

Conclusion

Amongst Strangers and Retrogrades

The strange story of John Dwyer's contradictions, his lonely struggles and inflated ambitions, is not an isolated tale. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of tested loyalties and fluid allegiances, of questioning and doubt, as men and women struggled to adapt to the dilemmas thrown in their paths. Dwyer and his contemporaries had to choose between integrating with or challenging the prevailing social system: it was not always clear which course they had chosen. Far from settling on clear-cut defiance or accommodation, they often had to renegotiate their relationships with each other and the authority structures around them.

William Schey proved adept at negotiating life's quandaries, and his career was a testament to successful social and political assimilation. Like Dwyer, Schey had worked his passage to Australia, and found opportunities through the labour movement. At age 20, Schey was a humble NSW Railways porter. The growth of unionism gave Schey's career a boost, and he became the foundation secretary of the Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Service Association in 1886. The gift of gab led Schey into the NSW Parliament as a Free Trader in 1887. Over the next decade Schey variously represented the Free Trade, Labor and Protectionist causes in Parliament. Losing his seat in 1898, Schey found that he had no head for business. Like Joseph Creer, Schey was saved from financial ruin by his cronies in John See's Progressive administration. From 1900 until his death in 1913 Schey served as the NSW Director of Labour, surviving successive Progressive, Liberal and Labor regimes.

William Holman eulogised him as 'accomplishing wonders' as Labour Director.¹

Schey had certainly proved ideologically flexible, although to accuse him of simple opportunism misses the point. Schey's erratic path had a fixed destination: he craved social inclusion and economic security. Freemasonry was a totem of Schey's arrival as a respected, socially useful individual, and his accumulation of symbolic capital.² In 1912 Schey self-published a pamphlet that praised the brotherhood of masonry and advertised his participation in the United Service Lodge.³ To erase any doubt of his social success, the pamphlet included a full-length photograph of Schey proudly standing in his masonic apron (*see appendix 10*). Schey's well fed and well dressed body was adorned in the marks of his caste. Schey observed that freemasonry had been described as an aristocracy, or an oligarchy; typically, he preferred to obscure those hints of class envy and social division by categorising freemasonry as a theocracy, 'a community with God at its head, visibly ruling and governing its destinies.' Yet Schey also wanted the reader to acknowledge his upwardly mobile progress, describing his fellow lodge members as distinguished public servants, doctors, lawyers, military officers, professors, clergymen and city aldermen. Men who had made good, and who had agreed to select him for inclusion in their closed brotherhood, from which so many others were necessarily excluded. The process Bourdieu described as 'the miracle of mutual election.'⁴

1. *NSW Industrial Gazette*, August 1913, Vol.III, No.5, p.1452; RM Audley, 'William Francis Schey', *ADB* Vol.11 Melbourne University Press 1988 p.535.

2. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, p.22.

3. WF Schey, *Historical Notes concerning the United Service Lodge*, 1912, ML.

4. 'Smart clubs preserve their homogeneity by subjecting aspirants to very strict procedures.' None were stricter nor more secretive than the masonic order. Its distinctions were only

Schey made it clear that the United Service Lodge was an elite theocracy, of which he was a leading member. In the photograph he offered himself as a personification of the power of the social system - a power that he had accumulated towards himself through his acquisition of cultural status and product. Critically, the Lodge had a history - a tradition that justified its perpetuation of itself and the wider social structure that it helped to preserve, and a tradition Schey could also appropriate as custodian of its memory.

John Dwyer would have liked William Schey's career, just as he envied the success of Joseph Creer, Billy Hughes, William Holman or Joseph Carruthers. Dwyer claimed recognition, standing outside his barracks with flag unfurled: an iconography of challenge, but the flag also staked a claim to be included and to be heard. Dwyer's radicalism was disrupted by the competitive struggle that capitalism imposed. Dwyer both identified and contested with radicals and labourites, liberals and temperance workers, the successful middle class and the most impoverished boarding house lodger. Forced to compete, held in economic poverty, Dwyer could not clearly define which of these identities he intended to become. Dwyer could only struggle and create in bursts of intense and always frustrated activity, abandoning one failed scheme and trying another, fuelled by ambition and resentment. This alienated disjunction is a consistent

conferred on the successful, and those who had already so absorbed its values that their imaginative membership had already been captured before the act of initiation. An outcome that was achieved by identifying what a good mason was *not* - a career failure, a catholic, a threat to the established social order. 'Because the social reality of the criteria of selection can only come from outside, that is, from an objectification of what is refused in advance as reductive and vulgar, the group is able to persuade itself that its own assembly is based on no other principle than an indefinable sense of propriety which only membership can procure' - the 'miracle of mutual election'. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge London 1998 pp.162-63.

theme of his papers: Dwyer's attempts to accumulate symbolic capital were always denied.

There are many stories in Dwyer's papers that might be described as 'a history from below'. The really subversive, hidden history in John Dwyer's papers is not the story of the ASB's striving radicals, but the story of the crowd mocking McMillan in 1893, or Dan's ungrateful swagmen in Harden; the sullen, withdrawn workers Dwyer encountered on his 1892 organising trip; the workers baiting Hughes and Black beneath the window of the Wynyard Hotel; those stewards & cooks unwilling to join the union, the women in George Ardill's refuge, refusing to do as they were told. Rebels scorning the god-bothering temperance parson and the earnest socialist, rejecting the demands to reconstruct their lives, failing to do what they are told or follow the scripts of improvement. Some may say these examples are too scattered across varying experience, too diffuse for useful critical analysis: experience refuses to be boxed in. Workers, ordinary men and women, develop their own forms of implicit or overt dissent, assessing their interests and needs. They make up their own rules, based on a judgement of their circumstances, managing their own social space. As historical actors they are prone to rudely disrupt tidy categorisation - including mine.

Dwyer's radical contemporaries were subject to the same pressures workers had to negotiate, and the aspirations that animated William Schey: they were forced to choose. Rose Summerfield, later Rose Cadogan, believed that women deserved to be heard, and she struggled to find a path to liberation. Socialist, women's rights activist and temperance worker, Cadogan sailed for New Australia with her husband Jack in 1899.

John and Annie Dwyer were invited to the Cadogan's send-off.⁵ In William Lane's colony Cadogan found the same insidious multiculturalism that had weakened her faith in Australia. Lane's refusal to admit non-whites to New Australia or Cosme eventually collapsed before the reality of rural Paraguay, and a subversive tendency of the colonists to establish relationships with the locals. In November 1901 Cadogan wrote to the *Sydney Worker*, bitterly warning its readers to not believe all they heard about Paraguay. 'It is a fine country, but, owing to the ignorance, indolence, and superstition of the natives, it is a poor place to live in, and anyone may do better in any part of Australia. One regrets that such good workers in the reform cause should be buried among strangers and retrogrades.'⁶ The choices confronting radicals were often difficult, the consequences unpredictable. The ingrained fears that fed Rose Cadogan's racism led her from Australia and into despair, realising too late that she could not get back.⁷ Nor could she conceive of how to live amongst strangers. Her son Leon would find a way, and when he became a champion for the rights of Paraguay's indigenous people, there was little doubt that he had inherited his mother's thirst for justice.⁸

Others had only to stay at home to find themselves amongst strangers. In 1907 James Morrish, the pioneering socialist and executive member of the Social Democratic Federation, could hardly have conceived of circumstances that would leave him, in February 1917, as the defeated Nationalist candidate for the electorate of King. Caught up in the

5. 'Invitation to Mr & Mrs. John Dwyer, to a social evening, 5 April 1899, for Mr & Mrs John Cadogan, leaving for South America, to be held at the Mayfield Hall, Castlereagh Street.' Dwyer papers, general correspondence ML MSS 290.

6. *Worker*, 23 November 1901.

7. Souter, *A Peculiar People*, p.231.

8. *ibid.*, pp.232-3.

elemental tests provided by the Great War and the conscription crisis, a patriotic instinct stirred in Morrish, pulling too strongly against the hopes of socialism and internationalism. Did those hopes suddenly seem vague and dreamy against the hot immediacy of communal loyalty? Every day, dreams and ambitions were submitted to the relentless test of prevailing circumstances; every day men and women were forced to choose - the company of comrades or retrogrades. And there was that demanding need hanging over them all: the ceaseless chase after cash, the desire to achieve economic security in a time of relentless insecurity, the ambition to succeed. Success, the great promise, or the sharp taunt, of life in a New World society, a life that Dwyer described to Hughes as 'this merciless fight for existence'. Billy Hughes seemed to win that fight by remembering the same lesson Joseph Creer absorbed as a young Manx boy: every man for himself. Dwyer, the ardent Darwinist, was found unfit in the harsh scramble for economic gain, power and prestige.

Men must live. John Dwyer seethed beneath the everyday pressures that consumed his life, under the gaze of an extra-cosmical god that belonged to the world and kept him trapped in its harsh conditions. Dwyer's occult manuscripts reveal just how much these dilemmas preyed on his mind. Dilemmas that both constrained Dwyer, and drove him to the creative act that he made in 1888, to strike out on a different path in his life. With that decision Dwyer won a kind of victory, hammered out day by day, and so much a part of his condition that its extraordinary nature was hardly apparent to him and rarely acknowledged during his life.

John Dwyer could not change the face of the world, but he helped individual men and women find work, or keep the landlord at bay. Dwyer must have provided thousands of poor and unemployed men

with shelter, compelling politicians and bureaucrats to recognise and respect their needs. Camus believed that the act of rebellion lures the individual from his solitude; he realises his unhappiness is shared by others.⁹ In his act of rebellion, however troubled and qualified, Dwyer contributed to making Australia a society which treated its citizens less harshly, that began to patch together a social security net and an industrial award system, to fashion the conditions of the 'people's peace' that Alfred Deakin promised in 1903, and whose benefits so often eluded John Dwyer and his family.¹⁰ John and Annie, Elizabeth, Daniel, Henry and Timm, paid the price of pioneers. All John Dwyer could leave behind were his papers, a mark of struggle and a declaration of identity.

⁹. Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, Penguin Books London 1971, p.28

¹⁰. *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 30 July 1903, p.2864.