

**Hard Cash**  
**John Dwyer and his Contemporaries,**  
**1890-1914**

**M. G. Hearn**

A thesis submitted to the Department of  
History at the University of Sydney in  
fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 2000.

## Abstract

John Dwyer (1856-1934) was a London docks foreman who emigrated to Australia in 1888. Leaving his London employment on his 'own accord', Dwyer embarked upon a quest for recognition - recognition of his rights as a worker and his identity as an individual. Dwyer and his family arrived in New South Wales to be greeted by the economic depression of the 1890s, and state and employer mobilisation against organised labour and working class radicals. Dwyer was soon reduced to scraping together a living as a boarding house manager in Sydney's poorest districts, as he helped organise the Active Service Brigade, which agitated on behalf of the unemployed.

Dwyer's surviving papers - twenty-one boxes of correspondence, manuscripts, minutes, handbills, tracts and newspaper clippings, plus several other volumes - document the life of a working class political radical and autodidact who embraced temperance, and who was fascinated by new ideas in religion and science - Darwinism, Theosophy and occult spiritualism. This thesis places Dwyer in the context of the intense ideological ferment of new ideas in politics, theology and science that characterised the period 1890-1914. Ideas that aggressively challenged the old certainties, and which Dwyer embraced in his project to 'change the face of the world.' Changing the world contested with the need to endure its conditions. Theosophy and temperance appealed to Dwyer's notion of duty, and an instinct to rationalise the social and economic roles he seemed unable to escape. The fragmented nature of his papers, and stop-start bursts of public activism - in politics, theosophy and temperance - reflect the tension between an urge to fight, to understand, to create - struggling against the daily demands of making a living and feeding a family.

The thesis explores Dwyer's relationship with fellow radicals and workers, the labour movement and members of Sydney's social and political elite - men and women who shared and contested with his vision. Dwyer's complex and at times apparently contradictory values can be found amongst radicals and labourites alike - for example, William Lane, W.G. Spence and Bernard O'Dowd. Nor was Dwyer's interest in theosophy or the occult as unusual as it might seem to modern readers.

Dwyer's papers provide important insights into dilemmas that have challenged historians: the problem of alienation, the role of the individual in the historical process, the nature of working class radicalism. Issues often analysed in theoretically abstract terms, or at a broad level of historical inquiry, across a national or class-wide scale. Broad analyses of social forces or ideologies tend to distort their historical impact and meaning, failing to capture the complex relationship of phenomena such as class or ideology with individual experience. Working from Dwyer's experience, this thesis argues that it is possible to build a complex picture of working class life in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the staff of the State Library of New South Wales for the diligent and professional assistance provided to me in the course of my thesis research. I would also like to thank R.R. Aspinall, Librarian, Museum in Docklands Project, Museum of London, and his staff, for the vital information forwarded concerning John Dwyer's employment with the London and St Katherine Docks Company.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Stephen Garton, and my associate supervisor, Peter Cochrane, for their advice and encouragement, and the staff of the Department of History, particularly Bronwyn Hutchinson and Joan Patrick, for their kind help. Finally, this thesis could not have been written without the love and support of Margaret, Elizabeth, Chris and Tom.

## Contents

Abbreviations	iv
Introduction	1
<i>Reading John Dwyer</i>	
Chapter One	30
<i>London Stories</i>	
Chapter Two	56
<i>Men Must Live - The Mittagong Citizen, 1890-2</i>	
Chapter Three	86
<i>Let Us Be Patient - Disciplining the Unemployed, 1892-3</i>	
Chapter Four	118
<i>A Wild Awakening - The Active Service Brigade, 1893-4</i>	
Chapter Five	164
<i>Before The Law - The Sydney Anarchy Trials, 1894-5</i>	
Chapter Six	210
<i>Babylon The Great - Modernism and the Dwyer Papers</i>	
Chapter Seven	265
<i>The Master Worker - Dwyer and the Brigade, 1895-1900</i>	
Chapter Eight	299
<i>Citizen Dwyer - Campaigning for the Right to Work, 1900-14</i>	
Chapter Nine	333
<i>Every Man For Himself - John Dwyer's Federation</i>	
Conclusion	373
<i>Amongst Strangers and Retrogrades</i>	
Bibliography	380
Appendices	404

## Abbreviations

AANSW	Archives Authority of New South Wales
ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ASB	Active Service Brigade
ASL	Australian Socialist League
AWU	Australian Workers Union
DT	Daily Telegraph
IOGT	Independent Order of Good Templars
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
JRAHS	Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society
JLC	Journal of the Legislative Council
LA	Legislative Assembly
LEL	Labour Electoral League
ML	Mitchell Library
NSW PD	New South Wales Parliamentary Debates
PLL	Political Labour League
SDC	Sydney District Committee
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SLNSW	State Library of New South Wales
SLU	State Labourers Union
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald
V&P	Votes and Proceedings

He had struggled. He had sat for long hours beside the candle with the pages burning before him, trying to get into his head and make live there a belief in the forces of order and justice that would transform their lives, and had felt, with a deepening sadness, that the venture must be fruitless, because it had already and so clearly failed in him: and where else could it begin but with particular cases, in individual bodies and souls?

David Malouf, *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*.

## Introduction

### Reading John Dwyer

Served in the London and St Katherine Docks  
Co's employ for 18 years. Left the service of own  
accord.

- John Dwyer<sup>1</sup>

In 1913 John Dwyer, a 57 year old Sydney doss house manager and political agitator, meditated upon the nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus, he decided, as he sat writing in one of the rough rooms of 64 Forbes Street, Woolloomooloo, was a 'composite personality', who needed to be broken down into the constituent elements of his story in order to be understood and recast for new roles. The idea of the son of God had been drawn from Greek, Jewish, Latin, Syrian sources - and others, he added, breaking off the list in his small exercise book. There seemed too many sources to record, and they had spilled into so many interpretations, 'Spiritualistic, Christian and non-Christian, Materialistic, Theosophical, Agnostic, Scientific, Philosophical.' The process of making Jesus, unmaking and remaking him, 'has been at work for 1913 years and continues to the present day.'<sup>2</sup> Dwyer could not command all the Jesus sources, or the stories that unfolded from them: they dissolved into that endless category, 'and others', into codes Dwyer was too tired to follow, or lacked the resources to discover. Dwyer would have instinctively understood Patrick

---

<sup>1</sup>. John Dwyer, 'Family history of John Dwyer from about 1770-1775', c1912, Dwyer papers ML MSS 290 box 1, p.2.

<sup>2</sup>. John Dwyer, 'Jesus, Man, Myth of God?' Dwyer Papers ML MSS 2183/3, item 4, p.18.

Joyce's argument that the historical agent is 'forced to know...there is no alternative but to be an active agent, if knowing is to occur at all.'<sup>3</sup>

Dwyer 'read aggressively' to overcome the conditions that had held him down.<sup>4</sup> In 1913 he tried to unmask the Christian myths in the name of science. 'All improvements in the Christian religion are due to scientists and sceptics.'<sup>5</sup> He saw himself in a tradition of the evolutionists Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley, and the free thinkers Robert Ingersoll and Charles Bradlaugh.<sup>6</sup> Dwyer was a rational man of the future, sweeping away the religious 'cobwebs', and opposing state aid for private religious schools. 'Why should the State burden the minds of its youth with matters that are perfectly useless, in a world of fact and reality, of electricity, motor traction, aireoplanes [sic], steam and the like.'<sup>7</sup>

Dwyer was fascinated by a world that had so vastly changed since his mid-Victorian childhood, symbolised in the raw acceleration of that new marvel, the 'aireoplane', even though his language struggled to pace innovation. Yet 'the purely material', and the discoveries of science, were not enough, and he returned to the Bible in search of a transforming metaphor: 'man cannot live by bread alone'. Dwyer wanted a science with

---

3. Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.14.

4. Discussing Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms*, Robert Darnton observes that 'Menocchio did not simply receive messages transmitted down through the social order. He read aggressively, transforming the contents of the material at his disposition into a radically non-Christian view of the world.' Robert Darnton, 'History of Reading', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives in Historical Writing*, Polity Press London 1991, p.141. See also Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, Penguin Books London 1992.

5. 'Jesus, Man, Myth of God?', p.7.

6. *ibid.*, p.10.

7. John Dwyer, 'The Public Schools and Religion', November 1913 Dwyer Papers ML MSS2184/3 Item 4.

a soul.<sup>8</sup> Pursuing his soul stimulated his interest in theosophy and the occult, even as he embraced rational science. Dwyer also wanted to take something of Jesus with him into the new stories, the Christ he invoked in the name of his radical politics.<sup>9</sup> The uncertainties and trials of his life that forced him to know also made him hesitate before entirely abandoning the Jesus stories, as he strove to understand and change his fate. Dwyer's dissent was always contested by the insistent demands of tradition.

### **A quest for recognition**

John Dwyer (1856-1934) immigrated to Australia in September 1888, a 32 year old trying to make a better life for his wife Annie and their two young children, Elizabeth and Daniel. Leaving his employment as a dutiful London docks foreman on his 'own accord' Dwyer also embarked upon a quest for recognition - recognition of his rights as a worker and his identity as an individual. Bourdieu argues that 'struggles for recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life.' This desire to gain 'honour in the sense of reputation and prestige' is a process of accumulating 'symbolic capital'.<sup>10</sup> Dwyer has left us compelling evidence of his battle for symbolic capital.

Dwyer's surviving papers - twenty-one boxes of correspondence, manuscripts, minutes, handbills, tracts and newspaper clippings, plus several other volumes and an assortment of loose papers - document the

---

8. 'Jesus, Man, Myth of God?', p.8. Something new, argues, is always addressed in terms of something old, in the process of remaking discourse. Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p.14.

9. Dwyer claimed that socialists were only trying to fulfil the message of Jesus, that 'great social reformer', who preached and practised 'the great doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.' *Mittagong Express*, 7 August 1891.

10. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, Polity Press London 1990 p.22.

life of a working class political radical. The papers also reveal that his struggle to transform society was always a struggle to change and comprehend himself. Joyce argues that 'the self and the social constitute one another'.<sup>11</sup> Dwyer laboured to constitute a meaningful sense of self through his interaction with his peers, and through his hungry reading. Dwyer's dialogue of interpretation and experience was maintained from the 1880s, as he started to gather his papers - itself an act of reflection - until the First World War. At the age of 60 Dwyer deposited the accrued evidence of his life with the State Library of New South Wales.<sup>12</sup> Dwyer was acutely conscious of his mortality, and the need to transcend Christian notions of a single life of suffering also drove this elaborate metaphor of self-preservation. 'Shall all the force and all the energy generated by man during a whole lifetime (if only one), all the force and energy, as represented by those experiences or impressions, be not conserved? Shall they be lost?'<sup>13</sup>

In New South Wales, Dwyer's quest was firstly played out in Mittagong, south west of Sydney, in a failed attempt to settle on the land. Driven to the metropolis, Dwyer joined a group called the Active Service Brigade, which agitated for the rights of the unemployed during the 1890s. The Brigade also ran a doss house, or what its leaders called a 'barracks', for unemployed men. Dwyer became the manager of these barracks, where the unemployed could be educated and drilled into a disciplined force of political agitation. In 1894 the Brigade split as a result of a criminal libel charge brought against its leaders by NSW Justice Minister Thomas

---

11. Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p.14.

12. See the bibliography for details of the Dwyer papers in the State Library of New South Wales.

13. John Dwyer, 'The Book of Notes and Observations on the Occult Subjects', 1897, Dwyer Papers, ML MSS 2184/3, item 1, p.33.

Slattery; they were convicted and Dwyer served a six month term in Maitland Gaol. In 1895 Dwyer revived the Brigade under his own control, as an expression of his iconoclastic politics. By the turn of the century, the barracks idea had been reduced to simple boarding houses, a pragmatic residue of the Brigade's theatrical radicalism. The boarding houses providing Dwyer with a threadbare income for the next twenty years, as his family shifted about inner-Sydney's poorest districts, renting cheap premises.

In the late 1890s Dwyer's interest in social change also manifested in membership of the Independent Order of Good Templars and the Theosophical Society. The IOGT explicitly sought working class support by linking drink to class issues; theosophy allowed him to express the personal and spiritual dimensions of his ideology. Like his political radicalism, these interests had their roots in his London life, and were fitfully pursued as he strove to improve the family income. Dwyer variously tried his hand at business schemes - sometimes to make money for himself, sometimes co-operative ventures for the unemployed; these schemes invariably failed. He repeatedly tried to find a way out of his circumstances, but success eluded him throughout his Australian experience. From 1921 he lived in working class obscurity in the western Sydney home of one of his children. He died in 1934.

John Dwyer was not an individual of historical significance, yet his struggles draw the attention of the historian. His papers provide important insights into dilemmas that have challenged historians and social scientists generally: the problem of alienation, the role of the individual in the historical process, the nature of working class radicalism. Issues often analysed in theoretically abstract terms, or at a

broad level of historical inquiry, across a national or class-wide scale. Working from Dwyer's experience, this thesis argues that it is possible to build a complex picture of working class life in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia. While Dwyer is not a crudely representative type, nor is he an isolated figure. He had contemporaries, men and women who shared and contested his vision. Dwyer's experience reflects working class aspirations tested by industrial conflict, economic hardship and chronic unemployment. The years 1890-1914 were a period of intense ideological ferment, when new ideas in politics, theology and science aggressively challenged the old certainties: John Dwyer was a part of all these stories. My interpretation of Dwyer's stories is outlined below in discussions of Dwyer's alienated consciousness, his experience as an historical actor, the implications of his life for the study of labour history and his relationship with his contemporaries.

### **Alienation: negotiating a world of spectacle**

"With every turning point in history there are two movements to be observed. On the other hand, the new shall come forth, on the other the old must be displaced". At these turning points we will encounter the authentic individual.<sup>14</sup>

Marx famously observed that individuals make their own history, but do not make it under circumstances of their own choice.<sup>15</sup> The traditions of the dead generations and the dilemma of his circumstances weighed

---

<sup>14</sup>. Jacob Golomb quoting Soren Kierkegaard, in Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, Routledge, London, 1995, p.205.

<sup>15</sup>. Karl Marx, 'the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', quoted in David McLellan, *Karl Marx*, Paladin, London 1977, p.243.

upon John Dwyer's shoulders as he embarked upon his quest for recognition. If we are to understand his quest, we must follow the expressions of the alienation that stimulated and constrained it. The alienation produced by industrial capitalism - a troubled consciousness of dislocation, of identity subordinated to a servile economic functionalism, has animated the work of Marx, Lukacs and Heidegger, and resonates in the more recent studies of Barrington Moore, Michel Foucault, Jacob Golomb and Patrick Joyce. This thesis reflects their influence; it is also influenced by ethnographic, 'theatrical' interpretations of experience.<sup>16</sup> These apparently disparate approaches offer interpretive codes for understanding the individual in history, and a tension evident throughout Dwyer's stories: the urge to push out the boundaries of experience and freedom, opposed by the urge to constrain them. 'Class consciousness', 'radical politics' and 'theosophy' are expressions of basic human needs: how to live? What to believe? Who defines our needs and our social roles, and how do we redefine them to satisfy ourselves?

Compelled to live, to quest and choose, Dwyer and his contemporaries had to negotiate 'a world of spectacle where their social relations are hidden as such and appear as the property of things outside them'.<sup>17</sup> Catholicism, temperance, Methodism and capitalism are human constructs: from birth, Dwyer was compelled to forge a relationship with

---

<sup>16</sup>. For an introduction to this approach, see the 'Discourse on Method', in Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, W.W. Norton & Co., NY 1988. See also Greg Denning, *Performances*, Melbourne University Press, 1996; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, Vintage Books NY 1985; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books 1973.

<sup>17</sup>. Goldman discusses Lukacs *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1926) and their identification of the individual's loss of self in modern society. Lucien Goldman, *Lukacs and Heidegger*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1977, pp.43, 45.

them.<sup>18</sup> Some materialists insist that a division be maintained between 'the representation and the real'. Kirk rejects an interpretation that societies are 'largely autonomous discursive (and other?) formations operating within their own spaces, patterns of articulation and chronologies.'<sup>19</sup> Kirk's hostility underestimates the power of representation to frame experience.

Dwyer was a product of a world of work and religious tradition deeply invested with its symbols and implicit codes of duty and conformity. Nineteenth century British culture was constituted by 'webs of significance', but John Dwyer did not spin them all himself, as Geertz suggests. Dwyer had to adapt his interpretations to the prevailing power structures around him.<sup>20</sup> Dwyer's life was projected into what Marx called

---

18. As Joyce says of historical actors, 'in handling the real they inevitably construct it.' Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p.12. Scott also emphasises 'the discursive nature of "experience" and ...the politics of its construction.' Joan Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, XVII, Summer 1991 p.797.

19. Neville Kirk, 'History, language ideas and postmodernism: a materialist view', in Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Post Modern History Reader*, Routledge London 1997, p.322. Kirk disapprovingly cites Patrick Joyce's claim that postmodern thought questions 'the idea of a clear distinction between representation and the real' (p.320). Samuel expresses a similar concern - that in the postmodern reading of signs 'women and men, as we encounter them in the past, are not social beings but imaginative constructs.' (Raphael Samuel, 'Reading the Signs', part 1, *History Workshop Journal*, XXXI, Autumn 1991, p.92). However Samuel seems to recognise that the men and women of the past may be interpreted as both social beings *and* imaginative constructs - 'the two camp division between fact-grubbers and mind-readers...is not one which would survive an extended scrutiny.' 'Reading the Signs' part 2, *History Workshop Journal*, XXXIII, Spring 1992, p.239. Kirk grudgingly concedes that 'the writings of Stedman Jones and Joyce have acted as a timely reminder that language and systems of discourse play active roles in the creation of aspects of social reality (Kirk, p.328).'

20. 'Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.'

the alienation of an 'external existence', 'the loss of his self', which he struggled, through socialism and theosophy, to reclaim.<sup>21</sup> Dwyer absorbed traditional discourses of duty - education, work and religion - and carried them into his project to break the traditions down into new stories. As Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (an influence on Dwyer) demanded, the old had to be smashed before the new could be forged. By remaking Jesus, Dwyer could reinvent himself.<sup>22</sup>

Dwyer the immigrant, the socialist and apostate, broke with the past. He exercised, as Joyce has argued, 'agency in the use of discourse',<sup>23</sup> and attained something of the quality the authentic individual who has rebelled against his subordination to 'blindly accepted ethical forms'.<sup>24</sup>

---

Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.5. Giovanni Levi expressed a concern that the work of Geertz and Robert Darnton produced 'a cultural history without social analysis', while microhistory, Levi's chosen methodology, seeks to include 'as formal a reading as possible of actions, behaviour social structures, roles and relationships.' Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives in Historical Writing*, Polity Press 1991, pp.103-105.

21. 'The *externalization* of the worker into his product does not only mean that his work becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists outside him independently, as something alien to him, as confronting him as an autonomous power.'; '...the worker's activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.' Karl Marx, 'Alienated Labour, Economico-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844' in Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *The Portable Karl Marx*, Penguin Books Harmondsworth 1984, pp.134, 137 respectively.

22. 'And he who will create in good and evil, truly he must be a destroyer first, and smash values.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, quoted in Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche*, Phoenix Books London 1997 p.18. Dwyer had read Nietzsche, or at least his friend Arthur Desmond's *Survival of the Fittest*, Desmond's interpretation of 'the philosopher with a hammer.' See chapter six of this thesis.

23. Patrick Joyce, 'The Imaginary Discontents of Social History', *Social History*, XVIII, 1, January 1993 p.81.

24. Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, p.8. Golomb notes the difficulty of attempting to define authenticity in objective or essentialist terms. Authenticity manifests, as Sartre

Dwyer was also prey to the conditions he could not control. He was prey to the representations of others, a vulnerability expressed through ingrained beliefs in work and duty as a fulfilment of his identity. He craved material success and social inclusion as much as he sought social transformation. Recalling Barrington Moore's lament that 'the notion that there is some indomitable spirit of revolt in all human beings is, I fear, sheer myth', we can sense the strain in John Dwyer's exhausting and often lonely struggle not only against state and capital but against himself.<sup>25</sup>

Heidegger argued that *Dasein* was capable of 'clearing away the concealment's and obscurities' of inauthenticity, but 'the real dictatorship of the "they"', its insistent and 'every day' demands and temptations, were powerful constraints.<sup>26</sup> Dwyer was forced into stratagems of self-

---

argued, in its lack: 'its presence is discerned in its absence, in the passionate search for it'. (ibid., p.7) This is because, Golomb argues, authenticity 'is a pathos of incessant change, as opposed to a passive subordination to one particular ethic', an act of self-realisation in the context of one's life circumstances. ibid., p.12.

25. Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: the social bases of obedience and revolt*, Macmillan Press Ltd London 1979, p.459. While Moore argues that conquering a belief that prevailing authority is inevitable 'is essential to the development of politically effective moral outrage', *Injustice* powerfully outlines the obstacles in the path of that victory. It is 'terribly hard' for people to believe that 'long established authority is not essentially benevolent. It is the source of awe, conscience and rewards, as well as punishments and frustrations.' Moore, *Injustice*, pp.458-9, 463.

26. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Blackwell publishers, Oxford 1996, pp.164, 167. Steiner cogently paraphrases Heidegger's concept of 'everydayness': 'the every day is the enveloping wholeness of being...We overlook the all-determining centrality of our being-in-the-world because the everyday actualities of this inhabiting are so various and seemingly banal'. George Steiner, *Heidegger*, Fontana Books, London 1997 p.85. In *Being and Time* Heidegger implicitly takes up the themes of Marx's early work, even as he rejected Marx's solutions. Marx's notion of the 'external existence' of the alienated worker anticipates Heidegger's inauthenticity and the influence of the 'They' over the struggling *Dasein*. For Heidegger's relationship with Marxism, see Steiner, pp.147-48.

management - rationalising his circumstances while keeping alive an instinct to question and rebel. His papers were not only a record of radicalism, but also an integral exercise in self-control, self-definition.<sup>27</sup>

### **An Individual in History**

Jacob Golomb notes that none of the thinkers he discusses describe an historical figure exemplifying authenticity/inauthenticity; they critique 'inauthentic modes of living'.<sup>28</sup> Golomb does not discuss Marx, whose 'extraordinary achievement', as Kamenka observed, 'had been to take the ontological concept of alienation and invest it - quite early in his thought - with concrete social and economic content'.<sup>29</sup> The quest to solve the dilemma of alienation is closely allied to the search for authenticity.<sup>30</sup> This thesis attempts to link the individual, and his social and economic

---

27. Discussing Nikolas Roses' 'techniques for managing the self', Patrick Joyce notes that the nineteenth century technologies of communication - private reading, diary-keeping - involved 'making the self visible to the self.' Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p.19. Porter says such technologies were 'surely crucial in representing and outlining the objectified self, which could thereby be composed (or discomposed) contemplated, and immortalized.' Roy Porter, 'Introduction' to Peter Burke & Roy Porter (eds.), *Language, Self and Society, A Social History of Language*, Polity Press London, 1991, p.12.

28. Golomb analyses the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. Golomb, p.7.

29. Eugene Kamenka, *Ethical Foundations of Marxism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972 p.151. Kamenka argued that the critique of alienation in capitalist society developed in Marx's early writings remained the vital theme throughout his life's work. See Kamenka, ch.14.

30. Marx's contemporary, Soren Kierkegaard, linked inauthentic life with modern industrialism in *The Present Age* (1846). Kierkegaard's critique of industrialisation is strikingly similar to Marx's work - the Economico-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, *The German Ideology* (1845). As Golomb paraphrases Kierkegaard: 'the anonymity of man, and his impersonal education in industrial society, the "abstract power" of the state, change him into a "phantom" in "the public...which is a monstrous nothing". It destroys his individuality, externalizes his "inwardness" and makes him forget what it means to be a genuine self.' Golomb, p.40.

*context* - concrete and symbolic - with the questions of alienation and authenticity, and as such the thesis is an argument for the centrality of individual experience in history. I have borrowed from Levi's conception of microhistory in order to explore 'the complexity of [Dwyer's] reality.'<sup>31</sup>

Broad analyses of social forces or ideologies tend to distort their historical impact and meaning, failing to capture the complex relationship of phenomena such as class or ideology with individual experience. Marxists relied on a totalizing explanation of history, but Foucault - himself drawn to totalizing formulations - refused to ignore the pebble in the shoe: 'whether one wants it to be or not, [ideology] is always in virtual opposition to something like the truth.'<sup>32</sup> This is not to argue that Marxism cannot help to explain Dwyer's experience, only to challenge its claim to universality.<sup>33</sup> Dwyer clearly had a class-based perception of his dilemma, which could be harshly expressed in unemployment, poverty and imprisonment. Dwyer did not entirely invest his hope for change in

---

31. Levi observes that 'the unifying principle' of microhistory 'is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved.' Social action is interpreted as an individual's constant negotiation of a normative reality, which though pervasive, offers many possibilities for personal interpretations and freedoms. As Levi concludes, 'The true problem for historians is to succeed in expressing the complexity of reality.' Levi, "On Microhistory", pp.97-110.

32. Quoted in Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History*, Polity Press London 1984, p.84.

Foucault, Poster's 'ardent detotalizer', added that 'ideology is in a secondary position in relation to something which must function as the infrastructure or economic or material determinant for it.' Ideology cannot be imposed over the vagaries of historical experience, which will always defy seamless categorisation. Foucault, however, at times succumbed to totalizing tendencies, as Curthoys notes of *Discipline and Punish*, with its 'ideas of system and dominating discourses that somehow co-opt or pre-empt everything they touch, including all forms of resistance.' Curthoys, 'Labour History and Cultural Studies', p.17.

33. Poster argues that Marxism, 'by designating itself "science"...gives itself a false and easy legitimacy, one that enables the Marxist theorist to place himself or herself above the masses as the bearer of the universal.' Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History*, p.85.

radical politics: embracing theosophy, Dwyer imagined that liberation might also be found in a renewed spiritual life. He also tried, from time to time, to relieve his financial circumstances through business enterprises - indeed his attachment to running boarding houses, long after the Active Service Brigade ceased to exist in any meaningful way, suggests a lingering appeal of self-employment and small business.

What would have happened to his radicalism had any of his ambitious schemes succeeded? His identity, already negotiating a number of shifts to adjust to new circumstances, new ideas, would have shifted again - or another layer would have been added, contesting with the experience already gathered. Justifying the need for new interpretations of class and the human subject, Patrick Joyce points to the fragmented and volatile nature of post-modern life, and its consequences for traditional (by which Joyce usually means Marxist) categorisations of personal or class identity.<sup>34</sup> The fragmentation of identity may now be more obvious, but it is not necessarily new: from the late nineteenth century, John Dwyer's life challenges us with a complex portrait of 'many "identities"', in one individual, identities that 'press in and conflict with one another.'<sup>35</sup>

Dwyer was always precariously poised, in class terms. Whether as a docks foreman, a boarding house manager or as the self-styled Master Worker of the Brigade, he was at once of the working class and constantly pulling - or being pulled - away from it. Gramsci conjures before us an appealing notion of the organic intellectual, arising from the working class to lead

---

<sup>34</sup>. Patrick Joyce, 'Introduction', in Patrick Joyce (ed.), *Class*, Oxford University Press 1995, p.4. Kirk retorts that 'many of the so-called determinists have *not* entertained uniform and undifferentiated views of the working class', and cites the work of Thompson, Hobsbawm and Montgomery. Kirk, 'History, Language, Ideas and Postmodernism', p.325.

<sup>35</sup>. Joyce, *Class*, p.7.

his fellow workers.<sup>36</sup> Dwyer had some success in fulfilling that role, working out - from his own experience, from his reading - a political response that he could urge others to follow.<sup>37</sup> However, the leadership he offered as Master Worker carried with it an implicit claim to have risen *above* his fellow workers. As an ex-foreman, Dwyer was used to ordering workers around, and his activism often seemed to create a gap between himself and the unemployed and the marginalised he hoped to lead. Dwyer's experience suggests that the radical project of the 1890s, far from offering a potentially winning formula for working class liberation, was riddled with contradictions - some flowing from the fraught nature of working class leadership, others from the codes of authority and economic power cascading down from the prevailing social system, corrupting the radical challenge. The radical groups were also prone to internal stresses and rivalries that impeded their effectiveness.<sup>38</sup>

A troubled picture of class struggle emerges from the study of Dwyer's life. It is not entirely a negative portrayal: we may also, as Levi suggests, identify the space, the freedom, individuals made for themselves in the normative system. Dwyer carved out a niche for himself as an activist, waging a dogged campaign to assist the Sydney unemployed - an activism

---

36. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, International Publishers New York 1971, chapter one.

37. Irving and Scalmer stress the need to understand labour intellectuals in their historical context, and to broadly interpret this category of 'self-constructing' individuals. T.H. Irving and Sean Scalmer, 'Australian Labour Intellectuals: an Introduction', *Labour History*, No.77 November 1999 p.5.

38. From a study of 1890s radicals in south-eastern Australia, Scates concludes, 'in the final analysis the decline of the extreme left can be attributed as much to their own divisions as to official persecution.' Bruce Scates, 'Faddists and Extremists: Radicalism and the Labour Movement, South Eastern Australia, 1886-1898', PhD thesis Monash University 1987, p.434.

only recently explored in the literature of welfare practice in the period.<sup>39</sup> Dwyer's efforts to help distressed workers, and indeed to encourage a culture of reading in the barracks, are not achievements to be disparaged, or overlooked because the evidence of these activities is necessarily fragmentary. His leadership was capable of yielding benefits for the unemployed, as well as a degree of personal gratification. By the early twentieth century, 'Domain Dwyer' had made something of a name for himself around Sydney, able to enlist civic leaders and prominent citizens into his campaigns. His efforts to improve social conditions were increasingly drawn, as outlined in chapter eight, to seeking the intercession of the powerful, even if, as some of Dwyer's fellow radicals complained, that collaboration mitigated against social change. Dwyer's campaigns suffered from his personal identity crisis, the marginality that he strove to escape. He sought not only social change, but also social inclusion, a respected and useful social identity.<sup>40</sup> Dwyer's radicalism was always an expression of his construction of himself, adapting to circumstance and opportunity at need; this not a picture of crass

---

<sup>39</sup>. Scates discusses working class 'self-help' movements and protests in the 1890s and household strategies for coping with poverty. Bruce Scates, *A New Australia, Citizenship Radicalism and the First Republic*, Cambridge University Press 1997, ch.5. See Brian Dickey, *No Charity There, A Short History of Social Welfare in Australia*, Allen & Unwin Sydney 1987, ch.4; Stephen Garton, *Out of Luck*, Allen & Unwin Sydney 1990, ch.4; Ray Markey, 'The ALP and the Emergence of a National Social Policy, 1880-1910,' in Richard Kennedy (ed.), *Australian Welfare History*, Macmillan Melbourne 1982; Anne O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison*, Melbourne University Press 1988.

<sup>40</sup>. Connell and Irving stress the 'integrative functions of state intervention' in the period, a strategy to limit working class mobilisation by appealing to the ambitions of working class leaders. Whether or not there was an overt 'strategy' - and there is evidence of state and elite resistance to ambitious working class leaders - the craving for inclusion was a wider phenomena, filtering throughout the working class, and of which the aspirations of senior trade union leaders or Labor parliamentarians were merely the most obvious manifestations. R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, Longman Cheshire Melbourne 1982 p.203.

opportunism, but the tense social relations into which working class individuals found themselves immersed from birth.

Levi's work demonstrates how traditional approaches to writing the history of the individual have been enriched in recent decades by new approaches to the study of history. Le Goff argues that the old 'reductionist, positivist and mystificatory historiography' of biography, with its simplistic focus on 'great men', has been successfully challenged by the critical innovations of the *Annales* school. Historians may return to the study of the individual as 'an indispensable complement to the analysis of social structures and collective behaviour.'<sup>41</sup> The *Annales* has not monopolised innovation.<sup>42</sup> The relationship between the individual

---

41. Jacques Le Goff, 'Writing Biography Today', in 'Trend Report: Biographical Research', *Current Sociology*, Vol.43 No.2/3 Autumn/Winter 1995, p.12.

42. Several recent works, each in their distinctive way, demonstrate new ways of reading the individual in history. They do not necessarily constitute 'biographical' studies in a conventional sense. Patrick Joyce explores the history of identity in nineteenth century England through the lives of working class poet Edwin Waugh and the middle class radical John Bright. Salvatore sensitively clarifies the terse entries of Amos Webber's journals, demonstrating that a significant study of the life of a nineteenth century Afro-American activist and worker, and its context, can be realised from apparently slender source material. Fairhall addresses the 'central problem in James Joyce's life [p.xii]' - how Joyce situated himself in relation to history and ideology. Macintyre and Denning's studies reveal through their structure and themes fresh approaches to drawing links between the individual's behaviour, the acquisition of tradition and expertise, and the relationship with their social or professional context. Rickard and Matthews allow the authorial voice to intrude rather self-consciously, but both offer significant insights into the complex lives of their subjects. Greg Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, Cambridge University Press, 1992; James Fairhall, *James Joyce and the question of history*, Cambridge University Press Cambridge 1995; Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*; Stuart Macintyre, *A Colonial Liberalism, the Lost World of Three Victorian Visionaries*, Oxford University Press Melbourne 1991; Brian Matthews, *Louisa*, McPhee Gribble Melbourne 1987; John Rickard, *A Family Romance*, Melbourne University Press 1996; Nick Salvatore, *We All Got History, the Memory Books of Amos Webber*, Times Books NY 1996.

and the society can be chartered through the 'biographical socialization' of the individual, the process by which, as Hoerning and Alheit outline, the individual constructs biographical experience, negotiating the 'layers of knowledge' he has inherited, and those which have accrued through his own social interaction. This restless process is continually built and modified as the individual negotiates new experience.<sup>43</sup> As Joan Scott observes, 'Experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted.'<sup>44</sup> Dwyer's papers reveal his acquisition and exploitation of experience: he vividly renders the progress of his problematic socialization. In this way he leads us into other stories, his relationships with close and distant contemporaries, social conditions and ideologies. He is intrinsically part of those stories, and this thesis diverts into them to explore Dwyer's relationship with those around him, and the ideas and tensions that animated his imaginative life and spiritual yearnings.

This thesis attempts to collapse the barrier between the history of the individual and the history of society, to reveal 'the drama of people struggling with conditions that confine them through the cycles of limited life spans'. This project, Bailyn asserts, is the 'heart of all living history', which I interpret as the living link between historical actor and reader.<sup>45</sup> Dwyer intended that his stories would be presented to future generations. He refers his treatment by society to us, conscious that his story, his trials, might be part of ours.

---

<sup>43</sup>. Erika M. Hoerning and Peter Alheit, 'Biographical Socialization', *ibid.*, pp.103-4.

<sup>44</sup>. Joan Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', p.797.

<sup>45</sup>. Quoted in Harry Knowles, 'Biography and the writing of history: a methodological problem?' Postgraduate research paper, Department of Industrial Relations, University of Sydney, 1999, p.22.

## John Dwyer and Labour History

Australian labour history has tended to marginalise the study of the individual, relegating it to standard biographies of prominent labour identities. The individual in the historical experience has often been presented as an adjunct to institutional studies, or an analysis of social phenomena.<sup>46</sup> Subsuming the individual into broader stories has often had the effect of presenting a narrow and regulated view of the working class historical actor - a strange outcome for a project so driven by a determination to unearth the buried histories of the poor and the working class.<sup>47</sup>

In *The Making of the English Working Class* E.P. Thompson criticised interpretations of working class experience that expected workers to serve as historical ciphers - as progenitors of the welfare state, the Socialist Commonwealth, or rational industrial relations.<sup>48</sup> John Dwyer and several of his contemporaries - John Arthur Andrews, Rose Summerfield and Arthur Desmond - continue to suffer from similar treatment. Attention has been paid to their interest in political agitation, socialism or anarchism, while almost entirely overlooking a range of interests and attitudes that may be perceived as quaint, unpleasant or backward looking - interests and attitudes that did not serve the construction of a socialist or

---

<sup>46</sup>. For a discussion of approaches to biography amongst Australian labour historians see Knowles, 'Biography and the writing of history', pp.27-29.

<sup>47</sup>. Studies that of course have intrinsic value. The range and vitality of Australian labour history, and the challenges it faces, can be gained from Terry Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, University of New South Wales Press Sydney 1994; and Robert Hood and Ray Markey (eds.), *Labour and Community*, proceedings of the Sixth National Conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, ASSLH Illawarra Branch University of Wollongong 1999.

<sup>48</sup>. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin Books Harmondsworth 1982 edition, pp.11-12.

radical future. The result has been a tendency to present a one-dimensional picture of these individuals.<sup>49</sup>

Dwyer is almost exclusively interpreted through his participation in the Active Service Brigade.<sup>50</sup> Little has been written about Dwyer's or Andrews' interest in theosophy, or Dwyer's and Summerfield's enthusiasm for temperance. There is limited analysis of Andrews' extensive surviving fiction (discussed in chapter six). Almost nothing is said about the intense racism expressed by Summerfield. Burgmann quotes Summerfield's important 1892 lecture, 'Master and Man' to promote an interpretation of Summerfield as a pioneer feminist. Overlooking Summerfield's xenophobia, Burgmann neglected an opportunity to probe more intensively into the imaginative limits Summerfield placed on her construction of women's rights - presumably non-European women would be denied the equality she sought for white Australian women.<sup>51</sup> Burgmann presents Arthur Desmond as a dashing radical while ignoring his ferocious racism (harsh even by contemporary standards), misogyny and fascination with violence - obsessions tediously consistent throughout Desmond's published writings.<sup>52</sup> Burgmann's aim

---

49. See Verity Burgmann, *In Our Time*, Allen & Unwin Sydney 1985; Bob James, *J.A. Andrews, a brief biography*, Monty Miller Press Sydney 1986, and *Anarchism and State Violence in Sydney and Melbourne, 1886-1896*, published by Bob James, Newcastle 1986; Bruce Scates, *A New Australia*. See also Scates thesis, 'Faddists and Extremists'.

50. Burgmann, *In Our Time*, p.64; Scates, 'Faddists and Extremists', pp.298-302, 328-9.

51. Burgmann, *In Our Time*, pp.78-9; Rose Summerfield, 'Master and Man', address to the Australian Socialist League, Leigh House, 17 July 1892, published by the *Hummer*, Wagga, 1892, ML. Burgmann's omission is all the more curious as she has elsewhere cogently analysed labour movement racism in the period 1887-1917, concluding that 'racism was deep-rooted in both the practices and ideologies of the working class at this time.' Verity Burgmann, 'Racism, Socialism and the Labour Movement, 1887-1917', *Labour History*, No.47 November 1984 p.39.

52. Burgmann, *In Our Time*, pp.64-5.

in writing *In Our Time* was to offset the interpretive distortions of 'conservative labour historians' like Bede Nairn's *Civilising Capitalism*. Nairn celebrated the reformist project of the late nineteenth century labour movement, overlooking the radicals who were often essential to stimulating and challenging that project. *In Our Time* restored the radicals to the historical picture, and marginalised the labourist tradition, replacing the conservatives' 'retrospective factionalism' with its own limited critique.<sup>53</sup>

These polarised interpretations perpetuate a labour history locked into outmoded and simplistic representations of working class experience.<sup>54</sup> Even a sophisticated analysis, Scates *A New Australia* (1997), essentially repeats Burgmann's interpretation of Summerfield.<sup>55</sup> *A New Australia* opens up a number of ways of reflecting upon the radicals and labourites of the 1890s - the autodidactic culture of reading, gender issues, the development of a radical alternative. John Dwyer was a part of those

---

53. *ibid.*, pp.15-16; Bede Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism, the Labour Movement in New South Wales, 1870-1900*, Melbourne University Press 1989 (the original edition was published in 1973). Ray Markey discusses the interpretive limits of Old v New Left critiques of Australian labour history. Ray Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales*, University of New South Wales Press, 1988, p.231.

54. Sewell and Curry have challenging the traditional - Marxist or materialist - interpretive framework of labour history which have contributed to narrow readings of working class experience; Curthoys and Scalmer have pursued the debate in relation to Australian Labour History - from perspectives more supportive of the Marxist tradition. Patrick Curry, 'Towards a post-Marxist social history: Thompson, Clark and Beyond', in Adrian Wilson (ed.), *Rethinking Social History*, Manchester University Press 1993; Ann Curthoys, 'Labour History and Cultural Studies', *Labour History* No.67 November 1994; Sean Scalmer, 'Experience and Discourse: a map of recent theoretical approaches to Labour and Social History', *Labour History*, No.70 May 1996; William Sewell jr., 'Towards a Post-Materialist Rhetoric for Labor History', in Lenard R. Berlanstein (ed.), *Rethinking Labor History*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago 1993.

55. Scates, *A New Australia*, pp.197-99.

stories. His experience suggests still more complex ways of reading 'the "political vision" of the nineties'.<sup>56</sup> Taking into account the diverse range of the activities and beliefs of Dwyer and his contemporaries develops a more intense picture of both the context and content of their politics, clarifying the external and internalised forces prompting their agitation, and often inhibiting its effectiveness.

Scates notes that a significant portion of the radical tradition of the 1890s was not socialist.<sup>57</sup> There was a clearly socialist strain in Dwyer's thinking, but it was far from the whole story. Dwyer's radicalism can only be fully understood by reference to his 'occult writings', amongst the most neglected of his papers. Dwyer wrote nothing of any length on political or social issues: at most, only short articles, reflecting commonly held views of the conditions of the working class, and a mix of received radical and reformist solutions to those problems. On the other hand, he wrote two eighty page manuscripts, and several shorter pieces, discussing his interests in the occult and religious issues: these were his only substantial creative works - or at least that have survived. Dwyer never discussed Marx, or other socialist writers of the day; yet by the late 1890s his 'Book of Notes and Observations on the Occult Subjects' reveals him as something of an authority on the debate about Darwinism.<sup>58</sup>

Almost the whole range of new ideas thrown up in the late nineteenth century feature in one way or another in Dwyer's occult writings. Several of the thinkers and activists who influenced Dwyer have already been noted - Darwin, Huxley, Nietzsche. Dwyer also plundered the work of the

---

<sup>56</sup>. *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>57</sup>. *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>. John Dwyer, 'The Book of Notes and Observations on the Occult Subjects', Dwyer Papers, ML MSS 2184/3, item 1, p.2.

popular writers Rosa Praed and H. Rider Haggard, and the prophet of theosophy, Madame Blavatsky, and her acolyte, Annie Besant. It might be argued that some, or most, of Dwyer's influences were not radical: Dwyer's interpretation of them was an attempt, as he quoted Praed, to 'change the face of the world'. Dwyer's occult writings, and his intuitive modernism, are discussed in chapter six.

Changing the world contested with the need to endure its conditions. Theosophy and temperance also appealed to Dwyer's notion of duty, and an instinct to rationalise the social and economic roles he seemed unable to escape. The fragmented nature of his papers, the stop-start bursts of activism - in politics, theosophy, temperance - reflect the tension between an urge to fight, to understand, to create - struggling against the enervating, daily demands of making a living, feeding a family. The discontinuous nature of Dwyer's papers becomes, as Ginzburg argues, 'part of the account'.<sup>59</sup> The range of meanings that the papers yield urge the historian - of labour or otherwise - to follow where they lead, rather than to insist that their meanings conform to the traditional interests of an historical specialism, or to confine our attention to only the obviously 'political' sections of the papers.

### **Dwyer and his Contemporaries**

Although Dwyer and his papers are the major focus of this thesis, I have tried to place him in his context, and capture some sense of interaction between Dwyer and others. Desmond, Andrews and Summerfield, Labour

---

<sup>59</sup>. Describing his work, *The Cheese and the Worms*, Carlo Ginzburg noted that 'the obstacles interfering with the research were constituent elements of the documentation and thus had to become part of the account...the hypotheses, the doubts, the uncertainties became part of the narration.' Carlo Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about it', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.20 No.1 Autumn 1993. pp.22-24.

Bureau superintendent Joseph Creer, the criminals Montgomery & Williams, the writer Henry Lawson, the free trade politician and banker William McMillan, the unionist and parliamentarian William Schey are discussed in various chapters because their stories intersect with Dwyer's. Aspects of their stories also sharply focus on the tensions facing the immigrant and working class experience in Australia in the period 1890-1914.

Dwyer's story is not unique: nineteenth century Britain produced many individuals, radicals and reformers, trying to chart a course through the competing ideas and socio-economic tensions around them. Dwyer's mix of radical politics, theosophy and temperance might seem disparate, but each strain merged in Dwyer's mind into an at least rudimentary philosophy. Some of his peers constructed their own: Annie Besant, whom Dwyer acknowledged as an influence, made a series of startling and controversial ideological shifts during the late nineteenth century, from Charles Bradlaugh's National Secular Society to the Fabians and the Social Democratic Federation, and finally into Theosophy.<sup>60</sup>

Dwyer's embrace of freethought developed into support for the SDF and theosophy. Two rather more famous radicals, born like Dwyer in 1856, echo his interests, and ideological and class ambiguities. Keir Hardie instinctively moved towards socialism, bringing with him a taste for lower middle class respectability and temperance.<sup>61</sup> Tom Mann, 'a whole

---

<sup>60</sup>. See Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

<sup>61</sup>. The Lanarkshire coal miner was an ardent supporter of the Evangelical Union and the Independent Order of Good Templars, the same temperance organisation to which Dwyer belonged, and which sought working class appeal by linking drink to class issues. Reid says Hardie was drawn to notions of middle-class self-improvement, and 'the old self-help virtues of the independent collier', virtues which Hardie took with on his journey to

souled advocate of total abstinence', as he described himself, followed Annie Besant from the incipient radicalism of the National Secular Society into the SDF. Dwyer certainly knew Mann during the latter's Australian sojourn; they had possibly met through the SDF in London. Mann's description of falling under Besant's spell is an enchantment that Dwyer may well have shared.<sup>62</sup> Many self-educated working class 'idealists' ventured to Australia.<sup>63</sup> Dwyer's complex and at times apparently contradictory values can be found amongst radicals and labourites alike - for example, William Lane,<sup>64</sup> W.G. Spence<sup>65</sup> and

---

socialism. Fred Reid, *Keir Hardie, the Making of a Socialist*, Croom Helm, London, 1978, p.41.

62. Mann first heard Besant speak in 1875. 'Mrs. Besant transfixed me; her superb control of voice, her whole-souled devotion to the cause she was advocating, her love of the down trodden, and her appeal on behalf of a sound education for all children, that I quietly, but firmly, resolved that I would ascertain more correctly the why and wherefore of her creed.' *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, Labour Publishing Co. Ltd London 1923, p.17.

63. 'Many of them had recent experience of both working conditions in the Old World and the radical theories being devised to explain and assault them. Many were restless, impatient, idealistic, and not a little shocked by the kind of work and working conditions they were forced to accept in the land of promise, the workingman's paradise'. Beverley Kingston, *The Oxford History of Australia, Vol.3, 1860-1900*, Oxford University Press 1988, p.99.

64. *ibid.* 'Lane with his idealism, his egoism, his personal puritanism, abhorring alcohol and anything but matrimonial sex, offered challenging leadership to workingmen.'

65. 'It is difficult to take Spence seriously as a socialist. He certainly claimed to be a socialist on occasions. But he also claimed other '-isms', including nationalism, new unionism, and single taxism. Spence cut his ideological suit to complement the taste of his audience. But he was not merely opportunist about this. He seems to have sincerely believed in all these 'isms', as being essentially about the same thing: the promotion of the good of mankind.' Ray Markey might have added temperance to his list: Spence was another Good Templar. Markey is also right to note Spence's sincerity. It is too simplistic to dismiss the quirks and contradictions of nineteenth century radicals and labourites as opportunism, or as 'muddle headed' thinking. To do so artificially isolates those views from the ideological and socio-economic ferment that generated them. Ray Markey, 'New Unionism in Australia, 1880-1900', *Labour History* no.48 May 1985, pp.25-6.

Bernard O'Dowd.<sup>66</sup> Nor was his interest in theosophy or the occult as unusual as it might seem to modern readers.<sup>67</sup>

The radical project was pregnant with potential for social change: fear and frustration also drove it into fantasies of race war and masculine violence.<sup>68</sup> The Australian radicalism of the 1890s reflects the dislocation and marginalisation of the working class. They sought economic security and jobs, but they also craved social space, a chance to shape a meaningful sense of identity in a new country. Rose Summerfield hoped it might be found in a white Australia; Arthur Desmond had a vision of the violent triumph of men. William Lane and Henry Lawson were also drawn to these fantasies of fulfilment. Lane and Summerfield travelled to Paraguay to try and make a racially and morally pristine New Australia a reality. Faced with failure, and a working class, as Desmond complained, unable to save itself, Summerfield lapsed into despair.<sup>69</sup> Lane, Lawson and

---

66. Frank Bongiorno's work on Bernard O'Dowd suggests parallels between Dwyer and O'Dowd, not least in the competing ideals which, Bongiorno notes, O'Dowd struggled to reconcile. Frank Bongiorno, 'Bernard O'Dowd's Socialism', *Labour History*, No.77 November 1999, p.97. See also Frank Bongiorno, 'Bernard O'Dowd and the "Problem" of Race', in Robert Hood and Ray Markey (eds.), *Labour and Community*, p.32.

67. Jill Roe outlines the influence of theosophy in late nineteenth century Australia, part of a wider fascination with spiritualism and the occult, which also left a profound mark upon Federation architect and Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin. Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief, Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*, University of New South Wales Press Sydney 1986; Al Gabay, *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne 1992.

68. See Neville Meaney, "'The Yellow Peril'", *Invasion Scare Novels and Australian Political Culture*, in Ken Stewart (ed.), *The 1890s, Australian Literature and Literary Culture*, University of Queensland Press St. Lucia 1996; Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, Cambridge University Press Melbourne 1995, ch.8; Marilyn Lake, 'The politics of respectability: identifying the masculinist context', *Historical Studies*, Vol.22, No.86, April 1986.

69. The issue of race and Desmond, Summerfield and Lane is continued in chapter four.

Desmond sought refuge in war, the exultation of man as a fighting animal, where the fittest would finally rule - over what kind of system, on whose behalf? The violent struggle seemed to become an end in itself. John Dwyer's papers echo these angry frustrations. A meaningful identity, a better life, might be found through socialism or theosophy. Sometimes it was easier to define yourself against those who denied your rights, or threatened to take your job - threatened your slim hold on a place in society. Scheming Jews, avaricious bankers, filthy 'chows', were amongst the targets of Dwyer and his contemporaries. Dwyer's bitterness at his fate led him into this scapegoating, although he lacked Desmond's capacity for hate.

The inchoate fascism evident in the attitudes of Desmond, Lane and Lawson was one way of attempting to resolve the anger and failure they felt - by inflicting it upon others. McQueen found Lawson guilty of fascist tendencies based on a six-point measure of culpability.<sup>70</sup> Desmond and Lane reflect these characteristics. It may be anachronistic to label these men 'fascist', but to describe the obsessions of Lane and Desmond as simply authoritarian or even racist is hardly adequate (Lawson's 'militarism' during the First World War seems, by contrast, merely pathetic). There is a need to confront this issue, and try to understand why these individuals expressed their identity in these terms. 'We ourselves are the war' one of the Freikorpsmen studied by Klaus Theweleit gleefully confessed, scorning the fools who thought the First World War fighting ceased with the armistice.<sup>71</sup> Desmond was gripped by the intense masculine neurosis described in Theweleit's analysis of the Freikorpsmen

---

70. An organic conception of nation; idealization of manly values; hostility to finance capitalism; elitist notion of leadership; racism, including anti-Semitism; militarism. Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia*, Penguin Books 1980 p.116.

71. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Polity Press Cambridge 1987, p.x.

and their threatened identities, which, together with his crudely Nietzschean code, and his exultant pleasure in violence for its own sake, certainly suggests an embrace of fascism as it emerged after the First World War.<sup>72</sup>

It is hardly true that every Australian radical went down that path, but a war, of a kind, raged in their minds: in angry speeches, tracts and articles they implicitly expressed a loss of identity. The radicals had been made sites of conflict - by imposed social conditions, by chosen acts of defiance, by the dilemmas they struggled to settle. They could identify social grievances, the emptiness of capitalist life; how were these conditions to be overcome? For all of the possibilities thrown up in the 1890s, there was also frustration and dead-ends. Focusing on the Nineties, 'when a New Australia seemed possible', Scates study of the radicals cuts out at the end of the century, before the failures accumulate.<sup>73</sup> If we are to understand the nature of the radical project, we must ask not only why Desmond and Lane collapsed into militarism and hate, but why Rose Summerfield despaired, why John Arthur Andrews constructed himself as a stranger, why John Dwyer's papers suddenly stop with his causes unfulfilled and questions unanswered. This thesis cannot resolve all those dilemmas; it does suggest ways of thinking them through.

The Dwyer papers reflect his social and imaginative relationship with his contemporaries; they also reflect his self-absorbed isolation. The manuscript collection identified as MSS290 contains some extremely valuable material related to his family - his wife Annie, and the four children - Elizabeth and Daniel, born in London, and Henry and Timm,

---

<sup>72</sup>. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, See Ehrenreich's foreword, and pp.18-26, 244.

<sup>73</sup>. Scates, *A New Australia*, p.11.

born in New South Wales. However these papers provide only a sporadic insight into their lives. I began my research with some months' absorption in the manuscript collection MSS 2184, which contains an extensive record of Dwyer's public life. Only after persistent digging in this collection was it possible to discover that Dwyer was married and that his wife's first name was Annie: I note this to emphasise Annie's marginality in Dwyer's political work and agitation. Dwyer's radical project was certainly male-centred, a reflection that capitalism, and the failure of the immigrant dream, had robbed him of his self-esteem and identity as a man.<sup>74</sup> His agitation focused almost exclusively on unemployed men; his notions of the role of the family reflect traditional patriarchal attitudes - a fact that we will see in chapter nine generated tensions with his older children Elizabeth and Daniel.

Annie was left to carry out many of the daily demands of the life they had chosen, and the circumstances forced upon them. She had to absorb John's alienation, as well as manage her own sense of loss and grievance. There is no doubt that the family and indeed the lodging house businesses would soon have collapsed if Annie had not maintained years of disciplined effort to hold them together. It was also difficult work; Annie found dealing with the customers stressful and exhausting. It was a task she endured almost every day from 1894 until about 1920. Annie's management of the barracks and boarding houses is, in a strong sense, an extension of the received notion of working class mother's work in the period - juggling child-minding and supplementing the family income by taking in lodgers or peoples' washing.<sup>75</sup> In practical terms, the barracks

---

<sup>74</sup>. Marilyn Lake, 'Women, Gender and History' *Australian Feminist Studies*, Nos. 7&8 Summer 1988 p.4.

<sup>75</sup>. For the traditions of the mother's role that Annie inherited see Ellen Ross, 'Labour and Love: Rediscovering London's Working Class Mothers, 1870-1918', in Jane Lewis (ed.),

and boarding houses were like 'taking in lodgers' on a grand scale. Annie was also left with the child minding responsibilities.

At a time when Australians are urged to celebrate the achievements of Federation and nationhood, this thesis may be seen as black arm band history, brooding on Dwyer's struggles: another chapter in the 'gloom thesis'.<sup>76</sup> Dwyer strove to take control of his life. He was also a victim of circumstances. The economic depression of the 1890s was a disaster that rivalled the sufferings produced for working class Australians by the Great Depression of the 1930s. John Dwyer and his family arrived poor in Australia. He continued to live, and finally die poor, in his adopted country. His timing was out; luck rarely ran his way. This thesis is not a picture of the idealised Australia promised by Federation politicians. *Hard Cash* is a story of an individual, his family, his contemporaries - the freedom they imagined and the conditions they experienced.

---

*Labour and Love, Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940*, Basil Blackwell London, 1986.

<sup>76</sup>. Docker styles the 'gloom thesis' as a project of the New Left, and, by implication, labour history in general - 'of Australian history as the story of racism and sexism, oppression and exploitation, endless suffering, joylessness, unrelieved grey. People are victims, not actors, in their own history.' Docker seems to prefer a history uncomplicated by the messy inconveniences, the facts of real people's lives, that might blur a legend of the Nineties as a golden age of literary life. John Docker, *The Nervous Nineties*, Oxford University Press Melbourne 1991 pp.xxiv-v, ch.23.