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IMAGES AND VISIONS OF SOCIETY IN THE SELECTED FICTION
OF THREE NEW ZEALAND WRITERS

A thesis presented in fulfilment
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But man is not an abstract being, squatting
outside the world.

Karl Marx:
'A Contribution to the Critique
of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'
1843.

ABSTRACT

Images and visions of New Zealand society, as they appear in selected works of fiction by John A. Lee, Frank Sargeson and Robin Hyde, are the prime concern of the thesis. The fiction selected for analysis broadly encompasses the decade 1930 to 1940.

The dominant image is of New Zealand as the respectable society. However, Lee, Sargeson and Hyde emotionally reject the bourgeois-puritan world they portray in their fiction; all three writers seek alternative societies in which the human qualities they see as denied in bourgeois-puritan life can find expression. The world of the dispossessed, a world seen particularly clearly in the light of the deprivation of the Depression, plays a large part in the fictional images cast by each writer; sometimes it is depicted as a world separated from the respectable society, sometimes it is depicted as a world inevitably locked into the dominant and respectable way of life. However, none of the three writers can find an imaginative resting-place in the world of the dispossessed as an alternative way of life.

Furthermore, the writers cannot extend their images of society as they experience it into a Utopian vision of an ideal society which is attainable within the existing social structure. The failure to create a practicable alternative persists in spite of a powerful interest, shared by all three writers, in the social world as they feel it ought to be as well as in the social world as it is.

In their quest for alternatives, two of the three writers create visions of potential societies, that is of societies seen as lying beyond the boundaries of the existing social structure. These are not realisable Utopias, as they would be if they were practicable alternatives; instead, they are wish-fulfilment Utopias. In other words they are compensatory in that they embody values repressed in orthodox society.

The analytical approach adopted in the thesis consistently views

both images and visions of the writers' imagined worlds as either direct or indirect portrayals of the New Zealand society to which the writers belong and which, in the end, shapes their fictional creations. Ultimately, it is argued, the writers' Utopias, like their images of existing society, lack the imaginative and social strength to stand on their own.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I examine some of the prose of three New Zealand writers. The writers are John A. Lee, Frank Sargeson and Robin Hyde. The prose I have chosen broadly encompasses the decade 1930 to 1940. The works considered are: John A. Lee's Children of the Poor and The Hunted, Robin Hyde's The Godwits Fly and Wednesday's Children and Frank Sargeson's I Saw in My Dream, That Summer and a selection of short stories.

The selection has been made on the basis of the strength of the images of society that come through the works of fiction as well as their artistic quality. The central concern is the writers' images of New Zealand society. The use of the word 'image' brings in a notion of a distinction between reality and a reflection of that reality. The reflection may or may not be an accurate depiction of the existing social scene. To the extent the particular image of society is shared and pervasive it will be the concern of the sociologist; to the extent to which the image is expressed through a particular writer's imagination it is the concern of the literary critic with sociological leanings.

My main focus is on particular works of literature but I look at these works in their social context. I am concerned primarily with the ideology of the time, so I look at social reality through the veil of its relevant ideas. Although I rely on sociological and historical approaches to my subject, both the sociology and history focus on subjective interpretations rather than objective accounts of that society.

Sociological analysis is used as the need arises. There is no single theoretical framework which encompasses the entire thesis. Because the sociological approach is instrumental rather than comprehensive, the analytic base alters as the thesis proceeds. I use a particular sequence of heuristic tools to enable me to explore different images of society as they appear in the literary works. By means of these tools I explore the social connections of these images in various ways: the relationship of the images to their components,

to one another, to the shared ideology of New Zealand society and - where appropriate - to society's material base.

I have not viewed the works of literature as secondary manifestations of the facts of a particular historical era. I have not attempted to master the appropriate history or to make the thesis historical in the sense of presenting a full range of relevant historical knowledge. I have, however, taken events of the time into account. An historical awareness is important; there is a need to be aware of the distinction between objective accounts of events and subjective interpretations of their significance even if I do not always succeed in making that distinction definitively.

In the first three chapters I explore the dominant image of New Zealand Society in the 1930s. It is an image of a society of respectability. In Chapter I the three writers' fictional descriptions of New Zealand as the respectable society are examined to form an impression of the nature and the power of this particular image. After an account of an 'official' historical assessment of New Zealand's literature in the first century of pakeha settlement, Chapter II is devoted to an attempt to make generalisations about the components that together form the total image of the respectable society in the minds of the people who write about it. No firm distinction is made between imaginative and documentary writing in making these generalisations, although more attention is given to the three writers I am studying. Imaginative and documentary writing are considered together because fictional images of respectable society tend to merge with the prevailing ideology when the image is so powerful: the image dominates so all sorts of people write about it.

The cultural hegemony of the dominant image is considered in an historical framework in Chapter III. The hold of the dominant image over the minds of New Zealanders is seen in terms of a particular ideological heritage for New Zealand as a British colony; the power of isolated and imported images over the minds of colonists is also considered in general terms. Only with the possibility of breaking the hold of the dominant image over people's minds, it is argued, can social innovators - and particularly artists - search for other images. It is on this note that the chapter ends.

Chapter IV is concerned with the extension of vision that is possible once the grip of the dominant image is broken. Chapter IV is a transitional chapter in that it examines both the characteristics of the newly-seen social world and the manner in which it is seen. In the context of the Depression, the new social world which became visible to the writers was a separate and disadvantaged social class. The three writers create images of this social class; in their writing it co-exists with the prevailing image of respectable society.

The way in which each writer sees the two social classes and the relationship between them is examined. I use Marxist approaches to the realm of ideas to explore these visions and this relationship. The power of the dominant ideology to affect the writers' visions of a class that is not their own is set against the writers' attempts to portray the separate form of consciousness that - according to a Marxist approach - should stem from a separate social class.

So the literary criticism in Chapter V is centred on the writers' depiction of a dispossessed social class, their vision of its relationship to the respectable society with which it co-exists and the way in which the writers' own world-views affect their exploration. The issue of separate forms of class-consciousness for separate social classes is important if the writers are to portray two social worlds without bias and distortion of one of those worlds. It is also important if the newly-seen world of the disadvantaged is to be considered as an alternative to the respectable society. I argue that, for all three writers, the newly visible world of the poor is seen as preferable to the respectable society. The writers depict respectable society but they reject it. The world of the dispossessed provides an alternative way of living within the concrete and existing social world as it is experienced in New Zealand.

Yet for none of the three writers does the world of the dispossessed provide an adequate alternative. For each there is a lack of emotional commitment to a search for social alternatives in the world of the dispossessed. This seemed curious to begin with, in the light of the three writers' rejection of the respectable society. Subsequently it made more sense in the light of another realisation. At least two of the three writers search elsewhere for alternatives; they go beyond the tangible social structure that they can observe. In their art, they

leave behind the imaginative limits of the social world as they experience it.

So Chapters VI and VII are, again, transitional chapters for at this point the thesis takes a different direction. The two images of society which have been considered up to this point are assumed to reflect a society which exists in material form. Marxist analysis in the sociology of literature is based on this assumption; most orthodox realist criticism works from this premiss. In moving to a consideration of images which do not fit into this category, realist analysis within a Marxist framework is only applicable to a limited extent. If the newly-revealed images can be seen as having a place within the existing social structure, such a form of analysis can still be used. If, however, the images lie beyond the social structure, other ways of looking at them may be necessary.

Two of the three writers search for alternative societies in a different social dimension. They enter a separate imaginative domain to create alternatives that lie beyond the familiar social world. They create potential societies - societies that lie beyond their grasp, societies that have a place outside the framework of the existing social structure. Whether the projected images of society are seen as arising from the growing edge of existing society or as lying beyond the social structure altogether, they are Utopias. Utopian images fall into three categories: political Utopia, the Utopia of the pure life of the senses and the Utopia of fantasy. Where appropriate, analysis of these Utopian images is in terms of broadly realist criteria. Where the images inhabit a realm of their own, I examine them only in terms of the separate social worlds that are created, without attempting to link them to images of the existing social structure.

I conclude that the search for Utopias, where it succeeded imaginatively, created a literature of compensation. The search for alternatives, whether as practicable possibilities or compensatory solaces, was a search for a replacement for an unsatisfactory way of life. The courage of the quest and the spur to creation in imagining alternatives could bring into being work of the quality of the best of Frank Sargeson and the best of Robin Hyde. But it was, ultimately, still a literature of compensation.

Chapter I

THE RESPECTABLE SOCIETY

There is an immediately obvious and arresting image of New Zealand society in the work of John A. Lee, Frank Sargeson and Robin Hyde. Each writer is preoccupied with a particular kind of social world. It is the world of respectability.

There are marked similarities in the pictures the three writers paint of the respectable world; later I shall try to trace its consistent characteristics as they appear in documentary as well as in imaginative writing. Here I shall avoid hazarding a typology as the writers' imaginative portrayals of the respectable world seem to me both a more immediately vivid and more concrete way of penetrating the shared image.

Each of the three writers sees this world in a distinctive manner and each stands in a different position in relation to it. I shall, in this introductory chapter, describe their visions in an impressionistic way: in the next chapter I shall include an analysis of the components of their images.

John A. Lee's fictionalised childhood is presented in two of his novels, Children of the Poor and The Hunted. Both are self-confessedly autobiographical. Lee's childhood was, he says, spent in the gutter. In his account of his childhood in Children of the Poor he describes himself as very poor indeed. His earliest experiences were in a self-contained world of poverty. Yet from his earliest social awareness Lee sees respectable society as the dominating social world. He sees it as a presence hanging over his own world of the poor. It is a powerful presence so that, very rapidly, the absolute poverty of early childhood becomes a relative poverty which measures itself against the possessions of those who inhabit the distant but ever-present established social world. For Lee, a family is poor in a social context set by the respectable:

Poverty is not a fixed quality. It is necessary to say this, for some people would be happy to wear cast-off trousers. Poverty also is relative. When one boy or girl in a street knows cast-offs, when one family knows left-overs, even if cast-offs mean warmth and left-overs mean a full belly, that family knows poverty. (Lee, 1973, 7).

Poverty is experienced in relation to outside standards. The standards are set by

...the world of superior persons whose teeth have never been sharpened by deprivation, whose sensibilities have never quivered from the shame of their poverty. (p.4).

And it is the world of superior persons that counts. So Lee and other children of the poor are necessarily outsiders - 'doubting vagabonds' (p.9) Lee calls them. And they exist only in sufficient numbers to 'season the spate of the smug' (p.9).

There is a complex blend of truculence and deference in Lee's attitude to this world. His stated position is one of rebellion, ('I was a rebel from the dawn of consciousness' (p.14)) and a sense of social outrage fuels both Children of the Poor and The Hunted. But confusion about his position blurs his relationship to the respectable world so he finds it difficult to attain the sharpness of focus that is necessary for a clear image and a steady target.¹ For instance he has a habit of seeing his own position through his enemies' eyes:

You may say "a rotten stock root and branch" but forgive me if at times I imply that the social system has also a taint that is reflected in these gutter children. (p.6).

And attempts to escape domination through irony do not really work:

So vicious am I that out of the gutter I see virtue shining through filth. I hand the balancing on to detached souls who, holding their noses, may condemn from respectable heights. (p.7).

A mock-humility which is intended to flatten 'respectable heights' instead conveys an impression of deferring to them.

Frank Sargeson's introduction to the respectable world was different from Lee's; he was born into it. Sargeson's hero, Henry, in his novel I Saw in My Dream was born into it too.² Henry's

childhood consciousness develops inside a respectable family firmly established in a respectable community. For Sargeson's hero, unlike Lee's, values of family and community are virtually the same; in fact Henry's family is an effective instrument for implanting the values of established society into its children. This is how the novel begins:

Who loves you?
Mummy and Daddy.
Who else?
Auntie Clara.
And who else?
Gentle Jesus...(Sargeson, 1974, 3).

The incantation of prayer with its nightly statement of love and dependence is reinforced by the warmth and security felt at the hearth. 'There was room for you there by the fire, only father and mother...' (p.24). Henry wants his place by the fire enough to do what he has to do to stay there; he is willing to 'be good'. Being good, in this instance, means studying. The image of Henry's homework in the novel is of a lonely but admired pursuit enforced by immediate rewards of a warm bed, good meals and a place by the fire. The task is a means of earning 'something perfect':

That something perfect took the shape of a ball, or
so it would seem now and then. You lived inside
the ball, and it was lovely to have it all round
you, you living contented right inside at the centre.
(p.24).

The best place of all is bed, 'snug as a bug in a rug'. Bed, the family group, the hearth have womb-like associations of security.

Being good through doing homework is a form of activity: being good, in much of the rest of the first part of the novel, is a form of imperilled inactivity. It is through his mother, in particular, that Henry learns what has to be done to keep to the path of respectability. The boundaries of permitted behaviour are clear. Spying on Auntie Clara in the bath ('He wanted to look, he had to look...he did look' (p.15)) brings immediate retribution and its moral backing is quite explicit.

To think I've reared such a boy, she said. And
she hit him. After all the years I've tried to
do my best for you, she said, to think I couldn't
bring you up clean.(p.16).

Henry is firmly locked into the respectable world through a

combination of reward and punishment but there is no doubt that repression from the outside is more important to Sargeson. Prohibition soaks through to Henry's inner life and is the basis of the half-repressed fears and imaginings that make up much of the first part of the book:

That time he'd looked through the keyhole yes,
and mother had said if he was a few years older
he'd have deserved to be LOCKED UP FOR THE REST
OF HIS LIFE oh no please God no you mustn't let.
But nobody was going to tell and nothing was going
to happen of course.(p.57).

Conscience and restraint, love and resentment weigh Henry down in the first part of the novel. The combined weights of such forces of socialisation would seem to be decisive in forming a boy's character. But Sargeson makes it clear that they are not. In fact the concept of socialisation with its inescapable formative power is in many ways inappropriate to Sargeson's imaginative vision. He describes Henry's recurring dream:

...all he ever did was try to walk through miles
and miles of dry sand carrying a heavy sort of
swag on his back. And the swag weighed him down
so much that he could hardly get his legs to
move. And it seemed to go on for hours and hours,
with him being dragged down by the weight of the
swag, and every minute feeling he'd have to drop,
yet somehow managing to keep his legs moving...
(p.78).

It is apparent that Henry's childhood experiences have not become part of him: a load, however heavy, can eventually be put down.

It is clear from the start that Henry will be compelled to journey away from the society of his beginnings. But if I Saw in My Dream is seen as a picaresque novel, the first part must be seen in terms of the failed picaresque. For each of Henry's attempts to escape from the respectable world ends in a chastened return to its comforts, its promise of success, its familiar fears and prohibitions.

However, the 'swag' of the past is cast off between Parts One and Two of the novel. Henry leaves home and is transformed into a alterego with a different name. Dave is no longer the same person as Henry. He is put in a position to start again.

With this transforming device, Sargeson can break free of the respectable world. No longer need Dave be enslaved by Henry's inadequacies. And no longer need Sargeson grapple with complexities of a prior and unwelcome socialisation in keeping faith with a new hero. The very fact that a craftsman of the calibre of Sargeson divides his novel into two discontinuous parts indicates, perhaps, his need to circumvent these unwelcome problems of socialisation. A sensibility fated to be formed inside one particular social world must find a means of moving to the outside if it wishes to achieve the detachment to judge it and the freedom to reject it. Sargeson recognises this problem in a way Lee does not.

For Robin Hyde the respectable world looms as large as it does for Sargeson and Lee. But there are important differences. For Hyde, the established world she surveys is the 'real' world: in one sense it is a world that is both inescapable and dangerous. Yet in another sense she plays no part in it. She belongs to it in part through her family and her social position, but she sees herself as unshaped by it.

Instead, Hyde shapes her world. She sees through the light of her imagination, a light which transforms the everyday into a form acceptable to her own distinctive vision. Hyde cannot accept the respectable world that surrounds her so she uses her power as a novelist to fashion it into a bearable form. Her imagination is a tool of psychic survival as well as of invention.

The opening of Wednesday's Children is set in an Auckland street.

Over all, the ghostly whispering of rain. It sounds like a multitude of little silver snails, all sneezing and spitting at once. In its black and silver winter's tale caparison, Withercombe Street achieves a dignity vanished with daylight. It is a street with a history, a street where the intelligent stranger, shutting his eyes, might hear the shuffle of silver-buckled shoes, the imperious stomping of elastic-sided boots, spellbound on some eternal journey. (Hyde, 1937, 15-16).

There are those who have the imaginative power to inhabit the world in this way and those who do not have it. A drunk has it; he

accosts Wednesday Gilfillan, the heroine of the novel. 'With wonderful clearness he saw the great rosy and crystal wings unfold behind her head.' (p.17). A clerk in a newspaper office is blessed with no such faculty. Even when Wednesday smiles at him '...unhappily his eyes were sealed, and he saw no more than a lady who wore démodée sealskins and tendered him a pink slip of paper together with the correct sum' (p.17). The fate of those bound into the respectable world is a fate of limited vision: it is 'to see no more than' the prosaic literal world.

In the second of Robin Hyde's novels to be considered, The Godwits Fly, a ride in a Wellington cable car becomes a mythic experience under the influence of the imaginative vision.

The driver was a one-legged man, his face calm as Pluto's. All day tunnel and sky slid over him. In the evening the tunnels went topaz, the open spaces cool black, scented by flowers. Lights gave themselves to the air, like sparkling lovely women with wreaths pinned in their breasts. He had nothing to do but push a lever up and down, smiling vaguely at the passengers. This left him with a face emptily serene, like a god's. (Hyde, 1970, 137).

There is a choice: one can see the world in this way or one can belong to the real world which is, for Hyde, a kind of hell.

There are two episodes in The Godwits Fly where Eliza Hannay, the heroine, has no choice about entering the real world. When she goes into hospital after an accident and again when she has a loveless affair that ends in a still-birth in Sydney, the novel changes in tone and in emotional setting.

In hospital Eliza enters what Hyde refers to as the kingdom of the defeated. This is a grim version of the real world where deadened feelings provide their own form of release. Eliza's casual love affair is with a man who has a face 'where all the sunshine had long since gone into coal' (p.186). Yet with this man Eliza can at least acknowledge the darkness. She can listen to his war stories and agree that they are funny.

Eliza said, 'Yes, funny'; because the desperate things that happen, the monopolizing tragedies and grievances, are funny; man-eating jokes. (p.185).

The style of writing closes in and darkens in this part of the book. The prose loses vitality. For a while Eliza Hannay settles for a numbed and sad recognition of the man-eating jokes of life. She even finds relief in facing reality. But she cannot accept the rock bottom solace provided by the real world for long because it is inseparable from the forces of darkness and death which she has to reject.

Eliza Hannay may belong to the real world unwillingly, but love for her mother makes it hard for her to reject it. For her mother, Augusta, belongs to the real world almost totally. However, Eliza loves her chiefly for glimpses of what she could have been if she had not been wedded to visible rectitude. Eliza's sympathetic understanding of her mother is presented mostly in odd moments of regret for a life foregone.

Eliza was as certain of her mother's respectability as she was of the floorboards under her feet. But suppose, just as a dream, he [her mother's imaginary lover] had existed, still existed, and a whole intrinsic world around his face? Ah, in that world, a red-haired strong woman could drop her ironing, let the starch-water fall with a blue crash to the kitchen floor, and run and run and run...(p.84).

* In Wednesday's Children there is no such blending of Hyde's two worlds and so there is much less sympathetic feeling for inhabitants of the real world. Hyde frees Wednesday from the need to live 'their way' by introducing a financial windfall. So Wednesday can escape to her island in Auckland harbour and avoid her respectable relations.

Hyde's attitude to the real world is complex. There is a revealing cluster of imagery associated with it. The real world generates an atmosphere of darkness yet Hyde refers to it in terms of an eye. The eye of reality is 'peering', like the beam of a lighthouse it probes without actually seeing. And as birds are drawn to a lighthouse beam, people are drawn to break themselves against the realities of existence. Yet the eye of reality is a blind eye. It provides no real vision, no illumination of the human condition.³

The respectable- or real-world, for Hyde, exists to be imaginatively overcome. Eliza Hannay thinks of her ability to write poetry as both a magical gift and a magical form of protection. It is

...a day dream power, which slips through the eyes of all children, sometimes through the brooding eyes of meadow-beasts as well, but which is only rarely held and formulated. (Hyde, 1970, 71).

The power to hold and formulate the day-dream vision provides Hyde with her imaginative alchemy when it can be sustained. Wednesday's Children's uneven quality is largely due to Hyde's inability to keep it up, in my view, and her struggle can lead to imaginatively unconvincing forms of vision.

Hyde's way of seeing the respectable world is markedly different from Lee's or Sargeson's and her position in relation to it is not the same as theirs. Yet already broad similarities begin to appear. The respectable society is seen as powerful both in the extent of its dominion and the strength of its values. A strong code of values becomes an issue of indoctrination for all three writers. Even when he does not recognise it, Lee is endangered by indoctrination. Sargeson struggles to free himself from it; Hyde's resistance to indoctrination is massive but not always effective. Even if the problem of indoctrination is overcome, the extent of the respectable society's dominion means the writers feel forced to inhabit it bodily and socially. Yet all three write as if they are unwilling participants.

A common image emerges of a society that will not do. Yet that society cannot easily be cast off because of its power over the writers themselves as well as over the life around them. It emerges from a framework of perception which I shall outline before moving on to a more thorough consideration of the nature of the image itself.

Footnotes

1. There are similarities between John A. Lee's perception of himself and Caliban in The Tempest. Lee's form of 'nature' is urban and proletarian but like Caliban's it does not take happily to an imposed and alien nurture. Yet, like Caliban, Lee is influenced by the social world he rejects against his will; unlike Caliban he seems to be largely unaware of the extent of his own indoctrination.

There are consistent links between the approach I take in this thesis and The Tempest; the island of New Zealand colonised by an alien culture can be seen in much the same light as Prospero's island subdued by the culture of distant Milan. Yet both islands are 'full of noises'; the natural life cannot be totally subjugated.

2. Sargeson's fictional world tends to be a North Island one; Lee's is South Island. Sargeson was brought up in Hamilton; Sargeson's hero, Henry, lives in an unspecified small northern town. ('Uncle Bob lived way down south and no-one had seen him for years' (Sargeson, 1974, 29)). Lee spent his childhood in Otago; Dunedin, Riversdale, Burnham and Troonsville are the principal settings for the two novels I am concerned with here. Some of Lee's place-names are real and some are imaginary.
3. Mr Bellister says: '...you're now afraid of the peering eye of reality.' And Wednesday replies: 'It's a glass eye. Quite, quite blind. And I'm only afraid of it for my children. My children and my island.' (Hyde, 1937, 261).

Chapter II

THE IMAGE-MAKING TASK

A series of essays was commissioned in 1940 in which New Zealanders took stock. Under various headings people wrote about the way they saw the development of New Zealand over its first hundred years. One of the most significant of these exercises in self-examination was E.H. McCormick's Letters and Arts in New Zealand. McCormick ends his survey where I have begun mine, with creative writers of the 1930s, particularly John A. Lee, Frank Sargeson and Robin Hyde.

McCormick's theme is the search for nationhood through imaginative creation. The search is for an authentic voice for an indigenous society. The ideal of New Zealand writing is, therefore, self-expression - self-expression in the exact sense of giving voice to one's own way of life. Lee, Sargeson and Hyde all speak from their own experience to some extent, according to McCormick, and he sees this as part of the new manifestation of '...signs, few but positive, of adult nationhood' (McCormick, 1940, 170). McCormick has reservations about all three writers and about Hyde and Lee in particular but he also focuses on their flashes of authenticity. He praises Lee's occasional verisimilitude, Hyde's knowledge of her own country and Sargeson's feeling for indigenous language.

However, apart from a few scattered comments, McCormick makes no attempt to characterise what is newly emerging in the imaginative writing of his time. Instead he sees his own era as a watershed but concentrates on describing its background.

Until the 1930s New Zealand writers had not been able to express themselves. There were exceptions, but in the early years of New Zealand's existence most writers tried to express a vision that was not their own. Experience was colonised at source. McCormick writes of tuis and fantails merging imaginatively with swallows and nightingales (p.161). In early novels colonial figures are bucolic foils, the

colonial background is strange and even malign (p.167). Rather than the world he lives in, the writer tries to see an idealised 'literary' world (p.162).¹

McCormick blames the grip of an alien tradition for many of the problems of authorial vision; the tradition is, of course, an imported one. And it tends to use the clichés of English romanticism rather than the everyday language of New Zealand (p.97).

Borrowed experience and borrowed rhetoric came between these early writers and knowledge of their own world. Writers did not imaginatively accommodate themselves to their own surroundings because they had no strong sense of those surroundings (p.97). They were imaginative exiles no longer at home in the old world but without any vital sense of the new. McCormick argues with authority and detailed documentation. And he argues that the cultural experience of New Zealanders during their first hundred years was mainly a derivative one.

His conclusions lead to certain expectations of New Zealanders' awareness about their own society. They lead to expectations of a sense of cultural limbo or, at least, an uneasy sense of the absence of a culture that can be seen as New Zealand's own.

Yet a first impression on reading the writings of the 1930s and subsequent decades gives quite the opposite feeling. There is a powerful sense of what New Zealand is like; descriptions of New Zealand society come from the pens of one writer after another. The force and sense of unanimity in the prevailing image of New Zealand society is anything but uncertain. The image of respectable society springs up with a jack-in-the-box energy and sense of completeness.

In fact the problems associated with the image arise simply because it is so powerful and so widely shared. Far from coming from a lack of clarity, these problems appear to be associated with the image's over-clear and almost blinding quality, its demanding nature and its capacity to fill imaginative horizons.

The writers I am concerned with depicted the image of respectable society in their work but it has continued to be a spring-

board for imaginative creation until the present time; Janet Frame's and Maurice Gee's writing would be markedly different if they were not concerned with the prevailing image. In my analysis, however, I shall concentrate on the image as it appears in the work of the writers I am concerned with. I shall pay attention too to relevant commentaries that have appeared over subsequent decades. They are consolidating commentaries, from my point of view, in that they explore in documentary terms issues that have been raised imaginatively by these three writers. The writers' images of respectable society are embedded in an ideology which is widely recognised.

It would be artificial to try and separate documentary from imaginative writing in my analysis, for there is often no hard-and-fast distinction between them in the work of the writers themselves. Pictures of New Zealand society come through both kinds of writing. In a society newly-seen, everyone seems to turn to the task of describing and analysing. Robert Chapman explores this phenomenon perceptively in his essay Fiction and the Social Pattern (1953). New Zealand writers create from the raw material of their own experience, he says, without either literary conventions or social categorisations to give them a vehicle for rhetoric. This means 'each author is driven to be his own sociologist, patiently observing the unrecognised majority pattern as well as minor variations...' (Chapman, 1953, 30). In an emerging society there is a need for what Chapman calls reportage, a need for a straightforward account of what is to be found in the social world.² So reportage will mingle with imaginative creation in works of fiction as well as social commentaries.

Despite McCormick's emphasis on the imported background to New Zealand's sense of itself in the thirties, there was a potent prevailing image of New Zealand society. And the task of conveying this image fell on all kinds of writers and has lasted for several decades.

There are certain distinctive attitudes, characteristics and codes of behaviour that together form the total image of the respectable society. Two words, more than any others, are applied to the New Zealand world of respectability; they are the words 'bourgeois' and 'puritan'. A problem arises from the very freedom and familiarity

with which the words are used: their meaning is not always made clear. A deeply-entrenched assumption lies behind this lack of clarity. It is an assumption of shared connotations. Everyone 'knows' what New Zealand society is like. The writer assumes he has grown up in the same climate of ideas as his reader so there is no need to explain what is meant by New Zealand puritanism or a New Zealand bourgeois way of life. Or, perhaps, self-conscious explanation is mixed with ideas that are taken to be self evident. So H. Winstone Rhodes in his preface to Sargeson's I Saw in My Dream (1974 edition) says Sargeson was brought up in an atmosphere of 'decayed and decaying puritanism' (Sargeson, 1974, xi) and assumes that his reader will know what he means. He writes of 'the life-denying prohibitions of a life-denying puritanism' (p.xii) and of the 'conventional restraints imposed by a puritanical middle-class' (p.xiii). Without explanation in his admittedly impressionistic essay Fretful Sleepers W.H. Pearson calls New Zealand 'the most puritan country in the world' (Pearson, 1974, 10) and says it is 'because of the narrowness and the puritanism' that New Zealanders can't write honestly.

The word 'bourgeois' is similarly unexplained. Yet its lack of precise meaning is linked to an assumption of shared emotional connotations. Pearson writes of a 'bourgeois eschatology' (p.3) without identifying the earthly reality clearly enough to make the heavenly comparison particularly telling. And the phrase is used in a context of denigration.

Sargeson's story An Englishman Abroad is set in Fascist Italy. All the characters are foreign; all are lost and anxious. Suspicion of the unknown permeates the story. Resentment felt by travellers in an unfathomable foreign setting vents itself in invective - an invective in which the word 'bourgeois' appears.

Two French girls use the word 'bourgeois' to condemn Italian men:

...they were bourgeois beasts, which besides being something unmentionably low, was the reason for their all having turned into Fascists. (Sargeson, 1973a, 108).

Later, the girls use the same word to deride an Englishwoman who

has a distressed gentlefolk air:

It is that bourgeoise, Madeleine said.
She is disgusting, Mathilde said. (p.109).

The story is not about New Zealand or New Zealanders, but Sargeson is making a point - that can be applied to New Zealand - about the use of an imprecise label as a means of derogatory distancing. The use of the word 'bourgeois' puts the girls' victims into a separate and inferior social category but it is a category without a consistent position or precise boundaries. In this story Sargeson makes imaginative use of the uncertain meaning combined with certain condemnation attached to the word 'bourgeois'.

Yet it is important to try and sharpen conceptions of words used so persistently. Partly because the words bourgeois and puritan can be used as semi-magical invocations to an unquestioned attitude, it is necessary to try and penetrate the values they signify and the connection between them.

Again it is Sargeson who provides a starting-point for analysis - a starting-point that is both an important conceptual distinction and an imaginative evocation. In his autobiography Once is Enough Sargeson distinguishes between forms of puritanism. He sees two types of puritanism, the pure and the impure. Pure puritanism was embodied in his father.

What was right was absolutely right because it had its source in God, and was entirely above and beyond social convention....My father was the pure puritan who believed that all the heavenly absolutes as he conceived them could and should be made to prevail on earth... (Sargeson, 1973b, 92).

Action in this world is sanctioned by a moral code which comes from the other world; the connecting thread provides a moral impetus. So the rationale for worldly action is found in a code of religious belief; the link is much the same as the one Max Weber traced in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Both Weber and Sargeson saw, however, that the other-worldly flavour could blend nicely with a this-worldly normative code:

Of course social convention was usually quite right because it was a Christian world we lived in...(p.92).

Sargeson's mother was a different kind of puritan. She was an impure puritan.

She was without the genuine moral drive that my father had: what she believed in was convention at a middle-class level: again and again she insisted that you must do the right thing because of what people would think or say if you didn't. (p.92).

For Sargeson's mother life was still dominated by a moral code but it was a code where the spiritual impetus had been lost and morality came from a this-worldly conformity. Puritanism remained in the expectation of certain prescribed forms of behaviour; puritanism no longer remained in the sense of a personally experienced religious conviction enjoining such behaviour.

Impure puritanism is dominated by what Sargeson calls the bargain of social convention. The bargain consists of an exchange of social propriety for social acceptance. It is a small step from this form of puritanism to the concept of bourgeois existence. Both are shaped by conformity. But they are shaped by a different kind of conformity. The conformity of impure puritanism is based on behaviour and what one does; the conformity of bourgeois values is based on ownership and what one has. Robert Chapman, in Fiction and the Social Pattern (1953) approaches a characterisation of the bourgeois element in this typology without using the word 'bourgeois': 'simple materialism' is the phrase he uses. 'Under all the Puritan values', Chapman says when discussing New Zealand's historical development, 'there slipped in a simple materialism combined with self-complacency' (Chapman, 1953, 40).

Images of the materialism of New Zealand bourgeois life have clear connotations - connotations of possessions, money and philistine values. Yet Frank Sargeson's emotional rejection of this code of values is so powerful that he sees bourgeois attributes consistently in terms of what they lack. Sargeson approaches 'simple materialism' in his autobiographies through a spiral of contrasts which are linked in a complex manner to one another and in which the bourgeois way of life is always seen as a form of negation.

The first contrast is concerned with everyday household living. The neat piling-up of the inert possessions of materialism is seen against the human substance of creative house-keeping. Sargeson describes a visit to his friend K. whose kitchen is in a mess.

Since knowing K. however, I have learned to interpret household disorder as a sign of life, and to suspect that those whose hands are always busy putting their houses in order are anticipating too much the hand of death. (Sargeson, 1973b, 21).

Household simplicity and an attendant disorder is almost a pre-requisite, for Sargeson, for entering a state where creative forms of house-keeping - gardening, food-gathering, cooking - can combine practical and mystical aspects:

Will the rice take up all the liquid? For some minutes I am anxious, but fear dissolves and I feel that I am on the point of being beatified. I add the pipis....The mixture is beautifully stiff. I taste and K. tastes too. This is the peak. Each grain of rice is firm and separate, not sticky. The flavour is ambrosial. We drink while I am serving out the helpings. A moment or two longer, and a reverse mechanism of the embodied spirit is beginning to operate...(Sargeson, 1973b, 29).

Eating such food can bring about a form of spiritual freedom.

Conspicuous consumption and its attendant obsessive care of possessions, on the other hand, are forms of material tyranny in Sargeson's world. Both are central to the bourgeois way of life. Sargeson sets the deadness of a servitude to goods against 'vitality in the raw' (Sargeson, 1973b, 27) in various ways. The starched embroidered table-cloths and tea-cups with 'absurd wavy brims' of 'a good girl' are seen in opposition to the affiliation order attached to the 'good thing' her husband gets embroiled with (p.33). And Sargeson contrasts the 'easy-going gaiety' of his grandmother with his mother's attempt to compete with 'the very best people by continuously washing, starching and ironing her tablecloths...' (p.97). Any capitulation to the house-building and house-maintaining demands of 'the destructive forces...of entrenched society' (Sargeson, 1975, 117) is a capitulation to the 'tyrant-time of clocks and calendars' (p.137) and thus to the bourgeois way of life in all its insidiousness.

Possessions are bought with money so money is just as central to the bourgeois way of life as goods are. And money is equally dangerous to the human spirit. A second contrast in the autobiographies is between money-making and 'wasting one's time' reading and writing. In a society dedicated to money-making and to the work that brings in

money, Sargeson cannot expect his writing to be taken seriously (Sargeson, 1975, 51). 'Butter-fat and bank-notes' (Sargeson, 1973b, 9) and a working philosophy based on grit and hard graft (Sargeson, 1975, 55) preclude a life of mornings given to a rigid writing routine and dreamy afternoons talking about T.S. Eliot (Sargeson, 1973b, 21). Sargeson's law qualifications are a means of buying himself into a civil-service job, security and a 'sleep of the spirit' (Sargeson, 1973b, 118). In the autobiographies, a down-and-out who likes Keats becomes a pied-piper who leads Sargeson away from his bourgeois job into the life of a writer (Sargeson, 1973b, 19). 'He was right and society was wrong' (p.19). For Sargeson, there is no possibility of compromise between the two sets of values.

Dedication to goods and money leads to philistinism; the canopy of shared values protecting bourgeois economic goals cannot co-exist with what Sargeson calls civilised values. A third contrast in the autobiographies is between philistinism and civilisation. Europe's civilisation may not be New Zealand's; the erudition of the German intellectual Karl Wolfskehl can overwhelm as well as invigorate (Sargeson, 1973b, 111). Yet Sargeson does not doubt that Italian children calling Wolfskehl 'il professore' is better than New Zealand girls laughing at him. Nor does he doubt that 'the satisfying exchange of intellectual pleasures' (p.110) is, in some unexplained way, spiced by the draughts and slow-heating gas-ring that would be anathema to the philistine soul.

A composite picture of bourgeois life emerges from these interconnected contrasts. It is a picture of a house cluttered with objects which absorb land, energy and money which could be better used. Money underpins the acquisition of both houses and objects. Money, as for Marx, is a pimp which procures a way of life at the cost of the alienation of the essence of man. For the result of the bourgeois way of life is a form of social capitulation and of spiritual death.

Bourgeois life is a life emptied of internal meaning. There is none of the impetus to action from within that invigorates pure puritanism. Robert Chapman sees materialism as a progression from a more substantial moral code, but he says that with the growth of

materialism the loss of moral substance could be ignored. There was no realisation, he says, that a living faith gave actions a sense of virtue but that such actions were 'not virtues when pursued for themselves and the goods and social standing their practice purchased' (Chapman, 1953, 40).

Max Weber, in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, wrote of the impetus to capitalist acquisition which had been provided by the Protestant ethic; avarice, Weber saw, could justifiably become the goal of the honest man within this framework of thought. Sanctification of greed is attained with an ease that ceases to be so surprising when put into this context of fundamental moral confusion. The progression from impure puritanism to the simple materialism of bourgeois life can be seen as a cumulative emptying-out of moral force. In bourgeois behaviour there may be little moral justification for what would be seen in another context as self-advancing behaviour. But if the emptying-out is not recognised, the sense of virtue will not be lost. There is an abiding haze of comforting confusion in which prosperity and salvation go together. No longer, as for the pure puritan, does being saved have to precede and justify the acquisition of goods and money. Instead prosperity somehow brings about salvation, even if the way in which they are connected does not stand close examination.

The development of this typology leads to a certain social framework. The progressive draining of meaning it reveals is not reflected in a weakening of value structure. In fact what remains is a strongly sanctioned code of behaviour. And a sense of the strength of normative control lies behind the images portrayed by the three writers. I shall turn now to a consideration of the bourgeois-puritan cluster of values as it appears in the imaginative writing of each of them.

John A. Lee's hero, Albany Porcello, absorbed church-based values when living with his grandparents in central Otago. When he could believe in his own goodness he could enjoy singing, adult approval for visible sanctity and 'the Jesus of the nursery rhyme hymns' (Lee, 1973, 67). More often he saw himself as a sinner:

Fearing, I hated God, for I was at heart a sinner who wanted to ignore every injunction just to see what would happen as a consequence....An intense preoccupation with God hangs over those early years like a black cloud. After my sin God always seemed on hand to judge me. I visualized my puny self standing before Him while He frowned from His throne. (pp.68-9).

When Porcello later whole-heartedly takes on the role of the sinner, he abandons a form of belief that would make him uncomfortable about his wrong-doing. His sin brings him to Burnham, an isolated country school for boys who have offended against the social code. The school is concerned with religious values and their application through flogging and other forms of physical punishment. Prayers or hymns said or sung accurately and loudly are the visible manifestation of spiritual grace:

School opened with prayer, the wounded boys making their praise of God the most vociferous. It was a school rule that though wounded in spirit and flesh one had to chirp like a cricket. (Lee, 1975, 44).

Porcello admits to an attendant that he does not know the words of a prayer. No, the attendant says,

Probably not, not used to prayer. Another gutter brat. The sooner you learn the better. (p.44).

In a similar manner, a doctrine of sexual abstinence ("Thou Shalt Not" was the beginning and the end of sexual understanding' (p.66)) is beaten, preached and insinuated into the boys. And the cleanliness that is next to godliness is instilled through the ritual of floor-scrubbing:

To be the fastest scrubber in the school was to occupy an envied eminence. It was to be head altar-boy before the god of cleanliness. (p.36).

The intense religious preoccupation of Porcello's early childhood, the belief that filled him with comfort or with fear has gone; at Burnham he experiences neither the faith of pure puritanism nor the bargain of social convention of impure puritanism to bring him into submission. Conformity is not internalised; it lasts only as long as it is imposed. In The Hunted Porcello's moral journey is a journey of resistance against the values he inadvertently absorbed as a younger child.

Before final release from Burnham, Porcello is sent to work in the town of Troonsville. Burnham is designed to inculcate religious and moral values; the pre-release system is designed to test them in the secular world. Porcello lives with and works for Foreman Alexander and his wife; he still has to work and to submit but in a setting of bourgeois comfort rather than puritan abstinence. The atmosphere is one of good meals and determined acquisition; a liking for well-being is combined with an obsession with money-making. Yet the apparent separation between these bourgeois values and the puritan values they seem to gainsay is lost in a confusion of motivation.

Foreman Alexander is a pillar of the Presbyterian church:

And Foreman's treasurership of the Presbyterian Church brought business in a community where religion had customer-winning power. (p.205).

Puritan adherence brings in bourgeois business.

"It pays to do right." That pleased Foreman. With all his bulk Foreman believed in that phrase. Christianity paid. The balance in the annual profit and loss account was the reward of Christian virtue. Goodness walked hand in hand with success. (p.203).

Yet the discrepancy in motivation cannot always be overlooked:

...Foreman believed that dancing was corruption but he catered for suppers at per dozen and per head, donning an apron and winning his profit from the scarlet whore. Dancing was wicked but its proceeds were purified if the catering firm was Alexander Brothers. In the same way Foreman would cater at a function where liquor flowed in gallons. He appreciated the gain while deprecating the source. (p.220).

A combination of bourgeois practice and puritan legitimation leads to the fundamental hypocrisy that Chapman discusses in his essay. And this hypocrisy cannot always be disguised. Lee sees this clearly and puts it into convincing form in Foreman Alexander.

Sargeson's characters live in a more complex world. It is a world which is not amenable to the exact application of specific elements, as Lee's is. It is a world of bourgeois and puritan values and ways of life, but the significant question is one of meaning. The presence or loss of substance in the established way of life is a constant theme in Sargeson's writing. What matters is the

invigoration of a living faith in daily life and whether it is possible in either secular or church-based forms of daily behaviour.

There are moments of animation in Henry's prayers and interior monologue in I Saw in My Dream³ but they are flickers of fear in his inner life rather than the living faith of pure puritanism. And Henry's unsteady allegiance to the code of morality his faith is supposed to require - shown in his 'goodness' in studying, his 'badness' in spying on Auntie Clara - indicate that the impure puritan's bargain of social convention has not been firmly struck. Observances demanded by puritan and bourgeois codes may dictate the way Sargeson's characters behave. But, for Sargeson, they are not imbued with a living faith.

In his short stories, images of death and emptiness are often associated with adherence to the moral code of the bourgeois-puritan life. These forces are usually set against the life of those who are seen as being beyond its influence.

The child who tells the story in An Attempt at an Explanation goes with his mother to the park when she is without work and they have nothing to eat. He loves his mother and all living things: the child's closeness to his mother and to the natural world is seen in relation to the third character in the story - a Methodist minister.

...our Methodist minister came walking through the park wearing his black hat and his long black coat. Mother and I both watched him coming and he kept on stopping to look at the flowers and touch them with his walking stick, and when he passed our seat and saw who it was he raised his hat to mother and stopped and said what a nice day it was. And then he went on, and right across the park he kept on stopping to look at the flowers and touch them with his walking stick.

Well, I couldn't help it. I started to cry....All I could do was to see a sort of connection between the lice and the silkworms and the birds and my mother and myself, and then, after you'd taken a sort of jump, our Methodist minister who walked through the park touching the flowers with his walking stick. (Sargeson, 1964, 66).

The child connects two opposed ways of existence. The minister is a puritan embodiment of separation from the natural world; shrouded

in black he repels colour and warmth, distanced by his walking stick he has no contact with people or with growing things. His adherence to the appearances of religion keep him from the spirit that would bring it to life. That spirit is, in ways which cannot be fully explained, to be found in people like the boy and his mother and in an understanding of animals, plants and the unaccountable forces that bring them all together.

The emptiness of religious observance without humanity is expressed in images of black clothes and a walking stick; the emptiness of secular conformity is expressed in another powerful image in Conversation with My Uncle. The focus of the story is a bowler hat.

My uncle wears a hard knocker. His wife put him up to it. She says it's the thing for a man in his position, and my uncle's position is pretty good. (p.9).

The most masterly of Sargeson's stories tend to be the shortest; the central object often becomes a significant symbol. Here the bowler hat becomes a black, inverted receptacle for an empty form of existence. Its rigid meaninglessness contains nothing; nor does the uncle's life:

He's an ascetic, my uncle is. He eats only a few mouthfuls of food a day. He's very thin, very cold to shake hands with. His wife says his hard knocker is the thing for a man in his position. (p.10).

The story ends with an emphatic moral statement:

O Lord! it's a good job everybody isn't like my uncle. We don't want a world full of dead men walking about in hard knockers. (p.10).

The hard knocker is the thing for a man in his position. Striking the bargain of social convention means behaving in ways that go with positions rather than people. And it leads to a form of living death.

In the Midst of Life...is death. And in the story with that name the story-teller says:

Anyhow, I think I'll give up going to see Frances and uncle Joe. It's too much like going into a cemetery. (p.19).

Frances' form of death comes from being tied to her father, uncle Joe: and this, in turn, comes from the way she lives:

Once she got properly on my nerves and I asked why she didn't try seducing the milkman or something like that? (p.19).

But Frances has relinquished this kind of spontaneity for another kind of rectitude:

I've noticed that Frances is very particular about her friends - well, if you can call them friends. They have to be the right sort of people, who're sure to say and do only the right sort of thing. (p.18).

Conformity, in both its puritan and bourgeois forms, may not be merely meaningless and harmless. It can take on a particular malignity through its own powers of perversion. The puritanism that has been beaten into the story-teller in A Good Boy becomes the moral justification for killing his two-timing girlfriend:

I went all righteous just like father and mother used to go when they caught me or anyone else playing them a dirty trick. Gosh, when I killed the girl I felt better and cleaner than I've ever felt in my life. I bet father used to feel just the same as I did then when he used to give me those hidings. I never wanted to be a good boy, but when it came to a sort of test I found I was a good boy after all. (p.29).

And a mother's agony when she fears her daughter has been killed in a factory explosion in They Gave Her a Rise is swamped by the greed of naked materialism when the girl survives and is offered danger money to return to work (p.35).

The stories are subtle and complex; the theme is a steady one. Religious observance without belief and bourgeois existence based on conformity will at best be empty and at worst malign. The bargain of social convention, however it is struck, must always lead to a profound loss of humanity.

Robin Hyde is unprepared to strike the bargain of social convention at all unless she is forced to do so. For Hyde there is no question of a living faith behind the 'real' world; in fact she rejects it in both its bourgeois and puritan aspects because of its attributes of death and darkness. Yet she sees these aspects quite clearly, if rather coolly. The world of religious observance is for Hyde a world of 'tepid soup and tepid salvation' (Hyde, 1937, 112) so it cannot draw on the white-hot power of Hyde's imaginative alchemy

to bring it to life. 'The odour of sanctity was much the same as carbolic soap' (p.112). Orthodox religion is part of the destructive world of dullness to which it attaches ideas of goodness, a 'meaningless, sad, constipated goodness' (Hyde, 1970, 90). But, as for Sargeson, its power can become malignant. Religious practice can destroy people.

The congregation of the Hannays' church in The Godwits Fly consists of

...the closed faces of middle age, mixed with the pink-and-white of little boys drugged by the air to lethargy.

A long time ago they had lost their angel faces, clear-minted with individuality and beloved significance. Now they huddled close, waiting. (Hyde, 1970, 90).

With these people, God can be treated like a gigolo.

Religion which is an emotional dilation, which finds outlet by puffing out its cheeks, is always at the critical moment going to play into the dirtiest hands available. Real religion is clear-cut, black and white; philosophy and magic...(p.90).

The ladies of the church have their eye on Carly, Eliza Hannay's conformist sister:

Anything they can do to make Carly like themselves, shining church brasses, breaking off the tall stems of lilies to fit the altar vases, that surely they will do. The dead are anxious for company, so also are the living dead. (p.115).

The living death of orthodox religion is seen against a backdrop of the philosophy and magic of 'real religion'. In Wednesday's Children orthodox religion is embodied in Wednesday's relative, the Reverend Crispin Westmacott. The Reverend Westmacott verges on caricature; his distance from Wednesday's life-giving island and from Hyde's sympathy is so great that Hyde allows him to exist as a series of parsonian clichés. To the characteristics of a stock figure of a vicar - irascibility, a spluttering self-righteousness and a relentlessly kill-joy attitude, Hyde adds associations of death and death-dealing. The Rev. Westmacott gutters 'like an enraged corpse candle' (Hyde, 1937, 36) and is described as 'a withered god surrounded by withering human sacrifices' (p.226).

The living dead lend themselves to caricature; this is true of their secular embodiments too. Brenda is a totally bourgeois figure in Wednesday's Children. 'Wednesday hadn't stayed good' (p.44) but Wednesday's relative, Brenda, had. Usually Brenda appears in her dining or drawing room.

Brenda, trying to be composed, but still very jerky,
sat on the damson-brocaded couch, making dry,
aimless little remarks...(p.98).

Hyde portrays her as an unhappy, uncertain sensibility imprisoned in an exterior devoted to propriety in dress, manners and behaviour. Hyde allows her a little pathos but no inner life.

Brenda is a crude stereotype of bourgeois inadequacies; Carly, Eliza's sister in The Godwits Fly, is bourgeois but not stereotyped. Carly grows up and becomes 'the little housekeeper' she showed signs of being in childhood. Carly is a figure of compassion once she is left with only her glory-box and memories of a dreary and long-dwindling courtship. Yet, for Hyde, Carly's capitulation to bourgeois values means she is beyond salvation.

Hyde is always a perplexing writer. The clarity of her depiction of puritan observance and bourgeois existence come mainly from her rejection of the world they belong to, a rejection that can lead her into the over-simplicity of caricature. And the crudeness of caricature is useful for illustrating a typology, even if it is an inferior element in Hyde's imaginative output.⁴

For Hyde, meaning cannot be found in a world which is anti-thetical to life-giving forces. And both Lee and Sargeson fail to find meaning in that world. Whether the world of respectability is seen as a whole, or whether religious and secular elements are seen separately, it is characterised principally by the lack of a spirit of its own.

Chapman also sees this world through images of emptiness. He writes of 'the husk of respectability' (my italics) (Chapman, 1943, 51). And the world forms, Chapman says, the social pattern in New Zealand, a pattern which he talks about in different contexts but always in terms of hollowness. The image persists whether people are seen as failures who are rejected by the pattern or as innovators who

reject it; unfortunates 'fall through' the pattern involuntarily (p.31) and Chapman compares writers who choose to escape the pattern to 'men clinging to a net which encloses a balloon' (p.31).

The social pattern may be lacking in substance but it is extremely powerful. Bourgeois and puritan values mould people's attitudes and pervade the social system. Attempts to escape their influence usually fail and moments of rebellion are followed by a 'relapse into convinced conformity' (Chapman, 1953, 52). There are similarities between the convinced conformity of Chapman's social pattern and Sargeson's impure puritanism. Both hold their shape because of outside pressure rather than inner substance. And both dominate the social world.

Sargeson's mother, the impure puritan, was not an isolated figure:

My mother was indeed truly representative of the prevailing general sentiment about what life in New Zealand should be - the sentiment which powerfully shapes and dominates New Zealand life to this day. (Sargeson, 1973b, 93).

And Chapman writes:

There is no alternative to the way of life dictated by the pattern....If the pattern pinches ...there is no escape from it. (Chapman, 1953, 52).

New Zealand is seen as a society imprisoned by the values of respectability; the image prevails in documentary writing as well as in the fiction of the three writers.

How did the way of seeing discussed in the last two chapters come to dominate the vision of New Zealand writers? To explore this question, the historical background of the prevailing image must itself be seen as a form of ideology. With the approach taken in this thesis, only if events are interpreted in the light of the ideology in which the image is embedded, can a historical account be said to explain the dominance of the image.

In the next chapter the historical explanation of the founding of New Zealand colonial society in particular and new societies in

general will rest on an interpretative approach to historical accounts; there will be no attempt to establish the objective truth of the explanations that are considered.

In this context of interpretation, an attempt will be made firstly to account for the power of the prevailing image and secondly to provide an explanation for the breaking of its hold over the minds of New Zealanders.

Footnotes

- 1 The periods indicated by the references in this paragraph are as follows: p.161 - the World War I era; p.167 - novels written before the turn of the century. Despite the historical gap, the telescoping of imaginative response seems justifiable in the light of McCormick's central argument of the derived colonial mentality.

- 2 Reportage can easily become mere reportage of course. And mere reportage is a problem in the imaginative writing of John A. Lee; McCormick write of Children of the Poor that there is 'too much unassimilated descriptive matter and too many passages of raw propaganda...' (McCormick, 1940, 174).

- 3 'Though your sins be as scarlet. Only against the Holy Ghost oh no. No. He could ask the reverend, but no no it couldn't be. IF? Never forgiven, never Never...' (Sargeson, 1974, 64) ...and so on. Passages of interior monologue of this kind punctuate the narrative of Part One.

- 4 When Hyde writes less well, she is more useful sociologically. And the uneasy feeling I have about Lee's description of bourgeois and puritan values (see p.20 above) arises from his precision in describing them. A basic dilemma for the sociology of literature arises from the fact that writing which provides the best sociological evidence is not always writing which carries the most imaginative conviction. There is a difference between reporting accurately (e.g. Footnote 2 above) on bourgeois and puritan characteristics and understanding them at imaginative depth. As a sociologist I am grateful for the pinpointing reportage provides; as a literary critic I prefer writing like Sargeson's which is not so amenable to categorisation.

Chapter III

THE BACKGROUND OF THE IMAGE

To explore the background of the image of respectable society, I shall start by looking at it through the eyes of one of its most influential purveyors, Robert Chapman. The historical section of his essay Fiction and The Social Pattern (1953) is presented as explanatory background to a contemporary situation; Chapman himself is not writing self-consciously in terms of an image. My approach, then, is to look at the historical development of the image, using Chapman's arguments as ideological evidence.

The New Zealand social pattern came ready-made, Chapman says.

This sketch, then, begins at the point where the outlook of New Zealanders was imported. For the New Zealand pattern, as should be obvious, was not a fresh growth but grew up from the trunk of the British social pattern. The visual analogy is of a Y, one of the arms of which is our pattern, the trunk reaching up in time to early and mid-Victorian England...it is important to grasp that the pattern came ready-made from a given tradition and circumstances. It was as old as Great Britain when it arrived. (Chapman, 1953, 33).

The early immigrants may have come from various levels of the English hierarchy (pp.31 and 34) but the beliefs and outlook that prevailed were those of the largest group, 'the labouring class' (p.34). The dominant ideology was the ideology of the lower middle class.

Chapman sees the impetus for belief of the early immigrants as an evangelical form of puritanism. Its moral doctrine, formed for those who were ambitious but deprived in the old country, was particularly effective in the new country. A belief in self-improvement supported by self-denial - particularly fleshly abstinence - could combine with hard work to bring tangible rewards in a pioneering situation (pp.34-6). The pure puritan's moral impetus would bring visible earthly confirmation of his virtue. And what he gained would be ratified in standards set by his new-world neighbours, standards formed back in the old country.

The pattern enjoined work and promised reward and respect for it... [and the aim became] the high Victorian display of the upper middle class which the immigrant domestic may have seen and envied back in England. (p.39).

New goals did not develop in a new environment. Instead the mental horizons for social ambition were set by a higher social class in the mother country. People wanted what they already knew to exist. A framework of possibility was set in advance; ambition could move only upwards to the upper reaches of a social class established elsewhere and outwards to the material limits set by standards of bourgeois success. Around these second-hand horizons there were limits. Whether fired by the belief of pure puritanism, whether establishing the network of shared norms to ensure the conformity of impure puritanism, or whether simply gaining and getting at the material level, the restrictions were the same. The image could bring to light only what it had contained, potentially, at its source.

An Aristotelian vision of what is possible lies behind Chapman's sense of the restrictions imposed by the pattern. It may also lie behind the ahistorical tone of much of the essay. For Chapman assumes that the pattern has not changed since it was established. He moves from a discussion of mid-Victorian evangelism to contemporary problems of adolescence or marriage without a sense of dislocation. For Chapman both are part of the same thread of development from inherent possibility to actualised form; he seems to see the values of New Zealand life at the time he wrote his essay as much the same as they were almost a hundred years before. Such a sense of the conflation of time is not surprising. Chapman's vision of the iron grip of the social pattern means that there would be no impetus from either inside or outside society to change it, so there is no reason why the present should be different from the past.

Chapman sees the relationship between Victorian England, the coloniser, and New Zealand, the colonised, as both partial and static: a segment of the total way of life of the mother country is set down on the new land and stays there, unchanged either by the new environment or by any form of internal dynamic. Chapman's microcosmic approach to the colonisation of New Zealand can be seen in macrocosmic form in Louis Hartz's book The Founding of New Societies (1964). Hartz presents a theory of the development of new societies based on the study of 'five societies created by European migration in modern times' (Hartz, 1964, vii). The word 'created' is illuminating, for Hartz sees the founding of new societies in terms of imposition of the old upon the new; the new land is seen as a passive setting for an imported way of

life. Such a view of colonisation recognises the need for strong and convincing images in a new society and directs the search for those images to the land from which the colonisers came.¹ Set in Hartz's framework, the grip of one particular set of imported ideas on an entire nation can be seen as part of a colonising trend rather than as a unique fate for New Zealanders.

Hartz sees new societies as fragments broken off from old societies. In establishing a new society 'part of a European nation is detached and hurled outwards onto new soil' (Hartz, 1964, 3). Elsewhere Hartz writes of 'bits of Victorian England' (p.12) and their establishment in new countries.

Hartz does not apply his own theory to New Zealand but parallels are apparent. The fragment is often a middle or lower class segment of the social scale, Hartz says. And as we have seen, Chapman sees the main group of immigrants to New Zealand as the lower social groups in the England of the industrial revolution. The fragment spreads and enlarges into a whole way of life in the new land, according to Hartz. Its potential for change lessens at the same time as its influence grows: 'The world has shrunk, but precisely for that reason it has blossomed as well' (Hartz, 1964, 9). The bourgeois-puritan way of life is seen to spread throughout New Zealand. It is also seen to dominate; the fragment, Hartz says, comes to master an entire region. Established respectable society in New Zealand is seen as tenacious and resistant to change; Hartz sees the fragment as inevitably ossifying in the new land. As part of a pre-existing whole artificially cut off from the moving pattern of that whole, it loses the stimulus towards change that competing ideologies would provide. The fragment remains 'morally fixed at its point of origin' (Hartz, 1964, 8).

The fragment expands to fill the entire social universe, becomes unadaptable and apparently dislodgeable, according to Hartz. Chapman sees the New Zealand social pattern as so homogeneous and so insistently demanding that it is almost impossible to see the world in any other way (Chapman, 1953, 31).

Chapman writes too of attitudes to the monolith when he refers to the self-complacency of New Zealand life; in the same vein Lee writes of 'the smug' and Sargeson of self-righteousness. Hartz's theory

provides an explanation for this moral attitude. The isolated essence of the fragment, he says, has to be converted into a new sense of wholeness so moral justifications are developed which deny the humiliations of the old way of life (Hartz, 1964, 11). The fragment develops its potential in a restricted geographical space and extends its sway over the minds and spirits of the colonists. Further than that it cannot develop. Walls go up around the fragment, Hartz says. Chapman and other writers I am concerned with see New Zealand as a walled country; for them the social extent and moral grip of the bourgeois-puritan cluster of values make it into an ideological fortress.

As there is no possibility of development within the fragment, the result is a static state of affairs. Chapman and other New Zealand writers convey their sense of helplessness about the bourgeois-puritan way of life; they do not like it but they recognise its power. Hartz talks about new societies in general and his fragment theory leads him to conclude that there is little possibility of change from within.

The inertia and tenaciousness of the fragment comes from the extent of its power, Hartz says. In the old society it could not have a total and unchallenged hold on the minds of all citizens for in its native land its moral basis was as an ideology amongst other ideologies. In the new society, however, 'an ideology becomes a moral absolute, a national essence, a veritable way of racial life' (Hartz, 1964, 6).

Hartz uses a revealing metaphor in his discussion of this process. In losing its partial and relative nature the ideology sinks, Harts says. 'It becomes a universal, sinking beneath the level of thought to the level of an assumption' (p.5). Applying this to New Zealand, the bourgeois-puritan cluster of values would be accepted as an unquestionable moral code. It would be too deeply sunk into the lower layers of consciousness to be open to examination. It would become a framework for thought so deeply embedded in the mind, individual and collective, that it would never occur to anyone to question it. T.E. Hulme in Speculations (1936) writes of doctrines-felt-as-facts; what Hartz indicates here is that an ideology that in Europe would be seen as a doctrine would, in the isolation and safety of the new society, lose its examinable qualities and become an unquestioned fact.

While the fragment is accepted as a moral absolute and is not even consciously considered, its power persists. However, sooner or later there is a major change. This change is usually brought about by the impact of the outside world. External events can bring about a shattering of the unquestioned hold of the fragment's ideology on the minds of members of society.

The effect is one of release. When fragments undergo this change, determinism is converted into choice, Hartz says. There is a prying loose from the helplessness of absolute belief. Raised at last to the level of consciousness, ideas can come under conscious control; for the first time they become open to criticism. A new sense of relativity is written into the consciousness of society. Once again the code of the fragment can be seen as an ideology amongst other ideologies. And a sense of relativity means there is a new openness to the possibility of alternatives.

A comparable process can be seen as underlying the new forms of New Zealand writing that appeared in the 1930s. Sargeson, in the first of his autobiographies, writes of the questions he began to ask himself at the beginning of his writing career.

What was the European doing in this far away Pacific Ocean country anyway? Had he the right to be here? What were the ideas and ways of life he had brought with him and how had they developed? Was a community being built which could continue to flourish, or was the European occupation a kind of tenancy which would eventually be terminated? Did I personally agree with the prevailing sentiments on these matters? (Sargeson, 1975, 95).

These are questions that arise from a crisis in perspective and they betray the curious mixture of naïveté and penetration that come with ideas that are newly obvious. Sargeson seems to be blinking in the bright light of a newly attained freedom of perception.

The value of Hartz's theory for my argument lies in the interpretative framework it sets up to account for the power and tenacity of the fragment's hold over a new dominion and a colonising people. It also lies in the explanation Hartz provides for the breaking of this hold. Hartz's theory traces the progress of an image of society in the consciousness of men from the unquestioned to the questionable. Once a vision of society is questionable, someone will question it: Sargeson's

questions were addressed to himself and they underlay the search he traces in his autobiographies for 'his' New Zealand.

At the level of macrocosm, Hartz sees the search initiated by this new licence to question in terms of a search for a national identity. 'The new generations burst forth,' Hartz says, 'with a "discovery" of their national essence, amazed that its novelty has never been recognized before ' (Hartz, 1964, 12).

At this point Hartz's theory cannot be applied so neatly to emerging images of New Zealand society. A new image of New Zealand cannot be seen in terms of what Hartz calls 'the national moment'. There is no sense, in documentary or imaginative writing, of an instantaneous Hartzian 'bursting forth' of complete national identity. Yet a sense of national identity is central to the new awareness that arose with the breaking of the hold of the old image. But it is a sense of the importance of a national moment for a country that had previously been content to see itself as a colony. This awareness heralded a long period of struggle to achieve a sense of nationhood, a struggle that has persisted to this day.

The search for nationhood in New Zealand, then, can be seen as starting with a recognition of a lack of nationhood. This recognition provides a form of explanation for the impetus behind the long-lasting attempt to establish an indigenous image of New Zealand society. An image of the respectable society was cast clearly and consistently by imaginative writers and by documentary commentators. For these writers the image was of New Zealand society and in this way it was an image of indigenous society. But there is an important distinction to be made here. The respectable society in New Zealand could be seen as indigenous in one sense but not in another. It was indigenous in that it was the society to be found in New Zealand. But it was not indigenous in another sense; it did not belong in New Zealand.²

This explanation accounts for the hold of the image over the minds of so many different writers. It accounts, too, for McCormick's failure to identify it in his essay (see p.11 above). McCormick is concerned with emergent indigenous images of New Zealand that are appropriate to the newly developing society; he is not concerned with what he happens to find in New Zealand.

And there is a strong sense, amongst a wide range of authors, that the respectable society does not belong in New Zealand. The three creative writers imaginatively reject this image while they are imaginatively obsessed by it. It is felt to be inappropriate and seen to be imported by Robert Chapman. Throughout his essay Fiction and the Social Pattern Chapman explicitly rejects the image as neither right nor endemic: 'The puritan tradition [was] imported and incongruously set down...' (Chapman, 1953, 58) in New Zealand, he says, and it 'went clean contrary to the new facts' (p.39). The unsuitability of the social pattern to the New Zealand character leads to crises of incongruity which are captured in the work of creative writers, Chapman says, who portray an isolated individual struggling 'under the disturbing weight of a pattern he does not understand' (p.55). Chapman, writing nearly two decades after the three imaginative writers I am concerned with, is still beset by problems of identity similar to theirs. In grappling with the hold of the image of respectable society, the struggle towards a sense of nationhood does not seem to have got very far.

All this dissatisfaction leads to an obvious question. If the bourgeois-puritan cluster of values is not seen as appropriate for New Zealand, what is? This question underlies both Chapman's essay of 1953 and Pearson's of 1952. Both see faults in New Zealand's puritanical tradition. But neither succeeds in creating a vision of what should take its place. Pearson ascribes this uncertainty to New Zealanders in general. 'We haven't made up our minds...', he says, '...whether we mean to stay, why we are here anyway, what life is all about...' (Pearson, 1974, 28). Pearson sees the challenge to artists in proletarian terms, although he says he is not advocating a 'self-conscious rush to the proletariat' (p.31). The challenge is to 'make a meaning out of the drives and behaviour of the common people...' (p.31). The artist must identify with the people, however difficult being 'a spy in enemy territory' (p.31) may be, in order to invigorate them. 'Our job is to penetrate the torpor and out of meaninglessness make a pattern that means something...' (p.31). Pearson does not suggest what such a pattern might be. He advocates a different social system but suggests no social structure which could implement his unlocalised yearnings for significance.

Pearson ends his essay with a plea; Chapman ends his with a clarion call. Pearson makes uneasy concessions to a need for a new social system and a new attitude. Chapman winds his revolutionary bugle with no such sense of hesitation. 'The artist,' Chapman says in his final sentence, 'must sound his trumpet of insight until the walls of Jericho - the pattern as it is - falls down' (Chapman, 1953, 58).

Neither commentator formulates a clear alternative to the image he rejects;³ both turn to artists in their hope for a more substantial solution to the problem. It seems to me that the search of the three creative writers for an image of society they can live with leads them beyond the thinness of the final paragraphs of both Pearson's and Chapman's essays. There is, in the writing of the three authors, a gradual release of alternative forms of consciousness, a struggle towards the imaginative creation of different visions of society. These images vary in their sense of solidity; substance in the visions of alternative ways of life is often pursued rather than achieved. Tracing the course of this pursuit is important to an understanding of the work of the three writers. It is to the struggle for visions of alternative forms of society that I shall turn now.

Footnotes

- 1 Hartz's theory of colonisation is at one end of a possible scale of interpretation for examining the inter-relationship of the old and the new. It looks at the relationship between the coloniser with his cultural baggage and the new land with its own limitations in a particular way.

Frederick Turner is near the other end of the scale. In his book The Frontier in American History (1920), Turner sees the confrontation between the settler and the new land on much more equal terms; he sees it as a meeting between savagery and civilisation. To begin with, he says, the 'wilderness masters the colonist'. 'The environment is too strong for the man' (Turner, 1920, 3). Gradually the two forces become more balanced and the result is a new society. 'Little by little he [the colonist] transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not old Europe. The fact is that here is a new product which is American' (Turner, 1920, 3).

Hartz's opposing view of migration as virtual social creation, which finds a New Zealand endorsement explicitly or implicitly in many of the documentary works I consider in this thesis, has more explanatory power for the approach I have adopted at this stage with its emphasis on a shared prevailing image. It is for this reason that I have concentrated on Hartz's book.

An interpretative framework such as Hartz's, incidentally, obviously allows little cultural autonomy or cultural influence to native social groups; it is significant that there is little acknowledgement of Maori ways of life in the accounts I am concerned with here.

- 2 Uncertainty about the way of life that belongs in New Zealand is complicated by a widespread pre-occupation with England as Home. All three of the writers I am concerned with write about this issue. John A. Lee puts it like this:

New Zealand has never established its own culture except of material things. For decades it has called Britain Home, a term that is finally being discarded...our childish games reflected the struggles of Buffalo Bill, rather than local history. We were always Indians or else we fought them. (Lee, 1973, 122).

There is a well-known passage in The Godwits Fly where Robin Hyde explores the same problem:

You were English and not English. It took time to realise that England was far away and you were brought up on bluebells and primroses and daffodils and robins in the snow - even the Christmas cards were always robins in the snow. One day with a little shock of anger you realised there were no robins and no snow and you felt cheated. Nothing else was quite as pretty. Tall sorrel heads of the dock plants were raggedy under your hands... (Hyde, 1970, 34).

Frank Sargeson, in the first of his autobiographies, writes of finding a honeysuckle tree on his uncle's farm, another sort of honeysuckle from the English one 'which brought back memories of home'.

The discovery of the honeysuckle tree had somehow mysteriously revealed to me something of the true nature of the pilgrimage I had so persistently imagined....Not that it was possible for me to escape immediately the imitation English world that so much of my home town environment made itself out to be. Nor could I think of my two worlds as completely separated since there were so many obvious links overlapping. (After all my uncle knew his tree by the same name that my mother's old lady friend gave to her climbing shrub....). Nevertheless I could, from that time on, so easily take for granted a world that was different...' (Sargeson, 1973b, 47).

Sargeson's recognition of his home-town environment (which he sees as irredeemably bourgeois and puritan) as 'imitation English' endorses Chapman's argument for the imported character of the social pattern.

- 3 Chapman advocates a search for a new platform of values based on 'humanitarian liberalism' (Chapman, 1953, 57) but his practical suggestions are limited to better psychological and family services within what he sees as the existing way of life (p.58).

Pearson lists certain 'virtues and strengths' of New Zealanders (Pearson, 1974, 29) but does not develop them into any image of a concrete alternative or even pay them much attention because, he says, '...it is bad for New Zealanders to read praise: it lulls us when we need to be made alert ' (p.29).

Chapter IV

THE EXTENSION OF VISION

McCormick recognised that the Depression, which was a recent event in 1940 when he wrote his centenary essay, was to have a profound effect on New Zealand life:

The 'Great Depression' disorganised New Zealand's economy and the social edifice based on that economy; it led to political changes more radical than those of the nineties; it effected a reorientation in outlook of major importance to New Zealand's literature and not without some influence on its art. The precise link between cause and effect is not always easily discerned; but it can be said with certainty that a continuation of the comfortable pre-Depression conditions could not have led to the New Zealand of 1940 with its signs, few but positive, of adult nationhood. (McCormick, 1940, 170).

Chapman quotes and confirms the findings of this passage in his 1953 essay and Robin Hyde writes that the Depression meant release for her generation (Hyde, 1970, ix).

The three writers' perceptions of their social world can be looked at profitably from McCormick's starting-point. For they all see a separate social world lying alongside the respectable society. It is a world where emphasis on material gain and a code of behaviour to go with it, is inappropriate. It is the world of the dispossessed, the disadvantaged, have-nots. The very words used to describe this world characterise it in terms of the bourgeois attributes it lacks - attributes of possession, advantage, having. All three authors write about this world with an air of innovation. There is a sense in all of them of an extension of vision. No longer are they and their readers condemned to see only the world of respectability; they are able to extend their range of perception to include something new. Robin Hyde wrote to John A. Lee in 1936 in terms of the excitement of a newly released and newly shared power to see clearly. She praised his novel Children of the Poor:

...it was not half what I would like to say, for the other half would be a comparison of your books with some of the pretty mediocrity which grows like a pearly cataract all over the eye of New Zealand. (Olssen, 1977, 87).

The most obvious way in which the Depression forced people to see poverty was by bringing about more poverty. According to McCormick, the socio-economic situation in New Zealand changed fundamentally in the 1930s and the Depression brought to an end an era of prosperity that had lasted almost unbroken for forty years (McCormick, 1940, 170). Economic hardship became too widespread to ignore; people recognised it because they could no longer fail to do so.

However, there is another way in which the Depression altered the established way of seeing. It gave social permission to see a different social world. For the Depression served as a catalyst for seeing a world of poverty that had been largely socially invisible before. So an awareness of poverty could be newly included in the vision permitted by a shared ideology.

John A. Lee, for instance, wrote both Children of the Poor and The Hunted in the 1930s but both novels are set substantially earlier during the childhood of a fictionalised Lee. Yet it is assumed that the fact of poverty in New Zealand is a revelation to Lee's readers and they are told explicitly both that poverty exists and how they are to react to it. Towards the beginning of Children of the Poor Lee says:

This is a story of the gutter. The gutter is not of Paris, of London, of New York, alone. The social gutter is over every clime and race, of village as well as of town, of the New World as well as of the Old. There is a broad, deep gutter in British Overseas Dominions. (Lee, 1973, 7).

And Bernard Shaw praised the novel in a message printed on the dust-jacket of the original (1934) edition, in terms that have a quaint and obvious ring to them half a century later:

Your book has a peculiar poignancy as a record of a life of poverty and the world of the poor where normal poverty is not disgraceful.

To be aware of the possibility of other social worlds is a necessary pre-requisite to discovering them. The Depression may be seen as a catalyst which allowed new and different social worlds to be seen but it was a slow-working catalyst; the stronghold of the existing way of seeing society could not be overthrown quickly. There could be no instant sense of nationhood; the search for new ways of life had to begin with the sense of relativity discussed in the last chapter.

Sargeson describes his literary apprenticeship as largely concerned with this search. He began to look for, he says, people who could provide an element of the unknown as

...a kind of leaven to that great mass, the too-too-solid lumpen-bourgeoisie I had during all my adult life taken far too much for granted. (Sargeson, 1975, 148).

No longer being condemned to take the bourgeoisie for granted was a form of release that allowed the search to begin for a way of life not based on bourgeois values. And without this first step, a consideration of the world of poverty in a novel such as Children of the Poor could not become mentally respectable and socially acceptable.

The most appropriate and illuminating way of looking at this extension of vision is from a materialist standpoint. And it is to a Marxist - and particularly neo-Marxist - form of materialist analysis that I shall turn now.

The first questions I shall examine in Marxist terms are the ones I have just been looking at - the dominance of bourgeois-puritan ideas and values over the minds of New Zealanders and the first moves to see alternatives once this hold was broken.

According to Marxist analysis, ideas stem from the social structure. The way people live, their socio-economic existence, expresses itself not just in their social organisation but in their ways of thought. The material facts of existence determine a person's ideas, values and beliefs. For example, members of respectable society will think in the way their material life dictates. So in I Saw in My Dream it is apparent that Henry's ideas will be shaped by his bourgeois-puritan environment. According to this line of thought, the surprising fact is that Henry ever manages to become transformed into his alter-ego Dave at all; to do so he has to find not only courage but also an alternative vision. And in order to maintain his transformation he must find a material way of life that can support the ideas and values that are appropriate to his identity as Dave.

Henry's way of thinking is unsurprising; it is determined by

the facts of his everyday life. And Sargeson is being faithful to social facts in presenting Henry at the beginning of the novel as mentally as well as physically possessed by his way of life. But how can John A. Lee's hero's thinking be explained? It should, according to this form of materialist reasoning, be a reflection of the material circumstances of his life; as a slum-dweller and child of the gutter Albany Porcello should think in the way that is appropriate to his social position. The fact that he does not think the thoughts of the gutter - or rather that he does not do so consistently - can be explained by another important aspect of Marxist thought. In any society, one social group will be the dominant group; this group will be responsible for the way of life not just of itself but of other groups over whom it has effective control. And this control means that the ideas of the subordinate group can be controlled as well; those who control the means of material production, Marx said, also control the means of mental production. So through obvious devices such as propaganda, or less obvious devices such as establishing norms of desirable ways of life, the ideas and aspirations of one social group can dominate those of another.

Social institutions are a particularly effective means of controlling the ideas of a dominated social group and preventing the development of the values appropriate to their own experience in the material world. The teaching of the church or the education system, the rulings of the judiciary can systematically reinforce the values of the powerful group and indoctrinate those who do not belong to it into its form of perception.

The dominant social group in New Zealand in the thirties espoused values I have described as bourgeois-puritan values; these dominant values were imposed on Albany Porcello through his reading, his religious training, his wrongdoing and his schooling. I shall analyse Lee's novels more closely in the next chapter; here the point is that the hold of bourgeois-puritan ideas on the minds of New Zealanders can be explained at least partly in terms of dominant values. To the extent that the ideas of respectable society held sway, even over people whose material lives did not give rise to these ideas, to that extent these ideas can be seen as a form of cultural hegemony. In this context the lapses of proclaimed socialists, such

as Lee, into the enemy's forms of thought begin to make ideological sense. And the breaking of the hold of alien forms of thought can be seen in terms of a new form of consciousness, a consciousness which allows forms of thought to arise that are appropriate to particular forms of living.

An analysis which takes account of the full complexity of socially-based thought must refer to both forms of explanation. Sometimes it will be appropriate to see ways of thought in terms of the dominant ideology and sometimes in terms of thought that arises from the material circumstances of a particular way of life.

In a Marxist framework of interpretation, an extended vision in New Zealand in the 1930s shows up a material base that is not only wider than it was perceived to be before but which includes a different mode of material life. What the Depression both provides and reveals is a way of life that is seen as based on neither the acquisition of goods nor the accumulation of money, both of which are basic to bourgeois existence. The bourgeois way of life is, by definition, not available to those without goods and without the means of acquiring them through paid work. The social and economic factors which constitute the two co-existing ways of life are so different and the distribution of power that accompanies them is so unbalanced, that the two groups form distinct social classes.

According to Marxist thought, these classes must be in a relationship of conflict with one another. Provided members of the subjugated class can see their subjugation clearly, they must feel envy and aggression towards the dominant class. The dominant class, in its turn, must feel endangered by the threat of potential usurpation of its position from below.

A class-divided world, then, is the newly visible social world of the 1930s in New Zealand. What part does art play in all this, according to materialist criticism? The imaginative artist, and particularly the writer, has a particular task. He has to transcribe the social reality that he sees. The writer who, according to Marxist thought must therefore be a realist writer, reflects the social world. This is the view of art behind Stendhal's celebrated observation that

the novel is a mirror 'journeying down the high road', sometimes reflecting 'the azure blue of the heaven, sometimes the mire of puddles' (Laurenson and Swingewood, 1973, 13). The realist artist must be true to his task; he must be what George Lukács, the neo-Marxist literary critic, has described as an incorruptibly faithful observer (Lukács, 1950, 24).

If realist fiction reflects the social world and if, in capitalist society, social classes form the structural base of society, then social class must be the essential concern of realist literature. And as the relationship between the classes is essentially one of division and of struggle, the faithfully realist writer must convey the sense of this struggling and divided life.

John A. Lee's dedication to Children of the Poor reveals a class-based way of seeing the social world.

To daughters of the poor, to errant brats and gutter-snipes; to eaters of left-overs, the wearers of cast-offs.

To slaves of the wash-tub and scrub-brush, whose children, nevertheless, go to hell.

To teachers who adopt, through compulsion or desire, the method of the barrack square.

To juvenile culprits fleeing from the inescapable hand of the law, sometimes called justice.

To that world of superior persons whose teeth have never been sharpened by deprivation, whose sensibilities have never quivered from the shame of their poverty.

In particular, to those whose birth - inexcusable audacity - may have offended against Holy Law; whose life, against Man's...

THIS STORY OF THE GUTTER.

"A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord."

The deprived, in this dedication, are victims of the world of superior persons in the sense of material dependence (slaves of the wash-tub, eaters of left-overs), moral subjugation (juvenile culprits) and exclusion from religious salvation (their children go to hell). In both the novels I am concerned with Lee writes about two social classes in New Zealand and he often writes about them in the rather muddled manner of this dedication. To the extent that his passion gets the better of his clarity he does not fulfil one of the basic criteria of realist writing.

An important ideal for the realist is a clear and even-handed vision of the class-based social world. In the New Zealand context of the 1930s this means the writer must be able to stand outside the worlds of both respectable society and the dispossessed and see them with equal dispassion and equal completeness. He must be able to do a wizard-of-oz act and, in stepping through the door into a new world, see it as clearly as the world he just left. He must work towards ridding himself of preconceptions based on socialisation into his own world and also prejudices about the newly-visible one.

This ideal is one that is stressed in the writing of many neo-Marxists. Raymond Williams¹ sees the realist writer as responding to all the factors in his social world and thus reflecting what he calls the whole reality. A good writer does not suppress aspects of the society which he surveys and so create a literary distortion which Williams calls a selected reality; he does not allow himself to see only what he wishes to see and thus gain an artificial authorial control over his material. If he does select and distort he creates what Williams calls a negotiable world. The propensity to negotiate his vision of the social world at will must, according to Williams, come into conflict with an author's dedication to verisimilitude. It must stand in the way of his determination to convey an accurate reflection of everything he sees, however unpalatable he finds aspects of this whole reality.

Lukács praises Honoré de Balzac for his unflinching realism; Balzac, Lukács says, wrote as he saw even at the expense of his political convictions. Balzac's artistic integrity prevailed over his cherished opinion. He revealed against his will. And the great realist will always '...describe what he really sees, not what he would prefer to see. This ruthlessness towards his own subjective world picture is the hallmark of all great realists in sharp contrast to the second-raters, who will always succeed in bringing their own Weltanschauung into "harmony" with reality' (Lukács, 1950, 11).

Such an outside stance calls for a self-conscious distancing from the world to be written about. Karl Mannheim considers this necessary detachment in his book Ideology and Utopia (1960). It can be fought for only by people who are willing and able to scrutinise

their own social moorings closely, he says, and thus transcend their own class boundaries (Mannheim, 1960, 141). They can then work towards a position from which a total perspective would be possible and thus become attuned to the dynamically conflicting forces that underlie their class-based society.

Mannheim, however, does not see this process of detachment as easy or even as totally possible. According to Mannheim's framework of vision it would not, in fact, be possible for Hyde, Sargeson or Lee to totally cast off their own experience or their own conditioning within the sphere of one class or another. However they might wish to be ruthless towards their subjective world pictures there would be limits to their powers of ruthlessness. For every member of society, according to Mannheim, is attached to his own interest-base; writers are not different in kind from anyone else.

We belong to a group not only because we are born into it, not merely because we profess to belong to it, nor finally because we give it our loyalty and allegiance, but primarily because we see the world and certain things in the world the way it does (i.e. in terms of the meanings of the group in question). In every concept, in every concrete meaning, there is contained a crystallization of the experiences of a certain group. (Mannheim, 1960, 19).

A writer through his powers of self-consciousness may, however, be able to detach himself from his group more readily than most people; he may be able to become what Mannheim calls an unattached intellectual. The economic and ideological bonds that fasten such people to a particular social group are less strong than they are for other members of society. These are socially marginal people. Sargeson's friendships, as they appear in the three volumes of his autobiography, tend to be with marginal people in this sense. They include refugees (Sargeson, 1975, 111), an aide-de-camp to the Governor General (Sargeson, 1975, 128) and a cultured and declassée Englishwoman (Sargeson, 1973b, 22); very few of his friends belong firmly to the socially dominant middle class.

These observations lead to certain questions, questions which need to be put at this stage. How far is it possible for any of the three authors to see clearly and judge dispassionately as they survey

their social world? What is the effect of their own social class on their vision? And what is the effect on that vision of the dominant class?

Even if one can assume the authors to have a totally detached and totally clear vision - and one cannot - there is another problem. This last problem is not directly linked to the forms and possibilities of vision available to the writers' imaginations. It is a problem to do with perception of the socio-economic base itself. If the orthodox Marxist view of the social world is of a class-based substructure, two classes with separate and antagonistic modes of material existence must eventually give rise to correspondingly separate and antagonistic world-views. But the writers may not be able to see the relationship in this clear-cut way. They may not, in their writing, be able to distinguish 'two nations' with two separate ways of life and thus two separate sets of values. The two world-views may not be in a relationship of opposition to one another at all; the bourgeois way of seeing the world may not in fact be fundamentally opposed to the way of seeing of those who are dispossessed.

So, in analysing literature from a materialist standpoint, two distinct sets of questions become significant. Firstly there are certain questions that arise about the social world itself. The main focus of concern is the nature of the new image of existing New Zealand society revealed by the extension of vision triggered by the Depression. If two distinct social classes are shown up, not only their separate characteristics but their relationship to one another is important; it will be particularly significant to discover whether their value-systems are to be considered as in opposition to one another or not.

Secondly, however, there are other questions which are closely related in practice but are analytically distinct. These questions are concerned with the writers' individual interpretations of this social world. Generally held perceptions about society as a whole must have an influence on individual writers' imaginative interpretations of that society; writers, like everyone else, belong to a social group. But there is a range of potential individual response. Personal variations can be seen as having a place on a continuum. At one end of the scale is an ideal-typical version of Mannheim's unattached

intellectual; he embodies the theoretical possibility of detachment and so can see the whole reality of his society in all its contradictions accurately and from the outside. At the other end of the scale is the ideal-typical possibility of total ideological enslavement to an unchosen set of values; all expression of ideas would, in this extreme state, presumably be a form of unconsidered and involuntary propaganda.

These are theoretical possibilities only and their usefulness is in the heuristic tools they provide for consideration of what lies between them. They allow questions to be asked about the relationship of the writer to his social world, essential questions about the group the writer belongs to as a member of society and his attitude to it as a writer. Does he belong willingly or unwillingly? Is he even aware he belongs and if he wishes not to belong is he able to detach himself?

These questions can seldom be answered definitively and they will not be asked directly in the next chapter. However, consideration of the writers and their works will be from within the framework of vision that I have outlined here.

Footnote

- 1 My analysis is based on Raymond Williams' book The Country and the City. In this book theoretical observations and a theoretical framework are so deeply embedded in specific examples and literary criticism that I have culled my theoretical observations from several chapters. However, a significant chapter is the one called Knowable Communities, pp.202-220.

In Chapter IV of this thesis it is difficult to acknowledge specific authorities more than I have. Yet the analysis of this chapter is based on my understanding of a materialist, and more particularly a Marxist, approach to art and literature.

Chapter V

THE WORLD OF THE DISPOSSESSED

John A. Lee was brought up in poverty. So to the extent that his thoughts as a writer reflect his material life, he must write directly about being poor. There is a passage near the beginning of Children of the Poor which is an evocation of poverty and social rejection from a position inside its social world.

Neither my mother nor my sister made any impression that lingers in my mind from that time, yet a vivid recollection of these pinafore days exists despite the obliterating years. Every morning there came a parade of prisoners from the city jail, marching to labour on a piece of Government land at the north end of the City.

The prison was in the heart of the City. I can shut my eyes and see that shuffling parade of men in broad-arrowed moleskins. I can hear the clinking of picks and shovels in the tool handcarts that were drawn by two harnessed humans. I can recall the faces of marching convicts, some shamed by the bold curiosity of side walk loiterers, some, the tough old lags, hard and defiant. The warders with rifles were grim in their dark uniforms alongside the snow-white moleskins. Maybe it was only the sombre uniform that made the warders seem severe. The parade was so impressive that even today those jailbirds march across my consciousness and down Athol Place as though I were witnessing the scene. Perhaps the unusual silence of the parade - for there was no sound except the creaking tool handcart, shuffling feet and clanking tools, with perhaps an occasional whisper of recognition from curious onlookers, for Athol Place probably recruited its quota of that army - gave to the parade a grim quality intimidating even to our baby minds. Who knows but I may have seen my progenitor shuffle by in branded moleskin.

Every morning for weeks that parade came into the Place and my ears still seem to hear the clank-clank, chink-chink of the picks and shovels, the handcart wheels rattling against macadam and the shuffle-shuffle of feet. And my eyes still see grim warders with batons and rifles, the averted faces of the shamed, the unashamed stare of the calloused, the gazing kerbside idlers. Athol Place pitied the moleskin-clad figures; I pitied them. Perhaps the outcast in me instinctively sensed a kinship. (Lee, 1973, 18-19).

However, there is surprisingly little writing in either Children of the Poor or The Hunted which is invigorated by this strong sense of identification with social outcasts. Yet imaginative identification with the objects of his concern is an important creative device for a writer who, through the evocative power of his fiction, wishes to bring about change in their social situation. And his biographer says that Lee's literary aims were polemic: 'The purpose of his art, as of his politics, was to ensure that no-one had to live as the Porcellos had lived in Dunedin. His instruments were shock and passion' (Olssen, 1977, 79). Lee was a politician who saw himself as taking time off from public life in order to express himself in 'this dream world' of fiction-writing; his main aim in life was to 'stop the human family living in a pigsty' (Olssen, 1970, 45). Lee aroused both outrage and interest when his novels were published and, according to Olssen, he did extend the vision of his compatriots by delivering a blow at '...a cloying and repressive tradition. His onslaught on Victorian sensibilities helped create a freer atmosphere within which other New Zealand artists could grow and work' (p.69).

Lee's own passion may have helped to shatter what Chapman has called the crust of complacency about society's respectable nature; it seems to me that Lee mostly fails to set up a substantial imaginative alternative. Part of the problem lies in the power of the dominant values he is fighting against.

For instance, an important early imaginative experience for Lee is an experience at school. The children are being read the poem Barbara Freitchie and Lee describes his attempt to translate a poem from an alien social world into terms that he can understand.

The clustered spires of Frederick town seemed very much like the spires of Presbyterian Dunedin, except that the town was smaller, easier to encompass with the eye, and orchards came down the hills to the shadow of the spires. I saw more orchard than green walls on the surrounding hills - inviting orchards. Knowing fruit hunger, the apples to me were red-cheeked, ripe, sugary, hanging heavily, and there were fat gooseberries, peaches, long pears like heavy bells, rows and rows and rows. You see my poetry had a relationship to the sort of food I longed for. The vision splendid could excite my glands! (Lee, 1973, 150).

Lee can imagine Dunedin and he can imagine hunger. His rudimentary attempt at creating his own imaginary world is limited from going much further by the lack of common ground between his life and the life of the poem. It is also, incidentally, limited by sudden and frightening punishment for inattention. This incident is significant because it gives some indication of the extent to which the development of Lee's imagination was limited by the power of alien values.

There is a chapter in Children of the Poor called Our Happy Christmas. It starts:

Christmas used to come but once a year too often. Sometimes poverty is less endurable and most cruel in its deprivation. Such a time was Christmas Eve. The excess of rejoicing in neighbourhood homes creates an excess of gloom where the table has no dainty. When poverty only starves the body it is bad enough, when it shames the mind it is worse. (Lee, 1973, 89).

The story is a sad one of scarlet fever, a child from a benevolent society and scavenging in a timber yard on one side of the social boundary and of other children's bounty on the other.

"Why are we not to get presents?"

"Mother hasn't got any money," I answered.

"Why hasn't Mother got any money?"

"Because we are poor."

"I'm going to hang up my stocking tonight."

The threat shocked me profoundly. Without knowing why we were different from other children, I knew that our poverty was not mother's fault. I knew that fever had defeated her efforts to procure food, clothing, medicine, and rent, and I sensed the cruelty of leaving an empty stocking dangling in front of her nose to taunt her with her failure. As I shared her crusts in our battle with adversity, I came in that moment to share her mental and emotional battle. (p.90).

And the scene ends with Christmas dinner:

There was a pound of well-watered mince meat and an onion stewing in the pot for tea. Maybe we enjoyed our evening meal better than many a cloyed palate enjoyed heavy suet pudding. (p.93).

The phantom bourgeois audience that settles on Albany Porcello's shoulder in the opening paragraph of this chapter is addressed defiantly in this last sentence. And the phantom never really goes away. Lee's vigilant eye for the effect of what he is saying on his necessarily bourgeois reader prevents him from entering the scene

imaginatively. There is no sense of basic conflict between the mother's poverty and the sister's desire for presents, for instance. Albany is not torn between childish covetousness and sympathy for his mother; instead he sides with the morally correct stance of filial loyalty. Beneath the smooth and dutiful moral progression of this scene there must lie two conflicting class-based sets of attitudes - the attitude of poverty-stricken want and the attitude of sanctified greed of Christmas. But Lee does not acknowledge them; in this passage there is no sense of the struggling and divided life based on values in conflict.

Here the projected reader is a phantom presence; elsewhere the reader becomes an explicit 'you'. This reader is assumed to be bourgeois and to have stereotyped bourgeois prejudices about the poor:

If you feel we inherited our criminality I shall not argue. If you believe that I am wrong when I suggest that factors other than birth contributed to our downfall that is your privilege. (p.7).

You cannot, as you read by the fireside, imagine yourself stooping so low as to steal less than a cool half million. But this boy was poor...(p.8).

The stereotype stands in the way of a clear view of the social world.

This basic confusion of imaginative class identification takes a curious form in a scene from The Hunted. While he is at Burnham School, Albany Porcello is a victim of an alien bourgeois institution for recalcitrant boys. The institution consists of staff, whose aim is to break and tame the boys, and of boys who have some feeling for one another's suffering. Yet there is not a clear-cut division between punisher and punished when Porcello is flogged:

With the dualism that possesses mankind at a blood sport, those in almost ringside seats knew the ache of Porcello, and the lust of Henderson. Each mind was caught up in the battle of authority versus outlawry. Each boy lived the part of brutish victor and squirming vanquished. (Lee, 1975, 97).

The split of imaginative identification is a paralysing split; it prevents the development of any kind of new form of separate consciousness amongst the boys which would come from a consistently shared sense of being unjustly oppressed. And, for the Marxist, this is a necessary first step in the growth of a separate class consciousness.

Yet Lee does break through the impasse in an episode where Porcello is singled out for especially harsh punishment. A British sergeant-major comes to the school and drives Porcello to the limits of physical endurance in a sadistic form of army drill. It continues day after day until Porcello feels his personality is falling apart. But after a while there is a change.

He might have collapsed but he did not. For as he groped and stumbled around in the awful sunlit gloom of mental weariness, as he floundered towards collapse, a gleam of light shone out, a beacon to his mind. As a drowning man clutches at a straw, so did his collapsing body integrate around this ray of mental sunshine. It was as if, after abandoning himself forever to stumble in a tunnel, walled forever away from mental light, the end was suddenly discernible, an immense way off, but attainable, so that the soul drove the super-wearied feet on towards the hope of salvation....He knew a glow as the idea sustained him. He rallied to engage himself in contest that had ceased to be one-sided. Snade the Torturer, who must win, had become Snade the Antagonist, who might lose. For Albany Porcello would run away again. And that decision gave reason to all the aches he suffered. Each gruelling experience was a step to success. If he could triumph over Snade he would become the fittest boy in the school. If he ran away no-one would ever be able to catch him, he would be so fit. He would be able to run on and on for ever. He saw himself almost in the three-leagued boots of fairy lore, legging it over the provinces. He would be fit, fit, fit. And that was how he managed to continue his drill. The thread which held him together in the teeth of shattering discomfort was ambition for superb fitness. When the Sergeant-Major said "Left! left! left!" he said to himself, "Fit, fit, fit". (Lee, 1975, 122-3).

Here there is no sharing of identity with other persecuted boys. Albany's triumph is a solitary one, but by turning the punishment drill into a form of training for freedom he subverts the dominant values and gains a personal victory. He takes the first step towards a separate world view.

But then something unexpected happens. For Albany sells out. Far from identifying with the other boys and becoming a spearhead for a new set of values that would work to their advantage, he uses his new physical fitness to undermine his new way of seeing. He becomes Snade's cipher. Snade uses Albany to humiliate the other boys.

....How unfit they were. How sound he was. He watched Snade screw a boy's head right and left, hold it up against the pressure of sharp pain, and he didn't mind a bit. He had been purged of all compassion.

He entered into an entente with Snade. Snade was proud of his toughness, proud of his handiwork. He was the means whereby Snade could demonstrate that he did not ask too much of anyone. "What, tired? Why, Albany Porcello hasn't turned a hair." (p.125).

In this scene, for the first and only time, there is tension between two sets of values which are generated by differing interpretations of the same situation. An unexpected outcome, arising from the contradictions of the situation itself, seems possible. But when Albany sells out to the sergeant-major the novel resumes its predictable course.

It is difficult to know how conscious Lee is of the implications of both Porcello's bid for freedom and of his capitulation. I suspect that he is not a detached realist author consciously weighing up two sets of values and telling an imaginative truth in allowing the social victory to the dominant way of life. It seems more likely that Lee fails to create a watertight world of the imagination that is separate from the world of dominant bourgeois values because he fails to be aware of that world.

In fact the sergeant-major episode is the closest Lee comes to struggling free of a vision steeped in bourgeois preconceptions. Elsewhere the lack of a separate working-class mentality is marked. Lee seems unable to translate his awareness of working-class stigma into a clear vision of working-class attitudes. He approaches this transformation but never quite makes it; Porcello's grandmother has storytelling abilities which are seen as working-class (Lee, 1973, 64); the ragged and down-at-heel girl he meets by the river at Troonsville is trusting enough to love him without assuring herself first of his saintliness (Lee, 1975, 247). But these are qualities generated by an awareness of absence; they are fostered to produce a substitute comfort for those who do not have access to the comfort provided by possession and respectability.

Another form of compromise with the dominant world-view is

compromise through language. There are many passages in Children of the Poor written in the manner of the following extract. Lee is describing the country surroundings of his grandparents' house:

I remember sunsets even more clearly because they were shared. The glow of human love was added to the beauty of the parting day. Childish mouths opened like wide open beaks of hungry birds in awe of the glory and ache of parting day. Childish hearts throbbed with that exquisite melancholy that has ecstatic pleasure. If we could have but the delicate membranes of childhood always to catch the virginal impact of earth and sky melodies, would we require musical machines to excite our palates? Adult age requires cleverness and sneers at the natural harmony that enthralls openmouthed pagan children. Adults have music compounded like jam, so much of this and so much of that ingredient and the careful observance of rules. All is categorical and analysed until a sound is only music if it accords with convention. Even God is an involved complexity. Children worship the pagan gods of colour, of sun and moonlight, flower and leaf. Every night we worshipped openmouthed as though to ingest the twilight harmony. My brother would rock on a home-made but satisfactory horse and with his eyes turned fanatically to the tree-tops, would croon again and again and again:

"Up in the balloon, boys
Up in the balloon." (Lee, 1973, 35).

This is self-consciously 'fine' writing, commonly assumed to be suited to the elevated subject of sunsets and childish innocence. In fact the prose has little relationship to its subject; it certainly cannot be seen as an appropriate form of expression. In one sense it is not bourgeois any more than it is working-class prose; it lacks all sense of place in that it is language loosened from all social moorings. It is the placeless prose of romantic pastiche. Yet it is still a form of compromise with the dominant values imposed by bourgeois society. For it arises from the unthinking absorption of a second-rate tradition that comes from the lower reaches of the bourgeois-controlled education system.

In lapsing into this received form of expression Lee is breaking faith with his own experience. At his best Lee does not write like this: in parts of The Hunted he writes in a style honed to its subject. For instance when Porcello runs away, Lee's style is fittingly spare and fast-moving. So the distance of the prose from observation in the purpler passages is the more marked.

It is paradoxical that novels so self-proclaimedly about the poor, written by a poor-boy turned socialist, should fail to create a substantial imaginative world of the dispossessed. Lee rejects the bourgeois world with passion, yet its shadow consistently falls across his vision. In fiction, political conviction must develop out of imaginative conviction; Lee fails to create more than a passing sense of political outrage because he fails to create imaginatively the world of the poor from inside that world. So he does not fully present two worlds, one bourgeois and one working-class and let the political evidence of the need for change speak for itself.

Members of the exploited class in capitalist society will eventually see their own situation clearly, rise up and take over the means of production, according to Marx. So the imaginative writer's task can be seen as helping the growth of class consciousness by allowing the political evidence to speak for itself without nudging the process on with too much polemic. In his autobiographies Frank Sargeson says that he saw his political task in these imaginative terms. Sargeson made friends with a Marxist:

When he learned that I was a writer he visited me one evening to suggest how I might make the best use of my talents - which, it went without saying, was to assist the workers in their struggle, and at first I resisted by saying that workers in his sense of the word were hard to identify and difficult to organise in a non-industrial yet not by any means at all peasant community: and I thought I might best make myself useful if I could with some truth depict in a form of fiction some New Zealand individuals who might be more or less representative - and so perhaps make the need for revolutionary change clear to everybody. (Sargeson, 1975, 43).

Uncertainty about the economic base on which New Zealand rests does not affect Sargeson's conviction about the part he can play as a writer. For Sargeson, political awareness is primarily absorbed into the personal and imaginative quest that underlies his writing.¹

The personal quest is traced in the three volumes of Sargeson's autobiography. In the second volume Sargeson describes an important change of heart that came when he was retrieving a tennis ball on the racecourse of his home town:

I was even rationally clear that this new world suddenly encountered was my world, the one I, by nature, belonged to and that across the road was the world of my brother and his friends, of tennis lawns and tennis togs, office hours and after hours - a world which was not my world, a world in which I could never, in any true sense, belong, and from which I had already begun to detach myself. (Sargeson, 1975, 57).

Like Lee, Sargeson is aware - in the new climate of opinion of the 1930s - of a separate social world. The movement he wishes to make is in the opposite direction to Lee's: Sargeson wants to escape the bourgeois world of his birth and enter the world of the dispossessed.

On the racecourse Sargeson finds the tennis ball and he meets Harry. Harry is 'a very thoroughly horsey sort of man' (Sargeson, 1975, 57) who belongs to the racing world and drifts from one job to another.

He had worked in kitchens, mowed lawns, dug gardens, been a hotel porter, run a vegetable round, lived as a cowman gardener, but it was his job as a pub stiff which had suited him best and he thought he would try next time for a barman's job and hope his itchy feet wouldn't get the better of him too soon. (p.60).

Sargeson writes of his feelings about Harry:

There was nothing light or inconsequential in my attachment to him. I was committed well beyond the reservations I had always been aware of in other relationships - all of which he accepted, tacitly admitting his own involvement but I know there was nothing in our relations as important as another simple fact of life on this planet, namely, the presence of horses. (p.67).

Harry moved into Sargeson's bach:

...and it is not untrue to say that he stayed for 36 years. (p.61).

Sargeson sees his relationship with Harry as a significant commitment not only to an emotional relationship but to the way of life that he is searching for. It is Harry's inarticulate, drifting, spontaneous world that Sargeson wants to enter and he counts himself lucky, he says, that Harry was merely indifferent to his world with its litter of books and papers (p.60). What Sargeson learns from Harry cannot be learned elsewhere:

Like myself he was seldom or never bored. Life, all life, was much too interesting and human life with its deep mystery of personal motive and behaviour the

most interesting of all. But for the most part he preferred not to be explicit, to leave openness or all attempts at such to myself, and it was this drive which had much to do with my achieving at last some literary distinction. I learned to use my imagination to assist me in becoming explicit on paper while at the same time leaving a good deal to become intelligible to the reader only upon the condition of a half-way meeting. He must not expect much from me unless he used his imagination and I must emphasise that in this literary matter I owe to Harry my friend more than I can say. Great areas of his life and character remained inscrutable to me but for that reason he was constantly stimulating to my imagination. I was never confident that I understood him, but I never fell into the trap of supposing there was nothing to understand. (p.71).

Harry's world and the distinctive way of understanding that world can only be penetrated by a form of language that is different from the language of Sargeson's background:

...it seemed that virtually always the more or less formal language of the English novelists had been used to deal with the material of New Zealand life (and in my view that was to say colonial life). It may be uncomfortable to remember that I had myself aimed at a kind of Galsworthian prose style. So the question became inevitable, whether there might not be an appropriate language to deal with the material of New Zealand life? I had, I told myself, got rid of my first naive notion of copying life but it seemed now there was perhaps another kind of copying I had overlooked. (p.93).

An extension of vision from the bourgeois society of Sargeson's birth and a relocation of understanding in a different social world are major themes of the autobiographies. The transition from one social class to another is also the main theme of several of Sargeson's short stories. Two powerful stories are Cow-pats and A Piece of Yellow Soap. Each brings into synthesis the two social worlds of possession and non-possession which are separated by an economic and social gulf. Imaginative fusion is brought about through an image which is also an object of significance in the story - the cow-pats in one, the soap in the other. Both are images of transition from one social world to the other.

In Cow-pats a cow-cocky family is hit by 'the mortgages' (Sargeson, 1973b, 52). But the precariousness of their life is not apparent to them for some time as they have nothing to compare it with: 'As I've said, we didn't know any other sort of life.'

...what sticks in my mind are the seasons when our boots wouldn't be any too good. Sometimes they'd leak so much that mother'd tell us we'd be better off if we didn't wear them at all. Of course some mornings there'd be a frost, and our feet would be pretty cold by the time we'd got the cows into the yard. But one of my brothers found out a good way of warming his feet up. He stuck them into a cow-pat that had just been dropped and he said it made his feet feel bosker and warm. So we all stuck our feet into cow-pats and after walking over the frost it was bosker and warm sure enough. Mother wasn't too shook on our doing it at first, but afterwards she didn't mind. So on cold mornings we'd watch out, and whenever a cow dropped a nice big pat we'd race for it, and the one who got there first wouldn't let the others put their feet in. (p.52).

Here the image of the cow-pats is straightforward but already it hints at the possibility of a double interpretation. Sticking feet into cow-pats is a game if one has good boots: it is still a game for those whose boots are not good enough to wear but who are not yet too worried about their dilapidated state. The transition from an image of possession in the bourgeois world to non-possession in the world of the disadvantaged is completed with a trip to town with the story-teller's exhausted mother. After this trip the story-teller can no longer see the cow-pats as part of a game because of something that happened while he was staying at the hotel.

...one morning just as the porter was finishing the steps an old man came along the street and asked if he could warm his hands up in the bucket of water. The porter said, Sure, so the old man put his hands in the water and kept them there until they were warm.

Well, that was something I understood without having to ask any questions. Perhaps it's stopped me from asking a good many questions in my life. (p.53).

An old man warming his hands in a bucket of dirty water finally takes the image of the cow-pats out of the realm of privileged fun and into the realm of serious deprivation.

The protagonist of A Piece of Yellow Soap is a milkman who has to collect money from a woman each Saturday morning:

....We used to argue. I would always start off by being very firm. Didn't my living depend on my getting money out of the people I served? But out of this woman I never got a penny. The more I

argued the tighter the woman would curl her fingers on to the soap; and her fingers, just out of the washtub, were always bloodless and shrunken. My eyes would get fixed on her fingers and the soap, and after a few minutes I would lose all power to look the woman in the face. I would mumble something to myself and take myself off.

I have often wondered whether the woman knew anything about the power her piece of yellow soap had over me, whether she used it as effectively on other tradesmen as she used it on me. (p.12).

Here the two interest bases are clearly drawn and their necessary conflict with one another made apparent. The milkman's position in his world is made explicit. 'Didn't my living depend on getting money out of the people I served?' But the woman cannot or will not pay. She belongs to a world where survival is dependent on managing not to pay what she owes. She succeeds only because the milkman, in spite of himself, slides imaginatively into her place. He makes the transition through imagining his own fingers around the soap. 'I knew what they must have felt like to her...' This weekly moment of identification pinpoints the clash of interests of the two social worlds. And the piece of yellow soap both separates those worlds and brings them together; it provides a focus for the irony inherent in the different interpretations of the same event that must come from conflicting world-views.

In both these stories Sargeson succeeds in entering two dissimilar social environments and creating them from the inside. Yet simultaneously he detaches himself from both, views them from the outside and unifies them through the masterly use of a single image. Sargeson's ability to create from the inside and control from the outside is also apparent in his novella That Summer. Most of the action takes place within the world of the dispossessed yet the bourgeois world never totally disappears from view. And Sargeson keeps a firm hand on maintaining an imaginative balance between these two social milieux.

The dispossessed, in That Summer, are the unemployed in Auckland during the Depression. The hero travels from a safe farm job into the heart of the deprivation of the Slump. There is a sense of movement throughout the novel, of people drifting aimlessly from one situation to another and from one intense relationship to another. Friendships

are important because there is so little else to rely on. Yet they are subject to change as circumstances change and they are precarious as there is so little permanence in the social structure to keep them firm.

Sargeson's characters' concerns are his concerns; from a position inside their world he creates their way of life and their ways of thought and speech. In That Summer there is a steadiness of authorial stance, within the vision of the victims of the Slump, that has no time to develop in the short stories. Yet the bourgeois world is always present; when it is on the fringe of the consciousness of the characters it is on the fringe of the structure of the novella, when it interferes more with their lives it plays a more significant part structurally.

Money is important in That Summer. Like the central images in the short stories I have discussed it is also a significant concrete object which brings the bourgeoisie and the working class together. In That Summer there is a money tree. The hero moves into a boarding house belonging to the Clegg family. The parents fight and the daughter whines. The little girl

...started asking her mother if she could have some money to spend. She asked about fifty times before her mother said no, and asked her if she thought money grew on trees. (p.148).

The child gets Sargeson's hero to look under a tree with her.

We couldn't see any money hanging on the tree and Fanny was disappointed, but I said maybe it was the wrong time of year. Fanny said perhaps it had fallen in the grass, it would if it was ripe she said. So we looked and I had my fingers on a sixpence in my pocket, and then I thought no, I'll give the kid a real thrill, I'll make it a bob. So I dropped the bob and so help me if it wasn't the sovereign the old lady had given me on the farm. I put my foot out but Fanny was too quick. She didn't know what to make of it but she wouldn't let me have a look, and before I could stop her she'd run up the bricks singing out that it was a money-tree. Her old man looked over the top of his paper and held out his hand, but Mrs. Clegg suddenly showed up and got in first. And then there was a proper hullabaloo, the two of them going it, hammer and tongs, and Fanny howling and jumping up and down on the bricks. (p.152).

With a deftly handled and vivid incident, Sargeson says a great deal about his characters' attitude to money. He takes a cliché, 'money doesn't grow on trees', and works it into an important image. It

symbolises two different sets of values: on the one side is the bourgeois obsession with accumulation and greed; Mr Clegg, although he is out of a job, puts himself firmly into this camp with his obsessive digging under the money tree for weeks after the money has been found. Then there is another view of money that comes from the hero, Bill's, world. Money is for giving away and for playing games with; it is, above all, to be taken lightly even if Bill loses a little too much of it for comfort:

Well, I felt a bit sore over this sovereign but
I thought if Mrs Clegg put it towards buying a new
glass eye I wouldn't mind so much. (p.152).

The bourgeois code sees money as currency and a form of closely-guarded exchange; people in Bill's world like to see themselves as expecting nothing in return for the money they distribute. The values they pride themselves on are different. And the two sets of values are in conflict. However, it is not an equally matched conflict, for the bourgeois view of money must influence the attitude of the dispossessed. The poor need to use money in the bourgeois way in order to survive. Money that is given for food in a spirit of generosity will have to be spent on a square meal in a spirit of exchange. Basically the issue is clear. On one side there is the pure generosity that implies friendship:

No, I said, you take the dough.
God bless you mate, he said. (p.69).

On the other side there is bourgeois calculation. But the necessary dominance of calculation over generosity in a shared environment where people must eat brings the conflict squarely into the world of the dispossessed.

Doubts about the strength of friendship to withstand the test of the love of money cause Bill the most acute of his anxieties. Such a conflict comes to the surface and propels the action twice; once Bill is betrayed, the second time he fears he will be betrayed. The first time a girl and a man he had thought was his friend steal his money.

The second time is more serious as the friendship which is under threat is the friendship with Terry. There are many parallels between Terry in That Summer and Harry, Sargeson's friend of the autobiographies. The intensity of the relationship is certainly much the same. Terry and Bill go to the races together and Terry strikes up a friendship with

Reg after Reg has won a lot of money. Bill's unease brings all his doubts about the relationship of money and friendship to the surface of his mind.

Terry's after that boy's dough, I told myself, but I didn't believe it all the same. No, I thought, Terry's a decent bloke and I don't reckon he'd do a thing like that. On the other hand what did I know about Terry? He wasn't the sort who ever let you know much about himself, though you could tell he always had a lot going on his mind, even if you had to guess what it was about. Terry wouldn't do a thing like that, I kept telling myself, but I sort of thought it was no good telling yourself that about anybody. Anybody is likely to do anything, I told myself, particularly where there is money concerned. And I remembered how out at the races I'd been thinking what money does to you.

But what was I worrying about anyhow? Because Terry could do what he liked so far as I was concerned. He was up against it the same as I was and when things are tough a man can't be worried. That's what I'd thought when I pinched the money out of the milk billies, so where was the difference? And then I thought that maybe I was only feeling sore because I was jealous of this Reg. Because I'd thought Terry was the sort of bloke who'd got solid with a cobber, and quite apart from the money business I didn't like the way he cottoned on to Reg. (p.182).

'Anybody is likely to do anything...where there is money concerned.'

The tension is acute: on which side of the moral divide will Terry fall? The clashing values of antagonistic classes plays itself out in Bill's mental conflict. According to Lukács, personal conflicts that reflect and embody large and inevitable social conflicts can be created only by realist writers of quality (Lukács, 1950, 86). The power of this episode in That Summer can be seen in terms of realist criteria. Sargeson brings into the mind of his central character the conflict he understands from his knowledge of both social classes and from his ability to see the relationship between them as a faithful observer of the human scene.

Yet it is not quite like that. Is Sargeson a totally faithful observer? Given the clearly portrayed need for bourgeois money in the world of the disadvantaged, a question about verisimilitude arises. Would friendship prevail in the end?

In That Summer the bourgeois world interferes with the lives of the dispossessed mainly through the power of institutions controlled by the bourgeoisie. Bill, the protagonist, is unjustly arrested for molesting a woman and immediately alien values close in on him; Bill's

self-respect, throughout the ordeal, depends on keeping his own values intact. They are not in danger during his wrongful conviction and arrest; he expects detectives to dehumanise him as he expects women to betray him. What he believes in is imperilled only when Terry comes into the situation. While he is under arrest Bill keeps himself going by thinking of Terry's welfare. However, Terry soon plays a more direct part in the situation; he promises a kind of friendship that can outweigh the power of the law.

You won't need any lawyer, he said. Listen boy, he said, you don't need to worry, because I'm promising you there won't be any case.
All right Terry, I said, but are you sure?
Shake, he said.
All right, I said. And I certainly felt bucked, though I had no idea what he was going to do, yet I felt dead sure I could depend on him all the same... (p.193).

Bill's inner conflict reflects the conflict between the two value systems involved; the vacillation in his convictions reflects the alternating supremacy of particular ways of seeing appropriate to one world or the other. For certainty gives way to doubt:

I had the law dead against me, and instead of trying to do anything about it I was just relying on Terry. And I'd ask myself what could Terry do against the law all on his own any more than I could? (p.202).

In a powerful court scene the power is on the side of the institution of the law:

...it was easy to tell the courtroom was somewhere upstairs because of the sound of feet moving. My two mates were going up for sentence and it wasn't long before they were taken out. I was left there on my pat so just to calm myself down I walked about the cell, and it was a terribly dirty place, nothing like what I'd been used to....But it wasn't long before one of my mates was put back in again, and I didn't know what he'd got but he took it pretty hard. He just sat there with his head in his hands and didn't say anything...(p.203).

Sargeson takes hold of a physical fact, the fact that the courtroom is above the cells, and turns it into an image that reveals a social situation. The law is an institution which is alien and incomprehensible to the prisoners, yet it has them in their power; in this scene it pulls them up to its brief form of justice before casting them down to their fate as its victims.

Here Sargeson temporarily tips the balance of power in favour of the bourgeois institution; ultimately the rival power of friendship wins out. For when Bill appears in court Terry has done his stuff; Bill is acquitted because of Terry's behind-the-scenes machinations.

Throughout That Summer social institutions play a double part. Institutions have power over those who are necessarily their victims. But if the victims are individually wily enough and stick together solidly enough, they can get the better of them. Bill and Terry manage to avoid separation and survive financially despite the power of the unemployment office to keep them apart through its ultimate economic control. And when Terry is taken sick, Bill helps him to escape from hospital in a wheelbarrow, takes him home and nurses him until he dies.

It seems to me that there are times when Sargeson the incorruptibly faithful observer parts company with Sargeson the questing man. What Sargeson sees, and what he portrays at his most objective, is a social world where there are two classes and two sets of conflicting values; bourgeois values may be in structural control but the power that is pitted against them is often strong enough to allow Robin Hood type victories to the dispossessed. They must be Robin Hood victories for when Sargeson, like Balzac (cf. p.45 above) writes as he sees he allows that the victory of the dispossessed is nearly always temporary. Victory is temporary because power is held by the enemy class, so control of the circumstances of victory is ultimately in the hands of that class. So bourgeois power may even control the values of the dispossessed; friendship, for instance, may lose its strength when it is removed from the controlling social structure that gives it significance. Friendship compensates for deprivation that comes about because of the mess the ruling class have made of the social world. Once the deprivation disappears, what will be left of the friendship? Is it an independent quality that can grow in its own soil? Whether the values in conflict with the dominant ones are independent in this sense and thus truly oppositional is an important theoretical question that I shall return to in the next chapter.

Sargeson is led into a form of slight compromise with principles that are basically realist. He sees conflicting qualities in the

society he observes. But he fails to see clearly qualities in the subservient class that can thrive on their own. And he wishes to see them. He is on the side of dispossessed but he cannot trust to social truth-telling to make their morally superior strength self-evident. So, every now and again he puts his finger on one side of the realist scales. Sargeson's observation and presentation of two New Zealand social classes in conflict is, at its best, shrewd and illuminating and its quality can be assessed in terms of realist criteria. But there is, underneath it all, an imbalance. In That Summer the weighting in favour of the dispossessed is an undercurrent rather than a surface tendency. In the two short stories I discussed earlier it is more explicit. The last sentences of both are different in tone from what has gone before; they add statements about how the stories should be read.

In Cow-pats the polemic is brief and lightly handled:

...to see an old man who might be glad of a few cow-pats to warm himself up in was somehow a bit too much for me. (p.53).

In A Piece of Yellow Soap the moral message takes longer to spell out and it takes a heavier hand:

Well, she is dead now, that woman. If she has passed into Heaven I can't help wondering whether she has passed in holding tight to a piece of yellow washing soap. I'm not sure that I believe in Heaven or God myself, but if God is a Person of Sensibility I don't doubt that when He looked at that piece of yellow washing soap He felt ashamed of Himself. (p.13).

To recognition of the undoubted strength of Sargeson's social observation, another recognition must be added. The questing man in Sargeson can be at war with the incorruptibly faithful observer; when the man wins, realist criteria begin to provide an inappropriate form of judgment.

Like the other two writers, Robin Hyde sees two social classes in New Zealand society; unlike them, she has no difficulty in keeping her distance from what she sees. She stays outside the social world she writes about; problems of bias or distortion through a one-sided class indoctrination are irrelevant in analysing her work because they simply do not arise.

An easy form of explanation is provided by The Godwits Fly, Hyde's autobiographical novel. Eliza Hannay's mother, Augusta, belongs to the respectable world; her father, John, belongs - if not to the world of the dispossessed, at least to the world of working-class socialism. But Hyde's detachment seems to be to be more a psychic possession than a social gift. Her own mind is so little influenced by the social world that it cannot be 'explained' in terms of socialisation. Her immigrant status as well as her parents' differing class backgrounds probably made it easier for her to develop her distinctive vision, of course.² But it seems to me that Hyde's psychic independence is what matters and any criticism of her work must continually take this independence into account.

Early in the childhood chapters of The Godwits Fly Eliza Hannay visits an old couple called the Puckles:

The greatest curiosity in the cabin was a dried Maori head. Eliza always hoped he wouldn't show it, for its lips were drawn back in such a queer, implacable grin from its long yellow teeth, and its eyes had dried up and you could see them between the lashless eyelids. On a satin cushion in the room sat a small liver-coloured pug who cried perpetually, both from his eyes and from his negroid black nose. He made Carly and Eliza uncomfortable; Augusta said that children with runny noses were dirty and not to be played with, and when they sat near him they were seized with a desire to sniff. But Mrs. Puckle was most attached to her pug. The steadiness of the thread worming its way over the bobbins, the horizontal legs, the tears of the pug, all made the big room rather frightening, even on the days when old Mrs. Puckle didn't produce her legend.

This was about the time when she was bitten by a katipo spider. The katipo, a tiny black spider with a red spot on its back, was almost the only poisonous thing in the country, though the boys called the rose and indigo blobs of jelly washed in with the tides at Lyall Bay "stingarees", and said that once a little girl was stung to death by them. But Mrs. Puckle had really met her spider, and been bitten. She didn't die, though she might have; but her arm swelled up the size of a bolster and turned purple as a damson plum, and for three days and nights she cried for the pain of it, without so much as a wink of sleep. (Hyde, 1970, 4).

Hyde takes account of Augusta's moral code of respectability; Eliza's discomfort about the pug dog comes from knowing how Augusta reacts to runny noses. But the discomfort is momentary. Eliza is

quite unlike Sargeson's Henry who is guilt-ridden and mentally stifled by his mother's moral code. Augusta's code of values cannot distort experience for her daughter or prevent a clear appreciation of what lies beyond the mother's knowledge. Maori heads and katipo spiders play no part in Augusta's life but this does not affect Eliza's distinctive experience of them.

Augusta keeps aloof from the distasteful world around and imposes a protective distance on her children. Eliza transposes this distance into her own form of detachment; she is as unaffected by a succession of working class neighbourhoods as she is by her mother's values.

...Eliza wasn't ever to take the short cut home through Duffel Street, where the slatternly little houses, squeezing close together, belonged to The Micks. But it was fun to look down from the white handrail above, and imagine what was going on down there; the fiery spit and crackle of red-headed life. (p.31).

Eliza's imagination is like a magic cloak; it both protects her from the harm of a malignant real world and enables her to see it in a transformed and unthreatening way. The prohibitions of Augusta's respectable world have no power to prevent the magic; even if they cannot be transformed they can be avoided:

'Mother says so,' pronounced Carly. There were several other things at the Zoo that mustn't be looked at. If they saw men coming out of the Gentlemen's Only, they must look the other way; then there was the Fire-Bellied Newt, which lived under a soggy green mass of reeds and branches in the stone caves called 'The Aquarium'. 'Mother says belly's a rude word,' said Carly simply. 'Come and see the sea-lions.' They saw the sea-lions, which gulped down live gleaming fish and waddled about on amusing flippers, but had no fiery bellies. (p.24).

Looking away from the Gentlemen's Only means Eliza can see the fire-bellied newt; avoiding the word 'belly' still leads her to the sea-lions. Throughout the private and public life of her childhood Eliza slips from under the influence of dominant values with a nonchalance that makes nonsense of their power over others.

Hyde's freedom from the tyranny of other people's perceptions allows her to see the class-based social world with remarkable clarity. Augusta won't allow the children to eat margarine which she considers

'cockney and horrible' (p.4), she disapproves of 'meaty-coloured combinations' on washing-lines; she says of someone 'At least he's a gentleman and the children knew this meant he could do anything he liked without being permanently in the wrong' (p.19).

Hyde sees the values of the social class which Augusta despises, and to which John belongs, with accuracy and lightness of touch. John is quite different from Augusta:

Augusta and John couldn't have been more different, Eliza thought. Augusta said, 'Dear old England,' and had been longing and longing to go there ever since she was a little girl....John, though he had been in England at school, and would show them pictures of forests and cottages if he felt in the mood, said, 'Curse your bloody British Empire,' when he was angry. John was an atheist and read all the books about it that he could get from Carl Withers. Augusta sent the children to Sunday School every week, and Carly brought home texts illuminated with puffy silver letters, lilies and lambs. (p.46).

A little later there is another comparison:

Two people, solidarities, dreamers, winning out of their first environment, find a dog-chain twisting their ankles together. Still they fight for their escape; one lonely, shy, suffering under a sense of social injustice, for escape into the steaming companionship, the labouring but powerful flanks of mankind: the other fights for what blood and tradition have taught her, fields of bluebells ringing all on the one exquisitely lengthened note... (p.47).

The values of husband and wife are in conflict. But Hyde writes with a zest for their differences; she brings them into an imaginative unity without blunting the contradiction between them. John and Augusta fight; how could it be otherwise? But for Hyde, John and Augusta are not adversaries representing opposed class positions in a class-divided social world. To weigh the novel down with this sort of sociological analysis is to misunderstand it.

In fact The Godwits Fly is a perplexing book to comment on from a sociological point of view. In one sense it calls for a sociological approach. Hyde's social perception is acute. She observes the world around her without class bias and with the detachment of an outsider; Sargeson and more particularly Lee do not, in my view, achieve her free

stance or her unbiassed view of the world. Yet all too easily an appreciation of Hyde's social awareness turns into an expectation of social seriousness - a seriousness that can carry the full weight of a Marxist analysis. And Hyde's writing lacks that seriousness. John's political convictions, for instance, lead to failure and defeat. But it is inappropriate to put a Marxist interpretation on this and wonder about Hyde's views on class solidarity and the potential for revolution. For neither are her concern. Objective 'truth', an accurate reflection of the social world is less important to her than her own way of seeing that world; her psyche is the filter through which social 'reality' is seen and to which it is in the end subservient.

In Wednesday's Children any journey from Wednesday's island to the mainland is dangerous. Both the bourgeois and working-class worlds are to be found on shore and both may be death-dealing. Nothing much can be done to redeem imaginatively the bourgeois world, but the working-class world can be made bearable. Often, however, it is not bearable. Wednesday arrives in Auckland and is confronted by an unpleasant man:

Filled and running over with his wrongs, he stuck his elbow into Wednesday's ribs, wiped his boots on her stockings, opened out his morning paper all over her, and glared haughtily at her every time he turned a page. And the moment she arrived in town, glad though she felt to escape from the service car, Wednesday noticed how the pavements were decorated with the litter of blown-about papers, and little trails of spit. There was nothing even faintly agreeable until, halfway to the cottage, she passed the timber-yards and met the smell of new-cut wood, clean with a white pungency. After that, the forest stalked beside her, past the Chinese masonic clubs with their queer black characters whisking over calico banners like lizards, past the cobblers, and the old-clothes-shops. (Hyde, 1937, 159).

The smell of new-cut wood is an agent of transformation for Wednesday; before she smells it there is nothing 'even faintly agreeable', afterwards a forest stalks beside her and she is able to see quite differently. The smell of the timber yards which releases Wednesday's vision has to fight against the smell of gasometers:

Just before you reached the smell of the gasometers you passed one or two fragrant thingsA timber yard with sawn rimu and pine planks bleeding red drops of resin. (p.107).

Transformed through the smell of resin, the world of the poor takes on a new life:

Shady little cafés with Dalmatian names offered young men and women single beds, clean, at a shilling the night. No shops displayed any clothing for women, except faded second-hand things, always shapeless and somehow too long, always marked, "Bargain, 2/3d." The women who kept the secondhand shops were tiny old Jewesses with bird-bright eyes and hopping feet, who were themselves not so much clothed as blanketed in black. But mostly the feminine population of this district bought its clothes at Jumble Sales, where the wives and daughters of the well-to-do came down in cars and sold off their nearly new garments at fantastic prices, 6d for a hat, quite good frocks for a shilling. Occasionally, bright-eyed and laughing, the flowery girls would join in the fun and fight for their own castoffs with frantic women who clawed at the silks and tried jejeune silk blouses against their slumped but massive bosoms.....

There was a Chinese shop who sold water-lily shoots and quaintly flowered teasetts, but if you stood outside it more than ten seconds such a frightful wave of stench pervaded the atmosphere that Wednesday was sure the hidden celestials within said "Foreign Devils" and stirred up a dead cat with a stick.....

As you got further away from the sea and the tram-tracks, and into the hilly network of interlacing, meaningless-looking streets, everything became very dark. The street-lamps were few and poor, and sometimes they had been smashed. No private windows here blazed with the safe gold of electric light. Yet, as dusk fell more steadily, in its fine lilac frame which had turned now to indigo, the whole district had a kind of dreaming beauty. The wooden cottages were of old patterns, steep-horned, steep gabled with rickety steps leading up to verandahs whose wooden boards had fallen in here and there, disclosing black gulfs of reeking cellar. Sometimes as one hurried past, the light of two candles set against flimsy curtains would be like two beautiful hands lifted up in prayer, such a human and earnest prayer that no God would ever deny it. People had not failed to plant a few geraniums in these streets, women had not failed to produce large-eyed children and even to rear the greater part of them, though many of the children had slight skin diseases, running noses, or the mystery referred to at their schools as Things In the Hair. In some of the cottages, a tuberculous couple might have as many as thirteen susceptible children. This did not impair the fact that night, when you ran through it, made little of the gasometers but much of the velvety softness, the little cool drizzle of lilac rain finer than any music Debussy ever dreamed about. (p.107).

Dalmatians, Jewesses and Chinese populate the poverty-stricken Auckland streets and romanticise the fact of poverty through their indomitably exotic quality. But Hyde's romanticism heightens colourful qualities that are to be found in the backstreets; it does not sentimentalise them by pretending they are acceptable. Hyde does not deny or distort the unpleasant evidence before her. On the contrary, short and vivid descriptions of a tuberculous couple with thirteen susceptible children, of black reeking cellars, of large-eyed children with the ailments of the poor are amongst the most memorable parts of this passage. These things exist. But the question, for Hyde, is whether they can be made imaginatively bearable or not. When the gasometers win, they cannot; when the smell of timber or the velvety softness of the night win, they can.

Such an approach means that Hyde's powers of social perception cannot become sociological powers. The social fact of the smell of gasometers has to be dismissed if Hyde is to be able to write. The sociological crime of suppression of social evidence is necessary for Hyde's psychic survival and thus, ironically, for the release of her socially acute vision; only if she can avoid gasometers and unpleasant men can she allow herself to see clearly.

In fact the object in life of one of Hyde's central characters is to falsify social reality. Madame Mystera is a fortune-teller; when she dies, Wednesday takes over the job. Madame Mystera makes up futures, 'improvised but pleasant', for her clients who are nearly all poor:

Some may think this immoral and deceitful of Madame Mystera, but Wednesday worked her oracle to suit her philosophy. Confidently expect the agreeable things are bound to happen, she thought, and you have gone some distance towards magnetising them. It is true that they may come in different shapes from your first expectation, but the shapes will be desirable. The gods are not envious but they are cruelly and bitterly intolerant of one thing - whining. No man is invulnerable to the stroke of accident, death or misfortune. But by so much as a man expects, he goes armoured. The secrets of the past are best faced and then forgotten. The secrets of the future are best unfeared, expected with grace and delight. Working along these very elementary principles, Wednesday had had some success as a witch... (p.168).

In other words Mme. Mystera is a realist's nightmare; she spreads false consciousness like honey, she reinforces the dominant value system with

every fairy-tale invention, she puts a nail in the coffin of revolution with every soothing lie.

In Wednesday's Children there is a courtroom scene as there is in Sargeson's That Summer. Madame Mystera is arrested for her fortune-telling exploits; like Sargeson's Bill she is a victim of the law.

Wednesday thought: "My first crime...really it's almost disappointing. One expects something big to come of a crime. All those policemen, and lawyers in wigs, and the poor old gentleman with his gavel. Reporters are like mosquitoes, they breed freely on the pestilential swamp of 'now just what the devil do I mean?' Curiosity? Vulgarly? Triviality? No, it's a blend of all three with some unknown ingredient thrown in. The trouble is, there is a wrong conception as to the nature of Sin. That's what throws everything out of joint, and makes the instruments of society seem so blundering and base. Sin, real sin, is cruelty, and the ignorance that is father and child of cruelty. And then again there never was a bigger contradiction in terms than 'innocent vanity'. Of all the vanity knocking around this world, less than 1 per cent is innocent, or anything like it. I wonder if I told the magistrate that, would he be interested? I suppose not. Anyhow, I must consider my children. The main thing is to avoid publicity of the wrong sort, though it does seem a waste of an interesting situation. I think I wanted the proceedings, since they must happen at all, to have some note of drama, something clear, blood-red or black, worth remembering. Once there was the princess with hair black as the raven, lips red as blood, skin white as snow. Once there was Bill Shakespeare and once Jesus Christ, but whoever would think it, to see all our flat, listless faces? Oh dear, I'd willingly die on the spot if that would only make the rest come alive again."

"Five pounds or seven days," said his Honour. Wednesday started. "Now this" she thought, "is unforgiveable of me. I haven't got five pounds to hand. Where can I get five pounds without giving myself away? Seven days then..." Suddenly one of the sealed faces in court, a different face, though at first glance it looked smooth like the rest, caught her attention. She thought with a rush of thankfulness: "There's Mr. Bellister. How wonderful, now I can borrow five pounds from Mr. Bellister."

Mr. Bellister paid Wednesday's fine as soon as she was shepherded from the court. "You sit in the waiting-room," he said, disliking the stare of the police officials, who somehow reminded him acutely of cold sauce congealed on a boiled suet pudding. (p.183).

Unlike the court scene in That Summer there is no sense of threat in this scene. For Wednesday is totally protected from involvement in the workings of the law by an unshakeable belief in her own code of values ('there is a wrong conception of the nature of sin'), by the way she sees the law's representatives ('the poor old gentleman with his gavel'), by her longing to work a transforming magic on the benighted world she finds herself in ('...some note of drama, blood-red or black...'). She is also, at a more useful level, protected by a well-heeled English gentleman who happens to be falling in love with her.

It is inappropriate to turn to forms of analysis that were useful for looking at Sargeson's court scene; Hyde's scene cannot be examined in terms of conflict between the exploited victims of the law and the exploiting administrators of its system of justice. But it is equally inappropriate to accuse Hyde of suppression of parts of what she sees in the interests of the political advantage of one social class or the other. She is simply less interested in what she sees than how she sees it; she is not interested in taking seriously a social world that she sees clearly enough. As long as her exuberance and her ability to see things 'her way' lasts, nothing else is of much importance to Wednesday Gilfillan. Here, it seems to me, Hyde's detachment takes her so far away from the reality of what she sees and so far into her own imaginative world that the scene becomes unconvincing.

In this scene, the social world and Hyde's individual psyche drift apart; at her best she fuses them:

Trees do not merely grow about us, they grow into us and through us, shadowing and scattering with winged seeds the whole land of our consciousness. Roads are not merely set before our eyes, land-roads and sea-roads, but the Romans of Britain, the padding barefoot runners of the New Zealand bush, the coracles and canoes in turn, made roads with patience over us. We were given to these things and become not quite separable from them. And that is why people are wrong when they say that the eyes are the windows of a soul. The eyes of a man who has stopped trying to think, just for the one moment, are the windows of the world's soul. (p.87).

When the world becomes part of Hyde, as it does after she smells resin from the timber yard, she in turn becomes the window of its soul. In her effortless, apolitical way she imaginatively creates the world of dispossessed. But in her apolitical way she has no interest in

thinking about how it could be changed. For Hyde, social consequences are of no concern at all.

The Depression provided a catalyst for an extension of vision for the three writers I am concerned with; what was newly revealed was a separate social class. In this chapter I have analysed the three writers' visions of the nature of the deprived class and its relationship to the dominant bourgeois class. I shall begin the next chapter by drawing some general conclusions about what the Marxist form of analysis I have used brings to light in the work of the three writers. Then I shall look at the assumptions on which such an analysis rests and gauge its relevance for further examination of their work.

Footnotes

- 1 Sargeson did take some active part in political life. A propaganda leaflet he wrote for the Young Communists' League was distributed amongst schoolboys and publicised in 'Truth'. This led to a police investigation and to Sargeson having to hide his typewriter for a while. But in his autobiographical account of the incident, Sargeson does not give the impression of taking either his own political activity or the police enquiry particularly seriously (Sargeson, 1975, 44-45).
- 2 Gloria Rawlinson, in her introduction to the New Zealand Fiction edition of The Godwits Fly (1970), writes of Robin Hyde's family background. (Hyde, 1970, ix-x).

Chapter VI

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW ZEALAND UTOPIA

So far I have assumed that New Zealand society was seen as primarily static. An image of New Zealand society as the respectable society had insinuated itself into the national consciousness, I argued; with the Depression a shutter was drawn back and more of the national picture was revealed and recognised. The picture was unmoving rather than moving; the vision of society was broadened rather than fundamentally altered. The only sign of movement was at the edge of the newly panoramic view of the social world; the Depression was certainly a catalyst but it was a slow-working catalyst. And I have concentrated so far on its function in extending vision rather than in bringing about a basic sense of looking forward.

The realist writer who mirrors this static vision in his writing is what Lukács calls a critical realist. The ideal critical realist penetrates the antagonistic relationship between the two classes that make up the social world. He portrays this relationship at depth - from the inside through imaginative identification, from the outside through the struggle for impartial objectivity. His vision may well be obscured in ways I have explored in the last two chapters, but the ideal of critical realism still serves as a measuring-rod of artistic achievement.

However, society may not be seen as merely static. It may also be seen as dynamic. The difference between the two paradigms is fundamental. A dynamic vision allows different images to be projected. If a society is seen in terms of its potential for movement, the range of interest expands. No longer is the way of seeing limited to the existing social world. An interest in what could be augments an interest in what is; a principle of futurity is added to the reality principle that underlies realistic writing.¹

If a vision of society allows social futures² to be envisaged,

these futures can be approached in different ways. The release of the imagination into the sphere of projection, within a dynamic paradigm, can give rise to opposing views about what is to be done with possible futures.

A passage in Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia - remarks made almost in passing - gets to the heart of the difference in forms of vision that I am looking for. Mannheim is discussing the sociology of knowledge and the way thought cannot be separated from its context of collective action; previously he has made the point that an individual, whoever he may be, speaks the language of his group and thinks in the manner in which his group thinks. Members of society, Mannheim says:

do not confront the objects of the world from the abstract levels of a contemplating mind as such, nor do they do so exclusively as solitary beings. On the contrary they act with and against one another in diversely organized groups, and while doing so they think with and against one another. These persons, bound together into groups, strive in accordance with the character and position of the groups to which they belong to change the surrounding world of nature and society or attempt to maintain it in a given condition. It is the direction of this will to change or to maintain, of this collective activity, which produces the guiding thread for the emergence of their problems, their concepts, and their forms of thought. In accord with the particular context of collective activity in which they participate, men always tend to see the world which surrounds them differently. (Mannheim, 1960, 3).

There are two central verbs in this passage - the verb 'change' and the verb 'maintain'. The guiding thread to the fabric of collective thought comes from the will to change nature and society or the will to maintain it. Mannheim does not elaborate. But it seems to me that a spirit of change on the one hand and a spirit of maintenance on the other are two fundamentally opposed categories. They are categories in the Kantian sense of being the bedrock of thought: one spirit or the other is the unconscious base on which a society's consciously held world-views will always rest. Aspirations, forms of ideology and ways of tackling collective problems all presuppose either a spirit of change or a spirit of maintenance.³

The writers I am concerned with, who can be seen as an intellectual vanguard, saw New Zealand society as having a potential for movement forwards. A dynamic as well as a static paradigm can be applied to their writing. Within this dynamic paradigm, all three saw the potential for movement as a force to be encouraged. They did not look around them with a sense of fundamental artistic acceptance of what they saw. They could not find an imaginative resting-place within the existing social system. Their work was not imbued by a spirit of maintenance. Instead they wanted to provide an alternative to what existed, to envisage social worlds other than the ones they experienced. Their work was imbued by a spirit of change. It is this spirit that underlies the writers' consistent rejection of the bourgeois-puritan world and their consistent search for an alternative to take its place.

A spirit of change is based on hope for the future; this particular spirit is based on the hope of a better New Zealand. Such a hope must be connected to what Mannheim calls the Utopian mentality.⁴

The search is for Utopia. What kind of Utopia? The social longing may be for what is clearly seen as attainable; then the search will be for what Mannheim calls realisable Utopias.

Utopias are realisable, according to Mannheim, when they are integrally connected with the established social order. This kind of Utopia is a future version of the society that exists already. The impetus for its development comes from within the present social structure; Mannheim sees the relationship of new societies to existing societies in terms of Marxian dialectic:

...the relationship between utopia and the existing order turns out to be a 'dialectical' one. By this is meant that every age allows to arise (in differently located small groups) those ideas and values in which are contained in condensed form the unrealized and the unfulfilled tendencies which represent the needs of each age. These intellectual elements then become the explosive material for bursting the limits of the existing order. The existing order gives birth to utopias which in turn break the bonds of the existing order, leaving it free to develop in the direction of the next order of existence. This 'dialectical relationship' was already well stated by the Hegelian Droysen, though in a formal and intellectualistic fashion. His definitions may serve for the preliminary clarification of this dialectical aspect. He writes as follows:

&77

'All movement in the historical world goes on in this way: Thought which is the ideal counterpart of things as they really exist, develops itself as things ought to be....'

&78

'Thoughts constitute the criticism of that which is and yet is not as it should be. Inasmuch as they may bring conditions to their level, then broaden out and harden themselves into accord with custom, conservatism, and obstinacy, new criticism is demanded, and thus on and on.'

&79

'That out of the already given conditions, new thoughts arise and out of the thoughts new conditions - this is the work of men.' (Mannheim, 1960, 179-80).*

Mannheim's quotations from Droysen point to an important aspect of the new earthly regime that will grow in the womb of the old; its birth will bring into being society as it ought to be. And Mannheim's stress on the dialectical relationship between 'what is and yet is not as it should be' and things as they 'ought to be' leads to a certain expectation. It leads to the expectation that realisable Utopias can in fact only be realised in terms of existing social groups.

New Zealand social groups in the 1930s were seen in terms of social classes;⁵ the subservient class was seen to be the class of the dispossessed. This leads to the expectation that the New Zealand version of a realisable Utopia would be found from within the world of the dispossessed. Such a supposition is basic to Marxist political thought. The dialectical relationship of social groups must be seen in terms of social classes. This is the assumption behind what Lukács calls social realism.⁶ Society changes because it must as the dominated class develops class consciousness, becomes aware of its heritage and breaks the barriers put up by the dominant class.

In New Zealand the hope was for the emergence of a better social world after the sufferings of the 1930s. Within the framework of vision that I have just constructed, this new society must be found amongst the

* This is the way Mannheim refers to Droysen in his book; I have quoted verbatim.

values and the way of life of those who were dispossessed.

To what extent did this search play a part in the three writers' work? It played no part in Hyde's; her lack of a political sense excludes her from an analysis based on the idea of practicable change.

Both Lee and Sargeson, it seems to me, did assume that Utopia could be found to have its roots in the world of the dispossessed.⁷ But they did not explore or create clear Utopian alternatives from within this world.

If possibilities for concrete and specific changes were to be found in the world of the dispossessed, there would be two necessities. Firstly the writers would need to see and to isolate values in the dominated class that were fundamentally different from the values held by the dominant class. They would need to reflect in their work values that were in opposition. Secondly they would need to be emotionally committed to the world of the dispossessed. The intellectual and imaginative focus of their Utopian search would have to be within the social world of the dominated class.

Firstly, then, I shall consider the values of the dispossessed class in terms of their opposition to the prevailing values. For values to be oppositional they must inhabit what Mannheim calls a separate universe of discourse from the dominant values (Mannheim, 1960, 250). Only if the two value-systems are 'worlds apart' (p.56) can there be a fundamental difference between the social order that exists and the social order that is to grow from the existing one. If this difference in values is not to be found, the value system that is envisaged will be some form of 'negotiated version' of the dominant value system, according to Frank Parkin, the contemporary British writer on social class:

That is to say, dominant values are not so much rejected or opposed as modified by the subordinate class as a result of their social circumstances and restricted opportunities. (Parkin, 1972, 92).

The underprivileged do not reject the dominant values and create an entirely different normative system. They do not build alternatives, Parkin argues, because they cannot:

Members of the underclass are continually exposed to the influence of dominant values by way of the educational system, newspapers, radio and television,

and the like. By virtue of the powerful institutional backing they receive these values are not readily negated by those lacking other sources of knowledge and information. (p.92).

In line with this argument I maintain that Lee and Sargeson could not find a firm enough platform of alternative values in the world of the dispossessed to get an imaginative footing. So they neither saw nor created social worlds that were basically oppositional.

I think I have established already that this is so. The swamping of Lee's vision by a combination of diffuse social passion and the prevailing dominant values means that Albany Porcello is never placed in a separate social world at all; there is no firm ground, in the novels of which he is the hero, on which a new social structure can be built for him and his kind.

Even Sargeson, with his delicate mastery of their ways of thought and speech, fails to create a separate universe of discourse for the dispossessed. In the last chapter we saw that he finds distinct qualities amongst the poor and unemployed and often these are in conflict with the qualities of the dominant class. But he fails to establish them as truly oppositional: the friendship and loyalty which he celebrates arise in reaction to oppression and thrive in situations of economic misery. Sargeson cannot imbue them with an independent life. In spite of himself, he sees them as the reverse side of a rejected coin.

There is a telling anecdote in the autobiographies about the period of economic revival just before World War II:

When the unemployed began to be absorbed into an economy revived in part by Labour policy, but perhaps more by reaction to increasing signs of war, it was not uncommon for somebody I had known during the peak time of unemployment to visit me and with hardly a pause for greetings, begin to giggle over the spectacle of my 'living as though the slump was still on!' I soon learned that any endeavour to explain would be useless and that although formerly there had been tolerance besides the warmth of comradeship and fellow-feeling, one must expect little of these virtues to survive when the clichés about rugged competition and all the dismaying rest of it were reviving along with the economy. (Sargeson, 1975, 98).

Sargeson is on the verge of realising that the qualities he values most

are dependent on bourgeois competitiveness 'and all the dismaying rest of it'. But he does not push this realisation to the tragic conclusion it would be if his vision of a New Zealand future was totally pinned on hopes for the dispossessed.

But Sargeson's vision was not pinned on such hopes. After reading Sargeson one is left with a feeling that he is not devastated by his failure to find the strong social alternative in the world of the dispossessed that he spent so much energy in seeking. It is here that I come to my second argument. For I suggest that neither Sargeson nor Lee were totally committed to a Utopian search within the underprivileged class of the existing social order. Had they been, there would have been fundamental differences in both the tone and approach of their writing.

The English poet, Stephen Spender, saw himself as politically committed during the thirties. In his book The Thirties and After he writes about the artistic corollaries of dedicated belief in a politically realisable Utopia. Writers of his time, Spender says, were necessarily political even if they were only half political:

With the political half they really did try to see the world from the ideological viewpoint: this is with the idea that all those thinking and doing activities which brought one in relation with other human beings involved, consciously or unconsciously, participation in a struggle between opposed interests, those of capitalist imperialism and those of the socialist revolution. Perhaps one might not in past historical situations have seen this, but in the thirties it was so highlighted by current circumstances that if one belonged to the ruling class, not to see it was to take the side of the class into which one had been born and which had a definite interest in not seeing it; for whoever saw it was almost certain to take sides against his own class. (Spender, 1978, 18).

A constant preoccupation with political affiliation leads to political self-blame as a 'conscience-stricken member of the exploiting class' (p.30), to political gestures such as joining the International Brigade in the Spanish civil war and to non-political temptations:

It is conceivable that an artist might write from the standpoint of a consistently materialist philosophy, but even then his occupation of writing poetry would remain the very type of idealist activity which is tactically dangerous to communism. The people who read these poems would linger over certain aspects of materialism, they would forget, in the course of their meditations, the social revolution, and, here,

in the very heart of materialism, idealism would creep in offering its dangerous delights and consolations. (p.49).

Spender draws up a blueprint for the social realist dedicated to a realisable Utopia.⁸ Only if writers can cultivate an attitude based on these beliefs can their dedication to a new society based on the world of the dispossessed be guaranteed.

Neither Lee nor Sargeson wrote like this. Yet, to a certain extent at least, they both thought they did. This makes things confusing for the critic. The spirit of change behind the work of both writers appears to be directed towards a realisable Utopia arising from within the social structure. But neither writer could find the necessary imaginative foothold in oppositional values. This is virtually as much as I can say about Lee; I do not think his imagination extended beyond the social limits I have discussed up to this point. There is more to be said about Sargeson. It seems to me that Sargeson partly failed to create a politically realisable Utopia because he was not committed to the search in the way Stephen Spender describes commitment. Sargeson did not, in his heart of hearts, believe that the New Zealand he was searching for could be found in a politically realisable Utopia.

Nor, I suggest, did other New Zealanders. Sargeson was not alone in having only one eye on the world of the dispossessed and the other eye pointing somewhere else entirely. In Sargeson, and in other writers, an uncoordinated vision underlies the search for an appropriate New Zealand identity. Yet their search for the 'real' New Zealand is both urgent and relentless. The spirit of change powers the quest; it is assumed that there is an ideal but hidden form of existence waiting to be discovered by New Zealanders.

The 'real' New Zealand is the land to which New Zealanders will awaken from their fretful sleep (Pearson, 1974, 32). It is New Zealand as it should be. Yet it may be a New Zealand foregone: Sargeson writes of the 'real' New Zealand not as it might be but 'as it might worthily have been' at one stage (Sargeson, 1973b, 48). However, there is no doubt that it is a Utopian land. Chapman sees New Zealand as a 'land fit for human ease and companionship'. 'There is a possibility here,' he says, 'of a truly human ease and depth of living' (Chapman, 1953, 58).

John A. Lee's political ideals are, according to his biographer Olssen, based on a better world in which 'evil idols topple, new and more and human values emerge' (Olssen, 1977, 206). In an essay he wrote in 1937, Socialism in New Zealand, Lee saw the new world to be brought about in terms of un-named human ideals; he wrote about 'a socialism in which machines have yielded time to know a richer emotional life' (p.127). In the same essay Lee damned communism and committed himself to individual freedom (p.127).

There is a determined euphoria and an intractable haziness about these visions. They do not conjure up Utopias that are in any way realisable Utopias in the sense I have discussed. The focus of their vision lies somewhere beyond the social structure. The spirit of change does not operate only within the social structure. Much of its most vigorous attention is directed to a different realm altogether.

It seems to me that much of the best work of Sargeson and Hyde belongs to this realm. However, Sargeson and Hyde conjure up visions that are socially concrete. They avoid haziness because their visions are substantial. And it is in this realm that much of the most valuable stimulus to their imagination lies.

Footnotes

1 Frederic Jameson, in his book Marxism and Form, discusses the principle of futurity (the phrase is his) in the light of both the Utopian idea and what he calls the 'massive weight of what is' or the smothering effect of 'the realism of the reality principle' (Jameson, 1971, 90). Jameson sees preoccupation with the existing world as a deadening preventative to the released life of the imagined alternative which leads to a 'long-hoped-for enlargement of our beings' (p.102).

2 The word future is used here not merely in the sense of 'what will be' but also in the sense of 'what could be'.

3 There is a difference between these spirits and a society's forms of vision. To say a society is imbued by a spirit of change or a spirit of maintenance is not the same as saying a society is seen as changing or unchanging. To talk about the way society is seen is to put man in the position of an observer of the social world: the ideal will be objectivity, even if it is an unattainable ideal. To talk about the spirit of a society is to talk about its sense of direction. It is to talk about the collective will and yearning that imbues a society's purposes; it is to put man in the position of architect of his own destiny.

Collective visions of society and collective spirits that lie behind society are not, then, the same. But in practice they will be closely interconnected; collective aspirations must affect what is seen and how it is seen.

4 The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines Utopia as follows:

1. An imaginary island, depicted by Sir Thomas More as enjoying a perfect social, legal, and political system.
- b. Any imaginary or indefinitely-remote region, country or locality.
2. A place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs and conditions.
- b. An impossibly ideal scheme for social improvement.

There seem to be two main thrusts to these definitions:

- a. The first includes aspects of social structure and has political and pragmatic connotations.
- b. The second emphasises the spiritual and imaginative ideal in Utopian thinking.

Mannheim tends to assume that social-structural elements exist in most of the types of Utopia he considers. In my subsequent analysis I shall refer to both aspects.

5 Mannheim himself does not specifically refer to social classes in his analysis. And his approach tends to be broader in its implications than a narrow and orthodox Marxism would allow. Yet his materialism is fundamentally Marxist, particularly in its basic vision and its sense of the movement of history.

- 6 Lukács uses the phrases 'critical realism' and 'social realism' often in his writing. I interpret these phrases in the context of both the destructive clash and creative fusion of his artistic and political selves. The critical realist is based on his aesthetic persona, the social realist on his political persona. The social realist is dedicated to the political revolution; the social realist puts his art to the service of recording and thus expediting the inevitable social, political and economic changes that occur as the underclass moves forward. In theory, for the committed Marxist, the critical realist and the social realist coincide; the good critic reflects at depth the inevitable political change in his society. In fact artistic integrity and political dedication may not always make good bed-fellows (see, for example, footnote 7 below). And Lukács' attempts to reconcile the two, in his life and in his aesthetics, have given rise to negative criticism of his work.
- 7 Lee's socialism underpins this assumption, so does Sargeson's account of conversations with his Marxist friend (see p.58 above) and the polemic behind the endings of his short stories Cow-pats and A Piece of Yellow Soap.
- 8 As the passage I have quoted on p.49 of Spender's book hints, Spender had too much subtlety of mind and sense of poetic survival to adhere too closely to his own principles.

Chapter VII

UTOPIA AS WISH-FULFILMENT

The spirit of change can underlie the longing for a Utopia different in kind from the political Utopia I have discussed. To start the discussion I shall look at Mannheim's distinction between different kinds of Utopian mentality:

Wishful thinking has always figured in human affairs. When the imagination finds no satisfaction in existing reality, it seeks refuge in wishfully constructed places and periods. Myths, fairy tales, other-worldly promises of religion, humanistic fantasies, travel romances, have been continually changing expressions of that which was lacking in actual life. They were more nearly complementary colours in the picture of the reality existing at the time than utopias working in opposition to the status quo and disintegrating it. (Mannheim, 1960, 184).

Realisable Utopias, as Mannheim calls them, are intended to work within the existing order and disintegrate it. Wish-fulfilment Utopias are different. They are constructed in a realm that lies beyond the existing social structure. They focus on futures, but futures that are not to be seen just as quantitative extensions of the present (see p. 78 above). In wish-fulfilment Utopias the change is a qualitative one. The social attributes of such Utopias can be seen as taking the place of attributes to be found in the 'real' world. Wish-fulfilment Utopias express what is 'lacking in actual life', they consist of the 'complementary colours in the picture of reality.'

These attributes can be seen in terms of systematic compensation for the inadequacies of the everyday. The idea of compensation is based on the sociological truism that societies contain alternatives to themselves. Within this perspective, normative structures are seen as artefacts which are codified from a wealth of possible norms. The norms which dominate comprise only a part of the normative range a society produces. To avoid an unworkable social situation arising from the contradictions inherent in the full range of possible norms, a lopsided normative structure is created. Internal consistency in normative

prescription is achieved through the suppression of contradictions.

Society functions efficiently insofar as the normative artefact is accepted. The legitimization of the one-sided normative structure is essential for smooth-running and coherent social organisation. The artist, however, can be a potential subverter of this acceptance. The artist can work within the zone of suppression. In creating alternative societies through his imagination, he works in the sphere of norms which are present in society but unacknowledged. The normative world he is concerned with in his imaginative alternative may be the most unacceptable and thus the most firmly repressed by the code of the overt normative order. In other words the values explored in the created alternative societies may be the very negation of the values endorsed by the accepted ideology of the society.¹

A detached search for completeness at the abstract level gains a new dimension when applied to the social circumstances I am concerned with in this thesis. The artist's wish for imaginative escape must be particularly powerful when the established normative structure is seen as intolerable. The imagination takes refuge in wish-fulfilment Utopias, Mannheim says, when it can find no satisfaction in existing reality.

A powerful and basic rejection of respectable society was a large part of the impetus behind the writers' work. The control of bourgeois and puritan ideology over what could and could not be done, thought and imagined was the target of their revolt.

Bourgeois ideology, more than many ideologies, inspires rebellion in artists. César Graña traces the historical background for this rebellion. Graña argues that as bourgeois hegemony grew in nineteenth century Europe, so did artistic resistance to its implications. During the nineteenth century, he says, there developed amongst artistic 'free spirits' a habit of contempt for the bourgeoisie, particularly for the 'reputed valuelessness of their lives and anonymity of their souls' (Graña, 1971, 12). Contempt mingled with fear - fear of the sinister and pervasive power of such values. And it generated a desire for antithetical values.

A sense of freedom from the oppression of bourgeois-puritan values releases their opposites. A longing for a world of chaos is a form of compensation for the established norms of strict rule-bound control. Chaos can take destructive or constructive forms; its value lies in its freedom from restriction. Urban mean-spiritedness gives way to the cornucopian abundance of rural life; sexual liberation comes with the casting-off of a repressive and inhibiting sexual code.

The bourgeois way of thought, blinkered and dedicated to rationally calculated ways of working for specific goals, gives way to its antithesis. Thought unbound by goals and expectations can have free rein. It can link existing ideas and develop new ones once it is free of the curbs of orthodoxy and common sense. So both ecstasy and anarchy are possible.

Once the iron grip of rational calculation on the mind is loosened,² non-rational ways of thought are possible. There is an invitation to fantasy. And release from the need for total explanation means the inexplicable need no longer be explained away. There is a place, in a Utopia of compensation, for mystery and for the unknown.³

Such a Utopia of wish-fulfilment is, as Mannheim says, the realm of myths, fairy tales and humanistic fantasies. It can also be a social realm. The life that is lived within a framework of wish-fulfilment can still be a social life; it takes imaginative form within a framework of social structures and social possibility. The social possibility, however, is possibility of a certain kind. Perhaps it is better to use the word 'potential' rather than the word 'possible'. Wish-fulfilment Utopias lie beyond existing society's grasp. In this sense they are unattainable. Yet they are envisaged through social analogies. So in this context of thought they are still potential social worlds.⁴

A distinction I touched on earlier, in discussing Hyde's class perceptions (cf. p. 73 above) becomes important here. It is the distinction between the creation of social worlds on the one hand and the suitability of seeing those worlds in terms of sociological analysis on the other. Wish-fulfilment utopias may or may not be subject to sociological analysis. Karl Mannheim, again, provides the key to the distinction.

Societies - actual, realisable or potential - can only be examined sociologically, Mannheim says, if their meanings are rooted genetically in collective purposes. Only when the vision of an individual is in contact with some important current problem can that vision 'flow back into the outlook of the whole group' and be utilised for collective life (Mannheim, 1960, 186-7).

Mannheim is not always easy to follow and my interpretation may be idiosyncratic. But it allows me to examine the authors' Utopias of wish-fulfilment in two separate ways. If the writers' potential societies inhabit a place within the social structure in that they are rooted in its collective purposes, they will be subject to sociological analysis. The form of sociological analysis I have used in this thesis is realist analysis. So it will, at times, be appropriate to look at the authors' wishful Utopias according to the realist criteria I have developed.⁵ At other times, however, wishful Utopias will lie beyond limits that can contain the collective purposes of social life. Then I shall have to look at them as if they had a form of independent social existence; my analysis will not fit into an orthodox sociological framework.

* * * * *

Utopias as wish-fulfilment, particularly in the writing of Hyde and Sargeson, fall into two categories. Both are compensatory in that the values they explore are denied or repressed in bourgeois existence. The first alternative celebrates the natural life of the bush and countryside, and it celebrates sexual freedom. It can be seen as a form of compensation for the sensory repression of bourgeois life. The second alternative moves into the sphere of fantasy; its aura is one of mystery and distance and unbridled imaginative freedom. It compensates for the tyranny of rationality in bourgeois forms of thought. These are, however, broad and over-simple qualitative distinctions. For in my analysis - first of the rural-sexual alternative and then of the alternative of fantasy - freedom of the senses and of the spirit will often overlap in practice.

The rural-sexual alternative has a precise if symbolic place in Sargeson's personal development. He writes about it in his autobiographies. He writes of climbing Te Aroha and of what he felt once he was in the heart of the bush.

My time of delight would be over far too soon - my time of delight in that half-lit place of springing trees and wheeling ferns and swinging vines. It might be Apollyon's world but it was mine too - and it was as though the devil entered into me. I wanted to kick up my heels and run about, to touch and put my arms about this tree or that, to snatch up handfuls of leaf-mould to smell, to listen for the sound of birds and running-water, to look for the tracks of wild pigs....I am sure that my mouth must have drawn up at the corners, perhaps my ears grew longer. It was the pure life of the senses that I temporarily lived, a pure and shameless life that was suddenly and miraculously permitted me. (Sargeson, 1973b, 15).

Sargeson's phrase 'the pure life of the senses' evokes the distinctive quality of the rural-sexual alternative. It conveys Sargeson's sensuous feeling for the bush and has overtones of human eroticism. The emphasis is on the adjective 'pure'; the unspoiled natural world is idyllic and cleansed of the impurities of everyday living. It is shameless in comparison to the artificial shame of the man-made world.

I was always secretly conscious of seeing myself as Christian in Pilgrim's Progress whenever I climbed Te Aroha. It was a fancy that would always suggest itself to me very strongly when I was entering the bush about a third of the way up the mountainside. One began the climb on what used to be called Bald Spur and I had always found it dull and unadventurous. One was not yet remote enough from the familiar world of which the roofs of the town were a constant reminder. But once I was at the top of that spur my imagination would immediately begin to work and I would feel my flesh tingle. The connecting ridge declined a little to begin with, taking you quite out of sight of the world you knew, taking you through scrub which you thought might conceal minor terrors such as lions and tigers. But it rose at last to take you up into the bush which might have been the hiding-place, the eternal dwelling-place of Apollyon himself. I was secretly terrified. (p.15).

The power of the pure life of the senses comes from its distance from the roofs of the town and the familiar; it is totally beyond the everyday social world. Its magic takes the form of both terror and delight; its otherworldly quality is embodied in Sargeson's vision of himself as a combination of Bunyan's Christian and an inhabitant of the dwelling place of the devil Apollyon.

Yet the massive imaginative displacement that lies behind the discovery of this alternative world takes place in the heart of Sargeson's own country, New Zealand. In I Saw in My Dream Sargeson creates such a world for his fiction. Pungas belong to it:

Down below they shot out and spread out bigger rounder than cartwheels. Black trunks, green cartwheels. So much insolent strength, and somehow very wicked-looking... (Sargeson, 1974, 164).

Yet the bush does not remain apart and alien:

...the bush might persist in having its own life, but the cleared land was empty and waiting, helpless to live now a life of its own, and depending instead on some new and mysterious relationship with the lives of men and their beasts. (p.90).

The bush remains mysterious but also moves into the world of men and their animals and so into the social structure. In fact the fusion of man and nature is an important part of Sargeson's social vision:

And then Johnny had gone out into that waiting world, knowing his relationship with it, perhaps not what you'd call conscious of any such relationship yet knowing it all the same - and he'd gone to milk the cow. (p.90).

Yet the comfortable relationship in which men incorporate nature into their everyday social world is on the borderland of the uncomfortable and frightening natural world of which it is an uncertain part:

Dave looked at the shrinking shade and felt a sudden moment of sickness and dismay. Soon there would be nowhere to go, no place to shelter from the burning sun - and even though there might be you had to stick to the dusty road and step it out mile after mile. (p.232).

Uncertainty about their rightful place in New Zealand rural life imperils people's relationship to the land, particularly if they are pakehas.

Jack says it's our home but sometimes it'll strike you a different way. As if the white man never should have tried to settle it at all - though it might be all right for a few maoris living along the rivers. They'd make it a good enough home, granted. But as for the white man he's only got it on a sort of lease, with the wear and tear all the time getting him down. (p.128).

And throughout I Saw in My Dream it is the Maoris who are most at one with their natural surroundings. Rangi and Eileen scratch a living growing potatoes and are despised by most of the pakehas in the novel.

They play an important part in Dave's imaginative life. Eileen's sexuality is set against the malignant flirtatiousness of one pakeha woman, the gross sexual deadness of another. Maoris are elemental and mysterious:

It was as though Rangi was looking at [Dave] very strangely, but because of the dark glasses you couldn't be sure...[it was like] looking into the blackest night, age-old and secret. These people were like the part of the valley outside that wasn't lit by the moon - the bush side. (p.196).

Towards the end of the novel, Dave and the others drive sheep to the sale-yard where there is a merry-go-round. Rangi, Eileen and their children ride on it:

The merry-go-round had stopped, and Dave went over to speak to the Poruas. Rangi and Eileen were on horses, each with a little boy riding in front; but the little girl sat in a car in the shape of a dragon all by herself.

You come on for a ride, Eileen said. You sit with her and keep her company.

But Dave patted himself.

Empty belly, he said. Later on. But can I fetch you something to eat?

No. No thanks. They had a big parcel of fish and chips. And the bottles of pop. There. In the dragon (like the taniwha, eh!) Poppy was minding it. There was plenty. Dave should get on and eat some, and have a drink through a straw. (p.252).

The merry-go-round itself, the fish and chips and the pop belong to the pakeha world. The Maoris live the way the pakehas live - they have to - but they alter this way of life and make it their own. The dragon is a taniwha, the little girl - Poppy - has a red name like Cherry in the first part of the novel. And red, for Sargeson, is the colour of sexual freedom.

Eventually Dave starts his journey home after a half-hearted sexual escapade that ends in failure:

And looking away back over the town as the grade became steeper you could see the merry-go-round in the far distance. It was turning, turning - and that dot of red that turned up! And turned up again! And again! Yes, that must be Eileen in her silk dress. And she'd never even mended the tear in it, Dave had noticed. (p.255).

What is left, at the end of a long working day, is the gay, effortless yet relentless turning on the merry-go-round of those who are in tune with their world. Eileen's torn red dress rhythmically appears and re-appears; her eroticism, her sensuous acceptance of the world around her routs the superficial illusion of bourgeois dominance. Maoris are incorporated into the social structure; they live by the pakeha economic code and go to the sale yard like everyone else. But it is qualities they bring in from outside the social structure - qualities of mystery, sensuality and ease of living - that give them their power over pakeha values. Yet the relationship between the ways of life, is, in this episode, one of harmony. The Maoris accommodate themselves to pakeha demands amicably enough yet they subtly transform them; the two sets of values do not need to come into conflict.

In I Saw in My Dream pakeha and Maori values can co-exist in an easy if slightly disturbing and mysterious relationship within the pakeha social structure. There is another opposition of values in the novel where such co-existence is not possible. Where the values of respectable society on the one hand and the compensatory values of rural-sexual freedom meet, there is tension. In a long episode Sargeson builds up pictures of worlds based on these opposing values and of the clash when they confront one another.

The scene starts with a Christmas dinner that goes wrong:

She'd never had a worse failure of a plum pudding.
The water had got in through a hole in the cloth
she'd never even noticed. And she burnt the white
sauce. She wondered how Dave could sit there and
eat any of the dinner at all....

...the heat was coming down from the roof in waves
...and the old man in his flannel looked a good deal
hotter than Dave. He said yes, he'd have another
helping. There was nothing wrong with it, Fan, he
said. He was partial to a bit of duff that stuck
your ribs together. (pp.167-8).

In this passage there is a prevailing sense of the gross unsuitability of a winter solstice celebration in a summer solstice setting. There is a strong feeling that the graft from the old culture to the new has failed to take. Even the nutcrackers are kitsch travesties:

...they were in the shape of a pair of women's
legs, wearing high-heeled shoes. (p.169).

The European bourgeois custom of Christmas dinner may be found in New Zealand; its nightmare quality comes from the fact that it does not belong.

Mrs Daley, a neighbour, pays a Christmas afternoon visit to the McGregors. She comes on horseback. She arrives with her hat on crooked, hugging a torn and broken umbrella. During the polite, racist, menacing and tedious chit-chat between Mrs Daley and Mrs McGregor the umbrella is kept before the reader. Finally the story behind its torn and broken condition is told. Mrs Daley was riding a mare to do her visiting and carrying an umbrella to protect herself from the heat. From behind a Maori hovel 'that rig' appears. Mrs Daley

...never would have believed that a horse could have turned round so quick. And then it had up and mounted the mare before you could say knife.

Can you see me Mrs McGregor? she said. There I was sitting on Molly, and that brute of an animal had its front legs round my waist. Its hoofs were in my lap, if you please!

It was a simply dreadful situation for any decent self-respecting woman to be in, Mrs. Daley said. And not a soul in sight - though in a way she'd felt glad there was nobody to see, even though it meant she'd just had to set to work to save herself. So first she tried to prise those hoofs off her legs with the umbrella. But Lord, the weight! And the brolly broke! So then she'd twisted round and whacked at its head. But that did no good either. And all the time she was digging her heels into the mare but she must have been Horsing (the slut!) because she wouldn't budge an inch.

Oh, I was in despair then, Mrs McGregor, I can tell you, she said. I wished I could have got down on my knees to say my prayers, but I yelled instead. And the weight of that animal was bringing the tears into my eyes.

Still, it was save herself or be crushed to death, so she had twisted round again, and this time she had managed to jab the rig in the eye with the broken end of the umbrella. And that did the trick. It was the rig's turn to yell then (only scream was the word), and serve it right. And Molly had decided to get a wriggle on when she got a jab with the umbrella herself. (p.175).

This passage, amusing and horrifying at once, brings the values of the established bourgeois world and the values of the pure life of the senses into an extraordinary form of conflict. Its power comes from the conflict itself, its ambivalence from the lack of resolution. Mrs Daley represents respectability - the callous, mealy-mouthed respectability of the dregs of the bourgeois mentality. She even threatens to resort to prayer, in a travesty of puritan belief.

Visiting is a bourgeois occupation, but to undertake it Mrs Daley unavoidably has two elements of the opposing natural world to contend with - a randy mare and the heat of the sun. To protect herself from the latter she takes an umbrella. But the rig comes on the scene and mounts the mare. The powers of sex overwhelm Mrs Daley and actually threaten to invade her own body. 'So first she tried to prise those hoofs off her legs with the umbrella.' The depth of enmity in the battle between the two opposing elements accounts for the horror of the episode. The bourgeois custom of polite visits prevails at the price of great cruelty. Jung saw horses as emblems of sexual power and the sexual threat; in Peter Schaeffer's play Equus the blinding of a horse is associated with a boy's battle with the powers of his libido and his psyche. In Sargeson's hands a strong and familiar theme takes on new shape. Two worlds meet in antagonism and explode into violence.

Sargeson brings together forces arising from within two antagonistic worlds and shows what happens when they meet. The rural-sexual world, insofar as it has any form of existence within the social structure, works against the bourgeois world of Christmas dinners, afternoon calls and umbrellas. Sociological analysis, using realist criteria, reveals conflict at a deep level handled by Sargeson with great subtlety. The two contrasting worlds are not class-based, as the orthodox Marxist would say they must be; but both the bourgeois and the rural-sexual worlds have a material base. And Sargeson reveals and explores the inevitable conflict generated by these opposing bases.

Some of Sargeson's most subtle awareness of social conflicts comes from his feeling for the clash between bourgeois-puritan existence and the rural-sexual life. Aware of its otherness, he nevertheless incorporates the pure life of the senses into his vision of the existing social structure and this complex vision leads to some of his finest writing.

The pure life of the senses generates no such imaginative complexity in the work of John A. Lee. Lee is aware of rural spaces and sexual freedom but makes little creative use of them. In fact it is increasingly tempting to pay little attention to Lee's work and he will not play much part in this thesis from now on. We are now in the realm of Utopias of wish-fulfilment. And Lee's inability to struggle free of his own conditioning and imagine alternatives to what exists, rules out much of his work from this part of my analysis.

Albany Porcello in The Hunted escapes from Burnham into open country. Lee sees his relationship to the natural world around him in two ways. The first is couched in the language of placeless pastiche and conveys sentiments proper to a sensitive boy brought up in the established Romantic tradition:

...being hunted brought kinship with open spaces.
I know the majesty of towering moonlit Alps seen
from sea-level plains. I know their morning
splendour when wraithed in cloud and mist. I
know the music of skylark long after the singer
has winged to heaven. I have slept by rivers
when hot winds dissolved snow, so that I lay
down beside trickle and awakened by torrent. I
have slept to branch and leaf lullaby. (Lee, 1975, 7).

The second is more convincing; the countryside is brought to life as a supplier of Albany's needs:

Through all that day he had found no field of
turnips to bloat his paunch, not a single root
of any description, just the juicy ends of wheat
and grass stalks, a petal or two of yellow gorse
that he had sucked upon his tongue for its flavour
....Then he went to bed on a heap of eucalyptus
leaves raked together with his hands, cursing
himself that he had not stayed at the last straw
stack he had seen in the daylight. (p.150).

Finally Porcello finds country people who help escaped Burnham boys; Lee gives them imaginative life for the duration of Porcello's necessary encounter with them (p.153). But the countryside provides no real alternative to the rejected bourgeois world; it has no life of its own beyond what can come from Porcello's self-interested interpretation. There is no compensatory world to be found in the countryside.

For Robin Hyde the pure life of the senses matters very much. It matters mainly because it is inviolate: its point and its identity lie in its separation from the established bourgeois world. Unlike the other social milieux we have looked at, the rural-sexual world does not need to be transformed to make it bearable. It inhabits a sphere of its own already, and as long as it continues to do so there is no danger of contamination from bourgeois-puritan values.

So when John and Augusta quarrel, an alternative world of escape lies waiting:

Quarrelling....It was what made everything in the house seem funny and strained, a tone too loud, 'Tonight after dark,' she thought, 'we will play we're in the bush.' Years ago, they had picnicked in the bush....And a fantail came and flirted with his fan, and Bob Harris made a supplejack bow and arrows. There was a stream, amber-brown, smelling of wild mint. The high fennel arched above their heads....She didn't quite know what happened next, but it always developed after dark... (Hyde, 1970, 39).

The bush exists in fact and it exists as a separate abode for the imagination. There are certain rare people who belong to this inviolate world; Timothy Cardew, whom Eliza loves, is one of them. Timothy lives the pure life of the senses; his sexuality and his response to the natural world are two sides of the same self:

Then he dropped down, laughing, and pulled you down beside him, starting to kiss you with quick, hard kisses, themselves rather like pebbles or pieces of turf. Hedgehogs came tumbling out of the yellow grass, with their funny little cold noses and shrivelled paws, and Timothy watched, pointing them like a setter as the grass-heads swayed. When he had them, he made them uncurl and tickled their underneaths. 'Soft-belly, soft-belly....These are our mascots, aren't they, Eliza? These are our special beasts.' (p.122).

Timothy moves with spontaneity, commitment and passion from one erotic encounter and one natural setting to the next:

When he got to the post office, he found that the yarn about a beautiful new girl was gospel, and fell in love with her on the spot. (p.131).

Suddenly a deep sigh in the apple-thickets froze his blood. He felt his hair rise, and taking tight grip of his courage kicked out into the bushes, routing out not a ghost but a scoffing herd of Maori pigs, preposterous lean-snouted Calibans. Timothy laughed and laughed....He ran the rest of the way to camp...his panacea for

everything, flinging himself into the wind, making rhythmic contact between the soles of his feet and the hard earth. The stars blazed bitterly white. (p.134).

Timothy is without control, order or rationality. He embodies qualities denied by the bourgeois youths who half-heartedly court the Hannay girls, sing sentimental songs at the piano and disapprove of John's left-wing politics.

For Eliza, his essence is his distance from the world she rejects. His world must remain apart from the established world if she is to love him. Yet the worlds do come together, in spite of her ideals, when Timothy's flouting of sexual convention turns into admissions of loving other women (p.136), when his spontaneity leads to a sudden abandonment of her (p.159), when his independence means he works out a plan of going to England without her. So Eliza's love for Timothy is a tormented love. But there is no real conflict of values, for Eliza recognises that Timothy cannot submit to the rules of a world she herself rejects.

When a crisis of potential conflict arises, Eliza is consistent in her stance. She becomes ill and has to go into hospital. The hospital belongs to the bourgeois world. Eliza cannot escape, while she is in thrall to the hospital's 'real' world, to the compensatory life of the bush. Her sister comes to see her:

Once - queer once - she said, 'Don't you think all the trouble began when we left off playing games after dark?' One Hannay didn't need to ask another, 'What trouble?' Lost, in a wilderness of brick and mortar, rules and regulations, love and hate; instead of the thicket where there were supplejack bows, and streams with eels and wild mint. (p.172).

And she cannot allow Timothy into this grim real world:

She didn't want her lovely free ones in the hospital ward - not Timothy.... (p.172).

So Eliza accepts Timothy's rejection of her;

He was sorry, he wrote that he was sorry; but pain, sickness, were a kind of separate little Hell, inaccessible unless one pretended. (p.179).

For Hyde the pure life of the senses must remain separate from the bourgeois world; it cannot be brought into the existing social framework and it cannot be analysed in sociological terms. In fact in many ways, in The Godwits Fly, it is not a social world at all.

An individual communes with nature or at the most with one other human being who exists to love and be loved. Unlike Sargeson's rural alternative, it is seldom a peopled world. The rural-sexual life not only stays outside the social structure it also has very little social identity. So although Hyde's descriptive writing is powerful it is necessarily limited in scope. For it cannot feed on living tensions generated by social conflicts. And in my view Hyde's evocations of the rural-sexual alternative are, for this reason, less interesting than Sargeson's.

* * * * *

Now I shall examine the wish-fulfilment Utopia of fantasy. This alternative necessarily lies beyond the existing social structure; it exists only because a form of compensation is needed for what are seen as inadequacies in the existing world. John A. Lee was a novelist only for the duration of the social concerns he wished to express in fictional form. I have argued that he was not a freely imaginative writer and he certainly was not an imaginative writer who could create his own fantastic world.

Sargeson is primarily a realistic writer. Portraying New Zealand was the goal of most of his creative work. Yet he creates potential societies. I have already examined his half-realisable political alternative and the more vivid and substantial alternative of the pure life of the senses. For Sargeson the pure life of the senses exists largely within the social structure of New Zealand life even if it feeds on an extrinsic and compensatory code of values.

Yet there is a strong element of fantasy in one of Sargeson's major works - I Saw in My Dream. The second part of the novel is reminiscent, in many ways, of some of Shakespeare's comedies. There is a world of mortals living their everyday lives, unaware of another life being lived around, behind and above them. There is a shadowy, exuberant life surrounding the prosaic happenings of I Saw in My Dream. It is necessarily a separate life yet those who live it belong to a particular genre of immortals. Rangi and Eileen belong half to the

everyday and half to the fantastic world. They exist as flesh and blood to the other characters; they are seen, known and talked about. Yet they exist in another domain too. Mrs Daley, in her umbrella and horse episode, was

...ready to swear that somebody had poked their dirty face up above the bank of the creek to look at her. She wouldn't like to say for sure if it was Rangi or Jerry or Eileen or who...! (Sargeson, 1974, 176).

The most immortal of these half-mortals is Cedric. Cedric too has been reported as 'looking at' Mrs Daley. He is the son of the McGregors for whom Dave works; Dave has taken Cedric's place in coming to work on the farm. For Cedric has disappeared. His parents pretend he has gone to town, but it soon becomes apparent that they do not know where he is. There are stories about Cedric's mysterious cave, and Cedric half appears in other veiled snatches of conversation. Sometimes something more substantial is said. Unlike ordinary people, Cedric was never frightened to be alone in the bush (p.164). And Johnny, the farm hand, tells Dave a story about Cedric. One day, he says, he came upon Cedric naked.

But that wasn't everything, Johnny said. He was waving his arms while he was running about. He looked as if he was mad. And when he'd turned over two summersaults he sat up on the grass and laughed, the young imp. And I thought he was laughing all by himself at first, but he wasn't. Because I heard somebody else laughing too. It was a tart and she got up and turned summersaults like Cedric. And after she'd finished she was sitting next to him, and the both of them were laughing. (p.165).

The girl, who was naked too, climbed a tree.

But I didn't stay underneath the tree, because do you know what she did? She tried to wet me.

This elemental behaviour is not unlike the behaviour of Sargeson in the autobiographies, feeling his mouth draw up and his ears lengthen, kicking up his heels and running about. It is the behaviour of a figure who epitomises otherworldly forces, animates them and concentrates them into the slightly malignant innocence of an imp. And it is as an imp that Cedric haunts Sargeson's novel. In this guise he is beyond the strictures and indeed the mode of understanding of the bourgeois world. Johnny's account of his attempt to tell Cedric off, quoting the Bible and puritan morality, highlights the separateness

of Cedric's existence:

I never told Mrs McGregor, Johnny said, but I did give young Cedric a good talking to. I told him some things I remembered out of the Bible, and I said how I always tried to set a good example. (p.166).

Cedric's behaviour belongs to a potential world; unlike Rangi and Eileen's rural and sexual life it cannot be incorporated into the existing social structure. Like other immortals - Puck, Ariel - Cedric is a cross between wish-fulfilment and devilish quirkiness. The qualities he embodies are essentially removed from the everyday:

...she had the feeling he [Cedric] was somewhere round about the district, but it was most extraordinary - there wasn't a soul she knew who had seen him or heard anything about him. Except of course what she knew for a fact wasn't true.

It's just as though the earth has swallowed him up, she said. (p.210).

Cedric is omnipresent but not seen; the mythic quality of his existence may be otherworldly but if the earth has swallowed him up it will be of the underworld too. Orthodox members of the bourgeois world can know of Cedric's world only in an oblique manner, often through a bemused sense of being haunted by it. Direct knowledge is not possible when the modes of consciousness are so different.

Yet Sargeson creates an image which develops during the novel and which serves as a means of bringing together these necessarily opposed forms of consciousness. It is an image of enclosure. In Part I of I Saw in My Dream it takes various forms - a ball, a cave, being 'snug as a bug in a rug.' In Part I its connotations are a combination of claustrophobia and security - the two sides of the bourgeois ideal that Henry alternatively craves and struggles against.

When Henry becomes his alter-ego Dave in Part II, the image changes and grows. Part II begins with an evocation of the terror of transformation into a new form of existence...

...why am I oh why am I here in the cold and the dark? Cold bed rolling over to the sun, cold embryo waiting to be born. (p.85).

The embryo image leads into a cave image a few pages later:

...and why did the thought come to him that he had somehow got himself lost in some sort of cave, with no hope of ever being able to find a way out? (p.91).

The embryo is cold, the cave is a labyrinth for getting lost: the images are no longer ones of safety. Dave is propelled into the new world. He likes his new life, he lives fully in it; he no longer needs caves and embryos as havens of escape and a compromised safety, as he did when he was Henry. But caves still play a part in his life. Now he looks for caves in a spirit of adventure and hears about the cave that Cedric discovered. Cedric's cave is often mentioned; Dave becomes intrigued. A sophisticated, brittle conversation centres on caves and their connotations:

Lots of people wish they could go away and live in caves. Be adult-educated and read modern psychology...
It's the idea of a cave, he said. What do you think of?...
...Balls, he said.
No, he said, don't get excited. I mean the shape of a ball - or a cave. Think of yourself inside - snug as a bug in a rug. Just as if you'd never been born. (p.212).

Sargeson reminds the reader of the connotations of the cave image in Part I of the book and prepares him for a new way of seeing caves. For Cedric's cave has much more complex connotations. It is supposed to be a prison. Cedric's parents, who belong to the bourgeois world, prepare the cave for Cedric the wrongdoer.

He [Mr McGregor] told me straightout he was going to make the cave so as nobody could get out of it. And I knew he meant Cedric. It did give me an awful feeling, but I didn't feel as if I was doing any wrong. Instead I couldn't help feeling pleased. Because it was Cedric that was doing wrong, and if his father was going to try and stop him from doing it I thought I was only doing right to help him. And the boss must have thought to himself I would never tell, because he never asked me not to. (p.239).

But Cedric disappears and Dave suggests what might have happened to Cedric's cave:

Listen Johnny, he said. Suppose Cedric knew it was all going on. Say he was hanging round waiting until you'd got it nice and comfy for him - do you see? Then he just walks in and makes himself at home. (p.240).

The image of the cave as a prison is turned inside out. Cedric's parents, as emblems of the bourgeois-puritan society, want to imprison their son Cedric, the emblem of all the elemental forces that threaten to destroy their world. Instead, Cedric escapes from their grasp, inhabits the cave and makes it a sanctuary for the very attributes his parents most fear.

The world of fantasy is necessarily separate from the bourgeois world for most of the novel; here Sargeson brings the two worlds together. Like the piece of yellow soap and the cow-pats in the short stories I considered earlier, the cave becomes an image of transition between one way of life and another. Perhaps it is more appropriate to say the cave is an image of inversion. For the world of fantasy is inevitably a radical inversion of the bourgeois world. So it is only by totally reversing the purpose of the cave, in moving it from one world to another, that Sargeson can bring the two worlds into contact.

Sargeson makes use of an image to join the unjoinable; Hyde tries to keep the bourgeois world she rejects completely separate from the fantasy world that is her imaginative haven. For Robin Hyde, the world of fantasy is the most inviolate of her inviolate worlds. Like the pure life of the senses at its purest it is not in need of imaginative transformation - partly because it is an imaginary creation but also because of its fundamental distance from the 'real' bourgeois world. The main necessity is to keep the worlds apart.

In The Godwits Fly Hyde creates her own Alice-like rabbit-hole to her particular Wonderland. She calls it the Glory Hole.

As Sargeson's semi-immortal figures in I Saw in My Dream live amongst mortals, so the Glory Hole is entered only through the ordinary everyday world. Eliza discovers it when she is still very young.

'Hullo, little girl next door. Come along over; hurry up, and I'll show you the Glory Hole.'

'What's the Glory Hole?'

'Where the fairies live. Hurry, this is just the time to catch them at afternoon tea'....Bob pulled aside the matting on the floor, and there lay a great hole, a square filled with black velvet darkness.

'Down there is where the fairies live.'

She stared at him.

At this point Bob Malley's mother appears.

She said at once, 'You're not taking Mrs Hannay's little girl down your nasty, dirty hole, Bob Malley, I'll tell you that. I'd like to know what her mother would have to say - her pinny all dust and

webs when she goes home. The very idea!
 So Eliza has to sit on Mrs Malley's knee while Bob goes down the hole
 and Mrs Malley asks:

'Would you like to live here and be Mrs Malley's
 pet girl?'

Live with the Glory Hole....And yet Mrs Malley
 didn't care, she wasn't wondering where Bob was
 now, downstairs in the dark earth. Perhaps the
 big spiders had got him. Perhaps there was a
 stair that twisted up and up.

'I'd want to go down the Glory Hole.'

Mrs Malley laughed.

'You'd get cobwebs on your pinny that your mother's
 ironed all nice and fresh for you. You're lucky
 little girls to have such a good mother.'

Presently Bob's freckled hands came into sight
 again, and a moment later the rest of him doubled
 over the edge of the Glory Hole. A strand of web
 lay dusty on his cheek, and he looked tired, but
 to Eliza his eyes seemed full of mysterious light.

'There you are, Liza.'

He put into her hands a lavender china shoe,
 filled with wet new violets. Their scent made a
 pale streak in the wash-house.

'The Fairy Queen sent you some violets in one of
 her shoes, and she hopes you'll come yourself next
 time.'

Mrs Malley could smile; but one night, perhaps
 when the moon floated like a white terrifying
 balloon over the fences, Eliza was coming back to
 the Glory Hole; she wanted to see the Fairy Queen
 for herself; she wasn't afraid of dirty spiders in
 Fairy Land. (Hyde, 1970, 7).

The Glory Hole is dirty and filled with violets, mystery and fairies:
 Eliza is excluded from it by her clean pinny. As long as Eliza is too
 young to resist her 'good mother' and her bourgeois childhood, she
 will be excluded from the fantasy world she longs for.

The two worlds are separate; yet one is constantly jostling
 against the other;

Going towards Calver Street, she thought suddenly
 of the Glory Hole. Wherever you went, you came to
 the edge of it. (p.110).

As Eliza grows older, she manages to break free from the bourgeois
 world imposed by her mother. So the Glory Hole becomes more accessible.
 Sometimes it releases a natural world;

Moss cushions squelched with bright dew under their
 feet, sometimes spurting up in a bright, tall jet.
 Out of the manuka bushes, whose grey presence now

took command of the whole world, shutting out sky and valley and the ridge behind, were shaken great globules of rain, and millions of grey moths, as fine as silver powder. (p.104).

But the magic of the Glory Hole cannot be relied upon. The Utopia it releases is always under threat from the deadening, alien half-light of the 'real' world. Then everything appears totally different.

The bright golden moss had gone, leaving bald earth. Leaves, leaves - a million to every bush, pointed and grey, little flint arrows. The dusty bodies of moths were an excrement from the manuka, one grew tired of brushing them away.

Tired of everything but going on, wet through, enclosed in the grey shell of the moment; because, no matter how often one discovers that this is the Glory Hole, always one feels, 'Perhaps this time it won't be.' (p.104).

The grey presence of the manuka bush that can take command of the whole world all too easily becomes splintered into countless sharpened leaves and the grey shell of the moment. Throughout The Godwits Fly the most precious and seemingly most inviolate of Utopian worlds is endangered by the sinister powers of reality. The magic of the Glory Hole lies solely in its precarious separation from the everyday; it is not an alternative in which human interaction plays much part.

In Wednesday's Children, however, Hyde does create a fantastic social world based on the elements denied in everyday bourgeois existence. This potential society is created on an island in Auckland harbour. Here an ideal form of existence can be nourished and allowed to develop its distinctive form of life. It is a life built on the consequences of sexual freedom and fecundity: children run wild under the loving but unconventional care of a Maori nurse, fish and animals breed, plants abound. Wednesday has four lovers ('we don't believe in marriage here') from four different countries who father five children. There are no men on the island because Wednesday has given up each lover as she became pregnant:

But, my darling, I don't want you to be hurt, I would like you to be free, free as cats and counter-lunchesWhat use are you to me if you aren't free? My darling, surely you don't think I want to spend the rest of my life cooped up in the nursery with a pig-headed, spoilt, miserable child, who insists on grizzling because it's a rainy day and he can't run outside and play? You can't think I want you to bore me, my darling? (p.236).

Like her lovers, Wednesday's children are only of use to her if they

are free. And on her island they can roam as free spirits, unrestricted by bourgeois codes of behaviour. 'You see, they are impossible children to live in your world. They won't mix' Wednesday says (p.235).

Wednesday's dream children, somebody calls them:

'Attica,' Wednesday said quietly, 'I'll always defend you.' The child looked round at her, tangle-haired and dark as a witch, strange as a nymph. 'Will you?' she asked, 'will you?' (p.271).

The witch and the nymph can only survive on an island separated by an expanse of water from bourgeois reality.

There is a thriving small society on the island; interaction with the mainland is only to be tolerated if the island's system of values can not merely survive but conquer antithetical bourgeois qualities. So the children's trips to the mainland become wild and improbable expeditions of wish-fulfilment: one child kidnaps a chorister at a concert and brings him back to the island, one tames and rides a lion in front of a cheering circus crowd, one joins a religious fanatic on his wanderings. Each child returns to the island with his or her fantasy existence uncontaminated.

Wednesday can take refuge in the fantasy of her island after each of her perilous visits to the reality of the mainland; physical distance protects her from contamination in a way that is not possible for Eliza Hannay who has to live in the 'real' world. Wednesday returns to the haven of a dream life and dream children. Dreams cast a light which can keep reality at bay:

She stood blinking and uncertain as he hauled her round. The rainbow of creative effort had not yet quite broken and she did not know whether the two intervening faces were dream or human. (p.217).

The dream quality of Wednesday and her children is hinted at quite early in the novel. Mr Bellister, who is a visiting English gentleman, seems to belong to the bourgeois world. But he understands Wednesday and her way of life in a way someone who is an orthodox member of bourgeois society cannot:

...he could not get out of his head the picture of a little island with warm white sands and impudent blue wavelets: and on, or in, these sands and wavelets, naked as they were born, an imaginary Wednesday Gilfillan, an imaginary Attica, imaginary Dorsets and Naples and Limericks and Londonderrys bringing up the rear. (p.42).

And Mr Bellister is the only person who has a firm foot in the bourgeois world whom Wednesday can allow into her other life and even then Wednesday has doubts:

'Nobody ever comes to the island except bona fide refugees,' she said, 'You are not that.' (p.261).

Mr Bellister loves Wednesday and he understands her. But he is fatally linked to bourgeois reality. And the alternative of fantasy can no longer survive once it has been touched by bourgeois elements.

Mr Bellister's love for Wednesday and his visit to her island are disastrous. The fantastic world of the island is penetrated by the bourgeois principle and, for Hyde, such penetration means desecration and death. Once the real outer world invades the island it dissolves, its insubstantial pageant fades. Nor can Wednesday herself survive the intrusion of the outside world: she vanishes and is presumed to be drowned. And it transpires that her children have not existed at all.

Wednesday's niece mourns her disappearance:

...it wasn't that she had cherished any such intense devotion for her Aunt Wednesday, or sentiment for the non-existent children. It was that life, solid life, was like the glossy table, a sleek beast, demanding too many sacrifices to provide the polish for its surface. Somehow cruel and wrong. (p.284).

With Mr Bellister's visit to the island the spell is broken; the fantastic world can no longer conquer and put the bourgeois world to ridicule and to rout. Wednesday will not live to be one of the sacrifices demanded for the surface polish of respectable existence. Before she disappears, she writes Mr Bellister a farewell letter:

Death and love, Mr Bellister, those are the only two things worth letting touch either body or soul. There has to be a way into the old, shining, laughing look of the grasses on the hillside, that haven't the faintest idea whether they exist now or in ancient Greece. We have to exchange relationships, which gall us and goad us, for community, which laughs and is free. (p.276).

For both Hyde and Sargeson, Utopia takes a form of wish-fulfilment in which repressed counterparts of day-to-day bourgeois existence are

brought to life. And both writers give their finest imaginative attention to the alternatives of compensation they create.

But neither writer creates imaginative worlds that can withstand the power of the prevailing bourgeois-puritan world. Sargeson's alternatives sometimes co-exist with the pakeha world but the co-existence is always on pakeha terms. Sometimes Sargeson's alternatives attempt to subvert respectable society. But the subversion is always at the level of mischievous nuisance rather than the level of basic threat. In Sargeson's work, Utopias of wish-fulfilment have their being as back-drops to established everyday existence rather than as fully-fleshed opponents to it.

In Wednesday's Children Hyde creates an alternative society on Wednesday's island. But its substance depends on lack of contact with the bourgeois world just as the Glory Hole, in The Godwits Fly, can only survive if it is kept inviolate. Once the principle of separation is violated the alternative cannot continue to exist.

Neither Hyde nor Sargeson create an alternative world where they can find a satisfying imaginative resting-place. In my view this is because they fail to create potential societies that can imaginatively counterbalance their existing society. So the 'real' New Zealand remains elusive; the core of a new national identity does not appear in the Utopian visions generated by these novels.

Footnotes

- 1 This typology is much more likely to apply when artists cannot find satisfaction in existing reality. And the typology runs the risk of over-simplification unless two major qualifications are made. Firstly, the artist may be quite content to endorse socially accepted (if not socially dominant) values - the artist who sees himself as Stephen Spender saw himself, or who is (in Lukács' phrase) a social realist falls into this category. Secondly, the dominant values of a particular form of society may be congenial to the artist. One of the reasons that Alexis de Tocqueville mourned the passing of aristocratic society was that no longer would society produce great works of art. If a privileged group was not to be allowed leisure, imaginative licence and the backing of a sense of civilisation, art would indeed go underground if it was not driven out of existence altogether, Tocqueville argued in Democracy in America. And Tocqueville saw the greatest threat to art arising in what we have come to call bourgeois society.

- 2 Max Weber saw rational action in relation to a goal as the form of thought necessary to the purposes of modern societies. Its increasing dominance of contemporary thought and ways of doing things would lead, Weber said, to a lack of possibility for other ways of thinking and thus to what he called the 'iron cage of the future.'

- 3 My typology of compensation is based on the ideas of Frederick Nietzsche and particularly his concept of Apollonian as opposed to Dionysian ways of thought. I have taken the principles of antithesis and of the release of repressed ideas from Nietzsche's dichotomy. And I am indebted to J.P. Stern's Nietzsche (Fontana Modern Masters, 1978) for some specific oppositions, particularly the opposition of order and chaos. But most of the particular forms of opposition I have set up in the previous three paragraphs I have geared to my own purposes though they are not original (cf. also Marcuse's Eros and Civilisation).

- 4(a) I am indebted to a passing remark in Jean Duvignaud's The Sociology of Art (Paladin, 1972) for the phrase 'potential society' which I have developed in my own way.

- (b) The idea of potential societies has a certain respectability in New Zealand literary history. It might be called the Erewhon syndrome. Samuel Butler, in Erewhon, imagined a distorted reflection of contemporary society. Erewhon is a totally imaginary society yet it is set in a Canterbury valley and its literary point comes from its dependence on social characteristics and the creation of a distinctly - if satirically reversed - social world.

5. Although I am discussing images of society, here, within a context of a dynamic rather than a static paradigm (see p.78 above), two forms of society (one potential and one existing) can be set side by side in a static manner and thus considered in their relationship to one another. So it is useful to analyse with the tools of realist criticism that are appropriate to such social interconnections.

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION

Each of the three writers I have considered in this thesis writes about social worlds. These social worlds range from the scrupulously observed to the determinedly conjured up; the range is wide, the challenge to the writer's imagination is not always the same. The range of possible ways in which New Zealanders can live together, as they are evoked in the fiction I have considered, rests on a basic assumption. It is the assumption that there is a gap between society as it is and society as it ought to be. In New Zealand in the 1930s the majority of people did not live as the three writers wished them to live or as they wished to live themselves. So in the writers' ways of looking at actual or possible societies there is a sense of dislocation: part of the social world is to be rejected, other parts are to be accepted or - if necessary - created.

All three writers rebelled against the bourgeois-puritan society they saw themselves as forced to inhabit. All three refused to give that society the imaginative endorsement it would have received if they had blindly reflected its dominant values and produced a conformist literature. For each, a corollary of imaginative scepticism about the prevailing values of the respectable society was a profound emotional rejection of those values. The quest was for an alternative society in which the human qualities denied in bourgeois-puritan life could find expression and fulfilment. This alternative was sought both in the existing social world as the writers experienced it and in potential social worlds as the writers imagined them.

For John A. Lee, the principle of rejection was basic. Lee had known an alternative to the prevailing bourgeois-puritan code of values as a childhood member of the submerged society of the dispossessed; he chose the society he was born into and tried to cast off the society that imposed itself upon him. Lee was a politician who was a living emblem of the change he worked for. Writing fiction was a parenthetical

activity. He did not have the wish or the imaginative power to create alternatives that lay beyond the limits of his own remembered experience. The force of his fiction came from his social position and from the vividness of his autobiographical evocation.

Robin Hyde rejected bourgeois-puritan values as whole-heartedly as Lee. The strength of her rejection was the impetus that propelled her into the search for alternatives. She found them both in the experienced and imagined worlds; the location of discovered alternatives was less important than the motive power that led to the discovery. For it was the necessity of Hyde's rejection of respectable society that fuelled her visionary powers; her ability to make myths from worldly people and events and her magical transformation of the ordinary were forms of compensation. Imagination was the means of escape from the unendured everyday. Her imagination's hold on a way of life that could not, by its nature, be earth-bound was the source of Hyde's unparalleled creative power; at the same time it was the source of her indiscipline and structural weakness. The dislocation of consciousness between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be is far greater than it is in the work of the other two writers. Hyde rejected one so completely and embraced the other so desperately that her imagination was fatally uncontrolled at the same time that it was fanned to its full creative potential. Existing society, rejected, could not put any kind of check-rein on the imagined world.

Although, like the other two writers, Frank Sargeson emotionally rejected the values of the bourgeois-puritan world, he paid those values more imaginative respect than either Lee or Hyde did. Sargeson, in my view, was the most self-aware of the three writers; he learned his craft and he learned his task of full-blooded, humbly faithful and unopinionated evocation of what he wrote about. So when he depicted the respectable society he emotionally rejected or alternative societies either experienced or imagined, Sargeson created fleshed-out social worlds. And he brought those different worlds together in his writing. The values of the world of the dispossessed confront the values of a bourgeois-puritan judiciary in the court scene in That Summer, the values of the rural-sexual world parody and almost rout the social conventions of the respectable society in Mrs Daley's Christmas afternoon visit in I Saw in My Dream.

There is more conflict than harmony in Sargeson's depiction of the meeting of the values of these different worlds. This is because Sargeson saw the values of alternative societies as antithetical to the values of the conventional and accepted way of life in New Zealand in the 1930s. The scenes where these opposing values are brought into an imaginative whole are amongst Sargeson's finest writing. Sargeson created both worlds and in bringing them together let the clashes and confluences of opposites create their own repercussions, their own subtleties and their own ironies.

Sargeson's creative powers are powers of the realist writer if realism is taken in its broadest and deepest sense. 'Man is not an abstract creature, squatting outside the world,' Marx said. And the realist writes about the world he belongs to. Yet although he is essentially a member of society, the realist writer is not an ordinary member of society. He can do what Sargeson does. He can take in more of his own world than ordinary people; he has a wider range of vision and he can make connections between the parts of his wider experience. The artist's imagination, Coleridge said, works towards the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities. If the opposite and discordant qualities are social qualities, as they are for Sargeson, the achievement of the imaginative balance is a social achievement.

Orthodox realist literary criticism works on the actual rather than the potential social world. If the canons of the realist approach are extended to include potential as well as actual societies, to include the writer's active imaginative power to create social alternatives as well as the capacity to passively reflect existing societies, then Sargeson can be seen as a realist writer. For an artist like Sargeson explores a hinterland of potential worlds; his imaginative ordering includes social alternatives he has conjured up himself.

A realist interpretation may need to be extended to include potential as well as actual societies, but the realist premiss still holds. The writer can think only what his society allows him to think; limits to his imagination are set - in the end - by the world he inhabits. I argued in Chapter VI that New Zealand in the 1930s was a society activated by a spirit of change rather than a spirit of maintenance. A spirit of change entails a search for alternatives; a search for

alternatives entails rejection of part of the social world; a basis of rejection generates a dislocated imaginative consciousness. The three writers, whether consciously or not, wrote on the basis of these presuppositions. Two of them, in quite different ways, faced the imaginative challenge the divided consciousness entailed. As much as she could, Hyde withdrew into the alternative world she created or transformed herself. Sargeson was the only writer who effectively bridged the gap between society as it was and society as he thought it should be. Sargeson was able to bring all the elements of his complex vision into a balanced and integrated whole. At times he did so. But Sargeson's vision, in the end, was a morally weighted vision. He saw alternative values as morally superior to conventional values. And he weighed the scales in their favour through overt polemic (as in the endings of Cow-pats or A Piece of Yellow Soap) or by falsifying his vision of the power of alternative values to stand on their own (as in his examination of the political effectiveness of Terry's and Bill's friendship in That Summer).

In my view Sargeson's basic moral choice fundamentally affects his artistic vision. It distorts that vision in a radical manner. The distortion stems from the world-view Sargeson shared with other New Zealanders and it stands in the way of his artistry. In this, Sargeson is not different from the other two writers. The urgency of the quest for change that they all felt as New Zealanders in the 1930s overrode their search for detachment as writers. The force of the search overcame the need for a clear eye, the need for unflinching depiction, that is the goal of the realist writer. The struggle of the great realist writer to face his world, to stand firm and communicate what he sees as its truth, was not the central struggle of these three writers. Primarily committed to change, they could not be totally committed to truth-telling.

I interpret Mannheim's 'spirit of maintenance' not as a wish to keep society as it is but as a wish to face it as it is. Only when a spirit of maintenance imbues a society can its artists confront that society steadily. Then the 'national moment', so long sought in New Zealand, arrives for artists. They may not like what they see but they will do their best to see it clearly and communicate it fully. They may well leave to revolutionaries and reformers the task of altering

the world on the basis of the new form of vision. The artists' task is to use their breadth of social vision and depth of imaginative vision, to use their superior powers to integrate what they see and their ability to communicate it to others. They need to have the courage to determinedly keep their feet in the face of what they see, the courage to 'bear the fate of the times like a man', as Max Weber put it. If they can find that courage they can harness it to their gifts of penetration, integration and to the gift of words. This is what Sargeson did, but he did not do it unfailingly or as his main imaginative purpose.

Even Sargeson could not overcome the dislocation of consciousness that he shared with everyone else in his society. In a way it is irrelevant to imply that he wanted to. For Sargeson belonged to his time. In the works I have considered, Sargeson belonged to the era whose ambience of unreadiness has been captured in an often-quoted couplet:

Not I, some child born in a marvellous year
Will learn the trick of standing upright here.

Allen Curnow wrote these lines in 1940, at the end of the decade I have examined. In the context of this thesis, the 'marvellous year' could be a span of years when the 'national moment' at last arrives. In my view the national moment will emerge more slowly than we expect and will take the shape of an acceptance, generated in the spirit of maintenance, of New Zealand society as it is. Acceptance does not imply complacency. In fact it will take the place of the optimism, so often an unearned optimism, that is a necessary national attribute of a society imbued by a spirit of change. Such an acceptance will probably be based on facing painful truths. It may well be a tragic acceptance. It will not preclude hope and it will not preclude change. But both will arise from facing the reality of a society that is not seen as improving of its own accord.

Curnow implies that, when the time is ripe, not he but another writer will find and keep his feet in a new world. There is always a temptation to end with prophecy and to see one's own age as a millennium. The strong signs of a resurgence and expansion of the arts during the last decade reinforces that temptation. If, however, my feeling is right and New Zealand is entering a new age, artists will be both the measure and forerunners of her new identity.

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