try to be funny!¹⁴⁴ There was nothin' left from the wreck—¹⁴⁵ nothin' to speak of.

CARL. All is fish¹⁴⁶ vot gomes to Stumpy's net.

STUMPY. How the hell could I go out in a little boat with a big sea runnin'? I like to steer clear of trouble.

¹³⁷ by] of C.

¹³⁸ dide] tide C.

¹³⁹ No tam fear.] excised C.

¹⁴⁰ poat] boat C.

¹⁴¹ man] man, C.

¹⁴² (*Shouting*). *Sing rally, ri-a-rally!*] excised C.

¹⁴³ Stumpy.] Stumpy, eh! C.

¹⁴⁴ funny!] funny. C.

¹⁴⁵ wreck -] wreck ... C.

¹⁴⁶ All is fish] All fish A.

CARL. Well, it's yust¹⁴⁷ the same old place, Stumpy.
 STUMPY. Shipwreck don't change much.
 CARL. And you're lookin' yust the same.
 STUMPY. Do you think so?
 BEN. Wait till the fishin' gets goin'. You'll have plenty o' company then.
 STUMPY. Too much, maybe. (*Laughs.*)
 BEN. What are you laughin' at?¹⁴⁸
 STUMPY (*Putting a scarf on bar*).¹⁴⁹ What do you think this is?
 CARL. It's some voman's ting.
 BEN. You don't see many women about here, worse luck. (*Picking it up.*) It's a scarf or something.
 STUMPY. You don't think it's mine, do you?
 BEN. What are you coming at?
 STUMPY. Whose is it, then?¹⁵⁰
 BEN. How should I know?¹⁵¹
 STUMPY. It's the wife's.¹⁵²
 BEN. Whose wife?¹⁵³
 STUMPY. Mine, o' course! You didn't know I was married, did you?¹⁵⁴
 BEN. You can't spring that on us.
 STUMPY. Why not?
 CARL. Oh, you tanned old salt-crusted sinner.¹⁵⁵
 BEN. Give us a chance, Stumpy.
 STUMPY. You young fellows think you're damned smart; but I've beaten the lot of you this trip.
 BEN. What does Tom think of it?
 STUMPY. He don't know. He's back in the bush somewhere. But I don't give a curse what he thinks.
 BEN. Who is she?
 STUMPY. Madge.
 BEN. Madge! You don't mean Madge Kennedy!
 STUMPY (*Laughing*). Who else would I mean!
 CARL. An ole man like you, you should be tanned ashamed of yourself.
 BEN. You've beat me, Stumpy.
 STUMPY. And a few others, too. All the men were after her, and I don't blame 'em for it. You won't find her equal in all Eastern Gippsland, or over the Border either.
 BEN. And how long have you been married?
 STUMPY. Nearly two months.

¹⁴⁷ yust] just C.

¹⁴⁸ What are you laughin' at?] *excised* C.

¹⁴⁹ (*Putting a scarf on bar*)] (*Picking up bright-coloured scarf that has been lying near, and putting it on the bar.*) C.

¹⁵⁰ Whose is it, then?] Whose do you think it is? C.

¹⁵¹ know?] know! C.

¹⁵² It's the wife's.] (*Jauntily.*) It's the wife's! C.

¹⁵³ wife?] wife! C.

¹⁵⁴ did you?] did you! C.

¹⁵⁵ sinner.] sinner! C.

BEN. Stumpy's comin'¹⁵⁶ out in his old age. I wondered why he wanted those brown gum-boots.

CARL (*Singing*).

*Stumpy Sam was a roarin' sailor;
Plow, my bully boys, plow!*

BEN (*Shouting*).

Blow, my bully boys, blow!

Where's Madge now?

STUMPY. Never you mind.

BEN. We'd have come around before, only we didn't like to disturb a young couple on their honeymoon.

STUMPY. You're getting smart young fellows since you left school.

BEN. Keep your hair on, Stumpy.

STUMPY. If she'd knowed you were comin' she'd have stayed in to meet you. But she didn't expect such fine company, so she went out for a ride.

(*Short pause.*¹⁵⁷)

BEN. What do you do with your wooden leg when you go to bed, Stumpy?

CARL. *Stumpy Sam vos a roarin' sailor;*

Plow, my bully boys, plow!

BEN. He'll¹⁵⁸ soon have little Stumpies runnin' all over the place.

CARL. He's¹⁵⁹ got enuf already. Wherever he goes he leaves a vew behind, and they're mostly¹⁶⁰ twins.

BEN. One at a time's no good to Stumpy. My oath, there'd be a mob if he mustered them.

CARL/BEN (*Shouting*).

*Stumpy Sam was a roarin'¹⁶¹ sailor;
Blow, my bully boys, blow!*

BEN. It's no joke bein' one of Stumpy's bullocks,¹⁶² but he might treat his wife different.

STUMPY. You can chyack as much as you like,¹⁶³ but I was never blown over yet by anybody's breath.

CARL/BEN. *Wey-hey-ho! Wey-hey-ho!*

Blow, my bully boys, blow!

STUMPY. Shut up, there. I heard somebody.

BEN (*Going to door*). It's the Sergeant.

STUMPY. He was down last year. We're getting too damned civilised.

BEN. You can't trust Gregory. He pokes his nose into everybody's¹⁶⁴ business.

¹⁵⁶ comin'] coming C.

¹⁵⁷ pause.] pause. They drink. C.

¹⁵⁸ He'll] I suppose he'll C.

¹⁵⁹ He's] Ah, he's C.

¹⁶⁰ and they're mostly] mostly C.

¹⁶¹ roarin'] roaring A: consistent with verse elsewhere in the text; roaring C.

¹⁶² bullocks,] bullocks; C.

¹⁶³ like,] like; C.

¹⁶⁴ everybody's] everybody C.

STUMPY. As soon as he leaves the station¹⁶⁵ everybody passes¹⁶⁶ the word along. It's just as well to be a day ahead of him.

(Enter SERGEANT GREGORY, a big stout man about fifty, in riding breeches and leggings. He has a bluff, hearty manner.)

SERGEANT. Hullo, there, Stumpy.¹⁶⁷

STUMPY *(Behind bar)*. Come in, Sergeant. It's a long time since you were round here last.

SERGEANT. You know I can only get down about once a year, unless there's some special business.

STUMPY. You¹⁶⁸ mean the *Lass O' Gowrie*? You're down about the wreck?¹⁶⁹

SERGEANT. Yes. I want to find out all I can.¹⁷⁰ It was bad luck¹⁷¹ that old ship going down after all the trips she'd done.¹⁷²

STUMPY. She was forty¹⁷³ years old, and the cobra had got into her keel. I never fancied her.

SERGEANT. I got as far as the Bastion to have a look for her, so I thought I might as well come along to see you. We'll have a drink anyway.

STUMPY. Whiskey? And two rums. *(Pushes over bottle.)* Help yourself, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. You'll join us, Stumpy?

STUMPY. I'll have a drop o' rum, too.

SERGEANT. I'm only making a flying call. *(Drinks.)* Good luck!

CARL. Gut luck!

STUMPY *(Lifting his glass)*. I'll give you the old whalers' one¹⁷⁴—a short life and a jolly death!

SERGEANT. This is a hard place to get at from any side.

STUMPY. You can take your choice—you¹⁷⁵ can come by sea¹⁷⁶ or through the bush.

SERGEANT. One's as bad as the other. It's a rough bush, and a rough coast too. You're cut off from the rest of the world, sure enough.

STUMPY. I always did like a quiet life.

BEN. Don't you believe him, Sergeant! Many a jolly spree we've had in this old bar-room.

STUMPY. Only when some rowdy fishermen drop in, or there's a big cattle muster in the Spring.

SERGEANT. I've a big district to cover, hundreds of miles, and there's always something happening. I know a few wild people I've got to keep an¹⁷⁷ eye on.

BEN. And I bet Stumpy's one of them.

¹⁶⁵ station] station, C.

¹⁶⁶ everybody passes] we always pass A.

¹⁶⁷ Stumpy.] Stumpy! C.

¹⁶⁸ You] Oh, you C.

¹⁶⁹ wreck?] wreck, are you! C.

¹⁷⁰ find out all I can.] make some inquiries. C.

¹⁷¹ luck] luck, C.

¹⁷² down after all the trips she'd done.] down, after all the trips she's made. C.

¹⁷³ forty] over forty C.

¹⁷⁴ one] toast C.

¹⁷⁵ choice—you] choice. You C.

¹⁷⁶ sea] sea, C.

¹⁷⁷ an] my C.

STUMPY. I've had my day, Sergeant.
 SERGEANT. I don't know if I'd trust you very far even now, Stumpy.
 STUMPY. You will have your little joke. What can I do—me,¹⁷⁸ a poor old man with a wooden leg!
 SERGEANT. It's a pretty bad business, the old ship going down like that, and four men drowned.
 STUMPY. What could she¹⁷⁹ do in that sea!
 CARL. Id plow, by George, id plow!
 STUMPY. There's not¹⁸⁰ much I can tell you, Sergeant. It was a pitch black night. But¹⁸¹ I happened to see her, just before dark. She was five or six miles off, battlin' with the storm. I wondered if she'd get through.
 CARL. If anybody go troo, Ay go troo.
 STUMPY. She must 'ave¹⁸² been driving ashore in the night.
 SERGEANT. I climbed up on the rocks to-day, but I could see no¹⁸³ sign of her, only bits of broken timber on the beach. She must have broken right up.
 STUMPY. These things happen at sea, Sergeant.
 SERGEANT. Shipwreck! The Point still deserves its name.
 STUMPY. Aye. We're used to wrecks along this coast. I've seen a few in my time. But never mind the *Lass O' Gowrie*. She's gone now, so let her rest and rot in peace¹⁸⁴ like the old *City O' Liverpool*. We'll have another drink. Same again, boys?
 SERGEANT. Not for me. It's not often I get down as far as this, and I'd like another look round before I go. You can see the whole sweep of the coast from that cliff of yours.
 CARL. I show you my new poat—only forty tons—Ay puilt her myself. Gut liddle sea-poa,¹⁸⁵ der *Helsingfors*.
 STUMPY. No smuggled goods on board, Carl?
 CARL. Ay give up dat game. I pring stores vor people round der coast, and Ay¹⁸⁶ take pack load of vattle-park—dat is all.
 SERGEANT. Right you are, Carl.
 CARL. Ay show you every tamn¹⁸⁷ ting. Gome mit me.
 (*Exeunt CARL and SERGEANT.*)
 STUMPY. What the hell is he nosing round here for?¹⁸⁸ This isn't like a settled district. We don't want police in these parts. I'd better see what he's doin'.
 (*Exit STUMPY.*)
 (*Pause.*)

¹⁷⁸ do—me,] do, me - C.

¹⁷⁹ she] any ship C.

¹⁸⁰ There's not] There ain't C.

¹⁸¹ night. But] night ... but C.

¹⁸² 'ave] have C.

¹⁸³ could see no] couldn't see a C.

¹⁸⁴ peace] peace, C.

¹⁸⁵ sea-poa,] sea-boat - C.

¹⁸⁶ Ay give up dat game. I pring stores vor people round der coast, and Ay] (*Amiably.*) I give up dat game. I pring stores for people round der coast, and I C.

¹⁸⁷ tamn] tam C.

¹⁸⁸ for?] for! C.

(Enter TOM. He is a well-built man¹⁸⁹, with deep-set eyes, clean-shaven and sunburnt. He is dressed in riding-trousers, with short leggings, green jersey, and a duck-feather in his battered felt hat.)

BEN. Hallo, stranger.¹⁹⁰

TOM. Hallo¹⁹¹, Ben.

BEN. Where have you been?

TOM. Back in the hills. We're going to have a big muster this Spring. We haven't had a muster for five years. There must be hundreds of cattle running wild out there.

BEN. You've been out of the world.

TOM. I've only been away three months.

BEN. I know you don't hit it with the old man.

TOM. No. We hate each other. I don't come here more than I can help.

BEN. How's that, Tom?

TOM. I don't forget the way he treated my mother^{192, 193}

BEN. It might be different now.

TOM. How?

BEN. Don't you know?¹⁹⁴

TOM. Know what?

BEN. Your old man's married again.

TOM. No.

BEN. True. And who do you think's the girl?

TOM. What do I care!

BEN. It's Madge Kennedy.

TOM. Madge!¹⁹⁵

BEN. It beats me how he ever got her.

TOM. No. He couldn't do that!¹⁹⁶

BEN. I thought you were sweet on her yourself, Tom.

TOM. We¹⁹⁷ used to have some good rides together. She's a great rider.

BEN. My word! And she can handle a gun and a fish-rod, too.¹⁹⁸

TOM. You're stringing me on, Ben. I don't believe it.

¹⁸⁹ man] young man C.

¹⁹⁰ Hallo, stranger.] Hullo, stranger! C.

¹⁹¹ Hallo] Hullo C.

¹⁹² my mother] mother A.

¹⁹³ I don't forget the way he treated my mother.] (*Grimly*). I don't forget the hell of a life he gave my mother. C.

¹⁹⁴ know?] know! C.

¹⁹⁵ Madge!] Madge. C.

¹⁹⁶ No. He couldn't do that!] God, he couldn't do that! That old devil ... and Madge Kennedy. C.

¹⁹⁷ We] (*Gruffly*). We C.

¹⁹⁸ gun and a fish-rod, too.] rod and a gun as good as any of them. C.

(Enter MADGE, dressed¹⁹⁹ in a short dark skirt, leggings, a rough woollen jacket²⁰⁰ and a man's felt hat. She carries a pair of wonga pigeons in her hand.)

BEN. Hallo, Madge, it's²⁰¹ you!

MADGE *(At door, drawing back)*. Hello²⁰²!

BEN. You look surprised.

MADGE. I didn't expect to find anybody.²⁰³

BEN. What have you got there?

MADGE. Only a couple of wongas I shot.

BEN. Come in. Don't be shy.

MADGE. I'm not used to seeing people. *(Comes into room.)* Hallo, Tom!²⁰⁴

TOM *(Sullenly)*. It's true, then. Hell!

(MADGE puts birds away²⁰⁵ and goes over to him.)

MADGE *(Holding out her hand)*. Don't you want to meet me?

TOM *(Turning away)*. No.

MADGE *(Softly)*. Tom!

TOM *(Angrily)*. No.²⁰⁶ *(He goes over to corner.)*

(MADGE comes in opposite direction.)²⁰⁷

BEN. What a colour you've got in your cheeks.

MADGE. It's the wind. I've been out for a ride. *(Sits down to take off her leggings.)²⁰⁸*

BEN *(Coming over²⁰⁹)*. I'll help you with 'em.

MADGE. Go away, Ben.

BEN. Still as wild as ever, Madge?²¹⁰

MADGE. I do a bit²¹¹ of fishin' and shootin'. You don't call that wild, do you? What²¹² are you down for, Tom?

TOM *(Slowly)*. I'm after cattle.

BEN. I thought you'd see our cutter come in.

MADGE. I didn't ride round the cliff to-day. I took the track through²¹³ Shady Gully.

¹⁹⁹ MADGE, dressed] MADGE. She is dressed C.

²⁰⁰ jacket] jacket, C.

²⁰¹ Hallo, Madge, it's] Hullo, Madge. It's C.

²⁰² Hello] Hullo C.

²⁰³ anybody.] anybody here. C.

²⁰⁴ Hallo, Tom!] Hullo, Tom. C.

²⁰⁵ away] down C.

²⁰⁶ No.] Get out! C.

²⁰⁷ *(MADGE comes in opposite direction.)*] *(MADGE crosses to other side and sits on bunk to take off her leggings.)* C.

²⁰⁸ *(Sits down to take off her leggings.)*] excised C.

²⁰⁹ over] across C.

²¹⁰ Madge?] Madge. C.

²¹¹ I do a bit] Wild! A lot of chance I get. I do a bit C.

²¹² you? What] you. *(Turns to TOM timidly.)* What C.

²¹³ through] thro' C.

(Pause.)

TOM (*Awkwardly*). We're goin'²¹⁴ to make a brandin' yard out there. It saves a lot of argument later.

BEN. Madge don't want to hear about your bullocks.

MADGE. I'm glad to hear about anythin'²¹⁵. We've been all alone—all alone, only me and Stumpy.

(She almost breaks down, but manages to pull herself together.)

BEN. Buck up, Madge. It'll be livelier when the cutters are runnin'²¹⁶. My oath, we'll see to that.

MADGE. He don't care, not him. He'd like to keep me all to himself.

BEN. So that's the sort old Stumpy is.

MADGE. It's worse than living in a lighthouse.

TOM (*Involuntarily*). ... I wondered ... how it would be ...

MADGE (*Fiercely*). But I'll pay him out yet.

BEN. Good for you, Madge.

MADGE. Sometimes I have to laugh at him, hoppin' round on his old wooden stump. (*Imitating STUMPY's walk.*) Clonk-clink-clonk—that's the way he goes, tryin' to find out what I'm doin'.

There's one good point about a wooden leg, though. I can always hear him comin'.

BEN. Well done, Madge!²¹⁷ (*Imitating grotesquely STUMPY's walk.*)²¹⁸ Clink-clonk-clippety-clop — you're²¹⁹ as much of a sport as ever.

MADGE. Sport! A fine lot o' sport here.²²⁰

BEN. We used to have plenty.²²¹ (*Trying to put his arm round her.*)²²² Come on, Madge.

MADGE. That'll do. (*Pushes him off.*)²²³

BEN. What's wrong?

MADGE. Behave yourself, Ben.

BEN. I thought I was behavin' well to-day. (*Again trying to catch her.*) Kill or cure, that's me, Sydney or the bush.²²⁴

MADGE. Don't be a fool, Ben. (*Crosses to TOM.*)

BEN (*Drawing away*). I'm out of this, am I?²²⁵

MADGE. Come on, Tom. You dance²²⁶ with me.

BEN (*Going away*). It's my mistake. You're the curly-headed boy, Tom.

MADGE. Come on.

²¹⁴ goin'] going C.

²¹⁵ anythin'] anything C.

²¹⁶ runnin'] runnin' again C.

²¹⁷ Madge!] Madge. C.

²¹⁸ (*Imitating grotesquely STUMPY's walk.*)] (*Grotesquely imitating STUMPY's walk.*) C.

²¹⁹ you're] ah, you're C.

²²⁰ here.] here! C.

²²¹ plenty.] plenty one time. C.

²²² (*Trying to put his arm round her.*)] (*Puts his arm round her, and starts to whistle and dance her round.*) C.

²²³ That'll do. (*Pushes him off.*)] (*Breaking away.*) That'll do. C.

²²⁴ well to-day (*Again trying to catch her.*) Kill or cure, that's me, Sydney or the bush.] meself well to-day. (*Again tries to catch hold of her.*) C.

²²⁵ I?] I! C.

²²⁶ Tom. You dance] Tom ... dance C.

TOM. No.

MADGE. Don't sulk, Tom.

TOM (*Scornfully*). I don't want you—you²²⁷!

MADGE (*Trying to hold him*). Tom!

TOM (*Breaking away*). Let me go!

(*Enter STUMPY.*)

STUMPY. What the blazing hell are you up to?²²⁸

BEN. We were just having a game.

STUMPY. A game, was it! I know your games, young woman. Oh, it's my son, Tom, is it!²²⁹

BEN (*Lightly*). It's all right,²³⁰ Stumpy.

STUMPY. He's²³¹ a good judge o' stock.

TOM (*Fiercely*). Shut up, you fool!

STUMPY. You weren't pullin' Madge about, were you? You weren't tryin' to kiss her.²³² Of course not. You're too innercent. It's my suspicious nature.²³³

TOM. What are you saying?²³⁴

STUMPY. Let this be the end of it. If you try on any more of your games I'll deal with you both, by crikey I will—and²³⁵ you too, young woman.

(*MADGE pours out a glass of rum, and hands it to him.*)

MADGE. Take this. You're lookin' bad.

(*STUMPY drinks it quickly.*)

STUMPY (*Drunkenly, and turning²³⁶ on MADGE*). You're gettin' too free with the young men.

Don't you ride every day into the bush on the chance o' meetin' a man²³⁷ on horseback, or go round the cliff to see if a boat's comin' in?²³⁸ You'd like a lot of men hangin' round, with plenty o' dancin'²³⁹ and kissin' and huggin' and muggin'—wouldn't that be jolly,²⁴⁰ just the thing for a lively young girl!

TOM (*Going up threateningly*). I'll hear no more o' this.

BEN. It's the grog talkin'.

²²⁷ you - you] you ... you C.

²²⁸ to?] to! C.

²²⁹ it!] it. C.

²³⁰ It's all right,] There's no harm, C.

²³¹ He's] H'm ... he's C.

²³² her.] her! C.

²³³ nature.] nature! C.

²³⁴ saying?] raving about! C.

²³⁵ will - and] will ... and C.

²³⁶ turning] and turning C.

²³⁷ man] straggler C.

²³⁸ round the cliff to see if a boat's comin' in?] go round the cliff to see if a boat's comin' in! C.

²³⁹ o' dancin'] of dancin' C.

²⁴⁰ muggin' - wouldn't that be jolly,] muggin' ... wouldn't that be jolly, ... C.

STUMPY. You take advantage of me because you can hear me comin'. That ain't fair and sportin' like;²⁴¹ but it don't matter. Make no mistake. I'm hardy and stubborn yet. (*Laughs.*) I'll square things up somehow.

(*Enter CARL, boisterously.*)

CARL. Der Sergeant trust Carl. Everybody trust ole Carl.

STUMPY (*Staggering a little*). He'd like to get me, eh?²⁴² You'd all like to get me. But I'm too cunnin' for you. (*Laughs.*) You don't catch this old bird in a trap.

MADGE. He's drunk. He don't know what he's sayin'.

CARL. Ve must get down to der cutter, Ben.

BEN. What's the hurry?²⁴³

CARL. Ve haf a lot to do before it's dark. Ve haf yust vun liddle trink before ve go.

(*MADGE serves out drinks*²⁴⁴.)

TOM. Happy days, Carl.²⁴⁵

BEN. Here's a go.²⁴⁶

CARL (*Lifting glass*).

Here's good luck to me and you,

Sing rally, ri-a-rally!

STUMPY (*Turning on TOM*). You think I'm fair game, don't you! You don't know the kind²⁴⁷ of man I am. I'll settle any of you. By the Lord, I'll -²⁴⁸

MADGE (*Pushing him away*). Take no notice of him. He's been at the bottle all day.

CARL. Ve must go now. (*Sings.*)

Here's good luck to me and you,

Sing rally, ri-a-rally!

Come along, boys, come along.

(*Exeunt CARL and BEN*²⁴⁹ *singing.*)

TOM (*Fiercely, as he points at MADGE*).²⁵⁰ You can have her—you'll²⁵¹ make a fine pair.

MADGE (*Going to him*). Tom.²⁵²

TOM. Don't come near me. (*Pushes her away roughly.*) I hate you.²⁵³

MADGE (*Brokenly*). Oh, Tom!

²⁴¹ like;] like ... C.

²⁴² eh?] eh! C.

²⁴³ hurry?] hurry. C.

²⁴⁴ out drinks] drinks C.

²⁴⁵ Carl.] Carl! C.

²⁴⁶ go.] go! C.

²⁴⁷ kind] sort C.

²⁴⁸ I'll -] I'll ... C.

²⁴⁹ BEN] BEN, C.

²⁵⁰ (*Fiercely, as he points at MADGE.*)] (*To STUMPY, fiercely, pointing at MADGE.*) C.

²⁵¹ her - you'll] her. ... You'll C.

²⁵² Tom.] Tom! C.

²⁵³ you.] you! C.

TOM. To hell with you.²⁵⁴

STUMPY. Come here, Madge!²⁵⁵

(Tries to get hold of her,²⁵⁶ but MADGE easily breaks away.)

MADGE *(Going to bar)*. Go away! I'd better get you another drink.

STUMPY *(Following her)*. Don't want drink—want you.²⁵⁷

MADGE *(Giving him glass)*. Here, take this!

STUMPY *(After taking it at a gulp)*. You make good grog, Madge.

MADGE. Come²⁵⁸ now, and I'll put you on the bunk.

(Puts him on bunk.)

(STUMPY stretches out on bunk.)

STUMPY. Madge! Madge!

MADGE. What do you want!

STUMPY. You. Come here.

MADGE. *(Standing over him.)* You're drunk—²⁵⁹ dead to the world.

(She goes²⁶⁰ and gets a blanket, and then returns to throw it over STUMPY.)

TOM *(Fiercely)*. Now you get out—get out, I say—²⁶¹ I'll look after him.

MADGE *(Pleadingly)*. Tom!

(She goes to him, but shrinks back, and goes out, sobbing.²⁶²)

(TOM looks after her, and then at STUMPY.)

TOM *(Sardonically)*. Shipwreck!

Curtain.

²⁵⁴ you.] you! C.

²⁵⁵ Madge!] Madge. C.

²⁵⁶ her,] her; C.

²⁵⁷ drink - want you.] drink ... want you! C.

²⁵⁸ Come] Come, C.

²⁵⁹ drunk -] drunk ... C.

²⁶⁰ She goes] The light fades. MADGE goes C.

²⁶¹ out - get out, I say -] out ... get out, I say ... C.

²⁶² back, and goes out, sobbing.] back from his anger, and goes out sobbing. C.

ACT TWO

(Three days later.)

(On the cliff, overlooking the Southern Ocean. The sea is like green jade near the shore, but deep blue in the channel. All round the shore there are trees and grasses down to the water's edge, twisted apple-gums, slim acacias, and great masses of tea-tree. On one side there is the opening of a big rough shed. On the other, old, grey, lichen-covered rocks on which brown nets are spread.)

(It is a bright, clear²⁶³ sunny day.)

(MADGE is on the cliff, overlooking the sea.)

(Enter STUMPY.)

STUMPY. What are you doin' up there, Madge? Admirin' the view?

MADGE *(Sullenly)*. Oh, it's you.

STUMPY. I can't bear to let you out of me sight. ... It's a fine perch you've got. You can see a long way from there; but there's nothing in sight to-day, not a sail anywhere²⁶⁴ or a puff of smoke.

MADGE. No. There's only the sea. *(She comes down.)* I just wanted a blow.

(STUMPY goes to meet her.)

STUMPY. You're lookin' well, Madge. What lovely brown arms you've got! You can see where the sun's been kissin' them. *(Tries to kiss them.)* Don't they want Stumpy's kisses, too?

(MADGE draws away.)

You're a fine-looking girl, there's no doubt about that. *(Chuckles to himself.)* And I'm the lucky man. I've got you. Nobody else can touch you. You're mine, Madge. *(Tries to kiss her.)*

MADGE. Don't do that!²⁶⁵

STUMPY. A bit fretful to-day, are you? I'm not surprised. We've been having too much company lately.

MADGE. Don't you ever want me to see anybody!

STUMPY. O' course I do. You're a high-spirited young girl, and I like to see you having a good time. And they're fine young fellows²⁶⁶, too, Ben²⁶⁷ and my son, Tom.

MADGE. I was glad to see them anyway.

STUMPY. Fine, dashing young fellows, especially Tom. *(Laughs.)* He's like his mother, she was a great horse-woman²⁶⁸, bred on the hills. Tom's good too. But I believe I'm as good as any of 'em²⁶⁹ yet.

MADGE. You've got to brag.

STUMPY. I ain't braggin'. I can hop round yet²⁷⁰ in spite of my wooden leg. I want to tell you something.

MADGE. I don 't want to hear it. *(Turns her back on him.)*

²⁶³ clear] clear, C.

²⁶⁴ anywhere] anywhere, C.

²⁶⁵ that!] that. C.

²⁶⁶ young fellows] fellows C.

²⁶⁷ Ben] Ben, C.

²⁶⁸ horse-woman] horsewoman C.

²⁶⁹ 'em] them C.

²⁷⁰ yet] yet, C.

STUMPY. Wait a minute. ... You know Gregory was down about the wreck. He's gone now, and he won't be back for a year. He didn't get much out o' me.

MADGE. What do I care about it!

STUMPY. I'm an old hand at this game, and I made no mistake about the fate of that ship. I was down there next morning to have a look.

MADGE. Down at the wreck?²⁷¹

STUMPY. And just in the nick o' time. There was the *Lass O' Gowrie*, still fast on the rocks. It was the white o' dawn, Madge. I had the whole open sea to myself, only for the gulls and gannets²⁷².

MADGE. I thought you said she'd broken up in the night.

STUMPY. That's what I told old Gregory. There wasn't much left;²⁷³ but I got out to her and fossicked round. Thank my lucky stars I can handle a skiff yet. It wasn't an easy job, girl. A nasty sea was runnin' when I went out; but I managed to make three trips. It was a wonder I got back at all the last time. A Sou' Easter swept²⁷⁴ up straight from the icebergs—it was a snifter of a breeze. I dashed through the break, big waves sweeping the²⁷⁵ little craft broadside, stern first and every other blasted way, till I found myself²⁷⁶ dumped upside down on the beach.

MADGE. I might have guessed it. My God, Stumpy, you were never born to be drowned.

STUMPY. I was a bit dazed, and when I picked myself up again and looked round—what do you think, Madge—the *Lass O' Gowrie* was gone.

MADGE. Gone! What had you done to her?²⁷⁷

STUMPY (*Slowly*). She must have slipped from the rocks.

MADGE. That's you're story. You don't tell me.

STUMPY. Well, something happened to her, and then she broke up, broke up completely.

MADGE. You old scoundrel, you blew her up. That's what you did—you put a charge in her.

STUMPY. What's it matter! Let her go! There was nothing valuable—²⁷⁸ no money boxes,²⁷⁹ or jewels for pretty young girls; but every trip I was loaded up to the gunwale with junk of some kind or other.

MADGE. Stuff you took from the wreck?

STUMPY. It was hard-earned, going out with those heavy seas breaking over the skiff.

MADGE. The things you do,²⁸⁰ you frighten me. Surely somebody must have seen you out there.

STUMPY. It was a grey,²⁸¹ foggy morning. I'd everything out o' sight before the boat from the lighthouse arrived.

MADGE. Hidden away?

²⁷¹ wreck?] wreck! C.

²⁷² gannets] the gannets C.

²⁷³ left;] left, C.

²⁷⁴ swept] sprang C.

²⁷⁵ sweeping the] sweepin' me C.

²⁷⁶ myself] meself C.

²⁷⁷ her?] her! C.

²⁷⁸ valuable—] valuable ... C.

²⁷⁹ money boxes,] money-boxes C.

²⁸⁰ do,] do ... C.

²⁸¹ grey,] grey C.

STUMPY. Yes. In a little cave I know—²⁸² a pretty little cave with green walls. It's hard to find²⁸³ and all covered up with tea-tree and creepers. (*Goes to her exultantly.*) That was the real way of it, Madge. You know now what I done at the wreck.

MADGE. God, you're terrible. I didn't think you'd have the nerve.

STUMPY. Nerve's all right. I was as steady as a rock. You've had nothing but scorn for the old man,²⁸⁴ but tell me, could Tom have done that much! He hasn't the guts, I can beat 'em all yet. I'll show you, Madge —²⁸⁵

(*Enter CARL and BEN.*)

CARL. All apoard, now, all apoard!

STUMPY. Are you goin', Carl?

CARL. Ya. Ve vos vaitin' all mornin' for der tide.

BEN. We've had a good time, Madge.

CARL. A tam gut time. (*To STUMPY.*) She's a ver' fine young girl. Ay no understand vy she marry you, Stumpy, you damned old scoundrel.

BEN (*Looking at nets*). Nets look a bit rotten, Stumpy.

STUMPY. That shows there's been fish in them.

BEN. Snags, you mean. You've got enough nets, but there's no fish. A couple of good men could keep a cutter going.

CARL. All you have round here is vild cattle²⁸⁶ and der tam vattle-bark.

MADGE. I hope you have a good run.

CARL. Trust old Carl for dat. You can't drown a Finn. Ve Dutchies trink salt vater²⁸⁷ instead of milk ven ve vos babes.

BEN. So long, Madge. Sorry to leave you.

MADGE. Hope you are, Ben.

BEN. I wish we could take you with us.

MADGE. I wouldn't mind.

STUMPY. Stop your foolin', you two.

CARL. Ve yust got time for vun liddle trink.

BEN. You'll join us, Madge.

STUMPY. Leave her alone. I'll only open the bar for you.

(*The MEN go off.*)

BEN. We'll be running pretty regular now, especially if you're here, Madge.

CARL. Now, yust vun before ve go. Der tide vaitis for no man.

(*Exeunt CARL, BEN and STUMPY.*)

(*Pause.*)

(*MADGE watches them got out, then sits on rock.*)

(*Pause.*)

(*Enter TOM.*)

MADGE. Hullo, Tom.

²⁸² know -] know ... C.

²⁸³ find] find, C.

²⁸⁴ man,] man ... C.

²⁸⁵ Madge -] Madge ... C.

²⁸⁶ cattle] cattle, C.

²⁸⁷ vater] C.; water B.

TOM (*Bashfully*.) It's you? Madge!

MADGE. Don't go off! I'm all alone. Had a good day?

TOM (*Slowly*.) I found some of 'em I wanted. It's a job ridin' these hills, and I wasn't travellin' slow

-

MADGE. You'll be breaking you neck one of these days.

TOM. I was nearly horned by an old red bull. But what would you care.

MADGE. I'd care all right.²⁸⁸ (*Beckoning to him.*) Won't you sit down here, Tom?

(*TOM hesitates, and then sits beside her.*)

TOM. Oh, Madge, how did it happen! I was away at the time. How did it happen, Madge?

MADGE. Stumpy got hold of me. Mother almost sold me to him.

TOM. He'd stop at nothing to get what he wanted.

MADGE. Mother was hard. I told her I'd never speak to her again. I dunno where she is, and I don't care.

TOM. So that's how he got you, damn him!

(*Short pause.*)

MADGE. He's as jealous as hell, and you never know what he'd do.

TOM. He gets terrible wild; but it's when he's quiet that you've got to watch out.

MADGE. He's a queer one, and Shipwreck's a queer place too. ... It was night when I first come, and you couldn't see the place till you were right on it. You know his funny-lookin' house and sheds, and that old rotten jetty he has, and the windin' track up the cliff—my word, when you see it all at night for the first time, with the dark hills round you, and the big bloodwoods, and the roar of the breakers in your ears, you can't help being scared. ... Anything terrible could happen, and nobody at all ever know about it.

(*Short pause.*)

TOM. They say²⁸⁹ we're a bad family and there's a curse on the place.

MADGE. A curse!

TOM. You know what the old man is—well, his father was worse. It was in the early days. One night he brought in some blacks, and tied them to trees. He had supper turned in; and can you believe it, when he got up²⁹⁰ next morning he shot them all—in cold blood.

MADGE. God, it's a²⁹¹ blackfellows' curse.

TOM. So they say. We're a bad family—nigger killers.

MADGE. But, Tom, you're not like that.

TOM. I'm more like Mother, I think. She was different—she couldn't forgive Dad for the things he did. And I stuck up for her. That's why he always hated me.

MADGE. Don't let him get you.

TOM. I'm not frightened. And I never stay here long.

MADGE. You're free.

TOM. And you must be free.

MADGE (*Impetuously*). Oh, Tom, let's get away.

TOM (*Holding her*). I'll be with you, Madge.

MADGE. Oh, Tom, what can we do!

TOM. I won't be far away now.

²⁸⁸ I'd care all right.] A lot. A.

²⁸⁹ They say] It's whispered A.

²⁹⁰ got up] rose A.

²⁹¹ a] what they call a B.; excised B.

MADGE. I didn't think you'd ever look at me again.

TOM. God, I was jealous.

MADGE (*Faintly*). I couldn't help it.

TOM. I know, Madge. I was mad.

MADGE. I struggled hard to get away; but he'd never let me.

TOM. The old devil!

MADGE. I wanted to tell you; but you always sent me away. (*Breaks down.*)

TOM. I was desperate, too.

MADGE. Won't you forgive me for what I've done?

TOM. I had to. I had to give in at last. I wanted you Madge.

MADGE. And I wanted you.

(*They kiss.*)

TOM. I'll see no harm comes to you. If he dares to touch you I'll -

MADGE. You'll stick to me, Tom?

TOM. Always.

MADGE. I thought you were going off again.

TOM. Only into the bush there.

MADGE. And you'll be back soon?

TOM. It depends.

MADGE. Depends on what?

TOM. On you.

MADGE. Won't you come along when Stumpy's not here. He's often away with his team of bullocks.

TOM. Wish I knew the times.

MADGE. I'll let you know, Tom. I'll give you a signal.

TOM. What sort o' signal?

MADGE. Let's see. ... How about two shots from my gun?

TOM. Good.

MADGE. Fired from the cliff.

TOM. I'll know the sound, and I'll be listening.

(*Short pause.*)

MADGE. Do you love me, Tom?

TOM. Like hell. You look lovely to-day, Madge.

MADGE (*Gently*). ... You hated me at first, Tom.

TOM. Yes, I hated you—I hated you—because I loved you.

(*He holds her in his arms, kissing her passionately.*)

(*Pause.*)

(*Enter STUMPY, stealthily.*)

STUMPY. Hullo, there!

(*He gives a laugh, and MADGE and TOM start back.*)

Hullo. Sorry to disturb you.

MADGE. My God, you gave me a fright.

STUMPY. I've caught you this time. Didn't you see me coming? You're not as keen-sighted as I thought you were.

TOM. I can pick out my own bullock in any mob yet.

STUMPY. Tom's only got two subjects, bullocks and dingoes. But what's the meanin' o' this! You looked a pretty couple sittin' there, kissin' and kissin'.

MADGE. Don't you think I should ever see anybody?

STUMPY. You're a wild one, Madge. Goin' out with young men—ridin' all day and dancin' all night—that's the sort o' life you'd like.

MADGE. I didn't hear you comin'.

STUMPY. That was a pity. (*Laughs.*) You thought you were nice and safe here. It didn't matter about me. You'd be sure to hear me bumpin' away on me old wooden stump—that sharp sound always gave me away.

MADGE. What's wrong with you.

STUMPY. It used to worry me, makin' that noise; but it don't seem so bad now. You see this stump. I just put a pad on the end of it to soften the sound—a little rubber pad.

MADGE. You took a lot o' trouble for nothin'.

STUMPY. I dunno. It was well worth it. You tricked me once before, but I've caught you now. I said I'd catch you. I stole right up on you behind the trees, and you never knew I was comin'. (*Laughs.*)

MADGE (*Defiantly*). What do I care if you do see me!

STUMPY. Go it, my beauty. I like a girl with a bit o' devil in her. ... But you won't be so darin' next time. ... Tom won't, anyway.

TOM (*Flaring up*). What's that?

MADGE (*Checking him*). Don't answer him.

STUMPY. I can't go round as quick as I once could; but I can shoot pretty straight, Tom.

TOM. You can't frighten me like that, you old fool!²⁹² (*Laughs.*)

STUMPY (*Mockingly*). Tom's a darin' rider—he'd go full gallop down the side of a hill; but he's a bit timid off his horse.

TOM. We'll see. ... (*Turns to MADGE.*)²⁹³ Don't forget your promise, Madge.

MADGE. No fear.

STUMPY (*Suspiciously*). What's that?

MADGE. Nothing.

STUMPY. Take yourself off, Tom! I won't have you round here.

TOM. You like to sling off²⁹⁴, don't you; but I'll have the laugh at you. So long, Madge! (*He waves to her.*)

(*Exit TOM gaily.*)

STUMPY (*Exultantly*). I've got him well scared up. I bet he'd rather face a wild bull than the old man. You won't see him round here again while I'm about. I could break in my hands any pair of those young whipper-snappers you admire.

MADGE. You seem mighty pleased with yourself.

STUMPY. Aye. And I've reason for it. There's been too many people for my liking. It's better without people. (*Looking out.*) Look, there goes the cutter.

MADGE (*Climbing on rock*). I can see her.

STUMPY. They're gone—that's good—they've all gone.

MADGE. The sea looks lovely to-day. I wish I was sailin' away somewhere.

STUMPY. Away from Shipwreck! You're better where you are, Madge. We might have some peace now, peace after storm.

MADGE (*Returning*). It'll be worse now than ever.

STUMPY. Don't you believe it. Things are just as they should be. I've got something to show you, Madge.

²⁹² that, you old fool!] that! A.

²⁹³ (*Turns to MADGE.*)] not in A.

²⁹⁴ sling off] mock A.

MADGE. I don't want to see it.

STUMPY. You're wilful, Madge. You always were a wilful girl. ... There's a few things I picked up from the wreck.

MADGE. You said they were down in the cave.

STUMPY. So they were when the Sergeant was pokin' round. But I went down last night at the edge o' dark and retrieved them. I brought them along in the sled. Don't go away, Madge. Have a peep in the shed first.

(MADGE goes over.)

MADGE *(Looking into the shed)*. Good lord, what have you got there?

STUMPY. Spoils of the sea! There's a lot of stuff hidden under the nets and sails, dozens o' cases, tinned meat and fish, gallons of oil, chests of tea, enough for a year and more. ... That's only an iron bar—it might come in handy one day ... and there's some old chairs and bamboo poles—you never know your luck at sea.

MADGE. Now I know why you don't want nobody round.

STUMPY. I only want you, Madge. I trust nobody. We're far better by ourselves. ... It's a funny mixed lot o' things. Salvage work, Madge, salvage work.

MADGE. Shipwreck's a savage place, and by God, you're like it.

STUMPY. Maybe I am. I've spent most of my life around this coast. I don't exactly pray for a wreck; but when there is one—well, it's not for me to complain of an act of God.

(STUMPY picks up a few things and then goes into shed.)

(Enter SERGEANT.)

SERGEANT. Hullo, Stumpy!

MADGE. It's the Sergeant.

STUMPY. You here!

SERGEANT. I'm just having another look round. You seem surprised to see me.

STUMPY. I thought you'd left Shipwreck.

SERGEANT. Only for a few days. I meant to come back, just to make a call on you when you didn't expect me.

STUMPY. What's the game?

SERGEANT. I want to know a bit more about the wreck.

STUMPY. The *Lass O' Gowrie*?

SERGEANT. Yes.

STUMPY. Tom's put you up to this, the hound! He's in with the police.

SERGEANT. You're wrong, Stumpy. Nobody knows anything about what I'm doing.

STUMPY. He's in it somehow, damn him, that treacherous son o' mine.

SERGEANT. I could do with some more information, that's all.

STUMPY. You'd better go back to the Bastion, and get it for yourself.

SERGEANT. I noticed a lot of tins and boxes about.

STUMPY. It's food-stuff. You know yourself Carl just brought in the stores.

SERGEANT *(Looking into shed casually)*. So he did. ... And I suppose he brought those chests in there, too, and those cases.

STUMPY. Those are old things. I've had them for years.

SERGEANT. Some of those boxes still look damp. How's that? They must have been drenched in the cutter.

STUMPY. You're a great joker, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. I'd like to know how they got there, though. I hope you've nothing hidden away in the shed.

STUMPY. I don't know what there is, all sorts of odds and ends. I throw everything in there.

SERGEANT. I'd better go in and have a look. (*Going into shed.*) Great Scott! It is a collection, like an old curiosity shop.

(*Exit SERGEANT into shed.*)

STUMPY. It's only an old storeroom. I've had it for twenty years.

SERGEANT (*At opening of shed*). Hullo, what's all this! You've got plenty of sails along the rafters there. ... Is this all building material in the corner? And these cases—some are empty, and some aren't, eh, Stumpy? It's dark inside. I can't see too well. What's this lying under this pile of nets here? I'll find it. (*Coming to door with compass.*) What's this?

STUMPY. You've found something, have you?

SERGEANT. A ship's compass.

STUMPY. Yes.

SERGEANT. A ship's compass from the *Lass O' Gowrie*. How did it get here?

STUMPY. You think you're funny, Sergeant, but there's nothing to be surprised at.

SERGEANT. But how did you get hold of it?

STUMPY. It's quite simple. I was out in the skiff, and I found it floating about.

SERGEANT. Floating about!

STUMPY. Yes. And I dragged it in and brought it along.

SERGEANT. It seems to me, Stumpy, I'll have to bring you along.

STUMPY. Me. Where to?

SERGEANT. Along to the Station. You've lived outside the law and defied it; but it's got you at last.

STUMPY (*Angry and indignant*). You haven't beaten me yet.

SERGEANT. It's no use, Stumpy. Your little tale didn't bluff me. I knew you were out to the wreck, the first man as usual. There was an explosion heard early that morning.

STUMPY. Who told you that?

SERGEANT. You must have been up to something. You didn't know the lighthouse men had seen you there?

STUMPY. Oh, they put you up to this!

SERGEANT. You're as cunning as a crow, Stumpy, but I've caught you at last.

STUMPY. This won't be the end of it. Damn you I can do more than that. I'll -

SERGEANT (*To MADGE*). I'm afraid Stumpy's got to come with me.

STUMPY. No, no, I'm not goin'! I can't leave Madge. I can't leave her here. A young woman left alone, you never know what she'd be up to.

SERGEANT. Will you be all right, Madge?

MADGE. O' course I will, Sergeant. I've got me gun. (*Laughs.*)²⁹⁵

SERGEANT. You'll be able to get someone round to help you.

STUMPY. I won't have nobody about her. No tricks, my girl! I know what you've been doin'. And I'll get you, by God, I will.

SERGEANT. You'd better get your horse, Stumpy.

STUMPY. How can I travel two hundred miles on horseback?

SERGEANT. You can ride with the best of them. But there's no hurry. We needn't got fast.

STUMPY. What the hell do you mean! I won't stick it.

SERGEANT (*Putting hand on him*). Come on, Stumpy. We'll saddle up the horses.

STUMPY (*Wildly*). No, no! What'll happen if I'm away! I don't trust her. Everythin'll got to hell. Look at her. She's laughing at me. But wait till I come back. Blast you, I'll settle the lot of you ...

²⁹⁵ A young woman left alone, you never know what she'd be up to./SERGEANT. Will you be all right, Madge?/

MADGE. O' course I will, Sergeant. Ive got me gun. (*Laughs.*)] SERGEANT. Will you be all right, Madge?/MADGE.

O' course I will. I'll try to manage somehow./STUMPY. A young woman left alone, you never know what she'd be up to.

A.

SERGEANT. Come on. It's a nice day for a ride, eh?

(Exeunt SERGEANT, with STUMPY.)

*(MADGE watches STUMPY and SERGEANT go out.)*²⁹⁶

Curtain.

²⁹⁶ *(MADGE watches STUMPY and SERGEANT go out.)*] *(MADGE watches STUMPY and SERGEANT go out. She looks round carefully, and then gets her gun, climbs to the top of the cliff. She stands there for a moment, then fires two shots into the air.)* A.

ACT THREE

(The kitchen or living room. About a year later.)

(There is a porch at the back, and to the right of the porch a dresser. On the right is a window, overlooking the sea. Below it is a door leading to other rooms. On the same wall, in the corner, between the window and the dresser is a sofa, with its back turned. On the left wall is an open fireplace, with a brick oven at the side, and an old-fashioned twisted chimney. There is a kettle boiling on the fire. On the same wall hang a bridle and spurs, two guns and a belt of cartridges. An old wooden table with a lighted lamp, is in the centre of the room. Some supper things are on it. There are chairs at the table, and an arm-chair beside the fireplace.)

(A BABY, a few months old, is lying on the sofa.)

(TOM and MADGE at table, finishing supper.)

TOM *(Quietly)*. I had to chain up that dog of yours again. He'd been off with the dingoes. They were calling for him down the gully. *(TOM drinks, then puts down pannikin and rises. He crosses and gets bridle from the wall.)*

MADGE. What are you doing?

TOM. I'd better mend this bridle. *(He sits in arm-chair, mending bridle.)*

MADGE *(Pouring tea into her pannikin)*. It must have done a bit o' work.

TOM. Yes. I've covered a lot o' country in the last few weeks.

(Short pause.)

MADGE *(Drinks and puts down her pannikin)*. Heard anything of Stumpy?

TOM. He's still in gaol, I'm told, and keeping things lively.

MADGE. Strange to think of him caged up like that.

TOM. He'll never be the same man again. I can't be sorry for him, Madge. He thought he could do anything. Mother tried to make the best of him, but his cunning and cruelty were too much, and killed her in the end.

(Short pause.)

MADGE. It's a different place since he's been away.

TOM. It used to be a savage wilderness, with only a few cattle-men about and the blackfellows. It took a strong man to battle through it.

MADGE. But I'm not scared now. It's as if a curse or something had been lifted.

TOM. It would be a great place without him.

MADGE. But when he comes back!

TOM. I've thought of that.

MADGE. What'll we do then?

TOM. I've got my eye on a place—good grass and water, and plenty o' room to move. And you'll come with me, Madge. *(Rises.)* It's not too bad now. *(He hangs bridle on peg.)*

MADGE. There must be some kind o' spell about Shipwreck. I've wanted to get away; but something's always happened to hold me here.

(BABY stirs on sofa.)

MAADGE *(Rising from table)*. It's baby.

TOM. Hullo, there, what do you want?

MADGE *(Going to BABY)*. Hush, my little one, hush!

TOM *(Looking over)*. What's up?

MADGE. He was only a bit lonely.

TOM. Hullo, boy. Want to have a look at us, eh!

MADGE. Don't wake him. I don't want the light in his eyes. *(Moves sofa a little.)* You sleep there, Baby. ... Ain't he a fine little thing!

TOM. My word! He can kick like a young colt.

MADGE. We've got him anyway.

TOM. I can see that kid in the saddle soon. I'll make a great little rider of him.

MADGE. Go on. He's only two months.

TOM. Nothing like beginning young.

MADGE. I suppose you'll want to make a cattle-man of him too.

TOM. What do you think! He'll be a great help to me rounding them up.

MADGE (*Leaning over BABY*). Hush! You sleep there, Baby. Mummy's with you. Hush!
(*Short pause.*)

MADGE (*Starting up*). What was that?

TOM. What?

MADGE. Outside. I thought I heard something. Listen!

TOM (*Listening*). I can't hear anything.

MADGE. It gave me a start.

TOM. You're nervous, Madge. It was nothing at all.

MADGE. Do you know, Tom, I thought it was Stumpy.

TOM. Him!

MADGE. That funny sound on the track, soft and stealthy like, pad, pad, pad ... I must have been dreaming.

TOM. It's all right, Madge. I've got something to show you.
(*Exit TOM.*)
(*MADGE looks anxiously round and then leans over BABY.*)
(*Enter TOM, with 'possum rug.*)

TOM. See here, Madge. This is the rug I've been making for you—there's some nice 'possum skins in this one, more than a hundred.

MADGE (*Looking at rug*). What a beauty!

TOM (*Picking out a skin here and there*). That's a rare one—you don't often get that colour, that pale grey ... and that's not bad either. Feel that fur.

MADGE (*Handling rug*). They're all lovely.

TOM. There are no flaws anyhow. I picked them out of hundreds. Do you like it, Madge?

MADGE. It's the loveliest rug I've ever seen.

TOM. It's light, but it's worth two blankets.

MADGE. It's too good for me.

TOM. Damn it all. I snared the little beasts for you.²⁹⁷

MADGE. Thanks, Tom. And for him, too?

TOM. My word!

MADGE (*Putting rug over sofa*). I'll put it over the sofa. ... And I'll shift the lamp. (*Shifts lamp.*)
Now, have a good sleep, baby.

TOM (*Poking fire*). I'll make up the fire.

MADGE (*Sitting on arm of TOM's chair*). He was worth it all, Tom. He was worth everything.
(*Pause.*)

MADGE (*Rising*). I do hear somebody.

TOM. Who is it?

MADGE (*Screaming*). It's him ... it's him!
(*TOM rises as door opens.*)
(*Enter STUMPY.*)

²⁹⁷ I snared the little beasts for you.] *underlined, but not excised. B.*

STUMPY (*At door*). I'm back.

MADGE. It's Stumpy.

STUMPY. The old man's back at last.

MADGE (*Starting back*). It's not you.

STUMPY. It's only Stumpy. Ain't you glad to see me, Madge? (*Enters room.*) Hullo, is this Tom?

Didn't know you'd have company to welcome me home. You both look surprised. Didn't you hear me comin'? Oh, I forgot. I had the pad on. (*Laughs.*)

MADGE. You cunnin' old devil.

STUMPY. You didn't expect me so soon ... good conduct, that was it. They were mighty glad to see the last of me. I've been in my grave about a year with a big stone on my head. I dunno how I ever got out. But I come back to life when I got the smell o' the sea and the old gums again. (*He leans on table, looking round with a queer expression.*) I've got some old scores to pay off.

TOM. You're lookin' a bit queer.²⁹⁸

STUMPY. I'm free again, free, and I want to celebrate it. ... It's great fun to be back. It's all fresh to me again. I'm feelin' like a wallaby escaped from a pen. It was grand to get into the bush, lookin' up some of me old haunts, caves and lairs and duck holes, I used to know them all. I just seen a mob o' kangaroos—remindin' me of the old days. I ain't boastin', likely to see in their lives. Kangaroo-tail roasted, I like it better than soup. Say what you like, there's no place like Shipwreck. I'll never leave it again. There's more sport here than anywhere else. I was born and brought up on this coast, that might make a difference. (*Sees ducks on table.*) Hullo—ducks! There were no ducks in my last camp. You can still shoot, Madge? You don't mind me havin' a taste, do you. You've left one for me. (*He sits at table, and takes off a piece of duck with his fingers.*) That's good ... good. This used to be a great blackfellows' place ... always plenty o' game and fish and oysters, natural food! There's nothin' better than black duck, but a swan's just as good. I'm so hungry I could do a cygnet for supper now, stuffed with onions and fat bacon. But I'm satisfied, Madge. This is a real treat. (*He eats more duck, then sits back in his chair.*) Well, what's news? Anythin' special been happenin' at Shipwreck since I was away? No more wrecks, I suppose? (*Laughs.*) I'll have a drop o' tea if you don't mind. (*Fills pannikin and drinks.*) You can't beat a good drink o' tea.

TOM. You must be done up. Won't you got to bed?

STUMPY. There was a sort o' haze before my eyes, but it's clearing away now. ... I was worryin' how you'd get along without me; but I see you've got round Tom to help you work the place. Thanks, Tom. I didn't know I'd be away so long. It's a pretty hard place to look after, and you need a man about. You're a shrewd one, Madge. Tom's a great horseman and cattle-man. ... I give him credit for that. He'd pick out his own bullock after seven years by the shape of its head. (*Laughs.*)

TOM. What ails you? You're lookin' damn strange.

STUMPY. Tom's no son o' mine. He's too like his mother. He's touchy—take offence at nothing. (*Rising from chair.*) I don't want to put you about, but you'd hardly believe how I want to take everything in. (*He goes to porch, looking at the sea.*) There's the sea. I want big breaths of it. (*Takes big breath.*) I could get drunk on the salt air. You can see the waves glittering and sparkling, and the fish leaping like flashes of fire. And look, there's the swans ... black swans ... ain't they wonderful glidin' there, to and fro ... glidin' across the moon-path. I've knocked round a bit, but I've seen nothin' to beat this. (*Turning round at porch.*) Do you know, Madge, I often used to dream of a big red moon shinin' on this very sea when I was far away. (*Returns to room*

²⁹⁸ queer.] queer. Are you still feelin' the strain? A.

and looks round.) It was a horrible place I was put in ... horrible! I thought it would choke me to death. But I'll have somebody's blood for it yet.

TOM. You're ramblin' a lot to-night.

STUMPY. Don't mind me. I'm tryin' to get me bearin's. It's just the same old place, Madge. That's how I wanted to see it. (*Goes over to fireplace.*) It's a grand fireplace, with the brick oven at the side. And you've still kept the old twisted chimney—I'm glad o' that—it's rare now, even in the bush. And there's the guns and a belt o' cartridges hanging down -

MADGE. That's my own bridle, though.

STUMPY. I suppose you do a lot o' ridin' with Tom (*Seeing rug on back of sofa.*) That's a nice rug you've got over there. (*Rises and crosses slowly to sofa and touches rug.*)

(*MADGE stands in front of BABY.*)

Good skins and well-tanned too. (*Leaning over sofa and seeing the BABY.*) And what have we got over here! Hullo, what's this little thing? A baby! Is it a boy?

MADGE. Don't touch him.

STUMPY. Hullo, don't you know me? (*Leans over CHILD.*)

MADGE. Go away. He's mine.

STUMPY. Yours, Madge. ... So he is. I can see that now. He's his mother's hair, and her blue eyes too. But—I don't suppose wooden legs run in families.

MADGE. You get away from him. He's mine anyway.

TOM. That'll do, Stumpy. We've had enough of this.

STUMPY. And what have you to do with it? Oh, I didn't know. Tom's is it? So he's going to be a little cattle-man, is he? We'll see about that. (*He takes BABY in his arms and carries him through the porch.*)

MADGE (*Wildly*). Quick. Stop him! He'll do something. Throw him over the cliff.²⁹⁹

TOM (*Rushing after STUMPY*). I'll get him.

(*Exit TOM through porch.*)

(*Sound of struggle outside.*)

MADGE (*Screaming*). Where are you goin'!³⁰⁰

(*Exit MADGE.*)

(*Outside.*) Give him to me.

(*Re-enter MADGE, carrying BABY, followed by TOM and STUMPY.*)

They've frightened you. ... Oh, what's the matter, baby! What's the matter!

(*MADGE puts BABY on sofa.*)

(*She sits in chair.*)³⁰¹

TOM (*Wildly*). You flung him down.

STUMPY (*Quietly*). It was your fault, rushing at me like a madman. You made me drop him.³⁰²

MADGE. Oh, my baby. (*Puts him to her breast, then screams.*)³⁰³

TOM (*Going to MADGE*). My God, what is it?

MADGE (*Softly*). He's dead.

²⁹⁹ Throw him over the cliff.] B.; not in A.

³⁰⁰ Where are you goin'!] O, what is it! A.

³⁰¹ (*Sits in chair.*)] B.

³⁰² You made me drop him.] You knocked him out of my arms. A.

³⁰³ Oh, my baby. (*Puts him to her breast, then screams.*)] (*Crying over baby*). ... oh, my poor little baby. A.

*(TOM comes over to her.)*³⁰⁴

STUMPY *(Grimly)*. Poor little thing!³⁰⁵

TOM. You killed him.

STUMPY. Nobody'll ever know, Tom. ... You won't tell.

(STUMPY draws revolver, and shoots TOM who staggers and falls.)

(MADGE utters a wild cry.)

(STUMPY remains silent and motionless.)

Curtain.

³⁰⁴ *(TOM comes over to her.)*] B.; not in A.

³⁰⁵ Poor little thing!] Poor little thing!/MADGE(*Crying softly over baby*). O, baby, poor little baby! A.

ACT FOUR

Scene One

(The same. Three days later.)

(MADGE is sitting brooding before the fire.)

(Enter STUMPY.)

STUMPY. It's a fine bright morning, blue and sunny. ... You're too glum, lass. What's the matter?

MADGE. Don't look at me like that! ... Oh, I'll go mad.

(Rises and goes to porch.)

STUMPY. You're young, Madge. You're not used to the hazards of life. I was young once, too. But time and tide are always flowing.

MADGE *(Looking away)*. ... Shipwreck's got you, baby ... and Tom, too.

STUMPY. You're not listening. You're away, girl.

MADGE. Leave me alone!

STUMPY. No fear o' that. I've got you all to myself at last. Do you wonder I'm glad to be back.

(MADGE still looks away.)

What are you dreaming about?

(MADGE returns and walks about restlessly.)

MADGE. Oh, God! What can I do! I'll get away yet.

STUMPY. So you'd like to leave Shipwreck, old Shipwreck.

MADGE *(Wildly)*. It's you—it's you.

(Short pause.)

STUMPY. It's this way, Madge. I don't want you to go yet. I've got a bit o' business to do to-day. We can't both go at the same time. Someone has to mind the place. *(Chuckles.)*

MADGE *(Moving away)*. I don't care.

STUMPY. I'm takin' some things through to a couple o' prospectors back in the hills there. I've hooked up the bullocks. Didn't you hear them? No, you wouldn't hear anything. You've been in a daze.

MADGE *(Turning)*. You're goin' away?

STUMPY. Just into the bush. You don't look sorry to hear it.

MADGE. You can go to hell. I want you to.

STUMPY. I'll get there in good time. Don't worry about that.

MADGE. Has the gaol made you mad?

STUMPY. I wonder can I trust you alone. The cutter should be in any time now—and there's always the chance of a straggler.

MADGE. What's wrong with you? Are you drunk?

STUMPY. No. I'm real sober this morning. I'm taking no risks. You're a flighty girl, Madge.

(Short pause.)

I'll be back before dark, if I'm lucky. It's not too far if a man takes the short track. But you'll have the whole day to yourself.

(MADGE gives hysterical laugh.)

STUMPY. I don't think you'll be cryin' your eyes out when I'm gone. Why are you laughin'? You seem almost glad to get rid of me. Oh, you are! That's not the right kind o' feelin' for a young wife. *(Holding her.)* Come and give me a kiss. *(Tries to kiss her.)*

MADGE *(Pushing him off)*. Don't touch me.

STUMPY. Why are you so proud.

MADGE *(Fiercely)*. Go away!

STUMPY *(Quietly)*. You're so changeable, Madge. Stumpy don't change. You can always depend on Stumpy.

MADGE (*Crying out*). I hate you.

STUMPY. Hate away. I don't mind. I love you just the same. I'm as mad on you as ever.

MADGE (*Drawing back*). Don't come near me!

STUMPY (*Going to door*). Of course, if you don't really want me, I'll get a move on. (*Turning round at door*.) And you won't miss me too much? You might go for a ride. And there's the skiff. You can handle a boat. We'll see lass. We'll see about that.

(*Exit STUMPY.*)

(*MADGE walks nervously round the room. She is flushed and excited.*)

(*Re-enter STUMPY, with a bullock-chain in his hand.*)

STUMPY. Hullo, you're all flushed and excited. Are you grievin' because I've got to leave you?

MADGE (*Seeing chain in his hand*). What's that you've got?

STUMPY. Just a bullock-chain. I'm takin' no chances this trip. ... You see, Madge, I don't want to be too long away from you, so I'm takin' a short cut through the debbil-debbil country.

MADGE. It's all debbil-debbil country round here.

STUMPY. No, it ain't. There's only one strip, four or five square miles; but that's enough. It's a weird gloomy bit o' country, hidden in the scrub-covered hills. The blackfellows thought it was haunted, and kept off it. And now the stockmen always ride round it—they're scared of it too. It's always been like that. It's the queerest kind o' place I ever seen. There's no cattle runnin' wild about there. No beast'll go near it. There's no a damned lizard on it. There's no life at all, not a blade o' grass. Even the birds won't fly over it. It's all haunted or blasted or somethin'. It's debbil-debbil country right enough.

MADGE. You look more horrible than ever. Go away!

STUMPY. I'll be off soon. I've often thought o' crossin' it; but somehow I used to be scared of the old blackfellows' curse. There were lots o' blacks round here when I was a boy, and my word, they knew more than you'd think. But I'll risk it, Madge, just for your sake. I was wonderin' about the bullocks; but I think I can push 'em through. They only need a bit o' coaxin', so I've tied a piece o' barbed wire on the whip. ... That'll help them to forget their fright. (*Laughs.*)

MADGE. You savage old beast.

STUMPY. No one's ever been through the debbil-debbil country that I've heard tell of. But I'll have a go at it. Old blackfellows' talk won't stop me.

MADGE. Somethin'll happen to you. I know it will.

STUMPY. I'll be all right. It's you I'm worried about.

MADGE. Me!

STUMPY. I've been thinkin' it over, and I don't know if it's good for a young girl to be left alone.

MADGE. What do you mean!

STUMPY. Young girls do gad about these times. But I want to protect you. There may be a few wild young fellows knocking round somewhere ... you know what young fellows are. (*Laughs.*)

MADGE. What can you do!

STUMPY. I'll have to see what I can do. I've thought of a little plan.

MADGE. What is it? The look you've got, you frighten me.

STUMPY (*Quietly*). I was thinkin' of chainin' you up to the wall there.

MADGE (*Laughing wildly*). Chaining me up!

STUMPY. That's the idea.

MADGE. You wouldn't dare.

STUMPY. I'd dare anythin'. I'm not so soft-hearted as I once was. (*Goes after her.*) Don't be frightened.

MADGE. Go away!

STUMPY. Come on, my darling. (*Gets hold of MADGE.*) Now I've got you.

MADGE (*Struggling*). Let me go! Let me go!

STUMPY. You can't get away. Here's the very place.

MADGE. What are you doin'?

STUMPY. You'll see in a minute. (*He chains her to the wall with a bullock-chain.*) That's splendid.

You won't wrench this ring from the wall. I got it from the deck of a good old ship.

MADGE. Have you gone mad?

STUMPY. No. I'm sensible. You'll be safe there. The lock's all right, I think. I'll take the key with me.

MADGE. You're crazy. You must be crazy. (*MADGE struggles in vain.*)

STUMPY. Don't struggle, girl. It's no use. You can't break that chain.

MADGE. You've done enough. (*Screaming.*) Let me off! Let me off!

STUMPY. Don't scream. You might disturb the neighbours.

MADGE. Oh, if Tom was alive! ... Oh my God! (*Breaks down and cries.*)

STUMPY. Never mind Tom. I'll fix everything myself. (*Puts table near her.*) You don't think I'd let you starve, do you? I wouldn't lose you for the world. (*Takes things from dresser.*) Here's some corn beef ... and a loaf of bread.

(*MADGE lifts her head and struggles in vain.*)

MADGE. I'll make you suffer yet.

STUMPY. Steady on, there. You'll knock the loaf over.

MADGE. I don't care. I won't be chained up.

STUMPY (*Putting big jug of water on table*). Be careful. Don't spill the water. You'll need a drink before I'm back.

MADGE. You can gloat over that, can you! You'll pay yet for what you've done.

STUMPY. Hush! You're well off where you are. You can look out of the window there whenever you like. It's a nice view over the sea. ... What are you strugglin' for?

MADGE. You can't keep me here. (*Struggling.*)

STUMPY. I don't think you'll be ridin' far to-day, Madge.

MADGE. Oh, I can't bear no more. Let me free!

STUMPY. Too much freedom ain't good for a young wife. You won't be led into temptation now.

MADGE (*Screaming*). You devil! You grinnin' old devil!

STUMPY. Screams won't swerve me. You know I'm pig-headed, obstinate old man.

MADGE (*Faintly*). Oh, for God's sake -

STUMPY. Don't waste your breath, Madge. We don't go much on God in these parts.

MADGE. You'll get your death for this, I swear you will.

STUMPY. Be quiet, Madge. You can't cut the cable and drift off now. You'll be safe here. (*Looks at table.*) Is there anything more you want? There's the lamp, but you won't need it. I'll be back before dark, and it'll be a clear night, plenty o' stars and a bit of a moon. I hope you have a nice quiet time. (*Goes up to her.*) Won't you give me a kiss before I go? You can't keep me off. I can kiss your neck and your shoulder and your arm, anyway. ... Well, good-bye, little wife. I'll be back soon. I'll get the team through. The debbil-debbil country won't beat me.

(*Exit STUMPY.*)

(*MADGE struggles for a while, and then resigns herself hopelessly to her position.*)

Curtain.

ACT FOUR

Scene Two

(The same. The evening of the same day. It is light; but the sun has set, and night is quickly drawing in.)

(MADGE is sitting before table, with her head buried in her hands. She starts as if awakening from a dream. She pours out a pannikin of water and drinks it. Then she rises and feels the chain. She struggles for a moment to free herself, and then gives up the attempt. She looks vaguely round the room, and then goes to the window. She stands there looking out. Suddenly she gives a start.)

MADGE. ... What was that! *(She listens.)* It's nothing, only the wind, and the sand swirling about.

(Pause.)

(She starts and looks towards the door.)

What was that?

STUMPY *(Outside the door)*. Madge! Madge!

MADGE. Who is it?

STUMPY *(Outside the door)*. Open the door.

MADGE. My God, it's you!

STUMPY. Let me in.

MADGE. What's wrong with you?

STUMPY. I'm hurt—nearly blind.

MADGE. Blind!

STUMPY. Where's the handle! I can't reach it. ... Ah, that's it.

(STUMPY opens door and falls across it into room.)

MADGE. What are you doin'?

STUMPY. I've got here. I've got here.

MADGE *(Starting back)*. Go away! Go away!

STUMPY. I'm done for.

MADGE. God, what a sight you are! You're all over blood.

STUMPY *(Tries to move into the room)*. I can't do no more. Help me, Madge, quick!

MADGE. I can't.

STUMPY. Do something. I've collapsed. Hell, can't you do something!

MADGE. No, Stumpy, I can't.

STUMPY *(Struggling to move)*. Damn it, I can't move. I must be broken to bits. I'm done for. I know I'm done for.

MADGE. Oh, go away, you look horrible.

STUMPY. Debbil-debbil country! The bullocks wouldn't go on it, damn 'em. I started to flog 'em ... with the barbed wire tied to the whip ... blast 'em—it flew back and caught me in the eye.

MADGE. I knew there was a curse on you.

STUMPY. I was blinded, and they went wild. They turned on me and trampled me down.

MADGE. Anyway, the bullocks paid you back.

STUMPY. Madge! Madge! Come here. Don't turn away. I won't hurt you.

MADGE. You made us suffer. It's your turn now.

STUMPY. Help to lift me up.

MADGE. Help you—you!

STUMPY. I'm in pain. It'd ease me a bit.

MADGE. Not me. You've earned what you've got.

STUMPY. I've been strugglin' through the bush for hours and hours ... half blind and broken ... it was too much for me ... it was too much for any man.

MADGE (*Mockingly*). Never mind, Stumpy, you've got home, to Shipwreck.

STUMPY. Like a wounded beast to his lair.

MADGE. A savage beast, too.

STUMPY. It's the end o' me. ... Can't you help me, Madge?

MADGE (*Lifting chain*). You see I can't help you. I'm chained up.

STUMPY. Chained up!

MADGE. You chained me to the wall, you devil.

STUMPY. I forgot.

MADGE. You've got the key.

STUMPY (*Feeling in pockets*). Hell, I've lost it.

MADGE. I can't help you, then, and I wouldn't if I could. You look done, Stumpy. You can't move; but somebody's sure to come and set me free. You had your laugh when you chained me up; but I've got the laugh of you now. (*Hysterical laugh.*)

STUMPY. I can't raise myself. ... Somethin's gong wrong inside.

MADGE. You gave me an awful time. I thought I was losing my wits.

STUMPY. I can't last long ... (*Becoming delirious.*) Move, you devils. ... I'll make you move. Gee on, there! I'll flay you alive. I'm blind, am I! Curse the bloody wire. ... Oh, hell ... it's flamin' hell! (*STUMPY struggles frantically to move towards MADGE; but at last collapses against the wall.*) I want you, Madge. ... Help me. ... Come near. ... Just let me touch you ... Madge.

MADGE. It's no good tryin' to crawl to me. (*Goes to length of chain.*) Look, you can't get near me. It's no good, Stumpy.

STUMPY (*Muttering in delirium*). Go on, you brutes. ... I'll slash you and flay you and blast you. ... What the hell now! Tom's is it! (*Laughs wildly.*) I've got you now, Madge. You're chained up, my beauty. You'll gad about no more. ... Oh, the bloody wire. ... I'm blind. ... Curse the brutes ... curse them ... Madge ... Madge ... blackfellows ... debbil-debbil country ... it's dead. ... It's all dead ... the curse. ... Ah ... I'm gone ... ah ... ah! (*STUMPY groans and falls back.*)

(*Pause.*)

MADGE. The light's fadin' It'll be dark in a minute.

(*Pause.*)

How are you now, Stumpy? You're boss, are you, and you can do as you like. ... You do look funny, lyin' there, crumpled up agin the wall. ... You must be done in, Stumpy. ... Can't you move? Stumpy, you old devil, Stumpy!

(*Pause. The light fades.*)

(*Voices heard outside.*)

What was that! Someone's comin'. ... Don't you hear anythin'? They're comin' at last. ... Why don't you speak? My God, you're not dead, are you!

(*Noise of MEN outside.*)

(*CARL's voice is heard.*)

CARL (*Singing*).

Oh, Ay can't marry you, my dear

Until we get ashore

Gome, stack the weather lift, my son,

What ho, vor Baltimore.

MADGE. It's Carl.

(*Enter CARL and BEN.*)

BEN (*Shouting*).

And hey, for Baltimore!

CARL. Here's vun case vhiskey, Stumpy!

MADGE. You've come. Oh, thank God, you've come.

BEN. Madge!

MADGE. Is that you, Ben?

BEN. Yes. Where are you?

MADGE. I'm chained to the wall.

BEN (*Going to her*). Chained up! (*Finding lamp on table.*) Wait till I get a light. Here's the lamp.

CARL (*Seeing STUMPY*). My Gott! Vot is dis!

BEN. Madge chained to the wall, and Stumpy lying there on the floor.

MADGE. Quick! Help me.

BEN. We're with you, Madge.

(CARL goes over to MADGE.)

BEN. Who's done this to you?

MADGE. Him.

BEN. Stumpy! He's got you padlocked. Where's a bar? I'll break the lock.

CARL (*Picking up bar at fireplace and handing it to BEN*). How's dis?

BEN (*Taking it*). That'll do. Keep still, Madge. (*He wrenches and breaks the lock.*) That's it. ...

That's done it.

CARL (*Taking and throwing down chain*). A pullock-chain, too!

MADGE. Where am I! I can't move. (*Sways as she takes a few steps.*) My head's swimmin' round.

(BEN holds her.)

BEN. We'll look after you, Madge.

MADGE (*Screaming*). Don't let him near me.

BEN. No fear o' that. We'll get you away from here.

CARL. Petter cover him up. I pring pieces o' sail.

(Exit CARL.)

MADGE (*Vaguely*). ... Oh, it was awful, with the sand swirlin' about, and beatin' against the pane. ...

I thought someone was comin' ... but it was only the sand ... driftin' sand. ... I didn't struggle no more.

BEN (*Examining the body*). He's been through something, with his eye torn, and all spattered with blood.

MADGE. It was the bullocks ... they trampled him down.

BEN. Ah, that was it. He was trampled to death by his bullocks.

MADGE. Look, I can walk. (*Goes to window.*)

(Enter CARL, with sail.)

CARL. We cover him up ... ja ... wrap him in bit o' sail.

BEN. The very thing.

CARL. A tam gut sail, too.

(CARL and BEN wrap STUMPY in sail.)

MADGE (*Staggering and crying out*). Are you sure he's dead? Don't let him touch me. ... I'm done too.

(BEN and CARL goe to her.)

BEN. It's all right, Madge. You want a rest, and then you can tell us the whole story.

MADGE. Don't let me see him again. I'll go mad.

CARL (*Soothingly*). Hush! You must sleep, sleep.

BEN. Come with me, Madge. (*Holds her.*)

MADGE. God, there's been a curse on the place.

CARL. A curse, ja, dat vas so. But it must be vorked out now.

MADGE. Oh, take me away -

(Exit MADGE with BEN supporting her. CARL watches them sympathetically.)

(Short pause.)

(CARL then goes to look at STUMPY.)

CARL. ... Ah, Stumpy, you vas a darin' old man—ve can't gainsay dat. You t'ought nodin' could ever stop you, Gott or man or beast; but no vun is as strong as dat. ... You vas just a man, Stumby!

(Short pause.)

(Enter BEN.)

BEN. If it didn't give me a turn, it was nobody's business.

CARL *(Suddenly alarmed)*. Ah, vot vas ve doin'! Ay no take tead man on my liddle cutter. It pring pad luck.

BEN. Don't worry, Carl. *(Whispering.)* He might drop overboard.

CARL. Ah, vot you say?

BEN. He might easy slip overboard with that wooden leg of his.

CARL. Gut. I no tink o' dat.

BEN. Lift him up, Carl.

CARL. Steady dere, steady.

(They take up body.)

BEN. Come on, Carl.

CARL. ...Ve just take him liddle vay out.

(They carry out STUMPY, both singing, not loudly.)

Stumpy Sam was a roarin' sailor;

Blow, my bully boys, blow!

Wey-hey-ho! Wey-hey-ho!

Blow, my bully boys, blow!

Curtain.

Notes

ACT ONE—Scene One

like a ship's cabin: Cf. The setting for Act One of Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*:

The hilly country in the middle of the north edge of Sussex, looking very pleasant on a fine evening at the end of September, is seen through the windows of a room which has been built so as to resemble the after part of an old-fashioned high-pooped ship, with a stern gallery; for the windows are ship built with heavy timbering, and run right across the room as continuously as the stability of the wall allows.

it takes a young devil to make an old saint.: Cf. *(Proverb)* Stumpy misquotes the old medieval proverb 'Young saint, old devil.'

skiff: a typically small flat-bottomed open boat with a pointed bow and a flat stern. originally developed as an inexpensive and easy to build boat; powered by sails as well as oars.

spar: *(nautical)* a thick, strong pole such as is used for a mast or yard on a ship; ie Stumpy's wooden leg.

the licence: a Marriage Licence. Marriage law was first administered in Australia by the British colonies, which inherited British common law traditions. A major trope in the Gothic novel often involved a naive young wife, a rich older husband, and a terrible secret; Cf. Horace Walpole's, *The Castle of Otranto*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

'You've got a good head for business, Stumpy.': the theme of 'wife as commodity' and marriage as transactional also occurs in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Eden: proclaimed as a township in 1885, a coastal town in the South Coast region of New South Wales, located between Nullica Bay to the south and Calle Calle Bay, the northern reach of Twofold Bay, and built on undulating land adjacent to the third-deepest natural harbour in the southern hemisphere.

We can get [to Eden] in about three days.: A horse traversing scrubland might average 35-40 kilometres a day. According to Stumpy's advice, Shipwreck is approximately 100-120 kilometres south of Eden; nb Mallacoota Inlet is 70km from Eden, suggesting that Shipwreck is a further 30km south of Mallacoota.

ACT ONE—Scene Two

cutter: a small sailing boat with one mast, a bowsprit, a gaff and a boom.

Go, she must, or go to blazes,/ Blow, my bully boys, blow!: EJ Brady, 'Yankee Packet'

Go she must, or go to blazes -

Blow, my bully boys, blow;

Shout the good old packet's praises -

Blow, my bully boys, blow ...

der Helsingfors: (*Sweedish*) Helsinki, the capital city of Finland.

Der seas is deep, der seas is vide,/Der tead man he goes overside: EJ Brady, 'Lost and Given Over'.

chyack: to jeer at, tease, deride; Cf. Henry Lawson, *Joe Wilson and his Mater*; 'Romany was a quiet chap after all, and the chaps had no right to *chyack* him.'

the cobra had got into her keel: Cf. teredinid or *Teredo*. Although commonly called shipworms they are a shellfish and not a worm. They are also known as cobra, a name from the local Aboriginal name, *cah-bro*. They are a marine wood-borer which inhabit trees and logs that have fallen into the water and remain submerged, preferably in still water.

the Bastion: Bastion Point guards the entrance to Mallacoota Inlet

a short life and a jolly death!: Whalter's oath; Cf. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*.

wonga pigeons: (*Leucosarcia melanoleuca*) a large, plump pigeon that has a short neck, broad wings, and a long tail. Its length varies from 38 to 40 centimetres. It has pastel blue-grey back feathers. The head fades to a creamy-white colour. The underside is white with dotted dark grey spots such that a white V can be seen on its chest. They eyes are a dark red-brown colour and they have pink eye-rings that encircle them. Legs are red and the sexes appear identical but immature pigeons are browner with a less distinct V pattern.

Shady Gully: Cf. Shady Creek, Mallacoota.

the curly-headed boy: Cf. the Anonymous poem 'The Boy Who Never Told a Lie'

Once there was a little boy,

With curly hair and pleasant eye—

A boy who always told the truth,

And never, never told a lie.

Der tide waits for no man: (*Proverb*) 'Time and tide wait for no man.'

he'd go full gallop down the side of a hill: Cf. Banjo Peterson's *The Man from Snowy River* (*The Bulletin*, 26 April 1890)—

But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,

And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,

And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed,

While the others stood and watched in very fear.

fires two shots into the air: Cf. *Two shots from off stage* is used as a signal in Dion Boucicault's, *London Assurance* (5.i). Boucicault's play concerns the aging Mayfair playboy Sir Harcourt Courtly who arranges to marry 18 year old Grace Harkaway by special provision of her dead father's Will; Grace is ultimately wooed by Courtly's son Charles. This scenario informs on the same triangular relationship in *Shipwreck* (between Stumpy, his young wife and his son).

ACT THREE

twisted chimney: The twisted and flamboyant moulded brick chimney was a particular feature of English architecture in the Tudor period. the spiralled design was functional as hot air moved upwards with the flow of the wind and therefore cooled down chimneys faster than other designs; folklore suggest that the shape stopped witches from coming down the chimney.

ACT FOUR—Scene One

the debbil-debbil country: (*Aboriginal pidgin*) Devil or malevolent spirit; Cf. DH Lawrence, *Kangaroo*.

ACT FOUR—Scene Two

They turned on me and trampled me down.: Cf. the stampede that tramples and ultimately kills Briglow Bill in Esson and Brown's *The Drovers*.

Vagabond Camp

A Play, in One Act

To Katharine Susannah Prichard
(Comrade in letters)

Text B

Copy Text

One manuscript survives, held in the Campbell Howard Collection, Dixson Library, New England University. Much worked over, the original manuscript (A) has two clear revisions. The first (B) in black ink develops the 'play, in one act.'

A major revision (C) occurs, initially blue, then black, lead pencil—with both horizontal and vertical strike out marks—with the emended sub-title 'a comedy.' While there is a perceived adjustment in tone, there is not any apparent shift in the authorial intention to warrant it to be deemed 'a new play' under Tansell's assessment of 'presumptive authority.' Clearly, text (C) represents Esson's final authorial intention. I have, however, included both versions of the play in order to provide an example of Esson's dramaturgical methodology (the compression of the opening to bring us directly into the drama; additional 'jokes'; and, removal of extraneous dialogue to hone the drama) over a period of time.

It is discernible—given internal evidence—that the first draft of the play occurred in 1923 (A), and that his revision, representing a 'rehearsal-ready' script, occurred in 1928 (B); the amendments made in (C), I suggest, took place a decade later—around 1938—after making his 'literary' will, while also under some pressure from Leslie Rees, recently appointed National Drama Editor for the Australian Broadcasting commission, to supply a radio play. Although ill by this time, Esson wrote to Rees in May 1938 from the Hotel Arcadia in Sydney:

As I'll be here for a few weeks, I hope to do a bit of writing. ... After stage plays, radio drama will be my next interest.¹

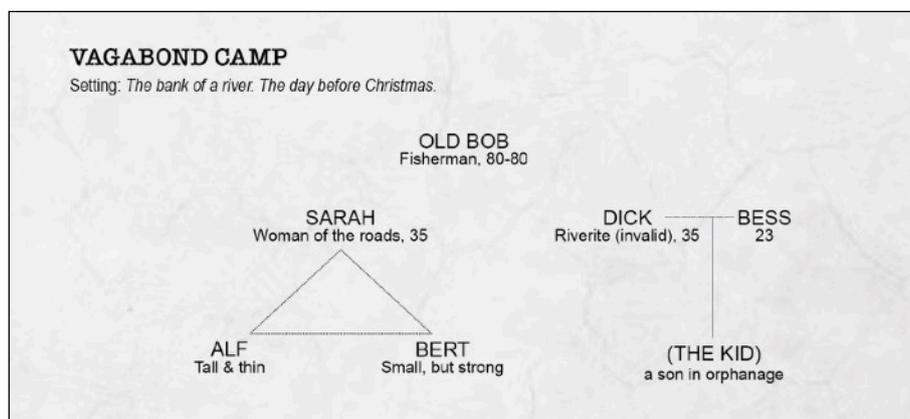
¹ Esson to Leslie Rees, 28 May 1938—Leslie Rees *Papers*, NLNSW

Characters

DICK, a riverite
BESS, his young wife
SARAH, a woman of the roads
ALF, companion to Sarah
BERT, companion to Sarah
OLD BOB, a fisherman

Setting

The bank of a river. The day before Christmas.



ACT ONE

(The scene represents the bank of a river.)

(Part of DICK's tent is shown, an old and dilapidated tent, made of superphosphate bags and covered with a kerosene tin roof. Trees may be seen lining the opposite bank of the river. There are stumps, branches and bushes about, and the ground is littered with yellow leaves.)

(It is a warm, blue, sunny afternoon, the day before Christmas.)

(Enter DICK, a country man about thirty-five, a little drunk, and carrying three bottles of beer.)

DICK *(Singing)*.

Christmas comes but once a year.

(Two men, ALF and BERT, spring at him from behind the bushes.)

Eh, what are you doin'?

ALF. These are mine.² *(He takes the bottles and puts them down.)*

DICK. What's the joke?

(The MEN struggle.)

Let go! What are you trying to do?

BERT. I'll show you, sonny. *(Knocks him down with a neat blow to the chin.)* He's down for the count.³

(The MEN then fall on him and take what he has.)

ALF *(Holding him down)*. I'll hold him.⁴

BERT. I'd better. He's in the the land o' dreams. I'd better go through him.⁵

ALF. Hurry up, Bert.

BERT. It's all right.⁶ They don't stir when I hit 'em.⁷

(Goes through his pockets.)

(BESS comes to door of tent. She is a good-looking young woman of twenty-three, with short straight black hair. She wears a short print dress, and a dark scarlet jumper, with black stockings and white shoes.)

ALF. Yow! Here's someone.

BERT. Blast it!

ALF. Come on! *(Takes up bottles.)*

BERT. Where's the beer?

ALF. I've got it. Come on, we'll do a dash.

BERT. The cow! I'd like to put the boot in.

(The MEN disappear before BESS observes them. She comes slowly out of the tent, and at last notices a MAN lying on the ground. She rushes up to him.)

BESS. My Gawd! It's me old man.

(Lifts up DICK's head on her knee.)

What's the matter, Dick?

DICK *(Looking round vaguely)*. Where am I?

² These are mine.] I'll take these. A.

³ He's down for the count.] *not in A.*

⁴ I'll hold him.] I've got him. A.

⁵ I'd better ... through him.] I'll go through him. A.

⁶ It's all right.] *not in A.*

⁷ when I hit 'em.] when I hit 'em. He's in the land o' dreams. A.

BESS. You've been hit out. Who done it?

DICK. I dunno.

BESS. Can't you get up? I'll help you.

(Tries to lift him to his feet.)

DICK *(Sinking down again)*. I'm terrible groggy. They've knocked the wind out of me.

BESS. What's the strong of it?

DICK. I dunno.

BESS. Don't you know who got to you?

DICK. I'm all dazed; can't remember a thing.

BESS. You must try, Dick. You went into the township to buy some beer for Christmas.

DICK. Three bottles. They've gone.

BESS. It's daylight robbery.

DICK *(Searching his pockets)*. And my cigarettes ... and money ... I had a few bob on me⁸ ... they've gone through me.

BESS. Lucky you didn't take that fiver with you.

DICK *(Speaking uncertainly)*. ... I must 'ave been in the pub havin' a few drinks when a couple of blokes came up and asked me to shout.

BESS. Was it them two crooks in the next camp, the big bloke and the little bloke? They're always hangin' round.

DICK *(Shaking his head)*. I dunno who they were. I⁹ wouldn't shout drinks as they weren't mates o' mine. That's why they must 'ave waited for me.

BESS. Behind the bushes there?

DICK. I dunno. They¹⁰ took all I had, Bess.

BESS. Fancy assaulting a man for what he had in his pockets! *(Lifting him up.)* Come on, Dick. Pull yourself together. That's the way. It's only a few steps.¹¹

(He walks slowly, supported by BESS.)

DICK. I'm all dazed and dithered.¹²

BESS. We'll get 'em yet. It was a funny thing to happen on Christmas eve.¹³

DICK. I dunno who done it.¹⁴

BESS. You'll remember later on when your head's clearer. ... Here we are, Dick. We're home now.¹⁵

(They reach door of hut.)

DICK. I'm knocked up. I'm all in.¹⁶ I think I'll have a stretch.

BESS. Good-Oh, I've got my own suspicions. We'll get 'em yet.

⁸ I had a few bob on me] it was only a few bob A.

⁹ dunno who they were. I] dunno. But I A.

¹⁰ I dunno. They] They A.

¹¹ It's only a few steps.] *not in A.*

¹² I'm all dazed and dithered.] I dunno who done it. A.

¹³ We'll get ... eve.] It's only a few more steps. A.

¹⁴ I dunno who done it.] *not in A.*

¹⁵ BESS. You'll remember later on ... We're home now.] DICK. I'll remember later on when me head's clearer./BESS. Here we are, Dick. We're home now. A.

¹⁶ I'm knocked up. I'm all in.] I'm all in. A.

*(Helps him inside.)*¹⁷

(Exeunt BESS and DICK into tent.)

(Enter OLD BOB, a fisherman of about seventy, with a straggling white beard. He wears old tattered clothes and corks round his hat. He sits on a stump and slowly fills his pipe.)

(Enter ALF and BERT. BERT is small, but strong and active, ALF tall and thin.)

BERT. Hallo, dad!

OLD BOB. Eh?

BERT. How are you getting on?

OLD BOB. Just keeping alive.

ALF. How's thing's? I bet you make a bit fishing. They say there's plenty o' big cod.

OLD BOB. Eh!

ALF. And 'possum skins, too.

OLD BOB *(Goes up and waves with his finger)*. You get a raisin, with cyanide, and nail it to a tree. That's the dodge to catch 'em.¹⁸ Sometimes a bloke comes round in a car and buys the skins. *(He laughs.)*

BERT. You're an old scoundrel, Bob.

(Enter SARAH. She is a woman of about forty, shabbily, but showily dressed, and bold and defiant-looking.)

ALF. Come on, Sarah. It's cooler here, with a breeze from the river.

SARAH *(Looking at OLD BOB)*. What have you dug up over there?

ALF. Don't you know him?

SARAH. It's old Bob.¹⁹

BERT. The man they couldn't hang.²⁰

ALF. He's an old-age pensioner, he's camped down the river here.²¹

SARAH. I like his whiskers and the corks in his hat.²²

ALF *(Arranging ferns and leaves)*. Sit down here, Sarah. I've got you some ferns.

(SARAH lies down on bed of ferns.)

SARAH. No doubt about it you see some queer sights in the country. If you let 'em alone the people live just like the fowls.

BERT. Open the beer, Alf.

ALF *(Opening bottle)*. All serene.

SARAH. Funny how I picked you two up, like babes in the bush. We don't meet many of your kind along the river.

BERT. We've only known you for a couple of weeks; but we ain't like strangers.

ALF *(Handing SARAH a pannikin)*. Try a cooler, Sarah.

SARAH *(Taking pannikin)*. I've got a lovely thirst. Here's a Merry Christmas to us all!

ALF. Good-O! *(Drinks.)*

BERT. After you, Alf. *(Takes and fills pannikin.)*

OLD BOB. Fishin' ain't what it used to be. *(Moves off.)*

¹⁷ Good-O ... *(Helps him inside.)*] It was a funny thing to happen on Christmas eve. A.

¹⁸ dodge to catch 'em.] dodge. A.

¹⁹ ALF. Don't you know him?/SARAH. It's old Bob.] BERT. That's Old Bob. A.

²⁰ BERT. The man they couldn't hang.] SARAH. I must have missed him. A.

²¹ ALF. He's an ... river here.] *not in A.*

²² I like his ... hat.] Strike me blind, he looks older than gawd. A.

BERT. Y'aren't going, dad! Plenty o' room for a good man.
 OLD BOB. Eh!
 BERT (*Handing him a pannikin of beer*). Have a drink with us.
 OLD BOB (*After drinking*). I'm an old-age pensioner. ... I've camped for twenty-five years along this here river. Don't I know it! I could tell you some funny things. (*Laughs.*) Funny things.²³
 ALF (*Touching his forehead*). Touched, silly in the head.
 BERT. All country blokes are touched.
 SARAH. Who's got a cigarette?
 ALF (*Giving her a packet*). I've got a packet for you.
 SARAH. We're in luck today. As long as you have plenty of enjoyment, that's the main thing.²⁴
 Everything in the garden's lovely. (*Sprawls lazily on ferns.*)
 ALF. This is Vagabond Camp, a good name for it -²⁵
 SARAH. We'll have a picnic—ain't it pretty here, in a camp on the bank of a river.
 ALF. Let's have a little harmony.²⁶
 BERT. I only know hymns.²⁷
 (*Sings.*)
Shall we gather at the river -
 ALF. Shut up, Bert. You're out o' time. I'll lead the chorus. I want to break into song.²⁸
 (*BESS comes to the door of tent and watches them.*)
 (*Singing.*)
The more we are together, together, together,
The more we are together, the merrier we'll be.
 Come on, you can all sing this.
 (*SARAH and BERT sing with ALF. OLD BOB watches them.*)
The more we are together, together, together,
The more we are together, the merrier we'll be.
 (*ALF and BERT dance round and shout.*)
 ALF/BERT. Hurrah! Hurrah!
 SARAH. Go on, Bob, have a dance.
 OLD BOB. I'm gettin'²⁹ stiff in the joints. (*Does a couple of steps and laughs.*)
 ALF. Good on you, dad.
 SARAH. Ain't you ever thinkin' o' gettin' married?³⁰
 (*They all stop.*)
 OLD BOB. I'm too old to get married. I'd be no good to a woman now. I'm thinking.³¹

²³ I'm an old-age pensioner. ... funny things. (*Laughs.*) Funny things.] I'm an old pensioner. ... I've camped for fifteen years along this river. I could tell you some funny things. (*Laughs.*) A.

²⁴ As long as ... main thing.] *not in A.*

²⁵ Camp, a good name for it -] Camp. A.

²⁶ Let's have a little harmony.] *not in A.*

²⁷ I only know hymns.] I want to break into song, but I only know hymns. A.

²⁸ Shut up. ... break into song.] Shut up. This is a better one. A.

²⁹ gettin'] too A.

³⁰ Ain't ... married?] *not in A.*

³¹ I'm too old. ... I'm thinking.] *not in A.*

BERT (*Taking off his hat and fanning himself with it*). Whew! It's hot.
 (*BESS goes back inside tent.*)

SARAH. Look, you can see the water shinin' through the trees.

BERT. I'd rather have a beer.

SARAH. You've no eye for beauty, Bert.

BERT. Haven't I now! Sarah looks like that Cleopatra in the pictures, lounging and lazy. (*Sits down beside her.*) You just want somebody to wave a fan over you, Sarah! (*Tries to kiss her.*)

SARAH. Don't annoy me. I was lovely and comfortable.

BERT. You've got some bonzer curves.

SARAH. Leave me alone. It's too hot for kissin' and muggin'.

BERT. You give a man feelings, Sarah. I'll squeeze you to death.
 (*Holds her.*)

SARAH (*Struggling*). Go away, Bert. (*Pushes him off.*) I was feeling so nice and drowsy.

BERT (*Rising*). You're hard, Sarah.
 (*ALF comes up.*)

ALF. Have a bit o' sense, Bert.

BERT (*Walking away*). What does a man live for except money and women and trying to pick winners.

SARAH (*Making herself comfortable*). You've got me all hot and bothered.³² Never mine love-making. I just want to doze and dream.

ALF. It's all Bert's fault.

SARAH. Any more beer?

BERT (*Taking bottle from hip pocket*). I've got a bottle up my sleeve.

SARAH. Good-O!

BERT. We might as well get drunk as be as we are now.³³

ALF. I've got the philosophy of life. Live as long as you can, drink as much beer as you can, work as little as you can—and don't complain.

BERT (*Handing SARAH a pannikin of beer*). Try this, Sarah.

SARAH. I think that saved my life.

BERT. I don't want to be nasty; but we've got to settle this business, me and Alf.

SARAH (*Angrily*). What the hell are you talking about!

BERT. Steady, Sarah. Don't go taking the bit in your teeth for a start.

SARAH. You'll spoil everything if you're not careful. I thought we'd have a little jollification together for the festive season.

ALF. That's the idea.

BERT. Get out you smoodger. I've had about enough³⁴ o' this three-cornered game. I ain't goin' to be the dummy.

ALD. Getting snotty³⁵, ain't you!

BERT. Too right, I am. It's my turn, Sarah.³⁶

SARAH. Do you think you own me?

³² You've got me ... bothered.] I'd like a bit o' peace now. A.

³³ We might ... as we are now.] *not in A.*

³⁴ about enough] enough A.

³⁵ Getting snotty] Jealous A.

³⁶ It's my turn, Sarah.] *not in A.*

BERT. Gorblime, it's more like as if you owned us.³⁷

(*OLD BOB rises and walks away.*)

OLD BOB. I ain't had a woman for thirty years, and I ain't worrying.

(*Exit OLD BOB.*)

SARAH. Listen to that old codger, he looks older than Gawd³⁸ ... I like the corks on his hat.

BERT. I want you, Sarah. It's my turn. I must have you to-night.

SARAH. Give it a rest, Bert.

ALF. All this bloody fuss is over you, Sarah.

SARAH. I'm sure I don't want no fuss.

BERT. Who's it going to be, Sarah, me or Alf?³⁹

SARAH. Don't be foolish, boys. I might want to keep you both.⁴⁰

BERT. I'll take him on at anything. We'll throw the dice for you if you like, or out the cards.

SARAH. Shut up⁴¹, Bert. I won't have no arguments in my⁴² camp.

BERT. I'm a good sport, but I want a fair go. Come on, Alf, and I'll blind you with science.

ALF. You can't beat Bert for a skite.⁴³

SARAH (*Rising*). I don't⁴⁴ want to start one o' yer Fitzroy vendettas. I've heard o' yer razor-slashin', but none o' them flash tricks here.⁴⁵

ALF. Where are you going, Sarah?⁴⁶

BERT. Hold on, I ain't finished yet.⁴⁷

SARAH (*Angrily*).⁴⁸ Blast you, do what you damn well like, but don't bother me. I had a wonderful scheme and you're trying to spoil it. I'll tell you nuthin'.⁴⁹ (*Moves off.*) Don't follow me! You can keep your beer. I'm goin' off on me own.

(*Exit SARAH.*)

ALF. See what you done now! She's offended.

BERT. Gawdstruth, they're all the same.⁵⁰ (*Fills pannikin.*) Have a drink, Alf.

³⁷ Gorblime, it's more ... owned us.] It looks as if you own us. Who's it going to be, Sarah?/SARAH (*Lightly*). Don't be foolish. I might want to keep you both. A.

³⁸ codger, he looks older than Gawd] codger. It's like hearing gawd talk A.

³⁹ Who's it going to be, Sarah, me or Alf?] *not in A.*

⁴⁰ SARAH. Don't be foolish, boys. I might want to keep you both.] ALF. He started it./BERT. And I mean to finish it./SARAH. Ar you going to fight about it, you two! A.

⁴¹ Shut up] Sit down A.

⁴² arguments in my] jealousy in Vagabond A.

⁴³ BERT. I'm a good sport ... science./ALF. You can't ... skite.] ALF. He'll be wantin' to draw a razor next. A.

⁴⁴ (*Rising.*) I don't] (*Rising*). None o' them flash tricks here! I don't A.

⁴⁵ I've heard ... flash tricks here.] *not in A.*

⁴⁶ ALF. Where ... Sarah?] BERT. I'm a good sport; but I want a fair go. A.

⁴⁷ BERT. Hold on ... yet.] *not in A.*

⁴⁸ (*Angrily.*)] (*Rising angrily.*) A.

⁴⁹ scheme and you're trying ... nuthin'.] scheme, but you're puttin' it out o' my head. You've got me all flustered. A.

⁵⁰ Gawdstruth, they're all the same.] I don't care. A.

ALF. Well, here we are, Bert.⁵¹ We had to get away till rumours o' that last job blew over.

BERT (*Fills pannikin*). We might have struck a livelier place.

ALF. I don't mind camp life for a change.

BERT. What sort o' camp is it! A dirty, ragged, rotten⁵² tent, eighteen pence a week, and dear at the money.

ALF. You didn't expect it to be like Government House, did you?

BERT. Made o' superphosphate bags with a kerosene tin roof! Too bloody primitive for me.

ALF. It'll do me for a bit. No complaints.⁵³

BERT. And those fly-blown riverites you find livin' here, about as intelligent as pigs. They never see a decent race or a picture show or a game o' football⁵⁴, they never see a damn thing. They might as well be out o' the world. I've had enough o' this free life⁵⁵, and the great open bloody spaces. (*Throws away beer bottle.*) Give me Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. (*Sits down and lights a cigarette.*)

(*Enter BESS. She watches them closely.*)

ALF. Good day, lady.

BESS. What are you doing here?

ALF. We're strangers, and we've been admiring the scenery.

BESS. You seem to be having a merry time. (*Finds beer bottles.*) Where did these bottles come from?

ALF. A Christmas box, lady.

BESS. That's only a blind.⁵⁶ You ain't up to no good.

BERT (*Coming forward*). A Merry Christmas.

BESS. I've been watching you, and I know what your little game is.

BERT. Don't get scotty over nothing. Join our little party. Have a cigarette.

BESS (*Taking and looking at packet*). Where did you get these?

ALF. You're terrible suspicious to-day.

BESS. You can't bluff me.

BERT. You're pretty cute for a country girl.

BESS. I know how you got 'em, and five shillings too, and three bottles o' beer. You robbed my poor husband.

BERT. Didn't know you were married.

ALF. What's your trouble, lady?

BESS. Great men you are to attack an invalid. You know he's got a bad leg, and work's hard for him.

BERT. Work's always hard, too bloody hard for me.

BESS. Anyone can see he's delicate. He's been gassed.

BERT. Gassed at home, you mean.

(*The MEN laugh.*)

⁵¹ Well, here we are, Bert.] Sarah's got her head screwed on right. ... Well, here we are, Bert. A.

⁵² it! A dirty, ragged, rotten] it! a dirty ragged rotten A.

⁵³ It'll do ... complaints.] What's the good o' growling! A.

⁵⁴ or a game o' football] or a football match A.

⁵⁵ this free life] this life A.

⁵⁶ That's only a blind.] *not in A.*

BESS. You're cowardly bandits, that's all you are, a pair o' cowardly bandits.⁵⁷ But I'm not frightened of you. You donged him, and you can't deny it.

BERT. You needn't take offence at that.

BESS. You knocked him down and stole his beer because he wouldn't shout for you in the pub. And why should he? D'you think he'd shout for city crooks⁵⁸ like you! It's not as if he was a drunk. He was only bringing home a few bottles for Christmas.

ALF. So that's the yarn he told you.

BESS. Yes. Ain't it true?

ALF. And did he tell you about Sarah?

BESS. Sarah?

ALF. Our little Sarah. She's our bit o' mutton.

BESS. You're shrewd, but it's only a shelf.⁵⁹

BERT. Didn't he tell you he was trying to steal Sarah? That's why we got to him, missus.

BESS. You're a liar. He's been with me for five years, and we've got a kid.

BERT. Where is it?

BESS. D'you think I'd keep it here! This ain't no place to bring up a kid.

BERT. I seen a few kids that don't seem to belong to nobody running around like little mongers.

ALF. Sarah's in our camp, and we won't have no one fooling round. Do you blame us for that!⁶⁰

BESS. A fine tale to screen yourself. I know better
(Enter OLD BOB.)

OLD BOB. The best way to catch cod's with a draw-net. You get some wire-nettin', in two or three hoops, like a rat-trap. That's the way. Eh!⁶¹

BESS. We'll see about this.⁶²

ALF. It's the truth, lady. You needn't make a song⁶³ about it.

BESS. I'll report you, see if I don't.

BERT. You're allowed to, lady.

BESS. I'll tell the police.

BERT. You wouldn't do that.

BESS. Just you wait and see.

BERT. The protest is dismissed.⁶⁴

ALF. You can't prove anything against us.

BERT. Don't you know it's the unwritten law!

⁵⁷ You're cowardly bandits, that's all you are, a pair o' cowardly bandits.] You're city crooks, that's all you are, a pair o' dirty crooks. *A.*

⁵⁸ city crooks] wasters *A.*

⁵⁹ You're shrewd, but it's only a shelf.] *not in A.*

⁶⁰ ALF. Sarah's in our camp ... blame us for that!] ALF. Sarah's in our camp ... blame us for that!/BERT. I'd like to kick the guts out of him, the mangy little cur. *A.*; ALF. Sarah's in our camp ... blame us for that!/BERT. I'd like to kick the guts out of him, the mangy little cur. The bloody cheek of him. *excised B.*

⁶¹ That's the way. Eh!] *not in A.*

⁶² about this.] about this. I'll tell the police. *A.*

⁶³ song] stink *A.*

⁶⁴ BESS. I'll report you .../BERT. The protest is dismissed.] BESS. I don't believe you. You're shrewd, but it's only a shelf. I know what Dick is. I'll see the plain -clothes man. *A.*

BESS. You think you're cunning, coming the bluff, but I'll put your pot on yet, you cowardly swine.
 I'll see the plain-clothes man.⁶⁵
(Exit BESS.)

BERT. A sweet-tempered little sheila⁶⁶, my oath!
 ALF. Damn her, what's she going to do!
 BERT. Nothing.
 ALF. I don't want to see the police. You dunno how they'll inquire into your family history. I come up to the country to get a bit o' quiet.
 BERT. They won't bother about us.
 ALF. Won't they! I don't like the look of it.⁶⁷
(Enter SARAH.)

SARAH. What's up now? Quarrellin' agen', my Gawd!⁶⁸
 ALF. What d'you think o' this? She's⁶⁹ gone for the police.
 BERT. Alf's got the wind up. He always was a squib.
 ALF *(Asserting himself)*. Who settled with little Dickie!
 BERT. Who did! I'll show you. *(To SARAH.)* Look at my hand, still covered with blood. It was me that hit the b--- and I'll hit him agen.⁷⁰
 SARAH. Never mind that. D'you think she's really gone for the police?
 ALF. She'd do anything, that woman.
 SARAH. You might both be pinched, and what would I do then!
 BERT. It's your fault, Sarah. You got us into this mess.
 SARAH. I'll get you out again, if you'll keep quiet and listen to me. We've got to play for safety. You'd better lie low for a bit.
 OLD BOB *(Coming up)*. Why don't you go fishin'? It's you both gettin' dotty about women. I ain't fretful.
*(Exit OLD BOB.)*⁷¹

ALF. What are we going to do?
 BERT. Look at him—sky-blue pink with funk.⁷²
 ALF. It might be a serious charge and lead to complications.
 SARAH. I'll fix it all up. I know the traps round here.⁷³ But you'd better get off, make yourselves scarce.

⁶⁵ I'll see the plain-clothes man.] *not in A.*

⁶⁶ sheila] piece A.

⁶⁷ ALF. Won't they! I don't like the look of it.] ALF. Won't they! I don't like the look of it./BERT. You needn't get excited about it. A.

⁶⁸ SARAH. What's up now? Quarrellin' agen, my Gawd!] SARAH. What's up now?/ALF. Go to hell./BERT. You big funk./SARAH. Fiughtin' agen! O, my gawd! A.

⁶⁹ What d'you think o' this? She's] She's A.

⁷⁰ and I'll hit him agen.] and I'll hit him agen./ALF. You can't beat Bert for a skite./SARAH. Don't start quarrelin' all over agen./OLD BOB. It ain't no use gettin' dotty about women. Why don't you go fishin'? I ain't fretful. *(Exit OLD BOB.)* A.; and I'll hit him agen./SARAH. Never mind that./ALF. You can't beat Bert for a skite./SARAH. Don't start quarrelin' all over agen./OLD BOB. It ain't no use gettin' dotty about women. Why don't you go fishin'? I ain't fretful. *(Exit OLD BOB.) excised B.*

⁷¹ OLD BOB *(Coming up)*. Why ... *(Exit OLD BOB.)*] *not in A.*

⁷² ALF. What are we going to do?/BERT. Look at him - sky-blue pink with funk.] *not in A.*

⁷³ I know the traps round here.] *not in A.*

BERT. What's the idea, Sarah?
 SARAH. Run away, and I'll tell you after.
 ALF. I don't want to see the police.
 SARAH. You know the spot down the river I showed you.⁷⁴ You'll be as safe as the bank there.⁷⁵
 ALF. You've got a shrewd head, Sarah.⁷⁶
 SARAH. Just be there till I tell you.
 ALF. I'm not looking for trouble.⁷⁷
 BERT. Come on, you big mug.
(Exeunt ALF and BERT.)
(A pause.)
(SARAH waits, looking round quietly.)
(Then enter DICK from his tent. He is still a little shaken and excited.)
 DICK. Sarah! It's you!
 SARAH. Hullo, Dicky-boy.
 DICK. They got to me, over by the bushes there. I was off me guard.
 SARAH. They were jealous of you, Dick, as jealous as mad bulls. But I'll pay them out for it.
 DICK. Have they gone?
 SARAH. They're hiding from the police.
 DICK. What's the next move?⁷⁸
 SARAH. It's Christmas to-morrow. Can't we have a bit of a spree!
 DICK. You and me, Sarah!
 SARAH. Yes. But how can we? I'm nearly broke.
 DICK. I've got a few quid safe.
 SARAH. I thought they went through you.
 DICK. I only had a few bob on me. I left a fiver at home.
 SARAH. That was a bit of luck. If you've got the money, bring it along and we'll clear out together.
 I've had enough of this rotten camp.
 DICK. There's nothing much here, only wheat fields and the same old river.
 SARAH. We'll get away from here. The world is wide, Dicky.
 DICK. You're a queer one, Sarah. I can't make you out. You've just been with two other blokes. Why do you want me?
 SARAH. It's always a bit of sport to take a man from another woman.
(Enter BESS, who hides behind the bushes, watching them.)
 DICK. I never met a woman like you before.
 SARAH *(Fixing her garter provocatively)*. You can't kid me. I don't believe half the things men⁷⁹ say.
 DICK. That's a lovely leg you've got.
 SARAH. Glad you like it.

⁷⁴ You know the spot ... I showed you.] *not in A.*

⁷⁵ bank there.] bank. Leave it to me. A.

⁷⁶ You've got ... Sarah.] *not in A.*

⁷⁷ SARAH. Just be there till I tell you./ALF. I'm not looking for trouble.] ALF. It's no use running into trouble. A.

⁷⁸ What's the next move?]) What are we going to do! A.

⁷⁹ believe half the things men] believe what men A.

DICK. My oath, I do. ... You're a beaut, Sarah. I must have you. (*Trying to kiss her.*) Come on, give us a kiss, just one.

SARAH. Not just now, later on. Listen. You can meet me, if you like, at the bend of the river.

DICK. Just ourselves.

SARAH. Yes, you know the spot.

DICK. And we'll have some kisses then?

SARAH. Heaps.

DICK. I'm balmy over you, Sarah. I've been balmy for weeks. I don't care what happens. Give us a kiss now. I can't wait.

(*Tries to kiss her.*)

(*BESS comes out from behind the bushes.*)

SARAH. Look out, Dick. Here's your missus.

DICK (*Trying to hold her*). Sarah, wait a bit, don't go yet!

SARAH (*Breaking away*). Got to fix things up. I'll see you some more⁸⁰.

(*Exit SARAH.*)

DICK (*Following her*). Eh, Sarah!

(*When DICK returns, BESS confronts him.*)

BESS. Strike a light, it's you!

DICK. What are you don' here?

BESS. I've been watching you chasing round Sarah, you silly goat.

DICK. Me.

BESS. You damn fool, she's got you on a string, makin' a holy show of you, leading you round like a prize calf, and laughin' at you all the time.

DICK. Sarah's all right.

BESS. Oh, yes, Sarah's all right, showing you her garter, and the shape of her leg. ... That was a fine yarn you spun refusin' to shout for strangers in the pub. You didn't tell me how Sarah had got hold of you and her blokes were jealous. That's why they got to you, and serve you damn well right.

DICK. Ease off, now.

BESS. It was just as well I didn't find the plain-clothes man. What a fool I would 'ave looked!

DICK. Run away; there's nothing doing here.

BESS. You want to see Sarah again. Careless swine she is. Look how they're livin', in a tent with rotten bag walls. They don't come down half way, and you can see their legs.

DICK. Too right you can. I've been admiring Sarah's ankles for weeks.

BESS. To think of you givin' a woman the glad eye, Gawdstruth, it makes me laugh. You're not worth two bob.⁸¹ You with your old mouldy face and your gammy leg and a cough on you like a sick sheep.

DICK. Y'ain't jealous, are you?

BESS. Jealous! I thought you liked the young stuff.⁸² She's years older than me, and all painted up, mutton tryin' to look like lamb.⁸³ I've got better legs than her. But you've gone blind. I'll soon show you who's jealous. I'll -

DICK. Hold on there.

⁸⁰ some more] later A.

⁸¹ You're not worth two bob.] *not in A.*

⁸² I thought you liked the young stuff.] *not in A.*

⁸³ painted up, mutton tryin' to look like lamb.] painted up. A.

BESS. I didn't jerry to it before. You're a devil of a fellow with the women, ain't yer! (*Laughs mockingly.*) I mustn't think of it. It'll give me hysterics.

(*Enter SARAH.*)

SARAH (*With a challenging smile*). Good day.

BESS. Clear out o' this, you.

SARAH (*To DICK*). Don't she put on airs!

DICK. Take no notice of her.

BESS. Get out. I don't want to speak to you.

SARAH. Don't be silly. Let's make it up, and be friends.

BESS. Friends with you! What will you want next, ham and eggs in Pentridge?⁸⁴

SARAH. You've got to take life as it comes, that's the only way to keep young.

BESS. Don't talk to me, a thing like you. I've nothing to do with you.

SARAH. Now listen. We might get a job at the cannery and⁸⁵ work together ...

BESS. How many more men do you want! You're livin' with two already—and a nice pair o' crooks they are. That ain't too pretty, is it?

SARAH. They've some funny ways in this camp. They think nothing of swapping wives, and sometimes it's the wives who swap their husbands.

BESS. Your argument's over ripe.⁸⁶

SARAH. You can't account for a woman's fancy, can you!⁸⁷

BESS. Get out o' this and go to hell.

SARAH. There ain't many women in this camp, and I dunno why we want to quarrel. None of us is perfect.⁸⁸ Have it your own way, then.⁸⁹ I'm too much a lady to force my company where it ain't wanted. The compliments of the season!

(*SARAH begins to move away.*)

BESS. There's lots o' stragglers along the river, nondescripts and ne'er-do-wells; but a woman—and God knows if she's married or not—living in a tent by herself, with two men hanging around,⁹⁰ that's a nice example for the young women of the camp.

(*SARAH turns.*)

SARAH. I say, Dicky boy.

DICK. Yes.

SARAH. Come here.

(*DICK goes over to her.*)

BESS. Don't you go.

DICK. Nobody asked you to butt in.

SARAH. You won't disappoint me, will you!

DICK. Not me.

SARAH. And you'll keep our appointment? You know where I mean.

⁸⁴ What will you want next, ham and eggs in Pentridge?] *not in A.*

⁸⁵ job at the cannery and] job and *A.*

⁸⁶ SARAH. They've some funny ... over ripe.] *not in A.*

⁸⁷ can you!] can you! I know ... I'll change you partners if you like. I'll have little Dicky, and you can have ... what about Alf? *A.*

⁸⁸ None of us is perfect.] *not in A.*

⁸⁹ way, then.] way. *A.*

⁹⁰ tent by herself, with two men hanging around,] tent with two men, *A.*

DICK. Right-O!

SARAH. I knew you couldn't refuse me anything. Now don't forget.

DICK. Not on your life.

SARAH. I'll be waiting for you, Dicky dear.

(Exit SARAH, laughing.)

BESS. Y'ain't goin' to meet her, are you?

DICK. Why not! D'you think you can stop me!

BESS. She's only makin' a fool of you.

DICK. Don't you worry.

BESS. What chance have you got with them two men?

DICK *(Swaggeringly)*. I've got a rough chance.

BESS. You're like a sheep, goin' to the slaughter.

DICK. I'll risk it. I can look after myself.

(DICK makes for tent.)

BESS. What are you up to now?

DICK. That's my business.

(Exit DICK into tent.)

BESS *(Calling after him)*. You can do what you like, you goat. It won't trouble me.

(Enter OLD BOB, with fishing lines etc.)

OLD BOB. I'll try my luck in the river.

BESS. There ain't much luck in this blasted river.

OLD BOB. You never know. I might get a bream or a cod or a stray catfish.

BESS. I wasn't thinkin' about the fish.

OLD BOB. There's a lot o' snags.

BESS. Too many bloomin' snags.

(Enter DICK from tent, with small swag.)

Hullo, what's your game?

DICK. Don't be so inquisitive⁹¹.

BESS. You've had your swag made up.⁹²

DICK. I'm travellin' light.

BESS. Are you drunk? Are you balmy? What's gone to your silly head?

OLD BOB. I'm just fixin' me lines. *(Sits down busy with his lines.)*

BESS. You're mad. You've gone ravin' mad chasin' after that woman. She's been wanderin' up and down the river for years, and always with different men. She's only a vagabond, a woman of the roads.

DICK. What's wrong with Sarah?

BESS. There's only one thing wrong about her, there's nothing right.⁹³

DICK. Oh, shut up, can't you!

BESS. My Gawd, to think we've been together for years, on cockie⁹⁴ farms and way-back sheep stations. Didn't I nurse you, night and day, when you were ill and nearly died!

DICK. Try to forget it. Here ... take this.

(Hands her two pound notes.)

⁹¹ inquisitive] curious A.

⁹² You've had your swag made up.] You've got your swag. A.

⁹³ DICK. What's wrong with Sarah?/BESS. There's ... right.] *not in A.*

⁹⁴ cockie] out-back A.

I'm givin' you some of me money. That's fair, ain't it!

BESS. Glory! Oh, my!

DICK. And you can keep the tent. (*Begins to move away.*)

BESS. For Gawd's sake, Dick, think what you're doin'!

DICK. I reckon we're square.

BESS. What about the kid?

DICK. Damn the kid. You can have him.⁹⁵

BESS. You're not going, you're not going to that woman. (*Tries to hold him.*)

DICK. Let go. Let my go. (*Pushes her off.*)

BESS. You dirty little grub, you can⁹⁶ got to hell if you like, but don't come back.

DICK. No chance. I've had enough of you and your bloody temper.

BESS. You look like a fourpenny rabbit.⁹⁷ I'm warnin' you now. Don't you come whingin' back to me.

DICK. What, come back! Back here—to you! (*Laughs.*) Gawdstruth, you must think I'm a mug. I've got somethin' better to do. (*Goes off gaily.*)
Christmas comes but once a year!
(Exit DICK.)

BESS (*Calling after him*). You fool, you fourpenny rabbit,⁹⁸ you blithering idiot—you're not worth a drink o' water.⁹⁹

OLD BOB (*Looking up from his nets*). Eh!

BESS. I've had enough of this camp life. Call these rusty old kerosene tins a house!¹⁰⁰ It ain't fit for a Chinaman. Fancy me, the fool, livin' in a place like that. I want a proper sort o' home.¹⁰¹

OLD BOB. Lookin' up at the sky last night I never seen so many stars before ... shinin' and sparklin'—you couldn't count 'em—the sky was just blazin' with stars. Ain't it wonderful how the stars come and shine over this bloomin' old Vagabond Camp.

BESS. Blest!¹⁰² if I know.
(Exit BESS into tent.)
(OLD BOB potters round with his fishing lines. Then he sings to himself.)

OLD BOB. *Three little black fish
 Just been hooked;
 Three little johnny-cakes
 Nearly cooked.
 Three little tucker-bags
 Nice and plump,
 And the dashed old flour-bag
 Dangling on a stump!*
(Enter BESS, carrying a bundle.)

⁹⁵ You can have him.] He'll be all right. A.

⁹⁶ You dirty little grub, you can] You can A.

⁹⁷ You look like a fourpenny rabbit.] *not in A.*

⁹⁸ fool, you fourpenny rabbit.] fool, A.

⁹⁹ idiot - you're not worth a drink o' water.] idiot. I've done with you. A.

¹⁰⁰ house!] house. A.

¹⁰¹ proper sort o' home.] proper house. A.

¹⁰² Blest] Blessed A.

BESS. Two can play at this game. There's nothing to keep me here. There ain't too many women about and I can pick up a man whenever I like. I'll get something better than my little Dicky-bird next time. I was a damn fool to stick to him so long.

OLD BOB. I might get a haul to-night.

BESS. The liar he is. Little Dicky gave me two notes and said we were square. He kept the rest for himself, but that woman'll get it all from him. ... But I'd a tenner planted for a rainy day. (*Holds up note.*) He didn't know about that. This is my little lot. (*Pointing to tent.*) And he gave me that beautiful home¹⁰³—he can keep it.

OLD BOB. Some of us don't want to shift. You can see where they've put pegs in the trees, and made a rough platform so they can go up and stay there when the river rises. Sometimes when a big flood comes down, a few of us get drowned.

BESS. He can drown if he likes, it won't upset me. I don't want him, the mangy little cur.¹⁰⁴ I'm clearing out.

OLD BOB. Eh!¹⁰⁵

BESS. I'll treat myself to a good time. It don't matter much where I go. Men are all fools over women.

OLD BOB. I don't want to hook one.

BESS. So long, dad. We ain't really married, you know, and the kid's in the orphanage, so there's nothin' to keep me to him. We're square, right enough, and I can go with a good conscience.

OLD BOB. The river'll do me. My luck's in the river.

BESS. I'm off for pastures new. Luck, did you say! I'll change my luck on the roads. A Merry Christmas, Bob.

(*Exit BESS.*)

(*OLD BOB again fixes his lines, singing to himself.*)

OLD BOB. *Three little black fish*

Just been hooked,

Three little johnny-cakes

Nearly cooked.

Three little tucker-bags -

(*Enter DICK, distractedly, with clothes torn, and spattered with mud.*)

DICK (*Breathlessly*). Gawdstruth, it was that cow, Sarah.

OLD BOB. Eh!

DICK. She got me down by the bend of the river, and two blokes jumped up and knocked me rotten. It was a trap. I was rooked—rooked¹⁰⁶ -

OLD BOB. I'm goin' fishin'.

DICK (*Going to tent and calling*). Bess, Bess! Come here. I'm in a hell¹⁰⁷ of a mess, mud and blood all over me.

OLD BOB. ... Always fishin' and fishin'. ...

DICK. I've had two teeth knocked out, and a cut over the eye. They're crooks, a pair of crooks from Fitzroy. ... Bess, where are you, Bess! (*He looks into tent.*)

(*Returning.*)

¹⁰³ home] house A.

¹⁰⁴ him, the mangy little cur.] him. A.

¹⁰⁵ Eh!] *not in A*

¹⁰⁶ rooked - rooked] robbed—robbed A.

¹⁰⁷ a hell] the hell A.

Where the hell can she be!

OLD BOB. Eh!

DICK. Bess. Haven't you seen her about?

OLD BOB. I never bother about women.

DICK. But you know Bess.

OLD BOB. I'm only an old codger, but I'm fly!

DICK. Where has she gone? What was she doin'?

OLD BOB. Eh! I know what she was doin'. (*Laughs.*)

DICK. What? Don't laugh like that. Tell me, quick.

OLD BOB (*Slowly*). Yes. ... I remember now. She had a bundle. ... She was clearing out.

DICK. Clearing out, rot! I don't believe it.

(*DICK rushes into tent, and then comes out bewildered-looking.*)

My gawd, it's true. She's taken her clothes. She's gone.

OLD BOB. And she had a ten-pound note in her hand.

DICK. Damn her, damn her! Going off without a word, who ever heard of a thing like that! (*He stamps up and down.*) If I could¹⁰⁸ get hold of her, I'd -

OLD BOB. Eh!

DICK. Any many might do his block over a woman, especially if he had a few drinks in. But for her to go off like that and¹⁰⁹ break up the bloody home, Gawd spare me days!

OLD BOB. Sometimes I never get a bloomin' bit, but it's better than runnin' after women. I tell you I haven't had a women for thirty years, and I won't want one for another thirty. I'll try me luck in the river. ... Here goes.

(*Exit OLD BOB, with his lines.*)

DICK. Well, I'm damned! (*Turns and walks towards tent.*)

Curtain.

Notes

superphosphate: Superphosphate fertilizers are produced by treatment of 'phosphate rock' with acids.

smooder: (*Australian, colloq.*) someone who behave in an ingratiating manner.

Fitzroy vendettas: Joseph Theodore Leslie 'Squizzy' Taylor was a central figure in the 'Fitzroy Vendetta', a violent feud between rival criminal gangs that lasted for several months in 1919. One gang, from Richmond, was headed by Taylor and the 'two-up king' Henry Stokes, while the other gang was based in Fitzroy and included Edward 'Ted' Whiting, Henry 'Long Harry' Slater and Frederick Thorpe.

razor-slashin': Razor gangs were criminal gangs that dominated the Sydney crime scene in the 1920s. With the passage of the *Pistol Licensing Act (NSW) 1927*, the New South Wales State Parliament imposed severe penalties for carrying concealed firearms and handguns. Sydney gangland figures then chose razors as preferred weapons, for their capacity to inflict disfiguring scars.

He's been gassed: One of the enduring hallmarks of World War One was the large-scale use of chemical weapons, commonly called, simply, 'gas'. Esson wrote to Vance Palmer from London that his half-brother Frank Brown 'got a bit of gas [in France] and lost weight, but on the whole he has been fairly lucky.'

mongs: (*British, informal*) a person who is stupid or who has learning difficulties.

sky-blue pink with funk: Cf. blue-funk (*slang*), a state of great terror or loss of nerve; sky-blue pink (*British, informal.*), a jocular name for a nonexistent, unknown, or unimportant colour; so the implication is that Alf is 'putting it on.'

¹⁰⁸ (*He stamps up and down.*) If I could] (*He stamps up and down.*)/ OLD BOB. I'm too old to get married. I'd be no good to a woman now./DICK. If I could A.

¹⁰⁹ But for her to go off like that and] But to go off and A.

wheat fields: Shepparton lies at 'the heart of the Victorian food bowl' supporting large areas of agricultural production.
Pentridge: Her Majesty's Prison Pentridge (often referred to as the 'Bluestone College', 'Coburg College' or 'College of Knowledge'), a prison first established in 1851 in Coburg, Victoria. The first prisoners arrived in 1851. The prison officially closed on 1 May 1997.

a job at the cannery: The Shepparton Fruit Preserving Co. Ltd was established as a co-operative just after the First World War by a group of fruit growers in Victoria's Goulburn Valley. The cannery operations began in February 1918, canning pears, peaches and nectarines under the brand name of SPC. SPC was incorporated as a public listed company in 1912, and Ardmona opened in 192.

bream or a cod or a stray catfish: bream, Murray cod and catfish are all freshwater or river fish.

Three little black fish/ Just been hooked ...: Cf 'Ten Little Injuns' was written by songwriter Septimus Winner in 1868 for a minstrel show and was much more elaborate and now considered derogatory:

*Ten little Injuns standin' in a line,
One toddled home and then there were nine;
Nine little Injuns swingin' on a gate,
One tumbled off and then there were eight.
Eight little Injuns gayest under heav'n.
One went to sleep and then there were seven ...*

Vagabond Camp

A Comedy

To Katharine Susannah Prichard
(Comrade in letters)

Text C

Characters

DICK, a riverite
BESS, his young wife
SARAH, a woman of the roads
ALF, companion to Sarah
BERT, companion to Sarah
OLD BOB, a fisherman

Setting

The bank of a river. The day before Christmas.

ACT ONE

(The scene represents the bank of a river. Part of DICK's tent is shown, an old and dilapidated tent, made of superphosphate bags and covered with a kerosene tin roof. Trees may be seen lining the opposite bank of the river. There are stumps, branches and bushes about, and the ground is littered with yellow leaves.)

(It is a warm, blue, sunny afternoon, the day before Christmas.)

(BESS comes to door¹ of tent. She is a good-looking young woman of twenty-three, with short straight black hair. She wears a short print dress, and a dark scarlet jumper, with black stockings and white shoes. She looks slowly round and at last notices a man lying helpless on the ground between the bushes. She rushes up to him.²)

BESS. Crickey. It's my old man. What's wrong, Dick?

DICK *(Vaguely)*. I dunno.

BESS *(Lifting up DICK's head on her knee)*. You've been hit out. ... What's the strong of it?

DICK. I'm all dazed and dithered.

BESS. Pull yourself together. Try to remember what happened. You went into the township to buy some beer for Christmas.

DICK. Six bottles.

BESS. They've gone. It's daylight robbery. *(Searching his pockets.)* And your cigarettes ... and money—you had a few bob you you—they've cleaned you out.

DICK. They sprung at me from behind the bushes.

BESS. Lucky you didn't take that fiver with you.

DICK *(Slowly)*. ... and knocked the wind out of me.

BESS. Who were they, the rotters?

DICK. I dunno. *(Sinking down again.)*

BESS. Can't you get up? I'll help you. *(Tries to lift him to his feet.)*

DICK. I'm terrible groggy.

BESS. Come on, Dick. *(Lifting him up.)* It's only a few steps. That's the style.

(He walks slowly towards tent, supported by BESS.)

It was a funny thing to happen on Christmas eve.

(They reach door of tent.)

DICK *(Staggering)*. I'm all in.

BESS. Have a stretch and you'll soon be right.

DICK. Good-O!

BESS. You'll remember it all when your head's clearer.

(Exeunt, BESS assisting DICK into tent.)³

(Pause.)

(Enter OLD BOB, a fisherman of nearly eighty⁴, with a straggling white beard. He wears old tattered clothes and corks round his hat. He sits on a stump and slowly fills his pipe.)

¹ *Christmas.)/(BESS comes to door] Christmas.)/(Enter DICK, a country man ... (Goes through his pockets.)(BESS comes to door B.*

² *She looks slowly ... She rushes up to him.] not in B.*

³ *BESS. Crickey. It's my old man. ... (Exeunt, BESS assisting DICK into tent] replaces some lines B.; scored out, in the first instance, with black vertical strokes then a single blue diagonal stroke. There is much emendation prior to the excision with a clean copy of the corrections, on lined notebook paper in Esson's hand in black lead pencil, inserted following the deleted pages.*

⁴ *nearly eighty] nearly 80 C; about 70 B.*

OLD BOB (*Sings to himself*).

*Three little black fish,
Just been hooked;
Three little johnny-cakes
Nearly cooked.
Three little tucker-bags
Nice and plump;
And the dashed old flour-bag
Dangling on a stump.*⁵

(*Enter ALF and BERT; ALF, tall and thin, BERT, short but stockily built.*)⁶

BERT. Hallo, dad!

OLD BOB. Eh?

BERT. How are you getting on?

OLD BOB. Just keeping alive. (*Chuckles.*)⁷

ALF. How's things? I bet you make a bit fishing. They say there's plenty o' big cod.

OLD BOB. Eh!

ALF. And 'possum skins, too.

OLD BOB (*Goes up and waves with his finger*). You get a raisin, with cyanide, and nail it to a tree. That's the dodge to catch 'em. Sometimes a bloke comes round in a car and buys the skins. (*He laughs.*)

BERT. You're an old scoundrel, Bob.

(*Enter SARAH. She is a woman of over thirty, shabbily, but showily*⁸ *dressed, and bold and defiant-looking.*)

ALF. Come on, Sarah. It's cooler here, with a breeze from the river.

SARAH (*Looking at OLD BOB*). What have you dug up over there?

ALF. Don't you know him? It's old Bob.

BERT. The man they couldn't hang.

SARAH. I must have missed him. I like his whiskers⁹ and the corks in his hat.

ALF (*Arranging ferns and leaves*). Sit down here, Sarah. I've got you some ferns.

(*SARAH lies down on bed of ferns.*)

SARAH. No doubt about it you see some queer sights in the country. If you let 'em alone the people live just like the fowls.

BERT. Open the beer, Alf.

ALF (*Opening bottle*). All serene.

BERT (*Handing SARAH a pannikin*).¹⁰ Try a cooler, Sarah.

SARAH (*Taking pannikin*). I've got a lovely thirst. Here's a Merry Christmas to us all!

(*They all drink.*)

⁵ OLD BOB (*Sing to himself*). ... *Dangling on a stump.*] not in *B*.

⁶ (*Enter ALF and BERT; ALF, tall and thin, BERT, short but stockily built.*)] (*Enter ALF and BERT. BERT is small, but strong and active, ALF tall and thin.*) *B*.

⁷ (*Chuckles.*)] not in *B*.

⁸ *a woman of over thirty, shabbily, but showily]* *a woman of about 40, painted, and shabbily but showily B*.

⁹ *hang/SARAH. I must have missed him. I like his whiskers]* *hang./ ALF. He's an old-age pensioner, he's camped down the river here./SARAH. I like his whiskers B*.

¹⁰ *All serene./BERT (Handing SARAH a pannikin.)]* *All serene. /SARAH Funny how I picked you to up ... but we ain't like strangers./ ALF. (Handing SARAH a pannikin.) B*.

OLD BOB. Fishin'¹¹ ain't what it used to be. (*Moves off.*)
 BERT. Y'are't going, dad! Plenty o' room for a good man.
 OLD BOB. Eh!
 BERT (*Handing him a pannikin of beer*). Have a drink with us.
 OLD BOB (*After drinking*). ... I've camped for twenty-five years along this here river. Don't I know it! I could tell you some funny things. (*Laughs.*) Funny queer things.¹²
 ALF (*Touching his forehead*). Touched, silly in the head.
 BERT. All country blokes are touched.
 SARAH, Who's got a cigarette?
 ALF (*Giving her a packet*). I've got a packet for you.
 SARAH. We're in luck to-day.¹³
 (*Sprawls lazily on ferns.*)
 ALF. This is Vagabond Camp, a good name for it -
 SARAH. We'll have a picnic—ain't it pretty here, in a camp on the bank of a river.
 ALF. Let's have a little harmony.
 BERT (*Sings*).¹⁴
Shall we gather at the river -
 ALF. Shut up, Bert.¹⁵
 (*BESS comes to the door of tent, and watches them.*)
 (*Singing.*)
The more we are together, together, together,
The more we are together, the merrier we'll be.
 Come on, you can all sing this.
 (*SARAH and BERT sing with ALF. OLD BOB watches them.*)
The more we are together, together, together,
The more we are together, the merrier we'll be.
 (*ALF and BERT dance round and shout.*)
 ALF/BERT. Hurrah! Hurrah!
 SARAH. Go on, Bob, have a dance.
 OLD BOB. I'm gettin' stiff in the joints. (*Does a couple of steps and laughs.*)
 (*They all stop.*)¹⁶
 SARAH. Good on you, dad.¹⁷ Ain't you ever thinking o' gettin' married?
 OLD BOB. I'm too old¹⁸ to get married.
 BERT (*Taking off his hat and fanning himself with it*). Whew! it's hot.
 (*BESS goes back inside tent.*)

¹¹ to us all!/(*They all drink.*)/OLD BOB. Fishin'] to us all!/ALF. Good-oh! (*Drinks.*) ... (*Takes and fills pannikin.*) OLD BOB. Fishin' B.

¹² Funny queer things.] Funny things B.

¹³ We're in luck to-day.] We're in luck to-day. As long as you have plenty of enjoyment, that's the main thing. Everything in the garden's lovely. B.

¹⁴ (*Sings.*)] I only know hymns./ (*Sings.*) B.

¹⁵ Shut up, Bert.] Shut up, Bert. I want to burst into song. B.

¹⁶ (*They all stop.*)] not in B.

¹⁷ SARAH. Good on you, dad.] ALF. Good on you, dad. B.

¹⁸ married?/OLD BOB. I'm too old] married?/(*They all stop.*)/OLD BOB. I'm too old B.

SARAH. Look, you can see the water shinin' through the trees.
 BERT. I'd rather have a beer.
 SARAH. You've no eye for beauty, Bert.
 BERT. Haven't I now! Sarah looks like that Cleopatra in the pictures.¹⁹ (*Sits down beside her.*) You just want somebody to wave a fan over you, Sarah!
 (*Tries to kiss her.*)
 SARAH. Don't annoy me. I was feeling lovely²⁰ and comfortable.
 BERT. You've got some bonzer curves.
 SARAH (*Struggling*).²¹ Go away, Bert. (*Pushes him off.*)²²
 BERT (*Rising*). You're hard, Sarah.
 SARAH (*Making herself comfortable*).²³ You've got me all hot and bothered.
 ALF (*Coming over*). Any more beer?²⁴
 BERT (*Taking bottle from hip pocket*). I've got a bottle up my sleeve.
 ALF. Good-O!²⁵ We might as well get drunk as be as we are now.²⁶
 BERT. I've got the philosophy of life. Live as long as you can, drink as much beer as you can, work as little as you can—and don't complain.²⁷
 ALF (*Handing SARAH a pannikin of beer*). Try this, Sarah.²⁸
 SARAH (*Drinks*). As long as you have plenty of enjoyment, that's the main thing.²⁹
 (*OLD BOB rises and walks away.*)³⁰
 OLD BOB. It's no use getting dotty about women, that's what I say.³¹
 (*Exit OLD BOB.*)
 SARAH. Listen to that old codger, babbling like that.
 BERT. He looks older than Gawd.
 SARAH. Funny how I picked you two up, like babes in the bush.
 BERT (*Asserting himself*). I'll take him on at anything.

¹⁹ pictures.] pictures, lounging and lazy. *B.*

²⁰ was feeling lovely] was lovely *B.*

²¹ bonzer curves./SARAH (*Struggling*.)] bonzer curves./SARAH. Leave me alone. it's too hot for kissin' and muggin'./BERT. You give a man feelings, Sarah. I'll squeeze you to death./(*Holds her.*)/SARAH (*Struggling*). *B.*

²² (*Pushes him off.*)] (*Pushes him off.*) I was feeling so nice and drowsy. *B.*

²³ hard, Sarah./SARAH (*Making herself comfortable*.)] hard, Sarah./(*ALF comes up.*)/ALF Have a bit o' sense ... trying to pick winners./SARAH (*Making herself comfortable*). *B.*

²⁴ hot and bothered./ALF (*Coming over*). Any more beer?] hot and bothered. Never mind love-making. I just want to doze and dream./ALF. It's all Bert's fault./SARAH. Any more beer? *B.*

²⁵ ALF. Good-Oh!] SARAH. Good-Oh! *B.*

²⁶ ALF. We might as well ... now.] BERT. We might as well ... now. *B.*

²⁷ BERT. I've got the ... don't complain.] ALF. I've got the ... don't complain. *B.*

²⁸ ALF (*Handing SARAH pannikin of beer*). Try this, Sarah.] BERT (*Handing SARAH pannikin of beer*). Try this, Sarah. *B.*

²⁹ SARAH (*Drinks*.) As long ... the main thing.] SARAH. I think that saved my life. *B.*

³⁰ the main thing./(*OLD BOB rises and walks away.*)] the main thing./BERT I don't want to be nasty; but ... and I ain't worrying./(*OLD BOB rises and walks away.*) *B.*

³¹ It's no use ... what I say.] I ain't had a woman for thirty years and I ain't worrying. *B.*

ALF. You can't³² beat Bert for a skite.
 BERT. I'm a good sport, but I want a fair go. You'll be referee, Sarah. (*Shaping up like a boxer.*)
 Come on, Alf, you long streak o' misery, don't be a squib, and I'll blind you with science.
 SARAH (*Rising*). I won't have no arguments in my camp.
 BERT. Hold on Sarah. I ain't started yet.
 SARAH. Blast you, I don't want to start none of your Fitzroy vendettas. I've heard of your razor-slashing, but none of them flash tricks round here. (*Moves off.*)
 ALF. Where are you going, Sarah.
 SARAH. I've done with you, done with both of you. I had a wonderful scheme and now you've gone and messed it all up.
 BERT. What's the idea, Sarah?
 SARAH (*Angrily*). Never you mind. I'll tell you nothing now. You can keep³³ your beer. I'm gong off on my own.
 (*Exit SARAH.*)
 ALF. See what you've done.
 BERT. There's a sweet-tempered little angel for you, if you like. Gawd's-truth, they're all the same.
 ALF. Well, here we are Bert. We had to get away till rumours o' the last job blew over.
 BERT. We might³⁴ have struck a livelier place.
 ALF. I don't mind camp life for a change.
 BERT. What sort o' camp is it!—a dirty, ragged, rotten tent, eighteen pence a week, and dear at the money.
 ALF. You didn't expect it to be like Government House, did you?
 BERT. Made o' superphosphate bags with a kerosene tin roof! Too blasted³⁵ primitive for me.
 ALF. It'll do me for a bit. No complaints.
 BERT. And those fly-blown riverites you find livin' here, about as intelligent as pigs. They never see a decent race or a game o' football,³⁶ they never see a damn thing. They might as well be out o' the world. I've had enough o' this free life, and the great open bloody spaces. (*Throws away beer bottle.*) Give me Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. (*Sits down and lights a cigarette.*)
 (*Enter BESS. She watches them closely.*)
 ALF. Good day, lady.
 BESS. What are you doing here?
 ALF. We're strangers, and we've been admiring the scenery.
 BESS. You seem to be having a merry time. (*Finds beer bottles.*) Where did these bottles come from?
 ALF. A Christmas box, lady.
 BESS. That's only a blind. You ain't up to no good.
 BERT (*Coming forward*). A Merry Christmas.
 BESS. I've been watching you, and I know what your little game is.

³² Listen to that old codger, babbling like that./BERT He looks older than Gawd./SARAH Funny how I picked you two up, like babes in the bush./BERT (*Asserting himself.*) I'll take him on at anything./ALF You can't] Listen to that old codger, he looks older than Gawd. ... I like the corks on his hat./BERT I want you, Sarah. It's my turn ... BERT I'm a good sport, but I want a fair go. Come on, Alf, and I'll blind you with science./ALF You can't B.

³³ for a skite./ BERT I'm a good sport, but I want a fair go. ... I'll tell you nothing now. You can keep] for a skite./ SARAH (*Rising.*) I don't want to start one o' yer Fitzroy ... (*Moves off.*) Don't follow me! you can keep B.

³⁴ We might] (*Fills pannikin.*) We might B.

³⁵ blasted] bloody B.

³⁶ race or a game o' football,] race or a picture show or a game o' football, B.

BERT. Don't make a song about it.³⁷ Join our little party. Have a cigarette!

BESS (*Taking and looking at packet*). Where did you get these?

ALF. You're terrible suspicious today.

BESS. You can't bluff me.

BERT. What's your trouble, lady? Can I assist?³⁸

BESS. I know how you got 'em, and fifteen³⁹ shillings too, and six⁴⁰ bottles o' beer. You robbed my poor husband.

BERT. Didn't know you were married.

BESS. Dick's been with me for five years and we've got a kid.

ALF. Where is it?

BESS. D'you think I'd keep it here! This ain't no place to bring up a kid.

BERT. I've seen a few kids that don't seem to belong to nobody running around like little mongers.

BESS. Great sports you are to attack an invalid. You know he's got a weak heart, and he finds work's hard for him.

BERT. Work's always hard, too hard⁴¹ for me.

BESS. Anyone can see he's delicate. He's been gassed.

BERT. Gassed at home, you mean.

BESS. You're bandits, that's all you are, a pair o' cowardly bandits. But I'm not frightened of you. You donged him, and you can't deny it.

BERT. So that's the tale he told you.

BESS. You knocked him down and stole his beer because he wouldn't shout for you in the pub. And why should he? D'you think he'd shout for city crooks like you! It's not as if he was a regular drunk. He was only bringing home a few bottles for Christmas.

(*Enter OLD BOB.*)

OLD BOB. The best way to catch cod's with a draw-net. You get some wire-nettin', in two or three hoops, like a rat-trap. That's the way. Eh! (*Sits on stump, away from everyone.*)

BESS. I'll report you, see if I don't!

ALF. You can't prove anything against us.

BESS. I'll tell the police. (*She moves off, then turns.*) You think you're cunning, coming the bluff, but I'll put your pot on yet, you cowardly swine. I'll see that plain-clothes man. (*Exit BESS.*)

ALF. Curse her, what's she going to do!

BERT. What are we going to do?

ALF. I don't want to see the police. You dunno how they'll inquire into your family history. I come up to the country to get a bit o' quiet.

BERT. We may be having a Merry Christmas, after all.

ALF. I don't like the look of it.

(*Enter SARAH.*)

SARAH. What's wrong?

BERT. What d'you think o' this! She's gone to the police.

ALF. She'd do anything, that woman.

SARAH. You might both be pinched, and what would I do then!

³⁷ Don't make a song about it.] Don't get scotty over nothing. *B.*

³⁸ What's your trouble ... assist?] You're pretty cute for a country girl. *B.*

³⁹ fifteen] five *B.*

⁴⁰ six] three *B.*

⁴¹ too hard] too bloody hard *B.*

BERT. It's your fault, Sarah. You got us into this mess.

SARAH. I'll get you out again, if you'll keep quiet and listen to me. We've got to play for safety. You'd better lie low for a bit.

OLD BOB (*Coming up*). Why don't you go fishin'? There's plenty o' fish in the river. (*Exit OLD BOB.*)

ALF. It might be a serious charge and lead to complications.

SARAH. I'll fix it up somehow. But you'd better get off now. You know the spot down the river I showed you? You'll be as safe as the bank there.

ALF. That'll do me.

SARAH. But you'll spoil everything if you're not careful.

ALF. I'm not looking for trouble.

SARAH. Just lie there quiet till I tell you.

BERT. We'll trust you, Sarah. Come on, Alf, you big mug.

*(Exeunt BERT and ALF.)*⁴²

(Pause.)

(SARAH waits, looking round quietly.)

(Then enter DICK from his tent. He is still a little shaken and excited.)

DICK. Sarah! It's you!

SARAH. Hullo, Dicky-boy.

DICK. They got to me, over by the bushes there. I was off my guard.

SARAH. They were jealous of you, Dick, as jealous as mad bulls. But I'll pay them out for it.

DICK. Have they gone?

SARAH. They're hiding from the police.

DICK. What's the next move?

SARA. It's Christmas to-morrow. Can't we have a bit of a spree!

DICK. You and me, Sarah!

SARAH. Yes. But how can we? I'm nearly broke.

DICK. I've got a few quid safe.

SARAH. I thought they went through you.

DICK. I only had a few bob on me. I left a fiver at home.

SARAH. That was a bit of luck. If you've got the money, bring it along and we'll clear out together. I've had enough of this rotten camp.

DICK. There's nothing much here, only wheat fields and the same old river.

SARAH. We'll get away from here. The world is wide, Dicky.

DICK. You're a queer one, Sarah. I can't make you out.⁴³

SARAH. It's always a bit of sport to take a man from another woman.

(Enter BESS, who hides behind the bushes, watching them.)

DICK. I never met a woman like you before.

SARAH (*Fixing her garter provocatively*). You can't kid me. I don't believe half the things men say.

DICK. That's a pretty⁴⁴ leg you've got.

SARAH. Glad you like it.

⁴² BERT Didn't know you were married./ BESS Dick's been with me for five years and we've got a kid./ALF Where is it? ... BERT We'll trust you, Sarah. Come on, Alf, you big mug./(*Exeunt BERT and ALF.*)] BERT Didn't know you were married./ALF What's your trouble, lady? ... ALF I'm not looking for trouble./BERT Come on, you big mug. B.

⁴³ make you out.] make you out. You've just been with two other blokes. Why do you want me? B.

⁴⁴ pretty] lovely B.

DICK. My oath, I do. You're a beaut. Sarah.⁴⁵ (*Trying to kiss her.*) Come on, give us a kiss, just one.

SARAH. Not just now, later on. Listen. You can meet me, if you like, at the bend of the river.

DICK. Just ourselves.

SARAH. Yes, you know the spot.

DICK. And we'll have some kisses then?

SARAH. Heaps.

DICK. I'm balmy over you, Sarah. I've been balmy for weeks. I don't care what happens. Give us a kiss now. I can't wait.
(He tries to kiss her.)
(BESS comes out from behind the bushes.)

SARAH. Look out, Dick. Here's your missus.

DICK (*Trying to hold her*). Sarah, wait a bit, don't go yet!

SARAH (*Breaking away*). Got to fix things up. See you later.⁴⁶ (*Exit SARAH.*)

DICK (*Following her*). Eh, Sarah!
(When DICK returns, BESS confronts him.)

BESS. Strike a light, it's you!

DICK. What are you don' here?

BESS. I've been watching you chase round Sarah, you silly goat.

DICK. Me.

BESS. You damn fool, she's got you on a string, makin' a holy show of you, leading you round like a prize calf, and laughin' at you all the time.

DICK. Sarah's all right.

BESS. Oh, yes, Sarah's all right, showing you her garter, and the shape of her leg. ... That was a fine yarn you spun, refusin' to shout for strangers in the pub. You didn't tell me how Sarah had got hold of you, and her blokes were jealous. That's why they got to you, and serve you damn well right.

DICK. Ease off, now.

BESS. It was just as well I didn't find the plain-clothes man. What a fool I would 'ave looked!

DICK. Run away; there's nothing doing here.

BESS. Look how she's livin', in a tent with rotten bag walls that don't come down half way.⁴⁷

DICK. That's all right.⁴⁸ I've been admiring Sarah's ankles for weeks.

BESS. I didn't jerry to it before. To think of you givin' a woman the glad eye, it makes me laugh.⁴⁹

DICK. Y'ain't jealous, are you?

BESS. Jealous! I though you liked the young stuff. She's years older than me, mutton tryin' to look like lamb.⁵⁰ I've got better legs than her. But you've gone blind. I'll soon show you who's jealous. I'll -

⁴⁵ You're a beaut. Sarah.] You're a beaut. Sarah. I must have you. *B.*

⁴⁶ See you later.] I'll see you some more. *B.*

⁴⁷ Look how she's livin' ... half way.] You want to see Sarah again. Careless swine she is. Look how they're livin', in a tent with rotten bag walls. They don't come down half way and you can see their legs. *B.*

⁴⁸ That's all right.] Too right you can. *B.*

⁴⁹ I didn't jerry ... makes me laugh.] to think of you giving a woman the glad eye, Gawdstruth, it makes me laugh. You're not worth two bob. You with your old mouldy face and your gammy leg and a cough on you like a sick sheep. *B.*

⁵⁰ She's years older than me, mutton tryin' to look like lamb.] She's years older than me, and all painted up, mutton tryin' to look like lamb. *B.*

*(Enter SARAH.)*⁵¹

SARAH *(With a challenging smile)*. Good day.

BESS. Clear out o' this, you.

SARAH *(To DICK)*. Don't she put on airs!

DICK. Take no notice of her.

BESS. Get out. I don't want to speak to you.

SARAH. Don't be silly. Let's make it up, and be friends.

BESS. Friends with you! What will you want next—ham and eggs in Pentridge?

SARAH. You've got to take life as it comes, that's the only way to keep young.

BESS. Young, you! Get out o' this, and go to Hell.⁵²

SARAH. Now listen, we might get a job at the cannery and work together ...

BESS. You've got a nerve.

SARAH. There ain't⁵³ many women in this camp, and I dunno why we want to quarrel. None of us is perfect.

*(Pause.)*⁵⁴

Have it your own way, then. I'm too much a lady to force my company where it ain't wanted. The compliments of the season!

(SARAH begins to move away.)

BESS. There's lots o' stragglers along the river, nondescripts and ne'er-do-wells; but a woman—and God knows if she's married or not—living in a tent by herself, with two men hanging around, that's a nice example for the young women of the camp.

(SARAH turns.)

SARAH. I say, Dicky boy.

DICK. Yes.

SARAH. Come here.

(DICK goes over to her.)

BESS *(Trying to stop him)*.⁵⁵ Don't you go.

DICK. Nobody asked you to butt in.

SARAH. You won't disappoint me, will you!

DICK. Not me.

SARAH. I knew you⁵⁶ couldn't refuse me anything.⁵⁷

DICK. Not on your life.

SARAH. Don't forget. So long, Dicky dear.⁵⁸ *(Exit SARAH, laughing.)*

BESS. Y'ain't goin' to meet her, are you!

DICK. Why not! D'you think you can stop me!

⁵¹ jealous. I'll -/*(Enter SARAH.)*] jealous. I'll -/DICK Hold on there./BESS. I didn't jerry to it before. You're a devil of a fellow with the women, ain't yer! *(Laughs mockingly.)* I mustn't think of it. It'll give me hysterics./*(Enter SARAH.)* B.

⁵² Young, you! Get out o' this, and go to Hell.] Don't talk to me, a thing like you. I've nothing to do with you. B.

⁵³ work together .../BESS You've got a nerve./SARAH. There ain't] work together .../BESS. How many more men do you want! ... BESS. Get out o' this and go to hell./SARAH. There ain't B.

⁵⁴ *(Pause.)*] not in B.

⁵⁵ *(Trying to stop him)*] not in B.

⁵⁶ Not me./SARAH. I knew you] Not me./SARAH. And you'll keep our appointment? You know where I mean./DICK. Right-Oh!/SARAH. I knew you B.

⁵⁷ anything.] anything. Now don't forget. B.

⁵⁸ Don't forget. So long, Dicky dear.] I'll be waiting for you, Dicky dear. B.

BESS. She's only makin' a fool of you.
DICK. Don't you worry.
BESS. What chance have you got with them two men?
DICK (*Swaggeringly*). I've got a rough chance. (*DICK makes for tent.*)
BESS. What are⁵⁹ you up to now?
DICK. That's my business. (*Exit DICK into tent.*)
BESS (*Calling after him*). You can do what you like, you goat. It won't trouble me.
(*Enter OLD BOB, with fishing lines etc.*)
OLD BOB. I'll try my luck in the river.
BESS. There ain't much luck in this blasted river.
OLD BOB. You never know. I might get a bream or a cod, or a stray catfish.
BESS. I wasn't thinking about the fish.
OLD BOB. There's a lot o' snags.
BESS. Too many bloomin' snags.
(*Enter DICK from tent, with small swag.*)
Hullo, what's your game?
DICK. Don't be so inquisitive.
BESS. You've had your swag made up.
DICK. I'm travellin' light.
BESS. Are you drunk? Are you balmy? What's gone to your silly head?
OLD BOB. I'm just fixin' me lines. (*Sits down busy with his lines.*)
BESS. You're mad. You've⁶⁰ gone ravin' mad chasin' after that woman. She's been wanderin' up and down the river for years, and always with different men. She's only a vagabond, a woman of the roads.
DICK. What's wrong with Sarah?
BESS. There's only one thing wrong about her, there's nothing right.
DICK. Oh, shut up, can't you!
BESS. My Gawd, to think we've been together for years, on cockie farms and way-back sheep-stations⁶¹. Didn't I nurse you, night and day, when you were ill and nearly died!
DICK. Oh, that's a thing of the past.⁶² Here ... take this. (*Hands her two pound notes.*) I'm givin' you some of me money. That's fair, ain't it!
BESS. Glory! Oh, my!
DICK. And you can keep the tent. (*Begins to move away.*)
BESS. For Gawd's sake, Dick, think what you're doin'.
DICK. I reckon we're square.
BESS. What about the kid?
DICK. Damn the kid. You can have him.
BESS. You're not going, you're not going to that woman. (*Tries to hold him.*)
DICK. Let go. Let me go. (*Pushes her off.*)
BESS. You dirty little grub, you can go to hell if you like, but don't come back.

⁵⁹ rough chance./(*DICK makes for tent.*)/BESS What are| rough chance./BESS You're like a sheep, goin' to the slaughter. DICK I'll risk it. I can look after myself./(*DICK makes for tent.*)/BESS What are B.

⁶⁰ You've| You B.

⁶¹ on cockie farms and way-back sheep-stations| on out-back farms and sheep-stations B.

⁶² Oh, that's a thing of the past.| Try to forget it. B.

DICK. No chance.⁶³

BESS. I'm warnin' you⁶⁴ now. Don't you come whingin' back to me.

DICK. What, come back! Back here—to you! (*Laughs.*) Gawd'struth, you must think I'm a mug. I've got something better to do. (*Goes off gaily.*)

Christmas comes but once a year.

(Exit DICK.)

BESS (*Calling after him*). You fool, you fourpenny rabbit, you blithering idiot.⁶⁵

OLD BOB (*Looking up from his nets*). Eh!

BESS. I've had enough of this camp life. Call these rusty old kerosene tins a house⁶⁶! It ain't fit for a Chinaman. Fancy me, the fool, livin' in a place like that. I want a proper sort o' house.

OLD BOB. Lookin' up at the sky last night I never seen so many stars before ... shinin' and sparklin'—you couldn't count 'em—the sky was just blazin' with stars. Ain't it wonderful how the stars come and shine over this funny⁶⁷ old Vagabond Camp.

BESS. Blest if I know! (*Exit BESS into tent.*)

(OLD BOB potters round with his fishing lines. Then he sings to himself.)

OLD BOB. *Three little black fish*

Just been hooked;

Three little johnny-cakes

Nearly cooked.

Three little tucker-bags

Nice and plump,

And the dashed old flour-bag

Dangling on a stump!

(Enter BESS, carrying a bundle.)

BESS. Two can play at this game. There's nothing to keep me here. There ain't too many women about and I can pick up a man whenever I like. I'll get something better than my little Dicky-bird next time. I was a damn fool to stick to him so long.

OLD BOB. Sometimes I never get a blooming bite. (*Laughs.*)⁶⁸

BESS. The liar he is. Little Dicky gave me two notes and said we were square. He kept the rest for himself, but that woman'll get it all from him. ... But I'd a tenner planted for a rainy day. (*Holds up note.*) He didn't know about that. This is my little lot. (*Pointing to tent.*) And he gave me that beautiful home ... he can keep it.

OLD BOB. Some of us don't want to shift. You can see where they've put pegs in the trees and made a rough platform so they can go up and stay there when the river rises. Sometimes when a big flood comes down, a few of us gets drowned.

BESS. He can drown if he likes, it won't upset me. I don't want him, the mangy little cur. I'm clearing out.

OLD BOB. Eh!

⁶³ No chance.] No chance. I've had enough of you and your bloody temper. *B.*

⁶⁴ I'm warnin' you] You look like a fourpenny rabbit. I'm warnin' you *B.*

⁶⁵ blithering idiot.] blithering idiot - you're not worth a drink o' water. *B.*

⁶⁶ house] home *B.*

⁶⁷ funny] bloomin' *B.*

⁶⁸ Sometimes I never get a blooming bit. (*Laughs.*)] I might bet a haul to-night. *B.*

BESS. I'll treat myself to a good time. It don't matter much where I go. Men are all fools over women.

OLD BOB. Eh!⁶⁹

BESS. So long, dad. We ain't really married, you know, and the kid's in the orphanage, so there's nothin' to keep me to him. We're square, right enough, and I can go with a good conscience.

OLD BOB. My luck's in the river.⁷⁰

BESS. Luck, did you say!⁷¹ I'll change my luck on the roads. A Merry Christmas, Bob. *(Exit BESS.)*
(OLD BOB again fixes his lines, singing to himself.)

OLD BOB. *Three little black fish*

Just been hooked;

Three little johnny-cakes

Nearly cooked.

Three little tucker-bags

Nice and plump,

And the dashed old flour-bag

*Dangling on a stump.*⁷²

(Enter DICK, distractedly, with clothes torn, and spattered with mud.)

DICK *(Breathlessly)*. Gawd'struth, it was that cow, Sarah.

OLD BOB. Eh!

DICK. She got me down by the bend of the river, and two blokes jumped up and knocked me rotten. It was a trap. I was rooked—rooked -

OLD BOB. I'm goin' fishin'.

DICK *(Going to tent and calling)*. Bess, Bess! Come here. I'm in a hell of a mess, mud and blood all over me.

OLD BOB. ... Always fishin' and fishin' ...

DICK. I've had two teeth knocked out, and a cut over the eye. They're crooks, a pair of crooks from Fitzroy. ... Bess, where are you, Bess! *(He looks into tent.)*

(Returning.) Where the hell can she be!

OLD BOB. Eh!

DICK. Bess. Haven't you seen her about?

OLD BOB. I never bother about women.

DICK. But you know Bess.

OLD BOB. I'm only an old codger, but I'm fly! *(Laughs.)*⁷³

DICK. Don't be a fool. Tell me where she's gone.⁷⁴

OLD BOB *(Slowly)*. She had a bundle. ... She was clearing out.⁷⁵

DICK. Clearing out, rot! I don't believe it. *(DICK rushes into tent, and then comes out bewildered-looking.)* My Gawd, it's true. She's taken her clothes. She's gone.

⁶⁹ Eh!] I don't want to hook one. *B.*

⁷⁰ My luck's in the river.] The river'll do me. My luck's in the river. *B.*

⁷¹ Luck, did you say!] I'm off for pastures new. Luck, did you say! *B.*

⁷² *Nice and plump ... on a stump.] not in B.*

⁷³ fly. *(Laughs.)*] fly. *B*

⁷⁴ Don't be a fool. Tell me where she's gone.] where has she gone? What was she doin'? *B.*

⁷⁵ *(Slowly.)* She had a bundle. ... She was clearing out.] *(Slowly.)* Yes. ... I remember now. She had a bundle. ... She was clearing out. *B.*

OLD BOB. She⁷⁶ had a ten-pound note in her hand.

DICK. The thief, damn her, damn her!⁷⁷ Going off without a word, who ever heard of a thing like that! (*He stamps up and down.*) If I could get hold of her, I'd -

OLD BOB. Eh!

DICK. Any many might do his block over a woman, especially if he had a few drinks in. But for her to go off like that, and break up the bloomin' old⁷⁸ home, it don't seem right.⁷⁹

OLD BOB. I'm nearly eighty, and I tell you I haven't worried about women for thirty years, and I won't worry for another thirty. (*Laughs.*) I'll try me luck in the river. ... Here goes.⁸⁰ (*Exit OLD BOB, with his lines.*)

DICK. Well, I'm damned. (*Turns and walks towards tent.*)

Curtain.

Notes

Cleopatra in the pictures: *Cleopatra* (1917) was an American silent historical drama film based on H Rider Haggard's 1889 novel *Cleopatra*, and the plays *Cleopatre* (by Émile Moreau and Victorien Sardou) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (by William Shakespeare). The film starred Theda Bara in the title role. It premiered in Australia in 1918.

⁷⁶ She] And she *B*.

⁷⁷ The thief, damn her,] Damn her, *B*.

⁷⁸ bloomin' old] bloody *B*.

⁷⁹ home, it don't seem right.] home. Gawd spare me days! *B*.

⁸⁰ I'm nearly eighty and ... Here goes.] Sometimes I never get a bloomin' bite, but it's better than runnin' after women. I tell you I haven't had a woman for thirty years, and I won't want one for another thirty. I'll try me luck in the river. ... Here goes. *B*.

The Quest

A Dramatic Legend in Six Scenes

Copy Text

One manuscript survives (*A*), typed in Hilda's usual format, held in the Campbell Howard Collection, Dixson Library, University of New England, Armidale.¹ There are a small number of emendations in Esson's hand (*B*). I have corrected spelling (including character names) and standardised layout and stage directions.

¹ In a letter to Allan Ashbolt from Campbell Howard (23 February 1961), he relates how he had just retrieved from Hugh Esson, Louis Esson's son, 'a box of Louis Esson's plays.' He mentions a number of scripts he discovered and refers to 'the original hand written manuscript of *The Quest ...*' The collection, however, only holds the one manuscript (36 page typed quarto), despite two entries in the catalogue (the second—76 page quarto—may very well have been an 'original hand written' version now lost). Howard forwarded a copy to the National Library of Australia (Letter to Professor K Macartney, 14 September 1962); this is a photostat copy of the extant manuscript.

Characters

PEDRO FERNANDES DE QUEIRÓS², a Navigator
DOÑA ANA, his wife
FRANCISCO, his son, aged ten
JERONIMA, his young daughter
CARLOS, a shipping clerk.
MARIA, his wife
A STATESMAN)
AN ADMIRAL) A Council of Three
A MATHEMATICIAN)
LUIZ DE BELMONTE BERMUDEZ, secretary to De Queirós, and a poet
JUANn, rich Peruvian youth
DE VEGA, rich Peruvian youth
INEZ DE MENDOZA, Peruvian girl
THERESA DE LARA, Peruvian girl
THE COMMISSARY, an aged brother of eighty
GONZALEZ, a ruffian
A STEERSMAN

Sailors, Soldiers, Friars, Indian Servants, Crowd and Loungers at Panama

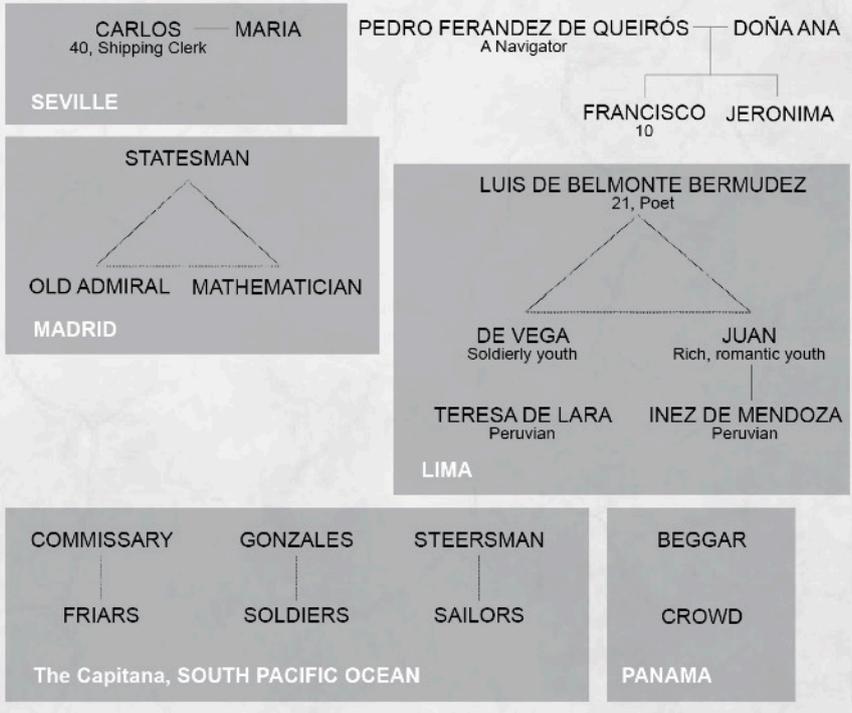
Setting

Scene One—A room in Seville, 1600.
Scene Two—Council Chamber, Madrid. Two years later.
Scene Three—A garden in Lima, Peru. Three years later.
Scene Four—On board *The Capitana*. South Pacific Ocean. 1606.
Scene Five—On board *The Capitana*. Mid-ocean. Six weeks later.
Scene Six—Panama, 1615. Near wharf, with a view of the sea.

² DE QUEIRÓS] DE QUEIROS (*throughout*) nb. Pedro Fernández de Quirós (Spanish); Pedro Fernandes de Queirós (Portugese);

THE QUEST

Setting: *SCENE ONE—A room in Seville. 1600.*
SCENE TWO—Council Chamber, Madrid. Two years later.
SCENE THREE—A garden in Lima, Peru. Three years later.
SCENE FOUR—On board The Capitana, South Pacific Ocean. 1606
SCENE FIVE—On board The Capitana, South Pacific Ocean (mid-ocean). Six weeks later. Threat of storm.
SCENE SIX—Panama. 1615.



Scene One

(A room in Seville, 1600.)

(It is a barely furnished room, with tables and chairs. Papers and maps are scattered on table. A cot lies against wall.)

(DOÑA ANA, a woman of thirty-six³, sits on low chair embroidering a shawl. FRANCISCO, a bright boy of ten⁴, sits on floor, drawing. JERONIMA, his young sister, stands eagerly watching him.)

JERONIMA *(Shouting)*. Ship!

ANA *(Wearily looking up from her embroidery)*. What are you doing, Francisco?

FRANCISCO. I'm drawing a ship.

ANA. Your father must have put these ideas into your head. You're always thinking about ships.

(Holds up shawl.) Look, Jeronima!

JERONIMA. Shawl!

ANA. I'm embroidering it for Doña Maria. *(Sighing.)* Ah, well, it just needs the finishing touches.

JERONIMA. Pretty Shawl.

ANA. We used to have many pretty things before your father went on strange voyages. ... But they're all gone now. ... I'm glad I haven't forgotten my needle-work. *(Sews.)*

JERONIMA *(Pleased with her discovery)*. Mast.

FRANCISCO *(Holding up drawing)*. That's a picture of the ship Father sailed in to the South Seas.

ANA *(Sadly)*. I know it well.

FRANCISCO. I've got to fill out the sails. *(Continues drawing.)*

(Pause.)

(A knock at the door.)

ANA *(Rising)*. Come in.

(Enter DOÑA MARIA, a kindly looking woman about forty⁵.)

It's Doña Maria.

(This kiss.)

Please be seated. I've been working at your shawl.

MARIA. Let me see.

ANA. Do you think that will do?

MARIA *(Examining shawl)*. It's beautiful, beautiful!⁶ How can I thank you, Doña Ana!

ANA. I'm glad I haven't lost all my skill.

MARIA. It's lovely work. You were always clever with your needle.

ANA. Once it was all done for pleasure. Now it is for bread.

MARIA. My poor Ana! And you come from proud Madrid.

ANA. My father was a licentiate. I'm afraid I wasn't reared for a life of toil and poverty.

MARIA. I'm sorry for you. And I hope it will be soon be changed.

ANA. But it's not that I complain of, Doña Maria. My husband's a strange man. He never thinks of himself.

MARIA. Nor of his family, either.

³ thirty-six] 36 A.

⁴ ten] 10 A.

⁵ forty] 40 A.

⁶ beautiful!] B.; beautiful. A.

ANA. Don't say that, Doña Maria. He is gentleness itself. It's my joy to work for him and the children. But he's still dreaming of making another voyage. Since he returned from Peru he has spent all his savings. He does nothing but draw up maps and plans, and write memorials. He is a sea-bird—never at home on land.

MARIA. Everybody knows he's a great sailor, and a most ingenious pilot.

ANA. But what use is that in Seville! I'm fearful he will leave me again, to sail strange seas. Oh⁷, if I could only keep him with me!

MARIA. Be patient, Doña Ana. Perhaps we may soon hear good news.

ANA. I have little hope. He can find nothing to do here.

MARIA. Listen! My husband has long been trying⁸ to get him a position in his own office. He has influence with the firm, and I feel sure your husband's services would⁹ be of value.

ANA. I want to keep Pedro at home. He has had enough of the sea. And so have I. Jeronima was born two months after he sailed from Peru with Mendaña.

MARIA. I've been fortunate, Ana. I have a pleasant home and a garden, and a good husband who is always kind and gay, and happy children.

ANA. Our life has been one long struggle.

MARIA. Carlos is only an ordinary man; but, perhaps, the ordinary man makes the best husband.¹⁰
(*Enter PEDRO FERNANDEZ DE QUEIRÓS. He is a slightly built man of thirty-five¹¹, of delicate health, but with the ardour and nervous vitality of the enthusiast.*)

DE QUEIRÓS. Greetings, Doña Maria!

MARIA. I hope you are well.

DE QUIROS. I would be better at sea.

MARIA. Surely you have travelled enough.

DE QUEIRÓS. My work is just beginning. I know the Viceroy of Peru would fit me out with an expedition; but I've first to get the permission of the King of Spain. I've waited for five years and not yet have I been admitted to the Court. I'm getting worn out with these tedious delays and disappointments.

MARIA. Why waste more time on fruitless planning, if you can never see the King!

DE QUEIRÓS. Perhaps a private company of merchants will fit out a ship. I could make them rich, rich beyond belief. Your husband is acting as my agent. He may bring us welcome news.
(*DE QUEIRÓS goes to look at FRANCISCO's drawing.*)

(*The WOMEN smile at each other and shake their heads.*)

ANA. I'll finish the shawl.¹²

(*She takes seat and embroiders shawl, while MARIA sits near, watching her.*)

JERONIMA. Ship, Father.

DE QUEIRÓS. Oh, a ship! (*He takes FRANCISCO's drawing.*) A beautiful ship. Well done, Francisco!

FRANCISCO. Is the poop high enough, Father?

DE QUEIRÓS. It's just right.

⁷ Oh] O A. (*See style note, Introduction.*)

⁸ has long been trying] B.; has been busy trying A.

⁹ would] B.; will A.

¹⁰ man makes the best husband.] B.; men make the best husbands. A.

¹¹ thirty-five] 35 A.

¹² I'll finish the shawl.] *excised A.; restored B.*

FRANCISCO. And the sails—are they full enough?

DE QUEIRÓS. I think so. They're catching the land breeze.

JERONIMA (*Shouting*). Sails! Sails!

DE QUEIRÓS. I would like another ship like that. (*He embraces the CHILDREN.*) Where's the map?

FRANCISCO. Here it is Father.

(*He brings map to DE QUEIRÓS, who looks at it carefully.*)

DE QUEIRÓS. I'll show you where we would sail away across the unknown seas.

ANA (*To MARIA*). It only needs the last few stitches.

DE QUEIRÓS (*To CHILDREN*). This map is wrong. Here should be the Solomon Islands discovered by Mendaña. And this should be Santa Cruz that we discovered on our last voyage five years ago. I was the pilot, and we meant to sail for the Great South Land that has never yet been seen by Christian men. But Mendaña fell sick and died, and the voyage must be begun again.

ANA (*Looking up from her sewing*). Don't fill the children's minds with travellers' tales of the sea.

DE QUEIRÓS. This is no traveler's tale, such as you hear in the streets of Seville from lying sailors. (*Lifting his hand.*) Across the Ocean lies a lovely land, the last of the Continents, and the best of all—*Terra Australis!*¹³ *Terra Australis!*

FRANCISCO. Are there savages, Father?

DE QUEIRÓS. We found many savages in lonely islands¹⁴.

FRANCISCO. Are there elephants and whales?

JERONIMA. Whales!

DE QUEIRÓS. We saw many wonders; beautiful shady trees, coral islands, gold and silver, and more valuable than gold and silver, all kinds of spices. Some day I'll show you many beautiful lands and islands.

(*Enter CARLOS gaily. He is a man of forty, stout and good-natured.*)

CARLOS. Greetings!

DE QUEIRÓS. You look gay, Carlos.

CARLOS. The sky is blue, and the sunlight shines on the orange trees. This is our Seville. What else can I be but gay!

MARIA. You bring good news, I think.

CARLOS. I hope I do.

DE QUEIRÓS (*Eagerly*). Has the Company agreed to my plan?

CARLOS. Not that, Pedro. It was too grand for them.

DE QUEIRÓS. Do they refuse to fit me out a ship?

CARLOS. That was impossible. Merchants are always timid in risking money on such a dangerous enterprise.

DE QUEIRÓS. There is no risk. The outlay would not be great, and I would bring them untold wealth of gold and jewels and spices¹⁵.

CARLOS. They think the discovery of unknown lands is an enterprise for the Government rather than for a private company.

DE QUEIRÓS. The Government is slow to move. I cannot get the ear of the Court.

CARLOS. Patience, Pedro, and wait for another shuffle of the cards.

DE QUEIRÓS. I've been waiting for days and months and years, and I'm worn out waiting.

¹³ - *Terra Australis!*] *Terra Australis!* A.

¹⁴ many savages in lonely islands] B.; may savages in lovely island islands A.

¹⁵ spices] B.; spice A.

ANA. My poor Pedro.

DE QUEIRÓS. I must act at once. I can endure these delays no longer. I may be a Job in poverty, but not in patience.

ANA (*To CHILDREN*). Run off, children.

FRANCISCO (*Opening door*). There's a donkey with baskets of oranges.

CARLOS (*Giving FRANCISCO a coin*). Try to get some.

JERONIMA. Orange!

FRANCISCO. Come on, Jeronima.

(*The CHILDREN run outside.*)

DE QUEIRÓS (*Excitedly*). I've done with Seville and its miserly merchants.

CARLOS (*Soothingly*). But listen, Pedro. That was but part of my message.

DE QUEIRÓS. I have it. They're jealous because I'm a Portuguese.

CARLOS. That's not the case. Old feuds are forgotten. We are now all subjects of the King of Spain.

DE QUEIRÓS. Spain is a proud land; but we Portuguese are born sailors. Who has ever equaled Columbus, Vasco de Gama, and the dauntless Magellan who have performed the most prodigious voyages recorded in history!

CARLOS. There's no prejudice, I assure you. My company fully recognises your great gifts. Indeed they have gone so far as to ask me to make you an offer to join them.

MARIA. I said he would bring good news!

ANA. Thank you, Maria.

DE QUEIRÓS (*Laughing cynically*). They offer me a position as clerk in a shipping office!

CARLOS. A head clerk!

ANA. It's a high position.

DE QUEIRÓS. My wife thinks I'm not only to be a clerk.

ANA. That is unjust, Pedro.

DE QUEIRÓS. I'm a pilot, a navigator. I was pilot to Mendaña on his last great voyage.

ANA. That was five years ago.

DE QUEIRÓS. And I've been waiting for my chance ever since. But people here won't listen to me.

They laugh, and call me a madman! Is Spain deaf to the voice of glory!

(*ANA puts a flagon of wine and glasses on table.*)

ANA. A glass of wine, Maria? Carlos?

CARLOS. I never refuse good wine. Have they wine like this in those far off unknown lands?

(*They all drink, except DE QUEIRÓS.*)

DE QUEIRÓS (*Still nervously excited*). You may laugh, Carlos; but a great continent is waiting to be discovered.

CARLOS. I don't want to discover anything more. (*Puts his arm round MARIA.*) I've my wife, my fruit trees, and my guitar.

DE QUEIRÓS. Ah, what do they care in Seville! Life passes here as lightly as a summer breeze. It's like a wine-song, or a dance to the clacking of the castanets. (*He goes to door.*)

ANA. And where are you going, Pedro?

DE QUEIRÓS. You must excuse me. I have most important business.

(*Exit DE QUEIRÓS.*)

ANA. He is beside himself. His dream of the New Land is like a strong wine that goes to his head, and makes him reel.

CARLOS. I did my best, but I fear he is bitterly disappointed.

ANA. He is used to disappointments. So are we all.

CARLOS. Our Company would be glad of a man of his gifts in the office. His knowledge of maps and charts, and his mathematical skill would be of great service.

ANA. What can I do! He wants to make another grand discovery for Spain.

CARLOS (*Lifting glass*). My respects, Doña Ana!

ANA (*Giving shawl to MARIA*). I think it will suit you.

MARIA. Many thanks, Ana.

CARLOS. It's not too late. Try to persuade him to stay at home, and forget the distant seas. I never had ambition. My idea is to enjoy the little you have, and let the fool seek more.

ANA. Pedro was never a seeker.

MARIA (*Kissing ANA*). Good-bye, Ana. You may keep him at home yet.

CARLOS. How can anyone every wish to leave our beautiful Seville!

(*Exeunt CARLOS and MARIA with shawl.*)

(*Pause.*)

(*ANA removes flagon and glasses and arranges flowers on table. She then looks at FRANCISCO's drawing and the map, shakes her head, and puts them away. Then wearily she sinks on low chair.*)

(*Enter FRANCISCO and JERONIMA, with oranges.*)

ANA (*Going to her*). You're tired, Jeronima.

JERONIMA (*Sleepily*). Tired.

ANA. Poor child, you can sleep here. (*Puts JERONIMA in cot.*)

FRANCISCO. You look tired too, Mother. (*Assists her to chair.*) What is it, Mother? You have tears in your eyes. What are you crying for?

ANA. Not for sorrow, for joy.

FRANCISCO. Is Father going to get a big ship and sail across the sea?

ANA. No, Francisco. He has sailed on many seas, but he is done with voyaging now.

FRANCISCO. Won't he sail again for the Great South Land?

ANA. No. We won't lose him again. He'll stay at home with us all. (*Clasps FRANCISCO in her arms.*) It's a happy day for me.

(*Enter DE QUEIRÓS, dressed as a pilgrim, and carrying a staff. He puts staff in corner.*)

(*ANA stares at him in astonishment, and utters a little cry.*)

(*FRANCISCO sits quietly in corner, watching the scene with wide solemn eyes.*)¹⁶

Pedro! Pedro!

DE QUEIRÓS. I have no choice¹⁷, Ana.

ANA. What are you doing?

DE QUEIRÓS. I must go.

ANA. How can you! You won't leave us again!

DE QUEIRÓS. I could wait no longer. Forgive me, dear wife. I've sold all I had. Now I wear the dress of a pilgrim. (*Puts some money on table.*) There's a little money for you—all I have.

ANA. Where are you going?

DE QUEIRÓS. To Rome.

ANA. Rome!¹⁸

DE QUEIRÓS. To see the Pope. It is Jubilee year, and I have faith His Holiness will help me.

(*ANA drops on chair, weeping.*)

¹⁶ (*FRANCISCO sits ... wide solemn eyes.*)] B.; not in A.

¹⁷ choice] B.; (*undecipherable*) A.

¹⁸ Rome!] B.; Rome? A.

Don't weep, dear Ana. I have a vow to fulfil. A great continental land lies to the South, and I must discover it before I die. But I need ships and money. I can do nothing here. I must first go to Rome, where the Pope's influence will ensure my success with the King of Spain.

ANA. Don't leave us, Pedro. Think of our children, Francisco and Jeronima.

DE QUEIRÓS. My dear children! I love my wife and children. Yes, Ana, I love my home, with its sweet memories, and the trees and corn fields, and the crowded streets of cities; and yet I must leave all to face dark and stormy nights, and the real perils of unknown seas, in quest of that far off lonely land¹⁹ I seem to glimpse through sea-spray and misty dreams.

ANA. I hate your Great South Land. It draws you away from us.

DE QUEIRÓS. But I'll return.

ANA. You may never return. What will become of our children if you are lost!

DE QUEIRÓS. Have faith, Ana. There are treasures in those far-off lands, and some day I'll make you all rich. But it isn't riches I seek. I have a mission to carry on and complete the work of Mendaña.

ANA. Why are you not content with simple life, like Carlos and other men?²⁰

DE QUEIRÓS (*Quietly, not boastfully*). I am de Queirós. Maybe, I'm the greatest sailor in the world today. (*He moves towards door.*)

ANA (*Trying to stop him*). Oh, Pedro. What can I do to stop you?²¹

DE QUEIRÓS. I'm thirty-five, and there's no time to lose. With staff in hand I shall wander through the cities of Italy.

ANA. But you're poor. You have no money.

DE QUEIRÓS. I have hope and faith. When I return from Rome, the Spanish Court may listen to de Queirós. ... Farewell, Ana. (*Kisses her gently.*)

ANA (*Pointing to cot*). She's sleeping.

DE QUEIRÓS. My innocent little daughter. (*He bends over cot to kiss her.*) Goodbye Jeronima. God will guard²² you.

ANA (*Brokenly*). May God guard us all!²³

DE QUEIRÓS (*Kissing FRANCISCO*). Goodbye, my boy.

FRANCISCO. Take me with you, Father. I want to be a sailor.

DE QUEIRÓS. When I come back,²⁴ we'll see. You're young.

FRANCISCO. I can draw a map with the lands of the South Seas.

DE QUEIRÓS. Bless you, my son. (*He goes to ANA.*) Forgive me, dear wife, for all the sufferings I cause; forgive²⁵ everything. (*He kneels before her.*) Give me your blessing, Ana. (*She puts her hands gently on his head.*)

ANA (*Softly*). Bless you, Pedro, bless you!

(*DE QUEIRÓS rises and takes his staff.*)

DE QUEIRÓS. ... Strange lands beckon to me, and I must go. (*Exit DE QUEIRÓS.*)

¹⁹ that far off lonely land] B.; that far of land A.

²⁰ men?] men.

²¹ you?] you!

²² guard] A.; typed emendation, acknowledged by Esson B.

²³ all!] B; all. A.

²⁴ back,] B.; back A.

²⁵ cause; forgive] B.; cause. Forgive A.

(Pause.)

ANA. He has gone. We may never see him again. *(She drops into chair, weeping.)*

FRANCISCO *(Trying to console her)*. Don't cry, Mother. Father will come back, and then he'll get a big ship, and we'll all sail away—away, away to the Great South Land.

Curtain.

Scene Two

(Council Chamber, Madrid. Two years later.)

(It is an austere room, sparsely furnished, but containing a heavy and handsome table. The tone is rich, but subdued. A door, Left, is hidden by heavy curtains. Maps and charts are displayed, and some great and extra-ordinary-looking globes, in gold colours, are mounted on iron stands.)

(Seated gravely at table are the COUNCIL OF THREE, a STATESMAN of high rank, an old ADMIRAL and a MATHEMATICIAN.)

STATESMAN. We have been appointed as a Council of Three, and His Majesty will act on our advice.

MATHEMATICIAN. It is a grave responsibility.

STATESMAN. It is for us to decide the fate of de Queirós.

ADMIRAL. What is his mission?

STATESMAN. He desires the King to fit out a fleet for the discovery of a New World.

ADMIRAL. He has great ambition. But what do we know of this Pedro Fernandez de Queirós?

STATESMAN. He is a Spanish navigator.

ADMIRAL. Spanish! I've been told he's a mendacious fellow of low-class Portuguese origin. How could we entrust him with the command of Spaniards!

STATESMAN. We cannot forget that Magellan was the Portuguese commander of a Spanish fleet.

ADMIRAL. But I believe this is a man of the Rica Nova in Lisbon, in whose mouth there is nought but lies, bragging and dishonesty.

STATESMAN. He has already given proof of his ability as a navigator. He acted as pilot for the great Mendaña.

ADMIRAL. And was the cause of the Admiral being lost with his fleet.

STATESMAN. That was only idle rumour. It was Queirós who brought back the vessels of Mendaña, after the death of the Commander, to the Philippine Islands.

ADMIRAL. I've never met the man; but I've heard, from good authority, he's only an idle dreamer, excited with fantasies.

STATESMAN. We must remember what was said of Columbus.

ADMIRAL. Queirós has the idea in his head that he is going to be a second Columbus, and that is his affliction.

MATHEMATICIAN. I should like to know what are his qualifications as a pilot. Is he an expert in making globes and charts? Does he understand the use of instruments necessary for navigation?

STATESMAN. There are many voices whispering various tales about the man, as though he was a legendary figure. Some say he's a great sailor, worthy of our trust, while others say that he's only an adventurer, or perhaps, a poor fanatic who should be confined as a lunatic. It is our duty to discover the truth.

MATHEMATICIAN. What are his credentials?

STATESMAN. He has just returned from Rome where he had an audience with the Holy Father.

ADMIRAL. Can that be true!

STATESMAN. Yes. He has brought letters both from the Pope and the Viceroy.

ADMIRAL. I believe he wandered through Italy as a pilgrim.

STATESMAN. We have received weighty testimonies from Rome in his favour. (*Takes up letter.*)

This is an important letter. (*Reads.*) 'A meeting of the best pilots and mathematicians to be found in Rome questioned him concerning curious things relating to his art, and made a report favourable both to the scheme and the man. De Queirós is a great pilot, with much experience of the South Seas.' (*Puts down letter.*) What do you think Admiral?²⁶

ADMIRAL. I'm an old sailor²⁷ and I may be growing suspicious; but I think we should exercise extreme caution.

MATHEMATICIAN. We are His Majesty's Council of Three; and we must act faithfully. It is our difficult duty to sanction or disapprove the enterprise.

STATESMAN. We must also consider the economic position. Spain is already heavily burdened with debts and obligations. There is little money in the Treasury. ... But, before we come to our decision, we must see the man himself. (*Rises and calls.*) Show in de Queirós.

(*The curtains are pulled aside, and DE QUEIRÓS enters the Council Chamber.*)

STATESMAN. Welcome, Captain!

(*DE QUEIRÓS bows gravely.*)

DE QUEIRÓS. Gentlemen, may I venture to hope that my mission has succeeded?

STATESMAN. His Majesty's Council will give the matter full consideration.

DE QUEIRÓS. Hasten the measures, I beg you, for this great and necessary work²⁸.

ADMIRAL. Have you a wish to emulate Hernando Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, and seize another mighty kingdom!

DE QUEIRÓS. Why not! Who says Spain can no longer produce brave and adventurous men!

ADMIRAL. You speak boldly, Captain.

DE QUEIRÓS. I know well that many think little of the enterprise or of me. They say that I promise more than I can perform, and that to accomplish so great a deed a person of more parts and valour is needed. That is true. I am all unworthy, I know, and yet I have faith that I can succeed.

STATESMAN. You propose to carry on the work of Mendaña?

DE QUEIRÓS. I do. This may be our last chance. The pirates are on the Pacific. I fear lest they prey on the Spanish possessions, enter the new lands, and bring everything to ruin.

STATESMAN. But are there any new lands to discover?

DE QUEIRÓS. Yes. The Great Southern Continent.

STATESMAN. Let us examine the maps.

(*The MATHEMATICIAN arranges maps and globes.*)

MATHEMATICIAN. Behold these beautiful maps! They are the work of the most celebrated cartographers such as Ribero, Mercator and Ortelius.

STATESMAN (*Pointing to map*). In Ribero's map no Southern Continent is depicted.

MATHEMATICIAN. Ortelius shows the East Indies and the adjacent islands. (*Showing place.*) He says it is uncertain whether this is an island, or part of a Southern Continent.

DE QUEIRÓS. Your maps and charts and globes are fabulous, taken from the writings of Ptolemy, Pliny, Strabo and Marco Polo, not the result of true discoveries.

(*DE QUEIRÓS goes to the great globe, examines it, and points to certain place.*)

Look, here on the globe, should be the Unknown Continent.

(*They all look intently at globe.*)

²⁶ What do you think Admiral?] B.; not in A.

²⁷ sailor] B.; Admiral A.

²⁸ work] B.; enterprise A.

MATHEMATICIAN. I'm inclined to agreed with de Queirós. It was foretold by Ptolemy and the Ancients. And, speaking as a mathematician, I think it must be so. For, according to the laws of physics, it is necessary that there should be a continent in the South to balance the lands in the North.

STATESMAN. That may be true; but I have a feeling that Spain has enough lands. Why seek to discover more?

DE QUEIRÓS. For the glory of God and of Spain. I desire to discover the Great South Land, greater than America, richer than Peru or Mexico—*Terra Australis*²⁹.

ADMIRAL. Do you remember the fate that has already befallen many of our gallant captains! Balboa was beheaded; Magellan fell into the hands of the Infidels; the astrologer, Ruy Falero died raving mad; and de Lepe, who first saw the Strait from the top-mast, deserted his companions for Mohammed.

DE QUEIRÓS. I know the dangers and difficulties; but has it not been said that in great affairs these³⁰ are always overlooked by Spaniards³¹.

ADMIRAL (*Won over*). You're right, Captain. It has always been our boast that we dare and venture the impossible.

DE QUEIRÓS. His Holiness heard me attentively, saw all the papers I showed him, encouraged me to persevere in my laudable intentions, conceded many graces and indulgences for the time when I should be on the voyage, and gave me letters of recommendation to His Majesty, the King.

(*Pause.*)

(*The COUNCILLORS confer together.*)

It is two years since I left Seville to walk to Italy. It is desirable that I should lose no more time.

STATESMAN. Captain de Queirós, now that we have heard you, we are impressed by your knowledge and sincerity. You have convinced us all that the enterprise you propose to undertake is a work worthy of Spain.

DE QUEIRÓS (*Greatly moved*). Am I dreaming! ...³²

STATESMAN. It is no dream, Captain. We will at once arrange an interview with His Majesty, and then you can start for Peru.

DE QUEIRÓS. And shall I have power to fit out an expedition?

STATESMAN. Yes. The King will write an order to the Viceroy that he must provide ships and sailors and all things necessary for the discovery of the Southern Continent.

DE QUEIRÓS. My faith was justified. I could never believe we had reached the sunset of Spanish splendour.

STATESMAN. It is your destiny, we believe, to become the Columbus of the South.

DE QUEIRÓS (*Fervently*). My aim is to add to the Spanish Empires in the West and East an Empire in the South, so that all round the world, God might be known and adored by all his creatures, chanting a universal hymn of praise.

STATESMAN. Spain will not fail.

DE QUEIRÓS. Nor her Knights of Adventure! ... There waits the Great South Land³³. ... With God, I go.

²⁹ Mexico - *Terra Australis*] B.; Mexico, *Terra Australis* A.

³⁰ these] B.; these (*Esson scores out, then restores the word.*) A.

³¹ Spaniards] B.; the Spaniards A.

³² dreaming! ...]B.; dreaming! . A. (*It is unclear whether Hilda intended an ellipsis, or the point is merely a typographical error.*)

³³ the Great South Land] B.; the unknown Southern Continent A.

(Exit DE QUEIRÓS, in exalted mood.)

Curtain.

Scene Three

(A garden in Lima, Peru. Three years later.)

(Upstage, Right, a fountain plays in marble basin, with a marble bench beside it. Behind is a shady avenue of trees, shrubs and flowers are abundant. At Left Centre is a table, gaily decorated, and displaying fruit, flowers and tall graceful wine-glasses. At Right Centre, another stone bench.)

(Seated at table are DE VEGA, a noble, soldierly youth, stern and ascetic-looking, and his friend JUAN, a rich, slightly dissipated, but handsome and romantic youth.)

(With them are INEZ DE MENDOZA, betrothed to JUAN, and TERESA DE LARA, beautiful Peruvian girls.)

(INDIAN SERVANTS bring more wine in old, picturesque jugs, set them on table, and go out silently.)

JUAN. You astound³⁴ me, friend de Vega. How can you leave these delights!—the flowers and moonlight, the wine and music, and the lovely ladies of Lima!

(He rises, lifting his glass to the GIRLS.)

(Recites.)

Whether you love me

I cannot tell

But that I love you

This³⁵ I know well.

(Bows to INEZ.)

INEZ *(Lightly)*. Who would believe our Juan?

JUAN *(Recites)*.

Myself I give you

Ever in fee

Doubt then of all things

But doubt not me.

(The GIRLS laugh.)

To your bright eyes! *(He drinks and sits down.)*

DE VEGA *(Earnestly)*. I seek more than earthly delights.

JUAN. And what is this mad expedition?

DE VEGA. I sail with de Queirós.

JUAN. To find new lands!

DE VEGA. We shall set sail for the Great Unknown Continent of the South.

JUAN. Have you the heart to leave Teresa?

DE VEGA. I've told her my plans.

TERESA. De Vega is a true Spanish Knight. I'm proud of him. It's an honour to see high adventure.

JUAN. I forgot. ... You are a soldier.

DE VEGA. And what are you, friend Juan?

JUAN. A lover. *(Recites.)*

³⁴ astound] B.; astonish A.

³⁵ This] B.; That A

*Since first I saw you,
Under your spell,
All my wits wander,
This I know well.*³⁶

INEZ (*Touching him with her fan*). You're a mocker, Juan.

(*Enter LUIS DE BELMONTE BERMUDEZ, an attractive young man of twenty-one*³⁷, a poet.)

LUIS (*Gaily*). You celebrate our departure.

JUAN. As you see. May I introduce you to the ladies, Luis!³⁸ This is Teresa de Lara, the celebrated beauty, for whom many men have gladly³⁹ died. ... Inez de Mendoza, betrothed to my unworthy self. ...

(*LUIS bows.*)

Luis de Belmonte Bermudez, the illustrious poet, renowned throughout Spain. ... Welcome to the luxurious capital of the Viceroy!

(*LUIS takes seat at table.*)

LUIS. You are too flattering.

JUAN. Wine, Luis? (*Fills his glass.*)

DE VEGA (*Enthusiastically*). Luis knows de Queirós.

LUIS. We were old friends, long ago in Seville.

INEZ. We're Spanish, but we've never seen Spain.

LUIS. I had to leave Spain to seek my fortune, first in Mexico, and then in Peru.

DE VEGA. And you again met our Captain!

LUIS. Fortunately. I've accepted the post of Secretary.

JUAN. I wouldn't trust de Queirós. He's a fanatic, a visionary.

DE VEGA. But his vision may be true.

LUIS. You don't know him as I do, Juan. He is no lover of fame or glory. He is strangely unlike his countryman, Magellan, the little man of steel. He is more like Columbus, who was also a visionary, full of dreams and aspirations. But de Queirós is a great man and a great sailor.

DE VEGA. And he has other great captains with him, Prado and Torres.

LUIS. Yes. They are powerful men to send on the one expedition. Sometimes I wonder if rivalry may arise or misunderstanding from clash of character. But let us trust our Captain. Maybe you'll see him here tonight.

JUAN. De Queirós?

LUIS. His very self.

JUAN (*Rising and calling*). Wine! Bring wine!

(*INDIAN SERVANTS enter carrying curiously shaped vessels that they put on table. JUAN then waves*⁴⁰ *them away and they silently retire.*)

Let us drink. What does the old poet say! (*Recites.*)

*Come, let us eat and drink today
And sing and laugh and banish sorrow
For we must part tomorrow.
For that is Wisdom's counsel still*

³⁶ See Note regarding translation and punctuation of poem.

³⁷ twenty-one] 21

³⁸ ladies, Luis!] B.; ladies! A.

³⁹ gladly] B.; already A.

⁴⁰ waves] B.; sends A.

Today be gay, and banish sorrow

For we must part tomorrow.

(Drinking.) Success to your voyage! *(Sits down.)*

DE VEGA. Who knows what our future may be.

LUIS. You say truth. Remember what Pizarro told us. What a lottery is this New World. The great prizes are indeed so few that it is heavy odds against us finding any, hazarding, as we do, our health, our fortune and our lives.

JUAN. The lands you seek were surely known to the Saracens and the Hindus and Chinese?

DE VEGA. Don't heed him. He's jesting.

INEZ. I've heard of the Land of Parrots.

JUAN *(Laughingly)*. And of men with dogs' heads.

TERESA. Are there really monsters and sea-dragons?

INEZ. And mermaidens?

JUAN. Tell us, Luis. You are a poet.

LUIS *(Shaking his head)*. No. I'm only a secretary.

JUAN *(Drinking.)* Here's to your return, with all the riches of the Moluccas and Java, and Cathay!

TERESA. You won't be jealous, Inez. De Vega will bring me pearls and ornaments of gold.

JUAN *(Mocking)*. King Solomon's⁴¹ gold.

DE VEGA. De Queirós will take us to the Isles of Solomon that Mendaña discovered.

TERESA. Were they the very Isles whence Solomon fetched gold to adorn the Temple at Jerusalem?

DE VEGA. I truly believe they are the land of Ophir.

TERESA. I wonder if the old tales are true.

LUIS. Who knows what is true or not! The world is full of marvels.

JUAN. Here are the marvels: fountains playing in the moonlight, flowers wine and Inez. *(Recites.)*

Since first I saw you

So it befell

My fate was to love you,

This I know well.

INEZ *(Gaily)*. And tomorrow he'll say the same to another. ... This I know well.

DE VEGA. I want adventure.

LUIS. Seek and ye shall find.

JUAN. Love or glory⁴²?

DE VEGA. Mocker! What is your choice?

JUAN. How can you ask! Give me lovely lips and wine ...

DE VEGA *(Rising)*. I'm tired of this folly. Gladly will I sail for the new South Land, a land for Spanish cavaliers to conquer.

(Enter DE QUEIRÓS.)

DE QUEIRÓS *(Gently)*. Not to conquer, to save.

LUIS. It's our Captain, de Queirós.

(They all rise.)

DE QUEIRÓS *(Triumphantly)*. Great news at last, Luis. I've seen the Viceroy. Our plans are completed to the smallest detail. Nothing has been left to chance. We're ready to sail.

DE VEGA *(Coming over eagerly)*. To sail! We're to sail!

(INEZ and TERESA quietly retire to the background, where they walk slowly along the avenue.)

⁴¹ King Solomon's] B.; Solomon's A.

⁴² glory] B.; play A.

JUAN (*With glass in hand, asking lightly*). Tell us about the ships, Captain.

DE QUEIRÓS (*Proudly*). They're well adapted for service. I shall command *The Capitana*, a beautiful ship with its standards and carvings, and painted with no little art. *The Almirante* will be commanded by Prado, with Torres as chief pilot. Our third ship is a launch of small size, but strong, and a good sailor named *The Three Kings*! *The Three Kings* of the Southern Spice Lands, who had seen the star and followed the gleam.

(*JUAN puts down wine-glass, crosses and nervously sinks down on bench beside fountain.*)

LUIS. I'm delighted. Who could have dreamed of this happy event when you entered Peru!

DE QUEIRÓS. It's nearly a year since I arrived at Callao, with debts for the passage and food, and no money. For three tedious years from the time I left Madrid, full of hope, I met with further disappointments and mishaps. Few had faith in the grandeur of the enterprise. But I forgive the scoffers now that our toils and adventures have been rewarded.

DE VEGA. What will they say when the New Land is discovered, and you return in triumph!

DE QUEIRÓS. I seek no triumph. This is a chivalrous enterprise, not a voyage for gain, demanding the personal sanity of each man who has the glory of sharing in it.

DE VEGA. The glory is great.

DE QUEIRÓS. We are sons of Francis, who always sought noble adventure in distant lands. Every soldier and every sailor must be a Knight of the Holy Spirit.

(*JUAN rises and advances with rapt expression.*)

JUAN. Captain, Captain!

DE QUEIRÓS. What is it, my son?

JUAN. Take me with you.

DE QUEIRÓS. What is your meaning?

JUAN. I've a burning desire to sacrifice everything and go with you. Your words have been more potent than wine. I see a new life before me. Take me, I beg you.

DE QUEIRÓS (*Quietly*). You would make the voyage with us?

JUAN. Yes.

DE QUEIRÓS. To the unknown Southern Seas?

(*INEZ and TERESA come out of avenue and stand beside fountain.*)

JUAN. More than anything in the whole world.

DE QUEIRÓS. Do you understand the art of navigation?

JUAN. No.

DE QUEIRÓS. Can you steer a course or make a reckoning?

JUAN. Alas, no.

DE QUEIRÓS. And you are rich⁴³. You've been gently reared. You may not be used to cold and hunger and hardship.

JUAN. I'm not weak, Captain. I've been careless and dissolute; but I've travelled through the snows⁴⁴ on the mountains.

DE QUEIRÓS. But our work is dangerous and toilsome.

JUAN. I'll do anything. I'll sweep the decks, I'll watch the stars from the mast-head. I'll fix the ropes and rigging, I'll try, I'll try to help de Queirós.

DE QUEIRÓS. Good, my son, I believe you. You have the right spirit.

JUAN. Is it true? Am I accepted?⁴⁵

DE QUEIRÓS (*Embracing him*). Yes. I accept you as one of our Knights of the Holy Spirit.

⁴³ rich] *B.*; rash *A.*

⁴⁴ snows] *B.*; snow *A.*

⁴⁵ accepted?] *B.*; accepted. *A.*

(DE QUEIRÓS goes slowly to avenue, Left, where he pauses⁴⁶ dreamily, looks up at the moon-lit sky.)

LUIS. You're coming with us, Juan. I drink your health. *(Goes to table.)*

DE VEGA *(Sceptically)*. You're more fitted for love-making in Lima⁴⁷ than for fierce battling with cannibal tribes and unknown seas and lands.

JUAN *(Defiantly)*. I'll go where another goes.

DE VEGA *(Clasping his hand)*. Well done, Juan. *(He goes to TERESA.)*

JUAN. I'm willing to cast my lot, life and fortune and all, on this one throw of the dice.

(INEZ leaves TERESA and DE VEGA, and advances to JUAN.)

INEZ. Juan!

JUAN *(Overwrought)*. See, she weeps at the thought of my venturing. She loves me!

INEZ *(Passionately)*. You can't go. You can't leave Lima.

JUAN. What use am I here, an idler and spendthrift!

INEZ. You're a fool, Juan. *(Turning away.)* No, I was the fool to believe your vows.

JUAN *(Pleased)*. Inez!

INEZ. You love me no more.

JUAN. I adore you.

INEZ. You don't love me. You've never loved me.

JUANA. You are my Madonna.

INEZ. So you say, and yet you want to leave.

JUAN. But I'll return more worthy of you. *(He kneels before her imploringly.)* Inez, beautiful Inez!

(TERESA comes forward.)

TERESA. Let him go, Inez, with my de Vega.

INEZ. Will you ever come back to me?

JUAN. I swear it.

INEZ. What do you swear by?

JUAN. By God and the Saints! *(He kisses her hands then rises proudly.)* And Inez!

TERESA *(Consoling INEZ)*. Take heart. We shall wait and pray together.

(TERESA leads her weeping to marble bench.)

(DE QUEIRÓS comes forward.)

DE QUEIRÓS. It's a beautiful night!⁴⁸ The sea is⁴⁹ calm, the wind fair. Everything is in our favour. Luis, we sail tomorrow.

LUIS *(Risin)*. Tomorrow!

DE QUEIRÓS. Yes. All is in order for our embarkation from Callao. The Viceroy has proclaimed a public holiday. It will be a day of days, ever to be remembered. *(Solemnly.)* Ours will be the most important expedition that ever set out in search of the Southern Continent.

JUAN *(Enthusiastically)*. Tomorrow!

DE VEGA *(Embracing him)*. We're sailing, Juan.

(TERESA and INEZ weep gently by the fountain.)

(LUIS, JUAN and DE VEGA watch DE QUEIRÓS whose eyes are shining.⁵⁰)

⁴⁶ pauses] B.; (undecipherable) A.

⁴⁷ in Lima] B.; at home A.

⁴⁸ It's a beautiful night!] B.; What a beautiful moonlight night! A.

⁴⁹ sea is] B.; seas are A.

⁵⁰ LUIS, JUAN ... are shining.] B.; LUIS and JUAN and DE VEGA watch DE QUEROS whose face is now pale and his eyes shining. A.

DE QUEIRÓS (*Quietly but fervently*). Let us pray for a good voyage!⁵¹

Curtain.

Scene Four

(On board The Capitana. South Pacific Ocean. 1606.)

(A portion of main deck, on the diagonal, with projection of raised poop deck up on Left. The face of the poop, which is elaborately carved, shows an open doorway. The poop deck, which is like a low balcony overlooking the main deck, is reached by a stairway with wooden steps. From the railings above hang the standards. Down Left, on main deck, below the poop deck, is the steering wheel, partly hidden by the shrouds—used as rope ladders—that rise to mizzen-mast, unseen, behind. Down Right is the main-mast, with sails, rigging, shrouds etc. On the main deck is a hatchway, while lying about are other sails, coils of rope, casks etc.)

(There is a backcloth of sea and sky. At Back the low bulwark of the far side of the ship is seen.)

(On rise of curtain SAILORS are working at sails, rigging etc. A few SOLDIERS, sprawling on the deck, are gambling with cards and dice.)

(A group of FRIARS passes across deck to forecastle—Right.)

(THE STEERSMAN is at the wheel.)

(On the poop deck are LUIS and JUAN, who is dressed in armour.)

SAILOR ONE. There's no sight of land.

SAILOR TWO. Whither are we drifting in the great Gulf?

SAILOR THREE. Maybe, to hell.

SAILOR ONE. Have we given up the search for Santa Cruz?

JUAN. Where are we now, Luis?

LUIS. Somewhere in the South Pacific. Are you afraid, Juan?

JUAN. Not afraid, but weary.

LUIS. We've only been four months at sea.

JUAN. I've forgotten time.

LUIS. So you long to return.

JUAN. I confess it. But shall I ever see Peru again, or Inez!

(Enter, on poop deck, THE COMMISSARY, an aged Brother of eighty.)

COMMISSARY. Have courage, son!

JUAN. I wear armour; but I'm no hero.

COMMISSARY. Have you forgotten the day of our embarkation from⁵² Callao?

JUAN. No. Never shall I forget it.

COMMISSARY. I'm an old man, but never have I seen a greater festival in Lima, with the city beflagged, church bells ringing, and the whole people gathered at the wharves. The ships were blessed, and hymns sung in the streets. Everybody prayed for our success and the safe return of the fleet.

LUIS. I can still hear the shouting when our sails at last caught the breeze, and away we went ... into the West.

JUAN. Many tears were shed that day.

COMMISSARY. It was only by the Captain's favour that you were allowed to sail with us. You're a noble youth, Juan; don't grow faint hearted and regret the enterprise.

⁵¹ voyage!] B.; voyage. A.

⁵² from] B.; at A.

GONZALEZ [SOLDIER ONE] (*On man deck*). Play up!

SOLDIER TWO. It's my throw.

SOLDIER THREE. No, it's mine!

(*They shout, quarrelling over the game.*)

COMMISSARY (*Seeing them*). Look, they're gambling. They've cards and dice. That the Captain won't permit.

(*THE COMMISSARY goes down stairway, and approaches the GAMBLERS.*)

GONZALEZ. Look out!

SOLDIER TWO. Here's the Commissary!

SOLDIER THREE. What do I care!

COMMISSARY. What's all this!

GONZALEZ (*Speaking for the rest*). Only a little play.

COMMISSARY. It's against the Captain's orders.

GONZALEZ. We're soldiers, not priests and scholars.

COMMISSARY. Have you no care for discipline?

GONZALEZ. Discipline! When we're lost in the Ocean.

COMMISSARY. I warn you. If you don't stop your play you may be put in chains.

(*THE COMMISSARY returns up stairway, to poop deck.*)

GONZALEZ. Let him babble, the foolish old man! Play up, boys!

(*Defiantly SOLDIERS continue their games with cards and dice.*)

JUAN. How can we trust these ruffians, thieves from Mexico and Peru, cut-throats from the lowest dens of Spain!⁵³

COMMISSARY. There are strange contrasts among them, martyrs as well as ruffians. They are willing to help us to conquer islands (if we can find them) but are determined meanwhile to have all earthly joys. But to de Queirós they're all Knights of the Holy Spirit.

(*SOLDIERS quarrel violently.*)

SOLDIER TWO. It's mine!

SOLDIER THREE. Liar!

GONZALEZ (*Rising*). God condemn⁵⁴ your soul! May a thousand devils torment you in the pit of hell.

(*Enter, from doorway at poop, DE QUEIRÓS, in Franciscan costume.*)

DE QUEIRÓS (*Quietly*). What have we here! ... Cards and dice. ... You know those games are forbidden.

GONZALEZ. But Captain, what can we do to pass the time?

DE QUEIRÓS. There are good books to study, and wooden swords to drill recruits with. You could learn the art of fortification and artillery, the spheres and navigation. These pursuits are better than gambling games.

(*LUIS, JUAN and THE COMMISSARY come down from poop deck to join DE QUEIRÓS.*)

GONZALEZ. I've sailed with Mendaña and other Captains before that. I was in the Great Armada against England, when the winds defeated our purpose. But what with prayers and fasting I've no strength left to fight again.

JUAN. This is a dangerous man. He should be put in chains.

DE QUEIRÓS. I've brought no chains, no irons. (*To SOLDIERS.*) But you deserve some punishment.

GONZALEZ. Do your worst, Captain.

⁵³ Spain!] B.; Spain. A.

⁵⁴ condemn] B.; damn A.

DE QUEIRÓS. You were quarrelling over your cards and dice, and cursing too. I must make an example. *(Pause.)* You will forfeit your day's ration.

GONZALES *(Laughing)*. With pleasure. It's not worth eating.

COMMISSARY. A mild punishment, Captain.

DE QUEIRÓS *(Picking up cards and dice)*. Here are the cards and dice. They're no help to us. Let us see them no more. *(Throws them overboard.)*

SOLDIER TWO *(Protesting)*. Captain!

SOLDIER THREE. What have you done!

DE QUEIRÓS. Enough! Attend to your business, men, and do not offend again.
(DE QUEIRÓS crosses to STEERSMAN.)
(To STEERSMAN.) Very good. You're keeping the course.

STEERSMAN. Aye aye, Sir.

DE QUEIRÓS. I thank you. *(Exit DE QUEIRÓS through the doorway at poop.)*

SOLDIER TWO. The sun is scorching.

SOLDIER THREE. Why didn't we stay at the island we passed?

SOLDIER FOUR. We must keep the ship moving.

SOLDIER FIVE. Where is it taking us?

GONZALEZ. Nobody knows—not even the Captain.

SOLDIER TWO. Devil take the sea.

SOLDIER THREE. Are we lost?

GONZALEZ *(Scornfully)*. Set the ship's hands where you like, he says, and God will guide them somewhere.
(Mocking laughter.)
(Exit GONZALEZ, down the hatchway.)

SOLDIER TWO. It's the salt food and excessive heat that afflicts me.

SOLDIER THREE. We're short of water, that's our chief trouble.

SOLDIER FOUR. It's the old story.

SOLDIER FIVE. Where's the Captain's fancy instrument?

SOLDIER TWO. To distil sweet water from sea-water.

SOLDIER THREE. Three jars a day.

SOLDIER FOUR. Not enough for a chicken.

SOLDIER FIVE. I've a terrible thirst I long to quench in the water-springs of Santa Cruz.

LUIS. No more of these mutterings and complaints. The Captain knows the lore of the sea. Go back to your work.
(SAILORS continue working at various parts of the ship. The SOLDIERS go sullenly down the hatchway.)
I must work too.

JUAN. At your poetry, Luis?

LUIS. I'm glad you can jest, Juan. I'm busy on scientific papers.
(Exit LUIS through doorway, at poop.)

JUAN *(Looking across sea)*. There ... I think I can see our other ships *The Almirante* and the launch. How small they look on the great ocean, bobbing up and down like ducks.

COMMISSARY. But the sea is calm. It was truly named the Pacific.

JUAN. Like all things in this world it's treacherous and deceitful. There's sometimes a cruel thought hidden behind a bewitching smile. That's our Pacific!
(Enter, from doorway, DE VEGA, in Franciscan costume, and carrying a book under his arm.)
What have you got there, de Vega?

DE VEGA. Nothing to interest you.

COMMISSARY. Let me see.

DE VEGA (*Showing book to COMMISSARY*). It's the life of St Anthony, the Hermit.

JUAN. I've no wish to become a hermit.

DE VEGA. Of course not, Juan. You care only for worldly joys.

JOAN. Yes, I sigh for Lima, with its fountains and green balconies and soft music.

DE VEGA. And Inez, and her bright eyes.

JUAN. And you've already forgotten Teresa.

DE VEGA. No. But I would live in solitude and teach the heathen.

JUAN. Go your way, St Anthony.

COMMISSARY. Be quiet, Juan. De Vega is a well disposed and soldierly youth, leading a life of self-denial.

JUAN. So am I, but against my will.

COMMISSARY. Never despair, my son. Our toils and sufferings will yet be rewarded.

(A group of FRIARS crosses deck from forecandle, Right, and passes through doorway at poop, Left.)

I'm eighty years of age; and yet I want to give my last strength to the cause. ... It's time for afternoon prayers.

(Exit COMMISSARY, after FRIARS.)

DE VEGA. Have you become too delicate for handling sail or hauling ropes?

JUAN. That's not my business. I'm a soldier.

DE VEGA. In appearance, not in ardour.

JUAN. Don't reproach me, de Vega. *(Recites softly.)*

The rose looks out of the valley

And thither would I go

To the rosy vale, where the nightingale

Sings his song of woe.

DE VEGA. You're love-sick. I'm ashamed of my friend.

(SAILORS and SOLDIERS come on deck, some from the forecandle and others up from the hatchway.)

JUAN. What do those men want! They look threatening. Let us turn back or we'll all die of hunger.

SOLDIER TWO. We've sailed far enough.

SOLDIER THREE. We've been deceived

SOLDIER FOUR. A curse on the ship.

SOLDIER FIVE. We'll endure no more.

(MEN mutter among themselves, some threateningly, while others carry on their work faithfully.)

(Enter DE QUEIRÓS, from doorway.)

DE QUEIRÓS. What are these new disorders and discontents?

SOLDIER. A pretty pass you've brought us to, Captain.

DE QUEIRÓS. I'm your leader. You must trust me as I trust you.

SOLDIER. You promised us a Land of Gold; but that was a fairy-tale. No glint of gold have we seen, and the further we go the worse we suffer.

DE QUEIRÓS *(With gentle irony)*. Are you brave lads so moved because you've missed a meal!

SOLDIER. It's the fiend who won't suffer us to enter the South Seas.

JUAN. You should have hung these cowards and traitors at the masthead.

DE QUEIRÓS. I would govern in peace. *(To the MEN.)* Have you lost the will to perform heroic deeds! No true Spaniard refused extraordinary service, if necessary, and scorns a reward.

SOLDIER *(Less aggressively)*. Fate is against us. You cannot hope to prevail, Captain.

DE QUEIRÓS. Think what Magellan said to his men. 'We'll eat the hides that cover the tops of the main-yard, before we turn back!'

JUAN. Magellan was a stern leader. He executed traitors to the cause, even royal officials.

DE QUEIRÓS. There's no need for bloodshed. I know my duty, and yours, too, sailors. It's for me to set the example, you to follow, if you're worthy of the name you bear.

(The MEN are now confused, not knowing what to do.)

(From the forecastle GONZALEZ is brought in guarded, followed by LUIS, later by COMMISSARY.)

LUIS. This is the leader of the discontented. Look at him! He is a well-known cut-throat and ruffian.

DE QUEIRÓS. Your name?

GONZALEZ. Gonzalez.

DE QUEIRÓS. Where do you come from?

GONZALEZ. Seville.

DE QUEIRÓS. A beautiful city, where my family dwells. I have dear memories of Seville. ... Why did you come on this voyage?

GONZALEZ. For loot.

DE QUEIRÓS. For that only?

GONZALEZ. I want gold, Captain, and plunder. I've heard of the great treasures of the Isles of Solomon. There are pearls there, and gold and silver.

DE QUEIRÓS. Are all your thoughts of gold and silver and pearls?

GONZALEZ. I want riches when I return to Spain. I want to eat good food and drink wine in the taverns, and spend money on gay ladies. After the hazards of a long and dangerous voyage, I want my reward.

DE QUEIRÓS. Do you care nothing for the great New land?

GONZALEZ *(Laughing)*. Is it richer than Peru, Captain?

DE QUEIRÓS. You think but of riches. Are you Christian or Moor?

GONZALEZ *(Laughing)*. Neither.

DE QUEIRÓS. What is his crime?

LUIS. He has many crimes. He's a cruel and desperate man. I've just discovered that he has shot natives from this ship, in wanton disobedience of your orders.

DE QUEIRÓS. Why did you do this terrible deed?

GONZALEZ. I did it for a bet to show what a good shot I was.

DE QUEIRÓS. How will it serve you to enter into hell with the fame of being a good shot! It's a foul and sinful thing to murder a body which contains a soul.

GONZALEZ. They were only black men and heathens. What does it matter if I send them to the devil today, as anyway, they'd have to go tomorrow. *(Laughs.)*

LUIS. And today he's been sowing strife among our men, even inciting to mutiny.

DE QUEIRÓS. What have you to say, Gonzalez?

GONZALEZ. It's true, Captain. You threw my dice overboard. I meant to stab you, take the ship, and sail for the Golden Isles.

DE QUEIRÓS. It was a foolish thought. I'm sorry for you.⁵⁵

JUAN. It was a mistake not to punish the wicked. See how this criminal has repaid you by speaking evil of you and your services, and trying to ruin the cause you love.

GONZALEZ. I'm an old soldier. Damn your cause and all your souls. I want treasure.

DE QUEIRÓS. Do you see that block placed at the yard-arm?

⁵⁵ I'm sorry for you.] B.; I'm sorry.

GONZALEZ. I do.

DE QUEIRÓS. Well, you'll have to hang there as a warning to others. *(To THE COMMISSARY.)*

You must confess him, Brother.

GONZALEZ. Confess, why? I haven't confessed for fourteen years.

DE QUEIRÓS. Have you no fear of death?

GONZALEZ. I've faced death many times. I'd like to see Seville again, if I'd gold in my pockets.

Yet, if it can't be, I'm ready.

(GUARDS take him away to forecastle, accompanied by THE COMMISSARY.)

SOLDIER TWO. This is the end of Gonzalez

SOLDIER THREE. He's earned his fate.

SOLDIER FOUR. A murderer and traitor.

SOLDIER FIVE. He's beyond forgiveness.

SOLDIER TWO. Why did we listen to him?

SOLDIER THREE. He'd have led us to perdition.

DE QUEIRÓS. He has one virtue, courage. Luis!

LUIS. What is it, Captain?

DE QUEIRÓS. Bring him back!

(Exit LUIS.)

JUAN. What are you doing, Captain?

DE QUEIRÓS. You'll see.

(Enter GONZALEZ, guarded, with LUIS following.)

Gonzalez!

GONZALEZ. What! Have I to be tried again!

DE QUEIRÓS. No.

GONZALEZ. I confess everything.

DE QUEIRÓS. That's better than lying. No, go! You're a free man.

GONZALEZ *(Dazed)*. Free! Am I free?

DE QUEIRÓS. Yes. But do no evil.

GONZALEZ. I thought I'd be swinging at the yard-arm.

(Exit GONZALEZ, bewildered, to forecastle.)

DE QUEIRÓS. I'm trusting the shock may waken his conscience.

JUAN. I fear he may try to injure you again.

DE QUEIRÓS. It would be great cowardice to think of that. I've never hoped to be of good report and I cannot waste a moment on such folly. I must consider more urgent matters.

(Exit DE QUEIRÓS to doorway.)

SAILOR ONE. Come on, boys, we'll fix the sails.

SAILOR TWO. Anything may happen now.

SAILOR THREE. We'll trust the Captain.

(SAILORS go about their work cheerfully.)

JUAN. They all seem in good humour again.⁵⁶

(Enter SAILOR FOUR.)

SAILOR FOUR.⁵⁷ Quick!

DE VEGA. What's the matter?

SAILOR FOUR. The seams have opened in several places. She leaks badly.

DE VEGA. We'll soon find the leaks and mend them. Come on, I'll find men to bale the ship.

⁵⁶ They all seem ... again.] *B. not in A.*

⁵⁷ SAILOR FOUR] SAILOR A.

(Exit DE VEGA, with SAILOR FOUR, to forecastle.)

SAILOR ONE. This is the ship to carry home the gold.

SAILOR TWO. Now I can see the old saying is true.

SAILOR THREE. What is that?

SAILOR TWO. That hunger sharpens wit.

(They laugh.)

JUAN. It's marvellous. What an extraordinary change our Captain made in them.

LUIS. He always believes in treating kindly and lovingly all the people under his charge. He needs no knife, chains or other rigour to keep them contented and firm in their loyalty.

(Enter DE VEGA.)

JUAN. How is it, de Vega?

DE VEGA. All's well. We were in good time.

JUAN. No more threat of danger?

DE VEGA. No. The men are working with a will. The ship's safe.

(Enter DE QUEIRÓS, on poop deck.)

JUAN *(Looking up)*. Captain.

DE QUEIRÓS. Yes.

JUAN *(Hesitatingly)*. Will we ever see land again?

DE QUEIRÓS. Surely.

JUAN. Before it's too late?

DE QUEIRÓS. Listen, Juan. Never lose faith. We may see land at any moment.

JUAN. Land! Are we really near land?

DE QUEIRÓS *(Quietly, but confidently)*. We should be, if my reckoning is correct.

JUAN. Thank you, Captain.

(JUAN returns to LUIS and DE VEGA.)

(Excitedly.) We may be near land.

DE VEGA. The Great Unknown Continent! Come on, Juan—Knight in Armour!

JUAN. I follow—St Anthony!

(Exeunt JUAN and DE VEGA, arm in arm, through doorway.)

(LUIS turns, looking up at DE QUEIRÓS.)

LUIS *(Humming as he climbs stairway and joins DE QUEIRÓS on poop deck)*.⁵⁸

Three dark maids who went together

Picking olives in clear weather,

My, but they were in fine feather -

DE QUEIRÓS. Why, Luis, is all your poetry only a celebration of love and wine?

LUIS. It is customary for poets to sing of the delights of the world.

DE QUEIRÓS. There is no delight in temporal things. How can the soul be satisfied with what is fleeting and illusory?

LUIS. I'm but a minor poet, a singer of light songs. Immortal themes are for the masters.

DE QUEIRÓS. If I were a poet I would sing of the Maiden of the South, the Unknown Continent; for, like old Magellan,⁵⁹ who burned with love for her, I know she is so beautiful, Luis, and more desirable than the ladies of Lima who are famed for beauty.

LUIS. But the ladies of Lima are sometimes kind.

⁵⁸ *(Humming as he climbs ... poop deck.)*] B. *(Reciting.)* A. *(Esson repositions, and emends, the Stage Direction previously placed after Luis' recitation.)*

⁵⁹ Magellan,] B. Magellan A.

DE QUEIRÓS. My Maiden is a Spirit. Her head is veiled, and flames flash all about her, threatening intruders; but she waits for her own true lover with eager eyes, like a Moorish⁶⁰ maiden behind her veil.

(Pause.)

LUIS. A verse comes into my mind, written by a Spanish poet.

*Behold where hidden are the lands
Scarcely discerned by mortal ken
Those are regions still unknown
Never pressed by Christian men.
This will ever be their fate
Want of knowledge keeps them there
Wrapt within a fleecy cloud
Until God shall lay them bare.*

DE QUEIRÓS. It's true, what the poet says. There is another world. I see it ... I always see it, dreaming or awake.

LUIS. For my part I would sail on and on, without the wish ever to find land. Here are no fair ladies to lead us into folly, no merchants bartering for gain. Where people are,⁶¹ there is strife and evil. There is peace on the sea.

DE QUEIRÓS. ... Storm or calm, sunlight or starlight, I must follow the quest.

LUIS. Are we sailing like Jason for the Golden Fleece, or like Ulysses in search of the Happy Isles! Shall we find the lost Atlantis, a Utopia of the South under the tropic of Capricorn!⁶² The Ancients dreamed of such a land.

DE QUEIRÓS. The Ancients were right, Luis.

LUIS. Maybe we shall reach the Gardens of the Hesperides, of which famous poets have sung; or, if later prophets have spoken truth, maybe we shall find ourselves at the end of the world itself, in the Garden of Eden!

DE QUEIRÓS. You were ever a dreamer, my friend.

LUIS. Nay, Captain. Our sailors are as worthy of fame as the Argonauts who sailed with Jason to Colchis; and your ship, *The Capitana*, deserves to be placed among the constellations more than the ship *Argo*, for *The Argo* sailed only from Greece through the Black Sea, while we are traversing an unknown ocean.

DE QUEIRÓS. My mission is for no Golden Fleece, jewels, silks or spices, silver or gold; it is for a mine of souls,⁶³ in the New South Land.

LUIS. And what will the New Land be! Will it be a land of griffins and other monsters, giants clad in wild-beast skins, and men with their heads under their shoulders? Or shall we be devoured, like the companions of Magellan, by the Anthropophagi, who the Indians called the cannibals!⁶⁴

DE QUEIRÓS. Why these vain fantasies, Luis?

LUIS. It's a speculation, Captain. Or will the men be nobler than the soldiers of Spain, and the women lovelier and more constant than the dear ladies of Lima! Will there be richer pastures and whiter cities! Will the laws there be just, unlike ours and virtue and valour honoured, and truth and beauty! Will our dreams here become realities there!

⁶⁰ Moorish] *B.*; moorish *A.*

⁶¹ are,] *B.*; are *A.*

⁶² Capricorn!] *B.*; Capricorn. *A.*

⁶³ souls,] *B.*; souls *A.*

⁶⁴ cannibals!] *B.*; cannibals. *A.*

(Pause.)

LOOK-OUT MAN *(At mast-head, off stage,⁶⁵ shouting cheerfully)*. Land. ... Land ahead!

(General excitement. SAILORS and SOLDIERS appear from all sides, some climbing out of hatch-way.)

SAILOR ONE. Land!

SAILOR TWO. Is it land?

SAILOR THREE. Where?

SAILOR ONE. Look ... mountains.

(Enter JUAN and DE VEGA, to main deck.)

JUAN. I see columns of smoke rising.

DE VEGA. There are people and villages.

(Enter THE COMMISSARY and FRIARS.)

COMMISSARY. Our sufferings are at an end.

(He kneels, praying. FRIARS chant Te Deum.)

DE QUEIRÓS *(From poop deck)*. This day is the most joyful and most celebrated day of the whole voyage.

LUIS *(Beside him)*. It is the Continent at last!

(SAILORS and SOLDIERS shout and cheer.)

LOOK-OUT MAN. Land ... high land ... ahead.

DE QUEIRÓS *(Lifting his hand in thanksgiving)*. Oh, Great South Land.

Curtain.

Scene Five

(The same. On board The Capitana.)

(Mid-ocean. Six weeks later. Night approaches. There is threat of a storm.)

(SAILORS are busy with sails, ropes etc. The STEERSMAN is at the wheel, partially hidden by shrouds. LUIS, is sitting alone on poop deck, writing.)

SAILOR ONE *(As they work at different tasks)*. How the ship rolls and pitches!

SAILOR TWO. There's a heavy swell and cross seas.

SAILOR THREE. Where are we now?

SAILOR FOUR. Mid-ocean.

SAILOR THREE. Will we ever see land again!

SAILOR FIVE. What a sullen and threatening sky.

SAILOR TWO. I fear the storm.

(Enter JUAN, from doorway at poop, Left.)

JUAN. Not too much noise, men.

SAILOR ONE. Why! Where's the Captain?

JUAN. Sick in bed.

SAILOR TWO. Ours is the unlucky ship.

JUAN. No more talk like that. We've seen enough treachery.

(JUAN climbs wooden stairway to poop deck.)

(Going to LUIS.) What are you writing, Luis? An epic poem?

LUIS. No, Juan. Only my report on the island.

JUAN. How could we have been so mistaken!

⁶⁵ off stage,] B.; not in A.

LUIS. It was only an island after all, not the Great Southern Land we sought.

JUAN. And yet at first it looked so.

LUIS. It was all a bitter disappointment. And then our enforced departure! No wonder the Captain's desperately ill.

JUAN. What dreams we had, what hopes!

LUIS. We mustn't think of that. This is my account of the official landing. (*Reads from script.*) 'I take possession of the bay, named the Bay of St Philip and St James, and of its port, named Santa Cruz, and of the site on which is to be found the city of New Jerusalem and of all the lands which I sighted and am going to sight, and of all the regions of the South as far as the Pole, which from this time shall be called *South Land of the Holy Spirit*. In the name of the King, Don Philip, Third of that name, King of Spain and of the Eastern and Western Indies, I hereby hoist the Royal Standard.'

(*Enter DE VEGA on poop deck.*)

JUAN. Ah, Luis, will we ever forget the processions and festivals, soldiers in armour, friars praying, natives dancing and singing, the discharges of rockets and fire-wheels -

DE VEGA (*Solemnly*). All in vain. It was the Island of Illusion.

JUAN. And we thought it was the end of our quest.

DE VEGA. Five weeks we spent there, and what was our achievement! Fighting with the natives, murder, rapine, plots and treachery.

JUAN. But we've left it, de Vega.

DE VEGA. To turn back, defeated, while Prado and Torres have deserted us and gone on South.

LUIS. What else could we do! We had no choice. They were too strong for us.

SAILOR ONE. They call this ocean the Pacific.

SAILOR TWO. The serene Pacific.

SAILOR THREE. Where are we going?

SAILOR FOUR. To Manila or Mexico.

SAILOR FIVE. We'll be carried by the currents into darkness and swept away.

LUIS. The storm's approaching. I must see the Captain.

(*Exit LUIS.*)

DE VEGA (*Looking out at sea*). Is that land in front of us?

JUAN. Where?

DE VEGA. That misty shape in the distance.

JUAN. I see nothing.

DE VEGA. It may be a small island.

JUAN. Another island of illusion.

DE VEGA. I seek a new life, Juan. I hate all this plotting and counter-plotting.

JUAN. Soon we'll return;⁶⁶ and, if not gold and jewels, we'll have at least strange dreams to spread before the feet of our lady-loves.

DE VEGA (*With strained expression*). I have no wish to return.

JUAN. Have you no thought of⁶⁷ Teresa?

DE VEGA. I love Teresa, but my love is sacred, not profane.

JUAN. Are you not tired of our long voyaging and fruitless struggle! Are you eager to seek once more the unattainable Continent?

DE VEGA. Perhaps my work lies closer at hand.

JUAN. What do you mean by that! You look strange, de Vega.

⁶⁶ return;] *B.*; return, *A.*

⁶⁷ no thought of] *B.*; forgotten *A.*

DE VEGA. I'm a soldier; but I would fight to capture only the souls of people.

JUAN. But you must first capture their bodies.

DE VEGA. True, Juan. You're still a mocker.

JUAN (*With deep sincerity*). Don't let us quarrel. We've been friends from youth.

DE VEGA (*With his hand on his shoulder*). Be kind to your Inez, Juan, and give Teresa my blessing.

(*Pause.*)

JUAN. Storm clouds are threatening, and darkness may soon be⁶⁸ upon us.

DE VEGA. Have no fear! (*He moves off.*)

JUAN. Where are you going?

DE VEGA. Who knows his destiny? Think kindly of me, Juan.

(*Exit DE VEGA.*)

(*JUAN paces up and down poop deck,⁶⁹ perturbed and then goes off.*)

SAILOR ONE (*While working*).⁷⁰ Are we keeping the course?

SAILOR TWO. We're sailing into the storm.

SAILOR THREE. Any of these mountainous waves may swamp us.

SAILOR FOUR. And send us to the bottom.

(*Enter DE VEGA, quietly, from doorway in poop. He crosses towards forecastle, carrying a frail craft.*)

SAILOR ONE. We're sailing back.

SAILOR TWO. Empty-handed.

SAILOR THREE. Where are the rich lands of gold and spices?

SAILOR FOUR. It's all the Captain's fault.

SAILOR FIVE. He's always ill.

(*DE QUEIRÓS, lying on a couch, is carried on to the main deck. The couch is set down not far from STEERSMAN. LUIS attends him.*)

DE QUEIRÓS. I must see for myself.

LUIS (*Lifting him on couch*). Be careful, Captain. It's a stormy night.

DE QUEIRÓS. Oh, why should I be so sick and feverish! I can suffer neither sun nor shadow. ...

Where are we now, Luis?

LUIS. We're still sailing North.

DE QUEIRÓS. Was it a plot? Had Prado a secret despatch with instruction to take over the command?

LUIS. It was a dangerous situation. There was mutiny among the soldiers.

DE QUEIRÓS. It was my physical weakness that prevented me contending with them. They ate against the enterprise, like moths!

LUIS. In any case we had to leave the island.

DE QUEIRÓS. But the Continent was near. I know it. I can see it. Oh, Land, sought for so long, intended to be found by so many, and so desired by me.

LUIS. The glory will yet be yours.

DE QUEIRÓS. I care nothing for glory. I had such faith. Why have these men deserted me! It's my sin. I'm unworthy.

(*Enter JUAN, distraught.*)

LUIS. What is it, Juan?

⁶⁸ soon be] *B.*; be soon *A.*

⁶⁹ deck,] *B.*; deck *A.*

⁷⁰ (*While working.*)] *B.*; not in *A.*

JUAN. De Vega, my friend. He's gone. He slipped overboard in a little boat.

LUIS. Overboard!

JUAN. It's my fault. I knew something was seriously wrong. I should have saved him.

LUIS. Bear up, Juan.

JUAN. He thought there was an island near.

LUIS. Have we passed an island?

JUAN. I couldn't see it. *(Breaks down.)* How can I tell Teresa? He may be drowned.

DE QUEIRÓS *(Rising on couch)*. Have faith, Juan. Whom God wishes to live,⁷¹ will live.

JUAN. He wanted to imitate St Anthony, renounce the world to teach the heathen, and live in solitude.

DE QUEIRÓS. He was a brave youth. He had his mission, as I have mine.

(Storm rages, and darkness begins to fall.)

JUAN. The storm's fiercer than ever.

DE QUEIRÓS. See to the lanterns, sailors.

SAILORS. Aye, aye, sir.

—We'll light the lanterns.

DE QUEIRÓS *(Rising on couch)*. We go North; but the land I seek is South. South and West and South. ... It's the Land of the Holy Spirit, and we're sailing away from it. *(Gets off couch and goes to STEERSMAN.)* No, no. ... We'll go back. I'm Commander still. ... Give me the wheel. We'll turn the ship round. *(Tries to take wheel from STEERSMAN, but, exhausted he falls back into LUIS' arms.)*

LUIS. Captain!

DE QUEIRÓS. I'm too weak. I'm lost, Luis.

(LUIS and JUAN assist him.)

LUIS. You'll gain strength and confound your enemies.

DE QUEIRÓS. Prado will see it with mortal eyes; but I see it too, Luis I see it ... my beloved Land. ... *Terra Australis*. ... *(Sinks on couch.)*

JUAN. How is he?

LUIS. He's very weak, but whom God wishes to live, will live.

(DE QUEIRÓS is carried off on couch, assisted by LUIS and JUAN.)

SAILORS *(Moving about ship)*. Lanterns! Light the lanterns!

(Lanterns are lit in several places. Storm still rages. Night falls.)

Curtain.

Scene Six

(Panama, 1615.)

(Near wharf, with a view of the sea, where vessels are riding at anchor in the roadstead. In the distance, through the tropic vegetation, may be seen the Governor's House, with the flag of Spain flying on the top, a stone church, a fort, and houses of adobe or sun-baked mud.)

(It is a hot, sultry, oppressive afternoon.)

(A few SAILORS and LOUNGERS are grouped about.)

CROWD. A curse on this Panama!

—It's devilish hot.

—Hotter than hell.

⁷¹ wishes to live,] B.; wished to live A.

—I'd rather be a mule-driver in Seville than the Governor of all Panama.

—The pirates and buccaneers can sack it,⁷² for all I care.

—I used to hate the sea and ships, but I'd like to⁷³ be on a voyage now.

—We must have been sent here for our sins.

—The only good place is the wharf, where you can see the ships.

—What good's that to us when we're confined to duty at the fort.

—I'd like to return to Spain or Peru.

—We'll get away yet.

—If we live long enough.

—More likely we'll all die of fever.

—Or other evils.

—I'm tired of voyaging.

(Enter DE QUEIRÓS, old-looking, sick and haggard.)

DE QUEIRÓS. What do I hear! Tired of voyaging! It's a great glory to plough the waters of unknown seas.

SAILOR. Who are you?

DE QUEIRÓS. A navigator.

SAILOR. What action have you ever done?

DE QUEIRÓS. I travelled twenty thousand leagues by sea and land, left my wife and family, spent all my fortune and injured my body with such suffering and terrible hardships that, even to myself, they seem almost incredible. And all this I've undergone that I might not abandon a work of so much importance.

SAILOR. Who knows what he's talking about! Tell us, Captain, what do you seek, with so much pain and trouble?

DE QUEIRÓS *(Earnestly)*. I seek the Great South Land.

(They all laugh.)

CROWD. You're another Pizarro.

—Or Christopher Columbus.

DE QUEIRÓS. For fifteen years, amid infinite difficulties, I've been engaged on this work of discovery.

SAILOR. Is there, in truth, a rich kingdom in the South?

DE QUEIRÓS. To those who can win through the tempestuous seas.

CROWD. But are they who say so worthy of belief?

—Where is this Great South Land?

—No one has ever seen it.

DE QUEIRÓS *(Quietly)*. I might have seen it myself.

(They laugh and mock him.)

CROWD. Don't listen to him.

—He's mad.

—Madder than Don Quixote.

DE QUEIRÓS. Yes, I discovered islands; and never have there been found inhabited islands that were not near a continent. It's another New World, like America, Austral Land of the Holy Spirit.

SAILOR *(Humouring him)*. It holds great riches, I hope.

DE QUEIRÓS. I've seen silver and pearls.

SAILOR. His wits are wandering.

⁷² sack it,] *B.*; sack it *A.*

⁷³ like to] *B.*; rather *A.*

DE QUEIRÓS. Torres says he saw gold.

SAILOR. I wish I could see gold, even a small coin.

(They laugh.)

DE QUEIRÓS. You may laugh, my friends; but there, far across the seas, may be toil, hunger and privation—and yet gladly would I barter all the riches of Mexico and Peru for a sight of that lovely, unknown land.

(Pause.)

SAILOR. What if those tales were true!

(Enter a BEGGAR-MAN.)

BEGGAR. Alms, give alms!

SAILOR. Go away!

DE QUEIRÓS. Who are you?

BEGGAR. A poor beggar, sir. I've been long on the roads.

DE QUEIRÓS. And I too; and on the seas.

BEGGAR. I ask but a trifle for a crust and a cup of wine.

SAILOR. I've nothing to give. Be off with you!

BEGGAR. Is poverty a sin?

DE QUEIRÓS. No, indeed. Riches and honesty, they say, seldom fit into the one sack. Here, take this! *(Gives him money.)*

BEGGAR. God bless you, sir.

DE QUEIRÓS. I've travelled far, and I owe money for rent, for fares, and the hire of mules. But what's a little gold and silver. I'll gain riches to pay for all.

(Enter LUIS, who quietly watches the scene.)

BEGGAR. All I want from this world is bread and patience and death with repentance.

DE QUEIRÓS. We're both seekers, friend. Go with God.

(Exit BEGGAR-MAN.)

SAILOR. I know that old rascal. He'll soon be found drunk in the tavern among the wine-skins.

(They crowd round DE QUEIRÓS, jeering him.)

CROWD. I'm a seeker, too, Excellency.

—Give alms!

DE QUEIRÓS. I've given all I had.

CROWD. Is that all your wealth?

—Where are your gold and pearls?

—Behold him—the Knight of the Rueful Countenance!

(LUIS advances.)

LUIS. What's this, you rabble, you scum of the earth, dare you insult de Queirós!

CROWD *(Surprised and ashamed)*. De Queirós!

—The great Captain!

—We meant no harm.

LUIS. Be off with you!

*(Exeunt the MEN casually.)*⁷⁴

What's this, you've given your money to a beggar-man! That's a fine jest, truly.

DE QUEIRÓS. Listen, my good Luis, there's no time for jesting. I'm fifty, and I feel old and sick; disease has sapped my strength, now when I need it most.

LUIS. I'm here to help you.

⁷⁴ *(Exeunt MEN casually.)*] B.; *(undecipherable)* A.

DE QUEIRÓS. I know. You've ever been my truest friend. To come to me again, after all these years, you have faith, Luis, faith in me and in the vision. (*Embraces him.*) Prado and Torres coasted along land. It must have been the Continent. The proof is completed by the letter of Torres which gave me great pleasure and incited me to continue this great and noble work.

LUIS. And yet, they never knew!

DE QUEIRÓS. Prado has said that I'm only a dabbler, a dreamer, a visionary. Is that true, Luis? Well, I've suffered for my dream. What years I spent in Spain in poverty and debt. Once I had to sell my clothes and bedding. And worse, I had to pawn the very banner under which I took possession of the island. I wrote fifty memorials and drew two hundred maps. ... Columbus' obstinacy was not so great as mine, nor so great his work.

LUIS. Your spirit never allows you to rest.

DE QUEIRÓS. How can I rest! It's Spain's last chance.

LUIS. What has Spain done to deserve it! She has committed innumerable sins, colonising only for gold and gems. Behold her works in America! Instead of saving the natives she has sold them into slavery when she hasn't exterminated them. Her conquests are a tale of blood and rapine.

DE QUEIRÓS. Yet God now offers her one more opportunity, and the last. All that has been lost in America may be gained in the new Land of the South. (*Takes out scroll.*) Here's the scroll, my recommendation to the Viceroy of Peru, signed by His Majesty, the King.

(*LUIS examines scroll.*)

LUIS. I trust when he learns the details of the enterprise he'll further your designs and fit you out some fine ships.

DE QUEIRÓS. It's the King's command. ... People think I'm mad, mad with voyaging. But I made a vow in youth that my life would be devoted to this glorious discovery. I must fulfil my vow.

(*Pause.*)

My work is just beginning. (*With ecstatic expression.*) Look ... I can see it ... that lone and lovely land. ... It seems the best and fairest has been kept to the last. ...

(*He shows signs of weakness and is about to fall, when LUIS supports him.*)

Luis!

LUIS. I'm here, Captain.

(*He places him gently on bench shaded by trees.*)

DE QUEIRÓS. I feel faint. ...

LUIS. It's the heat.

DE QUEIRÓS. Can this be the end of the quest! ... Was it only a dream, Luis?

LUIS (*Softly*). Life is a dream.

DE QUEIRÓS. Ah, the scroll!

(*LUIS gives him the scroll.*)

... My precious scroll. ... I would set out again on one last voyage. ... Too late. ... Oh, sweet South Land ...

(*He dies quietly.*)

(*LUIS bends over him.*)

(*Some of the SAILORS and LOUNGERS return. LUIS raises his hand. The MEN take off their hats.*)

LUIS. De Queirós has passed into the Unknown and the heroic days of Spain and Portugal have gone for ever.

SAILORS. What can we do!

—We'll carry him to the fort.

LUIS. Now he will rest in peace, his long voyaging over. Honour to de Queirós, the last of our long and glorious roll of sea-men. He has not failed. He has opened the way for great future

discoveries. Oh, great South Land, the *Terra Australia* he so sought and loved—I believe his vision was true. . . . Others will follow the quest.

(*CROWD stands round reverently, as LUIS bends over DE QUEIRÓS.*)

Curtain.

Notes

NB. Esson's principal reference was Clements R Markham's *The Voyages of Pedro Hernandez de Quiros 1595 to 1606*, published in 1904 by the Hakluyt Society.

Scene One

Seville, 1600: Port in Southern Spain. At this time the city had the monopoly of Spain's fabulously wealthy New World Trade. Cf. Esson's poem 'Seville' published in *The Bulletin*, 18 March 1915

There's Seville, in Spain, a dainty city,
With marble founts and Moorish walls,
With her beauties famed in amorous ditty,
And bull-fights, and gipsies, and bright mask-balls.
Each street, each stone, has a song or story
(An El Dorado once Spain could win),
Though Seville forgets her ancient glory
As she sways, in the dance, to the mandolin.
But Music, Romance, will linger ever
'Mong the orange groves by the Guadalquivir.

And here's a Seville, brand new, ungainly
(No Spanish casa or Moslem gate).
The traveler asks for her legend, vainly,
The grass is yellow, the rains are late.
But thrushes sing in the gum-trees, olden.
The creek can tell of the blue o' the sky,
And the sun looks down on a forest golden,
When children are chasing the dragon-fly.
Is this her tale, but the wind and weather?
If was here we crossed the hills together.

Doña Ana [Chacon, of Madrid]: daughter of the licentiate Juan Quevedo de Miranda. She was a year older than de Queirós. Their son Francisco, was born to them in 1590, after which they relocated to Peru; their daughter Jeronima was born some months after Queirós sailed from Peru with Mendaña in 1595.

the South Seas: commonly refers to the portion of the Pacific Ocean south of the equator.

Madrid: Capital city of Spain. Its name may be derived from the Arabic named *Medshrid*, which comes from *materia*, meaning 'timber'—a reference to the forests that grew there when the Moors built a fortress on the site in the Ninth Century.

licentiate: a person who has received a formal attestation of professional competence to practise a certain profession or teach a certain skill or subject

Mendana: Álvaro de Mendaña y Neira (1542–1595); Spanish navigator; best known for the two voyages of discovery he led into the Pacific in 1567 and 1595 in search of *Terra Australis*.

Viceroy of Peru: Luis de Velasco *hijo*, Marqués de Salinas, Spanish nobleman. He was Viceroy from January 27 1590 to November 4, 1595, and again from July 2, 1607 to June 10 1611.

King of Spain: Philip III (1578–1621), ruled 1598–1621; ruled Portugal as Philip II.

The Solomon Islands: an island group (consisting of six major islands and over 900 smaller islands) situated to the east of Papua New Guinea and north-west of Vanuatu; named after the Biblical King by Mendaña who discovered them on his voyage from Peru in 1568. He found no gold, let alone the fabled King Solomon's Mines.

Santa Cruz: Attempting to return to the Solomon Islands on his second trip of 1595, Mendaña discovered Nendo Island, which he named Santa Cruz. Mendaña died on the Island in the same year, and the settlement was abandoned and the three ships departed on 18 November 1595.

The Grout South Land [or *Terra Australis*]: a hypothetical continent which appeared on maps between the 15th and 18th centuries. Its existence was based on the idea that continental land in the Northern Hemisphere should be balanced by land in the Southern Hemisphere.

another shuffle of the cards: Cf. Cervantes, *Don Quixote*: 'What I say is, patience, and shuffle the cards.' (Chapter 23.)
a Job in poverty: In the Old Testament (*Book of Job*), Job was a Hebrew leader who questioned God's infliction of suffering on the righteous while enduring great suffering himself.

I'm a Portuguese ... Old feuds are forgotten: When de Queirós questioned the antipathy of the 'miserly merchants' of Seville against the Portuguese, Carlos is most likely referring to emnity prior to The Treaty of Tordesillas (7 June 1494), at which time Spain and Portugal divided the New World by drawing a north-to-south line of demarcation in the Atlantic Ocean—about 555 kilometers west of the Cape Verde Islands—off the coast of northwestern Africa and then controlled by Portugal. All lands east of that line were claimed by Portugal; all lands west of that line were claimed by Spain.

[Christopher] Columbus: (c. 1451–1506), Italian explorer, navigator, and coloniser. Born in the Republic of Genoa, under the auspices of the Catholic Monarchs of Spain, he completed four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean. Those voyages, and his efforts to establish settlements on the island of Hispaniola, initiated the permanent European colonisation of the New World.

Vasco de Gama: (c.1469-1528) Portuguese Navigator; he led the expedition which discovered the route to India round the Cape of Good Hope.

[Ferdinand] Magellan: (1480-1521) Portuguese Navigator; he sailed from Seville around the foot of South America to reach the ocean which he named the Pacific.

To see the Pope. it is Jubilee year: Holy Year was proclaimed by Pope Clement VIII in 1600. Christian Jubilees generally involve a pilgrimage to a sacred site, as in de Queirós case, to the city of Rome. In Christianity, the concept of the Jubilee is a special year of remission of sins and universal pardon. In the *Book of Leviticus*, a Jubilee year is mentioned to occur every fiftieth year, during which slaves and prisoners would be freed, debts would be forgiven and the mercies of God would be particularly manifest.

Scene Two

Council of Three: This scene is strongly reminiscent of Bernard Shaw's dialectical appraisal of 'the Maid' in Scene Four of *St Joan; a chronicle play in six scenes and an Epilogue* (1924) between the Earl of Warwick, Peter Cauchon, and de Stogumber. In Shaw's case, the argument falls against Joan. In reality, de Queirós arrived at Madrid with his credentials in the spring of 1602, and had interviews with Philip III, and with his Minister, the Duke of Lerma. The Pope's influence secured his success. Within a year he had obtained a royal order, through the Council of State, addressed to the Viceroy of Peru, instructing that dignitary to fit out two ships at Callao, to enable de Queirós to undertake an expedition for the discovery of the Antarctic continent.

the Rica Nova: (*Portuguese*) new rich.

Lisbon: Capital and Port of Portugal, located on the west coast, stands on the Bank of the Tagus river 15km from the sea.

Philippine Islands: Situated in the western Pacific Ocean, the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in Homonhon, Eastern Samar in 1521 marked the beginning of Hispanic colonization. In 1543, Spanish explorer Ruy López de Villalobos named the archipelago *Las Islas Filipinas* in honour of Philip II of Spain. With the arrival of Miguel López de Legazpi from Mexico City, in 1565, the first Hispanic settlement in the archipelago was established.

Spain is already heavily burdened with debts and obligations: the Spanish economy in the latter part of the 17th century was in decline as a result of plague and emigration impacting population growth; this was exacerbated by inflation—due to the volume of precious metals arriving from the Americas—the the subsequent threat to exports. Meanwhile, Spanish forces in Germany and the many ships at sea also put extra stress on the Spanish economy.

a second Columbus: according to Markam, this was actually said of him *after* his unsuccessful voyage: 'He is not a reliable man. He has got it into his head that he's a second Columbus and this is his affliction.'

Hernando Cortés: (1485-1547) Spanish conqueror of Mexico.

Francisco Pizarro: (1478-1541) Spanish conquistador; he served in Italy and with the expedition which discovered the Pacific. In 1526, he and Almagro sailed for Peru and in 1531 began the conquest of the Incas.

the pirates on the Pacific: the Barbary pirates; Cf. the Morisco.

[Diego] Ribeiro: (also known as Diego Ribero)(?-1533), Portuguese cartographer and explorer who worked most of his life in Spain. He worked on the official maps of the *Padrón Real* (or *Padrón General*) from 1518-1532. He also made navigation instruments, including astrolabes and quadrants.

[Gerardus] Mercator: (1512-1594), 16th-century German-Flemish cartographer, geographer and cosmographer. He was renowned for creating the 1569 world map based on a new projection which represented sailing courses of constant bearing (rhumb lines) as straight lines—an innovation that is still employed in nautical charts. He was one of the founders of the Flemish school of cartography and is widely considered the most notable representative of the school in its golden age.

[Abraham] Ortelius: (1527 1598), Flemish cartographer and geographer, conventionally recognised as the creator of the first modern atlas, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Theatre of the World). One of the founders and the notable representatives of the Netherlandish school of cartography in its golden age, he is also believed to be the first person to imagine that the continents were joined together before drifting to their present positions.

the writings of Ptolemy, Pliny, Strabo and Marco Polo: When Ptolemy of Alexandria published his *Geographia* (circa 150AD) he produced the hypothetical southern continent of *Terra Australis nondum cognita*, or the Unknown South Land.

[Vasco Núñez de] Balboa: (c. 1475 – 1519), Spanish explorer, governor, and conquistador. He is best known for having crossed the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean in 1513, becoming the first European to lead an expedition to have seen or reached the Pacific from the New World. In 1519, returning to Acia, Balboa was arrested by Francisco Pizarro, in the name of the governor and accused of trying to usurp the Administrator Pedrarias Dávila (Pedro Arias de Ávila) y Ortiz de Cota's power and create a separate government in the South Sea. Outraged, Balboa denied all charges and demanded that he be taken to Spain to stand trial at which time he was sentenced to death by decapitation. Balboa's head did not come off clean on the first try; it took three attempts.

Magellan fell into the hands of the Infidels: Ferdinand Magellan was killed by a poison arrow during a skirmish on the island of Mactan (in what is now the Philippines) on April 27 1521.

Ruy Falero died raving mad: Rui (Ruy) Faleiro, Portuguese cosmographer, astrologer, and astronomer was the principal scientific organiser behind Magellan's circumnavigation of the world. Faleiro planned to accompany Magellan however it is said that on the evening prior to embarkation, Faleiro worked out his own horoscope for the voyage: the stars predicted a violent death. Consequently, he remained behind. Other sources claim he went mad before the voyage, and thus did not join the expedition.

Scene Three

Lima, Peru: founded by Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro on January 18, 1535, as Ciudad de los Reyes, Lima became the capital and most important city in the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru. It is located in the valleys of the Chillón, Rímac and Lurín rivers, in the central coastal part of the country, overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Juan: Cf. Juan de Arguijo of Seville; the son of the Tenerife merchant Gaspar de Arguijo.

Whether you love me ...: Cf. Inigo López de Mendoza, Marquis of Santillana (1398-1458):

Poem

*Whether you love me
I cannot tell.
But that I love you,
This I know well.*

*You and none other
Hold I so dear.
This shall be always
Year upon year.*

*When first I saw you,
So it befell
I gave you all things -
This I know well.*

*Myself I gave you
Ever in fee.
Doubt then of all things
But doubt not me ...*

Luis de Belmonte Bermúdez: Cf. Luis Belmonte Bermúdez (c1598–c1650), a playwright of the Spanish Golden Age.

Come, let us eat and drink today/And sing and laugh and banish sorrow: Cf. Juan de Enzina 'Farewell to the Carnival' (translated by Dr Bowring):

*Come let us eat and drink today,
And sing, and laugh, and banish sorrow
For we must part tomorrow.
In Antruejo's honour—fill
The laughing cup with wine and glee,
And feast and dance with eager will.
And crowd the hours with revelry,
for that is wisdom's counsel still -
Today be gay, and banish sorrow,
for we must part tomorrow ...*

The Land of Parrots: '*Psitacorum Regio*' ('The Land of Parrots')—an alternative name to a Great South Land—appears on the 1564 New World Map by Antwerp cartographer Abraham Ortelius.

men with dogs' heads: The characteristic of cynocephaly (or cynocephalus) of having the head of a dog—or of a jackal—is a widely attested mythical phenomenon existing in many different forms and contexts. Medieval travellers

Giovanni da Pian del Carpine and Marco Polo both mention 'cynocephali.' Giovanni writes of the armies of Ogedei Khan who encounter a race of dogheads who live north of the Dalai-Nor (Northern Ocean), or Lake Baikal. Polo's *Travels* mentions the dog-headed barbarians on the island of Angamanain (the Andaman Islands). According to Henri Cordier, the source of all the fables of the dog-headed barbarians, whether European, Arabic, or Chinese, can be found in the *Alexander Romance* (any of several collections of legends concerning the mythical exploits of Alexander the Great).

Moluccas: The Maluku Islands (or the Moluccas), an archipelago within the Banda Sea, Indonesia, Geographically located east of Sulawesi, west of New Guinea, and north and east of Timor. The islands were known as the Spice Islands due to the nutmeg, mace and cloves that were exclusively found there, and the presence of these sparked colonial interest from Europe in the 16th century.

Java: an island of Indonesia; it lies between Sumatra to the west and Bali to the east. Borneo lies to the north and Christmas Island is to the south. Java's contact with the European colonial powers began in 1522 with a treaty between the Sunda kingdom and the Portuguese in Malacca. After its failure the Portuguese presence was confined to Malacca, and to the eastern islands. In 1596, a four-ship expedition led by Cornelis de Houtman was the first Dutch contact with Indonesia.

Cathay: the Anglicized rendering of 'Catai' and an alternative name for China. Originally, *Catai* was the name applied by Central and Western Asians and Europeans to northern China; the name was also used in Marco Polo's book on his travels in China (he referred to southern China as *Mangi*).

Ophir: a region mentioned in the Bible (*Genesis 10*), famous for its wealth. King Solomon received a cargo of gold, silver, sandalwood, pearls, ivory, apes, and peacocks from Ophir every three years.

The Capitana: literally the 'Captain's ship' (*The San Pedro*) commanded by Prado.

The Almirante: literally the 'second in charge' (*The San Pablo*), commanded by de Torres.

[Captain Don Diego de] Prado [y Tovar]: commander of *The Capitana* on de Queirós voyage of exploration in the South Seas in 1605-6. Prado's journal, *Relación (Relation)* addressed to the King of Spain provides an eye-witness detailed account of the discovery of Torres Strait and northern tip of Australia, made during the continuation of the voyage to Manila by Torres after the parting of the ships at the Island of Espiritu Santo, whence Queirós returned.

[Luís Vaz de] Torres: (1565 -1607), maritime explorer of a Spanish expedition noted for the first recorded European navigation of the strait which separates the continent of Australia from the island of New Guinea, and which now bears his name (Torres Strait).

Three Kings: *Los Trey Reyes*; the tender (or launch) the third vessel on the voyage.

we sail tomorrow: ie on the feast of St Thomas, 21 December 1605.

Callao: Main port of Lima, the capital city of Peru.

Let us pray for a good voyage: de Queirós spent the first three weeks of the voyage in his cabin; his diary refers constantly to 'sickness.' Meanwhile his crew laboured under the following general rules: 'there must be neither cursing nor blaspheming ... no playing with dice nor with cards—all gaming tables to be thrown over board ... all crew each afternoon to go down on their knees before images of Christ and the Virgin Mary and pray for intercession.'

Scene Four

South Pacific Ocean. 1606: the largest and deepest of Earth's oceanic divisions, the Pacific Ocean extends from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south and is bounded by Asia and Australia in the west and the Americas in the east. First sighted by Europeans in the early 16th century when Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama in 1513 and discovered the great 'southern sea' which he named *Mar del Sur*. The ocean's current name was coined by Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan during the Spanish circumnavigation of the world in 1521, as he encountered favourable winds on reaching the ocean. He called it *Mar Pacífico*, which in both Portuguese and Spanish means 'peaceful sea.'

St Anthony [of Padua], the Hermit: (1195-1231) Born Lisbon, Portugal. Christened Ferdinand, he took the name when joining the Franciscan order. He converted Muslims in Morocco.

The Rose looks out at the valley ...: Cf. Gil Vicente, called the Trobadour, Portuguese playwright and poet who acted in and directed his own plays. Considered the chief dramatist of Portugal, he is sometimes called the Portuguese Plautus, often referred to as the Father of Portuguese drama.

they have to go tomorrow: Cf. Mendana's camp master: 'because to kill is our pleasure and our profession ... and what matter if the heathen are consigned to hell today since they will go there in any case tomorrow?'; one soldier admitted to killing a nursing mother simply to provide his prowess as a good shot. [Markam.]

'Now I can see the old saying is true ... That hunger sharpens wit.': Thomas Dekker, *The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus* (1599), 2.ii: 'Hunger is a grindstone, it sharpens wit.'

Behold where hidden are the lands ...: 'A verse written by a Spanish poet,' quoted in G Arnold Wood, *The Discovery of Australia*, MacMillan and Co (1922):

*Behold where hidden are the lands,
Scarce discerned by mortal ken,
Those are regions still unknown,
Never pressed by Christian men.
This will ever be their fate,
Want of knowledge keeps them there,*

*Wrapt within a fleecy cloud,
Until God Shall lay them bare.*

men with their heads under their shoulders ... Anthropophagi, who the Indians called the cannibals: Cf. Shakespeare's *Othello*, 1.iii:

And of the Cannibals that each other eat.
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.

Oh, Great South Land!: Land was sighted on 26 January, 1606; this was in fact Polynesia.

Scene Five

the Captain's desperately ill: Leaving *Espiritu Santo* de Queirós ate fish, the highly poisonous fargos, and was violently ill with nausea, vomiting and high fever; for several days he was close to death.

I take possession of the bay, named the Bay of St Philip and St James, and of its port, named Santa Cruz, and of the site on which is to be found the city of New Jerusalem and of all the lands which I sighted and am going to sight, and of all the regions of the South as far as the Pole, which from this time shall be called *South Land of the Holy Spirit*. In the name of the King, Don Phillip, Third of that name, King of Spain and of the Eastern and Western Indies, I hereby hoist the Royal Standard.: Cf. Markam Chapter XXIV:

'Finally, I take possession of this bay, named the Bay of St. Philip and St. James, and of its port named Santa Cruz, and of the site on which is to be founded the city of New Jerusalem, in latitude 15° 10', and of all the lands which I sighted and am going to sight, and of all this region of the south as far as the Pole, which from this time shall be called Australia del Espiritu Santo, with all its dependencies and belongings; and this for ever, and so long as right exists, in the name of the King, Don Philip, third of that name King of Spain, and of the eastern and western Indies, my King and natural Lord, whose is the cost and expense of this fleet, and from whose will and power came its mission, with the government, spiritual and temporal, of these lands and people, in whose royal name are displayed there his three banners, and I hereby hoist his royal standard.'

Scene Six

Panama, 1615: In 1614, a new Viceroy was appointed to Peru, and de Queirós was given permission to accompany him. 'Seeing,' he wrote, 'that my health and patience were by now quite worn out, I decided to put into this man's hands all my life's work!' 'Trust me,' the Viceroy said, 'and I will do my best to help you.' They sailed for Callao. it was well for de Queirós that he died *en route*. For death spared him the last betrayal. He never knew that among the Viceroy's papers was an order expressly forbidding him ever again to search for the continent of his dreams. It has been said that de Queirós was the last of the conquistadors and that with him died the heroic age of Spain.

Don Quixote: the eponymous hero of Miguel de Cervantes novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, published in two parts (1605 and 1615); a satirical Romance. Don Quixote, a self styled knight, embarks on a series of chivalric adventures accompanied by his servant Sancho Panza. Don Quixote's imagination leads him to see harmless objects as enemies to be fought (as in his tilting at windmills).

Riches and honesty, they say, seldom fit into the one sack.: Cf. Richard Barckley, *The felicitie of man, or, his summum bonum* (1631): 'Riches and honesty seldom dwell together.'

'I'm fifty, and I feel old and sick; disease has sapped my strength, now when I need it most.: At the time of writing *The Quest*, Esson was himself fifty years old.

The Southern Cross

A Chronicle Play in Four Acts

Dedicated to
Katharine Susannah Prichard

Note: For help in many ways, I wish to thank Ernest R Pitt,
T Fleming Cooke, and the Staff of the Melbourne Public Library,
Maurice Blackburn MHR, the late R S Ross, Mrs J P Lalor and my wife.
LE

Publication

Hilda Esson (Ed.), *The Southern Cross, and Other Plays* by Louis Esson, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne, 1946)

Louis Esson, *The Southern Cross*, Manuscript 5579, British Drama League (Australian National Library) (A)

Copy Text

The copy text is based on that published in *The Southern Cross, and Other Plays*, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne, 1946.

I have noted variants in Esson's hand (in black ink) included in the typed manuscript (A) clearly used by Hilda for publication.

On the folder cover of the typed manuscript (A), is written in Hilda's hand: 'Last act—different from final version—but consider it better—was changed at Katie's [Katharine Susannah Prichard's] suggestion.'

There are seven hand-written quarto pages headed 'Act III Scene III' in Esson's hand (B). These pages are transcribed and included in Hilda's typescript (A) as ACT IV SCENE III, all of which have been excised with a vertical stroke in black pencil and not included in the Copy Text.

Esson began work on his 'Eureka play' in 1926 but it wasn't until 1930 that he wrote to his old theatrical colleague William Moore, that his 'chronicle play' was now structured in '4 acts and 12 scenes.'¹

¹ c. 1930—La Trobe [MS12156]

Characters

SIR CHARLES HOTHAM, Governor of Victoria
CAPTAIN KAYE, his Private Secretary
W F STAWELL, Attorney-General
JOHN FITZGERALD FOSTER, Chief Secretary
JUDGE BARRY
B C ASPINAL, Barrister²
COMMISSIONER AMOS
PETER LALOR, The Diggers' Leader
J B HUMFFRAY, Secretary of the Ballarat Reform League
GEORGE BLACK, Editor of *The Diggers' Advocate*
TOM KENNEDY, a Scottish Chartist
TIMOTHY HAYES, Chairman of the Bakery Hill meeting
CEDERIC VERN, a young German soldier
CARBONI RAFFAELLO, a teacher of languages
CAPTAIN ROSS, the standard bearer³
FATHER SMYTHE, a priest
PAT, a young digger
MAT, an old digger
HARRY, a storekeeper
A TROOPER
LADY HOTHAM, the Governor's wife
MRS KAYE, wife of Captain Kaye
ALICE DUNN, Lalor's fiancée
NORA, Pat's wife
MARY, a servant
JESSIE, a young girl

Diggers, Troopers, Soldiers, Officials, Jurymen,⁴ Pikemen, Women and Children,
Immigrants of various nationalities.

Scenes

ACT ONE

Scene One—Ballarat Gold-fields, July 1854.

ACT TWO

Scene One—Gold-fields, some months later.⁵

Scene Two⁶—Government Offices, Melbourne, 27 November.

² JUDGE BARRY/B. C. ASPINAL, Barrister] *not in A; emended in Esson's hand A.*

³ CAPTAIN ROSS, the standard bearer] *not in A.*

⁴ Jurymen,] *not in A.; emended in Esson's hand A.*

⁵ ACT TWO Scene One Gold-fields, Some months later.] Act I Scene II The same. Some months later A.; *emended in Esson's hand A.*

⁶ ACT TWO Scene Two] Act II Scene I A. *Note: Act I Scene III A. excised (see Notes)*

Scene Three⁷—Vice-Regal residence, Toorak, the same afternoon.

Scene Four⁸—Bakery Hill, Ballaarat, Wednesday afternoon 29 November.

ACT THREE

Scene One—Room in a store, the next day.

Scene Two—Bakery Hill, the same day (afternoon).⁹

Scene Three¹⁰—Eureka stockade, Saturday, 2 December.

Scene Four¹¹—The same. Early next morning.

ACT FOUR

Scene One—A room in Miss Dunn's house, Geelong, some weeks later, January 1855.

Scene Two—Vice-Regal residence, Toorak¹², a month later.

Scene Three—Supreme Court, Melbourne, 21 March 1855.¹³

Scene Four—A street, outside the Supreme Court, a few minutes later.¹⁴

⁷ ACT TWO Scene Three] ACT II Scene II A.

⁸ ACT TWO Scene Four] ACT II Scene III A.

⁹ Scene Two Bakery Hill. The same day. Afternoon.] *not in A.; emended in Esson's hand A.*

¹⁰ ACT THREE Scene Three] ACT III Scene II A.

¹¹ ACT THREE Scene Four] ACT III SCENE IV A.

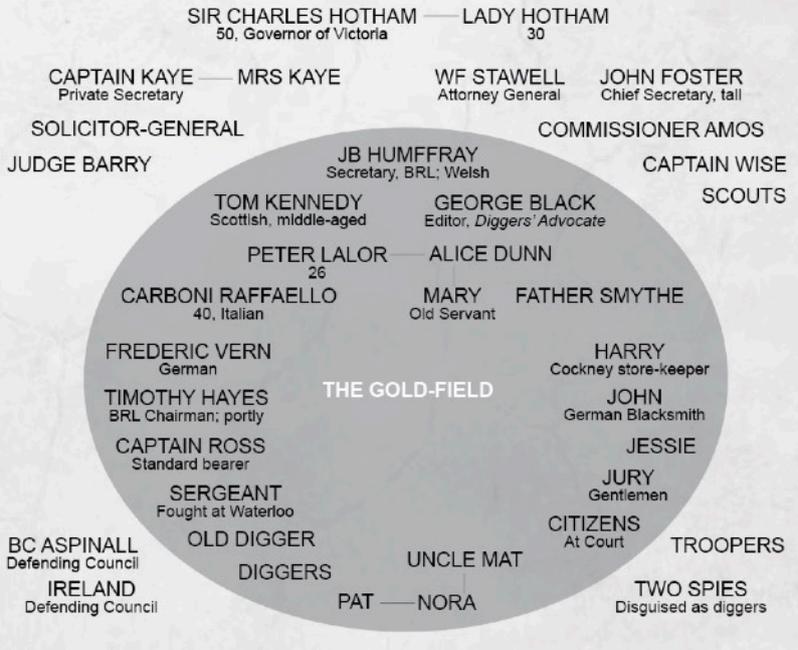
¹² Toorak] Toorac A.; *emended in Hilda's hand A.*

¹³ Supreme court, Melbourne. March 21st, 1855.] Ballaarat Gold-Fields. The first Anniversary of The Eureka Stockade. A.; *scored out and emended in Esson's hand A.*

¹⁴ A street, outside the Supreme Court. A few minutes later.] *not in A.; emended in Esson's hand A.*

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

Setting: *ACT ONE Scene One—Ballarat gold fields, July 1854.*
ACT TWO Scene One—Gold-fields, some months later. • Scene Two—Government Offices, Melbourne, 27 November. • Scene Three—Vice-Regal residence (drawing room), Toorak, the same afternoon. • Scene Four—Bakery Hill, Ballarat, Wednesday afternoon 29 November.
ACT THREE Scene One—Room in a store, the next day. • Scene Two—Bakery Hill, the say day. • Scene Three—Eureka stockade, Saturday 2 December • Scene Four—Eureka stockade, early the next morning.
ACT FOUR Scene One—A room in Miss Dunn's house, Geelong, some weeks later, January 1855 • Scene Two—Vice Regal residence, Toorak, a month later. • Scene Three—Supreme Court, Melbourne, 21 March 1855. • Scene Four—A street, outside the Supreme Court, a few minutes later.



ACT ONE

Scene One

(Ballaarat gold-fields, 1854.)

(The scene suggests the busy, multi-coloured, roaring life of the young mining settlement that has sprang up in the bush. Tents, claims, mullock-heaps, windlasses, cradles etc., are seen in the distance.)

(Across the back runs a bush road.)

(During the action, PEOPLE are coming and going, TROOPERS, CHINESE, BLACKFELLOWS, a few WOMEN and CHILDREN, and DIGGERS, dressed in blue or red shirts, corduroy or moleskin trousers, and wide-awake hats, some with Russian boots, and long scarlet sashes.)

(It is a bright, winter's day.)

(At Left Centre, is the opening of a tent. Beside it is a bench, with dish, billies, buckets etc.)

(At the rise of the curtain, a few DIGGERS are seen, some crossing slowly with their tools. A young man, PAT, and his wife, NORA, arrange things at bench, Left. An old man, MAT, NORA's uncle, is sitting on a stump.)¹⁵

(A cry is heard in distance, off-stage, 'Joe!—Joe!—' The DIGGERS stop work and look round anxiously as JESSIE, a young girl, comes running in quickly.)

JESSIE *(Shouting)*. Joe! Joe! Joey!

NORA. My grief, what's it now!

PAT *(Putting down his dish)*. Up with you, boys! The traps are out!¹⁶

NORA. The devil fly away with them!¹⁷

JESSIE *(Running off to warn others)*. Look out! Joe, boys, Joe! Joey!

NORA. She's a good little lass¹⁸ to give the warning.

MAT. It's another digger hunt, begob.

NORA. They're not coming here, I hope.

PAT. I'm off to my claim.

(PAT goes out quickly to the Left.)¹⁹

MAT. Is a man to find no peace at all!

(TROOPER marches in. He is wearing a blue shirt and thick boots,²⁰ with a carbine, and fixed bayonet. DIGGERS enter and gather round.)

TROOPER *(Bullying)*. Trying to escape, are you!

MAT. We are not.

TROOPER. I'm up to your tricks, hiding down a shaft, or running into the scrub. I want to examine your licence.²¹

NORA. Pat's just gone down to work.

¹⁵ *(Ballaarat gold fields ... sitting on a stump.)*] not in A.

¹⁶ out!] out. A.

¹⁷ them!] them. A.

¹⁸ NORA She's a good little lass] *(Exit JESSIE.)*/ *(Excited DIGGERS enter, and dash across the stage.)*/ NORA She's a good little lass A.

¹⁹ *(PAT goes out quickly to the Left.)*] *(Exit PAT, quickly, Left)* A.

²⁰ TROOPER marches in. He is wearing a blue shirt and thick boots,] Enter a TROOPER, in blue shirt and thick boots, A.

²¹ licence.] licences. A.

TROOPER (*Going to mouth of shaft, off-stage*). Below! Hallo, you fellow!

NORA. Surely you wouldn't be bringing him up!

TROOPER (*Shouting down*). Below, you fellow! Come²² up and show your licence.
(Enter CARBONI RAFFAELLO, an Italian, about forty, under the middle height, with reddish hair, and short red beard. He is a restless little man, voluble and delighting in quaint gestures. He wears a red shirt, moleskin trousers, and a wideawake hat.)

RAFFAELLO. Great Works! Great Works!

TROOPER (*Returning*). I know his little game.

RAFFAELLO (*With elaborate politeness*). Allow me to put a question of the old Roman stamp. *Cui bono?* That is, where does our licence money go?

TROOPER. Who the devil are you!²³

RAFFAELLO (*Raising his hat*). Carboni Raffaello, a teacher of languages.

TROOPER. An Eytalian!

RAFFAELLO. A Roman, milord! Unhappily, for the sins of my parents, I was born under the keys which verily open the gates of Heaven and Hell. But Great Britain changed the padlock long ago. Hence the dreaded *Civis Romanus sum* has dwindled into 'bottomed on mullock.'

TROOPER. I won't peck up that chaff of yours. Come here, you fellow, and show your licence.

RAFFAELLO. I've shown it three times to-day.

TROOPER. Give it here. I want to see it.

RAFFAELLO. Here is the talismanic document. (*RAFFAELLO produces licence.*)²⁴

TROOPER (*After looking at it, and handing it back*). Seems to be all right.

RAFFAELLO. It ought to be written on parchment.

NORA (*Laughing*). Sure it should!²⁵

TROOPER. No insolence. (*Going to shaft and calling.*) Come up, you fellow.
*(PAT returns slowly from his claim.)*²⁶

PAT (*Cheerfully*). Good day,²⁷ your worship; it's a fine day, surely.

TROOPER. Got your licence?

PAT. All serene, governor.

TROOPER. Where is it?

PAT (*Feeling in his pockets*). I had it this morning.
*(NORA slips into the tent.)*²⁸

TROOPER. You've no licence, you young beggar.

PAT. It'll turn up, your honour.

TROOPER. Fork it out, then; or you'll come along to the Camp.

NORA (*Coming back with licence*). What's all the fuss²⁹ about?

²² Below, you fellow! Come] Below! You fellow, come A.

²³ are you!] are you, fellow! A.

²⁴ I want to see it./RAFFAELLO Here is the talismanic document. (*RAFFAELLO produces licence.*)] I want to see it./ (*RAFFAELLO produces licence.*)/RAFFAELLO Here is the talismanic document. A.

²⁵ should!] should. A.

²⁶ (*PAT returns slowly from his claim.*)] (*Enter PAT from his claim.*) A.

²⁷ (*Cheerfully.*) Good day,] Good day, A.

²⁸ (*NORA slips into the tent.*)] (*Exit NORA into tent.*) A.

²⁹ the Camp./NORA (*Coming back with licence.*) What's all the fuss] the Camp./(*Enter NORA with license.*)/ NORA What's all the fuss A.

TROOPER. I want to see your licence.

PAT (*Taking it from NORA*). Here it is!³⁰

TROOPER (*Examining it*). It's as well for you. (*Hands it back.*)

MAT (*Indignantly*). Why should³¹ we be paying a licence fee of one pound ten a month,³² when the squatters hold thousands of acres for a few pounds a year?³³

OLD MAN (*Mildly*). There's something wrong about it.

TROOPER (*Turning on OLD MAN*). And you, fellow!

OLD MAN (*Surprised*). Me!

TROOPER. Hallo, I say, sir! Where's your licence!³⁴

OLD MAN. I never was a digger, worse luck, even when gold could be got by pounds' weight.

TROOPER. I've heard that story before.

NORA. This is fine sport for young gentlemen.

TROOPER. I'll have to arrest you.

NORA. Shame on you!

OLD MAN. I'm not a digger, I tell you. I'm a carpenter.³⁵

TROOPER. We'll see about that. Come along with me to the Camp.

MAT. This is like Rooshia, that's what it is.

TROOPER. Come on, now.

(*TROOPER leads out³⁶ OLD MAN as prisoner.*)

NORA. Look at him, the young blackguard, dragging off that poor old fellow to the logs.

PAT. To be chained to a tree, maybe, before he finds out his mistake.

NORA. It's a disgrace on us to³⁷ allow it.

MAT. Where's your freedom now, with hordes of armed men tramping about the diggings, hunting for licences!

PAT. There's an army of these young ne'er-do-wells, who were given jobs³⁸ by La Trobe.

NORA. Piccadilly young sprats, in their smart uniform, with the gold braid on it, putting on airs to show their superiority to the diggers!³⁹

RAFFAELLO. It's a rum sight for an old European traveller. The Camp's out every second day, now the weather allows it. True, one day they hunt their game on Gravel-Pits; another they⁴⁰ pounce

³⁰ Here it is!] Here it is. A.

³¹ (*Indignantly.*) Why should] Why should A.

³² month,] month A.

³³ year?] year! A.

³⁴ licence!] licence? A.

³⁵ a carpenter.] a respectable carpenter. A; respectable *scored out* A.

³⁶ (*TROOPER leads out*) (*Exit trooper, with A.*)

³⁷ on us to] on us all to A.

³⁸ who were given jobs] given jobs A.

³⁹ diggers!] diggers. A.

⁴⁰ another they] another, they A.

on the foxes of Eureka⁴¹; and a third on⁴² the Red Hill; but, though working on different leads, are we not all fellow-diggers!

PAT. Yes, we are. We are, surely.⁴³

RAFFAELLO. It's like Austrian rule under the British flag. *(He goes out.)*⁴⁴

NORA. How much longer shall we suffer it!

MAT *(Chanting)*.

*... 'Tis twelve months or more since our ship she cast anchor
In happy Australia, the Emigrant's Home,
And from that day to this, there's been nothing but canker
And grafe and vexation for Paddy Malone.
O, Paddy Malone, O, Paddy Malone,
Bad luck to the agent who coaxed you to roam.*

NORA. That's only an old song. They call this the Golden Colony.

MAT. It would have been better if they'd never found the gold.

NORA. You're just blathering, Uncle Mat.

MAT. Gold's a curse, I'm telling you. See what it's brought us, nothing but trouble.

PAT. We'll get rid of all that, never fear. This is a grand young country. Have ye no sight of the future, man?

MAT. There'll be no future. This is only a sheep country. When the gold's gone, there'll be nothing left.

*(The DIGGERS laugh.)*⁴⁵

(HARRY, a Cockney store-keeper, comes in flourishing a small newspaper.)

MAT *(Provokingly)*. Good day to you, Harry, my boy. What's your excitement?

HARRY. I've got some h'important news.

MAT. Do you tell me now! In my opinion it's a rotten bad government they have in this country.

HARRY. You're an old rebel. Listen to this! It's in the h'*Argus* 'ere!⁴⁶

MAT. Is it about the Rooshian war?

HARRY. No. *(Impressively.)* Our new Governor 'as arrived, Sir Charles 'Otham!⁴⁷

MAT. Och! What difference will that make! I trust none⁴⁸ of your governors.

HARRY. Sir Charles and Lady 'Otham reached 'Obson's Bay last month in the *Queen of the South*.

*(PAT has a glance at paper.)*⁴⁹

PAT. It's true, Nora.

⁴¹ Eureka] the Eureka A.

⁴² third on] third, on A.

⁴³ PAT. Yes, we are. We are, surely.] DIGGERS Yes, we are./We are surely. A.

⁴⁴ British flag. *(He goes out.)*] British flag./*(Exit RAFFAELLO)* A.

⁴⁵ MAT *(Chanting.)* ... *(The DIGGERS laugh.)*] not in A.

⁴⁶ *(HARRY, a Cockney store-keeper ... they have in this country.)* HARRY *(who has been very quiet during the preceding scene, rises and produces newspaper)* 'Aven't you 'eard the noos! /PAT What news! /HARRY It's in the *Hargus*, 'ere. A.

⁴⁷ Charles 'Otham!] Charles 'Otham. A.

⁴⁸ Och! What difference will that make! I trust none] I trust none A.

⁴⁹ *(PAT has a glance at paper.)*] *(DIGGERS crowd round looking at paper.)* A.

HARRY. And mark this! Sir Charles⁵⁰ is a naval h'officer who has seen active service in many parts of the world.

MAT. And he'll see active⁵¹ service here if he ever comes to the gold-fields.

HARRY. He'll know how to deal with h'outlaws and rebels.

MAT. Who's talking about rebels!

HARRY. We'll have responsible government now. La Trobe belonged to the h'olden times. 'Otham will h'usher in a new h'era.

MAT. Listen to the Oracle, airing his wisdom.

HARRY. You're too h'ignorant to h'understand politics. Everything will be different.

PAT. Let's hope it will. It's time we were treated like decent men.

HARRY. The diggers will want to 'ear the good news. Sir Charles 'Otham is Governor of Victoria.

(HARRY proudly marches off with paper.)

PAT. I hope he'll abolish the licence-fee.

NORA. And get rid of the gold-laced officials, always preying on the diggers.

MAT. Governor or no governor, it's a quare kind of life we've got to put up with.

PAT. I can't complain.⁵² I wouldn't change my twelve foot square for a squatter's station on the Murray. *(Moves away.)*⁵³

MAT *(Shouting after him)*.⁵⁴ Is it gold you're talking about! There's divil a bit on my claim. It was all dried up long ago.

*(DIGGERS and others scatter in different directions.)*⁵⁵

(Pause.)

*(SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM stroll in.)*⁵⁶

*(SIR CHARLES is a man of fifty, a little above the middle height, and of slight figure. LADY HOTHAM is under thirty, slightly tanned, fair,⁵⁷ with soft blue eyes. She is aristocratic-looking, but charming and unaffected.)*⁵⁸

LADY HOTHAM. Lightly tread, 'tis hollowed ground! We are not recognised, I hope.

SIR CHARLES. We'll pass for new chums making a trip round the fields. I don't think our appearance will cause any surprise.

LADY HOTHAM. It was a happy thought of yours to travel incognito like this.

SIR CHARLES. It was the best way. I could have learned little from an official visit. I prefer to see everything for myself.

LADY HOTHAM. You have a great task, Charles, to govern this young Colony.

SIR CHARLES. It is my duty.

⁵⁰ And mark this! Sir Charles] Sir Charles A.

⁵¹ he'll see active] he'll find active A.

⁵² HARRY He'll know how to deal with ... PAT I can't complain.] HARRY They'll all want to hear the news./*(Exit HARRY proudly, with paper)/(The DIGGERS begin to move off to their various jobs)/ PAT (Left) I mean to put in a good day's work.*

⁵³ *(Moves away.)] not in A.*

⁵⁴ *(Shouting after him.)] (Right, turning and shouting back) A.*

⁵⁵ *(DIGGERS and others scatter in different directions.)] (Exeunt DIGGERS, and OTHERS in different directions) A.*

⁵⁶ *(SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM stroll in.)] (Enter CIR [sic] CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM, incognito) A.*

⁵⁷ *fair,] but fair, A.*

⁵⁸ *unaffected.)] unaffected. She wears a dark silk dress with a plain black coat, and a silk bonnet with coloured ribbons) A.*

LADY HOTHAM. This will be the end of our honeymoon.

SIR CHARLES. It was against my better judgement I brought you here. This is no place for an English lady.

LADY HOTHAM. Don't say that. I'm glad I came.

SIR CHARLES. So you're not disappointed, my dear?

LADY HOTHAM. Oh, no, no! I find it exciting. I never could have imagined anything like it—the Californians with scarves and sombreros, sailor men in dungarees run away from their ships, the blackfellows with possum rugs over their shoulders, the Chinese, and Lascars and coolies, and that Piccadilly Johnny with eye-glass and peg-top trousers looking round with astonishment and disgust. It doesn't seem real to me yet.

SIR CHARLES. I've travelled a good deal; but there's nothing like it in the whole world.

LADY HOTHAM. I was afraid at first. It was so unlike our quiet English countryside—the revolver shots, the wild dogs barking all night, the shouts and laughter of the diggers.⁵⁹

SIR CHARLES. And only a few years ago there was pastoral silence and solitude. 'Resting-Place,' or 'Camping-Ground,'⁶⁰ that's what the natives meant by Ballaarat.

LADY HOTHAM. It's a different camping-ground now.⁶¹

SIR CHARLES. Yes. This is a new world, like the fabled *El Dorado*. If Fortunatus had thrown his cap over Ballaarat, the riches could scarcely have been increased. Thousands of adventurers⁶² have rushed here with the one ruling passion—the lust for gold.

LADY HOTHAM. Poor Mr La Trobe! How could he contend with such a society!

SIR CHARLES. He's an amiable man, but weak, too weak to rule firmly. And he hadn't the authority. I'm the first real Governor.

LADY HOTHAM. You're a born ruler, Charles. You have a great work to do in this country.⁶³

SIR CHARLES. It's a great responsibility. There are all sorts⁶⁴ on the diggings, and the tide of immigrants still flows on. There are dangerous characters among them, cut-throats, bush-rangers, Vandemonian pickpockets, as well as refugees and foreign agitators. It's a rude, unsettled country, and government will not be easy.

(*MAT and NORA return.*⁶⁵ *They gaze in surprise as SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM.*)

MAT (*Not rudely*). Hallo, sir, are you a new chum⁶⁶?

SIR CHARLES. Yes. This is our first visit to the gold-fields.

MAT. You'll see some strange sights here.

⁵⁹ Lightly tread, 'tis hollowed ground! We are not recognized, I hope. . . . shouts and laughter of the diggers.] Lightly tread, 'tis hollowed ground./SIR CHARLES It's a strange place for a honey moon [holiday *scored out A.*] trip./LADY HOTHAM I'm sure there's nothing like it in the whole world. It's as if Fortunatus had thrown his cap over the lands of Ballaarat. it's so wild and exciting it doesn't seem real. It's more like an extravaganza, don't you think! A

⁶⁰ Ground,'] Ground" - A.

⁶¹ It's a different camping-ground now.] What an amazing change the gold has made. A.

⁶² This is a new world, like the fabled *El Dorado*. If Fortunatus had thrown his cap over Ballaarat, the riches could scarcely have been increased. Thousands of adventurers] This is a new world, as rich as the fabled *El Dorado*. Thousands of adventurers A.

⁶³ the lust for gold./LADY HOTHAM Poor Mr. La Trobe! how could he contend with such a society!/SIR CHARLES He's an amiable man, but weak, too weak to rule firmly. And he hadn't the authority. I'm the first real Governor./LADY HOTHAM You're a born ruler, Charles. You have a great work to do in this country.] the lust for gold./LADY HOTHAM What curious characters we've seen [we've met *scored out A.*] - and the costumes! A

⁶⁴ It's a great responsibility. There are all sorts] There are all sorts A.

⁶⁵ *MAT and NORA return.*] *Enter some DIGGERS casually.* A.

⁶⁶ a new chum] a Johnny-come-lately A.

LADY HOTHAM. It's all very strange and interesting. (*Looking round.*) What is that big wooden place over there?

MAT. Oh, that's Bentley's *Eureka Hotel*. Don't go near it. It's a disgrace to the diggings.

LADY HOTHAM. Oh, I didn't⁶⁷ suspect that.

MAT. It's got a skittle-alley, and there's card-playing, gambling and all kinds of roguery. Diggers have been drugged and robbed there. It's a dangerous place, lady, fully of sharpers, gaol-birds and flash women.

SIR CHARLES. Thank you, digger. We'll take your warning. We're just looking round quietly by ourselves. (*To LADY HOTHAM.*) Shall we take a peep at the Chinese stores?

(*SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM walk away.*)⁶⁸

(*Some DIGGERS come in casually, including PAT.*)

(*They look in surprise.*)

PAT. Who's that toff?

DIGGER. I don't know. He's no relation of mine.

PAT. I prefer the lady. She's a stunner.

NORA. I'm ashamed of you, Pat.

MAT. Why did I leave the County Clare!⁶⁹ I'm always getting lost in the bush, and there's the sun burning your backs, snakes waiting for you in the grass, and those damned jackasses laughing at you in your torment, it's the devil's own country, ⁷⁰surely.

(*JESSIE runs in gaily.*)

JESSIE. See what I've got.

NORA. What?

JESSIE. A golden guinea,⁷¹ and a canary.

NORA. Good for you, Jessie.

JESSIE. From a lady and gentleman who just went by.

NORA. The Johnny-Come-Lately from England! He might be a duke in disguise.

(*HARRY rushes in excitedly.*)⁷²

HARRY (*Breathlessly*). It's the Governor.

MAT. What next!⁷³

HARRY. It's 'im all right. Sir Charles 'Otham.

MAT. What are you talking about?⁷⁴

HARRY. Sir Charles and Lady Hotham are making a surprise visit to the gold-fields.

⁶⁷ suspect] A.; realise *scored out* A.

⁶⁸ (*SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM walk away.*)] (*Exeunt SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM*) A.

⁶⁹ (*SOME diggers come in casually ... Why did I leave the County Clare!*) DIGGERS Who's that toff?/Don't know. I prefer the lady. She's a stunner./(*Enter other DIGGERS, including MAT, PAT and NORA*)/ MAT Why did I leave the County Clare! A.

⁷⁰ surely./(*JESSIE runs in gaily.*)/JESSIE See what I've got.] surely./NORA It was a lucky day for you when you crossed the line./MAT I know why they call it the line. It's to divide the right side of the world from the wrong./OLD MAN It might have been better if they'd never found the gold./PAT Listen to the oracle, airing his wisdom./OLD MAN See what it's brought us, nothing but trouble [strife and disorder everywhere *scored out* A.] This is only a sheep country./DIGGER Have you no sight of the future, man?/OLD MAN There'll be no future. When the gold's gone there'll be nothing left./DIGGER (*Laughing*) Good old squatters' man./(*Enter JESSIE, gaily*)/ JESSIE See what I've got. A.

⁷¹ guinea,] guinea A.

⁷² (*HARRY rushes in excitedly.*)] (*Enter HARRY excitedly*) A.

⁷³ MAT What next!] DIGGER What next! A.

⁷⁴ MAT What are you talking about?] DIGGER What are you talking about? A.

MAT. Go on with you now!⁷⁵

HARRY. They were travelling h'incognito!

MAT. How do you know?⁷⁶

HARRY. We soon⁷⁷ found out who they were.

(Cheers off-stage.)

DIGGERS. Here they come!⁷⁸

(SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM come back⁷⁹ surrounded by group of cheering DIGGERS.)

—Three cheers for the Governor!

—And his good lady!

(Cheers.)

—Speech! Speech!

—Give him a chance!

—Let the Governor speak!

—Speech! Speech!

(SIR CHARLES at last gets up on stump to address the CROWD.)

HARRY *(Advancing)*. Victoria welcomes Victoria's choice!

(Renewed cheers.)

SIR CHARLES. Diggers, I feel delighted at your reception. This is a new Colony—and I trust,⁸⁰ as your first Governor, to do all in my power to increase its prosperity. I shall not neglect your interests and welfare ...

DIGGERS *(Shouting and cheering)*.⁸¹ The Governor's for the People!

—Hurrah! Hurrah!

—Diggers' Charlie!

—Diggers' Charlie!

Curtain.

⁷⁵ MAT Go on with you now!] DIGGER Go on! A.

⁷⁶ MAT How do you know?] DIGGER How do you know? A.

⁷⁷ We soon] But we soon A.

⁷⁸ DIGGERS Here they come!] DIGGERS 'Ear them being cheered!/I hope he'll abolish the license-fee./And get rid of the gold-laced officials always preying on the diggers./Yes. And put an end to this cursed digger-hunting./HARRY *(Sententiously)* La Trobe belonged to the h'olden times. Sir Charles 'Otham will h'usher in a new h'era./DIGGERS Here they come. A.

⁷⁹ SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM come back] Enter SIR CHARLES and LADY HOTHAM, A

⁸⁰ reception. This is a new Colony, - and I trust,] reception - Victoria has been called the Golden Colony - and I trust, A.

⁸¹ *(Shouting and cheering.)*] margin note in A.

ACT TWO

Scene One

(The same. Some months later.)

(A small group of excited DIGGERS, RAFFAELLO, PAT, and MAT amongst them.)

PAT. What can we do! We must do something.

RAFFAELLO. This is a British Colony. We hope for Justice.

PAT. Bentley's a murderer, a bloody murderer.

MAT. It's no word of a lie he's telling you.

RAFFAELLO. He's been tried in Court.

PAT. At the Camp?

RAFFAELLO. Yes. We're waiting for the verdict.

PAT. There's only one verdict. We all know he's guilty.

DIGGERS *(Foreign)*. Assassin!

—Assassin!

RAFFAELLO. Some of my friends are foreigners. They are greatly excited.

PAT. We're all excited and burning with anger.

(Murmurs.)

RAFFAELLO. Quiet, my friends. Here comes the man we want.

PAT. It's Peter Lalor.

RAFFAELLO. Yes, Peter Lalor himself. He's a fine young man, with the degree of Civil Engineer, from Trinity College, Dublin.

PAT. But he's with us. He's one of the diggers now.

RAFFAELLO. A man of character is friend Peter, fast coming to the front in our affairs.

(PETER LALOR walks towards them. He is a man of about twenty-six, medium-sized, but strongly built, dark and bearded.)

DIGGERS. Hullo, Peter!

LALOR. Good day, diggers!

RAFFAELLO *(Intimately)*. Ah, Peter, what do you make of it?

LALOR. It's a bad business.

PAT. Any more news?

LALOR. Yes.

PAT *(Eagerly)*. Have you heard the verdict?

LALOR. I have. Bentley was acquitted.

DIGGERS. No!

—It couldn't be!

—He was guilty.

LALOR. It's true, boys. I swear it's true.

RAFFAELLO. Great Works!

LALOR. Shameless corruption in high places. I didn't expect that.

MAT. There'll be more trouble, I'm thinking.

LALOR. That fiery Scot, Tom Kennedy, is on the warpath, stirring up the diggers.

RAFFAELLO. My tent was a regular Babel to-day. Foreigners from all parts of the earth and the gold-fields crowded round to know what was this new uproar on Ballaarat.

LALOR. The news is spreading through all the fields. I fear the consequences.

RAFFAELLO. It was a foul deed I had to relate and translate in many languages.

LALOR. I'm afraid the time is up; but I'll see what I can do.

RAFFAELLO. I'll go with you, Peter.

LALOR. Whatever events may happen, and God knows things look black, let us act like reasonable men.

(LALOR and RAFFAELLO go out together.)

(Pause.)

(Shouts off-stage.)

PAT. What's this, now! Why are they shouting?

MAT. Will there be a fight?

PAT. It's Tom Kennedy.⁸²

*(TOM KENNEDY, a fervent, middle-aged Scotsman, comes in with a number of DIGGERS. He mounts the stump.)*⁸³

KENNEDY. Hear this, ye diggers, and judge for yersels what justice ye may expect. Bentley⁸⁴ was acquitted.

DIGGERS. Shame!

—He was guilty!⁸⁵

KENNEDY. Aye, guilty he was, there's nae doot about that. Scobie was murdered, and noo his murderer is set free. Some o' ye may not ken the true story. I knew Jimmie Scobie weel. A sober man maist times, he happened to meet an old friend and they had a bit of a spree together for auld lang syne. And what was the hairm o' that! But on his way hame to his tent he knocked at the *Eureka Hotel* *(Pointing.)* there it is—for a wee drap mair, pur foolish mon! There was an argument, a terrible row, and the next thing Scobie was discovered lying on the ground, wi' his heid battered in wi' a shovel.⁸⁶ That's the man Bentley is, the Vandemonian lag wi' his gang o' bullies. Many a digger, drunk or sober, has been robbed for his gold-dust in the Eureka Hotel. And what happened then, do ye ask! He feared the diggers' wrath, and escaped on horseback to the Camp, mind ye, the seat of government. It's hard to believe, diggers!⁸⁷ He had guid⁸⁸ friends there. One of the very magistrates that tried him had an interest in the hotel.

DIGGERS. Fine men we ha'e to rule the gold-fields!

—Some of them would swear a hole through an iron pot.

KENNEDY. A digger murdered, and his murderer let go! Have we nae rights! Are we to be treated like rude, lawless barbarians, fit only for the rule of the quarter-deck! No! No! We demand

⁸² *(A small group of excited DIGGERS, .../PAT It's Tom Kennedy] not in A.*

⁸³ *(TOM KENNEDY, a fervent, middle-aged Scotsman, comes in with a number of diggers. He mounts the stump.)]*
(TOM KENNEDY, a middle-aged Scotsman, is fervently addressing a group of excited diggers, MAT and PAT among them.) A.

⁸⁴ Bentley] ... Bentley A.

⁸⁵ DIGGERS - Shame!/ - He was guilty!] DIGGERS Acquitted!/That Murderer! A

⁸⁶ Aye, guilty he was, ... battered in we' a shovel.] Aye, Scobie was murdered, there's nae foot about that. A sober man mast times, he'd been having a bit of a spree for alud lang syne. On his way home to his ten he call at the Eureka Hotel for a we drop mair - and the next thing Scobie was found lying on the ground wi' his heid battered in./DIGGERS With a shovel!/ Murdered! A.; Aye, Scobie was murdered, there's nae foot abbot that. He had just gobe for a drink when Bentley and his ruffians came oot, and the next thing Scobie was lying on the ground wi' his heir battered in./DIGGERS With a shovel!/Murdered! *partially scored out A.*

⁸⁷ Eureka Hotel. ... hard to believe, diggers!] Eureka Hotel./DIGGERS Shame!/We all know he was guilty./KENNEDY But he escaped on horseback to the Camp. A.

⁸⁸ guid] A.; grand *excised A.*

justice. The spirit of the murdered Scobie is hovering over us, crying for revenge. (*Gets down from the stump.*) Come on, men! We'll show them who are the real rulers of Ballaarat!⁸⁹
(*KENNEDY rushes off, followed by some DIGGERS muttering with anger. Other DIGGERS are restless, not knowing what to do.*)

PAT. The diggers are crowding round the hotel, hundreds of them.

MAT. Look, troopers everywhere, bad luck to them!

PAT. Anything can happen. There may be a riot.

MAT. We'll have to take the law into our own hands.⁹⁰

(*NORA, pale and excited, comes over to them.*)⁹¹

NORA. God help us, the red-coats are out.⁹²

MAT. Where are they?

NORA. In front of the hotel. They've drawn their swords.

PAT. The gallant 40th!

MAT. Do they think that can scare us!

PAT (*Moving off*). I'll be with the boys.

NORA (*Trying to hold him*). Don't be rash, Pat!

MAT. Don't try to hold him back, Nora! I'm an old man and a quiet man; but I must be in this.

NORA. No, no, there'll be bloodshed.

MAT. Hush, Nora! What do we care for a pack of troopers and red-coats. Come on, boys!⁹³

(*MAT, PAT, and other DIGGERS, rush off to the hotel shouting defiance.*)⁹⁴

NORA (*Running after them*). What are you doing! Come back, Pat! (*She stops, sighs deeply, and leans against stump.*)

(*Short pause.*)

(*JESSIE comes in, excited and alarmed.*)⁹⁵

JESSIE. They've set it on fire!

NORA. What are you saying, Jessie!

⁸⁹ treated like rude, lawless barbarians ... the real rulers of Ballaarat!] treated like outlaws!/DIGGERS No! No!/We demand justice./KENNEDY .. The spirit of the murdered Scobie is hovering over us, and crying for revenge. . Come on, men! A.

⁹⁰ (*KENNEDY rushes off ... law into our own hands.*) (*Exit KENNEDY, with a few friends*)/DIGGERS (*eagerly talking among themselves.*) We're no better off since Hotham became Governor./That tyrant! [*undecipherable*] A.; (*Exit KENNEDY, with a few friends*)/DIGGERS (*Eagerly talking among themselves.*) Tom Kennedy's a fiery speaker./He'll rouse the diggers./We're ready now./What can we do!/A breaking point had to come./We won't stand much more./ Anything might happen./We were told everything would be different when Hotham became Governor./Things are as bad as ever./Worse I'm thinking. *partially scored out* A.

⁹¹ (*NORA, pale and excited, comes over to them*)] (*Enter NORA, pale and excited.*) A.

⁹² God help us, the red-coats are out.] God help us, the diggers are crowding round the Eureka Hotel./DIGGER There are plenty troopers about./PAT (*moving off*) I'll be with the boys./NORA (*trying to hold him.*) Don't be rash, Pat./(*Enter DIGGERS, running*)/ DIGGERS The red-coats are out. A.; PAT (*moving off*) I'll be with the boys.] PAT I must see what they're doing. *excised and replaced* A.

⁹³ MAT Where are they? ... Come on Boys!] DIGGERS The gallant 40th./PAT Where? DIGGER In front of the hotel./ NORA What are they doing?/DIGGER They've drawn their swords./NORA There'll be bloodshed./MAT I'm a quiet man, but I must be in this. Come on, boys! A.

⁹⁴ (*MAT, PAT, and other DIGGERS, rush off to the Hotel shouting defiance.*)] (*The DIGGERS rush off to the hotel, shouting*) A.

⁹⁵ What are you doing! Come back, Pat!/(*She stops, sighs deeply, and leans against stump.*)/(*Short pause.*)/(*JESSIE comes in, excited and alarmed.*)] Where are you going?/(*She stops, sighs deeply, and watches them anxiously*)/(*Pause*)/ Enter JESSIE) A.

JESSIE. Look—the smoke's rising, and you can hear the flames roaring.⁹⁶

NORA. My God, they're burning the hotel.

JESSIE. Isn't it awful! Oh, the roof's fallen in!⁹⁷

NORA. It's a big ramshackle place of weatherboard only. Nothing can save it.

JESSIE. See the sparks flying about!

NORA. It's all on fire now. It'll be burned to the ground. (*Taking JESSIE in her arms.*) Oh, Jessie, we cannot blame the diggers. They were desperate men this day.⁹⁸ Arrah, I wonder what'll be happening next!

(*They watch the burning hotel.*)

Curtain.

ACT TWO

Scene Two

(*Government Offices, Melbourne. 27 November.*)

(*At the centre of the table is SIR CHARLES HOTHAM, seated between WF STAWELL, Attorney-General, and JOHN FOSTER, Chief Secretary.*)

(*GEORGE BLACK, Editor of The Diggers' Advocate, JB HUMFFRAY, Secretary of the Ballaarat Reform League, and THOMAS KENNEDY form a deputation.*)

(*BLACK stands before the table. He is a tall man, with bright red hair and whiskers, and a ruddy complexion.*)

BLACK. We are here, you Excellency, as the representatives of the diggers of Ballaarat. We are requested to demand the release of Fletcher, McIntyre and Westerby, who are now in gaol, under sentence for having been concerned in the burning of the Eureka Hotel.

(*He hands letter to SIR CHARLES.*)

SIR CHARLES. 'Demand', gentlemen! Is the word used advisedly!

BLACK. That is the message we are here to deliver.

SIR CHARLES. As the representative of Her Majesty, I cannot allow the use of the word 'demand'.

BLACK. The delegation has no power to vary its instructions. From former and frequent disappointments,⁹⁹ the diggers object to the word 'petition'.

SIR CHARLES. The threatening attitude of the diggers was as unjustifiable as the indecision and vacillation of the authorities in allowing the riot to come to a head.

(*HUMFFRAY advances. He is a Welshman, a well-educated man with a musical voice.*)

HUMFFRAY. It was not an ordinary riot. The men burned the hotel as a protest¹⁰⁰ against the corruption of the authorities.

STAWELL. His Excellency, as you know, Mr. Humffray, appointed a special board to investigate all such charges.

HUMFFRAY. And was not everything that we had alleged against the authorities clearly confirmed!

⁹⁶ JESSIE They've set it on fire! ... Look - the smoke's rising, and you can hear the flames roaring.] JESSIE Look ... the smoke's rising./NORA And the flames!/JESSIE You can hear them roaring.

⁹⁷ Isn't it awful! Oh, the roof's fallen in!] O, The roof's fallen in. I think. A; I think *scored out* A.

⁹⁸ JESSIE See the sparks flying about! ... They were desperate men this day.] JESSIE It's all on fire now. See the sparks flying./NORA (*Taking JESSIE in her arms*) O, Jessie, we can't blame the diggers. They were desperate men this day. A.

⁹⁹ disappointments,] disappointments A.

¹⁰⁰ The men burned the hotel as a protest] A.; It was a protest A.

STAWELL. That is an entirely different matter.

SIR CHARLES. My only aim¹⁰¹ is to see equal justice done to all. Another trial was ordered, and imperative instructions were sent to apprehend Bentley and his associates.

BLACK. That gave great satisfaction, Your Excellency.

STAWELL. Bentley was found guilty of manslaughter, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment with hard labour on the roads.

BLACK. Wasn't that a justification of the miners!

SIR CHARLES. Certainly not.

STAWELL. The prisoners have been convicted of incendiarism.

BLACK. The diggers in Ballaarat felt very deeply that the men who are now in prison should not be there. They say they are all equally guilty in the burning of the hotel, and they contend that they were justified in so doing, considering that the Magistrate had failed to dispense justice.

SIR CHARLES. I cannot agree with them. The men deserved some punishment, and they got off very lightly.

KENNEDY. That's a' nonsense. One man was twelve miles awa', and anither at Mopoke Gully.

STAWELL. That was not proved in the evidence. The men had a fair trial.

SIR CHARLES. I cannot see my way to set aside the most important principle in the British Constitution, the verdict of the jury.

KENNEDY. But in ony case, why should three men be picked oot, as it were at random, and made scapegoats for the ithers! There's nae justice in that!¹⁰²

SIR CHARLES. Do you propose to take the law into your own hands! Victoria is not California, and as long as I am Governor, there shall be so such thing as Lynch Law.

STAWELL. The diggers, I am afraid, have been badly advised. A proper memorial on behalf of the prisoners might receive His Excellency's consideration.

(The DELEGATES consult together for a moment.)

HUMFFRAY. Cannot we accept that proposal?

KENNEDY *(Shaking his head)*. Na, na!

BLACK. We must carry out our instructions first.

(BLACK again advances to the table.)

BLACK *(To SIR CHARLES)*. If you would let the matter be in abeyance, we could present a memorial. In the meantime we ask Your Excellency to take into consideration the suggestion offered by the jury who, in fact, morally acquitted the men, although they found them legally guilty. 'The jury feel, in giving their verdict against the prisoners at the bar, that in all probability they should never have had that painful duty to perform if those entrusted with the Government offices at Ballaarat had done theirs properly.' The learned Attorney-General will pardon me for alluding to it; but he was present, and he heard the manifestation of feeling in the Court, showing that the public fully approved of the rider of the jury.

HUMFFRAY. May I suggest, Your Excellency, that the men be pardoned by an 'act of grace'?

SIR CHARLES. No. I must take my stand on the word 'demand'. I am sorry for it; but that is the position you place me in.

KENNEDY *(Coming forward)*. I would like Your Excellency to ken why we come here. Considering that ye have no' had time to develop yersel' in order that people might rightly understan' your course o' policy, we solicit Your Excellency, to allow us to go back wi' these

¹⁰¹ different matter./SIR CHARLES My only aim] different matter./HUMFFRAY I think the acquittal of Bentley has aroused the diggers more than any official act since the gold discovery./SIR CHARLES My only aim A.

¹⁰² that!] that. A.

men, we can claim peace.¹⁰³ But otherwise, I canna' see my way through it. I solemnly implore you to consider the position in which you are placed. To prevent the spilling o' bluid, which might¹⁰⁴ be the case wi' infuriated men, let us have peace, even if it thought inconsistent wi' the dignity o' the British Croon.

(SIR CHARLES glances at the letter on his table¹⁰⁵.)

BLACK. The general feeling of Ballaarat is that instead of these men being in prison, the corrupt officials, some of whom have been discharged, should rather have been suffering in their place. The act was done under a deep sense of official wrong, injustice and oppression.

(Pause.)

(SIR CHARLES looks up, holding letter.)

SIR CHARLES. This letter seems to me to be really subversive of all Government. *(Drops letter on table.)* You have placed me in a position which renders the release of these men impossible. I'm sorry for it; but we have all of us to give an account to those above us, and it cannot be.

FOSTER. You should be advised that the Government is doing all in its power to introduce important reforms. A *Constitution Bill* has already been transmitted to England for the Royal assent.

STAWELL. His Excellency is anxious to obtain a Parliament for Victoria, and to confer the franchise on the diggers.

KENNEDY. That's a' verra weel; but it will no' be easy to put off a lot o' angry men wi' promises.

(SIR CHARLES rises in his chair.)

SIR CHARLES. Tell the diggers from me, and tell them carefully, that the Government will inquire into everything and everybody, high and low, rich and poor; and you have only to come forward and state your grievances, and in what relates to me they shall be redressed. I can say no more. We are all in a false position altogether. I can say no more.

(The DELEGATES are about to retire.)

BLACK. I must take the liberty of once more pressing upon Your Excellency the importance of discharging these men. Such an act of grace would restore peace on the diggings, and take away the excuse for a riot.

SIR CHARLES. More threats of a riot! I cannot understand you, Mr Black. I have too good an opinion of the men of Ballaarat to think they would set themselves against the law.

(SIR CHARLES resumes his seat, consulting with STAWELL and FOSTER.)

(The DELEGATES withdraw. When they reach the door, KENNEDY turns and advances a few steps.)

KENNEDY. There is one remark I should like to make to Your Excellency—Sir Robert Peel did no' consider it beneath his dignity to change his mind, and we hope ye will grant the diggers their wishes on the point o' the release o' these men.

SIR CHARLES. I'm sorry, but that is impossible. Whatever the consequences, I cannot be a party to the destruction of the Government.

KENNEDY. Ah, weel, the responsibility's on your ain heid. Come awa', men.¹⁰⁶

(They march out.)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Your Excellency, to allow us to go back wi' these men, we can claim peace.] Your Excellency, in justice to yersel', to allay the excitement o' the people. If you allow us to go back wi' these men we can claim peace. A.

¹⁰⁴ might] must A.

¹⁰⁵ glances at the letter on his table] glances at letter on table A.

¹⁰⁶ men.] men! A.

¹⁰⁷ *(They march out.)*] *(Exeunt delegates)* A.

(SIR CHARLES picks up letter, frowns and drops it slowly on table.)

Curtain.

ACT TWO

Scene Three

(The newly-built Vice-Regal residence, Toorak¹⁰⁸. The same afternoon.)

(LADY HOTHAM's small drawing-room. It is elegantly furnished according to the taste of the period. There are low chairs, a round table, framed tapestries on the wall, and a few pictures, Persian rugs, a marble mantelpiece, Left Centre, and a round gilt mirror.)

(Backstage, Right Centre, is a little rosewood piano.)

(LADY HOTHAM and MRS KAYE are seated on low chairs.)

LADY HOTHAM. Who could have anticipated these troubles when we sailed for the Colony!

MRS KAYE. Poor Charles! He's wearing himself out.

LADY HOTHAM. He has only one thought, his duty to the Queen.

MRS KAYE. He must have had a trying day. It's disgraceful that the miners should have sent such an insolent deputation.

LADY HOTHAM. The whole unfortunate affair should be settled now.

MRS KAYE. It reminds me of the Chartist rising in England. But Sir Charles will show them the strong hand, like the Duke of Wellington.

LADY HOTHAM. I trust it will never come to that.

(Pause.)

(LADY HOTHAM rises and takes seat at table.)

I suppose we must hold our little party as usual.

(She picks up some invitation cards.)

MRS KAYE *(Rising)*. I'll help you with the names.

(She takes seat at table with LADY HOTHAM.)

LADY HOTHAM *(Putting down cards)*. Mr and Mrs John Briggs.

(They smile.)

(CAPTAIN KAYE enters. He is Private Secretary to the Governor, and an urbane man of the world.)¹⁰⁹

LADY HOTHAM *(Brightly)*. Isn't it frivolous, at a time like this, to be sending out invitations!

CAPTAIN KAYE. The Society of the Colony demands it.

LADY HOTHAM *(Laughingly)*. Demands! Oh, Captain, you mustn't use that word.¹¹⁰

CAPTAIN KAYE. My humble apology. I was carried away by the stream of political affairs.¹¹¹

MRS KAYE. Do you call it Society! Merchants and sheep-breeders!

LADY HOTHAM. The diggers are fine men, fond of their fun, I'm told, and a cock fight on Sunday, but chivalrous and well-spoken before me.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Toorak] Toorac A./B.

¹⁰⁹ *(CAPTAIN KAYE enters. He is Private Secretary to the governor, and an urbane man of the world.)*] *(Enter CAPTAIN KAYE, Private Secretary to the Governor, and an urbane man of the world) A.*

¹¹⁰ Oh, Captain, you mustn't use that word.] *note in A.*

¹¹¹ CAPTAIN KAYE. My humble apology. I was carried away by the stream of political affairs.] *not in A.*

¹¹² LADY HOTHAM. The diggers are fine men, fond of their fun, I'm told, and a cock fight on Sunday, but chivalrous and well-spoken before me.] LADY HOTHAM *(after glancing at list)* Richard Saunders, Esquire. A.

MRS KAYE. I shouldn't¹¹³ be surprised if some of them bring their cutty-pipes and spirit-flasks.

LADY HOTHAM. I think¹¹⁴ we can get on with the men, they're so free and easy; but the women -

MRS KAYE. In the latest red velvet robe, flounced with satin, and a pink gauze bonnet -

CAPTAIN KAYE. The Colonial mode, startling perhaps, but inimitable.¹¹⁵

LADY HOTHAM. Captain Kaye is an authority on Colonial manners.

CAPTAIN KAYE. Most of their husbands are rich, and that is all that matters in a young democracy. Why does a man struggle to amass a fortune, unless to be included in the Government House list!

LADY HOTHAM. Surely¹¹⁶ we're not so uncivilised as all that. (*Goes to piano.*) Listen to this! (*She plays a few bars of a waltz.*) How do you like it?

CAPTAIN KAYE. It doesn't sound like Chopin.¹¹⁷

LADY HOTHAM. Of course not. It's an original composition. It's called¹¹⁸ *Queen of the South*, a new waltz, dedicated to me by a local composer.
(*She plays a few more bars, then stops suddenly as she hears footsteps, rises quickly, and takes seat in low chair.*)
(*Pause.*)
(*SIR CHARLES enters.*¹¹⁹ *He is keen and alert; but has difficulty in controlling his nervous excitement.*)

SIR CHARLES. I'd rather meet General Rosas again than these delegates of the Ballarat Reform League. They came not to petition, but to demand, demand -¹²⁰

CAPTAIN KAYE. But they understand¹²¹ now who holds the authority.

SIR CHARLES. The affair has taken a serious turn.¹²²

CAPTAIN KAYE. We are not in England, Sir. This is a rough young community.

SIR CHARLES. Victoria, I am afraid, is getting like Brazil, or the republics of the River Plate. (*In a low voice.*) Why was I ever sent here!

LADY HOTHAM (*Quietly*).¹²³ It was the Queen's command.

SIR CHARLES. Wherever I am placed, I shall do my duty to the Queen. But I should have gone to the Crimea. The Duke of Newcastle¹²⁴ gave me his promise that if war broke out with Russia, I might give up the civil appointment. But he added later that if I refused to go to Victoria, he would not allow me to serve in the war.

¹¹³ I shouldn't] (*gaily*) I shouldn't A.

¹¹⁴ I think] (*Smiling*) I think A.

¹¹⁵ The Colonial mode, startling perhaps, but inimitable.] The Colonial mode. A.

¹¹⁶ Surely] (*rising*) Surely A.

¹¹⁷ It doesn't sound like Chopin.] It's certainly up to date. A.

¹¹⁸ Of course not. It's an original composition. It's called] That's the new waltz, A.

¹¹⁹ *SIR CHARLES enters.*] *Enter SIR CHARLES.* A.

¹²⁰ demand -] demand - the audacity! A.

¹²¹ understand] A.; realise *scored out* A.

¹²² The affair has taken a serious turn.] A.; There is a strong, democratic action, and the license is merely a catchword of the day. *scored out* A.

¹²³ (*Quietly.*)] A.; (*Quickly.*) *scored out* A.

¹²⁴ Newcastle] A.; Wellington *scored out* A.

LADY HOTHAM. You've done your share of fighting, Charles. For more than thirty years you have been on active service.

SIR CHARLES. Why, then, wasn't I sent to the Black Sea with the Fleet! I'm not too old, and my heart is with my comrades at the war. I could serve my country better as a naval officer, that as Governor of a turbulent Colony.

LADY HOTHAM. I can't believe yet that the men we met on the gold-fields intend to make mischief.

SIR CHARLES. That was four months ago. There have been great changes since.

LADY HOTHAM. I'll never forget the scene, the troopers and diggers, the tents, the creak of the windlasses, and the rattle of the cradles, the flags flying, and heads bobbing up and down from the lucky holes.

SIR CHARLES. That is only part of the picture.

LADY HOTHAM. And do you remember Big Larry, who lifted me in his arms and carried me across the muddy road—a Sir Walter Raleigh in a sou'wester! You were splendidly received—'Diggers' Charlie,' they called you!¹²⁵

SIR CHARLES. Yes, it's true that the great mass of the diggers are loyal; but they are urged on by designing men who have ulterior views, and hope to profit by anarchy—active intriguing foreigners whose aim is disorder and confusion! Some of them have taken part in rebellions in their own country, members of secret societies, rebels, refugees, and malcontents drawn from the ends of the earth.

LADY HOTHAM. I have hopes the crisis will soon pass.

SIR CHARLES. My duty is clear. Acts of open rebellion have been committed, and a severe chastisement is necessary.

(Pause.)

(SIR CHARLES nervously paces up and down room.)

LADY HOTHAM *(Gently)*. I'm sorry that has to be. But what are your plans?

(SIR CHARLES pulls himself together.)

SIR CHARLES *(Speaking tensely)*. I'm an old campaigner, not easily to be caught napping. I'm determined to meet force by force. Troops are now on their way to the diggings, mounted and foot police, and a detachment of the 40th Regiment, under Captain Wise, an able and trustworthy officer. I've issued full military instructions. Any riot or insurrection must be put down, whatever the consequences. I refuse to be intimidated by any armed mob. It must be met and dealt with, like a foreign foe in the hour of battle.

*(SIR CHARLES strides out dramatically.)*¹²⁶

(Pause.)

*(LADY HOTHAM anxiously watches SIR CHARLES go out, then she slowly takes seat at table*¹²⁷ *and handles the invitation cards.)*

LADY HOTHAM. Richard Saunders, Esquire. *(Puts down card.)*¹²⁸ Doesn't this seem like Nero fiddling while Rome burnt—as our patriotic press has so often reminded us?¹²⁹

MRS KAYE *(Also taking seat at table)*. I wonder shall we be accused of more extravagance?

¹²⁵ I'll never forget the scene ... they called you!] How can I forget Big Larry, who lifted me in his arms and carried me across the muddy road. And you were splendidly received—Diggers' Charlie! A.

¹²⁶ *(SIR CHARLES strides out dramatically.)*] *(Exit SIR CHARLES dramatically)* A.

¹²⁷ *table*] *table*, A.

¹²⁸ Richard Saunders, Esquire. *(Puts down card.)*] *not in A.*

¹²⁹ while Rome burnt - as our patriotic press has so often reminded us?] when Rome was burning. A.

LADY HOTHAM (*Picking up another card*¹³⁰). William Johnson! Who is he?
CAPTAIN KAYE (*Mock-impressively*). An honest land-agent, and a relative of the dear Mayor¹³¹.
LADY HOTHAM (*Mischievously*). As *The Herald* elegantly put it, we are getting altogether Too-rac-ketty -
(*They laugh.*)
(*Glancing at another card.*) Mr and Mrs ...

Quick Curtain.

ACT TWO
Scene Four

(*Bakery Hill, Ballaarat. Wednesday afternoon, 29 November.*)
(*A great mass meeting of DIGGERS, some with arms.*)
(*The new Australian flag, 'The Southern Cross', a blue bunting with the constellation of the Southern Cross in silver stars, floats on a flag-staff adjoining the temporary platform.*)
(*On the platform are TIMOTHY HAYES, chairman, the delegates, BLACK, HUMFFRAY and KENNEDY; PETER LALOR, with rifle, RAFFAELLO, FREDERIC VERN, FATHER SMYTHE*¹³² *and others.*)
(*TIMOTHY HAYES, a portly, genial man, addresses the meeting.*)

HAYES. Gentlemen, you have done me the honour of making me chairman of this mass meeting of diggers to-day, the greatest meeting that has ever been held in the Southern Hemisphere. (*Cheers.*) Work is suspended on all claims, and the diggers of Ballaarat are here assembled to demand their rights. (*Points to the flag.*) There is 'The Southern Cross'—the diggers' flag, waving triumphantly in the sunshine of its own blue and peerless sky.

I have on the platform beside me some of our greatest leaders, well-known to you all, Frederic Vern, Father Smythe, Carboni Raffaello, Peter Lalor and others, who will soon address you. But first I will ask for a report from the delegates of the Reform League, Thomas Kennedy, George Black, editor of *The Ballaarat Times*, and JB Humffray, the secretary, who have just returned from Melbourne after their interview with the Governor, Sir Charles Hotham. I will now call on George Black to speak on behalf of the delegates.¹³³

(*BLACK steps to front of platform. Cheers.*)¹³⁴

BLACK. Gentlemen, as your delegates¹³⁵ we waited upon His Excellency to demand the release of the three prisoners. We stated our case as strongly as we could; but I regret to say that so far the result of our mission has been inconclusive. I believe that personally¹³⁶ His Excellency had no

¹³⁰ *Picking up another card*] *Picking up card A.*

¹³¹ the dear Mayor] the Mayor A.

¹³² *FATHER SMYTHE*] *not in A.*

¹³³ (*TIMOTHY HAYES, a portly, genial man, ... on behalf of the delegates.*] *not in A.*

¹³⁴ (*BLACK steps to front of platform. Cheers.*)] (*GEORGE BLACK is at front of platform, addressing the meeting.*) A.

¹³⁵ Gentlemen, as your delegates] ... As you're delegates A.

¹³⁶ three prisoners. We stated ... I believe that personally] three prisoners./(*Cheers from crowd*)/VOICES How did you get on!/What did Diggers' Charlie say? A.

objection to granting the public prayer for the release of the prisoners. But he was powerless at present to do so. Unfortunately he was surrounded by injudicious advisers.¹³⁷

VOICES. Foster!¹³⁸

—Alphabetical Foster!

BLACK. As far as I could judge from our interview, the Governor was in favour of the people.

(Cries of dissent.)

Our Journey, gentlemen, may not have been in vain. We may yet succeed in our efforts. There was a particular objection to the word 'demand'. It has now been proposed¹³⁹ to adopt the form of a memorial, and petition the Governor.

(KENNEDY suddenly steps to front of platform.)

KENNEDY. Never! We'll na climb doon noo! It would be beneath the dignity of the League first to demand and afterwards to petition. Na! Na!

*(HAYES rises and comes between BLACK and KENNEDY.)*¹⁴⁰

Moral persecution is a humbug,

Naething convinces like a lick on the lug!

(Cheers and laughter, as HAYES manages to get BLACK and KENNEDY back to their seats.)

HAYES. Gentlemen, our next speaker is our old friend, Carboni Raffaello.

*(RAFFAELLO comes forward.)*¹⁴¹

VOICES. Great Works!

—Go ahead, Great Works!

RAFFAELLO. Citizens,¹⁴² I came from old Europe, sixteen thousand miles,¹⁴³ across two oceans, and I thought it a respectable distance from the hated Austrian rule. Why, then, this meeting to-day¹⁴⁴ at the Antipodes! We wrote petitions, signed memorials, made remonstrances by dozens; no go! We¹⁴⁵ are compelled to demand, and must prepare for the consequences. The old style, oppressors and oppressed.

¹³⁷ public prayer for ... injudicious advisers.] public prayer. As far as I could judge the Governor was in favour of the people; but he was surrounded by injudicious advisers. A.

¹³⁸ - Foster!] The Chief Secretary!/-Foster! A.

¹³⁹ As far as I could judge ... now been proposed] The result of our mission was therefore inconclusive./VOICES Did he release the prisoners?/No, no!/BLACK He was powerless at present to do so. But it was proposed A.

¹⁴⁰ *(HAYES rises and comes between BLACK and KENNEDY.)*] VOICES Good for you, Tom!/Groans for the New Chum Governor! A.

¹⁴¹ *(Cheers and laughter ... comes forward.)*] *(He sits down.)*/*(Laughter)*/*(TIMONTY HAYES, a portly, jovial man comes forward)*/VOICES That's Timony Hayes in the chair!/Hurrah, Timothy!/HAYES Gentlemen, I have the honour to preside at the greatest mass meeting ever held in the Colony. Work is suspended on all the claims, and the diggers of Ballaarat are here assembled to demand their rights. *(Point to flag)* There is the *Southern Cross* - *(Cheers)* - waving triumphantly in the sunshine of its own blue and peerless sky - *(Cheers)*/VOICES The Diggers' flag!/ The Southern Cross!/HAYES Our first speaker is Carboni Raffaello./*(He takes chairman's seat)*/*(RAFFAELLO moves through the crowd. LALOR gives him his hand and pulls him up on the platform.)* A.

¹⁴² Citizens,] Friends, Romans, countrymen, A.

¹⁴³ miles,] miles A.

¹⁴⁴ to-day] to-day, A.

¹⁴⁵ go! We] go - we A.

Why did I leave my beautiful Italy! To sweat and suffer more!¹⁴⁶ *Chi ste bebè; non si muove* is an old Roman proverb. If, then¹⁴⁷, in old Europe we had a bird in hand, what silly fools we were to venture across two oceans and try to catch two jackasses in the bush of Australia.

(Cheers and laughter.)

I had a dream, a happy dream. I dreamed that we had met here together to render thanks for a plentiful harvest, so that, for¹⁴⁸ the first time in this, our adopted land, we had our own food for the year. And, so,¹⁴⁹ each of us holding in our hands a tumbler of Victorian wine, you called on me for a song. My harp was tuned and in good order. I cheerfully struck up¹⁵⁰ 'Oh, let us be happy together!'

Not so, Britons, not so!¹⁵¹ We must meet as in old Europe—old style—improved by far in the South—for the redress of grievances inflicted on us¹⁵² not by crowned heads, but by blockheads

-
*(Cheers.)*¹⁵³

(RAFFAELLO gets down from the platform and mingles with the CROWD.)

HAYES *(From chair)*. I now call on Peter Lalor to address the meeting.

(PETER LALOR, rifle in hand, steps to front of platform.)

LALOR. Mr Chairman, fellow-diggers, this is the first time¹⁵⁴ I have ventured to make a speech at any public meeting. Coming to this new Colony I had hoped to work and live as a private citizen among you, away from the storm of politics. But that has been impossible. No man with a spark of patriotic feeling can refuse to play his part in this hour of crisis. I think the acquittal of Bentley has roused the diggers more than any official act since the gold discovery.

(Cheers.)

The burning of the hotel was only the occasion, not the cause of the present conflict. We were led to believe that under the rule of the new Governor there would be an end of tyranny on the gold-fields. And what do we find! The same injustice, corruption and oppression as before. Free men, and we are all lovers of freedom, will not endure it. We are of all nations, and I see among you Italian patriots, Hungarian followers of Kossuth, Swiss mountaineers, and sons of *La Belle France* with the fire of revolution still hot in their veins. *(Pointing to flag.)* Here is our flag, 'The Souther Cross', symbol of our hopes and aspirations. We are not the aggressors. But I tell you, diggers, the Camp is in arms, and we must be on constant watch. This great meeting to-day marks a solemn occasion. It may be a turning point in our history. We must be resolute and united in our efforts. Therefore, fellow-diggers and friends, I have the honour to move a

¹⁴⁶ Why did I leave my beautiful Italy! To sweat and suffer more!] For what did we come into this Colony! A.

¹⁴⁷ If, then] If then A.

¹⁴⁸ that, for] that for A.

¹⁴⁹ year. And, so,] year, and so A.

¹⁵⁰ struck up] struck up: A.

¹⁵¹ not so!] not so. A.

¹⁵² grievances inflicted on us] grievances, inflicted on us, A.

¹⁵³ blockheads - *(Cheers.)*] blockheads -/VOICES Vivo Raffaello!/RAFFAELLO I call on my fellow diggers, irrespective of nationality, religion or colour, to salute the *Southern Cross*, as the refuge of the oppressed from all countries on earth./*(Cheers.)*

¹⁵⁴ *front of platform.*]/ LALOR Mr. Chairman, fellow-diggers, this is the first time] *front of platform*)VOICES There he is!/That young man with the rifle./He's just coming to the front./Brave, Peter!/LALOR Gentlemen, this is the first time A.

resolution that a meeting of the members of the Reform League be called for next Sunday at the Adelphi Theatre, to define clearly the miners' policy.¹⁵⁵

*(LALOR resumes seat. Applause.)*¹⁵⁶

HAYES *(After putting the motion)*. Carried on the voices.¹⁵⁷

(Cheers.)

(From chair.) Our next speaker is Frederic Vern.¹⁵⁸

(VERN comes to front of platform. He is a tall, good-looking young man, with a strong German accent.)

VERN. I move a resolution dat dis meeting, being convinced dat der obnoxious licence-fee is an imposition,¹⁵⁹ and an unjustifiable tax on free labour, bledges itself to take immediate steps to abolish der same, by at vonce burning all der licences.

(Shouts and cheers.)

VOICES. Have you brought them!

—Here's mine!

—They'll all be wanted.

VERN. And dat, in der event of any barty being arrested for having no licence, der unided people vill, unter all circumstances, devend and brotect dem.

(FATHER SMYTHE comes forward.)

FATHER SMYTHE. Mr Chairman, I beg you, before you put the motion that the diggers should burn their licences, to think of the consequences. I have it on the best authority, that troops have already been sent from Melbourne, and will arrive at any moment at Ballaarat. My sympathies are with the diggers, and I admire their bravery; but what will that avail against the armed forces of the Government!

VERN. I haf no fear. I am a soldier!

FATHER SMYTHE. I ask you, diggers, for the sake of our cause, our just cause, not to do anything rash or foolish.

VERN. I vont action. Vot do you say, diggers!

(VERN and FATHER SMYTHE, arguing, go back to their seats.)

*(TIMOTHY HAYES lifts his hand to quell the uproar, and then addresses the meeting.)*¹⁶⁰

HAYES. Gentlemen, many a time I have seen large public meetings pass resolutions with as much earnestness and unanimity as you show this day; and yet,¹⁶¹ when the time came to test the sincerity, and prove the determination necessary for carrying out those resolutions, it was found that the spirit indeed was willing, but the flesh was weak. Now, then, before I put this resolution

¹⁵⁵ Coming to this new Colony ... clearly the miners' policy.] But I feel that the government of the gold-fields has been so oppressive and corrupt that unless some change is made there may be a serious outbreak. I trust we shall gain all demands by constitutional means, and without the shedding of one drop of blood. I propose therefore that a meeting of members of the Reform League be called for at the Adelphi Theatre to define clearly the miners' policy. *(Cheers)* We are not the aggressors; but the Camp is in arms and we must be prepared, Gentlemen, this may be a turning point in our history. It means nothing less than the overthrow of the old regime. A.

¹⁵⁶ *(LALOR resumes seat. Applause.)* *(LALOR takes seat.)* A.

¹⁵⁷ on the voices.] unanimously! A.

¹⁵⁸ Vern.] Vern! A.

¹⁵⁹ imposition,] imposition A.

¹⁶⁰ *(FATHER SMYTHE comes forward ... then addresses the meeting.)* *(Cheers)* *(VERN takes his seat. TIMOTHY HAYES rises to address the meeting.)* A.

¹⁶¹ yet,] yet A.

from the chair, let me point out to you the responsibility it will lay upon you. And, so¹⁶², I feel bound to ask you, gentlemen, to speak your mind. Should any member of the League be dragged to the lock-up for not having a licence, will a thousand of you volunteer to liberate the man?

VOICES. Yes! Yes!

HAYES. Will two thousand of you come forward?

VOICES. We will!

HAYES. Will four thousand of you volunteer to march up to the Camp, and open the lock-ups and liberate the men?

VOICES. Yes! Yes!

—We will!¹⁶³

—Down with the oppressors!

—Up the people!¹⁶⁴

HAYES (*Shouting and stretching forth his clenched right hand*). Are you ready to die! Are you ready to die!¹⁶⁵

VOICES. Yes! Yes!

—We're ready for anything!

—Hurrah! Hurrah!

HAYES (*Shouting above the clamour*).

On to the field, our doom is sealed

To conquer, or be slaves.

The sun shall see our country free

Or sink upon our graves!

(*Bonfires are lighted. Amid uproarious cheers the DIGGERS step up, and¹⁶⁶ throw their licences into the fire. Firearms are discharged in triumph.*)

VOICES. Hurrah! Bonfires ... Hurrah!

—To Hell with the licences!

—Throw them in, boys!

—Throw them in!

Curtain.

¹⁶² And, so] And so A.

¹⁶³ will!] will. A.

¹⁶⁴ Up the people!] Up the people!/Hurrah! Hurrah! A.; Hurrah! Hurrah! *scored out* A.

¹⁶⁵ die! Are you ready to die!] die? Are you ready to die? A.

¹⁶⁶ up, and] up and A.

ACT THREE

Scene One

(A room in a store¹⁶⁷. The next day.)

(At Left Centre is a plain table, placed lengthways, with chairs round it. At Right Centre is a small window. A door is at back-stage Centre.)

(Outside there is another digger-hunt. DIGGERS are heard rushing wildly about,¹⁶⁸ with TROOPERS following. Shouts of 'Joe—Joe—Joey!' Then a volley is fired. There is tremendous excitement.)

(It is a meeting of the DIGGERS' leaders. About ten are present, including RAFFAELLO, FREDERIC VERN and TIMOTHY HAYES.)

(Most of the MEN are seated at table in earnest discussion. Some watch the scene from the window.)

VOICES. They've fired a volley!¹⁶⁹

—Damn them! Damn their eyes!

—Red-coats and troopers!

—They're playing hell with the diggers.

—The Governor's orders, they say.

(Pause.)

—Is everything ready for our meeting?

—Yes.

—We're all prepared.

—Where's Peter Lalor?

(HAYES crosses to window.)

HAYES *(Looking out)*. There he is, on the stump!

VOICES. Well done, Peter!

HAYES. He'll soon be with us. *(He returns¹⁷⁰ to his place at the head of the table.)*

(Pause.)

HAYES. Commissioner Rede read *The Riot Act*.

RAFFAELLO. Great Works!

HAYES. Then the red-coats fixed bayonets and made a charge.

(VERN rises and goes to window.)

VOICES. A fine display of authority to massacre the diggers.

—A ruthless assault on innocent men.

(Pause.)

VERN *(Returning to table)*. Mein Gott, id's der vorst digger-hunt I've effer witnessed!¹⁷¹

HAYES. I didn't think they'd dare attack us, after yesterday's meeting. *(Again rises and crosses to window.)*

VOICES. The butchers!

—The dolly-mops!

—The bush-rangers!

¹⁶⁷ a store] store A.

¹⁶⁸ about,] about A.

¹⁶⁹ volley!] volley. A.

¹⁷⁰ He returns] Returns A.

¹⁷¹ witnessed!] witnessed. A.

VERN. How der devil can ve broduce our licence ven dey're all burnt!

HAYES (*At window*). Look! They've taken some prisoners, and are marching them back to the Camp.

RAFFAELLO. Great Works!

(*Pause.*)

(*As PETER LALOR appears at the door; the MEN crowd round him eagerly.*)¹⁷²

LALOR. Boys, this must be the last digger-hunt. We'll put an end to this accursed licence-hunting, mock Riot Act chopping, and Vandemonian shooting down of our mates.

VOICES. We will, Peter.

—We've sworn it.

LALOR. We have now to defend ourselves against the bayonets, bullets and swords of insolent officials.

(*The MEN seat themselves at table.*)

RAFFAELLO. Hush, one moment, Peter. (*He looks round stealthily and closes the door.*) We'll see no spy creeps in among us. (*He goes quietly to other side of store.*) I'm an old European fox for an occasion like this. (*He comes forward with bottles and tumblers and puts them on table.*) We'll put the bottles and tumblers here. We'll pretend to be having a spree, as a blind for any intruder. (*He takes seat with others at table.*)

HAYES. Is it making us conspirators, you are!

VERN. Dis is der Council of Var.

HAYES. I propose that we proceed at once to the election of our Commander-in-Chief.

VOICES. Peter Lalor!

—Peter Lalor!¹⁷³

LALOR. Gentlemen, I find myself in the responsible position I now occupy for this reason. The diggers were outraged at the unaccountable conduct of the Camp officials in such a wicked licence-hunt at the point of the bayonet, as the one this morning. They took it as an insult to their manhood,¹⁷⁴ and a challenge to the determination come to at our great mass meeting of yesterday. The diggers rushed to their tents for arms, and crowded on Bakery Hill. They wanted a leader. No one came forward, and confusion was the consequence. I mounted the stump where you saw me, and called upon the people to 'fall in' into divisions according to the firearms they possessed, and to choose their own captains. The result is that I have been able to bring about that order without which it would be folly to face the impending struggle like men. I make no pretensions to military knowledge. I have not the presumption to assume the chief command, no more than any other man who means well in the cause of the diggers.

(*He resumes his seat amidst muffled applause round the table.*)

HAYES. We feel that Peter Lalor has acted worthy of the miners in organising the armed men on Bakery Hill against the wanton aggression of the Camp.

VOICES. Hear, hear!

—We've sworn to defend our mates!¹⁷⁵

—The diggers must be united.

HAYES. One moment, gentlemen ... is there no experienced soldier amongst us?

¹⁷² (*As PETER LALOR appears at the door, the MEN crowd round him eagerly.*)] Enter PETER LALOR)/(The men crowd round him eagerly) A.

¹⁷³ - Peter Lalor!] - Peter Lalor!/(LALOR rises from his seat) A.

¹⁷⁴ manhood,] manhood A.

¹⁷⁵ mates!] mates. A.

LALOR. Signor Raffaello, you can point to honourable scars as evidence of your fight against the Austrians.

RAFFAELLO. Alas! I¹⁷⁶ have no longer the youth and vigour for such an emergency.

LALOR. I am only a digger. I have no ambition to be a leader of men.¹⁷⁷

VERN (*Rising*). I vos a soldier. I have four¹⁷⁸ years' military training in the landwehr. I understand var-science, der broblem of tag-tigs, der art of fortifications¹⁷⁹ -

RAFFAELLO. Nein, nein, mein Herr, we¹⁸⁰ cannot take in this oceanic military knowledge. (*Rising*.) Peter Lalor possesses the confidence of the diggers, and¹⁸¹ I propose that he should be their Commander-in-Chief.

(*VERN is about to speak; but¹⁸² hesitates, and then sits down.*)

However much a foreigner may be respected on the gold-fields, the right man should be taken from among the Britons. If a man is wanted to take responsibility and face danger, Peter is the man among men.

(*Applause round the table.*)

HAYES. All in favour?

(*After vote taken by lifting hands.*)

Carried!

(*More subdued applause.*)

VOICES. Bravo, Peter!

—The diggers' leader!¹⁸³

HAYES (*Rising and reciting with rhetorical fervour*).

O, tell me Shawn O'Farrell

Where the gathering is to be.¹⁸⁴

In the old spot by the river

Right well known to you and me.

One word more—for signal token

Whistle up the marching tune

With your pike upon your shoulder

At the rising of the moon.

(*Takes seat again.*)

LALOR. I thank¹⁸⁵ the Council for the honour conferred on me. It is understood that we have organised for defence, and have taken up arms for no other purpose.

VOICES. More power to you, Peter.

RAFFAELLO. Smother the knaves, old chummy. They breed too fast in this Colony.

¹⁷⁶ Alas! I] Alas, I A.

¹⁷⁷ I am only a digger. I have no ambition to be a leader of men.] *not in A.*

¹⁷⁸ four] vour A.

¹⁷⁹ fortifications] vortifications A.

¹⁸⁰ Herr, we] Herr. We A.

¹⁸¹ diggers, and] diggers and A.

¹⁸² *speaks; but] speak, but A.*

¹⁸³ leader!] leader. A.

¹⁸⁴ *be.] be? A.*

¹⁸⁵ I thank] (*rising*) I thank A.

LALOR. Gentlemen, I have not sought this position, but since you have appointed¹⁸⁶ me Commander-in-Chief, I shall not shirk. I mean to do my duty as a man. I tell you, gentlemen, if I once pledge my hand to the diggers, I will neither defile it with treachery, nor render it contemptible by cowardice.

(Applause.)

VOICES. Well done, Peter!

—Hurrah!

Curtain.

ACT THREE

Scene Two

(Bakery Hill. The same day. Afternoon.)

(A mass meeting of DIGGERS, most of them armed. 'The Southern Cross' is hoisted up the flagstaff, amid cheers. CAPTAIN ROSS, sword in hand, stands at the foot of the flagstaff. PETER LALOR, on the stump, holds with his left hand the muzzle of his rifle. CARBONI RAFFAELLO moves among the CROWD.)

LALOR. It is my duty now to swear you in, and to take with you the oath to be faithful to 'The Southern Cross'. Hear me with attention. The man who, after this solemn oath, does not stand by our standard, is a coward at heart. I order all persons who do not intend to take the oath to leave the meeting at once.

(A few DIGGERS move away.)

DIGGERS. Look!

—'The Southern Cross'!

—The diggers' flag.

RAFFAELLO. There is no flag in Europe half so beautiful as 'The Southern Cross';¹⁸⁷ no device or arms, only a silver cross of stars, like the one in our southern firmament.

LALOR. Let all divisions under arms fall in their order round the flagstaff.

(The armed DIGGERS advance, the CAPTAINS of each division making the military salute. LALOR kneels down with head uncovered, and with his right hand pointing to the standard.)

We swear by 'The Southern Cross' to stand truly by each other,¹⁸⁸ and fight to defend our rights and liberties.

DIGGERS. Amen!

(The DIGGERS stretch their right hands towards the flag.)

Curtain.

¹⁸⁶ Gentlemen, I have not sought this position, but since you have appointed] Since you have appointed A.

¹⁸⁷ Cross;] Cross, A.

¹⁸⁸ other,] other A.

ACT THREE

Scene Three

(The Eureka¹⁸⁹ Stockade. Saturday, 2 December.)

(In the distance, on backcloth, may be seen part of the irregular line of the rough, improvised Stockade, showing logs, slabs, from the shafts,¹⁹⁰ overturned carts etc.)

(Right Centre, an open tent, with rough table inside, covered with papers, documents etc. It is used as LALOR's headquarters.)

(The 'Southern Cross' flies from its own flagstaff.)

(There are DIGGERS round fire, backstage, cooking, burnishing arms etc. Throughout the scene, others pass in and out, helping to strengthen the Stockade.)

(At back, extreme Left¹⁹¹, just occasionally seen, a GERMAN BLACKSMITH is hammering pikes.)

(A few DIGGERS are drilling with pikes.)

SERGEANT *(Shouting commands)*. Shoulder pikes! Order poles! Ground arms! Stand at ease!

They've given me the awkward squad.

PAT. What do you know about drill?¹⁹²

SERGEANT. Didn't I fight at Waterloo before you were born?¹⁹³ Pick up poles! Shoulder pikes!

Right face! Quick march!

PAT *(Laughing)*. Go in, old Waterloo!¹⁹⁴

(The SERGEANT marches out with his squad.)¹⁹⁵

(PAT goes up to BLACKSMITH.)

Give me a pike, John! An eight-foot pike with a hook on it, top cut the bridles of the mounted police.

(PAT waits¹⁹⁶ as BLACKSMITH gets him a pike.)

(PETER LALOR crosses from the Left.)¹⁹⁷

LALOR. Keep up your drill, boys, and see your arms are ready.

PAT *(Coming forward with a pike)*. This will do me.

LALOR. Are these all the rifles we have?

PAT. All we could find. We searched the stores; but firearms are scarce.¹⁹⁸

MAT. I was a mighty swinger of pikes when I was young.

LALOR. But we must have arms and ammunition. That's our most desperate need.

¹⁸⁹ *The Eureka*] *Eureka A.*

¹⁹⁰ *slabs, from the shafts,*] *slabs (meant for shafts) A.*

¹⁹¹ *extreme Left*] *extreme Right A.*

¹⁹² PAT What do you know about drill?] DIGGERS What do you know about drill! A.

¹⁹³ born?] born! A.

¹⁹⁴ PAT *(Laughing.)* Go in, old Waterloo!] DIGGER *(laughing)* Go it, old Waterloo! A.

¹⁹⁵ *(The SERGEANT marches out with his squad.)*] *(Exit SERGEANT, with Squad marching) A.*

¹⁹⁶ *waits*] *waits, A.*

¹⁹⁷ *(PETER LALOR crosses from the Left.)*] *(Enter PETER LALOR, Left) A.*

¹⁹⁸ PAT All we could find. We searched the stores; but firearms are scarce.] DIGGERS All we could find./ We searched the stores, but firearms are scarce. A.

(*HARRY, the storekeeper, goes up to LALOR.*)¹⁹⁹
HARRY (*Protesting*). A party²⁰⁰ broke into my store.
MAT. Hallo, Harry, old boy.²⁰¹
HARRY. And purloined six York 'ams, one bag of Java sugar, and three cheeses.
MAT. A storekeeper should be proud of being a purveyor to the Reform League.
HARRY. There were six York 'ams -
LALOR. Send in you bill, and everything will be paid for.
HARRY. Thanks, Mr Lalor, I was just warning you. (*He goes out.*)²⁰²
LALOR. We mustn't antagonise the storekeepers; but²⁰³ I'll have to send out more pickets.
PAT. Come on, and see what luck we have. We're after muskets and revolvers!²⁰⁴
LALOR. Get all the firearms you can; but²⁰⁵ don't let our needs be made the cover²⁰⁶ for robbery.
(*PAT, MAT and other DIGGERS go off.*)²⁰⁷
LALOR (*To DIGGERS*). We've searched everywhere; but we're still desperately short.
(*RAFFAELLO and HUMFFRAY join LALOR.*)²⁰⁸
Glad to see you, gentlemen. Come inside.
(*The THREE MEN enter tent.*)
What news from the Camp?
RAFFAELLO. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*. I fear the Camp, especially when it makes fair promises.
HUMFFRAY. The Commissioners received our deputation, and I believe they meant to be conciliatory.
RAFFAELLO. We met in the moonlight, under a big gum-tree, a secret and mysterious rendezvous.²⁰⁹
HUMFFRAY. We put our case clearly, and made a petition that the men arrested at the last digger-hunt should be released.
LALOR. What did they say to that?
HUMFFRAY. They were unable to grant our request unconditionally; but promised that a reasonable settlement would be made.

¹⁹⁹ (*HARRY, the storekeeper, goes up to LALOR.*) (*Enter HARRY, protesting*) A.

²⁰⁰ (*Protesting.*) A party] A party A.

²⁰¹ boy.] boy! A.

²⁰² (*He goes out.*) (*Exit HARRY*) A.

²⁰³ storekeepers; but] storekeepers. But A.

²⁰⁴ PAT Come on, and see what luck we have. We're after muskets and revolvers!] DIGGERS Come on, and see what luck we have./We're after muskets and revolvers. A.

²⁰⁵ can; but] can. But A.

²⁰⁶ cover] A.; excuse *scored out* A.

²⁰⁷ (*PAT, MAT and other DIGGERS go off.*) (*Exeunt PAT, MAT, and other DIGGERS*) A.

²⁰⁸ (*RAFFAELLO and HUMFFRAY join LALOR.*) (*Enter RAFFAELLO, and HUMFFRAY, Left*) A.

²⁰⁹ Glad to see you, gentlemen. ... rendezvous.] LALOR What news from the Camp?/HUMFFRAY The Commissioners received our deputation./LALOR Come inside./(*the three men enter tent, and take seats at table*)/LALOR What do you make of it? A.

LALOR. A reasonable settlement! I hardly expected that answer from the Camp.²¹⁰

RAFFAELLO. More promises, more negotiations, more hallucinated yabber-yabber! I wouldn't trust King Rede.²¹¹

HUMFFRAY. I am not as sceptical as Raffaello. Naturally he was perturbed at the present state of crisis, arising from the burning of the licences; but I gathered from his general attitude, and that of the other Commissioners, that they were in favour of conciliation.

RAFFAELLO. Remember what he said: 'This is a strong democratic action, and the licence a mere catchword of the day.'

LALOR. That sounds like a threat.

HUMFFRAY. I can't believe Rede wants to stir up further strife with the diggers. I feel sure he'll do all in his power to avoid a conflict.

RAFFAELLO. But he has the power! When the deputation met King Rede, his shadow by moonlight as he held him arm *à la Napoleon* inspired me with reverence; but, behold, only a marionette was before us! Each of his words, each of his movements, was the vibration of the telegraphic wires from Melbourne!

LALOR. You infer, then, he was but a puppet of Governor Hotham?

RAFFAELLO. Yes, nothing but a puppet. His part was only to cajole and deceive us.

LALOR. In any case, we must be resolute. I have positive information that the Government has sent strong reinforcements from Melbourne, and they will soon reach Ballaarat. What does it all mean?

HUMFFRAY. We must continue our negotiations. It would be useless to fight against an armed Camp.

LALOR. But the Camp may suddenly attack us. I don't know. We must be prepared for anything.

HUMFFRAY. If you talk about taking up arms against the Government, I must retire. I'm no trimmer, as you know, but I entreat you not to be the aggressors.

LALOR. That was never our intention. We mean to keep strictly to the defensive.

HUMFFRAY (*Going off*). Then, I'm with you to the end.

LALOR. I know you are.

RAFFAELLO. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

LALOR. Our cause is just; but God knows what our opponents will do.

RAFFAELLO. When I was young, Peter, I thought with Rousseau that the heart of man was by nature good; but now, from bitter experience, I have to agree with the old prophet Isaiah, that man's heart is desperately wicked.

LALOR. Yet we believe in justice, and a man must try to play a man's part.

RAFFAELLO. Yes, that's so. Our diggers are loyal. Good luck, Peter.

²¹⁰ clearly, and made ...the answer from the Camp.] clearly, and a fair settlement was promised./LALOR I hardly expected that answer from the Camp./RAFFAELLO I fear the Greeks, especially bringing gifts. I wouldn't trust King Rede. This is a strong democratic action, he [undecipherable], and the license a mere catch-word for the day./LALOR And the other Commissioners?/HUMFFRAY They were most conciliatory. They promised everything. A.; This is a strong democratic action, he [undecipherable] us, and the license a mere catch-word for the day.] A.; HUMFFRAY He seemed to agree that our demands were just. *scored out A.*

²¹¹ More promises, more negotiations, more hallucinated yabber-yabber! I wouldn't trust King Rede.] More negotiations - more hallucinated yabber-yabber - A.

*(He turns to leave the tent. LALOR looks over documents on table. As RAFFAELLO crosses, VERN comes in flourishing a long sword.)*²¹²

VERN *(Shouting)*. Ooop²¹³ mit der barricades!

RAFFAELLO *(Laughing)*. Our famous strategist, Frederic the Great.²¹⁴

VERN. Ve must gonstruct der strong stogade. Come on, boys dere are still blaces to fortify. Bring logs, slabs, garts, barricaden bauen!

*(He goes out waving his sword.)*²¹⁵

RAFFAELLO. There he goes²¹⁶, long-legged, sky-blathering Vern!

(RAFFAELLO²¹⁷ retires to the back, examining arms etc. TWO TROOPERS, disguised as DIGGERS, come forward.)

TROOPER ONE. We're not recognised, Joe!

TROOPER TWO. They think we're miners.

TROOPER ONE. But how can we get back to the Camp?

TROOPER TWO. The guard won't stop you. You can come and go as you like.

TROOPER ONE. Lord love yer, it's a rum Stockade, not much more than a rough fence.

TROOPER TWO. And breastworks of overturned carts—all higglety-pigglety -

TROOPER ONE. They've only got picks and shovels.

TROOPER TWO. And pikes.

TROOPER ONE. We'll give Thomas the word. The troops'll make mince-meat of 'em.

(RAFFAELLO comes forward, watching them.)

TROOPER TWO. Look out!

TROOPER ONE *(With bravado)*. Now's our chance! We ought to attack first!²¹⁸

TROOPER TWO. We'll burn down the blooming Camp,²¹⁹ like the Eureka Hotel.

TROOPER ONE. Come on, boys.²²⁰

(They rush out excitedly.)

RAFFAELLO. I'm suspicious, mates. I've seen that kind before,²²¹ in old Europe.

(He follows the TWO MEN.)

²¹² I am not as sceptical as Raffaello. . . . *a long sword.*)] HUMFFRAY They seemed to agree that our demands were just./LALOR I'm surprised. I have positive information that the Government has sent strong reinforcements from Melbourne and they will soon reach Ballaarat. What does it all mean! RAFFAELLO [undecipherable]/(HUMFFRAY and RAFFAELLO rise)/HUMFFRAY It would be useless to fight against an armed Camp. We must keep strictly to the defence./LALOR But we must be prepared for anything.!(LALOR carefully looks over documents on table.)/(HUMFFRAY and RAFFAELLO leave ten as VERN enters with a long sword.) A.

²¹³ Ooop] Ub A.

²¹⁴ RAFFAELLO *(Laughing.)* Our famous strategist, Frederic the Great.] DIGGERS Hurrah! A.

²¹⁵ *(He goes out waving his sword.)*] *(Exit VERN, waving his sword.)* A.

²¹⁶ There he goes] *(Laughingly)* There he goes A.; *(Laughingly)*] *(gently)* scored out A.

²¹⁷ Vern!/(RAFFAELLO] Vern!/(HUMFFRAY If you talk of taking up arms against the Government, I must retire./ DIGGERS You're a trimmer, Munffray./HUMFFRAY I'm no trimmer. But I entreat you not to be the aggressors.!(Exit Hummffray.)/(RAFFAELLO A.

²¹⁸ first!] first. A.

²¹⁹ Camp,] Camp A.

²²⁰ boys.] boys! A.

²²¹ before,] before A.

*(KENNEDY rushes in excitedly.)*²²²

KENNEDY. Where's Peter? I maun see Peter. *(Goes to tent door.)*

LALOR *(Inside)*. What is it, Tom?

KENNEDY *(Speaking vehemently)*. I went to Creswick yesterday,²²³ and brought back four hundred determined diggers.

LALOR. I know, Tom.

KENNEDY. And now half of them have gone back in disgust. It wasn't the storm that drove them awa'.

LALOR. But where could we put them up?²²⁴ We had no accommodation, no provisions.

KENNEDY. It's an awfu' muddle. But we mustn't lose them a'.

LALOR. That's right, Tom. We need all the help we can get.

KENNEDY. I'll dae my best to prevent ony mair o' them slipping awa'! Ah, Peter,²²⁵ mon, we must keep up oor armed resistance.

*(He goes out, still highly excited.)*²²⁶

(LALOR smiles grimly, and again sits at table examining papers.)

DIGGERS. There's no chance of a fight to-day.

—Why not?

—There's never been a licence-hunt on a Saturday afternoon.

*(DIGGERS, including PAT and MAT, drag in the TWO TROOPERS in disguise.)*²²⁷

—We caught them.

—We tumbled to their little game.

(LALOR comes to door of tent.)

LALOR. Who are these men?

DIGGER. Spies.

TROOPER. We're no spies. We're honest diggers.

DIGGER. They're troopers disguised as diggers. I've watched them prowling round the Stockade.

PAT *(Coming forward)*. God save us, I know this man! How are you, your worship? This is the very man who once hunted me for a licence.

(The DIGGERS crowd round threateningly.)

DIGGER. What will we do with them?

TROOPER ONE. We're no spies!

TROOPER TWO. We want our liberty!

LALOR. Let them go!

DIGGERS. What!²²⁸

—They'll betray us!²²⁹

²²² *(He follows the TWO MEN.)/(KENNEDY rushes in excitedly.) (Exit RAFFAELLO after spies)/(Enter KENNEDY excitedly) A.*

²²³ yesterday,] yesterday A.

²²⁴ up?] up! A.

²²⁵ Peter,] Peter A.

²²⁶ *(He goes out, still highly excited.) (Exit KENNEDY, still highly excited) A.*

²²⁷ *(DIGGERS, including PAT and MAT, drag in the TWO TROOPERS in disguise.) (Enter DIGGERS, including PAT and MAT, with the Two TROOPERS in disguise.) A.*

²²⁸ What!] What? A.

²²⁹ betray us!] betray us. A.

LALOR. They can do us no harm. It's not worth the trouble to keep them. (*Contemptuously.*) Spies!

DIGGERS. Off you go!

—Away with you!

—You blackguards!

—Dirty spies!

(*The TROOPERS are driven off by jeering DIGGERS.*)

LALOR (*To DIGGERS*). Stick to your work, boys.²³⁰ Look to your arms.

(*He goes back to his tent.*)²³¹

DIGGERS. We're short of everything.

—Luckily a friendly butcher brought us a cart-load of meat.

—It was paid for, too.

—Peter pays for everything.

—It's a great leader we've got.

(*NORA appears and looks round anxiously.*)²³²

NORA (*Calling*). Are you there, Pat?

PAT. It's Nora. What are you doing on the Stockade itself?

NORA. I was thinking of you out in the rain all night,²³³ and the bitter cold, too.

MAT. Don't weaken the man, Nora. What's a drop o' rain itself to a hardy and enterprising young colonist.

NORA (*Taking out flask*). I just brought you a small flask of whiskey.

MAT. Nora, my darling, that was a kindly thought. (*Takes flask and coughs as he opens it.*) It'll prevent the cold I might be after catching through sleeping out in the devil's own rain last night.

(*Drinks.*) That's the real stuff, and no mistake.²³⁴

NORA. Don't let the oul' man take it all at once.

PAT (*Taking flask, and putting it in his pocket*). I'll mind it, Nora.

NOIRA (*As she walks off*). I had to see for myself you were not both destroyed.²³⁵

DIGGERS. This is getting a serious business.

—The Camp isn't idle.

—The red-coats are under arms.

—You don't think they'll attack us!

—Who knows if it'll thunder or rain!

(*Some DIGGERS march in*²³⁶ *with COMMISSIONER AMOS as prisoner.*)

DIGGERS (*Calling*). Mr Lalor!

—Mr Lalor!

(*LALOR*²³⁷ *appears at tent door.*)

LALOR. It's Commissioner Amos.

²³⁰ boys.] boys! A.

²³¹ (*He goes back to his tent.*)] (*Exit LALOR into tent*) A.

²³² (*NORA appears and looks round anxiously.*)] (*Enter NORA*) A.

²³³ night,] night A.

²³⁴ mistake.] mistake! A.

²³⁵ (*As she walks off.*) I had to see for myself you were not both destroyed.] I had to see for myself you were not both destroyed./(*Exit NORA*) A.

²³⁶ *Some DIGGERS march in*] *Enter Diggers, A.*

²³⁷ *LALOR*] *PETER LALOR A.*

AMOS (*Stiffly*). What does this mean?²³⁸

DIGGERS. We found him in his camp,²³⁹ not far from the Stockade.

AMOS. Your men broke in and attacked me.

DIGGER. We just took possession of the camp. I dunno what he was doing there, so we brought him along.

AMOS. I was on duty.

DIGGER. We were on duty,²⁴⁰ too.

AMOS. Am I to be regarded as a prisoner, Mr Lalor?

LALOR. Certainly not. We want no prisoners. Let the Commissioner go!

AMOS. This is an insult I cannot overlook. The matter will be reported to the authorities.

*(He goes off with dignity.)*²⁴¹

DIGGERS. To Hell with the Commissioner.²⁴²

—We'll keep his horse and arms.

—They might come in useful.

(LALOR comes forward.)

LALOR. We must have better order. People are coming and going as they please. If we're not more alert, everything will go to pieces.

DIGGERS. No fear, Peter!²⁴³

—We'll be ready.

LALOR. We had eight hundred men on the Stockade yesterday. Now we have less than three hundred. Let no man be absent again without leave. Don't go off to-night and get drunk in Main Street! Keep to your posts, men. The Camp is under arms, seven or eight hundred strong. God knows, there might be an attack at any time.

*(RAFFAELLO brings in a printed notice.)*²⁴⁴

RAFFAELLO. This is the latest Government notice. Great Works! *(Hands it to LALOR.)* Great Works at the Camp!

LALOR *(Reading it to DIGGERS)*. 'No light will be allowed to be kept burning in any tent within musket-shot of the line of sentries²⁴⁵ after 8pm. No discharge of firearms within²⁴⁶ the neighbourhood of the Camp will be permitted for any purpose whatever. The sentries²⁴⁷ have orders to fire on any person offending against these rules.'

*(VERN comes in with his sword.)*²⁴⁸

²³⁸ mean?] mean! A.

²³⁹ camp,] camp A.

²⁴⁰ duty,] duty A.

²⁴¹ *(He goes off with dignity.)*] *(Exit COMMISSIONER AMONS, with dignity)* A.

²⁴² Commissioner.] Commissioner! A.

²⁴³ Peter!] Peter. A.

²⁴⁴ *(RAFFAELLO brings in a printed notice.)*] *(Enter RAFFAELLO, with notice)* A.

²⁴⁵ sentries] A.; soldiers *scored out* A.

²⁴⁶ within] in A.

²⁴⁷ sentries] A.; sentinels *scored out* A.

²⁴⁸ *(VERN comes in with his sword.)*] *(Enter VERN with sword)* A.

VERN. More troops are coming from Melbourne under der great General²⁴⁹ Sir Robert Nickle. I will deach him der art of var! My Galifornians are out, all armed mit revolvers. I will lead der diggers to death or glory. *(He goes out flourishing his sword.)*²⁵⁰

RAFFAELLO. The red-coats are everywhere. They're getting as numerous as the locusts that plagued Pharaoh's land.

(Shouts outside.)

LALOR. The companies are forming.

*(Sounds of the 'La Marseillaise' heard in the distance, growing in strength till the fall of the curtain.)*²⁵¹

They're singing the *Marseillaise*!

RAFFAELLO. The Continental section of the diggers!²⁵²

(Some DIGGERS collect arms at back.)

DIGGERS. And don't forget the pikemen division.

RAFFAELLO *(Quietly to LALOR)*. What's the pass-word for to-night?

LALOR. Vinegar Hill.

RAFFAELLO. Very appropriate. ... Ah, Peter, we've all had our dreams of Utopia; but it cannot be found on this earth, not even in a British Colony ... John Bull was born for law and order, and safe money-making on land and sea.

LALOR. Well, to-morrow is the Sabbath Day. What will it bring forth?

RAFAELLO. I'm no prophet, Peter.²⁵³

LALOR. Nor I, either. Enough for the day—*(Pointing to the flag.)* Look, our flag's still flying.

RAFFAELLO. When I beheld our flag, I felt a sensation like the first declaration of love in bygone times. *(He salutes the flag.)*

(LALOR crosses to DIGGERS at back.)

LALOR. Are you ready, boys! Fall in!²⁵⁴

*(DIGGERS prepare to drill. 'La Marseillaise' swells up as the curtain falls.)*²⁵⁵

ACT THREE

Scene Four

(The same. Early Sunday morning, 3 December.)

(A few DIGGERS are on the watch behind some rough barricades. Others lie on the ground, sleeping. A signal gun is fired.)

²⁴⁹ General] General, A.

²⁵⁰ glory. *(He goes out flourishing his sword.)*] glory!/(Exit VERN, flourishing his sword) A.

²⁵¹ *(Sounds of the 'Marseillaise' heard in the distance, growing in strength till the fall of the curtain.)*] *(Sounds of the 'Marseillaise' heard in the distance)* A.

²⁵² diggers!] diggers. A.

²⁵³ Very appropriate. ... I'm no prophet, Peter.] Very appropriate. Ah, Peter, when I was young I thought with Rousseau that the heart of man is by nature good; but now, alas, I feel the truth from the prophet Isaiah that man's heart is desperately wicked./ LALOR Well, tomorrow is the Sabbath day. What will it bring forth!/RAFFAELLO I'm not prophet, Peter. A.

²⁵⁴ our flag's still flying. ... Fall in!] our flag's still flying. .../He crosses to Diggers at back)/Are you ready, boys? Fall in. A.

²⁵⁵ *(DIGGERS prepare to drill. The 'Marseillaise' swells up as the curtain falls.)*] *(Diggers prepare to drill)* A.

DIGGER (*Starting up*). What the devil was that!

(*LALOR runs in with revolver.*)

LALOR. Who fired that shot?

DIGGER. One of our sentinels.

LALOR (*Calling on DIGGERS*). Thomas has ordered the attack. Come on, boys. Get²⁵⁶ your arms and man the Stockade.

(*The DIGGERS take up their arms—guns, revolvers, pikes etc.*)

(*LALOR gets on stump to direct his MEN.*)

LALOR. They're coming up the hill.

(*VERN rushes across excitedly.*)²⁵⁷

What's wrong, Vern?

VERN. Der soldiers are coming. Dey're all round us, by Gott!

LALOR (*Shouting*). Take your posts, pikemen, on the top!²⁵⁸

PIKEMEN. Hurrah! We'll be there!

LALOR. Double file under the slabs.

(*The PIKEMEN rush off to their posts.*)

LALOR (*Calling*). Look out, boys. It's Wise and the scouts.

VERN. I'll make a dead cock of him, by mein Gott! (*He runs off shouting.*)²⁵⁹

LALOR. Steady, men. They're²⁶⁰ breaking into the Stockade.

(*CAPTAIN WISE, leading the SCOUTS on foot, breaks into back of Stockade. Some shots are fired. CAPTAIN WISE falls.*)

DIGGERS. Look, he's down.

—Who was it?

—Captain Wise.

(*CAPTAIN WISE is carried off by his MEN.*)

(*A bugle call is heard in the distance.*)

LALOR. There's the bugle. That means they're going to fire. Look out!

(*Shots are fired by the SOLDIERS. DIGGERS return volley.*)

DIGGER. That's a smart fire.

LALOR. They're coming. Steady, men!

(*LALOR is shot in the left arm. He falls from stump. DIGGERS rush to help him.*)

DIGGER. Are you hurt, Peter?

LALOR. A stray shot in the arm. Nothing much. (*He manages to rise and look round.*) They're fixing bayonets. They're going to charge.

(*Some DIGGERS rush in.*)

DIGGERS. The red-coats are everywhere.

—Here they come, rushing the fence.

LALOR. We can do no more. Get away, boys, quick as you can.

(*LALOR sinks down on a heap of slabs. DIGGERS try to lift him up.*)

²⁵⁶ boys. Get] boys, get A.

²⁵⁷ (*VERN rushes across excitedly.*)] (*Enter VERN, excitedly*) A.

²⁵⁸ the top!] the top. A.

²⁵⁹ Gott! (*He runs off shouting.*)] Gott!/(*Exit VERN, shouting*) A.

²⁶⁰ men. They're] men, they're A.

DIGGER. Come on, Peter.²⁶¹

LALOR. No, I can't²⁶² move. You must get away, boys.

DIGGER (*Examining him*). What is it, Peter?

LALOR. This arm. It's broken.

DIGGER. We'll bind it up.

(They take LALOR's coloured handkerchief, and quickly bind it round the wound.)

LALOR. For God's sake, boys, go and leave me. *(He collapses.)*

DIGGERS. We can't leave him here.

—He'll be trampled to death.

—We'll hide him in a hole, there.

—And put some slabs over it.

—We'll see they don't find him.

(The DIGGERS carefully carry LALOR²⁶³ off to hide him.)

(Just as he escapes, there is a scene of confusion, when the DIGGERS go off in all directions, and the TROOPERS, with shouts of triumph, break through the fence²⁶⁴ and dash after them across the stage.)

Curtain.

²⁶¹ Peter.] Peter! A.

²⁶² No, I can't] No. I can't A.

²⁶³ LALOR] PETER LALOR A.

²⁶⁴ the fence] the fence. A.

ACT FOUR

Scene One

(A room in MISS DUNN's house, Geelong. It is some weeks later, January 1855.)

(It is a simply²⁶⁵ but comfortably furnished room, with table, chairs, sofa etc. A lighted lamp is on the table.)

(A door, back-stage Left, opening on to passage. Another door, Right Centre. A window, Left Centre.)

(It is nearly midnight.)

(ALICE DUNN, LALOR's fiancée, is half-reclining on sofa. She looks weary and careworn.)

(Enter MARY, an old servant. She looks round room, and then goes softly to sofa.)

MARY *(Persuasively)*. Won't you come to bed now?²⁶⁶ It's nearly midnight.

MISS DUNN. I can't sleep.

MARY. You must try. I'm sure Mr Lalor's safe and in good hands.

MISS DUNN *(Dreamily)*. I can't forget that dream, Mary. You know I'm not superstitious; but I had a dream or a vision one night,²⁶⁷ or rather in the early morning, when I thought I saw Peter lying wounded and bleeding before me. And it was early on that very Sunday morning that the soldiers stormed the Stockade.

MARY. Oh, Miss Alice, it was only a dream.²⁶⁸

MISS DUNN. I sometimes wonder if it might be true. Where is he? Weeks have passed, and I've heard only rumours. Has he been wounded?

MARY *(Consolingly)*. You'll soon have him beside you again.

MISS DUNN. I'm not sure that he'll escape. *(Rises and gets placard from drawer.)* The Government's hunting everywhere for him. *(Holds up official notice.)* See this placard someone pulled from a tree. They're all through the bush. '£400 for the apprehension of Lalor and Black, late of Ballaarat.' *(Puts it away.)* To think of it—Peter in hiding as a proscribed rebel, with a price on his head! *(She breaks down.)*

MARY *(Going to her)*. They're terrible times we're living in. But we mustn't lose heart.

MISS DUNN. Oh, Mary, what can we do!

MARY. Mr Lalor has a great spirit, and nothing daunts him.

MISS DUNN. But there are spies everywhere, waiting and watching. I'm frightened what might happen. He may be lying out in the bush now, or captured by informers for the reward.

MARY. They haven't caught him yet.

MISS DUNN. Peter—a man like that—accused of High Treason!

MARY. Do they call it treason to resist oppression!

MISS DUNN. Yes, Mary, that's what they call it. Thirteen of our men are going to be tried in Melbourne.

MARY. I feel certain they'll all be acquitted.

MISS DUNN. How can we tell!

MARY. The people are with the diggers.

MISS DUNN. But the Governor is relentless.

²⁶⁵ simply] simply, A.

²⁶⁶ now?] now. A.

²⁶⁷ night,] night A.

²⁶⁸ Oh, Miss Alice, it was only a dream.] A.; It was only a dream. A.

MARY. He's a hard man; but they're turning against him. It's the same in Melbourne as on the gold-fields.

MISS DUNN. Yes, I know. The whole country²⁶⁹ is in a state of ferment. Oh, this suspense, will it never end!

MARY (*Helping her up*). You must come to bed now.

MISS DUNN (*Wearily*). Very well, Mary.

(*As they walk slowly across the room, steps are heard outside. They stop and listen intently.*)

MISS DUNN (*In a low voice*). What's that?

MARY. Hush! Don't stir.

MISS DUNN. Is it anyone for us?

MARY. I'll see. (*She looks cautiously through the window.*) Yes. They're coming here.

MISS DUNN. Who can it be, at this hour of night!

(*There is a low knock at outside door.*)²⁷⁰

MARY. I'll open the door. (*She opens the door at the back cautiously and goes out.*)²⁷¹

(*Pause.*)

(*Heavy steps are heard in passage. Then MARY opens room door, and PETER LALOR, wounded, is brought in by TWO DIGGERS, PAT and MAT.*)²⁷²

MISS DUNN (*Starting back*). Peter!

LALOR (*Faintly*). Alice! Here I am,²⁷³ what's left of me.

(*LALOR is placed gently on sofa.*)

MISS DUNN (*Going to him anxiously*). Oh, how are you? (*Examining him, then crying out.*) Peter—your arm!

LALOR (*Weak, but trying to smile*). Don't worry about that. It had to be amputated. It was only the left one, anyway.

MISS DUNN (*Holding him and half sobbing*). Are you here, Peter! Is it you! ... After²⁷⁴ all these weeks of anxiety to have you safe ... we'll look after you ... gladly.

MARY (*Quietly*). I'll get them something. (*She goes out door on Right.*)²⁷⁵

MISS DUNN (*To DIGGERS*). Take a seat.

(*They take chairs.*)

(*ALICE DUNN gently tends LALOR, who now lies back exhausted.*)

Oh, Peter! He's²⁷⁶ exhausted. We'll let him lie quiet. (*Whispering.*) How did you manage to get here?

MAT. We brought²⁷⁷ him in a dray, with a tilt rigged over it.

²⁶⁹ country] Colony A.

²⁷⁰ (*There is a low knock at outside door.*)] emended A.

²⁷¹ (*She opens the door at the back cautiously and goes out.*)] (*Exit Mary, by door, backstage, Left*) A.

²⁷² TWO DIGGERS, PAT and MAT.] TWO DIGGERS. A.

²⁷³ Alice! Here I am,] Here I am, emended A.

²⁷⁴ Peter! Is it you! ... After] Peter! ... Is it you! After A.

²⁷⁵ (*She goes out door on Right.*)] (*Exit MARY*) A.

²⁷⁶ Peter! He's] Peter! ... He's A.

²⁷⁷ MAT We brought] DIGGER We brought A.

PAT. He spent²⁷⁸ his time under that. He was still faint from loss of blood. He lived for weeks in the bush, in a dug-out, suffering great pain, before we could get him away.

MISS DUNN (*Turning to LALOR*). Oh, Peter, what perils and hardships you must have endured.

MAT. Yes, that's true.²⁷⁹ And once we had the devil of a²⁸⁰ scare. Two men came up to us, looked under the tilt,²⁸¹ and recognised Peter.

(*MARY brings in²⁸² bottle of brandy and glasses.*)

PAT. One wanted²⁸³ to lay the police on to us.

MARY (*Starting*). The police!

PAT. But his mate was a good fellow. He got some whiskey and kept him drunk till we made our escape.

MARY (*Putting the bottle and glasses on the table*). To think that any man would take blood-money!²⁸⁴

(*MISS DUNN rises and pours brandy into glass.*)

MISS DUNN (*To DIGGERS*). Help yourselves.

DIGGERS. Thank you kindly. (*They fill their glasses.*)

MISS DUNN. You must all be tired out. (*She gently raises LALOR, and gives him glass.*) Peter!

LALOR. Good luck, boys.²⁸⁵ (*He drinks and hands back glass.*) It's a wonder I'm alive and here at all.

MAT. Will he be all right now?

MISS DUNN. Yes. We've a spare room, a quiet one,²⁸⁶ at the back of the house.

MARY. I'll get it ready now. (*She bustles off.*)²⁸⁷

LALOR. I had loyal friends to protect me.

MISS DUNN. After all he's gone through,²⁸⁸ we mustn't lose him now.

LALOR (*Rallying*). There'll be small chance of losing me—when²⁸⁹ we're soon to be married.

MISS DUNN. For God's sake, don't let him be caught.²⁹⁰

MAT. There's no fear o' that.²⁹¹ I think we've put the traps off the scent.

²⁷⁸ PAT He spent] SECOND DIGGER He spent A.

²⁷⁹ MAT Yes, that's true.] DIGGER Yes, that's true. A.

²⁸⁰ had the divil of a] had a bad A.

²⁸¹ tilt,] tilt A.

²⁸² *MARY brings in*] *Enter MARY, with A.*

²⁸³ PAT. One wanted] SECOND DIGGER One wanted A. *Continue throughout scene DIGGER (MAT), SECOND DIGGER (PAT)*

²⁸⁴ blood-money!] blood-money. A.

²⁸⁵ LALOR Good luck, boys.] LALOR (*looking up*) What's this, brandy!/DIGGERS (*toasting*) Good luck, Peter!/ LALOR Good luck, boys! A.

²⁸⁶ one,] one A.

²⁸⁷ (*She bustles off.*)] (*Exit MARY.*) A.

²⁸⁸ through,] through A.

²⁸⁹ There'll be small chance of losing me - when] A.; A fine chance you'll have of losing me when scored out and *emended* A.

²⁹⁰ caught.] A.; caught now. *scored out* A.

²⁹¹ There's no fear o' that.] No fear of that. A.

LALOR. A fine match I am, a young fellow with only one arm, and an outlaw beside.
 MISS DUNN (*Soothing him*). Peter, my Peter!
 LALOR (*Gaily*). Is it my wealth she's after! I was one of the lucky diggers, picking up nuggets like plums in a pudding. I had a capital hole. It was like looking into a ginger-bread basket, it was so yellow with gold.
 MISS DUNN. Don't, Peter; don't talk so much.
 LALOR. Then the troubles began, and God knows what the upshot will be.
 (*MARY comes back carrying strips of linen for bandages.*)²⁹²
 MARY. It's a nice quiet room he'll have. (*To MISS DUNN.*) You'll²⁹³ need some bandages, won't you?
 MISS DUNN (*Taking them from MARY*). Thanks, Mary. I'll roll them up now. (*Rolls bandages.*)
 LALOR (*Earnestly*). I must get strong soon. Our mates are being tried for treason—and if one of these men is convicted I'll come forward -
 MISS DUNN. Be quiet, Peter. Wait till the trials are over.
 LALOR. How can I forget our dead comrades: Captain Ross, our standard-bearer, the first man shot; Little Thonen, the finest chess player on the diggings, with his mouth choked with bullets; the German blacksmith, who forged our pikes; Shannahan, the storekeeper, and many more gallant fellows killed on that fateful Sunday morning.
 MISS DUNN. They were heroes. They will always be remembered.
 LALOR (*Speaking strongly*). I used to think Foster, Alphabetical Foster, was the evil genius of the Governor; but I've learned since that Hotham, and Hotham alone, precipitated the struggle. (*He drops back exhausted.*)²⁹⁴
 MISS DUNN. He's still weak and over-excited. We must get him to bed.²⁹⁵
 (*PAT and MAT rise.*)²⁹⁶
 MAT. He couldn't be in better hands.
 MISS DUNN. Thank you for all you've done.
 PAT (*Proudly*). Peter was our leader!
 MAT. We'll be off now.
 (*MARY goes to window and peeps out.*)
 MISS DUNN. Are there any troopers about?
 MARY. No, there's not a soul in sight.
 (*DIGGERS shake hands with MISS DUNN.*)
 MAT. He has a good nurse, Miss Dunn.
 MISS DUNN. Show them the way, Mary.
 MARY (*To DIGGERS*). Come with me. We'll go out the back, and you can slip down a quiet little lane.
 (*DIGGERS*²⁹⁷ go out stealthily after MARY.)

²⁹² (*MARY comes back carrying strips of linen for bandages.*)] (*Enter MARY, with strips of material for bandages*) A.

²⁹³ have. (*To MISS DUNN.*) You'll] A.; have. You'll emended A.

²⁹⁴ LALOR How can I forget ... *drops back exhausted.*] LALOR (*speaking strongly*) I used to think Foster, Alphabetical Foster was the evil genius of the Governor; but I've learned since that Hotham, and Hotham alone, precipitated the struggle./(*He drops back exhausted*) A.

²⁹⁵ bed.] A.; rest scored out and emended A.

²⁹⁶ (*PAT and MAT rise.*)] (*The DIGGERS rise*) A.

²⁹⁷ DIGGERS] THE DIGGERS A.

LALOR. I came here, to this new, free land, as full of hope as the romantic immigrant of our Irish songs.

MISS DUNN. We didn't ask any more from life than we had a right to ask.

LALOR. I looked forward to a happy future, Alice.

MISS DUNN. And you promised, Peter, that you wouldn't take an active part in politics.

LALOR. I had to break that promise.

MISS DUNN. You were right. I didn't mean it in that way.

LALOR. You forgive me, then?

MISS DUNN. Forgive ... I'm proud of you, Peter.

LALOR. If I'm not hanged, we'll get married and live a good and true life yet.²⁹⁸

MISS DUNN (*Going over*).²⁹⁹ Are you comfortable, Peter?

LALOR. I'm fine, Alice. ... But the fuss you're making of me -

MISS DUNN. Hush! (*She bends over him tenderly.*) Oh, why had all this to be!

LALOR. I'd have been unworthy of you and your love, if I'd deserted my companions in danger.

MISS DUNN. Did you ever doubt me, Peter?³⁰⁰

LALOR. Never. Our love, if possible, has been increased by my misfortunes.

MARY (*Coming back*). I got them safely away.³⁰¹

MISS DUNN. They were good mates. ... Are you ready, Peter?

LALOR. Yes.

MISS DUNN. Come on, we'll see you to your room.

(*MISS DUNN and MARY gently assist him to get up.*)

MARY. You need a good long rest, Mr Lalor.

LALOR. Isn't it a disgrace, now, for a school-mistress to be harbouring a proscribed rebel, when she should be setting a good example to the young!

MISS DUNN. Hush, Peter.

(*They go out door Right Centre.*)

(*Short Pause.*)

(*MISS DUNN and MARY come back quietly.*)³⁰²

MISS DUNN (*Picking up strips of linen*). I'll fix his bandages.³⁰³

MARY. I've got plenty of hot water.

(*MARY goes to window and carefully sees that blinds are closely drawn.*)

MISS DUNN. We'll bathe the wound, and put on a fresh dressing. Oh, Mary, Mary, he's here, thank God ... and he's safe!³⁰⁴

Curtain.

²⁹⁸ LALOR I came here, ... and true life yet] *not in A.*

²⁹⁹ (*Going over.*)] (*Going to LALOR*) A.

³⁰⁰ Peter?] Peter! A.

³⁰¹ MARY (*Coming back.*) I got them safely away.] (*Enter MARY*)/MARY I got them safely away. A.

³⁰² (*MISS DUNN and MARY come back quietly.*)] (*Then re-enter MISS DUNN and MARY*) A.

³⁰³ (*Picking up strips of linen.*) I'll fix his bandages.] I'll fix his bandages. A.

³⁰⁴ We'll bathe the wound, and put on a fresh dressing. Oh, Mary, Mary, he's here, thank God ... and he's safe!] (*picking up bandages*) We'll bathe the wound and put on a fresh dressing. A.

ACT FOUR

Scene Two

(Vice-Regal residence, Toorak. A month later.³⁰⁵)

(THE GOVERNOR's study. It contains a conference table, Left Centre, and big desk, Backstage Right, with a pile of documents, books, pamphlets, papers etc.)

(Seated at table are SIR CHARLES HOTHAM and W F STAWELL, Attorney-General.)

(It's near the end of a long conference. SIR CHARLES looks older, harassed and worn-out with over-work.)

SIR CHARLES *(Deliberately)*. I've carefully considered everything. Whatever the consequences, justice must take its course.

STAWELL. The first batch of prisoners was deliberately acquitted in defiance of the evidence.

SIR CHARLES. I cannot understand it.

STAWELL. The scenes in Court were disgraceful. The juries were intimidated by the crowd.

SIR CHARLES. Are the Colonists in sympathy with the Eureka prisoners!³⁰⁶ But even if the juries fail to do their duty, that is no reason why I should not do mine.

STAWELL. What is your decision, Your Excellency?

SIR CHARLES. No effort must be spared to stamp out sedition. We must proceed with the trials.

STAWELL. I strongly advise you to do so. Two of the most prominent of the insurgent leaders, Timothy Hayes and Carboni Raffaello, will be brought before Judge Barry.

SIR CHARLES. I'm hopeful, that when the state of public feeling has quietened down, the new jury will bring in a just verdict.

STAWELL. The newspapers are greatly to blame. They urge that the trials should be abandoned, and a general amnesty declared.

SIR CHARLES. Impossible! I've no feeling of personal vindictiveness against these misguided men; but to condone treason would itself be treason. *(He rises, crosses to desk, and finds document.)* This is the report I've forwarded to Earl Grey. *(Reads carefully.)* 'The disaffected miners formed themselves into corps, elected their leaders and commenced drilling; they possessed themselves of all the arms and ammunition which were within their reach; they established patrols and placed parties on the high roads leading to Melbourne and Geelong,³⁰⁷ searched all carts and drays for weapons, coerced the men affected—and held a meeting whereat the Australian flag of independence was solemnly consecrated and vows proffered for its defence. All cause for doubt as to their real intention from this moment disappeared. ... A riot was rapidly growing into a revolution, and the professional agitator giving place to the man of physical force.' *(He puts down document, and returns to seat at table.)* What is your opinion, Mr Stawell?

STAWELL. I concur absolutely with Your Excellency.

SIR CHARLES. Thank you. No matter what happens,³⁰⁸ I'm determined that the rebels who took up arms against the Government shall be tried and dealt with as the law demands.

(CAPTAIN KAYE stands at the door³⁰⁹ with letters.)

CAPTAIN KAYE. Excuse me. Here are your letters.

³⁰⁵ *A month later.*] *A month later. Afternoon. A.*

³⁰⁶ prisoners!] prisoners? *A.*

³⁰⁷ Geelong,] Geelong; *A.*

³⁰⁸ happens,] happens *A.*

³⁰⁹ *CAPTAIN KAYE stands at the door*] *Enter CAPTAIN KAYE. A.*

SIR CHARLES. Please put them on the desk.

(CAPTAIN KAYE puts letters on desk.)

CAPTAIN KAYE. I hope I'm not interrupting you.

SIR CHARLES. No. We've had a long conference, and the Attorney-General³¹⁰ and I are in complete agreement.

STAWELL *(Rising)*. His Excellency is justified in taking a firm stand.³¹¹ *(Arranges his papers.)*

CAPTAIN KAYE. He's attempting to do what no man can do, to take all the responsibility of the Government on himself.

STAWELL *(Ready to leave)*. I'll do my best.

SIR CHARLES *(Rising and shaking hands with him)*. Thank you for your great help.

STAWELL. Good afternoon, Sir. *(He gathers up his papers and goes out.)*³¹²

(SIR CHARLES paces nervously up and down room.)

SIR CHARLES. I don't know what's come over the people. A public meeting called by the Mayor,³¹³ at the request of the most influential citizens, to support law and order, was borne down by turbulent sections, and adverse resolutions carried. Speeches were made, vying with each other in inflammatory declamation, and attacking the Government and the authorities. *(Greatly agitated.)* Often I'm in despair about the future.

*(LADY HOTHAM looks in.)*³¹⁴

LADY HOTHAM *(At door, roguishly)*. I hope I don't intrude, as Paul Pry says.

SIR CHARLES *(Smiling wanly)*. Please come in.

(LADY HOTHAM goes to desk.)

LADY HOTHAM *(Lightly touching a pile of documents)*. More papers and reports and petitions—I though you'd have finished this tiresome business.

SIR CHARLES *(Wearily)*. I wish it could be finished.

LADY HOTHAM *(Sympathetically)*. You stay up till two every morning, reading State papers. You're working day and night. You're risking a break-down.

SIR CHARLES. I cannot think of my own health or ease. I have my duty to perform.

LADY HOTHAM. But there are no signs of disorder on the gold-fields now!

SIR CHARLES. That is entirely due to the good work of Sir Robert Nickel and the 99th Regiment.

But the people are still in a highly excited state. *(He staggers and clutches a chair.)*

LADY HOTHAM *(Anxiously)*. What is it?

(CAPTAIN KAYE assists him to sit down.)

CAPTAIN KAYE. Let me help you, Sir.

SIR CHARLES *(Pulling himself together)*. Thanks ... I'm better now.

(They try to distract him.)

³¹⁰ the Attorney-General] A.; Mr Attorney-General scored out and emended A.

³¹¹ in taking a firm stand.] A.; in the strong stand he is taking scored out and emended A.

³¹² *(He gathers up his papers and goes out.)*] *!(Exit STAWELL, with papers)* A.

³¹³ Mayor,] Mayor A.

³¹⁴ *(LADY HOTHAM looks in.)*] *(Enter LADY HOTHAM, and MRS KAYE)* A.

LADY HOTHAM. I wish you had come³¹⁵ with us to the theatre last night. Brooke was simply magnificent as *Othello*.³¹⁶ What do you say, Captain?

CAPTAIN KAYE. 'Pon my honour, I really think GV Brooke is the greatest actor since Edmund Kean.

LADY HOTHAM. It was something to astonish the natives. (*She looks at SIR CHARLES anxiously.*) Charles!

SIR CHARLES (*Rising and speaking intensely*). There are rumours that I'm going to resign and return home. Then the trials would be abandoned and a general amnesty declared. But I've no intention of yielding to popular clamour. (*He again paces nervously up and down room.*)

CAPTAIN KAYE. I'll attend to your correspondence, Sir.

SIR CHARLES (*Absent-mindedly*). Thank you, thank you.
(*CAPTAIN KAYE goes out, with papers etc.*)³¹⁷

SIR CHARLES (*Excitedly*). Last time I drove out, I was received with boos and groans. Why are the people so hostile!³¹⁸ What do they want!³¹⁹ What do they expect me to do!

LADY HOTHAM (*Soothingly*). I met an old squatter yesterday, one of the old school. Gold was the curse of the country, he said. He longed for the quiet pastoral days,³²⁰ when Learmonth was at Ercildoune, and there was no sign of strife or disorder.

SIR CHARLES (*Raising his arm*). There are still rebel leaders hiding in the bush - (*He stops and reels slightly.*)

LADY HOTHAM (*Helping him*). You look pale and haggard. Are you ill?

SIR CHARLES. Just a touch of my old malady, that I contracted on the coast of Africa.

LADY HOTHAM. Sit down, Charles. (*Puts him in chair.*)

SIR CHARLES. It's a sudden attack ... I hope³²¹ I'm not breaking up.

LADY HOTHAM. You've been wearing yourself out. You must have a change.

SIR CHARLES (*Gasping a little*). I'm over fifty, and I've carried the thunder of British guns over many seas.

LADY HOTHAM. You have done the State some service ...

SIR CHARLES (*Rising with difficulty*). I'm still on deck.
(*Pause.*)

LADY HOTHAM. Charles!

SIR CHARLES. And I'll do³²² my duty to the end. I'll teach these rebels a lesson.³²³
(*He again staggers and falls back against the desk. LADY HOTHAM supports him.*)

³¹⁵ LADY HOTHAM I wish you had come] MRS KAYE Poor Sir Charles. he's simply worn out with all this worry./LADY HOTHAM I wish you had come A/

³¹⁶ the theatre last night. Brooke was simply magnificent as *Othello*.] the theatre last night./MRS KAYE It was a big audience for Melbourne. I never dreamed of witnessing such a scene out of London./LADY HOTHAM Brooke was simply magnificent as *Othello*. A.

³¹⁷ (*CAPTAIN KAYE goes out, with papers, etc.*)] MRS KAYE Poor Sir Charles! He's so conscientious, so high-minded./(*Exeunt CAPTAIN and MRS KAYE.*) A.

³¹⁸ hostile!] hostile? A.

³¹⁹ want!] want? A.

³²⁰ days,] days A.

³²¹ attack ... I hope] attack. I hope A.

³²² And I'll do] (*tensely*) And I'll do A.

³²³ a lesson.] a lesson - A.

ACT FOUR

Scene Three

(Supreme Court, Melbourne.)

(The trial of CARBONI RAFFAELLO before JUDGE BARRY.)

(At tables are the ATTORNEY-GENERAL and the SOLICITOR-GENERAL; and the defending counsels ASPINALL and IRELAND. The usual officials are present, and the JURY are in the jury box. The court-house is crowded with excited CITIZENS.)

(RAFFAELLO, in the dock, appears unshaven, haggard, careworn and dispirited. Throughout the trial, he is visibly excited, often gesticulating to COUNSEL, who endeavours to quieten him.)

(The ATTORNEY-GENERAL rises.)

ATTORNEY-GENERAL. Your honour, and Gentlemen of the Jury, the prisoner at the Bar is charged with having committed the crime of High Treason: namely, that he did levy and make war against our Lady the Queen, within that part of her dominions called Victoria, and attempted by forces of arms to destroy the Government by law established there, and to depose our Lady the Queen from her kingly name and her Imperial Crown.

Any insurrection, no matter how crude or undigested the plans may be, against the Government of a country, amounts in point of law to High Treason. We cannot suspect persons of High Treason; but we must gather it from their overt and certain acts, and from these we must conclude the intention. In the present indictment, the prisoner is charged with an intention to subvert the authority of the Queen. The Queen is not here, gentlemen; but her Government is, and any act to subvert the authority of the one is levied against the other, and in law forms High Treason.

The laws of the land we are all bound to obey, and if we feel, or are really aggrieved at these laws, we must endeavour to change them by Constitutional methods, what is generally known as agitation; but if force is allowed to be used, and that said force called in to repeal a particular law, we should be all, as a community, at the mercy of that force, to repeal all enactments or laws, righteous or wrong. To constitute High Treason it is necessary that there shall be an insurrection, such insurrection shall be by force, and it shall be to redress what is considered a public matter, and not a private wrong. Now, gentlemen, let me remind you of what actually happened. A meeting was convened at Bakery Hill, as the placard showed, for the speedy abolition of the licence-tax. All the parties assembled were called on to burn their licence-papers—the Jury will say for what object this was done. A holder of a licence-paper has the right to burn it, as much as his title-deeds if he pleases; but the question to judge of is—was not this done that they might all be compelled to sail in the same boat together, thus compelling the law of the licence-fee to be changed!

Next day there was an armed meeting of persons, with guns, pistols, pikes, drafted into companies under acknowledged leaders. The prisoner was then present, and took an active part in the proceedings. They assembled under a common flag, 'The Southern Cross'. The flag itself is an innocent symbol and harmless; but if it is used to collect together a large number of persons for illegal design, it ceases to be so. Then they knelt down and were sworn in, and repeated what seemed to be a solemn oath to protect each other. They were afterwards drilled with considerable skill, and on Saturday they threw up a Stockade, hastily constructed, but with buttresses erected by one who evidently knew military movements and tactics. This could not be a place of defence, but of offence as the Jury will judge. During all this the prisoner took an active part, although a man named Lalor seems to have been set in authority above him. This Lalor is not

now in custody; but the prisoner's identity can be clearly shown as a person well known upon the gold-fields as a foreign anarchist.

The learned Counsel for the Defence has asked triumphantly: 'What government was it proposed to substitute!' But that is in general the last thing considered by revolutionists. I feel confident that the Jury will return a verdict according to the evidence adduced.

(The ATTORNEY-GENERAL takes his seat. BC ASPINALL, Counsel for the Defence, slowly rises to address the JURY.)

ASPINALL. Your Honour, and Gentlemen of the Jury ... as you well know, the laws governing Ballaarat were felt to be very oppressive. Sir Charles Hotham went up to the diggings, holding out to the people strong expectations of reform, and telling them that the people were the source of all power. But, how soon were these hopes destroyed. His Excellency, indeed, ordered more and severer digger-hunts, and the violence that followed was due to these, and not to the Bakery Hill meeting. Look, gentlemen, at the facts! The diggers were hunted like wild beasts, and shots fired indiscriminately at men, women and children in their tents. It was enough to rouse the blood of a hot Italian, aye, and of an honest Englishman, too! It is not apparent that the whole course of events has been forced on by the myrmidons of those in power! It is alleged that drilling took place. I care not for that! I admit it, and read the daily paper while it was being proved in court.

(Laughter.)

Can we wonder that the diggers rallied behind the Stockade in a righteous movement for protection and defence! The unfortunate man at the bar is a foreigner, and has come 16,000 miles for liberty. I hope the Jury will not show him something worse than the Austrian law. I wish to suggest that it is just possible to get something worse from the Continent of Europe than so-called 'foreign anarchists.' We might get the spy system which is prevalent there. The Government has not been able to get the Irishman or the black man or the anonymous scribbler, and they now ask you to let this 'foreign anarchist' be sent to England as an oblation, to be hanged, drawn and quartered if they think proper—for with that the Jury has nothing whatever to do. This is putting the affair in a strong light; but I would have nothing to do with it, if I did not feel that it is a matter in which the whole Colony is strongly interested. I trust the Jury will set the Ballaarat High Treason cases at rest for ever by recording a verdict of 'Not Guilty.' Three Juries have already done this; and if this Jury does, surely the Attorney-General will take the opinion of representative citizens as decisive, and understand that the local Government, whom most of us detest and hate, has been taught a sever but necessary lesson. *(He takes his seat amidst applause which is quelled by the OFFICIALS.)*

JUDGE BARRY. Gentlemen, one principle you must keep in view is that, in High Treason, it is essential to prove the intention of the person so charged. There is a fundamental difference between any insurrection for a private object and one for a public purpose. The former is a mere misdemeanour or felony; but the latter is High Treason. In regard to the present trials it has been said that no treason has been committed, and providentially, that is the case. But what would have been the ultimate intention of these people if they had overthrown the troops! I cannot say. You have to consider, in this instance, whether the men were deprived of their legal rights, whether they were attacked by those who should have defended them, for then they would have been perfectly justified in protecting themselves. But is this the case! Have they any evidence to show that they were overawed and abused by any of their compatriots, whether out of the public service or in it? If, as would appear, there was no such thing, what then was the object of their army! There was their flag, 'The Southern Cross', and inferences might be legitimately drawn from the position it constantly occupied at the meetings of the insurgents. Having done what I feel to be my duty, I will ask you, gentlemen of the Jury, to do yours. Nothing could be more

illogical than to argue that because another Jury had acquitted Hayes, you should acquit Raffaello. It would ill become me to judge the motive you might have in returning a verdict; but I would ask you not to allow yourselves to be influenced by intimidation on the one hand, or by cajoleries or by specious arguments on the other; but to find your verdict from the evidence, as you are bound by your oath, and independent of what the consequences may be to the prisoner. Gentlemen, you must now retire and consider your verdict.

(The JURYMEN leave the Court room. The LAWYERS busy themselves with papers, and the PEOPLE whisper excitedly.)

Curtain.

ACT FOUR

Scene Four

(Through the brief interval between the scenes, the murmur of the CROWD is heard, then a whisper 'Not Guilty ... Not Guilty' growing in volume as the curtain rises.)

(Street outside the Supreme Court, showing doorway and steps. An excited CROWD, including TIMOTHY HAYES and THOMAS KENNEDY, is eagerly awaiting the verdict.)

(The shout is taken up, 'Not Guilty! Not Guilty!' as CARBONI RAFFAELLO appears in the doorway, with cheering friends, HAYES and KENNEDY congratulate him.)

RAFFAELLO *(Standing on the steps of the Supreme Court, and addressing the CROWD)*. ... For the first time in my life, I stood in a felon's dock, and before a British Jury. 'To be, or not to be—that is the question!' An awkward position for an innocent man surely ...

HAYES. It was no joking matter. We had the devil of a time, four months in Chokey, waiting for our trial.

RAFFAELLO. Then my chains sprang asunder, and I stand at the portal of the Supreme Court, a free man. *Magna Opera Domini.* *(Waves his hat.)* God save the people!

(Cheers.)

KENNEDY *(Shouting)*. We mauna forget the Flodden Field of Ballaarat.

HAYES *(Reciting to the CROWD)*.

They rose in dark and evil days

To right their native land.

They kindled here a living blaze

That nothing shall withstand.

Alas! that might can conquer right -

They fell and passed away.

But true men, like you men,

Are plenty here to-day.

(Cheers.)

RAFFAELLO *(Holding up his hand, and speaking with great fervour)*. My friends, once our flag was flying over the Eureka Stockade; but it was taken, and our standard-bearer shot down by a treacherous hand. Many of our comrades laid down their lives in the cause of liberty. Let not their sacrifice be in vain!

(Murmurs from the CROWD.)

Let us have done with the tyranny and oppression of the past—old style—and pledge our faith to the future—new style—to 'The Southern Cross' of Victoria! Whatever the Government may do, we'll have a free land—for a free people!

(Shouts and cheers from the CROWD.)

Curtain.

Excised Scene:

ACT ONE

Scene Three

(The same. The next evening.)

(Many DIGGERS, a few³²⁴ foreigners among them, are sitting round on barrels and upturned boxes, some smoking.)

(PETER LALOR is standing in the Centre.)

(He is a strong determined-looking man of twenty-six, with dark brown hair and whiskers, but shaven under the chin. He is dressed in digger costume.)

LALOR *(Speaking earnestly)*. I think the acquittal of Bentley has roused the diggers more than any official act since the gold discovery.

RAFFAELLO. My tent's been a regular Babel to-day. Do you know, Peter, foreigners from all parts of the globe left their rattling Jenny Lind's to inquire why there was all this excitement on Ballarat.

LALOR. I don't wonder at it. The affair has taken a serious turn. Three men have been arrested for burning the hotel.

DIGGERS. The wrong men they were.

—Any three they could lay their hands on.

—If they're guilty, we're all guilty.

LALOR. But these men will have to stand their trials in Melbourne at the Supreme Court.

MAT. I'm a quiet man myself, but I was in the thick of it.

DIGGER. We were all in it. What are we going to do, Mr Lalor?

LALOR. We must stand by our mates. We propose to send a deputation to the Governor asking for the release of the three prisoners.

DIGGERS. Hurrah!

—Bravo!

LALOR. The Government means to assert its authority. But we're diggers, and we mean to assert our authority too. Whatever the Government may do, we'll have a free land for a free people.

DIGGERS. Hurrah, Peter!

—We're with you.

LALOR. We're of all nations, but all lovers of freedom, Italian patriots, Hungarian compatriots of Kossuth, Swiss mountaineers, Irishmen who were in the agrarian troubles, and sons of la Belle France, with the fire of Revolution still hot in their veins -

(Enter some WOMEN, including NORA, carrying a rolled-up flag. LALOR goes to NORA eagerly.)

Ah, Nora, we were waiting for you. Let's see how you've been getting on. Is it nearly finished?

NORA. It is.

LALOR *(After looking round)*. There are no spies or troopers about. We're all friends here.

RAFFAELLO. What's the mystery?

³²⁴ a few] some A.

LALOR. You'll be surprised when you know. The women are doing their share, too. I'm proud of them.

DIGGERS. What is it?

LALOR. Well, it's our flag.

DIGGER. What flag?

LALOR. Spread it out, Nora, and let's see what you've done.

(NORA and the WOMEN spread out flag 'The Southern Cross' as the MEN gather round.)

NORA. We've been stitching away till the light failed on us.

LALOR. Well done. There it is, boys. We've our own flag at last the diggers' flag!

RAFFAELLO. Great Works!

NORA. Isn't it a fine flag now, with silver stars on a blue ground!

LALOR. A flag to rally the diggers, 'The Southern Cross'!

(RAFFAELLO looks at it with admiration.)

RAFFAELLO. There's no flag in Europe half so beautiful as 'The Southern Cross', no device or arms, only a silver cross of stars, like the one in our Southern firmament.

(Pause.)

NORA. For the love of God, don't let the troopers see it.

LALOR. No fear of that, Nora.

(Exit RAFFAELLO, into tent.)

MAT *(Pointing in direction of Camp)*. Look over at the lights of the Camp there. That's the kind of Government we've got. There you'll see Charlie Joe's minions carousing and guzzling at our expense, porter and sherry wine -

LALOR. And the best champagne too, I'll go bail.

(Enter RAFFAELLO, with bottles of wine, tumblers and pannikins.)

RAFFAELLO. Fill your tumblers and pannikins. I've no champagne to offer you, no White Capri or Chianti—but this is our native wine, the wine of Golden Victoria.

(They fill tumblers and pannikins.)

LALOR. May our mates be released, and peace reign over the gold-fields!

RAFFAELLO. Friends, Romans, countrymen, we shall do well in this bullock-drivers' land. The Spring season is at its full. Birds sing, and everywhere pretty little wild-flowers are teeming in the grass. The landscape is superb, reminding me for beauty *della bella cara Italia*. All should be joy and happiness among us ... *(Lifting his pannikin.)* Let us have done with strife and misery of the past—old style—and pledge our faith to the future—new style—to 'The Southern Cross' of Victoria.

(Some of the DIGGERS raise 'The Southern Cross'.)

LALOR. This is a solemn occasion. Already in this young country we are called upon to take part in the eternal conflict between tyranny and freedom. Here is our own flag ... the diggers' flat—let us swear by 'The Southern Cross' to stand truly by each other and fight to decent our rights and liberties.

DIGGERS *(Lifting their pannikins and shouting)*. The Southern Cross!

—Bravo!

—Viva! Viva!

—Hurrah!

Excised Scene:

There are seven hand-written quarto pages headed 'Act III Scene III' in Esson's hand (B). These transcribed by Hilda and included in Hilda's typescript (A) as ACT IV SCENE III, all of which have been excised with a vertical stroke in black pencil.

ACT FOUR

Scene Three³²⁵

(On the Ballaarat Gold-fields, Sunday, 2 December, 1855.)

(The first anniversary of the Eureka Stockade.)

(A few DIGGERS are grouped about, quietly waiting for the procession to start.)

(HARRY, the Cockney storekeeper; sits on stump, Right, reading a small newspaper. At the back, RAFFAELLO is seen seated, with a pile of small paper-covered books beside him. Some of the DIGGERS go and buy a book from him.)

(MAT takes a few strides, displaying his new black coat to PAT.)

(Enter NORA, from tent, carrying a crepe arm-band.)

MAT. What do you think of my new coat?

NORA. It's a fine coat, surely. And here's³²⁶ your arm-band, Uncle Mat. Come here and I'll put it on for you.

(NORA slips band on his arm.)

MAT. Thank you, Nora.

NORA. Who would have thought a year ago we'd be putting on mourning this day!³²⁷

HARRY *(Looking up from newspaper)*.³²⁸ I see by the paper Sir Charles 'Otham 'as 'ad a serious hilliness.

MAT. That tyrant! Were we to be treated like rude lawless barbarians fit only for the rule of the quarter-deck!

NORA. Hush! That's all done with. We want no more ill feeling.³²⁹

RAFFAELLO *(Holding up book)*. A lover of truth, that is the man I want—and he will have in this book the truth, and nothing but the truth. *The Eureka Stockade* by Carboni Raffaello.

PAT. Great Works!

(Enter TIMOTHY HAYES.)

DIGGERS. Hullo, Timothy!

HAYES. This is the first anniversary of the Eureka Stockade. There'll be a big gathering of diggers at the cemetery.

PAT. You're still alive, Tim.³³⁰ I thought they were going to hang you for High Treason.

HAYES. And Raffaello too. It was no joking matter. We had the devil of a time, four months in Chokey, waiting for our trial.

³²⁵ ACT FOUR Scene Three] ACT III Scene III B.

³²⁶ And here's] But here's B.

³²⁷ Who would have thought a year ago we'd be putting on mourning this day!] *emended A.*

³²⁸ *(Looking up from newspaper.)*] A.; *(PAT goes to Raffaello)/(looking up from newspaper) B.*; *(Pat goes to Raffaello) scored out B.*

³²⁹ feeling.] feeling./PAT *(to Raffaello)* Great Works! B; PAT *(to Raffaello)* scored out B.

³³⁰ alive, Tim.] here. B.

RAFFAELLO (*Coming forward*).³³¹ For the first³³² time in my life I stood in a felon's dock, and before a British Jury. To be or not to be that is the question. An awkward position for an innocent man especially.

HAYES. Silence in the Court!

RAFFAELLO. Then my chains sprang asunder, and I stood at the portal of the Supreme Court, a free man. *Magna opera Domini!* (*Lifts his hat.*) God save the people!³³³

(*Enter KENNEDY.*)

KENNEDY. Ho's a' wi' you?³³⁴

HAYES. We'll be moving off soon ... to meet³³⁵ round the graves of the men who fell at Eureka.

KENNEDY. Aye, we mauna' forget the Flodden Field o' Ballaarat.

HAYES (*Reciting*).

*They rose in dark and evil days,
To right their native land.
They kindled here a living blaze
That nothing shall withstand.
Alas! That might can conquer right -
They fell and passed away.
But true men, like you, men,
Are plenty here today.*

DIGGERS. Well spoken, Tim.

(*Pause.*)

—Here comes Peter.

—Peter Lalor!

—It's Peter Lalor himself.³³⁶

HAYES. Our late Commander-in-Chief, once a proscribed rebel, now elected member of the Legislative Council!

LALOR. I must thank the diggers for that.

DIGGERS. The Government had to give in at last.

—Yes. We've got a vote now.

—And there's no more license-hunting, my boys.

—And no overbearing officials in gold caps, mocking the diggers.

LALOR. We're only at the beginning of our history; but let us hope we've laid sound³³⁷ foundations for the building of a new land.

RAFFAELLO. Ah, Peter, we've all had dreams of Utopia; but, alas, it cannot be found on this earth, not even in a British Colony. John Bull was born for law and order, and safe money-making on land and sea.

³³¹ (*Coming forward.*)] *scored out B.*

³³² For the first] (*Acting with* [undecipherable] *move, to suggest* [undecipherable] *at the Supreme Court*) For the first *B.*

³³³ Then my chains ... God save the people.] *scored out B.*; The Jury are again in the jury-box. The Clerk of the Court: "Gentlemen of the Jury, have you entered your verdict?" Forman, "We have." The Clerk, "Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty." Foreman, "Not guilty."/ (*Diggers cheer*)/ Them my chains ... God save the people. *B.*

³³⁴ you?] you! *B.*

³³⁵ soon ... to meet] soon - it's going to be [undecipherable] to meet *B.*; it's going to be [undecipherable] *scored out B.*

³³⁶ - It's Peter Lalor himself.] (*enter Peter Lalor, with his left coat sleeve hanging empty, but he is not strong and vigorous.*)/DIGGERS - It's Peter Lalor himself. *B.*

³³⁷ sound] *A.*; some *excised and emended A.*; some *B.*

NORA. We're all getting our black bands.

LALOR. I can wear mine only on the right arm.

NORA. More power to you, Peter!

MAT. I'm an ould man now, and a quiet man; but—(*Suddenly becoming vehement.*) when I think of what we had to endure, I don't regret putting a couple of the red-coats on stretchers.

(*DIGGERS in different costumes, with their WIVES and FRIENDS, in little groups of two and three, with black arm-bands, pass slowly along the road on their way to the cemetery.*)

KENNEDY. The folk are moving along noo. We'd better be off.

LALOR. Yes. We'll go out proudly to the graves of our friends.

HAYES. Who'll carry the pole?

LALOR. I'm sorry I can't. Give it to Tom.

(*KENNEDY is handed a pole draped in sable, with black crepe streamers.*)

KENNEDY. You'll be with me, Peter.

HAYES. I wish we were carrying our flag with us.

DIGGERS. The diggers' flag!

—'The Southern Cross'.

RAFFAELLO. When I beheld our flag, I felt a sensation like the first declaration of love in bygone times.

(*They prepare to move off.*)

LALOR. A year ago 'The Southern Cross' was flying over the Eureka Stockade. But it was taken, and our standard-bearer shot down ... Come on, boys, we must have brave thoughts and memories to-day when we gather round the diggers' graves. Many of our comrades laid down their lives in the cause of liberty. It's right we should commemorate their sacrifice.

(*The DIGGERS move slowly behind LALOR and KENNEDY, carrying the pole.*)

RAFFAELLO Remember this Sabbath day and keep it holy ... Come on, Tim, we'll join the diggers.

(*HAYES and RAFFAELLO follow slowly behind.*)

(*The informal procession passes slowly along the road at back on the way to the cemetery.*)

Curtain.

Notes

Act One

Ballarat gold fields, 1854: Gold was first discovered in Ballarat on the rise above Canadian Creek at the base of Poverty Point (aka Golden Point) in late August 1851. Reports in the *Geelong Advertiser* instigated the first rush to the Ballarat Diggings. The Gold Commissioner exercised authority over the newly arrived diggers. Friction over mining licences and policing rankled many miners, especially those who could not afford the fee.

traps: troopers.

begob: (*Irish*) expressing amazement or emphasis.

licence: The Australian colonial governments created a revenue generating system by forcing each gold digger to buy a licence or Miner's Right. This revenue was then used to police the goldfields, supposedly to reinforce law and order. Each digger had to pay £1 10s each month, simply for the right to dig. Miners were not able to claim the land they were working, and could be forced by the Gold Commission Police to relocate without compensation. The government hoped that these high fees would force some classes of people to go back to work in the cities.

wideawake hat: hat with a low crown and a very wide brim.

Great Works!: Raffaello Carboni was known as 'Great Works,' a pet phrase of his.

Civis Romanus sum: (*Classical Latin*) 'I am (a) Roman citizen,' a phrase used in Cicero's *In Verrem* as a plea for the legal rights of a Roman citizen.

mullock: Waste rock from which the wanted gold, minerals, opal etc., has been extracted; waste material generated while mining, such as when sinking a shaft.

[Charles Joseph] **La Trobe** (1801-1875): appointed Superintendent of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales in 1839; after the establishment of the Colony of Victoria in 1851, he became its first Lieutenant-Governor.

Piccadilly young sprats, in their smart uniform, with the gold braid on it: Literally, a small fish; colloquially, a young, small, or insignificant person. Cf. Carboni: 'In justice, however, to Master Waterloobolter, candidate for gold-lace, it must not be omitted that he is a Piccadilly young sprat, and so at Julien's giant *bal-masque*, was ever gracious to the lady of his love.'

the Gravel-Pits: The Gravel Pits Mine was in close proximity to the Government Camp. The use of the bayonet point by the Military to clear riotous miners during a 'digger hunt' on 30 November 1854 ignited the armed insurrection at Eureka.

'Tis twelve months or more since our ship she cast anchor ...: Anon, 'Paddy Malone In Australia'; see AB Paterson, *Old Bush Songs*, <http://www.fullbooks.com/The-Old-Bush-Songs1.html>

Argus: a morning daily newspaper in Melbourne; *The Argus* was established in 1846; considered to be the general Australian newspaper of record for this period. Widely known as a conservative newspaper for most of its history, *The Argus's* main competitor was David Syme's more liberal-minded *The Age*.

the Queen of the South: an iron steamer built by C J Mare & Co of Blackwall and launched 29 October 1851; sailed from Southampton for Port Phillip and Sydney 4 April 1854 with 90 passengers, including Sir Charles and Lady Hotham, under Captain Norman.

a squatter's station on the Murray: squatting began soon after October 1835 when 'overlanders' (Hawdon, Gardiner and Hepburn) drove the first cattle from NSW down the central corridor, roughly following Major Mitchell's line.

'Resting-Place', or 'Camping-Ground', that's what the natives meant by Ballaarat: Prior to the European settlement of Australia, the Ballarat region was populated by the Woi Wurrung people. The Boro gundidj tribe's territory was based along the Yarrowee River. Some claim the name is derived from a local Woi Wurrung word for the area, *balla arat* (the meaning of this word is not certain; however several translations suggest 'resting place'). In some dialects, *balla* means 'bent elbow', which is translated to mean reclining or resting and *arat* meaning 'place'. The first Europeans to sight the area were an 1837 party of six mostly Scottish squatters from Geelong, led by Somerville Learmonth, who were in search of land less affected by the severe drought for their sheep to graze. The party scaled Mount Buninyong; among them were Somerville's brother Thomas Livingstone Learmonth, William Cross Yuille and Henry Anderson, all three of whom later claimed land in what is now Ballarat. Scottish settlers, Archibald Buchanan Yuille and his brother William Cross Yuille, arrived in 1837 and squatted a 4,000 ha sheep run. Yuille erected a hut at Black Swamp (Lake Wendouree) in 1838. Outsiders originally knew of the settlement as Yuille's Station and Yuille's Swamp. Archibald Yuille named the area 'Ballaarat'. Another claim is that the name derives from Yuille's native Gaelic *Baile Ararat* (Town of Ararat), alluding to the resting place of Noah's Ark. The present spelling was officially adopted by the City of Ballarat in 1996.

this is a new world, like the fabled El Dorado: Cf. Esson's *The Quest*.

Fortunatus: (*Latin*) 'happy, lucky, blessed. Cf. *Fortunatus*, a 15th century German chapbook about a legendary hero. The tale follows the life of a young man (Fortunatus) from relative obscurity through his adventures towards fame and fortune; it subsequently follows the careers of his two sons.

Vandemonian: a white inhabitant of Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania); especially one penally transported there before 1853

Bentley's Eureka Hotel: James Francis Bentley (1818-1873), arrived in Australia after being transported to Tasmania where he served a ten year sentence, before being released in 1851. He migrated to Melbourne immediately after his release, where he worked as a confectioner and gold buyer. The lure of gold overcame him and he headed for the fields and became the proprietor of the Eureka Hotel. On 18 November 1854, Bentley, Thomas Farrell and William Hance were convicted of the manslaughter of James Scobie, a Scottish miner who had been found dead near the Eureka Hotel a month earlier. Bentley, and his employees Farrell and Hance, had been tried and acquitted previously for this murder, but due to the outcry on the Ballarat Diggings, the insinuation of police corruption, and the subsequent riot and burning of the Eureka Hotel on 17 October 1854, there had been cause for a new trial. Maurice Ximenes, a Sub-inspector of police who commanded the Foot Police at Ballaarat, was present at the burning of Bentley's Eureka Hotel when 30,000 angry miners conducted a protest meeting. Ximenes had a number of police under his control hiding inside the hotel before the encounter, which led to the building's destruction. Ximenes lent his horse to Bentley so he could escape the crowd (the pregnant Mrs Catherine Bentley was left inside). Bentley later suicided by overdosing on laudanum, his wife Catherine, who survived, stated at the inquest: 'My husband has never been of quite right mind since he lost his property at the Ballaarat Riots. He has never recovered form the effects of it.'

'Victoria welcomes Victoria's choice!': On 22 June Charles Hotham disembarked from *The Queen of the South*, and, according to John Lesley Fitzgerald Vesey Foster (known to all as 'Alphabet' Foster) who served as Colonial Secretary to both Governor Latrobe and Governor Hotham later wrote: 'I was so hopeful the day he arrived, amongst much fanfare, thousands gathered at the docks to cheer him. He rode across the Princes Bridge [the Yarra] under a [triumphal arch] banner that read "Victoria Welcomes Victoria's Choice."' Hotham was escorted from the pier at Sandridge (Port Melbourne) to his swearing-in at the government offices in William Street by a grand procession. Besides the usual suspects—dignitaries, freemasons, tradesmen's guilds, schoolchildren, and the fire brigade—the procession included the company of Rowe's American Circus, on loan from their big top in Lonsdale Street. A crowd estimated at 10,000 greeted Sir Charles at Princes Bridge, with as many more waiting at William Street.

Act Two—Scene One

[James] **Scobie** (1826–1854): Scottish gold digger murdered at Ballarat. His death was associated with a sequence of events which led to the Eureka Rebellion. As reported in *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer* following the later Supreme Court trial in Melbourne, gold-miner Peter Martin gave eyewitness testimony regarding the death; he stated that he and Scobie went to Bentley's Hotel 'to get something to drink,' but found 'the house was shut up.' When Scobie approached one of the front windows, a hand broke through the window and struck him. Scobie then tried to get into the hotel, but Martin managed to get him to go '100 or 150 yards' away in the direction of Scobie's tent. Some men and a woman followed the pair. The woman told the men that Scobie had broken the window. Martin was knocked down, and one of the men struck Scobie with what Martin thought 'resembled a battle-axe.' Martin fetched a doctor, but Scobie was dead.

the redcoats: *Red coat* or *Redcoat*; an historical uniform worn widely, though not exclusively, by most regiments of the British Army (apart from artillery, rifles and light cavalry) from the 17th to the 20th centuries; it included a madder-red coat or coatee.

the gallant 40th: a Government force consisting of detachments of British Regiments, the 40th and 12th, plus mounted and foot police of the Victoria Police, attacked an entrenchment of aggrieved gold miners at Ballarat at daybreak on 3 December 1854.

Excised Scene Act One—Scene Three

Babel: Cf. (*Bible*) Tower of Babel, where God made the builders speak different languages.

Friends, Romans, countrymen: William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* 3.ii (Mark Antony).

della bella cara Italia: (*Italian*) of beautiful dear Italy.

ACT TWO- Scene Two

Government Offices, Melbourne. 27 November: situated in William Street.

The Diggers' Advocate: Joseph Henry Abbott (1830-1904), businessman, civic leader and politician. Excited by news of the gold rushes in Australia, Abbot arrived at Cole's wharf, Melbourne, on 17 November 1852. He went directly to Forest Creek where he was moderately successful digging for gold near Wesley Hill and Moonlight Flat. Early in 1853 he went to Bendigo with two friends and opened a general store, combining business with mining; in 1854 they erected a puddling machine. At this time Abbott first showed an interest in local affairs, and with Ebenezer Syme and George Thomson started a newspaper, *The Diggers Advocate*, that *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 9 January 1858, described as 'the champion of the diggers in the opposition to the license fee.' Thomson was editor and Syme a contributor, while Abbott acted as agent and reporter at Bendigo. This first goldfields' newspaper appeared weekly, sold for 2s and ran for two years. In order to give everyone an opportunity to peruse it, Abbott opened a reading room.

Ballaarat Reform League: established October 1853—officially constituted on 11 November 1854 at a mass meeting of miners in Ballarat—to protest against the Victorian Government's mining policy and administration of the goldfields. As with the Bendigo protests the previous year (the Red Ribbon Rebellion), the primary objective of the League was to oppose the Miner's Licence. The League also strove for justice for James Scobie, a Scottish miner who had recently been murdered outside Bentley's Hotel in Eureka, and for the release of three miners who had been wrongly imprisoned for burning down the hotel. John Basson Humffray was elected Secretary of the League. He urged civil disobedience to resist the Government, but, when tensions boiled over on 30 November 1854, his pacifist strategy was overturned and the miners opted to use arms to fight the authorities. The miners elected Peter Lalor as their commander, although he had no military experience. The actions of the League were reported in sensational and inflammatory terms by Henry Seekamp, editor and owner of the local newspaper, *The Ballarat Times*.

incendiarism: the act or practice of an arsonist; malicious burning; inflammatory behaviour; agitation.

Mopoke Gully: in Ballarat, near Black Hill.

ACT TWO—Scene Three

Toorak House: an Italianate residence built by James Jackson, a merchant, in 1849—leased for Sir Charles Hotham and became the second residence of the Governor in the Colony. The name of the house may have originated from Woi Wurrung language, with words of similar pronunciation meaning *black crow* or *reedy swamp*. I can find no reference for the consistent misspelling 'Toorac' in the copy text.

Duke of Newcastle: Henry Pelham Fiennes Pelham-Clinton, 5th Duke of Newcastle-under-Lyne KG, PC (1811–1864), British politician, who served in Peel's first two ministries, and followed him when he split the Tories over the corn laws. With Gladstone Pelham-Clinton mixed with the 'colonial reformers' and followed their general hostility to the policies of the third Earl Grey. Robert Lowe became a protégé and helped to shape his views on Australian questions. On 12 January 1851 he succeeded his father as Duke of Newcastle. In December 1852 Newcastle became Secretary of State for War and the Colonies under Lord Aberdeen. In 1853 he confirmed that no more convicts would be sent to eastern Australia, but in a speech in the House of Lords defended the decision to send convicts to Western Australia.

cutty pipes: smoking pipe with a forward canted tulip shaped bowl slightly bent from the 16th and 17th centuries. It had an ornamental spur on the heel of the bowl to strengthen the heel or base of the bowl and to provide a way to avoid being burnt, or a place to knock the pipe on gently. This shape was common because it was easy to craft in the moulds used for clay pipes.

[The] **Queen of the South:** Cf. Australian quadrilles, piano music, by Edmond Reyloff (1804-1881), published by Charles Jeffreys, London. I can find no connection to Lady Hotham.

the Crimea: a military conflict fought from October 1853 to February 1856 in which the Russian Empire lost to an alliance of the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain and Sardinia. The immediate cause involved the rights of Christian

minorities in the Holy Land, which was a part of the Ottoman Empire. The French promoted the rights of Roman Catholics, while Russia promoted those of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The longer-term causes involved the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the unwillingness of Britain and France to allow Russia to gain territory and power at Ottoman expense.

You've done your share of fighting, Charles. For more than thirty years you have been on active service.: Hotham entered the navy on 6 November 1818 and was promoted rapidly for peacetime: lieutenant in 1825; and post-captain in 1833. In 1842 on the South American station he was in command of the steam sloop *Gorgon*; she ran aground in Montevideo Bay in 1844 and he displayed stubbornness and skill in re-floating her. In November 1845 he commanded the squadron on the Parana River and, with help from a French force, defeated the Argentine insurgents under General Rosas. In 1846 he was made KCB and appointed Commodore on the west coast of Africa. His talent for languages prompted Lord Malmesbury to appoint him head of a mission to Paraguay to negotiate a commercial treaty in 1852. Lord Clarendon, Malmesbury's successor, thought the attempt futile and sent his recall, but the dispatch crossed one bearing home the completed treaty. However, Hotham was not appreciated by the Aberdeen ministry, and this as well as his quality is why the Duke of Newcastle appointed him lieutenant-governor of Victoria on 6 December 1853.

Sir Walter Raleigh (circa 1554–29 October 1618): an English landed gentleman, writer, poet, soldier, politician, courtier, spy and explorer.

a sou'wester!: a traditional form of collapsible oilskin rain hat that is longer in the back than the front to protect the neck fully.

Nero fiddling while Rome burnt: (*colloq. expression*) To occupy oneself with unimportant matters and neglect priorities during a crisis. The source of this phrase is the apocryphal story that Nero played the fiddle (the violin not invented until at least the 16th century) while Rome burned, during the great fire in AD 64.

the dear Mayor: John Hodgson (1799–1860), Australian politician, member of the Victorian Legislative Council and Mayor of Melbourne 1853–54. He died at his house in Kew of bronchitis.

The Herald: Until its establishment as a separate colony in 1851, the area now known as Victoria was a part of New South Wales and it was generally referred to as the Port Phillip district. The Port Phillip *Herald*, was a broadsheet newspaper first published as a semi-weekly newspaper on 3 January 1840 (from a weatherboard shack in Collins Street). It was the fourth newspaper to start in Melbourne. The paper took its name from the region it served.

ACT TWO—Scene Four

Moral persecution ... lick on the lug: A Scottish Chartist and founding member of the Ballarat Reform League, Tom Kennedy spoke at meetings in the lead-up to the Eureka Stockade conflict and was part of the delegation sent to Governor Hotham with a set of digger demands. While some of the reform leaders were committed to moral persuasion (at least until all peaceful means had failed), Kennedy was an advocate of physical force. His quoting of a pithy Scots' saying became well-known: 'Moral persuasion's all humbug, there's nothing convinces like a lick in the lug!' He was, however, absent from the stockade when it was stormed.—'A Nations Heritage' <https://www.egold.net.au/biogs/EG00056b.htm>

Chi ste bebè; non si muove: (*Italian*) literally, 'Who's a baby; it doesn't move.' No reference found for the proverb.

the Adelphi Theatre: Sarah McCullough (known as Sarah Hanmer, Mrs Leicester Hanmer) was an actress of some note at Ballarat, running what was referred to as Mrs Hanmer's Theatre at Red Hill. In 1854 she established the Adelphi Theatre in Esmond Street (initially a tent but later a weatherboard that became known as The Windsor). Mrs Hanmer became famous in vaudeville and melodrama. She advertised in the Geelong newspapers.

On to the field, our doom is sealed ... upon our graves: Sir Thomas Moore, 'The Parting Before the Battle'.

ACT THREE—Scene One

The Riot Act: *The Riot Act* (1714), an Act of the Parliament of Great Britain that authorised local authorities to declare any group of twelve or more people to be unlawfully assembled, and thus have to disperse or face punitive action. On 29 November the diggers, some 12,000 in number, held a meeting at Bakery Hill, condemning the treatment they had suffered at the hands of the Victorian Government. A party of police proceeded to the 'Gravel Pits' in a determined raid to apprehend unlicensed miners, and were met with a shower of stones and the occasional pistol shot. Robert Rede (1815–1904) and the few police and militia not already engaged in the affray arrived on the scene. Rede, who was a member of Victoria's volunteer militia (and rumoured to be Bentley's partner in the Eureka Hotel), reminded the diggers that a Commission of Enquiry had been promised them to find a more equitable system, and urged restraint. He then read the *Riot Act*. Peter Lalor urged resistance and the miners marched to Eureka goldfield and erected the Eureka Stockade.

The dolly-mops!: (*British slang*) strumpet, drab; amateur, or often part-time, female prostitute in 19th century London.

O, tell me Shawn O'Farrell ... rising of the moon.: Irish ballad, 'The Rising of the Moon'—words by JK Casey, music Turlough O'Carolan—recounting a battle between the United Irishmen and the British Army during the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The ballad took the tune of another Irish ballad, 'The Wearing of the Green', and published in John Keegan Casey's 1866 collection of poems and songs, *A Wreath of Shamrocks*. The lyrics were written by Casey (1846–70), the 'Fenian Poet', who based the poem on the failed 1798 uprising in Granard, County Longford. The ballad has been in circulation since circa 1865. The earliest verifiable date found in publication is 1867.

*And come tell me Sean O'Farrell where the gath'rin is to be
At the old spot by the river quite well known to you and me
One more word for signal token whistle out the marchin' tune
With your pike upon your shoulder by the rising of the moon.*

ACT THREE—Scene Two

'The Southern Cross': The flag is reputed to have been designed by a Canadian member of the Ballarat Reform League, Captain Henry Ross, inspired by the design of the Australian Federation Flag (the New South Wales Ensign). A popular legend claims that the flag was sewn by three local women—Anastasia Withers, Anne Duke and Anastasia Hayes. According to the Ballarat *Times*, on 24 November 1854, at 'about eleven o'clock "The Southern Cross" was hoisted, and its maiden appearance was a fascinating object to behold.'

ACT THREE—Scene Three

York 'ams: a mild-flavoured ham with delicate pink colouring, York Ham is traditionally served with Madeira Sauce. As a lightly smoked, dry-cured ham, it is saltier but milder in flavour than other European dry-cured hams. Folklore has it that the oak construction for York Minster provided the sawdust for smoking the ham.

Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes: (*Latin*) 'I fear the Greeks bearing gifts.' An allusion to the story of the wooden horse of Troy, used by the Greeks to trick their way into the city. It is recorded in Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Book 2*, i.e. 'don't trust your enemies.'

yabber-yabber: (*Wow Wurrung; later Australian colloq. slang*) to talk or chat.

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.iv (Marcellus)

the old prophet Isaiah, that man's heart is desperately wicked.: Cf. 'The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?' *Jeremiah* 17:9

Creswick: a gold-mining town in west-central Victoria, eighteen kilometres north of Ballarat, named after the Creswick family, the pioneer settlers of the region.

[Major] **General Sir Robert Nickle** (1786-1855): In 1853 Nickle was appointed commander-in-chief of the military forces in the Australian colonies. After several false starts in the unlucky steamer *Australian*, he travelled in the *Argo* and arrived at Sydney on 24 July. When gold was discovered in Victoria his headquarters were moved to Melbourne, where he and his staff arrived on 6 August 1854. After the disturbances at Ballarat in November, Nickle sent reinforcements from Melbourne and, accompanied by Colonel Edward Macarthur, followed with a slower-moving force of infantry and artillery. He reached Ballarat on 6 December, three days after the storming of the Eureka stockade. Feelings were running high but Nickle moved amongst the diggers' tents without an escort. Though he deprecated the revolt, he showed his disapproval of the actions which had caused it. Grievances were aired, tension subsided, arms were handed in, Nickle addressed a public meeting and martial law was repealed on 9 December.

'Marseillaise': The song was written in 1792 by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle in Strasbourg after the declaration of war by France against Austria, and was originally titled 'Chant de guerre pour l'Armée du Rhin' ('War Song for the Rhine Army'). 'The Marseillaise' acquired its nickname after being sung in Paris by volunteers from Marseille marching to the capital. Adopted as the Republic's anthem by The French National Convention in 1795. It is a revolutionary song, an anthem to freedom, a patriotic call to mobilise all the citizens and an exhortation to fight against tyranny and foreign invasion.

Vinegar Hill: Lalor's choice of password for the night of 2 December. The Battle of Vinegar Hill (*Irish: Cath Chnoc Fhíodh na gCaor*), was an engagement during the Irish Rebellion of 1798 on 21 June 1798 when over 13,000 British soldiers launched an attack on Vinegar Hill outside Enniscorthy, County Wexford, the largest camp and headquarters of the Wexford United Irish rebels. It marked a turning point in the rebellion, as it was the last attempt by the rebels to hold and defend ground against the British military. The battle was actually fought in two locations: on Vinegar Hill itself and in the streets of nearby Enniscorthy.

John Bull: a national personification of the United Kingdom in general, England in particular, especially in political cartoons and similar graphic works. John Bull is usually depicted as a stout, middle-aged, country dwelling, jolly, matter-of-fact man. Cf. 'Uncle Sam' in the United States.

ACT FOUR—Scene One

Geelong: a port city located on Corio Bay and the Barwon River, in the state of Victoria, 75 kilometres south-west of Melbourne. Named in 1827, from the local Woi Wurrung name for the region, *Djillong*, thought to mean 'land' or 'cliffs'.

Little Thonen: Edward (Teddy) Thonen, from Eberfeldt, Prussia; remembered in Ballarat as the 'lemonade seller' who travelled around the goldfields with a keg, selling lemonade (it may in reality have actually been alcohol). He seconded the nomination of Lalor to lead the diggers, and was the first killed during the battle at the Eureka Stockade. Raffaello Carboni reported that 'no one could defeat Thonen at chess.'

ACT FOUR—Scene Two

Earl Grey: Henry George Grey, 3rd Earl Grey KG GCMG PC (1802–1894), known as Viscount Howick from 1807 until 1845, English statesman. He became Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in the Whig Government led by Prime Minister Lord John Russell.

Paul Pry: a nosy person; from a character in the play *Paul Pry* by John Poole (1825).

99th Regiment: 99th Duke of Edinburgh's (Lanarkshire) Regiment of Foot, raised in 1824 in Edinburgh by Major-General Gage John Hall. They were known as the 'Queens Pets.' During its early years, the 99th spent much of its time in the Pacific. The first detachments of the 99th Regiment arrived in Australia with convicts transported aboard the transport ship *North Briton*, destined for Tasmania, in 1842. The rest of the 99th arrived with successive shipments of convicts. The 99th rotated through various colonial posts during much of 1842 until being ordered to Sydney. However, the 99th soon earned an unsavoury reputation, alienating the locals to such an extent that an

additional regiment (the 11 Regiment of Foot) had to be assigned to Sydney to keep the men of the 99th under control. The 99th remained in Tasmania for three years before being dispatched to New Zealand to take part in the New Zealand land wars. The regiment rotated back to the British Isles in 1856.

GV Brooke: Gustavus Vaughan Brooke (1818-1866), Irish actor. While in London in 1853 George Coppin engaged Brooke to give two hundred performances in the principal towns of Australia and New Zealand. The company, consisting of Brooke and his wife Marianne Elizabeth Woolcott Bray, the leading lady Fanny Cathcart, and Richard Younge, stage manager, sailed in the *Pacific* on 25 November 1854 and arrived in Melbourne on 23 February 1855. The tour opened on the 26th at Melbourne's only theatre, the ten-year-old Queen's. Brooke played Othello with Younge as Iago, Fanny Cathcart as Desdemona and Mrs Charles Young, a member of the Queen's company, as Emilia. Critics and audience acclaimed him although in an otherwise enthusiastic review the Melbourne *Argus*, 28 February, noted that 'the sacrifice of Desdemona ... was almost too painfully portrayed, and we suggest ... that its fearful consummation should take place ... out of sight.' The Company made a brief season in Geelong, before moving on to Sydney.

Edmund Kean: (1787–1833) celebrated British Shakespearean stage actor born in England. He was well known for his tumultuous personal life, and short stature. Sarah Siddons thought him 'a horrid little man,' and added that he 'played very, very well,' but that 'there was too little of him to make a great actor.'

Learmonth was at Ercildoune: The name Learmonth arises from lands in Berwickshire and the Learmonth of Ercildoune in the Merse. The Learmonth Family Motto is 'Dum Spiro Spero'. Thomas Livingstone-Learmonth (1783-1869), a strict Presbyterian, was a merchant in Edinburgh, Scotland then a comptroller of customs at Grangemouth before heading off to the West Indies making a great deal of money in the service of the British East India Company as a merchant in Calcutta. In 1835 he was a merchant in Hobart Town, and at the time his four sons were John, Thomas Jnr., Somerville and Andrew. Thomas and Somerville were still in their teens when they were sent by their father to Victoria to find suitable farming land for sheep. They were leaders in the pastoral settlement of what was then known as Port Phillip first settling at the head of the Barwon River, Geelong, and then at Buninyong followed by Burrumbeet in 1838 passing over the site of present day Ballarat. Settlers were afraid to penetrate in to the interior in order to take up runs as aborigines were committing depredations within 15 miles of Geelong. Early maps show that the 'Run' extended in 1848 to Mount Beckworth in the North East, the head of Mount Emu Creek in the West and below Lake Burrumbeet in the South. There were drought conditions in the 1830's and 1840's and that influenced their decision to acquire the Ercildoun Run, over 73,000 acres in size, with its excellent flowing springs at the foot of Mount Ercildoun. They erected a home and woolshed at Buninyong but the discovery of gold at Buninyong may have influenced them to shift farther out to Ercildoun.

You have done the State some service ...: Cf. 'I have done the state some service, and they know 't.' William Shakespeare, *Othello*, 5.ii (*Othello*)

ACT FOUR—Scene Three

Supreme Court, Melbourne: One of Victoria's earliest legislative acts as a Colony was to establish the Supreme Court. The last resident Judge, William a'Beckett became its first Chief Justice. He and the other Judge appointed to the Court, Redmond Barry, took their seats on the bench for the first time on Tuesday 10 February 1852. With the discovery of gold in late 1851, the population of the Colony tripled in the space of the year and the business of the Court rapidly increased. A third Judge (Edward Eyre Williams) was appointed in July 1852, and another Judge, Robert Molesworth in 1854. Molesworth was also the head of the newly constituted Court of Mines, which made determinations about mining rights. The old Supreme Court building, on the north-west corner of Latrobe and Russell Streets, Melbourne was constructed in 1842 to house the Supreme Court of New South Wales for the District of Port Phillip.

ACT FOUR—Scene Four

To be, or not to be—that is the question!: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Price of Denmark* 3.i (*Hamlet*)

Chokey: (*British informal*) prison.

Magna Opera Domini: Great are the works of the Lord, *Psalms* 110

They rose in dark and evil days ... are plenty here to-day.: *The Memory of the Dead*

(Words John Kells Ingram; music by William Elliot Hudson)

They rose in dark and evil days

To right their native land;

They kindled here a living blaze

That nothing shall withstand.

Alas! that might can vanquish Right

They fell and pass'd away;

But true men, like you, men,

Are plenty here today.

Lola, the Lorelei

Copy Text

Manuscript 542 (A), Hanger Collection, Fryer Memorial Library, University of Queensland. The document is a photocopy of an original quarto sized script, typical in style (layout and pagination) to other manuscripts typed by Hilda. There are corrections and emendations in black ink; also in Esson's hand; the address '77 Millswyn Street, South Yarra, Melbourne SW1' [Louis and Hilda's address from at least 1936] is written in the bottom left corner of the title page.

Characters

LOLA MONTEZ, Spanish dancer
FRANZ LISZT, celebrated pianist
RICHARD WAGNER, young composer
LUDWIG, King of Bavaria
FOLLIN, Lola's Manager
Voices of DIGGERS, THEATRE AUDIENCE, GUESTSs, ATTENDANTS etc.

Scenes

Ballaarat Gold-Fields, 1856
Dresden, 1843
Bonn, 1844
Paris, 1844
Munich, 1847

Music

- *The Lorelei* (Liszt)¹ from, say, the last section in 9/8 time from 'and smiling in triumph o'er him ...' (English words)
- Old Spanish Music for the 'Spider Dance'
- *Hungarian Rhapsody* (Liszt)
- *Rienzi* (Wagner)
- End of *Symphony in C. Minor* (Beethoven)
- *Die Liebestraum* (Liszt)
- Music Hall Song: *Lola, of the Rolling Black Eye*
- Prelude—*The Lorelei*.

¹ Franz Liszt - *Die Lorelei*, S.532 (Dossin)

ACT ONE

(Prelude: from The Lorelei.)

ANNOUNCER. Our play attempts to depict one of the most famous women of a romantic epoch—the beautiful and fascinating Lola Montez—Spanish Dancer—actress—the dazzling light of French Salons—the inspiration of poets and musicians—the favourite of a King—who, after a series of triumphs in Europe² and America, now arrives with her troupe of players, on the Australian goldfields.

It is Ballarat, February 1856. It is a lively scene. Here is a group of excited diggers watching Lola in action.

(SHOUTS. The sound of LOLA's whip cracking.)

LOLA. You scoundrel, Seekamp! How dare you insult me in your dirty paper! I'll show you how a Spanish woman defends her honour!

MINER'S VOICES. Isn't she a fury!

—Go it, Lola!

LOLA. You'd hound me from this town, would you! Well I'll turn the tables, and make Seekamp decamp.

(Laughter.)

It's lucky I carry a whip; but this is the first time I've used it on an ass ... Now, out of my sight, you coward!

MINER'S VOICES. Hurrah! Hurrah!

—Give her a cheer, boys!

(Cheers, and cries of 'Lola! Lola!')

LOLA (Amiably). Please let me explain. I appeal to you, ladies, as members of my own sex, and to you, gentlemen, as my natural protectors. There's a certain gentleman in this town called Seekamp. Take out the ee's and he becomes Skamp. He not only attacked my art, but said that I was a notorious woman. Notorious, indeed! I'm an actress.

(Cheers.)

MINERS' VOICES. This is a new sensation for the diggings.

—Things have been quiet since the Eureka Stockade.

LOLA. My friends, I trust to see you at the theatre to-night. We are presenting a sparkling comedietta, *The Eton Boy*, the stirring domestic drama, *Maidens, Beware!* to be followed by Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

(Applause.)

(Reciting airily.)

*As for myself, you'll find in Lola Montez
To study how to please my constant wont is,
Yet I am vain but I'm the first star here
To shine upon this Thespian hemisphere.*

VOICES. Hurrah!

—Lola! Lola!

(Continue cries: 'Lola!'—swell music under, fade into applause from audience, in theatre, and with cries for the Spider Dance.)

—The Spider Dance!

—Come on, Lola!

—The Spider Dance.

² Europe] England A.

FOLLIN. Ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure in announcing that, by the special request of many of our leading citizens, Madame Lola Montez will now perform her world-famous Spider Dance.

(Applause.)

(Old Spanish Music for the dance, and sound of castanets.)

VOICES. Look at her!

—With wire spiders on her skirts!

—Oh, they're falling off!

(Laughter.)

—See how she picks them up!

—Isn't she marvellous!

—She's very daring.

—Shame!

(Uproar in theatre. Music stops.)

LOLA *(Addressing AUDIENCE)*. I'm surprised at this demonstration. *The Spider Dance* is a national one, and is witnessed with delight by all classes in Spain, from Queen to peasant, and by both sexes. I have always looked upon this dance as a work of high art. It created a furore in Melbourne. I thought it would appeal to the liberal-minded diggers of Ballaarat.

VOICES. Yes. Yes!

—Go on, Lola.

LOLA. I thank you.

(Music again, with applause and cheers, soon fading out.)

(Then a knock at the door of LOLA's dressing-room.)

LOLA. Come in, Follin. I'm recovering from last night.

FOLLIN. There was nearly a fight in the theatre. That should make you famous.

LOLA. Yes. But not in the way I want.

FOLLIN. Well, Lola, here's a sharp contrast between the rough life of the diggings, and the elegance of the salons and Courts³ of Europe.

LOLA. I love the diggers.

FOLLIN. And they worship you. They were astounded to see you dancing at the pit-head and going⁴ down the deepest shaft as gaily as if you were entering a drawing-room.

LOLA. I want to see life in all its phases.

FOLLIN. You've had a marvellous career, Lola.

LOLA *(Dreamily)*. I have some cherished memories ...

FOLLIN *(Ardently)*. Lola⁵, my darling, my princess -

LOLA. I'm tired, Follin. Play something.

FOLLIN *(Resignedly)*. As you wish.

(FOLLIN at piano, plays a gipsy dance movement of a Liszt⁶ Hungarian Rhapsody.)

LOLA. What are you playing?

FOLLIN. One of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.

LOLA. Franz Liszt! Play some more!

(A few more bars.)

³ the salons and Court] the salons and the Courts *emended A.*

⁴ astounded to see you dancing at the pit-head and going] astounded to see you going *emended A.*

⁵ *(Ardently.)* Lola] Lola *emended A.*

⁶ *plays a gipsy dance movement of a Liszt*] *plays a part of a Liszt emended A.*

FOLLIN. Do you know it?

LOLA. Know it! I danced for him when he was composing it—a gipsy dance.

FOLLIN. For Liszt?

LOLA (*Laughingly*). Yes.⁷ I was his inspiration.

FOLLIN. You knew the great Liszt, Lola?

LOLA (*Reminiscently*). It was in Dresden, 1843. After a concert—he was the greatest pianist in the world—the high society ladies were buzzing round him like bees. I went up and said: 'Franz Liszt, I am Lola Montez!' He left them all, and came to me. 'Such beauty as yours,' he cried, 'is less of earth than of Heaven!' Franz was always very religious. He looked into my eyes and said: 'We have much to say to each other,' and carried me off at once. Ah, those Dresden days ...

(*Music from Wagner's opera, Rienzi.*)

A private performance of the new opera *Rienzi* was given in Franz's honour by the young German composer—Richard Wagner, I think was his name ... (*Voice fading.*) ... Franz took me with him behind the scenes at the Opera House.

LISZT (*Fading in*). Lola, this is my friend, Richard Wagner. I expect great things from him. Did you like the opera?

LOLA. It was sublime, truly great art.

WAGNER (*Bitterly*). Great art, indeed. Jingles in the Italian mode. What is Italian opera, after all—only a concert in costume!

LISZT. Why so bitter, Richard!

WAGNER. I imagine a new form—Music Drama—the art of the future.

LISZT. Oh, you Germans! 'Not content to be artists you must also be philosophers.' I remember Chopin saying -

WAGNER. Chopin! The only great music is German.

LISZT. There are oceans of German music to-day; but, except for yourself, Richard, not a living idea.

WAGNER. And I receive little but neglect or contempt.⁸

LISZT. The insects always buzz, and the frogs croak, when the nightingales sing.

WAGNER. I believe with Schopenhauer, that nothing endures in this world except the Idea.

LISZT. And Beauty, enshrined in a work of art.

WAGNER. Yes. All art is elegy.

LOLA. What a delight and privilege to hear two men of genius talking together.

(*The MEN laugh.*)

LISZT. Isn't she adorable! Well, Richard, I'm going to Bonn, as the guest of honour, to unveil the Beethoven memorial.

LOLA. How exciting! The Czar of Russia will be there, and Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort.

WAGNER. I'm ashamed of you, Franz.

LISZT. You know I care nothing for rank or royalty; but it's in honour of the great Beethoven.

WAGNER. If so, I forgive you.

LISZT. It should be a great gathering.

LOLA (*Impetuously*). Will you take me, Franz?

LISZT. With pride and pleasure, beautiful Spanish lady. Isn't she an enchantress!

WAGNER. She is too dazzlingly beautiful to be real.

LOLA. Thanks, Herr Wagner, for your noble and inspiring opera.

LISZT. I am to play the *Concerto*, and also to conduct the *Symphony in C Minor*.

⁷ (*Laughingly.*) Yes.] Yes *emended A.*

⁸ And I receive little but neglect or contempt.] I receive little but contempt or neglect. *emended A.*

(End of Beethoven's Symphony in C Minor, conducted by Liszt, at the Banqueting Hall, Bonn.)
(Applause from GUESTS.)

VOICES. Magnificent!

—A great symphony!

—A great conductor!

WOMEN'S VOICES *(Whispering)*. Look, dear, there's the Czar of Russia.

—And there's Queen Victoria of England, and Prince Albert.

(Excitement and murmurs among the GUESTS.)

VARIED VOICES. Who is this?

—This painted and bejewelled woman!

—Lola Montez!

—The Spanish Dancer.

—Liszt's latest inspiration.

—What is she doing?

—She's jumped on the table and begun to dance.

(Sound of castanets.)

LOLA. The Spider Dance.

(Faint Spanish Dance Music.)

QUEEN VICTORIA. We are not amused.

PRINCE ALBERT. It is a liberty, a great liberty. I am surprised at Liszt's conduct.

QUEEN VICTORIA. Mendelssohn would not have behaved like that. He was always a gentleman.

PRINCE ALBERT. Let us go!

(They prepare to leave.)

VOICES. Here comes Liszt himself.

—Won't he feel disgraced!

—What can he possibly say!

LISZT *(Gaily)*. Lola's a Lorelei—who knows what she'll be up to next!

(Music from the Lorelei ... then LISZT composing at the piano.)

(It is a room in a hotel, Paris. A knock at the door.)

LISZT *(Frantically)*. *Ach, Gott!*⁹ What is it!

LOLA *(Brightly)*. Lola, your Lola, Franz.

LISZT. How can you interrupt!

LOLA. Don't tear your hair, Franz. I like it as it is.

LISZT. You've broken the thread of my melody.

LOLA. What divine music were you composing?

LISZT. A new rhapsody.

LOLA. Oh, I thought you were practising scales.

LISZT. Practising scales! *Ach, Gott in Himmell!* You call my rhapsody practising scales.

LOLA. Don't be angry. I'll dance again for you.

LISZT. When I'm composing the interruption of even an angel drives me crazy. You're an angel, and I'm a musician, so I'm crazy anyway.

LOLA. I want to help you.

LISZT. I'm in the throes of composition, and no work is so difficult. It's done in blood and sweat and agony. A seeming trifle can upset me, and then the world of my imagination is shattered, and I'm distraught. Do you wonder I drink so much cognac! I need it to keep sane.

LOLA. Don't be so doleful, Franz. This is Paris. Aren't you happy?

⁹ *(Frantically.) Ach, Gott!] Ach, Gott! emended A.*

LISZT (*Sighing*). As far as may be, in this world of imperfections.

LOLA. I love life ... the greatest gift of the gods.

LISZT. Ah, life destroys romance.

LOLA. No! No!

LISZT. Death, perhaps, may immortalise it.

LOLA. Franz, you love me no more.

LISZT (*Disparingly*). *Ach, Gott!*

LOLA. You have a greater love, your passion for music.

LISZT. Listen, Lola -

LOLA (*With rising passion*). I won't listen. I know it. You've deserted me for you Muse—that's your greatest love. I know you, Franz. You'd sacrifice me or any other woman for a Sonata.

LISZT. But Lola, Lola -

LOLA. You know I love your music. Didn't I inspire you when I danced to your rhapsody? You said so, Franz. But I love life too—and live—love, Franz ... What's the matter! Oh, where are you off to?

LISZT. You're driving me mad, Lola.

(*He rushes out. Door slams.*)

LOLA. What have I done, Franz? Come back! Franz!

(*Pause.*)

(*LOLA screams.*) I'm locked in. (*Rattles door.*) Help! help! Where are you, Franz! (*Knocks loudly at door.*) Somebody come and let me out. (*More knocks.*) Won't anybody come! Very well, I'll show you. I'll smash everything in the room. Here's your big mirror—(*Smashes it.*) Did you hear that? And here's your beautiful bowl. Ah! (*Breaks it.*) Isn't that a fine crescendo! Now, my virtuoso, you won't compose on this piano any more! This chair will do. Here goes—(*Smashes the pianoforte with chair.*) This is Lola's Rhapsody—*agitato—con moto*—I'll show you, Franz (*Again smashes pianoforte.*) That's the *scherzo* ... I've ruined your piano, and now I'll wreck your whole room. (*Rushes round room, breaking everything she can.*) Lola's Spanish Rhapsody.

(*The door opens, and a WAITER enters.*)

Hallo! At last. Where has Herr Liszt gone?

WAITER. He did not confide in me.

LOLA. He's deserted me ... but see what I've done to his study. He'll never play that piano again.

WAITER (*Calmly*). Do not worry, that is nothing. Herr Liszt divined that Mademoiselle might be a little excited, perhaps. The damage has been paid for in advance.

LOLA (*Laughingly*). Oh, Franz, Franz, what an imagination!

WAITER. I beg to announce that the rent of the suite is arranged for several months, and a magnificent sum has been deposited to Mademoiselle's credit.

LOLA. I don't want it. I'm leaving ... at once.

WAITER. And where may Mademoiselle be going?

LOLA. I don't know .. away from here ... anywhere—I'll trust to my Fate.

(*A few bars from Liszt's Liebestraum, then fade in to LOLA's boudoir, Munich.*)

MAID (*Announcing*). His Majesty, the King!

LOLA. Ludwig, this is an unexpected pleasure.

LUDWIG (*With German accent*). Oh, my Lolita, how divine you are! Permit me, a mere mortal, to pay homage to the Goddess of Beauty.

LOLA. You are a poet, Your Majesty, and a lover of beauty, like one of the old troubadours.

LUDWIG. And may we have a *tête-à-tête* in your charming little room?

LOLA. Please be seated. I'm giving a soiree on Tuesday; but my guests will be only true friends, not hirelings.

LUDWIG. A distinguished visitor arrived yesterday in Munich, Herr Franz Liszt, on his way to Weimar.

LOLA. Franz Liszt in Munich!

LUDWIG. He is accompanied by a lady.

LOLA. A lady? (*Whimsically.*) She must be very beautiful.

LUDWIG. A Russian Princess, I believe.

LOLA. Oh, I shall ask Franz to bring his Princess to my reception.

LUDWIG. And Herr Otto Schmidt—the Professor.

LOLA. That fool! (*Laughingly.*) Oh, no, no! By the way, I had a message from Heinrich Heine, asking for the honour to see me. I replied that it is I who should be honoured to meet Heine, one of the greatest poets of the age.

LUDWIG. All men are your admirers, Lolita. Everywhere you've gone, they've followed you—in India, Turkey, Spain, Paris -

LOLA. Ah, Paris!

LUDWIG. Yes, even in brilliant Paris you were feted by the poets and wits.

LOLA (*Dreamily recalling their names.*) Balzac, George Sand, Alexander Dumas ... (*Then brightly.*) And it was in Paris, too, that I met the famous beauty, Alphonsine Plessis, the Lady of the Camellias ...

LUDWIG. But she wasn't as wildly beautiful as my Lolita.

LOLA. She was an ethereal blonde. We were too different in style ever to be jealous.

LUDWIG (*Jokingly.*) And will Baron Von Pechmann be among your honoured guests?

LOLA. That fat financier, and oppressor of the poor! If he dared to appear, I'd set my bulldog on him.

LUDWIG. I know your sympathies, Lolita. Like your poet, Heine, you are a soldier in the army for the liberation of humanity.

LOLA. I trust so. You have made Munich a city of art and letters; but shouldn't you work also for social justice and human betterment?

LUDWIG. Yes. Let us work together. Your inspiration has brought back to life the perished ideals of my youth.

(*Reciting*)

The first sight of thee gave new life to my being

What delight! that, like the wave

Renews itself out of its eternal spring.

LOLA. Favour or power, bestowed on anyone should never be used for personal or corrupt purposes.

LUDWIG. No, indeed. You have never done so. You have a generous soul. And your gifts—baskets of food for the poor, presents for the children, consideration for the hospitals -

LOLA. But you, your Majesty, spend most of your private income on charities.

LUDWIG. We have the same ideals. Lolita, are you not my best friend and Counsellor! I wish you to become a citizen of Bavaria. And it will be my pleasure to raise you to the Peerage.

LOLA. I beg you, no. It would be against my principles to accept a rank among the class I oppose.

LUDWIG. But you could use the weapon of the enemy for their own undoing.

LOLA. Ah, yes, I see, Sire. Then, for that reason, I will accept.

LUDWIG. Thank you, Lolita. Now, what would you be, a Countess or a Baroness. *Ach*, I shall make you both. Shall we drink to it?

LOLA. Your majesty, I have neither wines nor liqueurs to offer, only honest *Muenchner* beer.

LUDWIG. Beer! Delightful. You're incomparable, Lolita. You bewitch everything, soldiers and servant-maids—poets and musicians—horses, dogs and bird—peasants and kings. I lift my stein and give the toast: 'To the Future Countess of Landsfeldt and Baroness Rosenthal.'

(They clink glasses.)

LOLA. I thank your Majesty.

LUDWIG. Now, Lolita, you are the Queen of Bavaria. I'm your subject.

(Falls on his knees before her.)

LOLA. Ludwig ... my poor Ludwig.

LUDWIG *(Fervently)*. You are my Queen.

(Liszt's Rhapsody, as played by FOLLIN, back in the dressing-room.)

LOLA *(Fading in)*. Ah, Follin, those were the days ... in Dresden ... in Paris ... in Munich -

FOLLIN. And you were the uncrowned Queen of Bavaria!

LOLA. Ludwig asked me to come and comfort him in his last days at Nice. I was sorry for him, but I had to free my own [weird].

FOLLIN. You were born to rule men. Oh, Lola, I love you, I adore you -

LOLA. Get up, Follin! At present you're my manager.

FOLLIN. Have pity, lovely Andalusian!

LOLA *(Mockingly)*. I've told you before I'm not really Spanish, only partly by descent. I was born in the barracks at Limerick.

FOLLIN. But you're Lola ... I've followed you round the world. I've left wife and children for you -

LOLA *(Not proudly, but with pity)*. Oh—other men have done that.

FOLLIN. Oh, Lola, if I can't live, let me die, for you!

LOLA *(Quietly but intensely)*. Listen, Follin. Once ... it was in Paris ... twelve years ago—a man I loved was killed in a duel for me. He was Georges Dujarier. Georges—maybe, the one man in the world I every truly loved.

(Pause.)

FOLLIN. Oh, Lola, what can I do.

LOLA *(Familiarly)*. Be sensible, Follin dear. Think of our plans. Why not revive my first success, *Lola Montez in Bavaria!*

FOLLIN. If you say so.

LOLA. Yes, with my proper title: *Lola Montez, Countess of Landsfeldt*. It looks better on the bills.

(Shouts from DIGGERS outside.)

VOICES. Lola! Lola!

—We want you.

(Music Hall Song: Lola, of the Rolling Black Eye.)

FOLLIN. Here come the diggers to see you. Will you meet them?

LOLA. Yes, at once, delighted!

FOLLIN. That's your life, Lola, from one triumph to another.

(Door opens. Voices Swell. Shouts and song.)

(Then the gold-fields, as in the opening scene.)

VOICES. Lola!

—Lola for ever!

—Lola!

A DIGGER. On behalf of the diggers, I beg you to accept this gift—in the form of a nugget—rough like ourselves, but the genuine article.

(Cheers.)

LOLA. I'll always treasure it, as a tribute from the free citizens of the new world.

(Cheers.)

VOICES OF WOMEN (*Whispering*). Look at her, the hussy!

—It's a disgraceful scene.

—What fools men are—fools—dragging her carriage like horses and proud of themselves. And listen to her -

(*Voices fade.*)

LOLA (*Gaily*). My friends, once I was the uncrowned Queen of Bavaria—but now I've attained a higher honour—I'm Queen of the Digging's. Come on, my gallant steeds -

(*Sounds of MEN dragging her carriage, shouts and cheers, fading into the ending of The Lorelei.*)

End.

Notes

Lorelei (sometimes spelled Lorelai, Loreley, or Lorilee): a feminine given name originating from the name of a rock headland on the Rhine River. Legends say that a maiden named Lorelei lived on the rock and lured fishermen to their deaths with her song.

Hungarian Rhapsody: *The Hungarian Rhapsodies*, S.244, R.106, a set of nineteen piano pieces based on Hungarian folk themes, composed by Franz Liszt (1811–1886) during 1846–1853, and later in 1882 and 1885. Liszt also arranged versions for orchestra, piano duet and piano trio. In their original piano form, the Hungarian Rhapsodies are noted for their difficulty (Liszt was a virtuoso pianist as well as a composer).

Rienzi: *Rienzi, der Letzte der Tribunen* (*Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes*; WWV 49) an early opera by Richard Wagner (1813–1883) in five acts, with the libretto written by the composer after Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel of the same name (1835). The title is commonly shortened to *Rienzi*. Written between July 1838 and November 1840, it was first performed at the Hofoper, Dresden, on 20 October 1842, and was the composer's first success.

Symphony in C Minor: *The Symphony No. 5 in C minor* of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), Op. 67, was written between 1804–1808. It is one of the best-known compositions in classical music, and one of the most frequently played symphonies. First performed in Vienna's Theater an der Wien in 1808, the work achieved its prodigious reputation soon afterward. ETA Hoffmann described the symphony as 'one of the most important works of the time.'

Die Liebestraum: *Liebesträume* (German for 'Dreams of Love'), a set of three solo piano works (S.541/R.211) by Franz Liszt, published in 1850. Originally the three *Liebesträume* were conceived as lieder after poems by Ludwig Uhland and Ferdinand Freiligrath. In 1850, two versions appeared simultaneously as a set of songs for high voice and piano, and as transcriptions for piano two-hands.

Lola, of the Rolling Black Eye: a locally written ballad, apparently 'sung at ever music-hall in the Colony.' Quoted by Horace Wyndham in *The Magnificent Montez: From Courtesan to Convert* (DigiCat, 2022)

Seekamp: Henry Seekamp (c.1829-1864), newspaper editor and nationalist. He came to Victoria in August 1852, among the earliest gold-seekers. A dapper little man with a fierce temper, he launched Ballarat's first newspaper, the *Ballarat Times*, Buninyong and Creswick *Advertiser*, in March 1854. His journal proclaimed a radical and civic-minded programme and Seekamp became a forceful advocate of reform of the goldfields administration, votes for diggers, and improvements in education and local government.

comediotta: a light, farcical comedy.

The Eton Boy: a farce, in one act, by Edward Morton; Quoted by Horace Wyndham in *The Magnificent Montez: From Courtesan to Convert* (DigiCat, 2022)

Maidens Beware: Cf. *Maidens Beware!*, burletta in one act by John Thomas Haines (Royal Victoria Theatre, London, January (1837)).

Antony and Cleopatra: a tragedy by William Shakespeare. The play was performed first circa 1607 at the Blackfriars Theatre or the Globe Theatre by the King's Men. Its first appearance in print was in the Folio of 1623. Cf. Wyndham, Op. cit.

As for myself, you'll find in Lola Montez ...: Cf. See Wyndham, Op. cit.

Dresden, 1843: Between 1806 and 1918 Dresden was the capital of the Kingdom of Saxony. During the Napoleonic Wars the French emperor made it a base of operations, winning there the famous Battle of Dresden on 27 August 1813. Dresden was a centre of the German Revolutions in 1848 with the May Uprising, which cost human lives and damaged the historic town of Dresden. Lola Montez fled London in June 1843, arriving in Dresden. The twenty-three-year-old dancer had claimed to have been born in Seville, but, like much else in her life, this was invention on her part. Her real name was Elizabeth Rosanna Gilbert and she had been born in Ireland. Two years earlier, in 1942, she had learnt the odd word in Spanish, but the deception was soon discovered and was obliged to quit England for Dresden, where the city proved more credulous. She met Liszt in the following year.

the Opera House: The first opera house at the location of today's Semperoper was built by the architect Gottfried Semper. It opened on 13 April 1841 with an opera by Carl Maria von Weber.

Chopin: Frédéric François Chopin (1810–1849), Polish composer and virtuoso pianist of the Romantic era who wrote primarily for the solo piano. He gained and has maintained renown worldwide as a leading musician of his era, whose 'poetic genius was based on a professional technique that was without equal in his generation.' A child prodigy, he completed his musical education and composed his earlier works in Warsaw before leaving Poland at the age of twenty, less than a month before the outbreak of the November 1830 Uprising. Chopin formed a friendship with Franz Liszt and was admired by many of his musical contemporaries, including Robert Schumann.

Bonn: In 1815 following the Napoleonic Wars, Bonn became part of the Kingdom of Prussia. Administered within the Prussian Rhine Province, the city became part of the German Empire in 1871 during the Prussian-led unification of Germany. Beethoven was born in Bonn.

the Beethoven memorial: Liszt organized the fundraising for the Beethoven memorial statue or *Denkmal* in the *Münsterplatz* next to the Bonn Munster Cathedral. It was unveiled on 12 August 1845, in honour of the 75th anniversary of the composer's birth. It was attended by a large number of prominent figures: King Frederick William IV of Prussia and his consort; Queen Victoria (as part of her first continental visit since acceding to the throne 8 years earlier) and Prince Albert; Archduke Friedrich of Austria; the composers Hector Berlioz, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Ignaz Moscheles and Félicien David; the conductors Charles Hallé and Sir George Smart; the baritones Josef Staudigl and Johann Baptist Pischek (1814–1873); the sopranos Jenny Lind and Pauline Viardot; and Lola Montez. Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn, who had both written major works for the piano to raise funds for the monument, were unable to be present.

The Czar of Russia: Nicholas I (1796–1855) was the Emperor of Russia from 1825 until 1855. He was also the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Finland. He is best known as a political conservative whose reign was marked by geographical expansion, repression of dissent, economic stagnation, poor administrative policies, a corrupt bureaucracy, and frequent wars that culminated in Russia's defeat in the Crimean War of 1853–56. I can find no evidence that he attended the unveiling of the Beethoven monument other than Wyndham's reference to 'the King and Queen of Russia' attending the ceremony.

Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort: Victoria (Alexandrina Victoria; 1819–1901) was Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 20 June 1837 until her death. From 1 May 1876, she adopted the additional title of Empress of India. Victoria married her first cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (1819–1861), in 1840.

Banqueting Hall, Bonn: The day after the unveiling ceremony, Wednesday 13 August, there was a concert lasting four hours followed by a banquet for 550 guests at the Hotel Der Stern. The banquet was disrupted by the behaviour of Lola Montez, who danced on a table and embarrassed Liszt by insisting she was his guest at the celebrations and demanding a seat appropriate to her claimed status, thus upsetting a pre-organised seating arrangement. This scandalised the Bonn authorities, and it rebounded on Liszt himself, so much so that when Beethoven's centenary was celebrated in Bonn in 1870, he was not invited to attend.

We are not amused: Attributed to Queen Victoria by courtier Caroline Holland in *Notebooks of a Spinster Lady*, 1919. Holland attests that Victoria made the remark at Windsor Castle: 'There is a tale of the unfortunate equerry who ventured during dinner at Windsor to tell a story with a spice of scandal or impropriety in it. "We are not amused," said the Queen when he had finished.'

Mendelssohn: Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809–1847) born and widely known as Felix Mendelssohn, German composer, pianist, organist and conductor of the early Romantic period.

Ach, Gott in Himmell: (*German*) 'God in Heaven!'

agitato—con moto: (*Italian*, musical term) restless—with speed; quickly.

Scherzo: A light, 'joking' or playful musical form, originally and usually in fast triple metre, often replacing the minuet in the later Classical period and the Romantic period, in symphonies, sonatas, string quartets and the like; in the 19th century some scherzi were independent movements for piano, etc.

Heinrich Heine: Christian Johann Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), German poet, journalist, essayist, and literary critic. He is best known outside Germany for his early lyric poetry, which was set to music in the form of *Lieder* (art songs) by composers such as Robert Schumann and Franz Schubert. He is considered part of the Young Germany movement. His radical political views led to many of his works being banned by German authorities. Heine spent the last 25 years of his life as an expatriate in Paris.

Balzac: Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), French novelist and playwright. The novel sequence *La Comédie Humaine*, which presents a panorama of post-Napoleonic French life, is generally viewed as his *magnum opus*.

George Sand: Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin (1804–1876), aka George Sand, French novelist and memoirist. She is equally well known for her much publicized romantic affairs with a number of artists, including the composer and pianist Frédéric Chopin and the writer Alfred de Musset.

Alexander Dumas: Alexandre Dumas, born Dumas Davy de la Pailleterie (1802–1870), also known as Alexandre Dumas, *père* ('father'), French writer. Many of his historical novels of high adventure were originally published as serials, including *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Twenty Years After* and *The Vicomte de Bragelonne: Ten Years Later*. Prolific in several genres, Dumas began his career by writing plays, which were successfully produced from the first. He also wrote numerous magazine articles and travel books. In the 1840s, Dumas founded the Théâtre Historique in Paris. nb **Alexander Dumas fils** (1824–1895), French author and playwright, best known for the romantic novel *La Dame aux camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*), published in 1848.

Alphonsine Plessis, the Lady of the Camélias: Cf. Marie Duplessis, born Alphonsine Rose Plessis (1824–1847) a French courtesan and mistress to a number of prominent and wealthy men. She was the inspiration for Marguerite Gautier, the main character of *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas the younger, one of Duplessis's lovers.

Baron Von Pechmann: Johann Nepomuk Baron von Pechmann, according to Bruce Seymour (*Lola Montez: A Life*) Pechmann 'was a thirty-seven-year-old career jurist of a long, noble Catholic lineage; and though he had been acting police director [in Munich] only since the first of October, the baron was regarded as an upright and even handed man. The Spanish woman had bothered him from the first. Only after repeated demands had she come to police headquarters ... to complete the obligatory registration for foreigners, and even then she had been able to provide nothing indicating her identity or status. She had not even taken the matter seriously, filling in the blank after 'Accompanied By' with the words *un chien*, a dog. ... The baron's investigators had quickly turned up the stories of her expulsion from Berlin, Warsaw, and Baden-Baden. they knew about the note that disclosed she had been sleeping with Dujarier before he was murdered.'

my bulldog: Lola loved animals and appears to have had a number of dogs as pets; while with Ludwig she had a large black dog (that resembled a cross between a boxer and a mastiff) she named Turk; later a King Charles spaniel called Gip (1856).

The first sight of thee gave new life to my being ...: Louis of Bavaria, *To the Absent Lolita* quoted in Edmund B D'Auvergne's *Lola Montez: an adventuress of the forties*, Brentano's Publishers (1924)

Muenchner beer: Münchner Kindl means 'Munich child' in the Bavarian dialect of German, and is the name of the symbol on the coat of arms of the city of Munich. Crown Prince Ludwig, later to become King Ludwig I, was married to Princess Therese of Saxony-Hildburghausen on 12th October 1810. The citizens of Munich were invited to attend the festivities held on the fields in front of the city gates to celebrate the happy royal event. The fields have been named Theresienwiese ('Theresa's fields') in honour of the Crown Princess ever since, although the locals have since abbreviated the name simply to the 'Wies'n'. Horse races in the presence of the Royal Family marked the close of the event that was celebrated as a festival for the whole of Bavaria. The decision to repeat the horse races in the subsequent year gave rise to the tradition of the Oktoberfest.

Andalusian: a community in Southern Spain; south of the Iberian peninsula, in south-western Europe, immediately south of Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha; west of Murcia and the Mediterranean Sea; east of Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean; and north of the Mediterranean Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar.

Limerick: a city in County Limerick, Ireland. It is located in the Mid-West Region and is also part of the province of Munster. Limerick City and County Council is the local authority for the city. The city lies on the River Shannon, with the historic core of the city located on King's Island, which is bounded by the Shannon and the Abbey River. Limerick is also located at the head of the Shannon Estuary where the river widens before it flows into the Atlantic Ocean.

Georges Dujarier: During the time of her disappointing stage debut in Paris in 1844, Montez met Alexandre-Honoré Dujarier (1815-1845), 'owner of the newspaper with the highest circulation in France [*La Presse*], and also the newspaper's drama critic.' Through their romance Montez revitalized her career as a dancer. Later on, after the two had their first quarrel over Lola's attendance to a party, Dujarier would attend the party and then in a drunken state offend Jean-Bapiste Rosemond de Beauvallon. Dujarier was challenged to a duel by de Beauvallon and shot and killed. Esson's source material, *The Magnificent Montez*, erroneously uses the name 'Charles' Dujarier (there is no explanation as to why Esson changes it again to 'George') also mistaking his age as 'five and twenty,' born in 1815 Dujarier would have been thirty at the time of meeting Montez.

Lachryma Christi

[Incomplete]

Copy Text

Manuscript. Palmer *Papers* (MS1174 Series 28 Folder 23), Australian National Library.
[Copy held in the Campbell Howard Collection]

Typed (character names in Capitals; text indented) on quarto size paper, single side in a style consistent with Hilda's previous manuscript format, the manuscript has no title page, character list nor description of setting. Page numbering is at the head of the page, centred.

Katharine Susannah Prichard knew nothing of the play, responding to Campbell Howard in 1961:

Afraid I don't know anything about it. Never heard it discussed, & it seems to belong to the time Louis & Hilda were in New York—is not so mature in style as later work, the dialogue stiff, & cerebral, it seems to me.¹

On the front page, the words 'Don't know either' and what is decipherable as Nettie Palmer's signature along with the date 14/3/64 (the 4 crossed out and replaced by 5 in another unknown hand; immediately to the right is written '60'). There is also some undecipherable scribble in the top right hand corner.

There are two distinct sets of emendations to the text (*A*): both in Esson's hand, one in black ink (*B*), the other in pencil (*C*).

ACT TWO appears to be missing; I believe the manuscript to be incomplete.
I've standardised layout, corrected accidentals and italicise foreign words.

¹ Katharine Susannah Prichard to Campbell Howard, 26 February 1961—Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

Characters

MRS BURKE

GEOFFREY TODD, 40

ISABEL, Australian actress

DENIS (Den), Australian artist

ROSALIE GREGORY

MAURICE HANLEY, Australian novelist

Setting

ACT ONE—Isabel's flat, Broadway, New York, decorated in the 'modernist' style

ACT TWO—[missing]

ACT THREE—Isabel's flat, Kings Cross, with Harbour views; some months later. Den's portrait of Isobel a feature of the flat's decor.

ACT ONE

(ISABEL's flat, Broadway, New York.)

(MRS BURKE, an elderly woman, is arranging flat.)

(A ring at door.)

MRS BURKE. Coming! *(Opens door.)*

(Enter GEOFFREY TODD, an exuberant man of about forty.)

It's you, Mr Todd.

TODD. Here I am again. *(Puts down hat.)*

MRS BURKE. You've been quite a stranger lately.

TODD. Pressure of business. In my line a man gets little relaxation. How are you getting along?

MRS BURKE. We're doing fine. This is the pleasantest place I've ever worked in—there's no fuss, no interference, it's just go as you please.

TODD. Yes. It's delightfully informal. That's how I feel about it.

MRS BURKE. It's all Isabel's influence—we call her Isabel you know—she's an angel, it's a pleasure to look after her.

TODD *(Quizzically)*. An angel! I never thought of that.

MRS BURKE. She may be strange at times, and capricious like -

TODD. Temperamental, they say in her profession.

MRS BURKE. That's it. You never know what she'll be up to. She's different from the common lot.

TODD. I concur with your opinion, Mrs Burke. She sure is different.

MRS BURKE. She's so gay and generous, full of life -

TODD. She's an actress.

MRS BURKE. I've never seen her on the stage. I go to the pictures.

TODD. That shows your good taste, Mrs Burke. And she's a foreigner.

MRS BURKE. I wouldn't have known it. She don't look foreign to me.

TODD. She comes from Australia.

MRS BURKE. Where's that?

TODD. I dunno. It's on the map somewhere. Melba came out of it.

MRS BURKE. You don't say.

TODD. It was before your time. She was a singer.

MRS BURKE. A female crooner—I don't like 'em.

TODD. She made a big success in England and America.

MRS BURKE. And so will Isabel. I'm an old woman, and I've seen a lot o' life—but believe me, no one ever like her—she makes other people look like suet pudding.

TODD. I'll have to engage you as a press-agent. Where is the lady Isabel?

MRS BURKE. She's dressing. She's having a little party to-night. I'll tell her you're here.

TODD. She'll guess my business.

(Exit MRS BURKE.)

(TODD walks critically round flat, looks out window, then returns Centre, and lights cigar.)

(Re-enter MRS BURKE.)

MRS BURKE. She'll be down in a minute.

TODD. Good. Life's swift these days, Mrs Burke.

MRS BURKE. You're telling me. If it's not one thing it's another.—My nephew, Alf, had an accident last week. It was terrible. A load of iron fell on him, cracking his chest and injuring his lungs. The doctors say it's a marvel he's recovered.

TODD. I trust he'll come through all right.

MRS BURKE. He's off the danger list. But it'll be a long long time before he's back at work again.

TODD. This is a hard-boiled old town and it's almost a miracle we're alive at all.

MRS BURKE. Yep. But for all our troubles we must try to keep on smilin'.

TODD. That's the spirit, Mrs Burke.

MRS BURKE. I sometimes think to myself if things are like this here, in little old New York, what in the name o' goodness must they be like in China?

TODD. That's a deep thought.²

MRS BURKE. And then there's my daughter's husband. He's been out o' work for months, but it's no use worrying I keep as cheerful as I can -

TODD. There's nothing defeatist about you, Mrs Burke. (*Giving her note.*) Please accept this.

MRS BURKE (*With note*). What's this—a fifty-dollar note!

TODD. A slight token of esteem. It may help to pay the income tax.

MRS BURKE. Thanks, Mr Todd.

(*Enter ISABEL.*)

TODD (*With pretended ecstasy*). But what is this! Flourish off stage. See where she comes—the Queen of Tragedy—what an entrance—(*He claps and bows.*) Loud and sustained applause.

ISABEL (*Also bowing elaborately*). I thank you.

TODD. Brilliant—dazzling ...

MRS BURKE. He's only kiddin'. I'd better get the things ready. (*Exit MRS BURKE.*)

ISABEL. I like that cigar you're smoking.

TODD. It's a good 'un.

ISABEL. A symbol of success. You're got up like the advertisers' dream of the ideal salesman. I believe you could see our Sydney³ Harbour Bridge, if you liked.

TODD. You flatter me. It's enchanting to see you again. But business before pleasure—(*He takes out contract.*)—this is something that may interest you. It's your contract.

(*ISABEL takes document.*)

What do you think of it?

ISABEL (*Glancing at it*). It looks pretty cute to me.

TODD. It's the best I could do.

ISABEL. My stocks are rising. Am I worth all this? Isn't there some mistake?

TODD. Don't be frivolous about business. It's a serious affair believe me. You'd better sign it now and get it over.

ISABEL. At your command. (*She goes to writing table.*) This is a solemn rite. (*She sits before table and takes up pen.*) It reminds me of the scene in *Camille*. Shall I sign it like Sarah Bernhardt, with a dozen hesitations and flourishes, or like Duse, with one swift stroke?

TODD. I'm not concerned with your histrionic technique—as long as you sign it in the right place.

ISABEL. Here goes. (*ISABEL signs contract.*)

TODD. Something attempted, something done.

ISABEL (*Rising*). They get up those things very nicely in the States.

(*She gives contract to TODD, who puts it carefully in his pocket.*)

TODD. This is a big thing, Isabel, a really big thing. Rehearsals next week.

ISABEL. That's great. I'm longing to go into action. I'll be jumping out of my skin.

TODD (*Looking at her professionally*). You're looking swell to-night.

ISABEL. Coming from such a connoisseur I can take that as a compliment.

TODD. I believe you're throwing a little party to-night.

ISABEL. Denis said he would drop in with a friend from Australia.

² That's a deep thought.] B.; (*With mock seriousness*) You said it. A.; You said it. *deleted B.*

³ our Sydney] C.; the Sydney A.

TODD. Another damned Australian. They'll be owning New York soon.

ISABEL. Den's just finished my portrait.

TODD. You surprise me. I had the idea that it was never meant to be finished. You've had over twenty sittings.

ISABEL. Fifteen, to be precise, as you're a man of figures.

TODD. I'll have to be a man of figures when I sign the cheque for it.

ISABEL. I can pay for it myself.

TODD. What sort of dauber is he anyway -

ISABEL. Denis is an artist, but you wouldn't know the difference.

TODD. Art, art—I'm a business man—a poor tired business man; but since I met you Isabel I've heard nothing but art, pictures and poetry, music and drama—you'll be wanting me to put you into Shakespeare next—and then Ibsen or Strindberg, or Chekhov—help—you're turning me into a nervous wreck, with this blasted art—to hell with it -

ISABEL. Take the broad view, Geoff. You've made enough money out of it, anyway.

TODD. That's different. My principle is to bring art closer to the people, and the people closer to the box-office.

ISABEL. That's your idealism.

TODD. I'm an idealist, all right; but why did I have to fall for a Shakespearean heroine.

ISABEL. It doesn't seem to weigh too heavily on you.

TODD. I wasn't intended to be a married man. The strain's terrific. It's only my iron will that keeps be going.

ISABEL. And a few beautiful dames on the side.

TODD. I need some stimulus, Desdemona⁴. But I don't have their portrait painted.

ISABEL. Have you never been in an artist's studio?

TODD. Of course I have. But he wasn't a portrait painter. He was a commercial artist, and I bet he could make more by drawing a collar than your friend could with a cart load of his boloney. And he didn't take weeks over it.

ISABEL. Wait till you've seen my portrait.

TODD. Where is it, Juliet? I'm curious about it.

ISABEL. It's going into an exhibition first. After that we'll have to see where to hang it. (*Looks around room.*) I think that alcove's the best place.

TODD. I can see it there in all its glory. It may go with the antiques, and your other junk -

ISABEL. You'll love it, I'm sure. I look—shall I say—*distingué*—with that intense expression you've always admired.

TODD. I'm a man of the world, angel. You can't tell me when you have twenty-five sittings -

ISABEL. Fifteen, darling.

TODD. With an artist, famous I believe for his nudes, it doesn't mean a thing.

ISABEL. On the contrary, it means a great deal to us both.

TODD. And how, may I ask, as a matter of form, is your little affair progressing?

ISABEL. Oh, how can you be so conventional, Geoffrey. There's no affair. Artists don't make love to their models. That's a popular fallacy. They're too engrossed in their work.

TODD. I don't quite get it. I never could understand the artistic temperament.

ISABEL. Denis and I are pals—fellow travellers, if you like.

TODD. A new kind of boy friend.

ISABEL. Wrong again, Geoff, an old one. I knew Den in Sydney, and of course I was pleased to welcome him when he arrived in New York. He's had a great struggle. It's not easy for a

⁴ Desdemona] *The manuscript is torn leaving only '-ona' to represent TODD's witty referral to ISABEL as 'a Shakespearean heroine'; 'Desdemona' is the only Shakespearean character name with these concluding letters.*

newcomer to break through, as you well know. He held an exhibition, mostly landscapes; but with a few portraits, and sold hardly anything. But he had an astounding piece of luck. One day Rosalie paid a visit to his exhibition, and she was fascinated by the pictures, and the painter.

TODD. Rosalie—who's Rosalie?

ISABEL. Don't display your ignorance. She's one of the Gregorys—the great Gregorys. Her father's in the city.

TODD. Gregory—I wonder if it's John, the financier? It couldn't be. But it won't matter if it's one of the same family. They're all big shots.

ISABEL. You're right, Geoff, they are. But Rosalie's poppa happens to be John—head of the family and the firm. I don't think he drives a lift in the office.

TODD. Elevator, dear.

ISABEL. Well, so the story goes—Rosalie persuaded Pa—the Great Mogul himself—to see the Show, and the old man was so deeply impressed, he became Den's best patron.

TODD. Fancy that! I'd never have guessed a hard-headed man like old John Gregory had a weakness for art.

ISABEL. He's a financier, Geoff, and he's firmly convinced that Denis will be a big success—a commercial success—and he wants to get in on the ground floor.

TODD (*Bewildered*). I'll take the count. I didn't know there was any money in pictures, except Old Masters.

ISABEL. You're naive, dear. And that's not all. The best has yet to come. Rosalie and Den were so excited about it that they went off for a week-end, and they've been together ever since.

TODD. Gosh! Romance as well! Didn't the old man get wild!

ISABEL. Not after the first shock. It wasn't Den's fault. He never pretended he was a good proposition; but Rosalie wouldn't let him go. They're engaged now—Pa insisted on that—and they'll soon be married.

TODD. It's too deep for me.

ISABEL. Don't look so gloomy. This is a story with a happy ending. Rosalie has money of her own apart from that, and she's a bright intelligent girl, the latest New York model. Denis is becoming a fashionable portrait-painter.

TODD. But what does Pa think now?

ISABEL. He's delighted. Den is one of his investments.

TODD. The New Order in Wall Street. Things are getting a bit complicated.

ISABEL. Can I get you a drink, Geoff?

TODD. I need one.

(*ISABEL goes to cocktail cabinet and fills two glasses.*)

ISABEL. We all have our problems.

TODD. We sure have.

(*ISABEL hands him a glass.*)

ISABEL. Try this.

TODD (*Lifting glass*). Another kind of love, sweetheart!

ISABEL (*Also lifting glass*). Good luck, Geoff! What would have been my chance of a career, if I hadn't met you!

(*They both drink.*)

TODD. Don't put it that way, Isabel. You had the goods.

ISABEL. I know well what you've done for me.

GEOFF. That's my business. I couldn't afford to miss a good thing. But it's darned difficult to put over someone from nowhere, and I admit I had to put in some fine work to give you a start.

ISABEL. You're too modest, Geoff.

TODD. That's all you needed, a start. You could do the rest for yourself.

ISABEL. I'll never forget those early experiences. Some were humiliating. I was absolutely unknown—any letters of introduction I'd brought with me were futile—but one fine day—I'd been in New York only a few weeks—I set out confidently to see a theatrical agent. I didn't see him, of course, only one of his secretaries; but I sent in my card, and then sat quietly in the office, no one paying any attention to me. What a crowd, soubrettes, tragediennes, old comics, chorus girls—they seemed to know their way about. One girl came out, half triumphant, half disappointed, she'd got a job in a small travelling company. Most got nothing at all. 'Nothing doing,' they muttered. I wasn't even called in—just casually told to come another day. Three hours I sat there unwanted. But I didn't give up. I kept trying my luck, and sometimes I was even given a test. What was my act? What had I done? Could I speak? Could I walk? I was elated when at last my name was put down on a waiting list—with a dozen others. And that's how I went on for weeks and months—something to come that never did. Then, in desperation, I wrote a letter to a leading manager, telling him how good I was. To my surprise I was asked to call, and what a thrill! I was granted a special interview in his beautiful office in the theatrical building.

TODD. Who was he?

ISABEL. Never mind his name. He asked me to do a monologue from *The Stronger*, a scene by Strindberg, a virtuoso part. He was appreciative. I thought I'd made a hit. He suggested I should call next day to his studio, remarking that I had a distinguished form. It's a cynical world, Geoff, and God knows what would have happened to me if it hadn't been for you.

TODD. You made good, Isabel.

ISABEL. I hope I did. But you got me my first part, and you were always straight. I was grateful, Geoffrey. That's why I married you.

TODD. We meant well at the time.

ISABEL. Yes, we meant well, but it was a mistake.

TODD. And honest mistake on both sides.

ISABEL. It wasn't love, Geoff.

TODD. Love, what's that! You're as intense off the stage as on. I admire you, Isabel, by God, I do, you're a wonder. But for a man like me, the average sensual man as the French have it, you're too damned difficult to live with.

(Telephone rings.)

ISABEL *(Going to 'phone)*. I'll go. *(At 'phone.. Yes. ... Mr Todd? He's here now. ... I'll call him. (Turning to TODD.)* It's for you.

TODD *(At 'phone)*. Hello. ... Yes, speaking. ... How are you, darling? ... Of course I will. ... That sounds fine. I shan't be long. I've been detained on important business. ... What's that? ... It'll be okay by me. Thanks for ringing. *(Puts down 'phone.)*

ISABEL. Is that Edith.

TODD. No, Mabel.

ISABEL. Mabel Brookes, the Socialist?

TODD. Correct. I think I can produce her—on the social stage of course—no professional jealousy, I trust.

ISABEL. None at all. No doubt she has her place in the scheme of things—to point a moral and adorn a cocktail. ... Another drink?

TODD. I'd like it.

(ISABEL fills the glass he holds out.)

You've arrived, Isabel. You're a success. I guess you can get along without me now. *(Toasting.)*
The best of luck to the show.

ISABEL. Thanks. Wasn't it Nietzsche who said that marriages would be more satisfactory if married people did not live together.

TODD. Damn Nietzsche!

ISABEL. It doesn't seem to work out that way.

(TODD puts down glass.)

(Short pause.)

TODD. I say, Isabel. I've just had a big idea. How about a divorce or a separation?

ISABEL *(Lightly)*. Make it a divorce, dear.

TODD. I'm thinking only of my wife's happiness.

ISABEL. You put it so sincerely that I'll be noble too. My only thought is to give you back your freedom.

TODD. You're a good sport. *(Gets hat, etc.)* This is your own flat. I'm not necessary. I'm here only as your business manager.

ISABEL. Well, I'm all for the New Deal.

TODD. I'll see how it can be arranged. In a free and democratic country, divorce should be brought within the reach of all.

ISABEL. Must you go so soon.

TODD. Yes. I've got a date, Miss Julia. *(Strikes attitude.)* How do I look?

ISABEL. Devastating. God help poor Mabel!

TODD *(Good-humouredly)*. Hope you enjoy your little party. Sorry I can't join you—I'd be bored.

It's me for the simple life. *(Kisses her hand.)* Bye-bye, honey.

(Exit TODD.)

(Pause.)

(ISABEL laughs and rearranges flowers etc.)

MRS BURKE *(Looking in at door)*. Has he gone?

ISABEL. Yes. Come in, Mrs Burke.

(Enter MRS BURKE.)

MRS BURKE. Mr Todd's a card, ain't he?

ISABEL. A joker.

MRS BURKE. But he's got a kind heart ...

ISABEL. Men are strange animals. You can't always judge them by the outside—Who's the saint, or who's the sinner? They're deceptive. It's different with us women. We haven't such a mysterious sub-conscious—it comes too quickly to the surface. Our looks betray us.

MRS BURKE. Don't you believe it.

ISABEL. That's psycho-analysis. It doesn't seem to get us anywhere. What about supper?

MRS BURKE. It's all prepared. It's a nice chicken.

ISABEL. I'd like a surprise dish, too. What do you suggest?

MRS BURKE *(Baffled)*. Let me think. A surprise, did you say.

ISABEL. That's the idea. It must be something simple. How about stuffed mushrooms?

MRS BURKE. I bought some big ones at the market to-day.

ISABEL. All the better, if they're young and firm.

MRS BURKE. But have a heart, Isabel. I can't stuff 'em.

ISABEL. I'll fix them. I'll make the mince. It'll take only a few minutes. I used to be good at it.

MRS BURKE. I've never learned fancy cooking. I've had too much to do.

ISABEL. I like trying out a new dish once in a while; but I'm afraid I'm not domestic.

MRS BURKE. You can't be everything, dear. I've always been domestic—twice married, with six children and two grandchildren—it hasn't done much for me—a round of sickness and trouble—

always something wrong somewhere—but you just keep on goin' and kiddin' yourself it'll be a fine day tomorrow.

ISABEL. Life's as uncertain as the weather.

*We are not sure of sorrow
And joy was never sure.*

MRS BURKE. That's true enough. If we get a fine day it changes.

(Voices outside—laughter.)

ISABEL. Our distinguished visitors. I'll let them in.

MRS BURKE. I think you can manage. I'll be in the kitchen. *(Exit MRS BURKE.)*

(ISABEL opens door.)

(Enter DENIS, ROSALIE and MAURICE, all in evening dress.)

ISABEL. Hullo. Here you are!

DENIS. An irruption of the barbarians.

(Introductions.)

ISABEL. Delighted to see you.

DENIS. Rosalie—my fiancé

ISABEL. Isn't she charming?

ROSALIE. It's the relationship of tones, Den says.

DENIS. And this is my dear old friend, Maurice—we were boys together—Maurice Hanley, the famous Australian cow-boy novelist.

MAURICE *(Bashfully)*. Glad to meet you.

ISABEL. Welcome, all.

ROSALIE. I'm the only stranger in this burg. I'm a New Yorker.

ISABEL. Put your things anywhere.

(They park cloaks etc.)

DENIS *(With professional air)*. I like your flat, Isabel. It's modernist—that means a quaint mixture of the old style and the new—and the new is older than the old—it's amusing, but you've made it liveable.

ISABEL. I wish that were true. Please find some seats.

(They take seats.)

Are you liking New York, Maurice?

MAURICE. I don't know what to make of it. I'm still a bit strange to the streets and traffic and constant din -

DENIS. You'll have to forgive him for his untutored ways. He's a bush-wacker.

MAURICE. It's a new experience.

ROSALIE. It'll do him a pile of good.

ISABEL. I hope so. This is a place where things happen.

ROSALIE. We like plenty of action.

ISABEL. I see your engagement has been announced in the society papers.

DENIS. Why bring that up! It wasn't my fault. I apologise.

ROSALIE. And we're going to be married in church.

ISABEL. What church?

ROSALIE. We haven't decided on the denomination.

DENIS. I was brought up as a Roman, and Rosalie's a Baptist or something. I don't intend to meet trouble half-way. I'll beat it face to face, at the sacrificial alter.

ISABEL *(Reciting)*.

*You have lead me, like a heathen sacrifice,
With music, and with fatal yoke of flowers,*

To my eternal ruin.

DENIS. That's my position. But I'm a game loser. I don't give a damn.

ROSALIE. It may be all the same to you. You've been married before. It will be only my first wedding, and I want it to be worthy of the occasion.

DENIS. It's Pa's influence. I haven't a say at all. I'm simply another victim of high finance.

ISABEL. I'll see if I can fix you some cocktails. *(She goes to cocktail cabinet and mixes drinks.)*

ROSALIE. How do you like your portrait, Isabel?

ISABEL. It's beautiful—I mean as a work of art.

DENIS. Maurice lost his head about it. Of course, that was a personal, not an aesthetic reaction. He gave me no peace till I promised I'd bring him along to see you.

ISABEL. I thank you both.

MAURICE. I don't say you're a terribly bad painter, Den, but you've done her nothing like justice.

DENIS *(Laughing)*. Excuse my hollow laugh! Depictive art is the science of appearances. It's not subject matter—one subject's as interesting as another. Get the right relationship of tones—this tone against that—light and dark, warm and cool—naturally a form emerges -

ROSALIE. I know, dear, you've said all that before.

DENIS. People have no vision.

(ISABEL brings cocktail tray. All have drinks.)

ISABEL. This isn't my own invention, only my own fancy.

ROSALIE. Isabel's famous as a cocktail mixer.

DENIS. I can drink anything if it has alcohol in it.

MAURICE. I'm not much of a judge. It's a new one to me.

ISABEL. Glad you like it. I'm looking for the best place to hang the portrait.

DENIS *(Looking round)*. What's wrong with the alcove? It would be unobtrusive there. And the light's good.

ISABEL. Good. It was my choice too.

DENIS *(Holding forth brightly, not heavily)*. I'll try to explain to you ignoramuses. You'll like Isabel's portrait because I had an attractive subject. But take Velázquez, the Prince of painters—he painted beautiful women, certainly; but he also painted Phillip the Fourth, with his long Hapsburg chin and heavy jaw, and flat dull features, yet his portraits, truthful, without a thought of flattery or disdain are masterpieces. And take old gin-sodden Rembrandt! He humanised and glorified everything. Subjects like an Anatomy Lesson, with a corpse in the star part—and the interior of a butcher's shop, with meat hanging on the hooks were good enough for him. And take Michaelangelo - ⁵

ROSALIE *(Interrupting him)*. And⁶ take a little drink.

(DEN laughs and has another cocktail.)

Any developments on the theatrical front, Isabel?

ISABEL. There are.

ROSALIE. Sensational?

ISABEL. Decidedly. I've got another part.

DENIS. Cheers.

MAURICE. Congratulations.

ISABEL. It's in a new play.

DENIS. Any good?

⁵ And take Michaelangelo -] C.; And take - A.

⁶ And take] C.; Take A.

ISABEL. Was a new play ever any good. It usen't to be. But it's a good part. I'm excited to-night.
(ISABEL goes to dresser and produces plate of sandwiches.)

DENIS. Hullo! What's all this?

ISABEL. Just a few sandwiches.
(They help themselves.)

DENIS *(Appreciatively)*. Caviar.

MAURICE. Cocktails and caviar. I've read about the night life of a great city without ever dreaming I'd ever have the chance of hitting the high spots.

DENIS. That's a silly notion. Caviar suggests to me the simple village life of the Soviet Union.

MAURICE. That's nothing to laugh at. They may be trying to build something. What the hell are we doing!

DENIS. Bravo, Maurice. Your flow of Ciceronian eloquence is over powering.

MAURICE. There's something pretty rotten in our society.

DENIS. Yours for the revolution.

ISABEL. We live in a changing world. I'm by nature conservative; but from what I recollect I believe this generation, despite its mechanical entourage and superficial scepticism, is better than the last—franker, more sincere, much less complacent, and more intense in its way of living, not only intellectually but emotionally. Let's have another drink. I want to celebrate.
(They all have drinks.)

DENIS. My two greatest joys in life are food and drink—and painting.

ROSALIE. And what of love, Den?

DENIS. Love? I don't attach excessive importance to it. According to my theology, it's something you've got to catch and get over as quickly as possible, and then go on with the interesting business of living.

ROSALIE. I guess he needs re-education of the finer emotions.

DENIS. I've gone round, moonstruck, like a romantic poet of the 'nineties, or the hero of the *Dichterliebe*. But does it matter whether Romeo loves Juliet or Tristan loves Isolde, or anyone loves anyone else—I ask you, social reformers all, what difference does it make to the uplift of the masses!

ISABEL. My theology is different. What are the two greatest emotions that inspire humanity? Religion and love. And can you believe that such profound emotions belong only to a primitive society, and have no place in our own age?

DENIS. I'm a realist. Science and art—that's my religion—the worship of truth and beauty—no shams, no rhetoric, no false sentiment—we've been deceived too long—let's accept reality.

ISABEL. Reality! What is reality? Is a sunset real, or is it an optical delusion? or a chorus ending from Euripides!

DENIS. The old gods are dead—Aphrodite as well as Zeus. Nobody believes in inspiration any more.

ISABEL. I'm not so sure. I distrust science. It may be a whimsey, the⁷ last superstition of the rationalist.

DENIS. Don't undermine my faith, Isabel.

ISABEL. I'll leave that to Rosalie. There are two sides to our human nature symbolised in the old myth of the chariot of the soul—driven by two steeds—one white and one black—intellect and passion—a fierce conflict between the force of good and evil. But don't we know now that one is as necessary as the other, the noble white steed of our so called higher self, and the bad black steed of our dark, unknown unfathomable instincts!

⁷ be a whimsey, the] C.; be the A.

MAURICE. I'm not a psychologist. All I know is what I've gathered from life and nature.

DENIS. Maurice belongs to the age of innocence.

MAURICE. You may be right, Den. I'm soon out of my intellectual depth. I ought to be back in the bush—on the tail of the cattle—that's where I belong.

ISABEL (*Going to door*). I'll be back in a moment. I've something to see to.

(*Exit ISABEL.*)

ROSALIE. I don't know who's right, Isabel or Den. Perhaps they both are.

DENIS. What do you think of the siren, Maurice?

MAURICE. Didn't I tell you you didn't do her justice.

DENIS. Get back to the bush.

ROSALIE. I've been out on a ranch. It's awfully fascinating. I love wild life.

DENIS. The wild life of Manhattan cocktail parties.

ROSALIE. Denis is serious only in his art.

DENIS. You're serious only in your frivolity.

ROSALIE. That's a libel.

MAURICE. There's one thing I can say. New York hasn't spoiled Den.

ROSALIE. I'm thankful for that.

MAURICE. He's the same damned little elf as before.

DENIS. You're positively scintillating to-night, pal. Can it be the influence of New York, or, I don't want to say it, is it Isabel?

ROSALIE. I shouldn't be surprised if he had vision.

(*Enter ISABEL.*)

ISABEL. It isn't often you get a good break. I'm feeling a bit above myself. Shall we have supper?

MAURICE. Supper—drinks—conversation among friends—that's what I call true culture. I've been in a state of somnolence bordering on coma.

DENIS. You're bringing him out, Isabel.

MAURICE. I've been too much of a hermit. Often out in the bush, when I was first attempting to write I longed to meet someone who cared about these things, and was willing to help me out of my difficulties.

ISABEL. There must be some great stories there.

MAURICE. There are, plenty. I've a few good ones if only I could tell them.

DENIS. I'd love to stay, but Rosalie has booked me for some plutocratic function.

ROSALIE. There's a commission waiting for him.

DENIS. I dread the thought of it.

ROSALIE. A magnate—he's a banker you know—considers it is owing to his position that his wife should be expensively painted, the more expensively the better. We can't afford to miss the chance.

DENIS. I don't want to go.

ROSALIE. Neither do I. But I must drag him along.

ISABEL. I've something prepared—one of my few culinary specialities.

DENIS. Don't tempt me, Isabel. I've got to beat it. Economic determinism.

(*DENIS and ROSALIE get their things.*)

MAURICE (*Rising*). Do I go part of your way?

DENIS. No, you don't. You stay right here.

ISABEL. Where do you live, Maurice?

MAURICE. In Washington Square.

ISABEL. In the Bohemian quarter. I used to know it.

MAURICE. My place is quiet enough. It's a small bachelor flat.

ISABEL. I'm being deserted. Won't you wait for supper?

MAURICE (*With show of confidence*). Thank you. I'll be delighted.

DENIS. You can't beat Pa's business method: that is if you find a good thing, you should stay by it.⁸

ROSALIE. This is New York, Maurice. We're just getting started!

DENIS. What a life! Why did I ever become a portrait painter?

ROSALIE/DENIS (*Leave-taking*). Thanks, Isabel!

—It was a lovely time.

—Sorry we have to go.

—So long, Maurice.

—*Au revoir*.

(*Exeunt DENIS and ROSALIE.*)

(*Pause.*)

(*ISABEL goes to the window and looks out.*)

ISABEL. This is Broadway, Maurice.

(*MAURICE goes to her side, also looking out.*)

MAURICE. It's a wonderful⁹ view. It doesn't seem real.

ISABEL. A symphony of light and noise and speed—marvellous—fantastic—it gets you, somehow.¹⁰

MAURICE. It's a strange world to me.

ISABEL. Look. That's life, Maurice, modern life.

MAURICE (*Turning away*). It hasn't got me. I'm an alien.

ISABEL (*Returning to room*). Nonsense.

MAURICE. This is the most urban city on earth—the most artificial. I'm too primitive for it. There is a peasant in me.

ISABEL. You haven't settled down yet. It's an exciting place, stimulating to work in. How's the writing game?

MAURICE. Pretty tough. I managed to sell a few stories to popular magazines—adventure stuff—and I thought I'd made not such a bad beginning, till an American friend assures me that I was in the very slums of literature.

ISABEL. Cheer up! Once I played *East Lynne* with a third rate travelling company. How about supper! I'll show you if I'm any good. Have a cigarette while I arrange things.

(*MAURICE sits on sofa, with cigarette, watching ISABEL arranging table.*)

MAURICE. What beautiful glasses!

ISABEL. Venetian. I found them in an old curio shop.

(*She puts salad bowl on table.*)

MAURICE. What's this. An antique?

ISABEL. It's supposed to be. An old china bowl.

MAURICE. It's lovely.

ISABEL. After my first little success—it was in *Hedda Gabler*—I bought it as a souvenir.

MAURICE. That's a play I never cared for. It's definitely dated.

ISABEL. That's the popular belief. But what really do we know about life! We pride ourselves on our veneer of sophistication—we're wise guys, no longer duped by sentiment or passion—yet does human nature, unpredictable human nature, ever essentially change! After all, despite these

⁸ that is if you find a good thing, you should stay by it.] C.; that if you find a good thing stay by it. A.

⁹ wonderful] B.; marvellous A.

¹⁰ it gets you, somehow.] B.; it gets you. A.

sky-scrapers and cinemas and aeroplanes, we're not yet—though we may be heading that way, just robots in a brave new mechanical world ... Excuse me a minute. We need food.

(Exit ISABEL.)

(MAURICE rises, crosses to window and looks out.)

(Enter ISABEL with dishes.)

MAURICE *(At window)*. Broadway! It's got life, all right; but I doubt if I'll ever love it.

ISABEL *(Putting dishes on table)*. I don't love it—but it fascinates me. It has a strange magic of its own. Sit here Maurice.

MAURICE. Thank you, Isabel.

ISABEL. I haven't anything elaborate—just chicken and salad. *(She passes him plate.)*

MAURICE. Russian salad.

ISABEL. It has no political significance. *(She brings a bottle of wine from cabinet.)* I wonder will you like this wine!

MAURICE. What is it?

ISABEL. *Lachryma Christi!* It's a special favourite of mine. *(She fills glasses, and then takes seat at table.)*

MAURICE *(Lifting glass)*. All the best, Isabel.

ISABEL. Good luck, Maurice.

MAURICE. This is strong wine.

ISABEL. Latin.

MAURICE. I've never had it before.

ISABEL. I was first attracted by the name—*Lachryma Christi*.

MAURICE. It's warm and heady.

ISABEL. Neapolitan. Is the chicken all right?

MAURICE. Excellent.

ISABEL. New York's as much cosmopolitan as America. It has a bit of everything, an amazing place. It gets into your blood somehow.

MAURICE. It's wonderful, I know, with its life and glitter; but an old bush scene, with its sunlight and stillness, gets more into my blood.

ISABEL. Don't talk of the bush, Maurice.

MAURICE. Why not.

ISABEL. I feel homesick. I can't afford to. I've my work to do.

MAURICE. Why am I such a damned primitive.

ISABEL. So am I, Maurice, deep down. If it wasn't vain to say so I believe I draw strength from it.

MAURICE *(Laughing)*. You a primitive! I thought you were the last word in twentieth century sophistication.

ISABEL *(Pensively)*. I was born and brought up in a little country town in far Australia, quiet, unexciting, primitive—a little place unknown in song or story—and supremely unimportant except to those who love it. Fill the glasses, Maurice.

(He fills glasses.)

MAURICE *(Lifting glass)*. *Lachryma Christi*—a wine for lovers.

ISABEL *(In lighter mood)*. You're not married, are you?

MAURICE. Not yet, only engaged.

ISABEL. That's nothing.

MAURICE. I'm not technically engaged. I'm on probation. The family decided I should have to make good before I could be considered. They're country folk living on stations¹¹.

¹¹ country folk living on stations] country folk living on stations or big farms *B.*; business people in Melbourne *A.*

ISABEL. I'm more advanced than you. I have a husband, a technical husband. He's my manager.

MAURICE. Denis mentioned that.

ISABEL. He doesn't live here. This is my flat. He has two of his own. Is that surprising in these days of emancipation?

MAURICE. I'm trying to adjust myself to modern civilised conditions.

ISABEL. He's a fine fellow in his own way, and he's done a lot for me. (*Airily.*) But I'm convinced husbands are one of the plagues of this world. They have a stultifying effect on me. If I had my way I'd put them all in concentration camps. Oh, I'm forgetting the mushrooms.

(*Exit ISABEL.*)

(*MAURICE rises and walks round room .*)

(*Enter ISABEL, with fireproof dish of mushrooms.*)

ISABEL. See what I've made for you.

MAURICE. It looks tempting.

(*They both sit at table.*)

ISABEL. Stuffed mushrooms—my specialty. (*Serves them.*)

MAURICE. Marvellous. This is the life.

ISABEL (*Sincerely*). Some day, when I feel worthy, I want to go back and do something for my country.

MAURICE. But it's barbarous—the intellectual back-blocks.

ISABEL. I like that from you.

MAURICE. It's good enough for the likes of me. I've got no talent. I prefer life to literature.

ISABEL. Doesn't literature come out of life?

MAURICE. I'll have to ask Den. I'm a fool at dialectics.

ISABEL. You'll have to get rid of that inferiority complex. False modesty is an uneasy virtue. You don't know what you can do.

MAURICE. I'll say I don't. I've got a chaos in the should.

ISABEL. That's better. Will you have a liqueur? (*ISABEL gets liqueurs.*)

MAURICE. I can't call myself a literary frustrate. If I'd anything to say, I'd probably be able to say it.

ISABEL (*Giving him glass*). *Maraschino!*

MAURICE. Thanks. You look beautiful Isabel.

ISABEL. That comes like a sudden flash of poetry.

MAURICE. I haven't enough words for a poet. By God, you are beautiful.

ISABEL. Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?

MAURICE. It's true, Isabel, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It was a swell supper. I suppose I'll have to go now.

ISABEL. Why, may I ask?

MAURICE. It's the usual procedure.

ISABEL. How is it that when things get interesting people always want to go home.

MAURICE. You can't call me an escapist.

ISABEL. This may be a memorable moment in both our lives. Let's celebrate it.

MAURICE (*Impetuously*). Yes. We'll celebrate. (*He embraces ISABEL.*)

ISABEL. Maurice!

MAURICE. This is the first time I've ever been in love.

ISABEL. I'm not a cynic. I'm sure you mean it.

MAURICE. Absolutely. It's something I can't express—I'm supposed to be a writer and I'm dumb. But it's true.

ISABEL. And it's my first time, too.

MAURICE (*Quizzically*). You can't put that one over. I'm not the innocent boy from the bush I once was. I've become a sophisticate.

ISABEL (*Simply*). It's true. With Geoff it wasn't love—no, not for one single moment, neither of us ever pretended it was.

MAURICE. I'll never forget this night, Isabel.

ISABEL. Yes, it's love—love *à la mode*. (*ISABEL again fills glasses.*)

MAURICE. And this is the age of rationalism.

ISABEL. Have a drink, Maurice.

Curtain.

ACT TWO [missing]

ACT THREE¹²

(ISABEL's flat, King's Cross, Sydney.)

(Some months later.)

(MRS BURKE is setting table for supper.)

(Enter ISABEL, opening front door with key. She is in evening dress, covered with a dark cape, and she carries a bundle of flowers.)

MRS BURKE. Hullo! where have you been?

ISABEL. I just dashed down the street. I'd forgotten something.

MRS BURKE. I thought you'd bought out the Cross to-day. What have you there?

ISABEL *(Undoing bundle)*. Look—parrot-lilies—aren't they gorgeously barbaric—and a few red roses.

MRS BURKE *(Taking lilies)*. You're too extravagant. I'll put them over here, in the vase.

(MRS BURKE puts lilies in big vase on cabinet.)

How do they look?

ISABEL. Glorious.

MRS BURKE. I'll get them some water.

(Exit MRS BURKE.)

(ISABEL puts roses in bowl on table.)

(Re-enter MRS BURKE with jug.)

MRS BURKE *(Watering flowers)*. That'll freshen them up.

ISABEL *(Holding up tin)*. And here's another thing.

MRS BURKE. What?

ISABEL. Caviar.

MRS BURKE. Messy stuff. I don't fancy it.

ISABEL. Caviar to the general. I'll make a few sandwiches.

MRS BURKE. You're overdoin' it. Our kitchen table's like a delicatessen.

ISABEL. You don't do so badly in King's Cross if you know where to go.

MRS BURKE. Give me old Manhattan.

ISABEL *(Going to window and looking out)*. It hasn't a view like this. Don't you love it—the Harbour, the ferries, the twinkling lights -

MRS BURKE. Don't get so excited, Isabel.

ISABEL. Have a heart, my dear. Can you wonder that I'm just a little bit excited?

MRS BURKE. I know the answer to that one. It's Maurice.

ISABEL *(With feigned surprise)*. How in the world did you guess that?

MRS BURKE. Because you're all hot up. He's coming to-night, isn't he?

ISABEL *(Slowly)*. Perhaps.

MRS BURKE. I thought so. That's what all the fuss is about. You didn't deceive me for a moment.

ISABEL. I didn't try to. His movements are uncertain.

MRS BURKE. Too uncertain, in my opinion.

ISABEL. Wait and see.

MRS BURKE. Don't take me up wrong. I'm not the one to pick faults in a man. Maurice's a swell guy—I've a soft spot for him myself.

ISABEL. You're making me jealous.

MRS BURKE. I was real glad to see him waiting on the quay when the boat came in.

¹² ACT THREE] Manuscript reads 'ACT III'. Pagination is not continuous, beginning with '2' on second page of the new act. Given the brevity of the entire play, it appears like that the manuscript is missing ACT TWO.

ISABEL. I was expecting him.

MRS BURKE. Sure. You can't help liking him—he's so natural—but let me warn you, Isabel, he's only human.

ISABEL. Yes, human. He's too human.

MRS BURKE. What's happened to him all these weeks!

ISABEL. How do I know! He's on a station.

MRS BURKE. But he hasn't been near.

ISABEL. It isn't easy to leave your work. And his relations have grabbed him. He has heaps of them.

MRS BURKE. That's no excuse for being away so long—a whole month. He can't pull a stunt like that.

ISABEL. You mustn't judge people by their official actions. You take a cynical view of life, Mrs Burke.

MRS BURKE. I've seen a lot of it.

ISABEL. He'll come to-night if he can—he must come. ... Do you know we had a week-end in the Blue Mountains?

MRS BURKE. You [dark] lady, I suspected as much.

ISABEL. I couldn't tell you till I saw him.

MRS BURKE. Did you put him on the spot?

ISABEL. You're too hard, dear. We had a great time. I enjoyed every moment of it.

MRS BURKE. You're too impetuous, Isabel. You wanna be tough like me. In this world we're all goin' to get what's coming to us.

ISABEL. I hope I can take it. (*With sudden fear.*) God, you may be right.

MRS BURKE (*Sympathetically*). What's the matter?

ISABEL. What should be the matter?

MRS BURKE. Has he changed?

ISABEL. No. No! He didn't seem different to me. And yet -

MRS BURKE. Yet what?

ISABEL. I'm not sure, not absolutely sure. How can I be!

MRS BURKE. Is that what's upsetting you?

ISABEL (*With recovered poise*). Don't you worry. I'm prepared for everything.

(*Short Pause.*)

MRS BURKE (*Philosophically*). Ah, well, it's a great life if you don't weaken.

ISABEL. I could tell you something.

MRS BURKE. What's the big news?

ISABEL. It's all arranged. He's coming to-night, to-night! He wouldn't let me down. He'll be here at any moment.

MRS BURKE (*Examining things critically*). The way you've got the room decorated, with your parrot-lilies and all, you might be expecting the President.

ISABEL. There'll be no guests. We'll have a quiet night to ourselves.

MRS BURKE. What about those sandwiches.

ISABEL. I'll cut them now.

MRS BURKE. Listen a moment. I'm not a spoil-sport, as you know—but don't take men too seriously—they're no better than God made 'em.

ISABEL (*Gaily*). Don't be such a wet blanket. This will be a great night—a thrilling night—I'll have to hurry. I've to put on my final polish. I'll try to look my very best. It's an occasion.

(*Exit ISABEL.*)

(MRS BURKE does her best to make the room as right as possible, arranging a few things here and there.)

(A ring at door.)

(MRS BURKE opens door. Enter MAURICE. He is in evening dress.)

MRS BURKE. Welcome stranger.

MAURICE *(Shaking hands)*. How are you, Mrs Burke? I see you're still using the same beauty treatment.

MRS BURKE *(Directly)*. Where have you been?

MAURICE. I've been in the country.

MRS BURKE. I'll take your things.

(She takes his coat and hat and puts them away.)

MAURICE. Thank you. Back in the bush with horses and cattle.

MRS BURKE. I thought you'd given us the big go-by.

MAURICE. Give me a chance.

MRS BURKE. The Bronx cheer.

MAURICE. Haven't you a few kind words?

MRS BURKE. You and your cow-boy stuff. I prefer the lights of the city.

MAURICE. You're a sophisticate.

MRS BURKE. And what's your act.

MAURICE. It's a secret. How's Isabel?

MRS BURKE. All right. She'll be here in a minute.

(MAURICE takes seat and lights cigarette.)

MAURICE. Now, seriously, as a world traveller, what are your impressions of Sydney?

MRS BURKE. We've only been here a month. I'm not used to the climate. It's too warm, and it's the same for weeks at a time. I like changes.

MAURICE. Oh, I was forgetting you hadn't been here before. You're a refugee.

MRS BURKE. I'm not complaining. It has its points, and I've got Isabel. How do you like our little flat?

MAURICE. It couldn't be better—a combination of the classic and modernist.

MRS BURKE. It was Isabel's idea. She wanted to make it as much like the old place as possible.

MAURICE. Yes, it is familiar.

(Rises and examines a few objects.)

Here are the antiques—you wouldn't call them counter-revolutionary, would you? And here's Den's portrait.

MRS BURKE. We didn't bring any heavy furniture, only a few things Isabel always wanted round.

(MAURICE stands before portrait.)

MAURICE. Den hit it all right. It's a mighty good painting. It could be so one but Isabel.

MRS BURKE. There's no one else like Isabel.

MAURICE. That's true. She's out on her own.

MRS BURKE. Say what you like, we had some gay times in New York, good old Broadway!

(MAURICE goes to window.)

MAURICE. Let's see. *(Looking out.)* But the view is different. *(Returning.)* And life is different.

(Enter ISABEL.)

ISABEL. Maurice!

MAURICE. Who is this vision? Isabel.

(They kiss lightly.)

ISABEL. Glad you could come.

MAURICE. It's an honour to meet such a distinguished visitor.

ISABEL. Don't be silly. How's station life?

MAURICE. It's good, primitive, of course, but satisfying. It's a sort of family affair.

ISABEL. I know—all cousins, uncles, aunts and other relations. I've forgotten, mine, thank Heaven. They used to haunt me.

MAURICE. You're different from the rest of us. You're one of the chosen few strong enough to live alone.

ISABEL (*Frightened*). Don't say that. You frighten me.

MAURICE. How's the show going?

ISABEL. It's a terrific rush.

MRS BURKE. We've all been leading a fast life. This is Isabel's first night off.

ISABEL. You know what a new production means, discussions about lighting—drapes, props—all the damned modern mechanics—intensely interesting and important, with everybody in a tempestuous whirl, from the producer to the electrician—artists as men of action—thank God we open next week.

MRS BURKE. Sometimes she behaves very badly. She's like a time-bomb, you never know when she's going to explode.

ISABEL. You can't put that one over. It's my life, and I love it Maurice. Anyway you seem to thrive on it.

MRS BURKE. It's my first break too. I hope you behave yourselves. I've got to put on my hat.

(Exit MRS BURKE.)

(ISABEL and MAURICE go instinctively to window and look over Harbour.)

MAURICE. Our Harbour.

ISABEL. It's *ravissant*, an enchantment.

MAURICE. It's something of our own, and not too bad.

ISABEL. A conventional understatement.

(Short pause.)

Let's have a drink.

(ISABEL goes to cabinet and mixes cocktails.)

(MAURICE sits on sofa.)

MAURICE. Heard from Den lately?

ISABEL. Yes. I had a letter this week. *(Hands MAURICE cocktail.)* Try this.

MAURICE *(Taking glass)*. Thank you.

ISABEL *(Lifting glass)*. Cheers!

(They drink.)

MAURICE. You can still mix a good cocktail, Isabel.

ISABEL. I haven't all the various little exotic concoctions we used to get in New York. Still, I've done my best.

MAURICE. You've got the art of making a cocktail something original—even personal, if I may say so.

ISABEL. I'm flattered at your appreciation.

MAURICE. How's Den?

ISABEL. He's as whimsical as ever. He tells me he's fulfilling Pa's highest expectations.

MAURICE. A clever chap and a damned good painter. He can hold his own in any company.

ISABEL. His latest exhibition was a brilliant success.

MAURICE. I can well believe it. He only needed a chance. We didn't throw bouquets at him when he was here; but if he returns, crowned with laurels, we'll hail him as a national hero.

ISABEL. I don't think he would look the part.

MAURICE. And how's the beautiful Rosalie?

ISABEL. Resplendent as ever. They're a most devoted couple ... strange, for it wasn't really a love-match.

MAURICE. That may be the reason.

ISABEL. Of course, it isn't insipidly serene. There are minor differences. For instance, Rosalie has made his studio famous, turning it into a kind of show-place.

MAURICE. I can see Den there, trying to be polite to people he usually despises.

ISABEL. He hates it—but that's the American style.

MAURICE. They don't do things by halves over there. They go the whole hog.

ISABEL. I admire them for that.

MAURICE. It's modern life at quick tempo, but essentially hard and practical.

ISABEL. I don't believe it. We moderns, as we naively call ourselves, we like to think we're hard and practical, ultra-sophisticated, unromantic—disillusioned sceptics—yet underneath the bubbles of frivolity on the surface there may still be flowing a strong stream of deep and passionate emotion ...

MAURICE. We live in a changing world, and nobody seems to know what's right and what's wrong.

(Enter MRS BURKE in coat and hat. She carries a plate of sandwiches.)

ISABEL *(Banteringly)*. Look at her, the siren, dressed up like a movie-star.

MRS BURKE. Don't be flippant. Here's your silly sandwiches.

(She puts them on the table.)

MAURICE. Gee-whizz. I'm amazed. Where do we go from here.

ISABEL. She's a fast worker. She's off to make whoopee.

MRS BURKE. If you want to know, I'm going to the pictures.

ISABEL *(Laughingly)*. An incurable romantic at heart.

MRS BURKE. That's nothing to laugh at. I like a bit o' romance—something to take you out of yourself—you don't find much in real life.

MAURICE. That's so. It's not a romantic age.

ISABEL. I wouldn't be so dogmatic about it. Remember there was a first-class murder in the cabaret over the road there.

MRS BURKE. That was before we arrived. It's not much of a show now. I sometimes wish they'd murder the trombone-player.

ISABEL *(Kissing her)*. Mrs Burke's a darling, and I couldn't do without her; but I regret to say she has a poor sense of morals.

MRS BURKE. I never had time for any morals; but I was always respectable.

MAURICE. In this loose age, that's something at least to be proud of.

MRS BURKE. Respectability, I never got any medals for it; but it's about all I've got left, and it's no darned good to me.

ISABEL. You can see I've got my work cut out to keep her to the straight and narrow.

MRS BURKE. You've done a good job ... I'll have to hurry. You'll find everything ready, I think.

ISABEL. I'm sure I shall.

MRS BURKE. Well, I'll leave you now. It's a funny world. I hope you have a pleasant evening.

ISABEL. Thank you.

MAURICE. Good-night, Mrs Burke.

MRS BURKE. Good-night, children. See you later.

(Exit MRS BURKE.)

ISABEL. See what I've here -

(She offers plate of sandwiches.)

Do you fancy a sandwich?

MAURICE (*Taking one*). Caviar!

ISABEL. I thought you like it.

MAURICE. It's an acquired taste.

ISABEL. Not in our world.

MAURICE. You are setting a fast pace.

ISABEL. Why not! This is a kind of celebration.

MAURICE (*Embarrassedly*). Oh!

ISABEL (*Laughingly*). You see, Geoff's got our divorce—that's something to celebrate surely. It lets us both out.

MAURICE. I never really knew him. He belongs to a world I don't understand.

ISABEL. Poor Geoff! I've nothing against him. He was a good pal according to his lights.

MAURICE. The sky-lights of Broadway.

ISABEL. I believe my nerves are better. I'm ashamed to have such quivering nerves, another weakness of woman.

MAURICE (*Pleasantly*). You were always a little histrionic, Isabel.

ISABEL. That's not unnatural for an actress. We must run true to type. (*Gets cocktail.*) Just one other.

MAURICE (*With glass*). Success to the show!

ISABEL. I'll be here for about a year, and I'm terribly excited to be back. I know I'm nomadic—even playing with a travelling company through the provinces held no terrors for me—I enjoyed being in different towns every week, hanging stockings from lodging house windows—home was never like that—and yet, it's good too to be back—I'll show them if I'm any good.—I'll get the supper.

(*ISABEL goes out and returns with dishes.*)

Sit down, Maurice.

(*He takes place at table.*)

Here we are—a table for two—as in a good restaurant.

MAURICE. Much better.

ISABEL (*Passes plate*). Try this—just chicken and salad. You won't get much else. It's not an elaborate supper.

MAURICE. *Salad a la Russe*. You're going all Asiatic to-night.

ISABEL. Nonsense.

MAURICE (*Observing objects*). Why, here are your Venetian glasses, and the old Chinese bowl -

ISABEL. Do you remember them?

MAURICE. I should think so. (*Takes up glass.*) It's a beauty.

ISABEL. Wait a moment. It needs filling.

(*ISABEL gets bottle from cabinet.*)

See what I've got for you.

(*Puts bottle ceremoniously in centre of table.*)

A bottle of wine.

MAURICE. What's this! It can't be! *Lachryma Christi!*

ISABEL. The real thing.

MAURICE. You're a conjurer.

ISABEL. It isn't as easy to get here as in New York—but I had to have it.

MAURICE. *Lachryma Christi!* (*He fills glasses.*)

ISABEL. I might have got you a finer wine; but you must excuse a woman's sentiment.

MAURICE. You're as unpredictable as ever, Isabel.

ISABEL. I liked it, I fancy, for its name. It's a strong heady wine, tasting of Naples and Pompeii, dust and sunshine and shameless Latin passion.

MAURICE (*Putting down glass*). I think it's excellent.

ISABEL. It used to be. That was a long time ago—How's the chicken?

MAURICE. Good.

(*Pause.*)

ISABEL. By the way, Maurice, you haven't written me a line for a week.

MAURICE. I thought it would be better if you forgot me for a while.

ISABEL. Is your personality as devastating as that! I did miss a note, though.

MAURICE. I'm sorry.

ISABEL. Do you think I've gone off much?

MAURICE. Don't be ridiculous. You look as radiant as ever.

ISABEL. It may be the make-up.

MAURICE. I'm just taking it in that this room is just about the same as your flat on Broadway—the same ornaments—your picture there—the cabinet—these glasses -

ISABEL. That's the effect I tried to create. I didn't think I'd succeed.

MAURICE. Where are we? In Darlington or Broadway?

ISABEL. Do you remember that at our first meeting we drank a bottle of *Lachryma Christi*?

MAURICE. Of course I do. How could I forget!

ISABEL. I felt then that you are the only man I ever loved, or ever would love.

MAURICE (*Startled*). Good God, Isabel, don't say that. I'm not good enough.

ISABEL (*Lightly*). I suppose it's only a matter of attraction and repulsion. Some day the whole thing may be explained by mathematical physics.

MAURICE. Don't be cynical, Isabel.

ISABEL. I don't mean to be.

MAURICE. I don't ask a great deal from life. I love animals—horses and dogs—open-air work-space and sunshine—perhaps I want a wife and children—a rambling old homestead—enough to live on without worry—simple enough things, the opposite from all this.

ISABEL. I want contradictory things. I'm not completely civilised—I love wild things too. But I want also the things of the spirit. My life's in my work.

MAURICE. I'm a stick-in-the-mud—the eternal peasant rooted to the soil.

ISABEL. You may be close to the real and permanent things. I've used you, Maurice—not knowingly, I trust, but unconsciously—your stimulus has kept me going.

MAURICE. That's damned rot. What could I do!

ISABEL. I act better with you to help me—and acting, though it may sound idiotic to you—is more important to me than mere living.

MAURICE. I put life first. Life has to be lived. It's all we've got.

ISABEL. You're right—I know you're right—life's the thing, but I can't help my perverse personality ... drink up, Maurice. It's much ado about nothing.

(*They drink.*)

MAURICE. When the world's in a state of chaos—with millions of suffering people—does it matter greatly what happens to the individual?

ISABEL. And yet what else matters. Life is an individual affair. Each of us must die alone.

MAURICE. That's theology, not practical politics.

(*Short pause.*)

ISABEL. How long were we lovers?

MAURICE (*Startled*). Don't Isabel.

ISABEL. Six months—six whole months—well, that's a long time for a love-affair.

MAURICE. That was another world.
ISABEL. You don't seem very enthusiastic about it.
MAURICE. It was a miracle.
ISABEL. You were a strange creature in that environment—it wasn't your natural element.
MAURICE. I was pretty hard up at times. I couldn't do the stuff they wanted or any one else wanted. Sometimes I couldn't sell a damn thing, not even my best seller.
ISABEL. But the struggles, the disappointments and the celebrations we had over the slightest little success—it all seems so fabulous and far-away. They are not long, the weeping and the laughter
Love and desire and hate -
MAURICE. That sounds decadent poetry to me.
ISABEL (*Looking at him intensely*). Maurice!
MAURICE. Yes.
ISABEL. I've a simple question to ask you.
MAURICE. What is it?
ISABEL. Have you changed?
MAURICE. I don't think I've changed, Isabel. There wasn't much to change.
ISABEL. Luckily I'm feeling fine for the opening night.
MAURICE (*Seriously*). I've failed you, Isabel.
ISABEL. What does that mean?
MAURICE. I'm not like you. I couldn't keep up with you. Oh, you're a fire-fly.
ISABEL. Do I take that as a compliment or as a reproach?
MAURICE. Neither. When I came back, away from the whirl of New York, I saw clearly enough to what world I was attached.
ISABEL. Surely to God you don't mean to give up your career, and soberly settle down!
MAURICE. I've got to go my own way.
ISABEL. Your own way—not with me!
MAURICE. Everything's different now.
ISABEL. Different!
MAURICE. I'm simply not good enough.
ISABEL. That's a polite way of saying you've ceased to love me.
MAURICE. You're excitable to-night, Isabel.
ISABEL. Not unnaturally.
MAURICE. Passion isn't everything.
ISABEL. Passion—tempestuous passion, I mean, seems to demand a fatal ending.
MAURICE. Not in this age. It can end, prosaically enough, in marriage.
ISABEL. Marriage!
MAURICE. You'll forgive me, Isabel.
ISABEL. There's nothing to forgive.
MAURICE. I'm going to be married.
ISABEL. You! (*ISABEL laughs wildly.*)
MAURICE. Don't laugh like that.
ISABEL. You must excuse me. It came as a shock.
MAURICE. I didn't imagine you cared like that.
ISABEL. I must be a fool. I thought it would be all right—the same as before ...
MAURICE. Everything changes, Isabel.
ISABEL. That's true. I should have know that it's fashionable nowadays for love affairs to be short.
MAURICE. We must be realistic about it.
ISABEL. God help me. I seem to be the aggressor.

MAURICE. You're an anachronism. You're living in the wrong century.

ISABEL. When you met me at the boat, were you engaged then?

MAURICE. Yes.

ISABEL. Why didn't you tell me, Maurice?

MAURICE. I meant to, honestly I did; but when it came to the point I put it off.

ISABEL. You were always sincere. I trusted you absolutely.

MAURICE. I'll have to admit it. I hadn't the courage.

ISABEL. What is this thing called love. It plays strange tricks with mortals.

MAURICE. Be calmer, Isabel. You're too intense.

ISABEL (*Lightly again*). That's what Geoffrey used to say. (*She fills glasses.*) Let's drink and be merry.

(*They drink.*)

Here's to family life.

MAURICE. Good luck, Isabel. You were always a good sport.

(*ISABEL lights cigarette, rises from table, and walks about room.*)

ISABEL. How do you like this dress, and these fancy slippers?

MAURICE. They're exquisite.

ISABEL. I must be a defeatist.

MAURICE. Not on your life.

ISABEL. I suppose it means more to a woman that it does to a man. Man's life is of man's life a thing apart, you know. ... How's the next novel?

MAURICE. I'm still plugging away at it.

ISABEL. Is it a thriller or a tale of refined sentiment—blood or fluff?

MAURICE. A moment ago I thought you were too serious. Now you're delightfully flippant.

ISABEL. Caprice—a woman's privilege. You have a most satisfactory philosophy, Maurice; but unfortunately it isn't mine. Life, you say, that's all that matters. But what's living? Anyone can live. But what's life without love? When you're in love it's a different world, everything looks fresh and exciting, dawn and sunset, the routine of nature—dull streets and people passing—you seem to be looking at the world for the first time. And things are just the same. It's absurd that a purely subjective emotion should be able to create such a magical illusion. But is it illusion? Maybe, under the spell of the Cyprian our vision is a little clearer.

MAURICE. You look more than ever like a Bacchante, Isabel.

ISABEL. It must be the *Lachryma Christi*. (*Changing mood, she faces him.*) It's come to this, Maurice. I don't blame you, I don't blame myself. But when love goes, everything goes. This isn't hysterics or heroics. I may have got things all wrong, but that's the way I'm made. I may be heading for a fall. I'm afraid I'm in to exalted a mood. The Greeks had a word for it—*hubris*.

MAURICE. Good God, Isabel, I didn't mean to hurt you like that.

ISABEL. It may be sheer selfishness on my part.

MAURICE. Damn it all, you'll soon get over it. It's a wonder you've stood me so long. You're ten times better than I am. I'm only the average normal man, helping to keep the world going—there's one born every minute. You're in a different class—you're an exception, you're a champion. Oh, excuse me a moment—the mushrooms.

(*Exit ISABEL.*)

(*MAURICE rises and walks about the room, worried and perplexed.*)

(*Enter ISABEL, with dish of stuffed mushrooms.*)

ISABEL. Here are the famous stuffed mushrooms.

(*She serves them.*)

MAURICE. They're as marvellous as ever.

ISABEL. No, the glory has departed. Brightness falls from the air.

MAURICE. Don't you believe it.

ISABEL. We can't recapture the past. I tried to, but it was impossible. We can't cross the same river twice. It's not the same river.

MAURICE. I want to write a real novel some day—not yet. I'll have to go out into the bush all alone and think quietly, and try to puzzle out what it all means.

ISABEL. I hope married life won't spoil the opus.

MAURICE. That's not for you, Isabel.

ISABEL. No, certainly not. It was never my ambition to add more fools to the population.

MAURICE. You're not the maternal type.

ISABEL (*Gaily*). Is she a blonde or a red-head?

MAURICE. Brunette.

ISABEL. That was always your natural taste—the dark lady of the station—God knows why you ever fell for me.

MAURICE. Anyway we've seen it through.

ISABEL. To its noble close.

MAURICE. Surely we'll always be good friends.

ISABEL. That's an amazing suggestion.

MAURICE. What's wrong, Isabel?

ISABEL. Everything or nothing! Did you like our little supper Maurice?

MAURICE. It was perfect.

ISABEL. I've only two liqueurs—*Maraschino* and *Prunelle*—both very maidenly -

MAURICE. Either will do.

ISABEL. This may be our last supper.

MAURICE. No. Why should it me?

ISABEL. I'm no longer your Juliet, your Helena, your Isolde. The best you can do for me, Maurice, is to cast me for a kind of unofficial wife in the background. I'm sorry the role wouldn't suit me.

MAURICE. You're too intense. I can't live on the heights all the time. I told you there was a peasant in me, a plodder, rooted to the earth. You're all light and air and fire.

ISABEL. Do people ever know themselves.

MAURICE. It was the most marvellous time of my life, but I couldn't stay the course.

(*ISABEL releases a catch in her large ring and lifts the face of it.*)

MAURICE. What have you got there?

ISABEL. I always carry a little powder in this ring, dope to soothe the nerves—in case anything like this might happen.

To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,

A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket! -

MAURICE. What the hell's that!

ISABEL. I'm sane and clear of mind. I've exhausted all my wiles, all my supposed feminine charms. I've tempted you with supper, with *Lachryma Christi*, with old memories. And everything went flop. But I had to make sure, Maurice, deadly sure.

(*She shakes powder from ring into wine-glass.*)

MAURICE. What's the stunt, Isabel?

ISABEL (*Taking up glass*). Forgive me, Maurice. People in love do extraordinary things. It's not revenge. I don't want to spoil anything.

(*Short pause.*)

But I had to make the scene. I couldn't bear a tame ending.

(*She drinks the wine quickly.*)

MAURICE (*Going to her*). Tell me, what was the powder you poured in your glass?

ISABEL (*Slowly*). Cyanide.

MAURICE. No, no. It's not poison. You wouldn't do that.

ISABEL. It's quick.

(*The glass falls from her hand and crashes to the floor.*)

O, shut the door! And when thou hast done so,

Come weep with me, past hope, past cure, past help.

(*She staggers and drops on sofa.*)

MAURICE. Isabel!

(*He holds ISABEL in his arms as he kneels beside the sofa.*)

ISABEL (*Faintly*). I wanted total love—not love *à la mode* -

(*She sinks back on sofa.*)

Curtain.

Notes

Act One

ISABEL's flat, Broadway, New York: Esson and Hilda spent nine months in New York from 25 December, 1916, staying initially at 39 West Washington Square. By June, 1917 they had moved to an apartment at 1947 Broadway [at W 66th Street; now the Julliard School Irene Diamond Building]. They left for London on 8 September the same year.

I go to the pictures: the nearest 'picture palace' for Isabel would have been the ex-vaudeville house *Palace Theatre*, at 1564 Broadway at Times Square (a twenty minute walk).

Melba: Dame Nellie Melba (1861–1931), born Helen Porter Mitchell, Australian operatic soprano. She took the pseudonym 'Melba' from Melbourne, her home town.

Suet pudding: a boiled pudding, with suet as the shortening, with dried fruits.

Sydney Harbour Bridge: a steel through arch bridge across Sydney Harbour opened in 1932.

Camille: *La Dame aux Camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*) (1848), a French novel by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*. A stage adaptation by Edmond Rostand was presented by JC Williamson at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne in 1905 (starring Minnie Tittell Brune).

Sarah Bernhardt: original name Henriette-Rosine Bernard, referred to as 'the Divine Sarah' (1844-1923), French actress. She earned international fame playing *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *Fédora*, *Thédora*, *La Tosca*, Cléopâtre and as Marguérite Gautier, the redeemed courtesan in *La Dame aux Camélias*. Bernhardt performed much of this repertoire when she toured Australia in 1891, presented by Williamson, Garner and Musgrove.

Duse: Eleonora Duse (1858–1924), Italian actress, often known simply as 'Duse'. She came to fame in Italian versions of roles made famous by Sarah Bernhardt (with who she was often compared as a rival). Duse's style was less declamatory than Bernhardt, and known for her total assumption of the roles she portrayed.

Strindberg: Johan August Strindberg (1849–1912), Swedish expressionist playwright, novelist, poet, essayist and painter. See Esson's 'Expressionism in Drama', *Bulletin*, 15 March 1923.

Tchekov: Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860–1904), Russian playwright and short story writer; considered the 'father of theatrical realism.' [See Esson's 'Something with a Cow In It', *Bulletin*, 5 November, 1914; 'The Letters of Chekhov', *Fellowship*, June 1920 ; 'The Old Bogatyr' [Chekhov and Gorki], *Bulletin*, 21 August 1924; 'C K Munro', *Bulletin*, 30 July 1925]

Desdemona: a character in William Shakespeare's play *Othello* (c. 1601–1604). Shakespeare's Desdemona is a Venetian beauty who enrages and disappoints her father, a Venetian senator, when she elopes with Othello, a Moor several years her senior.

Juliet: Juliet Capulet, the female protagonist in William Shakespeare's romantic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet is the only daughter of the patriarch of the House of Capulet and falls in love with Romeo, a member of the House of Montague (with which the Capulets have a blood feud).

distingué: (*French*) distinguished.

The Stronger: (*Swedish: Den starkare*), play by August Strindberg (1889). The play consists of only one scene. Two actresses meet accidentally while Christmas shopping; one is the lover of the other's husband.

Wasn't it Nietzsche who said that marriages would be more satisfactory if married people did not live together: 'Friendship is the highest form of love,' according to the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, 'because great friends inspire each other and can even push each other towards the ideal of the Übermensch.' While he was sceptical that many people would be strong enough for this kind of higher relationship, Nietzsche saw friendship as essential to a good marriage. Sex, in contrast, creates complications, because a relationship based on romantic feelings is unlikely

to endure a lifetime. Furthermore, according to Nietzsche, the ontological differences between men and women tend to turn love into a war. In order to overcome the power games in the arena of love, Nietzsche thus challenges lovers to be great friends. Esson wrote to Padraic Colum (10 June 1918) 'Once I followed (in theory) Nietzsche's doctrine of "living dangerously," but now I would prefer an Oriental calm.'

the New Deal: a series of federal programs, public work projects, and financial reforms and regulations, enacted in the United States from 1933 in response to the Great Depression [3 Rs: Relief, Recovery, and Reform]. The New Deal included both laws passed by Congress as well as presidential executive orders, most during the first term of the Presidency of Democrat Franklin D Roosevelt (1882-1945).

We are not sure of sorrow: *The Garden of Proserpine* by English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909)

*We are not sure of sorrow;
And joy was never sure;
To-day will die to-morrow;
Time stoops to no man's lure;
And love, grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure. ...*

Esson writes to Vance Palmer of having just read Swinburn's letters (21 March 1919): 'I find that he used to go for a swim in winter and delight in storm and tempest. He had a superb contempt for the classic Mediterranean, that "tideless, dolorous, midland sea." Without doubt these northerners must have marvelous vitality.'

Cow-boy novelist: It's an odd choice of words by Esson; the Australian version of the cow-boy was 'the stockman.' But if Esson did have a reference for the character of Maurice, the closest 'stockman novelist' produced during the 1930s was Sydney writer Ion Idriess (1889-1979), who who have been well know for his early stories in *The Bulletin* before the first War. Idriess's biography of Sidney Kidman, *The Cattle King* was published in 1936.

modernist: Esson spoke of 'modernity' in art as early as 1901 in his first published article in the *Melbourne Age*: 'The National Gallery' (13 July), and while he regularly used the term 'modern', both in his published prose and correspondence throughout his life, it is only in *Lachryma Christi* that he specifically uses the term in its reactionary sense, to make the contrast with classical and traditional forms. In an unpublished article, his last known piece of prose, on 'The Legend of Australian Art' in 1938, Esson writes of critic Basil Buschel as 'a champion of Modernism (meaning those painters who derive from Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh).—Manuscript in Campbell Howard Collection, UNE.

a bush-wacker: (*Australian slang*) one who lives in the bush; a bushie; often viewed as unsophisticated.

You have lead me, like a heathen sacrifice ... eternal ruin.: John Webster *The White Devil* (1612) IV.ii

DENIS. ... Depictive art is the science of appearances. ... Get the right relationship of tones—this tone against that—light and dark, warm and cool—naturally a form emerges: Esson references the theory and technique of his friend, and fellow Scott, artist Max Meldrum who was considered the founder of Australian atonalism. Meldrum argued that 'painting was a pure science of optical analysis,' and believed that 'a painter should aim to create an exact illusion of spatial depth by carefully observing in nature tone and tonal relationships (shades of light and dark) and spontaneously recording them in the order that they had been received by the eye.'

Velázquez, the Prince of painters: Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), Spanish painter; a member of Spanish King Philip IV's royal court; well know for 'Las Meninas' as well as many renowned court portraits.

Phillip the Fourth: (1605-1665), King of Spain (1621–65) and of Portugal (1621–40), succeeding his father Phillip III; his reign witnessed the decline of Spain as a great world power.

old gin-sodden Rembrandt: Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669), Dutch draughtsman, painter, and printmaker. Gin was developed in Holland in the 17th century, produced as a medicine and sold in chemist shops to treat stomach complaints, gout and gallstones. To make it more palatable, the Dutch started to flavour it with juniper, which had medicinal properties of its own. Esson wrote to Vance Palmer (16 February 1917) that he saw 'Rembrandts ... Corot, Manet, Chavannes, Whitley and others' at the Metropolitan in New York.

Anatomy Lesson: 'The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp' (1632) by Rembrandt.

Ciceronian eloquence: Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC), Roman politician and lawyer, who served as consul in the year 63 BC. He came from a wealthy municipal family of the Roman equestrian order, and is considered one of Rome's greatest orators and prose stylists.

like a romantic poet of the 'nineties: It difficult to know who Denis is referencing here; all the great romantic poets—Coleridge, Shelley, Burns, Pushkin, Keats, Byron, Wordsworth, Blake—were all dead, and by the 1890s, the movement was well in decline (replaced by the modernist movement in literature). Perhaps Esson was trying to conjure an image of the Aesthetic movement, as he often quotes William Morris in correspondence and prose writing (especially linked with WB Yeats). See Esson's 'WB Yeats on National Drama', *Fellowship*, August 1921; 'Poets in Parliament', *Bulletin*, 9 December 1922.

the hero of the Dichterliebe: 'A Poet's Love' (Op. 48) (composed 1840), the best-known song cycle of Robert Schumann (1810–1856), text by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856). It tells of the sorrowful knight that sits gloomily in his house all day, but by night is visited by his fairy (nixie) bride, and dances with her until daylight returns him to his little poet's room.

The old myth of the chariot of the soul: In the *Phaedrus* (370 BCE) Plato (through his mouthpiece, Socrates) shares the allegory of the chariot to explain the tripartite nature of the human soul (or psyche). While the gods have two good horses, everyone else has a mixture: one is beautiful and good, while the other is deformed.

Economic determinism: in relation to Marx, a socioeconomic theory that economic relationships (a capitalist and a worker) are the foundation upon which all other societal and political arrangements in society are based. The theory stressed that societies are divided into competing economic classes whose relative political power is determined by the nature of the economic system.

Washington Square: Washington Square Park is a public park in the Greenwich Village neighbourhood of Lower Manhattan, New York City. Greenwich Village historically was known as an important landmark on the map of American bohemian culture in the early and mid-twentieth century. The Essons arrived in New York in December 1916 and were resident for some months at 39 West Street, Washington Square. The Washington Square Players was an influential little theatre group founded by Lawrence Langner and others at the Liberal Club (a barn in an alley next door to Albert and Charles Boni's Washington Square Bookshop) in 1913. Eugene O'Neill's one-act play *In the Zone* was produced by the Washington Square players in 1917. See Esson's 'The Washington Square Players', *Fellowship*, July 1920.

I managed to sell a few stories to popular magazines: Esson was frustrated that he couldn't break into the market in New York; he did manage a couple of publications: 'Some Distinguished Playwrights, and Belasco'; *Pearson's Magazine*, 4 April 1917; 'Hours with JM Synge'; *New York Evening Post Saturday Magazine*, 20 October 1917; 'The Pearl of Torres', *Adventure*, 18 July 1918; 'The Pigtail of Chun Yau', *The Popular Magazine*, XLV 20 August 1917. He wrote about the difficulty of the engagement [under the pseudonym 'Ganesha'] in 'The American Editor', *Bulletin*, 3 November 1921.

East Lynne: an English sensation novel of 1861 by Ellen Wood. The novel was first adapted for the stage as *Edith, or The Earl's Daughter* in New York in 1861 and under its own name on 26 January 1863 in Brooklyn; by March of that year, 'three competing versions were drawing crowds to New York theatres.' The most successful version was written by Clifton W Tayleur for actress Lucille Western. The much-quoted line 'Gone! And never called me mother!' does not appear in the novel, but does in multiple stage versions. A film version was nominated for an Academy Award in 1931.

Hedda Gabler: a 'realistic' play written by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) that premiered in Munich on 31 January 1891 at the Residenztheater. The title character, Hedda, is considered one of the great dramatic roles in theatre. Coral Browne played the role in Gregan MacMahon's revival in 1933 at the Garrick Theatre in Melbourne; McMahon played Lovborg, with Claude Thomas (Tesman), Phoebe Marks (Juliana Tesman), Lynette Dickenson (Mrs Elvsted), Joseph Ambler (Judge Brack) and Eileen Watt (Berta).

Lachryma Christi: (*Latin*) 'tears of Christ'; a red or white wine from the bay of Naples in Southern Italy.

concentration camps: The term *concentration camp* refers to a camp in which people are detained or confined, usually under harsh conditions and without regard to legal norms of arrest and imprisonment that are acceptable in a constitutional democracy. The first concentration camps in Germany were established soon after Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933. During the First World War the Australian Government interned 'enemy aliens' and held prisoners of war in what were referred to as 'internment' or 'concentration' [ie held in 'a relatively small and isolated area'] camps.

Maraschino: a liqueur obtained from the distillation of Marasca cherries.

Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?: Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 3.v (Phoebe)

à la mode: (*French*), in fashion; up to date.

Act Three

ISABEL's flat, King's Cross, Sydney: for health reasons, Esson moved to Sydney in May 1938, when, after a short stay at the Hotel Acadia, he took a flat at 'Holmside', 62B, Darlinghurst Road, King's Cross. Situated on the eastern side of Darlinghurst Road, an apartment on the top floor of the building would have views across Woolloomooloo to Jarremon Bay, the Botanic Gardens, Farm Cove to the Harbour Bridge.

Parrot lillies: a tuberous perennial with feathery blooms reminiscent of parrots; blooms November-May

Roses: the big spring flush of rose blooming comes between mid-October and mid-November in New South Wales.

Waiting on the quay when the boat came in: Maurice would have met Isobel and Mrs Burke at Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf when their ship from San Francisco berthed in Sydney (notionally) in the Spring of 1937.

'caviar to the general': (*phrase*) a good thing unappreciated by the ignorant. Cf. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, II.ii
I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted; or, if it was, not above once; for the play, I remember, pleased not the million; 'twas caviare to the general ...

The Bronx cheer—(*American slang*) A sound of contempt or derision, made by blowing through closed lips, usually with the tongue protruding, or 'blowing a raspberry'; 'Bronx cheer' originated as a slang term in the USA, appearing in newspapers from around 1920.

ravissant—(*French*) delightful.

I'm going to the pictures—The Kings Cross Theatre, on the corner of Darlinghurst Road and Victoria Street, was a picture palace showing movies and newsreels, opened in 1916.

there was a first-class murder in the cabaret over the road there: cf. On 17 September, 1937, the 250 pound George Jeremiah 'Jerry' Lynch was shot in the Top Hatter's Cabaret, 83 Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross. His shooting may have been over gambling debts but in a series of articles in *The Argus*, the Melbourne gunman 'Pretty Boy' Robert Walker claimed he had shot Lynch because he was either going to be beaten up or shot and that Lynch's death was the culmination of a quarrel which had begun in Parramatta Gaol. Esson's flat from May 1938 was 'just across the road' at 62B Darlinghurst Road.

Salad a la Russe: or *Salade Russe*; a Russian salad made of diced vegetables and other foods mixed with mayonnaise.

Darlinghurst: an inner-city, eastern suburb of Sydney, located immediately east of Hyde Park.

What is this thing called love: 'What is This Thing Called Love?' is a popular song written by Cole Porter, for the musical *Wake Up and Dream* (1929).

under the spell of the Cyprian: Cyprian of Carthage (210-258), a leader of the Christian church and one of the earliest proponents of the idea that only the church, particularly the bishops of the church, had the power to administer sacraments and determine who was or was not worthy of those rituals.

a Bacchante: literally, a follower of Bacchus; a priestess.

hubris: (*Greek*) excessive pride or self-confidence.

I want to write a real novel some day—not yet. I'll have to go out into the bush all alone and think quietly, and try to puzzle out what it all means.: In 1924, while in Mallacoota, Esson writes to Vance Palmer (15 March 1924):

‘About a month ago I had the idea of writing a novel; and I've been at it every day since. I've roughed in about a dozen chapters, about half, and written over 20,000 words. It has developed itself. I won't do this type of novel again; it is subjective, psychological, with a background of politics. My hero [is a mixture] of Meldrum and myself. It will be an account of the actions and reactions of an artist in a new country. ...’

'the glory has departed': Cf. 1 *Samuel* 4:22 'The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.'

'Brightness falls from the air.': Cf. Thomas Nashe's poem 'A Litany in Time of Plague'

*Beauty is but a flower
Which wrinkles will devour;
Brightness falls from the air;
Queens have died young and fair;
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
I am sick, I must die.
Lord, have mercy on us!*

The allusion is particularly apt, if not bathetic, given that Isabel is just about to take her own life

'We can't cross the same river twice. It's not the same river.': Cf. Heraclitus: 'No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.'

the dark lady of the station: Cf. 'The Dark Lady of the Sonnets', a woman described in Shakespeare's sonnets (due to her black wiry hair, and dark dunn-coloured skin) in contrast to 'The Fair Youth'.

Prunelle—(*French*) a little plum, from *prune*; a green French liqueur made from sloes.

Juliet, your Helena, your Isolde: the heroines from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, and Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde* respectively.

Poison in the ring: the character of Leonora in Verdi's *Il Trovatore* commits suicide by ingesting poison that has been secreted in her ring; in *The Three Musketeers*, by Alexandre Dumas (Père), Milady poisons Constance at the convent of Béthune by the device of a poison ring.

To carry pure death in an earring, a casket, | A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket!: Robert Browning, 'The Laboratory'.

O, shut the door! And when thou hast done so, | Come weep with me, past hope, past cure, past help.: Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 4.i

The Disputed Plays

Three one-act plays
Collaborations between
Frank P Brown & Louis Esson

**Louis Esson's dramatic collaborations with Frank Brown:
*The Drovers, Mates and Andeganorra***

Three of Louis Esson's short plays are curious both in their form and particularly their content. Two attributed to Esson, *The Drovers* and *Andeganorra* are set in the remote Northern Territory; the keen observation of landscape, situation and character (particularly the indigenous representations) suggests first hand knowledge and experience. The other, *Mates*, attributed to Frank P Brown, takes place in a shanty on the opal fields of North West NSW. The closest that Esson got to these isolated areas was his short few months in Bathurst in 1909 (when he was editor of *The National Advocate*). However, his younger half-brother, Frank Paterson Brown, travelled extensively in the Northern Territory.

As CJ Dennis remarked:

[Frank] was essentially an out-doors man prominent in many sports, yet he had too many remarkable talents that one rarely associates with a sportsman. His versatility was amazing.

...

He was an amateur boxer of distinction, and wrote plays that have been performed with success [apart from *Mates* there is no evidence for this]. He led a vaudeville team of wild Australian wood choppers and whip-crackers upon a successful tour of the United States, and wrote topical verse of remarkably good quality. He was a friend of Tom Mix and Hoot Gibson, in their early days; he joined a rush to the Alaskan gold fields, and pioneered the first of the famous cowboy rodeos. As a buffalo shooter in the Northern Territory his prowess is a byword, and many a friend among the real bushman and among his beloved aborigines of the north will mourn his passing. He gathered aboriginal lore, learned their dialects, and wrote songs for them in their own language. It was Jack London, the famous author, who inspired Frank to seek these Northern Territory adventures. Frank met London in Tasmania, and complained that the world nowadays lacked adventure. He had, he said, seen all his own country, and indicated the coastline he had explored. Jack London sent for a map, and pointing to the vast interior of Australia, asked: 'What about all this?' In less than two weeks Frank had crossed the straits, picked up two experienced bushmen en route, and was already on his way to walk from Bourke to Darwin. He accomplished that walk, and incidentally discovered the Mount Maroomba mine on the way.

Self advancement in any of these fields was the last thing he thought of. He was all for the adventure. Self-seeking was foreign to his happy nature, and to the end he retained those boyish qualities and those healthy enthusiasms that made him so well loved.¹

I contend that the three plays share authorship.

¹ *The Herald*, 27 November 1928 p.4

The Drivers

A Play in One Act

By Louis Esson & Frank P Brown

Background

The Drovers was included in the slim volume of plays *Dead Timber, and other plays*, produced by Hendersons—otherwise known as The Bomb Shop, the left-leaning 'modernist' bookshop located in Charing Cross, London—in 1920. There is no mention of it in correspondence prior to publication, nor any indication of its content and themes in other creative work. Esson's experience of the bush and 'the never never' was limited. In his prose piece 'Cain', published in *The Bulletin* (12 December 1907), he makes a brief mention of the 'trappers and drovers;' 'Vagabond Camp' observes

a number of interesting characters, old swaggies who have been everywhere, bushmen who were once shearers or drovers, a few nondescripts, and strange women of the roads.²

'Andy's Jimmy'³ includes observations of a drover's camp, but both the latter pieces were well after the writing of *The Drovers*, and the scope limited to his activity in the Howe Range of East Gippsland! Frank Brown, on the other hand, was well versed with the argot of the masculine world of the drovers, sundowners and bushmen of the Australian interior. 'He had an adventurous career,' the *Sporting Globe* reported in his obituary (28 November 1928),

He explored Australia and engaged in buffalo hunting in the north, padding the hoof from Adelaide. On one occasion he engaged in a deadly combat with an aborigine who had tried to kill a sick companion on the tramp, and in a duel which lasted overnight Frank Brown won the battle. For 12 hours the black fellow, creeping in the grass like a snake, tracked Brown, and when they met in combat the black fellow felled him with a huge rock. Our colleague—ever a sportsman—relied on his fists, and felled his adversary, and afterwards extended to him the hand of the victor, bathed his wounds, and sent him on his way.

Why Esson wanted to include the play in the published collection—especially given that it would not have the benefit of a production prior to its release—is unclear. What is evident is that the dramaturgy, the treatment and intimacy of the subject matter, as well as the keen observation of idiom, are vividly contrasted to the three other playlets in the volume.

Perhaps *The Drovers* was intended for William Moore's enterprise—The Pioneer Players—to hold an Australian Drama night in London; a companion piece to Sydney Tomholt's *Anoli, the Blind* (a drama about the cane country of North Queensland) and a comedy by Vance Palmer. Esson, meanwhile, had the complete draft of the play well before the opportunity for publication arose. 'I have had one small stroke of fortune,' he enthused to Vance (4 February 1920), 'Henderson, of the Bomb Shop, has accepted for publication my *four* one-act plays. They will be out in a few months.'

It appeared fortuitous that the writing of the play coincided with the appearance of Frank Brown in early 1919: 'Frank is in London,' Esson recorded, 'doing something at Australia House ... but he may soon return to Australia "on business." ... He got a bit of gas and lost weight, but on the whole he has been fairly lucky.'

'My quite firm memory,' Esson's son Hugh responded to Professor JD Hanisworth, 'is that *The Drovers* was based on a script by Frank Brown, a first draft of a one-act play.'⁴ This is corroborated by Leon Brodzky (Spencer Brodney) who responded to FH Rogers (Librarian at the University of New England) that he 'was told many years ago, there was another play [other than *Mates*] by Frank

² *The Herald* (Melbourne), 10 April 1923

³ *The Bulletin*, 6 March 1924

⁴ University of New England, 18 November 1982—Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

[Brown] but of which somehow Louis Esson was credited with being the author. I am not sure but I think this play was called *Drovers*.⁵ Further, a few years earlier, Alan Ashbolt (actor and broadcaster) wrote to Campbell Howard:

You'll be astonished to learn that I've finally been out to see Spencer Brodney. ... There's a vast collection of cardboard boxes in one corner of [Spencer Brodney's] study, and these reputedly contain letters and manuscripts. As I was leaving (after about four hours of talk), he said 'Did you ever hear of a play called *The Drovers*?' I said, 'Yes, that's one of Louis Esson's.' He said: 'Now that's a funny thing. Somebody else once told me—I think it might have been Leslie Rees—that it was written by Esson. But I've got an original manuscript there [in the cardboard boxes] somewhere, and I'm sure it was written by his half-brother, Frankie Walker [sic]. This is something that has always puzzled me.' The so-called 'original manuscript' (that's not a redundancy)—what Spencer meant was 'a manuscript in the author's own handwriting.'⁶

Meanwhile, Vance Palmer relates that *The Drovers* was written in 1919 in London:

All that summer [Esson] worked on *The Drovers*, trying in a Bloomsbury flat to capture the atmosphere of a cattle camp on the Barkly Tablelands, with the sun coming up over the arid plains, the drovers anxious about the dry stretch ahead of them, and the cattle 'pegging for a drink.' Louis was a slow worker. He would try out every phrase of his drovers' dialogue to make sure it was idiomatic. 'On horseback,' he would mutter, pacing about the room, 'on horseback, it doesn't seem right.' 'In the saddle,' someone would suggest, and his face would light up as if he had just dislodged a piece of grit from his eye.⁷

It would be illogical to think that Brown, having just served in France, arrived in London with a manuscript copy of *The Drovers*.

Palmer's description of Esson's work method does not negate that the background material—whether a story related by Brown or indeed a 'recalled' draft manuscript—were most likely supplied by Frank Brown during his time in London. Esson would later confirm to William Moore that he'd written another play, *Andeganora*, 'An Abo. [sic] one, from Frank's notes.' Coincidentally, responding to another request from Moore regarding contributing a play for publication in an anthology—*Best Australian One Act Plays*—Esson wrote:

As for *The Drovers*, there's no difficulty about copyright and if you wish to include it, you certainly can. But I'd like you to see [*Andeganora*] first.⁸

Why should there be copyright issues if Esson were sole author? There was no difficulty with copyright as Brown had been dead for a decade by this time.

Further connection between Brown and *The Drovers* comes in a letter to Leslie Rees, who had just scheduled *The Drovers* for Broadcast on the ABC, from Hilda in February 1940:

I'll be interested to hear *The Drovers* over the air. I should have liked to hear a rehearsal. The blackfellow's dialogue is particularly hard. Louis's brother Frank had the 'tune' of it beautifully—he trained the boy who played it here, and I've tried to preserve some memory of the rhythm and cadences. They're quite distinctive.

⁵ 4 December 1968—Campbell Howard Collection, UNE

⁶ 12 February 1961—Spencer Brodney *papers*; Born in Melbourne, Allan Ashbolt (1921-2005) was an actor; he and Peter Finch established the Mercury Theatre in Sydney. He worked for the NSW Film Council as film librarian, before gaining a contract with the ABC as a producer; in 1959 he was appointed as their first North America correspondent.

⁷ Palmer, Vance, *Louis Esson, and the Australian Theatre*, Op. cit. pg.18

⁸ From an undated letter—La Trobe MS12156

I believe there is sufficient evidence to consider *The Drovers* a collaboration between Louis Esson and Frank P Brown.

Performance History

The Drovers was first performed by the Pioneer Players at the Playhouse, Melbourne, 3 December 1923, produced by George Dawe, with the following cast:

ALEC McKAY	Mr George Dawe
'BRIGLOW' BILL	Mr Leo Burke
BOB	Mr Charles Doherty
MICK.	Mr Reg Moyle
ALBERT	Mr J O'Connell
A JACKEROO	Mr J Harcourt Bailey
PIDGEON	Mr Bryce Dunning

Other productions during Esson's lifetime:

- The Fellowship of Australian Writers Testimonial to Steele Rudd at St James' Hall, Sydney, 21-22 August 1921, under the direction of John Gould;
- Presented by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) 'on national relay from Melbourne,' Friday 17 September, 1943.

Copy Text

No manuscript of *The Drovers* survives and the current text is based on the script as published in *Dead Timber, and other plays*, Hendersons, London (1920).

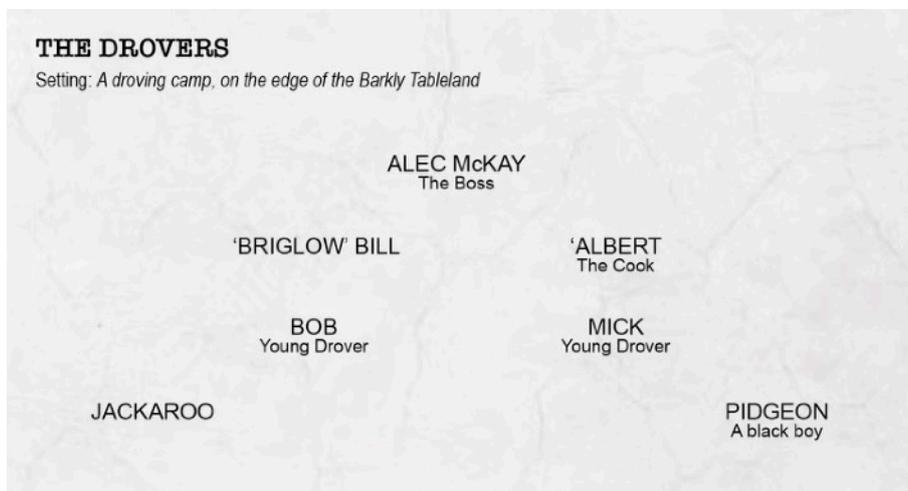
I have made a number of slight corrections (accidentals) and regularised the layout of stage directions.

Characters

ALEC. McKAY, the boss
'BRIGLOW' BILL
BOB, young drover
MICK, young drover
ALBERT, the cook
A JACKEROO
PIDGEON, a black boy

Setting

A droving camp, on the edge of the Barkly Tableland.



ACT ONE

(A droving camp, on the edge of the Barkly Tableland.)

(The camp is made on a little muddied water-hole fringed with a few gydgebra trees, the plains, unbroken by timber, stretching to the horizon. Early morning.)

(A camp-fire. Pack-saddles strewn about.)

(ALBERT, the COOK, is busy at the fire. He is a little fat man, fussy but cheerful.)

(A shot rings out.)

(The COOK drops the frying pan, and watches.)

COOK. They're off again.

(Sound of hoofs, stock-whips cracking—a stampede of cattle.)

(COOK picks up billy of water, and puts it on fire.)

(Two drovers, BOB and MICK, carry in 'BRIGLOW' BILL.)

(BRIGLOW BILL is a square built, determined looking man, with steely grey eyes. He is about forty-five, and has lived all his life in the bush.)

(BOB and MICK are young men. BOB is tall, wiry, and sandy-haired. He is burnt brick-red, and heavily freckled. He is good-natured, and has a fanatical love of horses. MICK is a little dark man, mild and rather silent, with perfect faith in the BOSS.)

COOK. What's wrong?

BOB. A stampede.

MICK. They've got Bill.

BOB *(As they put him down)*. How's that, Bill?

BRIGLOW. Easy, boys, easy.

MICK. How's that now, Briglow?

BRIGLOW. Let me sit up. It hurts to lie back. Prop me up a bit.

BOB. Is that better?

BRIGLOW. Yes. It catches me here.

COOK *(Giving him water)*. Here's a drink.

BRIGLOW. I'm done.

BOB. Nothing like it.

BRIGLOW. They've got me at last.

DROVERS. It's hard luck.

COOK. How did it happen?

BOB. The jackeroo fired his revolver at a dingo, and rushed the mob off camp.

COOK. God's truth, and them been ringing these two hours!

MICK. The Boss is as mad as a snake—he was flourishing his green-hide and cursing thunder and lightning till we got 'em together again.

COOK. It's hard luck, hard luck for us all.

BOB. It's no good growling. It's done now, and we've got to make the best of a bad job.

MICK. You should have seen the Boss -

BOB. He takes it worse than Briglow.

MICK. Can you blame him! Fancy the jackeroo firing his revolver and rushing the mob like that—it's the dead finish—Briglow's horse smashed to bits, Bob's horse with a broken neck, and Briglow here laid out -

COOK. And nothing in front of us but the long dry plains.

MICK. We'll have a lively time from now on.

BOB. My oath, we will!

COOK. What's up, Briglow?

BRIGLOW. Gimme a drink.

COOK. Right-O!

(Gives him pannikin of water.)

Sorry we haven't a drop o' grog left.

BOB *(Examining him)*. One thing—nothing's broken.

BRIGLOW. It's here—inside.

MICK *(To BOB)*. Any hope?

BOB. It'll be a long time before he's in the saddle again.

BRIGLOW. Bob!

BOB. I'm here.

BRIGLOW. Thanks for pulling me out.

BOB. That's nothing.

BRIGLOW. You risked your life to save me.

BOB. Give it a bone, Briglow.

BRIGLOW. It's rotten bad luck for Alec.

MICK. It is that.

BRIGLOW. He's responsible for them cattle.

BOB. We're a man short now. I dunno what we can do about Briglow.

MICK. The Boss'll think o' something.

COOK. He's quieter now.

MICK. The old man gave eighteen pounds for the gelding Briglow rode. He was going to run it at the Brunette races.

COOK. Wish we were there now! I'm going to get a tenner for two day's cooking.

BRIGLOW. Are the cattle steadying?

MICK. They were ringing when I left.

BRIGLOW. They'll give some trouble yet.

MICK. The Boss is with them, they'll never get away from him.

BRIGLOW. I can't do no more. It's the dead finish.

(Enter JACKEROO, an athletic young man, city-bred, out for experience. It is his first trip in the Never Never.)

JACKEROO. Where's Briglow?

COOK. There he is.

JACKEROO. Don't say he's done for! It was all my fault, firing at that dingo. The cattle rushed like mad, trampling him into the ground. My horse bolted. I couldn't pull him up in time to help.

MICK. Run away, you make me tired.

BOB. You've too much talk, young fellow.

JACKEROO. How are you now, Briglow? What can I do?

BRIGLOW. You can't do anything ... it's all over.

JACKEROO. Don't say that!

BRIGLOW. Part o' the game, lad.

JACKEROO. If I only had that medicine chest! The Boss wouldn't let me bring it.

COOK. It's all we can do to carry the tucker.

BOB. Pain-killer's all right, though.

COOK. Where can it be! Any of you blokes seen the pain-killer? There's some kicking about somewhere.

BOB. It's hard luck. Here we are, camped on a muddy water-hole, where there's not enough water to fill your hat, and five hundred cattle mad for a drink!

MICK. The old bloke'll think o' something, and pull us through. D'you remember when he took those steers from the yellow waterhole at Murrinjji, the short cut through the devil-devil country, where the ground broke under your feet, and the ants would eat you alive—only three of us and a Myall nigger! We got one drink for the mob in a hundred miles. He's a marvel, the old man is, and delivered only six short of his number.

(Thunder of hoofs heard.)

BOB. They're off again.

MICK. Blarst them!

BOB. Come on Mick!

(BOB and MICK dash off.)

(A pause.)

COOK *(To BRIGLOW)*. By gum, that Bob can ride. ... See him jump on that brumby brute! ... By gum, tho', look at the old bloke putting a bend on them. ... He's got 'em. ... Wheeled 'em a treat. Bob's up now, so's Mick. ... They've got 'em all right. ... Got 'em rounded up, and fetchin' 'em back to camp. ... Say, Briglow, ain't old Alec a bird! You should have seen him bending that mob, right on the shoulder o' the lead, swooping round 'em like a hawk.

BRIGLOW. The old man's a tiger, you can't beat him.

COOK. They're steadied now. ... On camp again ... but they're on the prod all right, and looking for trouble. ... Here's the Boss coming in, Briglow. He knows where the pain-killer is. You'll be as right as rain then.

BRIGLOW. He's a hard case, ain't he?

COOK. My oath!

(Enter ALEC, the BOSS. He is a man about fifty, tanned, wrinkled, with thick bristling eyebrows, and grey hair and beard. He is bandy legged, but sturdily built. In his younger days he was champion horseman of three states, and is now a famous bushman and drover.)

BOSS. The cattle's steadied.

(To JACKEROO.)

What the devil are you doing here?

JACKEROO. I wanted to see Briglow.

COOK. We're looking for the pain-killer.

BOSS. It's in the pack-bag. ... In the black bottle.

(To BRIGLOW.)

We've got them steadied.

BRIGLOW. Well done.

BOB. But the trouble is they're still pegging for a drink.

COOK *(With bottle.)* I've found it.

BOSS. Give it to me. *(Reads directions.)* 'Twenty drops maximum dose.'

(Pours half the bottle into the pannikin.)

JACKEROO. It's too much. ... Three times too much!

BOSS. I know the dose for Briglow. Here, drink this.

BRIGLOW *(Drinking)*. That's good.

BOSS. That'll fix you, eh?

(To COOK.)

Get a move on, Albert.

(Enter PIDGEON, a black boy, behind tree. He is tall and thin, and dressed in ragged trousers and shirt. He is quite young, but a little black growth of whiskers gives him a comical appearance.)

PIDGEON *(Poking head round tree, with a grin)*. Gibbit tobacco.

COOK. Get out o' this.

PIDGEON. Gibbit tobacco, Boss.

COOK. I'll give you a cracked skull. ...

(Exit PIDGEON.)

BOSS. Here's the pain-killer, Briglow. Here, stick my swag under you. *(He fixes him up.)*

BRIGLOW. Right.

JACKEROO. My God! It's terrible!

BOSS. What's done is done. You get out to the cattle now.

JACKEROO. All through an accident.

BOSS. You make things worse, jawing away like a blasted cockatoo. Get out, and mind you stay with them.

(Exit JACKEROO.)

BOSS *(To BRIGLOW)*. How are you feeling?

BRIGLOW. Numb and comfortable now.

BOSS. Good. ... We must get water for the mob. Not half of them had a drink at this mud-hole. That's the real trouble.

BRIGLOW. Yes, that's the trouble all right.

(Enter BOB and MICK.)

BOB. Cattle's steady as a rock.

BOSS. What's the time?

COOK. Quarter past four.

BOSS. How's the breakfast, Albert?

COOK *(Taking up a comically pugilistic attitude)*. Right, whenever you're ready. Stew on the left, damper on the right, and me in the blanky centre if you don't like it.

BOSS. Hurry up, boys.

(DROVERS take quick breakfast.)

COOK *(To BRIGLOW)*. Here's some stew, and a drink o' tea. That stew's made o' roast beef gravy. I reckon I can knock up a better stew than any man in this blarsted country.

BRIGLOW. My oath, you can, Albert. Leave it there. I'll have a cut at it directly.

COOK. When we get through to Urandangy, me and Bob's going to the Brunette races. I've got the offer of the cooking there—my oath, there'll be a jamboree. *Avon*, and *Eadingly*, and *Alexandra*, and *Alroy*, and the *OT*, and all the stations are sending horses. What o' the two-up then, eh? And they're getting a wagon load o' grog from Townsville. Paddy Lenny told me.

BRIGLOW. Remember me to the boys.

COOK. But what do you think o' this, Briglow? They're going to give me a blanky Chow for an offsider.

BRIGLOW. That's murder, Albert.

COOK. I'll make the yellow heathen move. Chows—Brunette's got one cooking now ... they can't cook. ... Now, I can make pastry out o' weevily flour as good as you'll buy in the Brisbane shops.

And I can cook a ragout -

(Sees PIDGEON breaking a piece of brownie.)

Here, you blanky black thief, I'll skin you alive -

(Exit COOK after PIDGEON.)

(The DROVERS take pannikins of tea.)

MICK *(To BOSS)*. What are we going to do?

BOSS. There's only one thing to do, get going.

MICK. What about Briglow?

BOSS. We'll see.

MICK. When are we starting?

BOSS. Right away ... piccaninny daylight.

BOB (*Coming over*). Without Briglow?

BOSS. How the hell can we travel with an injured man?

MICK. It's hard luck.

(COOK and PIDGEON enter.)

COOK. Pack the horses, Pidgeon.

(Goes over to BRIGLOW.)

Can't you do a bit o' stew, Briglow?

BRIGLOW. I don't feel like eating.

COOK. How about a drink o' tea?

BRIGLOW. Gimme a drop o' water.

COOK. Right you are, lad. *(Gets water.)*

BRIGLOW (*To BOB and MICK*). Look here. I've got a few pounds on me, you blokes can divvy that, and my cheque.

BOB. You'll be all right, Briglow.

BRIGLOW. But send a fiver to Joe Duggan. I owe him that.

MICK. We won't forget.

BOB. ... I think I'll buy that little mare—down at Banka Banka. *(To BOSS.)* Briglow says we can divvy his cheque.

BOSS. What about it?

BOB. I'm thinking o' buying that little Banka Banka mare, you know her—bay wi' black points.

BOSS. Yes.

BOB. And there's that roan gelding at *Alroy*. What do you think o' him—think he'd be better than the mare?

BOSS. Give it a rest, Bob.

(BOB and MICK finish breakfast.)

(The BOSS goes to BRIGLOW, and fixes him up carefully.)

BOSS. How are you feeling, mate?

BRIGLOW. I'm settled, Alec.

BOSS. By God, man, I'd rather it was me!

BRIGLOW. I ain't growling.

(The BOSS fills a pipe, and holds a match over it, while BRIGLOW puffs till the tobacco glows.)

BOSS. Have a quiet smoke.

BRIGLOW. We've had good times together.

BOSS. My oath, they've been good times.

BRIGLOW. Alec!

BOSS. Yes.

BRIGLOW. You'll be a man short now.

BOSS. We'll work it somehow. Albert will have to do a watch; and Bob will take your place on the tail of the cattle.

BRIGLOW. You might tell Bob if that baldy-faced piker gets slewing out on the left wing, not to lay the whip into him. He's blind in one eye. I just found out, last night. ... Just sing out, and he'll go back himself.

BOSS. How's it now, Briglow?

BRIGLOW. Easier. The pain's gone.

BOSS. That's something. Why should it end like this?

(He looks across the plains.)

The cattle are uneasy, and bellowing with thirst.

BRIGLOW. What are you going to do, Alec?

BOSS. We can't stay here, and we can't take you, Briglow. It's the devil's own luck—but there—
what's the use of magging like an old crow?

BRIGLOW. Who's grumbling? We know the bush, me and you. We're old at the game.

BOSS. We've got to get on. I'm in charge, and I'd push them through if every blanky man in camp
snuffed his candle.

BRIGLOW. You don't have to tell me that, mate.

BOSS. I've got to deliver the damned cattle.

BRIGLOW. I'd like to be going with you, ... but ... there's no chance. ...

BOSS. There's no bones broken. Let's see ...

BRIGLOW. It's inside ... something's crushed in the fall.

BOSS. I've seen such cases.

BRIGLOW. Haemorrhage.

BOSS. You might get better yet.

BRIGLOW. It's no use pretending. I'm settled, Alec.

BOSS. Curse the jackeroo!

BRIGLOW. Let the lad off light if you can. He didn't know what he was doing when he fired that
shot. He's new to the bush.

BOSS. ... And it's all a damned accident. ...

BRIGLOW. It don't matter. It had to come sooner or later. I've lived my life, careless and free,
looking after my work when I was at it, and splashing my cheque up like a good one when I
struck civilization. I've lived hard, droving and horse-breaking, station work, and over-landing,
the hard life of the bush, but there's nothing better, and death's come quick, before I'm played out
—it's the way I wanted.

BOSS. Maybe I'll finish like you, Briglow, out in the bush, I hope so anyway.

BRIGLOW. I've got no family to leave behind. Maybe the bush'll miss me a bit ... the tracks I've
travelled, and a star or two, and the old mulga.

BOSS. And I'll miss you. I've never travelled with a better man.

BRIGLOW. I hope you get the mob through safe. I'm real sorry I ain't no use, but it ain't my fault.

BOSS. Don't I know it! You've always done your share, Briglow, and a lot extra. I'll never find
another mate like you. The others are good lads, but they're young yet.

BRIGLOW. They'll soon get over it, and forget all about me.

BOSS. But I'll never forget, Briglow. It's part of my life.

BRIGLOW. Well, it's been a good life. I'm satisfied.

BOSS. That's the way to look at it, Briglow.

BRIGLOW. It's fate.

BOSS. That's right. It's fate.

BRIGLOW. No man can dodge his fate.

BOSS. We've had some good times together.

BRIGLOW. Yes, ... they were good times.
(COOK comes over to BRIGLOW.)

BOSS. I'll just have a drink o' tea, and get them started.
(He goes to camp-fire and fills pannikin.)
(The DROVERS come over.)

BOB. How's it now, Briglow?

BRIGLOW. The pain's gone.

BOB. I'll be taking your place on the tail of the cattle now.

BRIGLOW. Yes.

BOB. ... I think I'll buy the mare, Briglow.

BRIGLOW. The mare's the best.

BOB. Well, so long Bill.

BRIGLOW. So long, Bob.

(Exit BOB, singing:)

Give me a horse wi' a bit o' pace

And a saddle that's made by Uhl.

COOK. I've packed up and started the horses.

MICK. So long, Briglow.

BRIGLOW. So long, Mick.

(Enter JACKEROO.)

JACKEROO. Good God, we're not leaving him, are we?

COOK. You're as bad as a kerosene tin in a yard full of colts.

MICK. We're in for a rocky time, but I think the old man'll get through. He's a marvel, ain't he? So long, Briglow!

(Exit MICK.)

JACKEROO. How can I leave you, Briglow!

BOSS *(Coming over)*. Why ain't you with the cattle?

JACKEROO. I can't leave Briglow like this.

BOSS. You're a drover, ain't you?

JACKEROO. Yes.

BOSS. Your place is with the cattle. We've got to push that mob along, and we're a man short now. Get out to them. I'll see to Briglow.

BRIGLOW. You ought to be with the cattle, lad.

JACKEROO. What can I do? So long, Bill.

BOSS. Hurry up. Come on.

(Exit BOSS with JACKEROO.)

COOK. The cattle's started.

BRIGLOW. Fill my pipe, Albert.

COOK. Right-O! A smoke'll do you good. *(Gives him pipe.)* All right now, Briglow?

BRIGLOW. Yes.

COOK. Well, so long. I'll tell the boys about it at Brunette.

BRIGLOW. So long, Albert.

(Exit COOK.)

(A pause.)

(Then enter BOSS.)

BOSS *(Calling)*. Here Pidgeon.

(Enter PIDGEON.)

BOSS. You look out, Briglow. Supposin' him want tucker, water-bag, you gibbit!

PIDGEON. Poor fellow! Bullocky bin kill him dead all right.

BOSS. Bye'n'bye, me come back quick-fellow, and by God, if you no more bin good fellow, I'll murder you, you black devil.

PIDGEON. Me good fellow watch.

BOSS. You can't run away from me. Supposing you run, me track him up, track him up, bye'n'bye catch-im you, shoot-him Pidgeon full with bullet, leave-him Pidgeon alonga little fellow black ant. ... Here, tobacco.

(Throws a plug.)

(To BRIGLOW.)

I'll come back myself when we get the cattle to water.

BRIGLOW. I'll be gone then.

(They shake hands.)

BOSS. So long, old mate.

BRIGLOW. So long, Alec.

BOSS *(To PIDGEON)*. You good-fellow watch.

(Exit BOSS.)

(A pause.)

(The sun rises. From the edge of the Barkly Tableland the great plains stretch away, unbroken by timber, except the few gydgea trees that fringe the muddy water-hole. The DROVERS have disappeared on their journey across the long, dry stage.)

(BRIGLOW BILL is lying on the ground, his head resting on a swag. ALBERT's stew, and a bottle of pain-killer are both untouched.)

BRIGLOW. The sun's rising. It'll be hot for the cattle. And here I am, lying in the shade, instead of eating dust on the tail of the mob.

PIDGEON. See, hawk and crow, hawk and crow, they fly alonga mob. Plenty bullocky die before they catch-him water.

BRIGLOW. The old bloke'll pull them through. He's the big gun drover of the North, and I've been his right hand man these twelve years. He's got good lads with him, but he'll miss me.

(PIDGEON throws some sticks on the fire, and blows up the dying embers. Then he sits down, his legs crossed under him, and starts clicking two sticks together, and murmuring a kind of chant.)

PIDGEON. You, Briglow, and old man Boss, you savvy bush all-the-same blackfellow. ... I think first time you blackfellow, Briglow. You die, then jump up white fellow. Now you die, and bye'n'bye ... next time, you jump up blackfellow, alonga new fellow country—good country—plenty water, plenty fish, plenty tucker. ... You die all right.

BRIGLOW. That's right Pidgeon, I'm going.

PIDGEON. Oh, you poor fellow Briglow, me big-fellow sorry alonga you. ... Bye'n'bye me go back alonga my country, alonga camp-fire, alonga tribe. ... Me tell-im father, mother, brother, sister—me tell-im blackfellow all alonga camp—me tell-im poor fellow Briglow, he bin dead now. ... Then all blackfellow alonga camp make-im big-fellow corroboree alonga you ... all day, all night, we sing in corroboree, cut-im head, cut-im arm, alonga sharp-fellow stone.

(BRIGLOW BILL falls back exhausted. His pipe rolls along the ground.)

(PIDGEON rises stealthily, and goes across to the DROVER. He looks down at him carefully, shakes his head, and mutters:)

Poor fellow! Me sit down, wait alonga Boss. Old man soon come back alonga shovel ... put him deep in ground ... dingo can't catch-im bone.

(BRIGLOW makes no stir.)

(PIDGEON peers round camp.)

Me make little-fellow hill; me build up little mound, grass, bushes, stones, keep off bad spirits alonga bush. That one frighten-im debbil-debbil ... debbil-debbil can't catch-im Briglow now.

(PIDGEON picks up the pipe, and then sits smoking, again chanting to himself, and clicking the sticks together.)

Curtain.

Notes

Barkly Tableland: a rolling plain of grassland which runs from the eastern part of the Northern Territory into western Queensland. It runs parallel to the southern shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria, from about Mount Isa, Queensland to near Daly Waters. William Landsborough was the first non-Indigenous person to explore the tableland and named it after Sir Henry Barkly, then governor of Victoria. In 1877 the overlander, Nathaniel Buchanan and Sam Croker crossed the Barkly Tableland and rode on to the Overland Telegraph Line opening new land for settlement. It was not until the introduction of generous leasing arrangements on the Barkly in the late 1870s that the region became more settled. In 1883, Harry Readford, one of the inspirations for the literary character Captain Starlight, drove a mob of cattle to the Barkly and subsequently established Brunette Downs (then called Corella Creek), with outstations at Anthony Lagoon and Cresswell Creek, for Macdonald, Smith and Co. In 1884, 2,500 cattle were driven to Brunette Downs and in 1885, Readford brought in 1,200 mixed cattle from Burketown. Other stations in the area include Alexandria, Mittiebah and Walhallow.

billy: a cylindrical vessel with a wire handle, of various capacities, used in the outback for carrying water and boiling it to make tea; also used as a cooking utensil.

'Briglow' [Brigalow]: Australian tree, *Acacia harpophylla*; a slender acacia tree, that forms dense scrub, which thrives on the clay soil and is highly water stress tolerant.

jackeroo: or, jackaroo; an inexperienced person working as an apprentice on a sheep ranch

greenhide: untreated cowhide, used traditionally for making ropes, halters, bridles, pack bags as well as many other station uses.

Brunette races: horse races at Brunette Downs Station, on the Barkly Tablelands, approx. 350 kms North-East of Tennant Creek. The ABC Amateur Race Club was formed in 1910 by three cattle stations located on the Barkly Tableland: Alexandria, Brunette Downs and Creswell Downs each lent the Club the first letter of their name, and so the ABC Amateur Race Club was born.

ringing: rounding up 'mobs' of cattle. Cf. Ringer—a male or female stock worker on an Australian cattle station,

Never Never: the name of a vast, remote area of the Australian Outback, as described in Barcroft Boake's poem 'Where the Dead Men Lie' (*Bulletin*, 19 December, 1891):

Out on the wastes of the Never Never -

That's where the dead men lie!

There where the heat-waves dance forever -

That's where the dead men lie!

One reference earlier than Barcroft Boake's is 'The Never Never Land: a Ride in North Queensland' (1884) by Archibald William Stirling so it is probable the term was in general use in at least the second half of the nineteenth century. Life in the Never Never of the Northern Territory was described by Jeannie Gunn in two books including the classic Australian novel *We of the Never Never* (1908). Cf. Esson's poem 'The Never-Never', *The Bulletin*, 23 December 1909.

tucker: (Australia, *informal*) food.

the yellow waterhole at Murrinji: Cf. The Murrinji Track, an historic a 225 kilometre-long droving track from Top Springs to Newcastle Waters.

a Myall nigger: (*colloq.*) an Aborigine living in a traditional way. *nigger:* (*ethnic slur*) extremely offensive name for a native of the East Indies or one of the Australian aborigines. Nb. *myall:* a hard, scented wood yielded by several Australian acacias, esp. good for tobacco-pipes and whip-handles.

brumby: a free-roaming feral horse.

on the prod: (North American, *informal*) looking for trouble.

PIDGEON: Cf. A **pidgin** or **pidgin language**, a grammatically simplified means of communication that develops between two or more groups that do not have a language in common: typically, a mixture of simplified languages or a simplified primary language with other languages' elements included. It is most commonly employed in situations such as trade, or where both groups speak languages different from the language of the country in which they reside (but where there is no common language between the groups). A pidgin differs from a creole, which is the first language of a speech community of native speakers, and thus has a fully developed vocabulary and grammar.

What's done is done: Cf. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*: 'Things without all remedy/Should be without regard: what's done is done.' 3.ii (Lady Macbeth)

jawing: (*slang*) impudent talk; idle conversation; to chat, gossip.

damper: a traditional Australian soda bread, historically prepared by swagmen, drovers, stockmen and other travellers. It consists of a wheat flour based bread, traditionally baked in the coals of a campfire or in a camp oven.

Urandangy [Urandangi]: town is located on the banks of the Georgina River in Central West Queensland, 2,007 kilometres north west of the state capital, Brisbane and 187 kilometres south west of the regional centre of Mount Isa. An unnamed township was established 2 August 1883. On 12 December 1884, it was officially named Urandangi. The name is believed to be derived Aboriginal words, *uranda-ngie*, meaning 'much gidyea.'

Townsville: a city on the far-north Queensland coast adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef. It was declared a municipality in February 1866.

ragout: a highly seasoned dish of small pieces of meat stewed with vegetables.

piccaninny daylight [piccaninny dawn]:(*colloq.*) earliest dawn, first light; 'pickaninny' is a pidgin word for a small child.

Paddy Lenny: Frank Brown would be acquainted with horse-runner Paddy Lenny; a well known station hand at both Avon and Alexandria Stations.

Joe Duggan: Frank Brown would have known Joe Duggan as a well known welter-weight boxer in Melbourne.

Banka Banka [Station]: a location in the Northern Territory, 100 kilometres north of Tennant Creek along the Stuart Highway. An historic cattle station, it was the first operational pastoral lease in this region.

bay: a brown horse.

points: lower legs, mane and tail of a horse.

roan: a horse coat colour pattern characterised by an even mixture of coloured and white hairs on the body, while the head and 'points' are mostly solid-coloured. Horses with roan coats have white hairs evenly intermingled throughout any other colour. The head, legs, mane and tail have fewer scattered white hairs or none at all.

gelding: a castrated animal, especially a male horse.

Alroy [Downs]: a pastoral lease that operates as a cattle station in Northern Territory. The property is situated approximately 201 kilometres east of Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory and 226 kilometres west of Camooweal in Queensland. Located on the Barkly Tableland, a portion of the Playford River flows also through the station as does a portion of Buchanan Creek. It shares a boundary with Brunette Downs Station to the north, Rockhampton Downs to the west, Dalmore Downs to the south and Alexandria Station to the east.

baldy-faced: a white face, of Hereford cattle.

piker: (*colloq*) lazy; not to be trusted.

slewing: moving off course; turn.

left wing [or swing]: cattle drive position; *Wing or swing* is a position that helps set the pace of the herd and follows the lead of the point man in steering the herd. Cf. *Point* is the most enviable position as this person consumed the least amount of dust and dirt. He was one of the most experienced hands, and it was his job to point the herd in the right direction and to set the pace. *The pace* was almost always a slow one because moving the beeves too fast would make them lose weight.

Flank is a position intended to prevent strays. If there were any strays,

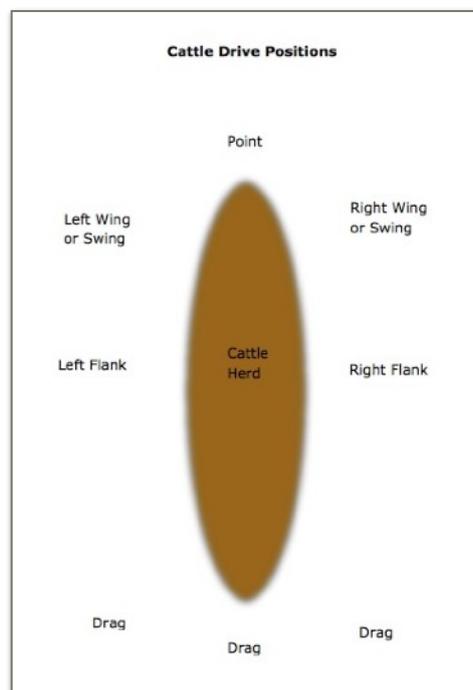
these riders went after them. *Drag* is the least prestigious position. It is an entry level position that calls for the least amount of experience. Riders in the drag positions push the slow cattle forward and they round up strays. They also eat the most dust!

magging: chattering incessantly.

overlanding: (*Australian colloq*) a Drover who covers very long distances, with large mobs of sheep or cattle to open up new land, engages in 'overloading.'

Give me a horse wi' a bit o' pace/And a saddle that's made by Uhl.: Cf. Uhl & Sons Saddlers; Darcy Uhr was one of the most picturesque figures in Australian pastoral history, who overhanded cattle from Charters Towers to provide beef for the growing population to Darwin. he and his party were the first drovers to take cattle around the Gulf route from Burketown to the Katherine River, a distance of 8799 miles. Uhr has many other remarkable driving treks to his credit; he was also the first to discover gold at Pine Creek in the Territory.

the big gun drover: gun (*colloq*) of, or relating, to someone who is expert.



Mates

By Louis Esson & Frank P Brown

Background

The Pioneer Players' 1923 season opened on 7 June at St Peter's Hall, Eastern Hill, with the premiere production of Esson's *Mother and Son*, preceded by *The Voice of the People*, a comedy by Alan Mulgan. The Players announced that the program for the second and third seasons would be chosen 'from plays by Katharine Susannah Prichard, Spencer Brodneyn, Stewart Macky, John Le Gay Breerton, Vance Palmer and others.'¹ Frank Brown's name is not amongst the list.

Clearly there was an expectation that something might come from Leon Brodzky, Esson's old university friend (now living under the name of Spencer Brodneyn). In later 1922 Esson had written to Brodzky:

We'll have to get our plans ready for next year. Have you any play, long or short, that you would like us to produce? If so, please send it along.²

Esson was more desperate by the following April, at which time he send an urgent telegram to Brodzky: 'Send Australian play immediately.'³ As late as August, albeit too late for the second season, Hilda Esson was still anticipating getting something from Brodzky:

We are looking forward with great eagerness to getting your play.⁴

The play-script did not materialise.⁵ *Mates*, credited at the time to Frank Brown, was ultimately one of five short plays presented by the Pioneer Players at the Playhouse on Thursday 16 August 1923; the others were Katharine Susannah Prichard's comedy *The Great Man*, Vance Palmer's tragedy *The Black Horse*, Stewart Macky's 'drama of thrills' *The Trap* and Ernest O'Ferrall's farce *The Bishop and the Buns*.

Brown was delighted by the casting of Ruby May. 'It does not often happen,' he revealed to *The Sporting Globe*,

that an actor or actress gets more out of a part than the author intended, yet that is just what Miss May has done with Carrie. When I wrote the play, I felt rather dubious about offering her the part, and I was afraid that she would be dissatisfied. That is not Miss May's way, fortunately. She studied hard, and surprised me by developing the part into one of distinct value.⁶

¹ *The Herald*, 4 May 1923

² 9 October 1922—Brodneyn papers, La Trobe MS6065

³ 13 April 1923

⁴ Hilda Esson to Spencer Brodneyn, 20 August 1923—Brodneyn papers, La Trobe MS6069

⁵ The manuscript for Brodzky's political comedy *Rebel Smith* arrived twelve months later, in June 1924. He had gathered the material for the play while he was in Queensland between 1918 and 1920. The play was published in New York by Siebel Publishing Corporation in 1925. Brodzky acknowledged Esson in the preface to publication:

The writing of this play was begun in Brisbane in November, 1920. After being put aside for several long intervals it was completed in New York more than four years later so that it might be produced by the Pioneer Players in Melbourne during the season of 1925. For having been spurred on to make this contribution to the stock of plays that are the beginnings of an Australian drama I have to thank Louis Esson. To him all Australians should be grateful for what he has done both as a writer and as the guiding spirit of the organisation which has made it possible for plays reflecting Australian life to be performed on an Australian stage.

⁶ *The Sporting Globe*, 15 August 1923

Mates is a character comedy of the opal fields, contrasting a pert disqualified 'under-worldly' jockey from the city with an unsophisticated yet honest shearer from the bush; both fall for the same 'girl behind the bar.' The mastership myth is—as in *The Drovers*—exploited dramaturgically, and there is evidence of the idiom and the situation of remote bush life so familiar to Brown.

But Hilda, as well as providing her impressions to Brodzky a few days after the opening, offered a variant insight into the providence of *Mates*:

We had our most successful night last week, when we gave five short plays—one of Louis's that was handed over to Frank Brown to touch up, as Louis didn't want his name on the programme, others by Kathie Prichard, Vance Palmer, Stewart Macky and rather a jolly farce by poor old gloomy 'Kodak'. He is an instance of the bad effects of journalism—he complains of being always 'jaded'. We find short plays are very popular. They were, too, in America with the Washington Square Players and so many others, and they give us what we need so badly, variety of names. Louis, Stewart and Vance are the only ones who have managed a long play yet. If I hadn't left this note to be dashed off at the last moment before the mail I would have told you of Louis' last play. We must print it as soon as we have any money.

Esson's son Hugh reiterated his mother's opinion, stating to Professor JD Hainsworth in 1982 that

Louis did not regard Frank as a literary man: indeed Louis was most suspicious of any writer who lacked education and culture. The intuitive Henry Lawsons were rare indeed—and how banal was Henry Lawson at his worst! I find it surprising that he let Frank Brown have the last say about *Mates*. Perhaps Louis felt that he hadn't made it his own. Unfortunately, I have no knowledge of the matter.⁷

Under these circumstance, it is appropriate to suggest that *Mates* was yet another collaborative writing effort, and both Frank P Brown and Louis Esson should be acknowledged joint authorship.

Performance History

Mates was first performed by the Pioneer Players at the Playhouse, under the direction of Mr George Dawe, Thursday 16 August 1923, with the following cast:

BILL (a shearer)	Mr Leo Burke
JOE (a jockey)	Mr Reg Moyle
NED DEVINE (a shanty keeper)	Mr J O'Connell
CARRIE (a girl behind the bar)	Miss Ruby May

Copy Text

Manuscript MSB 524 MS 10569 La Trobe Library Australian Manuscript Collection.

The manuscript (A), in Hilda's typical format, is typed on single side on quarto size paper. There is heavy editing, by Esson, in black ink (B), as well as additional material supplied, in both pencil and typed in purple ink on half-quarto copy paper, by Frank Brown (C) (these inclusions are consistent with other material by the journalist Frank Brown).

The cover sheet (single fold, landscape format) reads 'MATES by Frank P Brown' written in lead pencil in Frank Brown's hand. The verso of the cover sheet gives, in lead pencil, cast and scene.

⁷ 18 November 1982

The manuscript, however, also appears to be a pre-production draft as there are references in the reviews that are inconsistent with the extant text: that Ned has an outback reputation for 'tricks that are dark' is a detail not in the present draft; nor is an extended game of 'two-up' at the curtain where Ned 'fails to examine the pennies.'

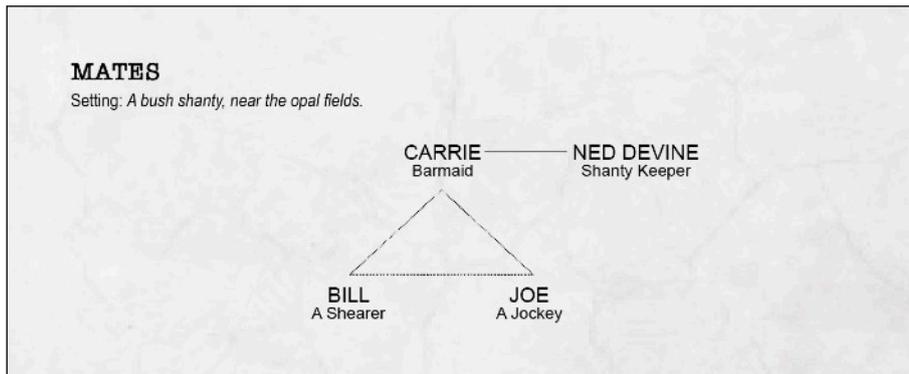
In this instance, I use (B) as copy text as being the reliable draft.

Cast

BILL ROSS, a shearer
JOE, a disqualified jockey
CARRIE, the barmaid
NED DAVIS, a shanty keeper

Setting

A bush shanty near the opal fields.



ACT ONE

(A bush shanty near the opal fields.)

(Enter BILL.)

CARRIE.⁸ Good heavens—what's this.⁹

BILL. It's my mate.

CARRIE. Who?¹⁰

BILL. It's my mate. *(Sits down exhausted.)*

CARRIE. What's the matter?

BILL. Nothing much.¹¹

CARRIE. Is he drunk?

BILL. No.

CARRIE. Sunstruck?

BILL. No.

CARRIE. Poor chap, he looks bad. What's wrong with him then?¹²

BILL. Done up a bit, that's all. He's not used to the track, and we've come a few miles. Don't worry, Miss, he's safe now.

CARRIE. He's only a lad, and he don't look too strong.

BILL. He's a townie ... he don't know the bush. And we struck a dry stage. It was pretty hot, the water bag leaked. We¹³ only had a pannikin of water to-day. We want water ... water.

CARRIE. His lips are cracked and swollen on his tongue dry. Poor fellow.

(Moistens his lips.)

He's like to faint.¹⁴

(Hands jug to BILL—BILL empties jug.)¹⁵

BILL. The worst's over now.

CARRIE. You look done up yourself.

BILL. It was a bit of a pull.

(CARRIE gets bottle.)

CARRIE *(Giving him glass)*. Try this.

BILL. Good health, Miss. *(Drinks.)* Ah! Rum! That's good stuff. Been pretty¹⁶ hot to-day.

CARRIE. A hundred and twelve in the shade.

BILL. I thought about that. Hot as hell it's been.¹⁷

⁸ CARRIE] M. A.; *over the course of the manuscript the character 'M' undergoes a transformation. Typed, in some cases, as 'Maud', it is scored out with a single lead pencil line and amended to 'May' in the left margin. [Miss Ruby May played the role of Carrie at the premiere.] The character name is emended to 'Carrie.*

⁹ CARRIE. Good heavens—what's this.] C.; *not in A/B.*

¹⁰ Who?] What's that? C.

¹¹ Nothing much.] Nothing. C.

¹² he looks bad. What's wrong with him then?] it looks like fever./BILL. No, nothing like that. C.

¹³ stage. It was pretty hot, the water bag leaked. We] stage, and it was pretty hot, and we C.

¹⁴ cracked and swollen on his tongue. Poor fellow./*(Moistens his lips.)*/He's like to faint.] black, and his tongue still and swollen. Poor fellow. *(Moistens his lips.)* He's still in a faint. C.

¹⁵ *(Hands jug to BILL—BILL empties jug.)*] C.; *not in A/B.*

¹⁶ Ah! Rum! That's good stuff. Been pretty] B.; That's the stuff. It's been pretty A.

¹⁷ Hot as hell it's been.] B.; *not in A.*

CARRIE. Come far?

BILL. From Bourke.

CARRIE. Bourke. So you've¹⁸ been on the track for weeks.

BILL. Yes, I met my mate back in Bourke. We're going to the opal fields.

CARRIE (*Handing him glass*). Have another drop. It won't hurt you.

BILL (*Taking glass*). Thank you Miss.

(*JOE stirs.*)

CARRIE. He's stirring.

(*BILL fills glass.*)

BILL (*Holding glass to JOE*). Try this, Joe.

JOE (*After drinking*). Whiskey! Gorblime! (*Talk husky voice.*)¹⁹

BILL. He's coming round.

CARRIE (*To JOE*). You're better now!

JOE. Come again.²⁰

(*They give JOE another drink.*)

Disqualified! (*JOE drops back.*)

BILL. He's still a bit weak.

CARRIE. He needs to rest, poor boy.

JOE (*Half rising and talking vaguely*). I was finished at the turn. I had no run left for the straight.

Damn the mulga! It's all head and sand and flies -

BILL. Keep quiet, Joe.

JOE. Disqualified for suspicious riding. That cock-eyed steward down the line always had me set.

Only one flamin' drink of dirty water in twenty-four hours.²¹

BILL. Steady, Joe, steady.²²

CARRIE. He's a bit delirious, ain't he?

JOE. Curse the flaming swag. I can't carry the weight. Opals—where are they? I don't want your purple opals. I want some water.²³ Gawdstruth it's a blackfellows' country. Give me little old Caulfield, where the cabbages grow.

CARRIE. Don't talk. Don't talk so much.²⁴

BILL. Quiet, matey.

JOE. Where am I?

BILL. We're safe, Joe.

JOE. We're not on the blazing track, dying of thirst!

BILL. No, we're here.

JOE. Gorblime ... how did we do it?

BILL. We done it all right, Joe.

JOE. I remember now. I cracked up on the track, God knows where it was, and you must have carried me in.

¹⁸ Bourke. So you've] *B.*; Bourke. ... Good Heavens! So you've *A.*

¹⁹ (*Talk husky voice.*)] *C.*; *not in A/B.*

²⁰ Come again.] *B.*; We'll have it again. *A.*

²¹ Only one flamin' drink of dirty water in twenty-four hours.] Only one blooming drink of dirty water in 24 hours. *B.*

²² Steady, Joe, steady.] *B.*; Steady, Joe. *A.*

²³ I want some water.] *B.*; *not in A.*

²⁴ Don't talk. Don't talk so much.] *B.*; Don't talk so much. *A.*

BILL. You weren't that heavy, Joe.
 JOE. Gorblyme, you saved my life, Bill.
 BILL. Rot.
 JOE. My oath you did. I know. You carried me all the way here. How far was it?
 BILL. It don't matter, Joe.
 JOE. How far?
 BILL. Aw! ²⁵About ten mile.
 JOE. Blime!
 CARRIE. That's wonderful.
 BILL. If a blanky Russian carried his mate ninety miles in the North West I ought to be good enough for a hundred and fifty.
 JOE. Bill's a stayer. He saved my life, by cripes he did.
 BILL. We're mates, ain't we?
 JOE. Yes.
 BILL. Well, that's all right, then.
 JOE (*To CARRIE*). Me and Bill's mates.
 CARRIE. Good luck to you both.
 JOE. We struck up in Bourke ... that's a fine town I don't think and now we're looking for opals in the blooming mulga.
 CARRIE. Hush ... don't excite yourself.
 BILL. Shut up. Joe, you're yappin' like a cockatoo.²⁶
 JOE. It was beer for breakfast one day, and the next you couldn't get water. When Gawd made this flaming country, why the hell didn't he irrigate it!
 (*Drops back again.*)
 BILL. He ain't²⁷ used to the bush, Miss.
 CARRIE. I know what to do. We'll put him on a mattress on the back verandah. It's shady and cool there.²⁸
 BILL. That'll be the very thing. I hope it won't be too much trouble, Miss.
 CARRIE. Nonsense.
 BILL (*Lifts JOE*). I can lift him. ... He's only a light-weight, seven stone six ... he's a jockey, Miss.
 CARRIE (*Helping him*). A jockey!
 JOE (*Vaguely*). Scratched for all events—that's me.
 CARRIE. He wants a good sleep.
 BILL. I've got him. Come on Joe.
 JOE. I'm all right—Jackaloo!²⁹
 (*They carry JOE to back veranda, then they return.*)
 CARRIE. He'll be comfortable there.
 BILL. My oath.³⁰ He only needs a rest. ... Look here, I want to pay for them drinks. Me an Joe 'ave gotta pound or two we ain't all together 'ard up. 'E's a good little fella only terrible ignorant about

²⁵ Aw!] *B.*; *not in A.*

²⁶ you're yappin' like a cockatoo.] *B.*; you're talking too much. *A.*

²⁷ He ain't] *B.*; He's not *A.*

²⁸ It's shady and cool there.] *B.*; It's nice and cool there. *A.*

²⁹ I'm all right—Jackaloo!] *B.*; I've got him. *A.*

³⁰ My oath.] *B.*; Rather. *A.*

bush ways. It was my fault takin' 'im over that track I might a known 'e couldn't a done it.
Dammit I might a known. What do I owe yer?³¹

CARRIE. They're mine.

BILL. That ain't fair. We're not swaggies³² cadging drink and tucker.

CARRIE. I can see that. ... Don't be a fool. It don't hurt to shout a drink or two does it.³³

BILL. I'll have another, then.

CARRIE (*Filling glass*). The same again?

BILL. Yes. I think I deserve it.

CARRIE. I should think you do.

(*BILL sits on chair, with glass.*)

BILL. My best respects. (*Drinks.*) It was a big job, carrying him like that, but I thought I could do it.

CARRIE. How are you yourself? You must be all in.³⁴

BILL. Right as rain now.³⁵ All the stiffness has gone. An' I'm glowin' all over.³⁶

CARRIE. Good-O.

BILL. But I'm glad it's over. (*Lights pipe.*) It's nice sitting³⁷ here in a cool bar parlour, having a quiet smoke and a yarn, after tramping for weeks on a dry stage. It was the thought of a place like this kept me goin'³⁸.

CARRIE. It's been a terrible dry season. All the station owners are movin'.³⁹

BILL. My oath! Joe's a townie ... he don't know the bush. He couldn't go a hundred yards without getting lost. And the heat broke him up altogether, that and thirst. At last he dropped his swag, and couldn't go no further, fell down dead beat. So I rolled the two swags into one and straddled him across. Then I shouldered the bundle and bowled along a bit at a time. I sort o' reckoned there was a shanty somewhere about⁴⁰ here.⁴¹

CARRIE. And you carried him for ten miles on your back.

BILL. Yes, Miss.

CARRIE. My goodness it must a been a job. You must be awful strong.⁴²

³¹ them drinks. Me an Joe ... Dammit I might a known. What do I owe yer?] C.; them drinks. What do I owe yer? A/B.

³² swaggies] B.; humpin' bagmen A.

³³ Don't be a fool. It don't hurt to shout a drink or two does it.] C.; Don't be a fool. A/B.

³⁴ You must be all in.] B.; not in A.

³⁵ Right as rain now.] B.; Right as rain. A.

³⁶ An' I'm glowin' all over.] C.; not in A/B.

³⁷ It's nice sitting] B.; It's nice to be sitting A.

³⁸ goin'] B.; up A.

³⁹ All the station owners are movin'.] B.; not in A.

⁴⁰ about] B.; around A.

⁴¹ that and thirst. ... somewhere about here.] C.; that and thirst. We only had a pannikin of water left. There wasn't a creek no-where, not even a muddy water-hole. At last he dropped his swag, and couldn't go no further, and fell down dead beat. I couldn't leave him where he was, he might have died on the track. So I rolled the two swags into one and straddled him across. Then I shouldered the bundle and started again. sort o' reckoned there was a shanty somewhere around here. A. *In pencil in the left margin, Brown suggests that Louis should 'cut this speech' but it is not scored through.*

⁴² My goodness ... awful strong.] B.; That was a great feat of strength. A.

BILL. I'm a shearer. ... You need to 'ave a strong back ... shearing. I'll have another.⁴³

CARRIE (*Pushing bottle over the counter*). Have one with me, Bill.

(*Fills BILL's glass and her own.*)

BILL. Good health, Miss.⁴⁴

CARRIE. Good luck.

BILL. Joe an' me's mates.⁴⁵ A mate's a mate whatever happens. It don't matter who he is, where he comes from, or what he does, so long as he's a mate it makes no difference. It's share alike and stick together till the end of the track. That's my idea.⁴⁶

CARRIE. You're a funny pair to be mates, though.

BILL. Aw!⁴⁷ I dunno.

CARRIE. He's a queer bird to be outback, ain't he?

BILL. There's all sorts out back, Miss. Joe comes from a place called Caulfield in Victoria. You know where that is?⁴⁸

CARRIE. 'Course I do. I learned geography at school.⁴⁹

BILL. I'll say this for him, he can ride. By gum he can. I thought only the Queensland boys could ride. But he says there's a lot of good horsemen out there⁵⁰ in Caulfield.

CARRIE. I've heard about them.⁵¹

BILL. He's only a little 'un but he's game, game as Ned Kelly, and a good mate, too.⁵² He's got a lot o' funny yarns and my oath he's smart.⁵³ He ain't used to the country, but I'll make a bushman out of him yet. How far⁵⁴ is it to the fields, Miss?

CARRIE. They're only fifteen miles off. We're the nearest shanty this side. All the opal gaugers come in here.⁵⁵

⁴³ I'm a shearer. ... I'll have another.] *B.*; Lucky I have a strong back and shoulders. You need them shearing. *A.*

⁴⁴ CARRIE (*Pushing bottle over the counter.*) Have one with me, Bill./(*Fills BILL's glass and her own.*)/BILL Good health, Miss.] *A.*; (*CARRIE pushing bottle over the counter.*)/BILL Good health, Miss. *B.*

⁴⁵ Joe an' me's mates.] *B.*; You see we're mates. *A.*

⁴⁶ no difference. ... That's my idea.] *B.*; no difference. I never heard tell of a man going back on his mate. It's share alike and stick together till the end of the track. That's what a mate means. *A.* '*Out*', in *Brown's hand*, inscribed in the left hand margin with a single vertical stroke to the left of the entire speech; three ticks above the crossed line: '*I never heard tell of a man going back on his mate.*'

⁴⁷ Aw!] *B.*; not in *A.*

⁴⁸ You know where that is?] *B.*; Ever heard of it, miss? *A.*

⁴⁹ Course I do. I learned geography at school.] *B.*; Of course I have. *A.*

⁵⁰ out there] *B.*; out back *A.*

⁵¹ I've heard about them.] *B.*; I've heard about them, Bill. *A.*

⁵² He's only a little 'un but he's game, game as Ned Kelly, and a good mate, too.] *B.*; And though he's only a little 'un, he's game, as game as a terrier, and a good mate, too. *A.*

⁵³ He's got a lot o' funny yarns and my oath he's smart.] *B.*; He's got a lot of funny stories and my oath he's smart at the cards. *A.*

⁵⁴ far] *A.*; fur *B.*

⁵⁵ All the opal gaugers come in here.] not in *A.*

BILL. I thought so, though it's years since I passed this way. We're going to the opal fields. A man might knock down a fortune at one stroke of the pick. We'll have to make a tenner for stores and things, and then we'll go ahead like smoke.⁵⁶

CARRIE. There's a lot o' luck in the game. Some strike it in a day, some in a year—some never strike it. I hope you and your mate'll make a rise.⁵⁷

BILL. Thank you, Miss.⁵⁸ I don't think a small one would hurt, eh! Will you join me, Miss?

(CARRIE fills glasses.)

CARRIE. Here's good luck to you on the fields. May you knock down a bucket full harlequin.⁵⁹

BILL. It was funny how we struck up in Bourke. I came down from Queensland, and Joe drifted in from Caulfield. God knows why he came there.⁶⁰ I found 'im sittin' on 'is bundle in the red dust outside⁶¹ a pub an' cursin' like a bullocky. 'What's eatin' you?' says I. 'Eatin me?' says 'e, 'Why you great long bone 'eaded streak o' misery there's nothing eatin' me, but if you'll wait till the sun goes down I'll eat you if you'll bring along a bit o' petter and salt.' 'What's the sun got to do with it?' says I. 'Too blanky 'ot fightin' in the middle o' the day,' says 'e. 'I take me pleasures in the cool of the evening.'⁶²

CARRIE. What did 'e do then -

BILL. 'Come an' have a drink,' he says. Well Miss he fair took me breath away, the little rat. I didn't know whether ter laugh or get wild. A whipper snapper 'is size talking like that to me. Well we went into the pub an' 'ad one or two. An' when I said I was 'eadin for the opal fields he looks 'imself on. 'Blime that'll do me,' sez he, 'You do the diggin' and I'll pick out⁶³ the stones.' 'Struth 'e's a funny little cuss. Any'ow we come along together and earned a quid or two breaking in an odd horse for the store keeper at Paragundy⁶⁴. And 'ere we are.

CARRIE. What made you come here. Ain't there no work in Bourke.

BILL. I spose a man could 'ave got a job but Bourke ain't what it used to be. Too close to Sydney. Anyhow I like the bush better.

CARRIE. I wouldn't mind seeing Sydney again, or Melbourne either.

BILL. 'Ave you been there -⁶⁵

(BILL leans forward and touches the pendant, a piece of black opal, dangling from CARRIE's throat.)

CARRIE. What are you doing?⁶⁶

⁵⁶ A man might ... ahead like smoke.] B.; A man might make a fortune at one stroke of the pick. We don't need much, a pick, rope and bucket, and a bit of a windlass when we get some more capital. We'll have to make a tenner for stores and things, and then we'll go ahead like smoke. A. 'cut', in Brown's hand, inscribed in the left hand margin with a single vertical stroke to the left of the lines.

⁵⁷ Some strike it ... make a rise.] B.; not in A.

⁵⁸ Thank you, Miss.] B.; That's true. ... A.

⁵⁹ May you knock down ... harlequin.] B.; not in A.

⁶⁰ came there.] B.; came there. Bourke isn't the town it used to be, too close to Sydney. A.

⁶¹ I found 'im sittin' on 'is bundle in the red dust outside] C.; 'E was sittin' on 'is bundle out in the red dust outside C.

⁶² evening.] C.; evening.' Come an 'ave a drink. I want to find out if your human or only stuffed. C.

⁶³ pick out] B.; find C.

⁶⁴ Paragundy] B.; Fords Bridge C.

⁶⁵ 'Ave you been there -] B.; I wouldn't mind seeing Sydney again./BILL It's quiet here to-night, ain't it?/CARRIE This is a quiet place, Bill, except when the boys come in from the fields for a spree. C.

⁶⁶ doing?] B.; doing, Bill? A.

BILL. That's a nice bit of opal.

CARRIE. Like it?⁶⁷

BILL. My oath. From the *New Field*?⁶⁸

CARRIE. Yes, from *Duck Creek*. One of the fellows gave it to me. It's real harlequin.⁶⁹

BILL. What's his name?

CARRIE. Ned Devine.

BILL. Never heard of him.

CARRIE.. Don't expect you have. He ain't famous you know. But he's clever ... clever with the cards and the coins.⁷⁰

BILL. I bet people have heard of me from *Avon Downs* to Bourke. I've shore on all the big stations, and been ringer three seasons running. I can do me two hundred a day any time you like. You ask any of the station 'ands ain't they heard about Big Bill Ross.⁷¹

CARRIE. You ain't jealous, are you?⁷²

BILL. Me?

CARRIE. I was only joking.

BILL (*Leaning over counter*). If I have any luck I'll bring you a piece of stone if you'll have it.

CARRIE. Thanks, (*Shyly*.) Bill.⁷³

BILL. My colonial oath. The finest piece in the field. I say what's your name Miss?

CARRIE. You can call me Carrie if you like.

BILL. Well Carrie—Some blokes have all the luck.

CARRIE (*Handing bottle*). Help yourself, Bill.

(*BILL fills glass.*)

You ain't married, are you Bill?

BILL. Me. ... No ... (*Drinks.*)

CARRIE. Ned's a married man.

BILL. Married, is he. What right's he to give you that stone? He ought to be ashamed of himself.

CARRIE. A lot of men have wives and families somewhere or other. It don't matter, Bill.

BILL. You're too good to be behind the bar, serving drink to miners and shearers.

CARRIE. I don't complain about it.

BILL. I've been in every out-back shanty, but I've never seen a girl like you before.

CARRIE. You just say that.

BILL (*Taking her hand*). I mean it, Carrie, my oath I do.

CARRIE. If I believed everything men told me -

BILL. I ain't a bloke like that, Carrie.

CARRIE. I dunno how far I'd trust you.

BILL. I know I'm only a bushman. ... You're as high as the stars above me -

CARRIE. Go on with you!

BILL (*Holding her hand*). As high as the stars -

⁶⁷ Like it?] B.; Do you like it? A.

⁶⁸ From the *New Field*?] B.; Is that from White Cliffs? A.

⁶⁹ Yes, from *Duck Creek* ... It's real harlequin.] B.; Yes. One of the fellows gave it to me. A.

⁷⁰ But he's clever ... clever with the cards and the coins.] B.; *not in A.*

⁷¹ You ask any of the station 'ands aint they heard about Big Bill Ross.] B.; *not in A.*

⁷² you?] B.; you, Bill? A.

⁷³ Thanks, (*Shyly*.) Bill.] B.; Thanks, Bill. A.

(Enter JOE, looking as fresh as paint. He wears a pink spotted tie, and has had a shave and brush up.)

JOE. Give the skirt⁷⁴ a chance, Bill.

BILL (*Dropping her hand*). It's you.

JOE. Who did you think it was, Jack Dempsey⁷⁵.

CARRIE. You look all right now.

JOE. I was always a good looking chap.

CARRIE. Go on with you.

BILL. You got on a clean shirt, 'ad a shave an' Gawdstruth you've brushed your blankin' 'air.⁷⁶

CARRIE. How are you feelin' now⁷⁷, stranger?

JOE. If you're asking after me I never⁷⁸ felt better during the whole course of a brief but brilliant career.

CARRIE. Go on!

JOE (*Leaning over bar*). I say, Gertrude.

BILL. 'Er name's not Gertrude—it's Carrie.⁷⁹

CARRIE. What do you want?

JOE. Are you going down the Bay on Sunday?

CARRIE. Don't be saucy.

JOE. Give us a date won't yer.⁸⁰ I've had nobody to talk to for weeks but that big blob over there.

Blime it was like talkin' to the wall. 'E don't understand English.⁸¹

BILL. What do you mean by that?

JOE. Run away, Bill. I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to this lady. Have you ever been to Melbourne?

(*BILL sits in corner.*)

CARRIE. I used to live there.

JOE. Straight?

CARRIE. Yes.

JOE. That's a bit of all right. How would you like to be in Bourke Street now?

CARRIE. It wouldn't be too bad.

JOE. And a run down to St Kilda, and a swing on the flying boats?

CARRIE. I dunno if I'd trust you.

JOE. And a bit of supper at the Chow to wind up.⁸²

CARRIE. Go on with you.

JOE. Short soup and duck fowl—*dim sim*, de-licious.⁸³

⁷⁴ skirt] *B.*; girl *A.*

⁷⁵ Jack Dempsey] *C.*; me ghost *A.*

⁷⁶ You got on ... blankin' 'air.] *B.*; You've gone and had a shave and brushed your hair, and you've put on a tie. *A.*

⁷⁷ feelin' now] *B.*; feeling *A.*

⁷⁸ I never] *B.*; I may say simply that I never *A.*

⁷⁹ 'Er name's not Gertrude - It's Carrie] *B.*; I say, Maudie. *A.*

⁸⁰ Give us a date won't yer.] *B.*; Won't you give me a date, love. *A.*

⁸¹ Blime it was like talkin' to the wall. 'E don't understand English.] *C.*; *not in A.*

⁸² And a bit of supper at the Chow to wind up.] *B.*; And how about a little supper at the Chows. *A.*

⁸³ Short soup and duck fowl - dim simm, de-licious.] *B.*; Short soup and duck fowl - *A.*

CARRIE. I know nothing about those places.

JOE. I'd show you round Melbourne. We'd have a good time. I got the ontree into the most select society. Why me Uncle's a Judge.

CARRIE. Go on.

JOE. Yes 'e judges at the terrier coursin'.⁸⁴

BILL. Talking about big sheds, Bogan Bill when he broke the record used shears three feet long and tied on a Chinaman for a knocker. The shed he shore in was so big the overseer had to ride round on a horse; they cut the brownie with a circular saw, and the cook's off-sider had to go out in a boat to sweeten the tea.

JOE. That's not the way to talk to a lady.

BILL (*Rising in wrath.*) You're a fine mate, you are.⁸⁵

JOE. Pay no attention to him, Clarrie. He's only an ignorant country yob.⁸⁶

BILL. Didn't I pick you up on the track?

JOE. Shut up, Bill. Ain't yer got no etiquette.⁸⁷

BILL. Didn't I carry you ten miles?

JOE. Can't you see we're having a little chat?

(*BILL sits again.*)⁸⁸

You're looking a treat tonight, Carrie. You've got Theda Bara whipped to a custard.⁸⁹

CARRIE. I know your kind.

JOE. You need a man about the place. I wouldn't mind taking on the job myself. I'd spruce this place up an run a book on the side.⁹⁰

BILL (*Rising again.*) What's that I hear?

JOE (*Ignoring him.*) I'm tired of humping a heavy swag, with nobody to talk to but that big goat. 'E gives me the willies.⁹¹

BILL. Aren't you my mate?

JOE. He don't know nothing. A man needs a bit o' lively company, eh, Carrie.

BILL. Aren't you coming to *Duck Creek*⁹² with me.

JOE. Don't interrupt, Bill. It's bad manners.

BILL. D'you mean to tell me -

(*BILL sits down again, scowling.*)

JOE. I just want to make enough to get back to the city.

CARRIE. How did you ever get out to the country?

⁸⁴ I got ... the terrier coursin'.] *C.* these emendations by Frank Brown still use 'Maud' as the character title suggesting that a final edit was undertaken by Esson who changed the name.; not in *A.*

⁸⁵ You're a fine mate, you are.] *B.*; You're a fine mate, aren't you? *A.*

⁸⁶ He's only an ignorant country yob.] *B.*; He's only an ignorant country bloke. He got a hole in the back of his neck an' it's blowin' his tongue about. *A.*

⁸⁷ Ain't yer got no etiquette.] *B.*; I'm busy. *A.*

⁸⁸ (*BILL sits again.*)] *B.*; not in *A.*

⁸⁹ You've got Theda Bara whipped to a custard.] *C.*; not in *A.*

⁹⁰ I'd spruce ... on the side.] *C.*; not in *A.*

⁹¹ I'm tired of humping a heavy swag, with nobody to talk to but that big goat. 'E gives me the willies.] *C.*; I'm tired of humping a heavy swag, with nobody to talk to but that big bloke over there. *A.*

⁹² Duck Creek] *C.*; White Cliffs *A.*

JOE. It was all through a misunderstanding with the stewards. I was disqualified for twelve months for suspicious riding. Me what's never rode a crook race in me life.⁹³

CARRIE. Oh, what a shame.

JOE. Yes. ... It spoilt my reputation. I was making a name for myself for riding a good loser. I don't so much mind losin' a living Darlin' but the reflection on me honour, ah! That's what 'urts.⁹⁴

BILL (*Again rising*). Are you coming with me or not?

JOE. Don't get excited lad.

BILL. Didn't I carry you ten miles on my back?

JOE. Pay no attention to him, it's only the booze⁹⁵ talking.

BILL (*Roaring*). Didn't I save your blasted life?

JOE (*Singing*).

Every morn I bring thee violets -

BILL. I saved your life, and now you try to steal my girl.

JOE. Cut out the comedy, Bill.⁹⁶

BILL. You'll cut me out, will you? I'll show you who's the better man.

JOE. Steady there, Bill.

BILL. I'll murder you, you little city waster.

(JOE jumps into middle of floor, and adopts pro pugilists attitude.)

JOE. The best of ten rounds. Box on! I'll dazzle you with science.

BILL. Wait till I land on yer.

JOE. You couldn't 'it me with an 'andful of wheat.⁹⁷

BILL (*Rushing*). Let me at you! I'll beat the life outer yer.

JOE. I'll bet you couldn't beat a carpet.⁹⁸

(BILL aims useless blows, JOE dodges them. BILL is persistent, and chases JOE round the room. CARRIE screams.)

(Running round.) Hold on, Bill. Can't you take a joke.⁹⁹

BILL. I'll get you. I'll have your blood. I'll -

(BILL is forcing JOE into a corner.)

(Enter NED DEVINE.)

NED. Hold on there!¹⁰⁰ What's the row, boys?

BILL. I saved his blarsted life.

NED. Saved his life why I thought you were going to take it.¹⁰¹

JOE. He's my mate.

NED. Sufferin' snakes it don't look like it.¹⁰²

⁹³ We what's never rode a crook race in me life.] C.; not in A.

⁹⁴ I don't so much ... That's what 'urts.] C.; not in A.

⁹⁵ booze] B.; beer A.

⁹⁶ Cut out the comedy, Bill.] B.; I'm ashamed of you, Bill. A.

⁹⁷ You couldn't 'it me with an 'andful of wheat.] B.; The best of ten rounds. Box on! A.

⁹⁸ I'll bet you couldn't beat a carpet.] C.; not in A.

⁹⁹ *(Running round.)* Hold on, Bill. Can't you take a joke.] C.; not in A.

¹⁰⁰ Hold on there!] B.; not in A.

¹⁰¹ Saved his life why I thought you were going to take it.] C.; not in A.

¹⁰² Sufferin' snakes it don't look like it.] C.; not in A.

BILL. And then he took my girl.
 JOE. She was mine. I seen her first.
 CARRIE. They've both had a few drinks, but they don't mean any harm.
 NED. Shake hands then, and call it a draw.
(BILL and JOE shake hands.)
*(Business.)*¹⁰³
 BILL. A nice sort of mate you are.
 NED. See here. *(Shows some pieces of opal.)* I've struck it rich. That's worth thirty pounds an ounce.
 JOE. Blime, give us a screen.¹⁰⁴ We're going on to the fields.
 BILL. You're not going with me. I'm done with you.
 JOE. I'll look after you, Bill.
 BILL. You're no mate for a man.
 CARRIE. We can take that trip to Melbourne now, can't we?
 NED. I suppose so.
 CARRIE. You promised, Ned.
 NED. All right. Got to humour the wife, eh, boys?¹⁰⁵
 BILL *(Gasping)*. Your wife! Pink me pretty, your wife.¹⁰⁶
 JOE. Wife. Oh! Blime, jugs fer luck. Listen to the birdies singin'.¹⁰⁷
 NED *(Inquiringly)*. What's this?
 CARRIE. Oh, just a bit of fun!¹⁰⁸
 BILL. Your wife?
 JOE. Bury me deep, boys, bury me deep! Lilies is me favourite.¹⁰⁹
 CARRIE. We're going on our honeymoon.
(BILL takes up swag.)
 CARRIE. Are you off, Bill.
 BILL. Yes. I'll be camping down by the creek tonight. 'Oly smoke wife¹¹⁰, mate, gorn, girl gorn, well I'm going too.
(Exit BILL.)
 JOE *(Shaking hands with NED)*. Allow me to congratulate you. Ned. I like Carrie myself, but you beat me on the post. But only because I was 'andicaped out of it.
 CARRIE. He's full o' luck. I'll have to see about supper, Ned.
*(Exit CARRIE.)*¹¹¹
 NED. So you're off to the opal fields.
 JOE. We want to give it a go.

¹⁰³ *(Business.)*] B.; not in A.

¹⁰⁴ Blime, give us a screen.] B.; not in A.

¹⁰⁵ humour the wife, eh, boys?] C.; humour the wife, eh? A.

¹⁰⁶ Pink me pretty, your wife.] C.; not in A.

¹⁰⁷ singin'.] C.; singin'. Throw me down a shaft. A.

¹⁰⁸ Oh, Just a bit of fun!] B.; not in A.

¹⁰⁹ Lilies is me favourite.] C.; not in A.

¹¹⁰ 'Oly smoke wife] B.; Wife A.

¹¹¹ He's full o' luck. I'll have to see about supper, Ned./*(Exit CARRIE.)*] B.; not in A.

NED. It's all luck. ... Look here. ... I've got the sugar now, in notes and opal. Some stone I sold on the fields to that blanky old robber who calls himself a buyer, just exes¹¹². (*Flashes roll.*) But you bet your life I'd keeping my main packet for the city jewellers.

JOE. How will you splash it up. Will you play the ponies?

NED. Not on your life. There's only one square way to gamble and that's with the pennies. Two up.¹¹³

Curtain.

Notes

shanty: a public house, often unlicensed; Cf. Rolf Boldrewood *The Miner's Right*: 'Any attempt to limit the licensing produced such a crop of 'shanties' or sly-grog shops.'

done up: (*colloq.*) done in, exhausted, very tired.

a bit of a pull: (*colloq.*) successful attempt; carried with influence, power or authority.

opal fields: The major opal mining areas of Australia include White Cliffs, Lightning Ridge (famous for producing black opal), the Grawin, Coober Pedy, Andamooka, Mintable, Lambia, and the Queensland Opal fields. White Cliffs, about 100km north of Wilcania in outback NSW, commenced commercial opal mining in the late 1880s and the town boomed as the European market sought the quality seam opal (usually white—milk—opal or crystal opal) that White Cliffs produced, but its life as the epicentre of seam opal petered out and the boom ended by the 1930s. The first registered miner in the Lightning Ridge area was Jack Murray in 1901. In 1902 surface opals were discovered by professional prospector Charles Nettleton who sank shafts at McDonald's 6-Mile and on Angledool Station. Nettleton moved on to the Dunumbral Run in 1903 and in that year sold the first locally produced opals for a mere thirty dollars. An opal rush occurred at Sims Hill in 1905 and the next year the Wallangulla settlement began to develop. New Town was surveyed in 1907. Wallangulla then became known as Old Town. The Wallangulla opal fields later came to be known as Lightning Ridge. In 1908 the Nettleton—or 3-Mile Flat settlement—was established. Approximately 1200 people lived at this settlement during its peak. New Town was connected to the telegraph line in 1911 and the following year settlement began to consolidate at this site.

Bourke: a town in the north-west of New South Wales, approximately 800 kilometres north-west of Sydney, situated on the south bank of the Darling River.

dirty water: (*colloq.*) alcohol.

the mulga: alternate term for the bush or wilderness regions.

Caulfield, where the cabbages grow: Caulfield is a suburb of Melbourne, 12 kilometres south-east of the CBD. Caulfield is best known as the location of Caulfield Racecourse (the Victorian Amateur Turf Club held its first meeting at Caulfield on 5 August, 1876). From 1882 Caulfield was known as a major market-gardening district.

cracked up: (*colloq.*) collapse under physical or mental strain.

If a blanky Russian carried his mate ninety miles in the North West I ought to be good enough for a hundred and fifty: Cf. Ivan ('Russian Jack') Fredericks(1864-1904) arrived in the Kimberley in 1886 to make his fortune in the gold strike. Known as the handmade wheelbarrow-pushing Kimberley prospector, who wheeled an injured mate from their bush camp, the 300 kilometres to remote Hall's Creek. In spite of his noble deeds he never struck it rich. He was about 40 when he died in Fremantle, victim of a hard life and hard drinking his last years spent in prison and a shelter for the homeless.

a stayer: (*colloq.*) a person of great stamina, endurance.

by cripes: (*colloq.*) expression of astonishment, surprise; a mild oath

swaggies: swagman, a tramp carrying his belongings in a 'swag' (one's personal belongings in a bundle, usually a blanket).

cadging: (*British, informal*) asking for or obtaining something to which one is not strictly entitled.

a yarn: (*colloq.*) story, tale, reminiscence; Cf. 'spin a yarn', tell a good story.

harlequin: 'Harlequin opal' is a name given to an opal with patches of fire in the shape of rectangles or diamonds. Extremely rare, Harlequin stone is the most prized of all opals, and were often referred to by the old miners as 'tartan shirts opal.'

cuss: (*informal*) an annoying or stubborn person.

¹¹² just exes] for exes A.

¹¹³ Two up.] B.; not in A.

Paragundy: The locality of Parragundy Gate is located in the Paroo Region of Qld; Cf. Ford's Bridge: a nondescript hamlet lying between Green Creek and the Warrego River, between Bourke and Hungerford.

Duck Creek: The Queensland opal fields are within a belt of deeply weathered Cretaceous sedimentary rocks known as the Winton Formation, which extends in a north-westerly direction from the New South Wales border at Hungerford stretching west of Cunnamulla, Quilpie, Longreach and Winton to Kynuna, a distance of about 1000km. Queensland's opal mining fields are located in the west and southwest of the State, and include the Toompine field (east and south-east of Toompine—includes Lushingtons, Coparella, Duck Creek, Sheep Station Creek and Emu Creek).

My colonial oath: (*euphemism*) my bloody oath; emphatic affirmation or agreement. Cf. Henry Lawson's short story 'His Colonial Oath'.

the skirt: (*colloq.*) girl or woman, especially as a sex object.

Jack Dempsey: William Harrison 'Jack' Dempsey (1895–1983), nicknamed 'Kid Blackie' and 'The Manassa Mauler', was an American professional boxer who competed from 1914 to 1927, and reigned as the world heavyweight champion from 1919 to 1926.

Avon Downs: a pastoral station on the Barkly Tableland in the Northern Territory of Australia. It is located 260 kilometres northwest of Mount Isa. In 1866, John and James Ranken, two cousins from old pastoral families in New South Wales, herded 4000 sheep to the area from Queensland's Mackay district, escaping severe drought. They settled in the area now known as Avon Downs.

Bourke Street: one of the main streets of Melbourne's CBD, named for Irish-born British army officer Sir Richard Bourke, who served as the Governor of New South Wales from 1831 and 1837 during the drafting of the Hoddle Grid. During the *Marvellous Melbourne* era.

St Kilda, and a swing on the flying boats: an inner suburb, 6km south-east of Melbourne's CBC, St Kilda was named after a schooner, *Lady of St Kilda* (which moored at the main beach for much of 1841) by Charles La Trobe, and the ship's master and early settler Lieutenant James Ross Lawrence. During the Land Boom of the 1880s, St Kilda became a densely populated district of great stone mansions and palatial hotels. But during the Depression of the 1890s, however, St Kilda began to decline.

the terrier coursin': the sport of chasing prey with dogs/terriers.

Bogan Bill: In the language of local indigenous people, Bogan means 'swamp rush,' a water plant characteristic of the Bogan River. The character 'Bogan Bill' first appears in a poem Henry Lawson wrote in January 1897 entitled 'The Shearing Shed'. That poem is a re-working in verse of a prose piece which had appeared in the *Worker* in November 1893 under the title 'Ladies in the Shed', in which a shearer called Bill is advised by his mate to 'twig the walk of her' as a lady walks by on a visit to see the shearing. Four years later Lawson changed this character's name from 'Bill' to 'Bogan', and so the name Bogan first appears as such in Lawson's work in January 1897. However this poem did not appear in print in *The Bulletin* until December 1897, and in the meantime Lawson had written a second poem in which Bogan Bill was the central character ('The Bosses Boots', *The Bulletin*, 20 February 1897).

Talking about big sheds, Bogan Bill ... to sweeten the tea: Cf. In a bushman oral tradition, The Speewah, a mythical Australian station that is the subject of many tall-tales and hyperbole, is retold to enhance the storytellers' masculinity by relating events of extreme hardship and overcoming the dangers of the Australian wilderness. While it is the Speewah Station in The Kimberleys, Western Australia, however, that is considered by some to be the original Speewah. The Speewah of legend, is an imaginary land and its boundaries have never been defined. At any rate the territory itself is supposedly very large: when one wanted to close the gate to the station he had to take a week's rations with him; and a jackeroo who was sent to bring the cows in from the horse paddock was said to be gone for six months, not due to incompetence (for there are no incompetent workers on the Speewah) but simply due to the sheer size of the Speewah; the dust storms were so thick that the rabbits dug warrens in them; even the birds were so big that they used Ayres Rock to 'stone the crows.'

Theda Bara: born Theodosia Burr Goodman, (1885–1955); one of the most popular actresses of the silent era, and one of American cinema's earliest sex symbols. She was well known for wearing very revealing costumes in her films (such as *Cleopatra* (1917)). Her *femme fatale* roles earned her the nickname 'The Vamp'.

Waster: (*colloq.*) one not occupied to his full potential; incapacitated as a result of excessive indulgence in alcohol

Pink me pretty: (*colloq.*) 'to 'pink' is to shear a sheep so closely so that the colour of the skin shows through; Cf. AB Paterson's 'Flash Jack from Gundagai'.

exes: (*colloq.*) without an indicated value.

Splash it up: (*colloq.*) spend freely; display wealthy conspicuously.

play the ponies: (*colloq.*) bet on the horse races.

Two-up: a traditional Australian gambling game, involving a designated 'spinner' throwing two coins or pennies into the air. Players bet on whether the coins will fall with both heads (obverse) up, both tails (reverse) up, or with one coin a head and one a tail (known as 'odds').

Andeganora

By Frank P Brown & Louis Esson

To Vance Palmer

Publication

Moore, W. & Moore, T.I., Best Australian One Act Plays, Angus and Robertson, Sydney (1937).

Memorable among the stage plays of general characters is Louis Esson's *Andeganora*, a story of conflict between white and black, with a Northern Territory campfire setting. Like the same author's *The Drovers*, its power is in its atmosphere and suggestion. Very stirring is old Andeganora's chanting over the fire as he incites his young tribesman to kill the wife-stealing white man.

The Bulletin, 15 September 1937

Copy Text

Moore, W. & Moore, T.I., Best Australian One Act Plays, Angus and Robertson, Sydney (1937).

Performance History

Andeganora was first performed by the Sydney Drama Society, at the Little Theatre (Phillip Street), Sydney, July 23, 1938, one of four Australian plays produced by Rosalie Wilson and under the direction of Alfred Race. The other plays included *At Dusk* by Millicent Armstrong, *Seeing Granny Off* by Hey Simpson, and scenes from M Barnard Eldershaw's novel *A House is Built* adapted by Rosalie Wilson).

Characters

ANDEGANORA, a very old blackfellow, father of Maboyer

BILL O'NEIL, a brumby-runner

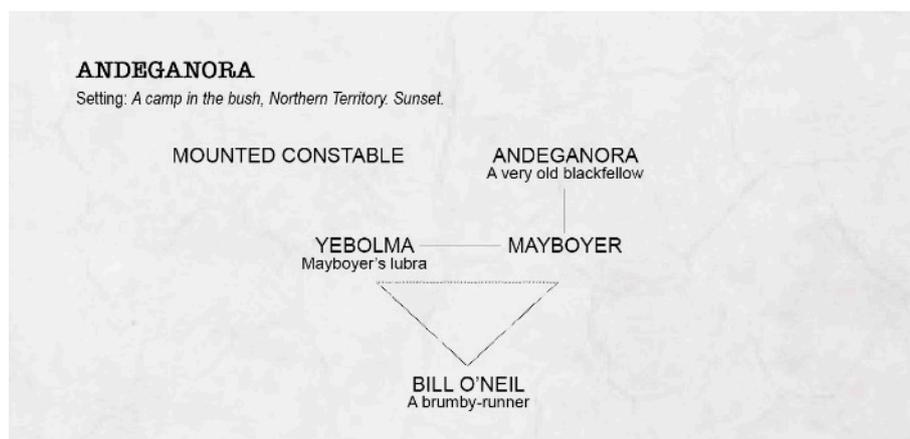
MABOYER, a black boy, working for O'NEIL

MOUNTED CONSTABLE

YEBOLMA, MABOYER's lubra

Setting

A camp in the bush, Northern Territory. Sunset.



ACT ONE

(A camp in the bush, Northern Territory. Sunset.)

(Back stage, Centre, is the camp-fire. Near it are dishes, billy-cans, tin plates and pannikins. At Right Centre are the pack-saddles.)

(It is after supper. BILL O'NEIL is squatting by the pack-saddles, smoking. He is a big, dark-bearded man, middle-aged, wearing khaki trousers, shirt open at neck, soft hat and elastic-side boots, with spurs turned the wrong way round. He has a revolver on belt. MABOYER, a black boy, is putting a cracker on a stock-whip. His shirt and trousers are ragged. Beside the camp-fire ANDEGANORA lies sleeping, with a blanket over his shoulders.)

(MABOYER suddenly straightens up and listens intently.)

MABOYER. Listen, Boss! I bin hear 'im horse, I think. *(Points with mouth.)* That way.

O'NEIL. That one lubra come back, eh?

MABOYER. This one no more lubra—him stranger horse orright.

O'NEIL. Which one stranger?

MABOYER. Can't see—too much scrub sit down. *(He throws himself down, putting ear on ground.)* Him close up now. That one Gov'ment I think ... I hear 'im big fella spur ... I hear 'im chain too. *(Jumps up.)* What's the matter that one come up here!

O'NEIL. How the hell do I know! *(He knocks ashes out of pipe.)*

(Pause.)

('Cooee' off, Left. O'NEIL rises and 'cooees' back. MABOYER, in his eagerness to see who it is knocks over the billy-can, and drops the whip.)

You clumsy swab!

MABOYER *(Surprised)*. No, Boss.

O'NEIL. Git outer the way.

MABOYER. No more you wild with me. Me good boy.

O'NEIL. No cheek from you, or I'll knock the liver outer you, like a dingo.

MABOYER *(Sulkily)*. One day Bill O'Neil kick dingo one time too much.

O'NEIL *(Picking up whip)*. What's that you're mutterin'!

MABOYER. No more growl alonga me.

O'NEIL *(Threatening him)*. Don't give me none o' yer lip. I'll ...

MABOYER. No more you growl, boss. Me good boy, orright. *(Retreats slowly.)*

O'NEIL. Off with you, or I'll belt the possum outer yer.

(Enter CONSTABLE. He wears riding-breeches, soft shirt open at neck, revolver on belt, riding-boots with big military spurs trailing on ground, and wide-brimmed hat.)

CONSTABLE. Hallo, Bill!

O'NEIL. Hallo! It's you, Constable.

CONSTABLE. What's the barney?

O'NEIL. Nothin' much.

CONSTABLE *(Laughingly)*. Can the Law be of any assistance?

O'NEIL. No. The buck was gettin' a bit fresh.

CONSTABLE. Still brumby-running, Bill?

O'NEIL. Yes. Got a few last night in the trap. The lubra's gone down to give 'em a drink, and hobble out me own crocks. Campin' here?

CONSTABLE. No.

O'NEIL. Why not? You'll get some good grass fer yer horses, just over the ridge there. *(Points.)*

CONSTABLE. I'm on business.

O'NEIL. What!

CONSTABLE. Did you ever know that buck of Yellow Harry's?

O'NEIL. My oath, I did.

CONSTABLE. Well, I'm after him.

O'NEIL. Go on, what's he been doin'?

CONSTABLE. He murdered Harry, speared him in the back.

O'NEIL. Hell. That's bad.

CONSTABLE. They were camped somewhere near the head of the King River.

O'NEIL. Fancy poor old Harry gettin' done in by a swab!

CONSTABLE. I hear he'd been with him a long time, too.

O'NEIL. That makes no diff'rence. A myall wants a bit o' handling. I reckon Harry was too easy-goin'.

CONSTABLE. The trouble is, it might stir up other blacks. Some of them are still pretty wild.

O'NEIL. I'm not scared. I've led me life, same as now, for nigh thirty years, and I orter know how to handle blackfellows. I soon knock the fight out of them. Rum and hidin's, hidin's and rum—that's wot does it—and I give 'em both.

CONSTABLE. You're tough, Bill.

O'NEIL. Yes, I'm too strong for 'em. It's only a weak man wot gets killed, like poor old Harry. I put the fear o' hell inter 'em. I make 'em scared of their own shadder. They know who's boss in this camp, anyhow.

(Pause.)

CONSTABLE. I say, Bill, is the going rough from here to the lagoon?

O'NEIL. No, it ain't a bad track.

CONSTABLE. My horse isn't shod. I left the barracks in a bit of a hurry.

O'NEIL. If you bear a bit to the north, you'll miss the stones.

CONSTABLE. Well, I'll have to get along.

O'NEIL. Won't you have a dish o' tea before you go? The billy'll boil in a jiffy.

CONSTABLE *(Laughing)*. Sorry. Duty calls. I want to cop that nigger before he can get into the Stone Country. *(Moves off.)*

O'NEIL. Hope you do.

CONSTABLE. Well, hooray, Bill. *(Exit.)*

O'NEIL. Hooray!

(Pause. O'NEIL fills his pipe, and goes to fire for a light. MABOYER, who has been in hiding, comes forward.)

MABOYER *(Excitedly)*. That one blackfella, Kara-Kara, bin spear 'im Yaller 'Arree.

O'NEIL. What the hell d'yer know about it?

MABOYER. That one, Kara-Kara, him Banyan blackfella—no good alonga white fella. Kacoodga good fella boy alonga white fella.

O'NEIL *(Slowly)*. Poor ole Harry! If that myall beats the John to the Stone Country, I'll get after him meself. I'll fill the swine full o' lead. ... My oath, I will.

(He spies YEBOLMA, who has come in quietly at back. She is a quaint and pathetic figure, with big, soft eyes and tangled hair. She wears an old print dress.)

O'NEIL *(Shouting at her)*. Eh, go on, fill the billy ... d'yer hear me—fill the billy and wash up.

YEBOLMA. Me wash 'im plate now. *(Busies herself with the dishes.)*

MABOYER *(Smiling)*. Me Kacoodga, me good boy.

O'NEIL *(Turning on him sharply)*. What are yer doin' loafin' round here—you git after the horses.

MABOYER. Orright, Boss.

O'NEIL. Put 'em on a bit o' grass fer the night.

(Exit MABOYER, in a flash.)

O'NEIL (*Shouting after him*). Don't forget to hobble ole *Skylark*, or I'll ...

(*YEBOLMA comes forward.*)

YEBOLMA. No more you wild with Maboyer. Him catch 'im brumby orright.

O'NEIL. He'd better or I'll liven him up.

YEBOLMA. Him good boy.

O'NEIL. You know a lot, don't you?

YEBOLMA. Me know plenty. Me learn cookin' and sewin'.

O'NEIL (*Chuckling*). Don't believe you.

YEBOLMA. Alonga Mission.

O'NEIL. How the devil did you get there?

YEBOLMA. One rain time, frog make big corroboree alonga billabong ... kangaroo plenty die ... fat crow sit alonga tree and laugh 'croah-aah' ... me hungry ... me go Mission.

O'NEIL. Why did you leave, then?

YEBOLMA. Me knock up too much yabber-yabber ... Missionary talk all the same wood-pigeon ... too much sing hymn alonga sky. Me knock up alonga that one God, too. Him tell God give everything ... him give tucker, flour, tobacco, everything. Me sit down wait. Him give little bit flour, little bit tobacco, him no give rum. Me think him stingy fella.

(*ANDEGANORA stirs by the fire. YEBOLMA goes to him, takes a piece of tobacco from her hair and gives him half. He clutches it eagerly, but soon drops off to sleep again.*)

O'NEIL. Why are yer givin' that old cow yer tobacco?

YEBOLMA. Him Andeganora ... Maboyer's father.

O'NEIL. Look at him, always crouchin' there beside the fire.

YEBOLMA. Him old man now ... very old—blind too.

O'NEIL. Why don't your get rid of him? He's worse than useless about here.

YEBOLMA. One time ... long long ago ... him big hunter, big fighter ... him savvy plenty corroboree ... teach young fella magic ... him savvy plenty thing ... him sing to rain ... make 'im come up when grass dry ... him sing 'nother blackfella dead. ... Old man wise.

O'NEIL. Magic. (*Laughs.*) I'll teach you magic. (*He goes and gets bottle of rum.*) This kind o' magic suits me. (*Drinks.*) That's better than old blackfellow's magic.

YEBOLMA. Plenty magic alonga bush. When blackfella enemy sneak up, like dingo, little quail whisper ... wake 'im up. Bill O'Neil no blackfella. No little quail whisper 'im.

O'NEIL (*Laughing*). Fancy birds talkin'! Haw, Haw! I suppose they sing comic songs, same as I heard up at Darwin. Come here. (*Offers her bottle.*) Have a nip with me.

YEBOLMA. No Boss, plis.

O'NEIL. I'm takin' a fancy to you. You've got some sense, and, no mistake, you're the prettiest girl I've seen for years. (*He sits by pack-saddles.*) Come over here, and we'll have a yarn.

(*Pause. She shrinks away. O'NEIL lifts his hand and beckons her over. Enter MABOYER, excitedly.*)

What the blazes is it?

MABOYER (*With pantomime*). That one yarraman, *Skylark*, run away first time. Me bin r-run 'im up ... r-run 'im up ... bin catch 'im alonga blind gully. Him rogue, that fella, orright.

O'NEIL. Did you put 'em on good grass?

MABOYER. My word, yes, Boss. Good fella grass. No horse walk away to-night, sit down all the time alonga green grass.

(*O'NEIL pours rum into pannikin.*)

MABOYER (*Crossing*). Me want 'im h-rum.

O'NEIL. I've got a good mind to stop your grog to-night.

MABOYER. You give rum now, plis.

O'NEIL. Here's your nip.
(Gives MABOYER pannikin of rum.)
 You're too fond o' rum.
(MABOYER drinks it eagerly, and gasps breathlessly.)
 See you git after them blarsted horses early in the mornin'. *(He puts bottle to his own lips.)*

MABOYER. Me catch 'em mornin' time before sun jump up.

O'NEIL *(Rising)*. I'm goin' ter the creek for a dip before I turn in. *(Looking at YEBOLMA and grinning.)* I won't be long, Yebolma. *(Exit.)*
(Pause. They watch O'NEIL go out.)

YEBOLMA. White man bin talk to me. Bill O'Neil want me sit down alonga him. Maboyer no care.

MABOYER *(Slightly drunk)*. You my lubra. No white man steal Yebolma. Maboyer strong fella.

YEBOLMA *(Expressing amusement)*. Oi'-ee, oi'-ee!

MABOYER. No more you laugh.

YEBOLMA. Maboyer him weak, poor fella. Too much like 'im rum. White man beat 'im ... steal 'im lubra. *(Mockingly.)* Me sorry poor Maboyer.

MABOYER *(Eagerly)*. No. You 'n' me go away together ... leave 'im this silly fella country ... leave this white fella too. Me know good fella country ... we go ... plenty kangaroo ... me all day spear 'im ... good fella lagoon there ... full up lily-root ... all day you catch 'im lily-root there. Then me talk alonga Yebolma. We go ... Maboyer and Yebolma go-o-o along lagoon.
(Pause. ANDEGANORA wakes from his stupor, and slowly rises. He is a very old man, with painted body, and white hair and beard. YEBOLMA throws blanket over his shoulder. ANDEGANORA starts to corroboree to himself.)

ANDEGANORA *(Chanting with expressive gestures, at first slowly and quietly, then wildly, exultantly, with growing frenzy)*. Him Andeganora ... big hunter, big fighter ... kill 'im enemy—dead. One time, l-long long ago, 'nother tribe name Banyan make big fight talk alonga Kacoodga. That time, Banyan blackfella all about corroboree ... sing him eat 'im up Kacoodga ... kill 'im old man, kill 'im lubra, kill 'im piccaninny ... drink 'im blood, eat 'im kidney-fat. Andeganora jump up—Kite-Hawk him name—big hunter, big fighter ... him talk alonga tribe. Him sing 'Let Banyan blackfella come on. Kacoodga plenty savvy fight too.' Him sing, 'When Andeganora walk, Banyan blackfella melt like goanna fat in sun!' Him lead Kacoodga alonga Banyan ... that night plenty dingo sing out, big mob ... dingo smell blood. That time Kacoodga make big fight alonga Banyan—oh, big fight—Andeganora throw one spear, spear 'im big mob Banyan at one throw. Kacoodga finish 'em quick - altogether. Andeganora kill 'im enemy ... kill ... leave 'im bone on ground for dingo and crow.

YEBOLMA *(To MABOYER)*. You no fight.

MABOYER *(Passionately)*. Me Maboyer. ... Fire ... white fella call Lightning!

YEBOLMA. You no kill enemy.

MABOYER. No more white man beat me ... steal lubra ... *(Throws pannikin fiercely to ground.)*

ANDEGANORA *(Chanting)*. Him Andeganora ... big hunter, big fighter ... kill 'im enemy—dead. By 'im by, blackfella all about make big corroboree—sing all night—'enemy die when Andeganora walk with spear—him bone smoke in sun.'
(The sun sets and dusk falls over the scene.)
(Enter O'NEIL, drunk.)

O'NEIL. What the hell's this? Shut that old cow's mouth! Stop that infernal noise or ... *(Takes out revolver.)* Damn it, I'm drunk. *(Drops revolver.)* It don't matter ... I got it. *(Manages to pick it up and replace it on belt.)* I don't need no revolver. They know Bill O'Neil. *(He laughs grimly.)* Eh, Maboyer, I'm goin' to give you hell's own hidin' in the mornin'. ...
(MABOYER fingers wommera on belt.)

And you ... (*Calling to YEBOLMA.*) don't run away ... I want yer. ... Git over there and turn in, damn yer. (*He reels towards blankets by fire.*) I've had enough of this flamin' corroboree ... (*He lies down, muttering drunkenly.*) Shut up, blast yer! (*He rolls over on blanket.*)

ANDEGANORA (*Chanting*). Andeganora kill ... kill 'im enemy ... leave 'im bone on ground for dingo and crow.

MABOYER (*Striking his breast*). Him all the same Andeganora! (*He seizes a spear.*)

(*There is a mournful howl in the distance.*)

Dingo! Him smell blood. (*He fits spear on wommera.*)

(*YEBOLMA watches him exultantly. ANDEGANORA continues to corroboree to himself.*)

ANDEGANORA (*Chanting*). Enemy die when Andeganora walk with spear, him bone smoke in sun.

(*MABOYER, with glistening eyes, takes a few stealthy steps and poises spear at the sleeping body of BILL O'NEIL.*)

Curtain.

Notes

The people who live in the Miwatj or north-east Arnhem Land region are known generally as Yolngu, which simply means 'people'. They belong to a number of intermarrying clans that are also closely related culturally and linguistically.

The main clans are the Rirratjingu ... Djapu, Marrakulu, Ngaymil, Galpu, Djambarrpuingu, Marrangu, Datiwuy and Djarrwark of the Dhuwa moiety; and the Gumatj, Dhalwangu, Manggalli, Madarra, Munyuku, Warramirri, Wangurri, Gupapuyngu and Ritharrngu of the Yirritja moiety.

National Museum of Australia

[<https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/yalangbara/yolngu>]

Yolngu Matha (human tongue) is the collective name for the languages of the Yolngu (Yolŋu).

I can find no reference for the names Andeganora, Maboyer, Yebolma nor Kacoodga in the Yolngu Matha.

cracker: the tip of a stock whip; usually a small attachment of horse-hair, silk or cord.

elastic-side boots: popular Australian work boot. The elasticated side design, originally invented in England by Joseph Sparkes Hall in 1837. In addition due to the boot not using laces the fit is less tight allowing more airflow, which makes a difference in hot weather. Also the lack of a shoe tongue makes it easier to waterproof the boot.

scrub: vegetation consisting of stunted trees, bushes, and other plants growing in an arid area.

lubra: an Aboriginal woman.

cooee: a shout used, usually in the bush, to attract attention, find missing people, or indicate one's own location. When done correctly—loudly and shrilly—a call of 'cooee' can carry over a considerable distance.

barney: (*British*) a quarrel, especially a noisy one.

hobble out me own crocks: the term 'hobbling' refers to the practice of tying any part of the animal's limbs (fore limbs tied together, hind limbs tied together, one fore tied to one hind; hind limb tied to neck) as a means of restraint; crock, as it 'quantity', O'Neil wants Maboyer to hobble his own horses, as opposed to the brumbies.

Yellow Harry: Cf. 'In the same locality [Clarence River, Northern NSW] was another half-breed [Mongolian] know as Yellow Harry. His mother was of some foreign nationality, and the somewhat fragmentary story was told that one day her husband, also a foreigner, came half demented to the other wife men of the camp and told them a tale that made them take action.' 'Smoke Ho', *Brisbane Worker*, 23 November 1927

King River: West Arnhem, Northern Territory.

a swab: (*slang*) uncouth or worthless fellow.

buck: the violent, jarring leaps and movements made by a horse which is trying to unseat its rider; term for young Aboriginal man.

Brumby-running: to hunt down wild horses. The name 'brumby' may derive from that of Major James Brumby who had a grant at Richmond Hill, NSW in the early colonial days. Many of his horses strayed, and she he left for

Tasmania, they became wild. However, Aborigines of the Maranoa district in Queensland also have a word, 'broombies', which they apply to unbroken horses.

myall: an aborigine who has had little or no contact with whites c/f Rachel Henning Letters (1864), 'They were myalls (ie wild blacks).'

Stone Country: the rugged region of Arnhem Land, east of Kakadu National Park.

jiffy: a very short time; quickly.

cop: (*slang*) policeman.

nigger: In the present-day English language, the word *nigger* is an ethnic slur, usually directed at black people. The word originated as a neutral term referring to people with black skin, as a variation of the Spanish and Portuguese noun *negro*, a descendant of the Latin adjective *niger* (meaning the colour 'black'). It was often used derogatorily, and by the mid-twentieth century, particularly in the United States, its usage became unambiguously a pejorative, racist insult.

Banyan: a native fig tree.

John: John Hop (*rhyming slang*) a cop; a derogatory term for a policeman; Cf. Edward Dyson *Fact'ry 'Ands* (1909): 'He had er John in tow ... there policeman was fer me.'

mission: a building or group of buildings in which missionary work is carried out.

corroboree: an Australian Aboriginal dance ceremony which may take the form of a sacred ritual or an informal gathering.

billabong: a branch of a river forming a backwater or stagnant pool, made by water flowing from the main stream during a flood.

yarraman: (*Pidgin*) horse; Cf. H Patchett Martin *Coo-ee: Tales of Australian Life* (1891) 'He just clapped spurs to his old yardman (horse), and never pulled up out of a gallop till he had got over the range.'

stingy: unwilling to spend or give; inefficient or scanty; ill-tempered.

blazes: (*euphemism*) hell-fire; *go to blazes!* to go somewhere very far away.

a dip: swim; bathe, wash.

piccaninny: (*Pidgin*) a small black or Aboriginal child.

wommer: a spear throwing implement consisting of a stick with a hooked end.

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