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THE NOVELIST'S PAIR OF TONGS:

=====

an investigation into the literary significance  
of John A. Lee's novels.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of M. A.  
in English Literature at Massey University.

J. S. Nicholson

1970

It is the artist alone in whose hands Truth  
becomes impressive and a living principle of action..

(J.S.Mill, letter to Carlyle.)



*As a child in Dunedin about the turn of the century.*



*—Alexander Tieson, M.L.A.  
On entering politics in the early 1920s.*



*As leader of the Democratic  
Labour Party addressing electors.*



*As he is today, aged 76.*



—Alexander Turnbull Library

**DAYS OF GLORY:** John A. Lee chaired by the members of his committee and his supporters after winning the Grey Lynn seat for Labour with a huge majority in 1935.

## ERRATA

- Page iv. item 1931  
add "adopted three children, aged two, three and seven."
- Page v. item 1943-53  
delete "adopted three children, aged two, three and seven."
- Page v. et passim.  
for The N.Z. Encyclopaedia read An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand.
- Page 10, line 12.  
for "he wrote" read "this latter wrote".
- Page 24, line 4.  
for "A N.Z. War History" read "An account of the incident"
- Page 24, line 14.  
for "Stewart" read "Stewart, Col.H."
- Page 30, line 11.  
for "Hannan" read "Hon. J.R. Hanan, Minister of Justice."
- Page 104, item 1(iv).  
for "Truth lib." read "the library of News Media (N.Z.) Ltd., Wellington, publishers of New Zealand Truth."; ditto page 106, item 3(iv).
- Page 106, item 3(iv).  
for "Study Lee", read "article".
- Page 106, item 3(iii).  
for "Country Lib.," read "Country Library Service."

Errata (Cont'd.)

Page 107. The references to articles, &c., under Gordon, Hall, Pearson, Rhodes and Stevens should read as follows:

Gordon, Ian A. Article on the novel, in Oxford New Zealand Encyclopaedia p.269. London, 1965.

Hall, D.O.W. Article on literature, in An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand vol.2, p.32.

Pearson, Bill. "Fretful Sleepers, A Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour, and its Implications for the Artist", Landfall 6(3): pp.201-30, September, 1952. Reprinted in Landfall Country (ed. Charles Brasch) Caxton, 1962. See also thesis p.20, line 21 and p.94 n.58.

Rhodes, H. Winston. "Writers and Writing in New Zealand, VI. The Novels of John A. Lee", New Zealand Libraries 10(11): pp.230-35. December, 1947.

Stevens, Joan. Article on fiction, in An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. vol.2, p.330.

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## PREFACE

With regard to Chapter 1: to find out how Children of the Poor, The Hunted and Civilian Into Soldier were originally received I have perused over 100 contemporary comments in newspapers, magazines and letters of overseas and New Zealand origin. I was aided in this search by Mr. Lee who made his files available to me at "Vital Books Ltd.," Auckland. The files were in no apparent order apart from a characteristic antithetical juxtapositioning of some comments; nor were the files complete; some documents were sealed. There were enough items of interest, nevertheless, to produce a firm outline of the history of the reception of the novels. Additional reviews were obtained from various libraries.

To find out how subsequent critics have judged the novels I have studied approximately 25 comments by New Zealand scholars and writers in various publications from the forties to the sixties, and in letters. Post-contemporary comment has been arranged as far as it was possible in chronological order. There has been no intentional slanting in the selection and arrangement of comments.

To describe the literary source of Lee's acknowledged power I subjected his first three published novels to a close reading. My observations on structure are confined mainly to Ch. IV. Style is detailed in Ch. V. It is not unusual for original feeling to disappear after analysis. Eliot noticed this happening, in Frontiers of Criticism, in which essay he refers to "the lemon squeezer school". Lee, however, presents the literary object in such a way that feeling tends to follow thought so that on thinking feeling returns. The alternation is endless and urgent.

Current readership statements have been detailed in the appendix.

In most instances book titles throughout the thesis have been abbreviated to initial letters thus: COP (Children of the Poor), TH (The Hunted), CIS (Civilian Into Soldier), LWPS (The Lee Way to Public Speaking).

The photos of the frontispiece are from the N. Z. Listener 17 Nov. 1967.

My thanks to Professor R. G. Freen who asked me to consider a thesis on John A. Lee, and who with Dr Broughton concluded that "such a study would have intrinsic merit." I am also pleased to acknowledge their advice and direction together with that of Mr O'Gorman. I thank also Miss Rodger who helped to find obscure references. Much appreciated, too, has been the goodwill and co-operation of all correspondents.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I have assembled this outline of Mr Lee's life from the following published sources, and from correspondence with him. I have tried to make it accurate and complete, but it is in some respects tentative, partly because some of the accounts I have followed are misleading. For example, in the Official History of N. Z.'s Effort in the Great War, vol. II, Lee is listed as "Sergt." in the index but referred to as "Pte." in the text.

## Delinquent Days

Dominion, editorial, 1st Oct. 1938.

The Lee Way To Public Speaking

I Fight For N. Z.

International Press Who's Who in N. Z. 1933

International Who's Who 1939

N. Z. Weekly News, July 28, 1969

Official History of N. Z.'s Effort in the Great War, Vol. II

The Encyclopaedia of N. Z.

The N. Z. Business Who's Who, 1967-8

Who's Who in N. Z., sixth and ninth editions

Wilmot, "John A. Lee, M. P. and Man of Letters,"

N. Z. Mag. 22, no. 4, 1943.

This outline is, as far as I know, the first extended chronological account.

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1891 Born, 31st October, Castle Street, Dunedin, son of Alfredo Lee and Mary, nee Taylor. (Can trace his gipsy descent on his father's side back to Wiltshire 1820. Lee is fifty percent gipsy; on his mother's side the Fleming family of the discoverer of penicillin appears at his grandparents' level. His grandfather served in 72 Highlanders and in India. A cousin, Alexander Taylor, decd., one of Alexandra's fruit pioneers was on the Anglican Synod, Otago, for 25 years.)

Attended Albany Street Primary School, Dunedin.

1906-8 Convicted of stealing. On being caught for another offence he was sent to the Burnham Industrial School officially until the age of 21. He escaped after two years from a job and worked on farms and in factories in Otago, as ploughman, waggoner, harvester, fencer, ditcher, flax and threshing mill-hand.

- 1909-10 Moved to the North Island and worked at various jobs including fencing, draining, post splitting, farming. Fled from the police down the Wanganui River.
- 1911-12 Mt. Eden: served 9 months 23 days. Released at age 21. For the rest of the year he was fencing in the bush and attached to the Public Works Department in North Auckland.
- 1913 Drove the last horse drawn bus between Birkenhead and Highbury. Listened to soapbox orators at Quay Street, Auckland. "I was ready to explode with radical ideas." (LWPS, 10)
- 1914-15 Joined a railway building gang in North Auckland at Otamatea early in 1914 where he worked with a pick and shovel. "In six months I passed from capturing pity to commanding the ears of hard bitten men." (LWPS, 49) Also served as a porter and barman, Waverley Hotel, Auckland in this period.
- 1916-19 Served with N. Z. E. F. 1st Wellington regiment, Hawkes Bay Company. Awarded D. C. M. for conspicuous gallantry at Messines. Lost left forearm at Maily Maillot.
- He writes, "During convalescence on the Oatlands Drive in Surrey in World War 1, I formed my own debating club," (LWPS 63) and states there were men of all opinions in the army hospital. Lee's first published writing which he claims is "not worth looking at," also belongs to this period. He wrote for the Chronicles of N. Z. E. F. He also wrote the original draft of Civilian Into Soldier when in hospital in Army Blue.
- 1919 Married Marie Ethel Guy, a descendant of the Grace cricketing family, Westport; elected President, Auckland Labour Party. "From 1919 until 1922 I was the speaker in Quay Street who drew the largest audiences" (N. Z. Weekly News July, 28. 1969.) Occasional Sunday night speeches in the Auckland Opera House after World War 1. "I was in demand as a speaker while I was yet a learner". (LWPS 78)
- 1921 Failed to win parliamentary seat Auckland East.
- 1922 Elected MP Auckland East; youngest member in parl. Lee was the prop. of a soap manuf. business when first elected to parliament.
- 1925 Wrote leaflet on Wage Cuts.
- 1928 Defeated by J. B. Donald  
Wrote Auckland Election Journal, (wrote it all each year except for one article).

- 1929 Managed the Palace Hotel in Rotorua: "One year was enough." Wrote another Civilian Into Soldier. The original draft was not used.
- 1930 Wrote the sequel Reintegration (unpublished). Writing full time and organising, unpaid, for the Labour Party.
- 1931 Elected MP for Grey Lynn; as before wrote Auckland Election Journal;
- 1932-3 Wrote Children of the Poor.
- 1933 Recorded in International Press Who's Who in N. Z. Activities mentioned: Past member executive R.S.A. Vice Pres. Auck. Rugby League, Port Chevalier Yacht Squadron. Recreations: Writing, reading, gardening, walking, football and dancing.
- 1933-4 Wrote The Hunted.
- 1934 Wrote Labour Has A Plan (Commissioned by Lab. Confr. 1933); The History of the Smash and Grab Government (200th sold); Children Of The Poor published.
- 1935 Polled the highest majority at the election. Wrote the Auckland Election Journal, "Message of a Statesman" (in the Journal). Return Soldier Vote Labour (a circular).
- 1936 Became N. Z.'s first Parliamentary Undersecretary, to Savage and Nash. The Hunted published.
- 1936-7 Wrote The Politician and the Fairy (unpublished; being revised; "trouble is that everyone concludes a book like this is completely autobiographical").
- 1937 Civilian Into Soldier published. Wrote Socialism in N. Z.
- 1938 Polled the highest majority recorded in N. Z. up to that time. Wrote the Labour Party policy almost single handed. Socialism in New Zealand published. "The world might gather from this publication that New Zealanders are descended from the 'scum of the earth'." (Dominion) As well as proclaiming policy Socialism in N. Z. was, Lee claims, "the first British text to advocate authors' lending rights." Wrote, If Prices Fall the People Perish (leaflet); N. Z. Labour Party Notes For Speakers: Hitler (pamphlet).

- 1939 Recorded in International Who's Who. Lee by this time had launched Labour's Housing Plan; played a large part in socialisation of Bank of N. Z., and in establishment of Motherhood Endowment. He had published four books, written one other, as well as numerous articles. Wrote The Lee Letter: Psychopathology in Politics (late in the year); Debt Finance For War; Peace Versus Democracy.
- Appointment revoked in December 1939
- 1940 Expelled from the Labour Party (May). "Between the date of expulsion and the next conference 200 branches of the Labour Party died". Debt Free Currency published in 1939 was published again this year (sold 80,000) Wrote I Fight For New Zealand (sold 100,000; 6d copy). Founded and led The Democratic Labour Party for three years.
- 1943 Published The Yanks Are Coming
- 1943-53 Established and edited Lee's Weekly; adopted three children aged two, three, and seven. Wrote Manufacture or Perish (sold 10,000). Published Shining With The Shiner (1944). (The N. Z. Encyclopaedia contains a column about Slattery, Edmund 1840-1927. The only references included are the obituary in the Otago Daily Times and Lee's short stories.)
- 1948 Established a bookselling business known as "Vital Books" Ltd.
- 1959-61 Member of the Council of N. Z. Book Assn.
- 1963 Published Simple On A Soapbox
- 1964 Attended Albany Street Primary School reunion. Wrote The Importance of Being Sir Earnest (unpublished, "novel on electoral power of booze in politics").
- 1965 Published The Lee Way To Public Speaking; Rhetoric At The Red Dawn; Shiner Slattery.
- 1965-6 Wrote My Childhood ("hurried, to leave a record") (unpublished).
- 1967 12th edition N. Z. Business Who's Who lists Associated Co's: Printing Service Ltd., Democratic Property Ltd., three directors, staff of Six. Published Delinquent Days.

- 1968 Wrote Roughnecks, Rolling Stones, Rouseabouts, (some of these short stories have been published in Focus). Revised Mussolini's Millions ("a trifle"; originally published as a serial in Lee's Weekly.)
- 1969 Honorary Doctorate of Laws conferred by Otago University. Sculptured head commissioned by N. Z. Arts Council.
- 1970 Represented P. E. N. at Wellington.

## RECEPTION AND REPUTATION

My intention in this chapter is to outline the history of the comment on Lee's three novels published in the thirties. The first part of the outline concerns contemporary comment.

(i) Children of the Poor

1.  
The succès de scandale<sup>1.</sup> which McCormick claims came to COP on publication is difficult to measure and would appear to be largely verbal and confined to New Zealand. This of course does not invalidate the intensity of the phenomenon and there is written evidence to show that an unusual event had occurred. Surviving commentaries either damn the book with faint praise, accept it with reservation or reject it totally. The amount of praise would appear to balance the amount of censure, not an unusual condition for a first publication except that COP was published anonymously in 1934 in both England and America, and subsequently sold 9000 copies up to the time that the plates were melted owing to wartime regulations. It used to be said that only one first novel in 300 sold over 3000.<sup>2.</sup>

3.  
Over 800 English copies came to New Zealand.<sup>3.</sup> I do not know about the American edition.<sup>4.</sup> Review dates indicate COP could have been and probably was being read and sold during the winter of 1934. Undoubtedly public interest was high during the election year of 1935 when the second edition was published with the author's name and when the book was 'hawked' by the conservative party. (The hawking will be

detailed in another section, see p. 36 ) Truth's review, Nov 7, 1934: ("New Zealand will sit up and take notice of this book") although stressing the book's sociological value, was headlined: "Sister's degradation for starving family. Sensational book on vice, poverty and misery". Truth also thought COP might prove disconcerting to Dunedin, as did Tomorrow, which thought smug Dunedin would call the book exaggerated.

Rhodes states in N.Z. Novels that COP was neither the first nor the last novel to attack middle class values but: "it caused its author to be attacked with more violence and venom than any New Zealand novelist before or since".  
5.

Mr L.G. Anderson, present superintendent of the Child Welfare Division, also remarks on the creation of "quite a sensation at the time, as I well remember." He goes on to say: "I was a university student at Canterbury at the time the book came out. I have a general recollection that the book was 'the talk of the town'. Everyone I knew read it and so did I. Perhaps the unusual (almost unique at that time) frankness in the early part of the book aroused a lot of interest. You will remember that John Lee describes his mother as a prostitute. That kind of thing was up until then, unheard of... Today it is common place for writers to engage in frank, even salacious disclosures. It wasn't then." Mr Anderson is not sure whether he is "right in crediting some of the initial interest to that disclosure... the book of course aroused indignation and shock as well as interest. Some people could not understand how a man could be so heartless as to describe his mother as a prostitute."  
6.

Replying to a request for amplification concerning the term: 'Succès de scandale', Dr. McCormick wrote: "the only authentic information on the local response to COP would be found in the reviews which the book received in New Zealand newspapers at the time... I was living in Dunedin at the time of the book's publication - or soon after - and the comment one heard in not very enlightened circles was that Mr Lee had acted disgracefully in revealing the sordid facts about his mother and his sister and his own upbringing. (The assumption was that the novel was autobiographical).... It was a purely local affair... chiefly concerned with the propriety of revealing discreditable facts about one's relatives. For it to be understood the controversy must be placed in its historic context."<sup>7</sup>

In support of his own assertion Prof. Rhodes wrote: "My remarks were not based on an examination of reviews, but on the comments I heard and were reported to me two or three years following its publication. In my experience only two New Zealand novels have become topics of conversation in ordinary gatherings of people. The first (leaving out Jean Devanny) was COP, the second Bill Pearson's Coal Flat. People took sides and argued with passion. In Lee's case it took longer because of the later political campaign and because he flaunted his 'gutter' upbringing in order to anger his respectable colleagues. The line of attack was generally that he had no right to drag his family through the dirt and from the point of view of the 'respectable' middle classes that he had no right to tarnish New Zealand and particularly Dunedin's name. He could not be forgiven for dragging family or national skeleton out of the cupboard.... How far

all this found its way into print I don't remember and it would take considerable investigation not only of reviews but of forgotten publications and letters to the paper to find out... There may have been and probably was more virulence in Dunedin, but I was thinking of New Zealand as a whole whenever Lee's name or the subject of the book were under discussion.<sup>8.</sup>

Part of the total pattern surrounding the New Zealand appearance of each of Lee's novels emerges from the preceding statements: publicity, instant reaction, the question of autobiography or the proportion of fact to fiction, propriety, originality of subject matter, authorial motivation, the association of literature and politics, controversy. The Hunted and Civilian Into Soldier, however, did not cause the same degree of sensation in enlightened or unenlightened circles.

As can be seen there is an element of doubt concerning how widespread the verbal response was. Available published statements also indicate more than a tremor of adverse moral criticism, that the sensation was confined to New Zealand but not solely to Dunedin, that it continued for at least four years. Dunedin generally, Lee claims, took thirty years to accept the book.<sup>9.</sup> Lee also claims: "COP in some circles in New Zealand almost got the reception that was given to Dreiser's Sister Carrie except that it was not suppressed.<sup>10.</sup>

<sup>11.</sup> An unspecified reader's report of 1933 gave the length of COP at about 92,000 words and the opinion of fair. "I do not recommend publication as it stands." The reader thought it would be better in the third person and improved by taking out such padding as lengthy accounts

of general history and topography of New Zealand. While he found fault with the episodic structure he considered the book contained some excellent matter. He found the study of the school master dull and the most interesting episode the visit of Rose to the Chinese den; the stay with the grandmother was also dull. This astute reader does voice some typical and later aesthetic criticism, namely the objection to episodic structure and to 'interpolations'.

Whether as a result of the report is not clear but James B. Pinker & Son, literary agents, rejected GOP in June 1933. "Frankly, accustomed as we are, unfortunately in this country to such worse poverty (three and four in a room) the children in this book do not seem terribly poor... hardly sufficient to arouse sympathy for their criminal tendencies."<sup>12.</sup>

It is evident that English acceptance followed American as Vanguard expressed annoyance at the Pinker attitude in a letter to Upton Sinclair who had sent Lee's novel to them. In 1933 President of Vanguard in a letter to Lee enclosing copies of the contract wrote: "I can't recall when any manuscript or book stirred me more profoundly." Again in 1942 on retirement he wrote: "All of us are convinced GOP is a great book," and again in 1948: "As you know GOP is one of my favourite books."<sup>13.</sup>

This indicates the original wholehearted acceptance of the affective power and may point to characteristic ethnographical differences: English reserve and American warmth. Shaw, however, remarked on the "peculiar poignancy" of GOP in the following year.<sup>14.</sup> The implied American definition of greatness and the use of the term book is of interest when considering New Zealand post-contemporary criticism and

the desire of critics to seek assurance in the more objective criterion of genre.

On the 21st December 1935 the chairman of the Hawera Public Library Committee replying to a letter about the withdrawal from circulation of COP wrote: "The decision of the committee, after reading it, is that, whereas the book may correctly portray the squalid existence of a section of New Zealand city poor, it introduces such gross immorality and dwells upon debasing sexual matters in such a manner that it is considered an unsuitable book for a public body to make available for general reading. For this reason it has been with-  
15.  
drawn."

During the first New Zealand Book Week of 1936 a Timaru paper reported that some objection had been made to COP and the book was un-  
16.  
officially removed from the library shelves. And while the book was praised by Alan Mulgan in the introduction of N.Z. Book Week, as probably the most realistic of all New Zealand novels, an impressive study of hard poverty in a young country, as notable for its psychological insight as for its picture of social conditions, and, containing passages of remarkable beauty, the title and author of COP  
17.  
is not listed in that publication.

Contradictory attitudes multiply.

In November 1938 the town clerk of the Rangiora Borough Council  
18.  
noted COP was second in public favour.

The final example of written condemnatory rejection comes in 1937 from Geo F. Inglis in Forum. He refers to the book as offensively filthy, distorted, valueless and poisonous, telling nothing of life

only of death and putrefaction.<sup>19</sup> (Lee comments that Inglis was once their landlord, that a pile of manure was discovered at the back of his house years later. Inglis didn't understand the book or was resentful.)

Inglis' attack was overtly a response to a eulogy by the Rev. O.E. Burton in the Methodist Bible Class Link (1937) who found "a rare beauty about much of the book", and the characters to be of absorbing practical interest. "In this book we have a boy looking at the church and deciding against it. His impressions are worth examining..." It should be read he thinks "By every minister, social worker, and Sunday school teacher..." He calls it a great human document and "no christian should read without serious examination of himself."<sup>20.</sup> This is the first acknowledgment of the book's moral value.

The review of The Glasgow Forward which was reproduced in the N.Z. Worker, widens the appeal to include the education of the young, social workers in slum areas, school teachers and stipendary magistrates, thus stressing the book's sociological value.

Tomorrow also recognises this value but raises the complex question of the book's motivation, thinking that unless the purpose is to open the eyes of society to the results of poverty it is a cruel and selfish book, (queried on this point Lee made no comment) "cruel in exposing the lives of mother and sister and selfish if merely satisfying an ego."<sup>21.</sup> One incident is remarked as hitting below the belt - that concerning the gaol chaplain. "Hitting a man when he is down is never fair play, neither points the moral or adorns the tale." Thus even in an early New Zealand radical paper controversy surrounded COP.

The New Zealand newspaper reviews with the exception of Truth (a warm reception) and the Otago Daily Times (which dinned with faint praise) were temperate. Such statements as follow, together with short plot accounts were typical: "indictment of those whose duty it is to help the poor;" "among the manuscripts of poverty and poetry;" "the rights of children are vital adjuncts to the rights of man;" "drama contained within the limits of actuality." The Otago Daily Times thought it "impossible to gauge the truth of the tale", called the first few pages "ranting, unedifying," considered "the sensation mongering modified as the story proceeded," that there was "sensitive writing in parts," but that there would be more merit "if the tale had been told without political bias."<sup>22.</sup>

Among those who valued the authenticity was Miss Baughan, a Christchurch prison reformer and social worker: "I know the chinese girl, the victims of Axeldeen ... you know much that the orthodox citizen can't believe."<sup>23.</sup> The Times Literary Supplement also stressed the 'ring of truth', and the moving quality. Robin Hyde called COP a tragedy.<sup>24.</sup>

Jane Mander was the first New Zealand commentator to my knowledge to judge the novel on its literary qualities. While hailing COP as a "landmark in New Zealand literature" she says it has technical faults. She notices overstressing and sarcasm and although she admires the portraits of the mother and the "power, the vitality, the magnificent material of the works of the greatest tragedy," in places it is "crudely written."<sup>25..</sup>

All the American reviews note the moving quality and the vigour of the writing; two of the five read note a universal significance. The New York Times, for example, states: "it (COP) is not confined to its time in a pre-war world nor its place in a certain section of New Zealand." Two reviews qualify praise with technical comments such as, "despite unevenness", and, "despite clumsiness of construction." The Saturday Review notes the "wonderful insight into the psychology of children".<sup>26.</sup> The New York Herald Tribune raises the question of responsibility: is character or environment responsible for delinquency? - an interesting point in the light of subsequent propaganda charges. This review also states that both revolt and showmanship enter into the tale - further evidence of complexity of theme and motivation.<sup>27.</sup>

While Tomorrow in New Zealand noted a lack of bitterness the American Saturday Review of Literature noted: "He is bitter and well he might be; his bitterness frequently carries him to sentimental extremes of exposition and commentary, but the solidarity of his accomplishment remains."<sup>28.</sup> Again contradiction and qualification.<sup>29.</sup> The SRL reviewer also wondered with other-world detachment what Rose would have said to Bessie Cotter's remark: "It ain't low wages that drives a girl into prostitution." The question of sentimentality is also raised for the first time by the SRL reviewer.

In general American criticism was favourable and balanced. Uncertainty about total value, seen in the acknowledgment of the affective power on the one hand and technical deficiencies on the other, indicates some distrust of the feelings, which distrust, with exceptions, tends to develop into bewilderment, neglect or indifference in subsequent

New Zealand comment which if not solving the original issues has at least clarified them. At the same time the appreciation<sup>of</sup> COP has increased, more copies being sold in 1967 than in 1935.<sup>30.</sup>

Those who, to my knowledge, accepted the book from the first unreservedly were, the President of Vanguard Press (and I presume Upton Sinclair; Simple on a Soap Box is dedicated to him "who found me my first publisher"), George Bernard Shaw (although Shaw was critical of Lee's acceptance of conventional shame, he thought one of the merits of the book was that despite the acceptance the thief and whore appeared as heroes)<sup>31.</sup>, Alan Mulgan, and Downie Stewart the nationalist intellectual in the Massey and Coates government of Lee's time. In a note to Lee in parliament he wrote: "when you meet that author of COP tell him I have read his book. So has my sister whose soft heart was melted again and again to an extent I have never seen before. I will tell you what I think when I meet you. It ought to have a good chance of becoming a classic."<sup>32.</sup>

Clearly the book did cause a stir and clearly the book was evaluated although no extended criticism was produced. New Zealand prose fiction of novel length has remained relatively untouched by the analyst. For the times it seems to have had exceptionally good coverage including one review I have not seen but one which pleased the author, an illustrated page and a half in the Dutch paper Het Volk.<sup>33.</sup> In Lee's view: "books like airplanes rise against resistance."<sup>34.</sup>

Before outlining post-contemporary opinion certain items of literary significance concerning TH and GIS will be dealt with.

(ii) The Hunted

TH was published in 1936 in book form and as a serial in Truth. Numerous reviews in English provincial papers recommended TH. Australian and New Zealand reviews were generally favourable, only The Otago Daily Times giving reluctant credit. Selections will illustrate the diversity of critical opinion.

One reviewer (R. Dunlop) thought the style became monotonous but in spite of it Porcello's bid for freedom aroused his grim hopes for success and he felt his panting exhaustion and his hatred of his environment. Another, in The Manchester Guardian, stated Lee had no grace of style though he could write. His story suffered from a lack of method. Pages of moralising interfered. The story should have been told through the consciousness of Porcello. Nevertheless it was an interesting book and the character powerfully presented. <sup>36.</sup> Book Review 2YA referred to TH as "superior in narrative and gusto," and although the author showed a lack of tact in choice of words, using "ingest" for "eat," for example, it was an uncomfortably powerful book and the reviewer felt encouraged to invite the application of world standards. TH was more than New Zealand. It was humanity. The same reviewer thought the picture overdrawn and propagandistic. <sup>37.</sup> Another, in The Evening Post declared Porcello a genuine creation. There is more than one review reference to frankness, poignancy, tragedy, truth and nobility, which qualities are admired. There are references to the book's moral and educational values.

The Otago Daily Times had the "tantalising sense that the author was on the verge of literary fulfilment" and thought the chase in part four

(as did other reviewers) to be tense and compulsive but that TH "for the most part" was "pedestrian narrative". It might be argued, the reviewer stated, that the book was sociology first and fiction second, a human document which elicited the reader's sympathy rather than his critical appreciation of style, but there were many books on sociology which required to be of outstanding performance to be highly praised. TH commanded no accolade. The reviewer next noted the book's special interest was that it was written by a man in a responsible position. However, it was not topical and hence the description was of historical importance only. Despite the demerits, which also included mention of needless underlining of class elements, vigour rather than strength of writing, disproportion in presentation of character, "Porcello emerges as a figure in whom we can believe."<sup>38.</sup>

Reviews, while praising Lee's realism, refrain from detail and hardly mention concerns such as violence, sadism, sex, and religious hypocrisy or why Porcello ran and from what. The reviewers were concerned with the effect of the story and how to reconcile the effect with the technique which produced it.

It was left to Truth to exploit the sensational aspects. Before describing the effect of this publication it is of interest to note a letter from Werner Laurie to Lee dated December 18th 1935, which informs Lee that their home office is on a "Purity in Books" crusade, that he has just been fined £50 and 20g costs for the publication of a book which contained no specific passage that was improper, the whole volume tending to be suggestive. There had been three recent book prosecutions and two more were coming in January.... "In view of these facts I have had to

withdraw your ms. from my printer and regret to tell you it will be necessary if the ms. is to be published in England for you to go over it and cut out all passages that might be considered improper. If issued as it now stands I feel confident it would be stopped immediately.... It will still I believe remain a fine story and one that ought to be published."

39.

The parts that required modifying or deleting are not entirely meaningful in isolation and difficult to locate as ms. and book page numbering do not match. Nor do these parts seem any more suggestive or explicit than many which remain. Some examples with ms. numbering are as follows:

- IOI The gymnastics of sex seemed dull and stupid. Substitute 'was' for 'seemed' or omit sentence altogether. "He had no inkling of the profound emotional joys" ... a most dangerous remark.
- IIO Leave out: "lips to lips".
- 340 Omit "his healthy lust - torn.
- 341 Omit "While Milly ate figs or dates he explored the mysteries of her body.

Truth published TH in thirteen instalments which ran from September 16th to December 9th, 1936. One hundred pounds was paid for the serial rights, a firm indication of value in early post-depression years. The serial caused widespread interest throughout New Zealand and according to Truth November 4th, 1936, hundreds of letters reached the author. After the first and subsequent episodes some of these letters were published. They testified to the authenticity of the book and some identified Jack Lee as the boy they used to know. The letters were "a tribute that pleased me better than any of those of the critics." 40.

People of all classes went into Truth's office with information about

the days of Burnham.

It has been affirmed that Beck, the first superintendent of Child Welfare, was aided by Lee in his campaign to abolish the Industrial School system with the possible implication that Lee's novels helped. However, the last Industrial School, the Burnham one, was closed in 1918 by Beck,<sup>41.</sup> then head of the Industrial Schools and Special Schools sections of the Education department. The novels were not in print at that time. Neither was Lee then a member of parliament. Nevertheless, near the end of Beck's career attempts were made to reintroduce disciplinary methods of an earlier day. These attempts were resisted. "The fact that Mr Lee's books COP and TH had been published and widely read must have helped Mr Beck in his resistance because they created a public opinion largely opposed to industrial school methods... influencing public opinion is an important achievement."<sup>42.</sup>

### (iii) Civilian Into Soldier

Although published in 1937 CIS was written almost ten years earlier. To say that "structurally and in style it continues the advance shown by TH over COP" is ironically inaccurate. The unnamed Evening Post review also declared CIS better than All Quiet on the Western Front but that as another war was looming on the horizon it was less pleasant to read the realities.

Adverse moral criticism appears in The Wairarapa Standard which condemns Lee as M.P. for writing CIS. The book "contains so much offensive matter that it is unfit to be placed on the shelves of a respectable library or in the hands of a decent woman." Vulgarisms are objected to.

The attacks on high commanders are thought insulting. Indignation is expressed at the favour given to prostitutes in preference to other society women caring for New Zealanders. The article concludes: "is it possible that the author is attached to a ministry that claims to be imbued with Christian ideals?"<sup>43.</sup>

"G.H.M." in the N.Z. Radio Record considered it right that the part played by prostitutes in winning the war should be made clear to the public. The book as a whole is "a magnificent piece of stark realism". He would not go so far as to agree with O.N. Gillespie that CIS was probably the finest war story in the English language but it was one of the finest and certainly the best that had come from New Zealand; in few novels had style been more suited to subject matter.<sup>44.</sup>

Another commentator in 1937 refers to it as a great book but not for every one. "In parts it is raw meat."<sup>45.</sup>

A review by D.O. Wall in 1937 is illuminating. He found it "crude but terribly alive;" "the descriptive power overwhelming, most compelling and horrible in the battle scenes;" "in many ways a bitter book but also funny." "Purely as a novel, that is as a well lighted stageful of soberly imagined puppets enacting an intimately plotted pageant more finished and symmetrical than reality, I don't think CIS quite as good as Lee's earlier novels. But it is a beast of an altogether different breed. It has a fine turbulence of spirit that makes it a much greater book." This appears to be the first explicit application of other than traditional criteria for judging Lee. Yet he concludes, Lee "writes with force rather than

elegance" as though elegance were superior.

An unidentified clipping states life as depicted by Mr Lee is "sheer rubbish ... his picture of the brutal sergeant major is an impossible creation." <sup>46.</sup> Lee, in a footnote, writes: "CIS is a book ordinary soldiers praised. Critics who denied the authenticity did so because they liked neither its underlying philosophy nor its morals or because they had not experienced trench warfare and thought it overdone."

Vanguard in a letter to Lee in 1934 expressed doubt as to the value of CIS calling it autobiographical material in non-autobiographical form. Guy was considered to be not credible and not an individual until the raffling of a pair of binoculars. The planned offensive part was magnificent and moving but merely an account of warfare. It could scarcely be called a war novel.

Lee's interest inexactitude may be illustrated by his reply to Werner Laurie who accepted the book and who thought "Barbed Wire" might be a better selling title. Lee wrote back in 1936 to say he would prefer the name CIS and wanted the sub title: "A study in Nervous Social and Material Disintegration."

As with Lee's other novels the published commentary concerning CIS reveals impact and controversy. There is a decreasing amount for each book shown by the relative number of commentaries and by the sales figures. While CIS is highly valued its appeal is narrower. As part of a sequence of three books its significance grows.

## (iv) Later Criticism

47.

Frank Sargeson's commentary may be the first appraisal .

"Mr Lee must unquestionably draw the attention of everyone genuinely interested in the development of New Zealand literature." He writes of "three outstanding novels," and also uses the term: "spiritual autobiography." To see why Lee has not written a really great novel Sargeson compares COP with Huckleberry Finn. Sargeson favours the evocative method. Twain evokes childhood. "Success in the creation of this kind is evidence of genius of the highest order. Porcello's childhood is described from the point of view of a man of mature years who imparts into his description all the conclusions his experience has brought him." He thinks TH shows the author's shortcomings at their worst. "Even in particular scenes you sometimes feel he has passed over actual experience in favour of creating people and their setting out of general observation." He thinks CIS is probably Lee's best book, the disconcerting theorising there being in character. Lee writes at his soundest, Sargeson thinks, when closest to personal experience, but CIS, an intensely individual war novel, is not every man's war experience. Sargeson wonders if Lee's individualism will eventually turn out to his advantage and demonstrate he has the creative power of the great novelist.<sup>48.</sup> "He has not yet written a novel in which he himself, so far as such a thing is possible, does not appear." Lee's footnote to this opinion is, "Creative power is the bank. I could invent a novel a month. The hardest task I have ever been faced with is giving power to real experience."<sup>49.</sup> The Sargeson criticism is

undocumented but reference in it to CIS as a recently published third novel places the date at 1937. As it aims at a general assessment it has been included in this section of later comments and opinions. Nearly ten years pass before another attempt is made to place Lee.

Reid in 1946 calls Lee: "something of a critical problem." GOP he finds often crude and violent, sordid, the propaganda naked: "yet the book is informed with a passionate humanitarianism." It is the first time the tale of the underprivileged is told in New Zealand. TH he finds less sincere or impressive. CIS despite crudities of construction and style has much to commend it as a picture of the common man at war. Reid objects to the political and social propaganda he finds in the novels.

Rhodes in 1947 writes; "the politician, the propagandist and the novelist are so combined in his person that it is easier to examine his political career than it is to estimate his importance as a writer." Rhodes doubts if you can answer precisely the question when does art become propaganda and when, more important, does propaganda become art. He admires Lee's iconoclasm. GOP is claimed as Lee's best novel. If Lee's breaking of the rules of the artistic games are crimes, he says, then Lee shares common ground with many great writers. Rhodes finds it well nigh impossible to disentangle all the doubtful qualities but he is more moved by the artlessness of Lee than by some stories of Katherine Mansfield and Sargeson which may be more artistically satisfying. He is uncertain about what the phrase "artistically satisfying" implies and involves. He is certain, "that passages in GOP and in TH are capable of moving me in a way in which very little

New Zealand prose has moved me, and I am not prepared to say that the effect is due to the theme rather than the treatment of the theme".<sup>51.</sup>

In the same essay Rhodes argues that suspense in TH is maintained either because of the author's skill or the reader's conviction that here is the material of life.

Rhodes also considers Lee has captured aspects of the New Zealand scene in a more profound way than anything presented in Cresswell's autobiography. Where else in New Zealand writing, he asks, has the aspiration of those hungry for life found adequate expression? "In terms of the art of the novel he may not be a great writer but as far as New Zealand is concerned an important one. He points the way to a fiction of social meaning."<sup>52.</sup>

The unanswered question is: do the "defects" complained of, carelessness, insensitivity to form, overemphasis, outweigh the "virtues" of truth, sincerity, poignancy, courage and honesty?

In a recent (1969) statement Rhodes says: "the effect in much of the book COP is due to the powerful expression of the theme."<sup>53.</sup>

David Ballantyne wrote to Lee in 1949: "... I mentioned COP in an article I did recently for The New York Times. I said it was the only book New Zealand cared to see reprinted."<sup>54.</sup>

Burton in 1958 advocates flamboyance, colour, variety and flexibility. He regards literature as a dynamic act which must be spontaneous. He praises COP as "probably the first book by a New Zealander to make a profound impression not on a small literary group only but on the community at large," but he says: "There is scarcely enough imaginative treatment to make it a novel rather than straight autobiography."<sup>55.</sup>

Davin in 1956 dismisses Lee in two sentences (Hyde, Mulgan, Sargeson, Davin, Guthrie Wilson, and Courage are given two paragraphs each and,

with the exception of Hyde, illustrative extracts. He compares COP and Man Alone: "Again John A. Lee in COP had given such a point of view but he was writing very close to autobiography whereas Mulgan was not. In his novel he relies on memory, it is his memory of things he has observed and not of actions where he had himself been the underdog." <sup>56.</sup> It would be of interest to discover the original manuscript which Lee in Delinquent Days (p35) claims "coloured" Man Alone, in order to gauge the depth of Mulgan's debt to Lee.

Holcroft in 1964 recalls that COP was praised on its first appearance by critics ready to welcome a new and strong note of realism in New Zealand fiction. Admitting that "the book has moving scenes" he says that "the man on the soap box is seldom silent." Holcroft is also concerned about the paucity of imitators or followers. He also implies exaggeration: "Poor children were with us; but in my experience they don't seem to have been numerous." In addition Holcroft thinks that as "most of us have memories of a childhood lacking in drama, or a drama contained in little things, visible only to us, only poets such as Katherine Mansfield and Janet Frame can describe them." <sup>57.</sup> It would be of interest to know if the reception of Beyond the Breakers and Brazilian Daughter determined Mr Holcroft's opinion. Pearson in <sup>58.</sup> "Fretful Sleepers" also objected to Lee's truth.

Gordon in 1965 notes Man Alone as the first modern New Zealand novel, and that the main defects of COP are typical of those of the pre-1939 period. He thinks they contain too many happenings, that they are often autobiographical, structurally weak, without memorable characters or philosophic viewpoint. They do contain excellent back-

grounds however. They do not satisfy the critical reader.<sup>59.</sup>

Jean Stevens in 1966 regards Lee's novels COP and TH historically<sup>as</sup> of major importance and intrinsically worth serious attention. She regards TH as Lee's best novel. It has thematic unity and fewer explanations clog the movement. COP is said to contain emotional overwriting. But for all the technical errors of COP and TH "there is none to compare with them in power." For her, CIS has no centre and lacks restraint and Guy never comes to life.<sup>60.</sup>

McCormick in 1947 considered the best episodes of COP "must rank high in the scale of New Zealand writing." What he refers to as a fault is said to mar TH and CIS more seriously but, "the trilogy ... was an important addition to New Zealand life not only on account of its intrinsic qualities but also because it helped destroy some of the comfortable illusions which had grown up round this country's social conditions and its history. This is not to belittle Lee's works, for a people bemused by false visions and blind to the world about them cannot claim to be mature."<sup>61.</sup>

McCormick in 1959 states that it is an open question whether COP is a good or bad novel. Although there is too much unassimilated descriptive matter and undisguised propaganda it is infinitely more than a social document. The best episodes show an imaginative quality. "The deficiencies of style and construction only mar COP; they do not outweigh its great merits." He goes on to say it is not in the first rank of fiction because of its defects.<sup>62.</sup>

McCormick in 1964 finds in a New Zealand literature course at Leeds that "COP seemed to have grown in stature and was generally admired by

63.  
students."

Two recent references conclude this section. Shadbolt in The  
64.  
Shell Guide to New Zealand (1968) refers to Lee as "the most effective  
chronicler of New Zealand poverty." Cross in the same year in The  
New Zealand Listener comparing Katherine Mansfield and Lee, preferring  
65.  
Lee, writes: "In Lee, the lesser artist, is more truth." A third comment  
by another practising writer will be introduced in the section, on  
propaganda.

It is fitting that Lee should have the last word, (already written  
in his first publication GOP) on the critic: "His own carcass  
unattractive, he yet excites attention by wounding someone greater.  
The desire to wound is not the cause; the critic is kindly but he has  
a desire to be noticed." (p.49)

The investigation of the most damaging charges in this chapter will  
form the subject matter of the next four chapters.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My intention in this chapter is to examine the autobiographical aspect of Lee's narrative technique. I am doing this first because much of the original response to COP was determined by Lee's autobiographical method and later comment was aimed at the method. The charges are that autobiography is an inferior form as it is factual and non-creative, that it is easy to write from personal experience, that a main interest is guessing how much is based on personal experience, that it is immoral to reveal private family life or unpleasant aspects of national life, that the subject matter is only of historical interest.

I do not intend to examine all the objections. Literary precedent, establishes the validity of writing from experience.<sup>1</sup> The morality of telling the truth must remain an open question. The criticism "of historical interest only" will be explored in Chapter 4. The question of immediate interest is: how factual are Lee's books?

The amount of determinable factual detail in Lee's books is small but significant. The historical circumstances of each book is generally known. Sinclair, for example, in A History of New Zealand writes: "Thousands of people were living in the towns in such circumstances as are painfully recorded in John A. Lee's novel COP." The building then known as the Burnham Industrial School in modified form still exists. "Burnham," Mr Andersen writes, "is handy to Christchurch. The original centre building of the Industrial School is still there, in the army

camp. It can be seen from the train and from the main road. It became famous because of John A. Lee's book.<sup>2.</sup> The basic history of Porcello-Guy parallel that of Lee and parts can be publically verified. A NZ War History, for example records that "one notable feat of fearless gallantry was on the part of private John A. Lee. He tackled single handed a machine gun near Wytchaete road and captured four gunners. Later when the Taranaki company was checked by an enemy post, Lee with two of his comrades, worked round behind the enemy and rushed the post capturing forty men and two machine guns so enabling our advance to proceed." For this action Lee was awarded the D.C.M. During the German offensive on the Somme late in the war Lee's left forearm was blown away. The preceding items were published in a preface to the Werner Laurie edition of CIS. A similar account may be found in the NZ War History listed in the bibliography (see Stewart).

Lee's boyhood delinquency can be established although few records remain. When the identity of the anonymous writer of GOP became known the Child Welfare Department discovered they were holding a sum of money for a former state ward John A. Lee. Mr Beck wrote to Lee telling him about the sum of money and informing him he was entitled to it if he could establish his identity. Acknowledgement of identity was subsequently made and the money claimed. Beck's second letter to Lee dated June 11th 1935 states: "I am in receipt of your recent letter and am pleased to enclose herewith a Money Order amounting to £34 -4 -1 being the total amount held here on your account... I should be pleased to see you at any time. Burnham was closed in 1918 and many changes have taken place since then. You will I trust find an entirely

different view point of dealing with youth now to what obtained in those days."

And the shadow of doubt cast on the legitimacy of Porcello in COP and on Lee has been publicly clarified. Although on this matter the author was personally indifferent public inaccuracy was something else. Lee writes: "May I say I didn't know, hadn't troubled to find out, didn't think it mattered whether I was or not. They (a Hastings newspaper) found out and cringed."<sup>3.</sup>

Known variants are few. Only a full biography could reveal them all. The period for CIS is stated on page 18 to be 1915 but Lee was still in New Zealand at that time, or at least his war service did not begin until 1916. Olsen's thesis (he has seen the court conviction) states Lee was sentenced to 12 strokes, (Porcello received six,) and his age on entry is said to be fifteen not thirteen or fourteen as indicated in COP (pp 214, 221). The general lack of chronological accuracy may be interpreted in a number of ways.

The characterisation of Porcello is significant. The Argus review, Melbourne, 1936, of TH includes the statement, "On the fly leaf of a friend's copy of COP Lee wrote Porcello is seventy-five per cent Lee and twenty-five per cent imagination." The reviewer guessed that TH might be more autobiographical. With reference to COP it is of interest to note further points from Olsen, and with reference to TH points made by the present superintendent of Child Welfare.

Olsen's thesis, on Lee as politician, contains two chapters where "the question of Lee's trustworthiness" may be raised: the first chapter dealing with Lee's early life and the chapter dealing with his expulsion from the Labour party. Olsen argues that the key fact

of Lee's early life was poverty and that an analysis of his response to it will enable a better understanding of the man. In the preface Olsen writes: "Chapter I deals with John A. Lee's early life and with his character. Most of the information has been drawn from Lee's COP. Some of Lee's statements can be checked, but most of them have to be accepted. One man, Mr R. McIvery, who attended the same school as John A. Lee said he had not been aware of any distortion in COP when he read it. He did not claim, however, to have known John A. Lee very well."

Mr L.G. Anderson writes: "A former member of our staff, now deceased ... had earlier worked at Burnham. Mr X told me he remembered John Lee as an inmate there. His recollection was that John Lee was a well behaved boy, easy to get on with, and that he should never have been sent to an industrial school. Mr X's opinion was that John Lee in his books, made himself out to be a 'tougher' boy than he had been in fact. Mr X often told me that Burnham was a good place, and that the staff there, with few exceptions, were decent, kindly people doing their best for the boys in accordance with the accepted standards of that time. Mr X, who was the kindest of men, claimed that the happiest days of his life were spent at Burnham. He discounted a lot of talk about the bad old days of Industrial Schools. My experience has led me to believe he was right;..."

Mr Andersen continues: "My belief is that the truth about the industrial school system probably lies about half way between the impression created by Mr Lee in his books and the impression created by our former staff member. Obviously we would not want to put the clock back... Our knowledge of child behaviour and social work has grown

since then and will continue to grow but, at the same time, it would be unfair to judge the industrial schools entirely by the recollections of the worst things that happened (or are alleged to have happened). As always one should try to strike a balance between the bad and the good." <sup>4.</sup>

The following tabulated extracts from some of the letters, supplied by Lee together with photographs to Truth and published by Truth in 1936, provide further illumination.

1. Albany Porcello is me, only the sex is different. I was like him at school and had plenty of strap. His experience of religion was mine. I know what it was to go to school three miles distant with no dinner and to fill myself with water cress from the creek, and fennel.
2. I don't think we have turned out such a pair of criminals after all Jack, although we were called so as boys. Like yourself I had a long war service with the Otago Infantry and later with the N.Z. Engineers.
3. As an old boy of Burnham I am following your book in Truth very closely. I may say the yard with its circle often haunts me.
4. I wonder where that devil of hell is? Dead, I hope... Remember how they used to crowd us into that room so that we should hear the sound of the blows and the cries of the poor lads from the next room?
5. I have had to walk round the big ring they call the detention yard until my feet were blistered and sore.
6. I was through that hell. Because I was a cripple I could do no work, and was kept in the detention yard for three and a half years. (This statement was made by a man who came into Truth's office).
7. An ex-warder stated that, "the whole environment to my mind was absolutely against improving the lad's outlook on life.

The next series of extracts and summaries are from letters <sup>in Mr. Lee's files</sup> which to my knowledge have not previously been printed unless use of some of them has been made by T. Prebble who had access to The Hunted folio for research papers on the development of The Child Welfare System.

1. You are quite right about when boys go to church, if they smile, well they are brought before the manager and they get a hiding.
2. A letter from Australia states the writer escaped three times was brought back twice and flogged. The third time he and another succeeded in stowing away at Dunedin. They landed in Melbourne in 1912.
3. Another states not all religious people were like the ones Lee had the misfortune to meet.
4. Another sees again the body of the boy who committed suicide, taken from the lamp room and the laundry.
5. On reading COP a letter of praise was received from a writer who identified himself as the fellow who kept saying, "I don't care". He was committed to Burnham with Lee.
6. A twenty-one page letter from a J.P. includes the following:  
I who have lived in and witnessed the scene (the gorging feats) thousands of times give testimony to the effect that your account is a positive masterpiece of descriptive work and is accurate to the smallest detail. How I laughed when I read it. Though one remembers there was nothing to laugh about at the time.
7. I can see the story is quite according to the facts and I can fill in the proper names although I cannot place Albany, nor the two men who did the hunting. The Henderson picture is true but the Sergeant Major seemed a fairly good sort but of course I seldom saw inside.
8. If ever there was a sadist it was him (Hendersen). He used to flog us kids many times unknown to the manager apart from boxing our ears and pulling our noses.
9. The man whom I name - was the headmaster there and if you forgot to say sir to him he would smack you right across the face with his hand or drag you round the floor by the nose or else pull your ear for you.
10. Another is declared a good euphonium player who became an asset to the band.

The publication of Delinquent Days caused a man who was in Weraroa in 1911 to compose a poem called "Tides of Memory". As he had a club boot, (half his right foot was burnt off when he was 18 months old) he never escaped. Three of ten stanzas read as follows:

For nine long years the world was lost  
 A number was my name  
 When I was freed to face a life  
 Without a single aim.

Turn back the tides of memory  
 And give me yesterday  
 Give me again each childhood hour  
 Ere childhood lost its way

I dare not ask for teenage hours  
 For them I never had  
 Crushed and silenced 'neath the tread  
 Of feet - by Justice clad.

Finally, a note from a teacher :

Arthur Bird a fellow teacher told me his father who became Chief Inspector for New Zealand had been a pupil teacher in the Industrial School you describe and that he said how true your story was.

And a note from Lee, *evidently to himself* :

A note I have tells me that when I went to Dunedin I met Billy Cole an undertaker, once monitor of no. 1 dormitory. He told me he had a discussion with the ex-manager after TH was published. Archy thought I had overdone Burnham but Cole insisted I had it to the last syllable. He said that Archy said of me, "He was a lovely boy to have in the house." (I was his head houseboy). But there was desperation behind those big brown eyes.

On the same day I met MacMahon who came and introduced himself, "Remember me? I'm the fellow whose nose used to bleed when slipped by -

Two unique confirmations of my book.

It may be seen that opinion on punishment is consistent. Letters condemning the sadistic Henderson indicate unnecessary cruelty existed. Opinion differs on other matters. The novel focusses on punishment and escape, the injustice of the long sentence and the lack of positive rehabilitation. Such focussing is characteristic of Lee's method - nothing inessential to the main theme is included. Details only of selected activities are given. The reader does not know, might never

know until the recapitulation in Here And Now (Mr 1957) what went on in the workshops (marked on the plan published in Truth) or how the few who did shoe repairing or carpentering were selected. Farming activities are not described, nor swimming; there is no sense of a timetable, no details of lessons but the uncivilised manner of eating, the drudgery of scrubbing floors, the lack of proper sex education, the unimaginative repression of intelligence is emphatically presented. It is not the purpose of this essay to establish all the factual circumstances. Felt injustice inevitably has a basis in fact and Lee's concern is continual as the Here And Now recapitulation shows as well as a letter to Hannan whose reply dated August 9th 1965 assured Lee: "every institution has its own library." There are also numerous references in the early parts of Delinquent Days. Lee also states in the Here And Now article that "Most of the staff were good folk caught in the toils of an impossible system." He wonders on learning of someone who knew him at Burnham and who had been in prison for forty years if it could have happened to him: "Who can tell, for I was as restless a lad as ever lived, and Burnham was not a school for good citizenship but a cage ... the best boys ran."

At this point, the question of autobiography merges with that of intent, value and propaganda. The immediate literary significance may now be put. Because the books are not strictly fact they should be regarded as fiction. Authenticity, which is not the same thing, is granted. In addition to the preceding information or external evidence there is the internal evidence of the books themselves, statements made in them by the author himself and private statements by the author which echo the former but which are more explicit. Together they justify some

fictional appellation.

The preface to COP (the work is in the first person) uses the word "story" seven times indicating an awareness of fiction and serving as a warning to the reader. The last paragraph contains "Nor will I swear to the verbal accuracy of recorded conversations although I can testify to their essential honesty."

TH is in the third person. The preface, in the first person, indicates the story will be based on personal experience but: "There was such a place as Burnham, no such place as Froonsville. The characters in this story are fictional, the raw material was real."

The narrator's statement on page 33 of COP makes it clear that the story will not be a complete record of experience but a selection of important happenings, the milestones, supposedly arranged in the order of remembering which may or may not be time order. The important happenings are the ones intensely felt, the milestones of the spirit, the ones which seem to have registered the pulsation of each heartbeat. They are of short duration. The times between, the miles will be ignored: "Memory never flows in a clear stream." The blurring of ocular details has been mentioned previously.

All this suggests fiction and imagination, the rearranging and transmuting of the known into new creations which may not always be completely truthful and accurate in detail.

On page 41 of Shining with The Shiner Lee uses the term "creative writing." The dedication to Delinquent Days again makes use of the terms "pulse" and "memory". "Memory recalls the occasion, imagination adds the pulse." And on page four the narrator talks of giving

"imaginative depth to fact," which in practice can mean and in places has meant the alteration, exaggeration, or concealment of fact, all legitimate activities of the novelist. Lee's attitude to himself varies. In Psychopathology in Politics which is reproduced in Simple on a Soap Box he refers three times to "The novelist in me." (pp 165 etseq). In Delinquent Days he feels compelled to say (p18) that "Accuracy has always been essential in all my autobiographical books." Accuracy may or may not mean factual accuracy. On page 18 he writes "I was under a cloud, the Burnham boy, and as I write I do not really know whether the cloud was caused by others or induced by the imagination." Surely both. And his knowledge of fact may be determined from what has already been established and from this quotation from Delinquent Days: "When fact tilts against an emotional wave, fact is the casualty. Fact counts for nothing against religious or political or any other strong emotionalism, but only in time." (p 56) Time changes non-empirical fact too. In TH Porcello has escaped for the fourth time and is sheltered by a farmer's wife. The narrator comments: "What queer fortune placed that kindly Samaritan on outpost amid the winds of that inhospitable gorge to succour runaway boys at the moment of their supreme distress."(p 156) In Delinquent Days (97) occurs the comment "The time to check wrong doing is as wrong doing commences. In much the same way I believe that no one helps an escapee from prison by sheltering him from the police." The discrepancy may only be apparent. It does not invalidate the ideals presented in TH. Lee's attitude to the insignificance of chronological fact relative to emotional fact or his concern with universals rather than trivial

particulars may also be seen in his allowing COP to be regarded as his first book or in his apparent unconcern that the front piece of the 1963 paper back edition should state that COP was hawked in 1922 when it was not published until 1934. The general mythological aura about bookcover biography however is merely typical of the genre.

That Lee's imagination was recognised apart from his books is acknowledged by Sutch in The Quest For Security In N.Z. Of the early Labour Party he writes, "the most imaginative mind was probably that of John A. Lee." In any case it would be futile to deny imagination to the man who could write notes for the Labour Party from the nationalist's point of view.

Lee, today, on the autobiographical method writes: "The fact of my books is the stuff of life ... but the form of the fact is something that demands a creative imaginative power.... Everything in TH happened to me or before my eyes but did it happen in the exact sequence, was there a clock ticking parallel. The background is ever real. I may at times manipulate the people. Where fact and fiction merge is something folk will find out when I am dead. The fact will probably be stronger than the text.

I wouldn't say COP was a complete family chronicle. I'll leave it at that. It was a complete happening and I gave it a pulse." <sup>5.</sup>

One problem of the autobiographical method, particularly if the tale is told in the first person, is that fiction may be mistaken for fact and action taken. This problem is magnified when the novelist is a public figure. Wilmot in The N.Z. Magazine remarked that some readers of COP leaped to the conclusion that the book was faithful autobiography,

that Lee's childhood and background were totally sordid, and that "This incautious conclusion led to threats of libel actions by Lee against several newspapers. Completely lacking a case, they apologised and in some cases handed over damages without going into Court." I have seen one statement of account for the 1938 Hastings case previously mentioned. Only Lee's posthumous papers may reveal the whole truth.

A second problem concerns how much truth to reveal, in order to say what one wants to say without jeopardising one's career on the one hand and one's principles on the other. Close friends and relatives would also be an inhibiting factor. Exactly why GOP was first published anonymously is not clear. Shaw did remark that Bunyan in his Pilgrim's Progress told that shame was the hardest nuisance to get rid of among all the pests on the road to the celestial city, his shame being illicit religion, and that Dickens being declassified in the blacking factory was shame again but that Lee should not remain anonymous any longer than he could help as it took a long time to become known in the wide world of literature and one could not afford to lose a moment of it. <sup>6.</sup> TH was openly acknowledged and publicised. Nevertheless the sequel to CIB, claimed to be 'political dynamite', remains unpublished to this day. Speculation on another Lee explosion is warranted.

A third problem of the method is that it can lead to a judgment of the man by the book or vice versa. Lee was aware that his books would be used to try and subvert his politics.

Finally, from a critic's point of view, if a writer has first to live through in fact and circumstance every experience he is to write about his output will be limited by the number and kind of experiences

he has had. Lee's total published output of significant fiction including the short stories compares favourably with that of other New Zealand writers. Professor E.A. Horsman of Otago University when conferring Lee's honorary doctorate said in his address that "If the politician lost power the writer gained it, not only in John A Lee's Weekly, but in the short stories and in the autobiographical works of the 1960s like Simple on a Soap Box." No final assessment can be made until all of Lee's numerous unpublished stories have been read.

The politician who writes novels is safe as long as he does not bring discredit to the party or accepts the role of dutiful servant to the state. Such a conformist role Lee could not fulfil. "A point must arrive at which freedom of expression would be of more importance to me than membership of the Labour party" (SCASB pp174-5).

The problem is acutely stated in a letter to J.B. Condliffe Feb 7 1939 :. . . "I have great difficulties as a scribbler. As a politician I have taken many literary risks but of course you will know how Socialism In New Zealand became the book of the election. There are some problems that I want to deal with but some problems if handled frankly would spell my death as a politician and I have a part to play even if the part is only in organising socialist opinion in the Labour Party."  
7.

Some further evidence of the problem in relation to politics as it concerns the novels of this thesis will be given.

The opening sentence of Delinquent Days is written from the point of view of other people: "Some people say I ruined my political career

by writing books which told some of the truth about myself and my antecedents, others that ruin set in when I told the truth about some of my associates." A personal statement reads "Writing ruined my political career. Psychopathology in Politics was a last straw. There were murmurs about Socialism in New Zealand. Parry believed COP brought pressure on Savage from the Catholic church although Marist Father Kimball was enthusiastic. They feared the fellow who could write that book heaven knows why. I was applauded in the party for pamphlets, speakers' notes, political papers, but the non readers flinched at my books ... they feared that like H.G. Wells I might write something the party <sup>could not endorse. They loved my work for the party,</sup> feared the effect of my non-political writing." 8.

Yet, "I would rather have been able to write the first of my books <sup>9.</sup> (COP) than to have known high office."

Lee states on page 241 of Simple on A Soap Box that "My three novels were hawked and assailed." No evidence of the hawking was kept but it is claimed that the book COP was taken from door to door and cyclostyled sheets containing odd parts were handed out as well. Leaflets were issued to rebut the assault. One such surviving leaflet is headed: "Good enough for a Governor-General, but not good enough for the touts of Mr Wildish." Quotations, from various sources, on the book's merits follow. The leaflet concludes: "Show your contempt for Personal Abuse by Voting LEE."

The reviewer of CIS in the N.Z. Radio Record Aug 13, 1937 saw the preface as political expediency. The preface stated Lee's hatred of war was not to be accounted a plea for British disarmament. Fascism was a major evil and Lee preferred, a regrettable necessity, to see

Britain strong. However, this view is maintained today (See N.Z. Weekly News, page 8 July 28, 1969).

Questioned by Truth in Jan (21st) 1936 about TH, "Mr Lee laughingly stated that he anticipated no political repercussions from the book. Asked if it was correct that since his elevation to his new post in the government, the book had been substantially excised, Mr Lee said that the book had been slightly reduced but there was no political significance in that whatsoever. It was entirely a question of the size of the book."

In a statement made to Truth on <sup>following</sup> Aug 9th in a full page announcement of the serial rights Lee wrote: "It would have been more pleasant for a politician to have avoided the portion of this book dealing with sex."

Linking a scarcity of characters with the autobiographical method is a debatable procedure. To create one interesting character in the round is an achievement and in Lee's case there are as well a number of readily identifiable type characters, some recurring in each novel and some merely but vividly sketched in (Mr Tucker, for example in TH). They will be related to the next topic of social comment. Apart from the principals Guy and Porcello, some of the more developed ones may be mentioned. They are Alice MacDonald, and Nick in COP, Henderson and Foreman in TH, Anne in CIS. There are over thirty characters in the three novels. While the novels may be judged defective by applying the criterion of "the greater the number of fully developed different characters the greater the novel" it would seem beside the intention of the novels and their particular success which was the establishment of that which unites people rather than the opposite. This has meant

some characters have tended to become caricatures or the embodiments of ideas. I do not think it has much to do with the autobiographical method as such or Chapman's theme in "Fiction and the Social Pattern" that writers of the period suffered from a lack of widely recognised types. An early comment on Sargeson would not be out of place here. In Ormond Burton's view "Sargeson has keen perception, great sincerity and extreme sensitivity. He described the type of character he knows, character which is real but can hardly be said to be typical. You feel that he taunts New Zealand with a distortion ... due to a colour blindness of the spirit."<sup>10</sup> It could be added that all the main characters in Owls Do Cry are slightly different aspects of one central type, that Daphne, Toby, Chicks, and Francis are in fact one symbolic representation.

Autobiography in theory is a personal recital of facts and opinions in chronological order about the life of the author. In practice there are few such books. It may be said all books are based on experience whether personal or vicarious as in the case of thrillers. Lee's works are far from straight, or naive autobiography but are the more powerful because they are based on personal experience. Clearly Lee is a shaper as well as a bearer of memory. Once Lee's works are accepted as fictions whatever name is applied, novel, autobiographical novel, or Bildungsroman the question concerning the proportion of fact to fiction is not important. What is important is the probability of the actions presented and their necessity, or, if the writer distorts parts of his story, known facts, in order to secure greater verisimilitude for the whole story, a consideration of the writer's purpose and the values expressed. In Lee's case this leads first to the question of propaganda.

## PROPAGANDA

In this chapter I intend to discuss the second major charge, that of propaganda. Some aspects of style and narrative technique are treated incidentally. Lee's novels are said to be marred by propaganda or declared to be propaganda. The accusation has probably developed because of a complex relationship between Lee's politics and his literature. The term of reproach has not been defined by even the most sympathetic of the commentators in Chapter 1.

Statements of avowed or implied purpose may not necessarily refute the charge but are of interest. In the preface of GOP (p7) the narrator states; "This story was put down that I might take stock of my progress, and thus ascertain what sort of child I was." Is self analysis propaganda? Novels written as part of an attempt of their creators to understand their own lives do involve criticism of life. In the preface of TH (p6) he writes: "It seems to me that those who lie abed safe from the depredations of such as I was might be interested in knowing a little about the hunted." This implies enjoyment on the adventure level and also a muted appeal for tolerance or acceptance: knowing is forgiving. In the same preface is: "I have a debt to the tens of thousands," the boys in state institutions ignorant of sex. This implies social conscience and didactic intent. Also relevant is: "The ancient mental science of catholicism is very modern." In CIS page 203 is found the statement, "Confession, open confession, is the supreme exorciser." This seems to be the voice of the author. In I Fight For New Zealand

under the heading of "Resurrection" there is a modified quotation from St. John 8:32, "The Truth shall make you free." Is a love of truth propaganda? In Rhetoric at the Red Dawn (p97) Lee, whose relationship with Downie Stewart was "alternately centrifugal and centripetal," states he once advised Downie who had found himself suppressing incidents which were unsavoury to "Put in the lot."

In a statement in Truth Aug 9, 1936, Lee said, about TH, "The book has been written as a story, and not as propaganda, but I know that public men, clergymen, prison administrators, are interested in juvenile delinquents, and to avoid the problem of sex would be to rob the book of certain lessons."

As a public figure of the times such a stand would have required nerve. The Truth serialisation shows no lack of it. Each episode contained a picture of the author as adult or child. Each episode had full page treatment - pictures of Burnham, interiors of cells, the grilled ventilators, the detention yard, the main building showing the window through which Porcello escaped. Title and author with full parliamentary qualifications always appeared in large headlines.

1.

Contemporary unpublished statements of purpose include:

I had to write the book (COP) and TH. I had burned for years to tell the story.

I am a propagandist but the purpose of my writing was not propaganda. I had a story to tell that I was determined to tell whatever the consequences. That the propagandist effort was probably greater because the story itself held people was a circumstance of the effort. (of COP)

When I write I get profoundly immersed in the experience, never think of its effect... but the book is written by one who for all his adult life had been committed to an attempt to lift the level of the social gutter. That is incidental. (of COP)

I wasn't conscious of a social purpose as I wrote TH. I wanted to tell a story and damn the consequences and the more vital the presentation the greater the social impact I suppose.

Of CIS: Important to me that people should know the hell to which young New Zealand was committed... having a point of view about yesterday and tomorrow did show, but incidentally, not purposefully... fashion caught up with my book 30 years in arrears as truth about the Western Front and the murderous imbecilities of Haig and Co started to out.

To me the past is rich in material that must be recorded because if my pen doesn't most of it never will. I have left reams for the future historian.

Two further retrospective statements indicating cathartic or therapeutic purpose fulfilled if at the expense of career follow:

N.Z. Listener Nov, 1967 "A Life Long Rebel"

In a letter to Linda McDougall ( who describes the birth of a T.V. documentary on Lee's life) Lee wrote, "Being a writer there is as much experience to note in being thrown down the stairs as in the act of climbing. The recording curiosity is a writer's armour against disaster. The salvage often outweighs the wreck."

Simple On A Soap Box (p176)

Asked to retract and apologise for his article Psychopathology in Politics Lee read out a statement by H.G. Wells on the honour and dignity of a free mind:

I shall keep on saying and writing just exactly what I am moved to say until I am forcibly stopped.

Clearly none of these statements can be confused with party politics. They are the statements of a novelist. This is not to deny that the novels have political implications. Such implications are the attributes of all 'true' novels the growth of which is traditionally associated with the rise of democracy. Olssen in his thesis on Lee as politician assumes from his reading of GOP that Lee "hoped to awaken the conscience of his native country," and adds:

"Like Jack London and Upton Sinclair he believed in the power of the word to convert and he hoped to convert people to a political philosophy which would destroy the system which had seen one sister become a prostitute, two sisters die and himself become a thief and a fugitive."

Lee states today: "Actually my writing did bring to my support people who would not have voted for us politically, estranged fewer. I was not to know this as I wrote... we thought the hawking might have some slight effect. It had only the effect of causing people to read and I would say five out of six who read became my supporters. I polled the N.Z. record majority beating it in 1938 which stands to this day. The evidence is that my writing made friends."<sup>2.</sup>

It may be true to say Lee's primary purpose was autobiographical but such a saying is an oversimplification. It would seem Lee regarded writing as therapy, in the case of COP to exorcise an intense feeling of shame and social injustice, in TH an intense feeling of alienation and legal injustice, and in CIS the shock of war and the bungling of high command;<sup>3.</sup> as a vehicle of ideas; as a means of mapping New Zealand history, fostering the sense of nationhood, shaking complacency; as a means of expressing permanent values through criticism of life as he experienced it in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, at home, at school, at work, in prison and at war. Each novel involves each purpose. The values expressed or the implicit purpose will be described in Chapter 4.

That an element of the crusader entered into the original motivation of the novels cannot be denied unless Lee was schizophrenic. "Our incendiarism was of the heart and mind and we attempted to inflame

human passion and awaken the will for a more decent society," he writes in Simple on A Soap Box (p283). While the main effect, for example, of COP is one of infinite and reflective compassion, the incendiarism being tempered by intellect, the sound of anger is heard in the dedication and epilogue. One may also consider that the immediate occasion of COP was the riots of 1932. "I started COP with the will to finish as I saw thousands of hungry men demonstrating."<sup>4</sup> The first riot broke out in Dunedin, Lee's home town, on the 8th April. The following week in Auckland a second riot occurred a little after 7.30 p.m. on Thursday 14th. According to Monigatti (N.Z. Headlines p134) Lee took part in the procession.

Where the term "crusade against poverty" occurs in COP (p121) the narrator is thinking of Rose and his guilt and of the crusade as a form of restitution. "For the world has other daughters, and the gutter is international." Past and present merge. "As I write, there are thousands of unemployed girls in New Zealand, and they live in starved and undernourished homes." The chapter title indicates poverty as a cause of prostitution and the narrator's statement about society being organised to victimise the very poor, underlines it.

The novels do criticise and comment on the social evils of war, poverty, and the maltreatment of children but this is not necessarily propaganda. As well, the novels are as much about character as about social conditions or environment.

Wellek and Warren in Theory of Literature (p35) suggest that if propaganda means an effort whether conscious or not to influence readers to share one's attitude towards life it is reasonable to contend that

all sincere artists are or ought to be propagandists for all serious art implies a view of life.

The debate concerning the relative merits of art as insight into truth and art as the persuasive purveyor of truth finally resolves into a question of artistic responsibility and the value of the truth conveyed. Lee's art does not confuse emotion and thinking (the association of introspection and action is remarkable) nor has his vision of life moved, by hypnotic suggestion, to premature or naive action. The narrator of GOP often reflects on Porcello's behaviour, and in TH Porcello escapes finally only after he has achieved a sense of maturity and is not swayed by the passion of the moment. He leaves in a moment of sad clairvoyance, a moment of truth. Guy suffers an identity crisis and recovery which the reader is detached from yet shares in.

I would say in Lee's art is a combination of insight, persuasion, and catharsis. The sincerity of feeling arises from the stories being grounded in experience.

It is, possibly, propaganda in the sense of persuasive purveyance of truth that Joan Stevens has in mind when she attempts to define the New Zealand novel by tracing four stages in its development: recording, exploiting, preaching, interpreting. "The true business of the novel, in its maturity, is surely," she asserts, "the last, to interpret something to somebody."<sup>5</sup> In the Encyclopedia of N.Z. vol 2 she states Lee's novels are in the preaching tradition but with an added violence derived from the overseas literature of protest. It is of interest to note here the opinion of a writer whose name has been linked with Lee's by D.O.W. Hall in the same encyclopedia, and the link acclaimed by Joan Stevens in The New Zealand Novel.

Noel Hilliard writes: "But greatly as I respect Professor Stevens I do not feel that this kind of grouping gets us very far. She elsewhere uses the term, 'preaching' - this and that is a preaching novel, a categorising which again I can't see is very useful and seems to carry the implication that by definition the genre is inferior... I need hardly reiterate that I have a profound respect for Lee as a political figure, as a man, and as a writer. But on the purely literary level I would say: He has done his thing, I am trying to do mine. The tradition is (if you'll pardon the phrase) bigger than both of us." <sup>6.</sup>

All artists select and focus. Burnham may not have been as black a hell as depicted in TH but evidence and history shows it was no heaven, that the portrayal was no more partial than Seddon's dream of 'God's Own Country,' which ignored 'Athol Place'.

The term propaganda in general implies calculation and intent to propagate a specific doctrine and takes the form of expounding a case. It can give rise to no great art. Analysis and explanation of a social problem belong to sociology or history or both. If propaganda in this sense must be applied to Lee's novels it can with some reason concern the chapter, "Vile Sex" in TH. There is the authorial acknowledgement of intent in the preface and subsequent publicity in Truth to support the view. The chapter, however, is not superfluous to the whole sequence, nor is it undramatic in itself; nor is there any extended analysis or explanation. Only a few sentences are involved and the 'programme' has to be extracted. "Strong social comment" would be a better label.

TH contains the greatest number of explicit social comments followed

closely by COP. There are relatively few in CIS. The novels are critical of society's institutions and their representatives. Authority generally is presented as harsh, unjust, sadistic, hypocritical or conformist. Teachers, parsons, detectives, employers, soldiers of rank are satirised, although, "There are good fellows in the world, human beings interested in human beings." (COP p238)

Characters sympathetically treated are generally but not always disrespectable or undistinguished socially, the failure, the drunk, the prostitute, the social outcast, the underdog, the unpretentious, such as Mona, Milly, Anne, Robbie, Alice MacDonald, Rose, Mrs Albany, Charlie Cliff, Jim Foreman, Mr Tucker; kind, feeling, thoughtful people of whatever class. The saving grace of the Manager in TH was his passion "For it is better to be enthusiastic about something, even cruelty, than passionless... he was not the type that assesses as though with scales." (TH p40)

In COP social comment is also revealed by attitudes towards the poverty ascribed to various characters. There is Mr Mason, the store-keeper, the dial of whose watch was kept to inform his private eyes and not to satisfy the curiosity of paupers. He appeared to exalt when he forgot to wind the watch up. (COP p102) And the narrator was convinced that the Sunday school teacher thought "holiness should be well dressed" (COP pIII). Monkey was one teacher who was "that human rarity who paid more attention to children from humble homes than she did to the well off pupils" (COP p107).

Comment is also made by means of recurrent character types and related incidents. The most severely criticised institution of society is religion. There is the dynamic attack in CIS in the chapter with

the misleadingly mild title of, "Fretful argument," with God and padre as butt, and the ironical, "Pagan death but Christian Burial" episode. In COP the chaplain is both a sadist and a pervert; in TH the chaplain is a sadist who flogs boys for smiling. When the 'Holy Willies' throw a party in COP it is the poorest dressed who get left out. It is a staunch Presbyterian who smashes a fist in Porcello's face in TH.

The second most severely criticised institution is education. There is little explicit mention in CIS but Burnham's lack of intelligent education is announced at shouting pitch, and Henderson the teacher is presented as a sadistic ignoramus. The conflict between Nick and Porcello in COP is given as a contributory cause for Porcello's delinquency. "No tragedy of youth exceeds the tragedy of a feared teacher," (p 154) although Nick himself is excused as "the creature of an impossible environment." He is said to have had 95 pupils in his class. (p 156).

The martinet type who is also sadistic is represented by R.S.M. Angley in CIS and Major Snade in TH. The Colonel in CIS who sends his men on daylight messages is not given a name. The law and the economic system is also attacked explicitly and by implication in the stories.

Thus in one sense Lee's novels are potent satires on inhumanity. While it may be said that some of the explicit social comment suggests doctrine, suggestion is not exposition so that I conclude that Lee's novels are propagandistic only in the sense that they convey "truth" persuasively and that in this sense propaganda is not a term of reproach. It is a term of approval. The value and presentation of Lee's truth

is the subject of Chapter 4. The manner of Lee's presentation is further described in Chapter 5.

I have included lists of explicit social comments<sup>7</sup> in the notes to this Chapter to show the parts which probably gave rise to such terms as "naked" or "undisguised propaganda." As the narrator's comments arise naturally from the stories they should, ideally, be considered in context. However, they may in isolation be regarded stylistically as a supplement to Chapter 5 and as implied value statements supplementary to Chapter 4. Whatever way one regards them they are interesting parts of a total statement.

## CHARACTER AND VALUES

My intention in this Chapter is to establish the main values presented into order to show that Lee's novels are not merely of historical interest, that they are about 'things that matter.' As this involves a consideration of the main actions and the character who experiences them an aspect of Lee's narrative technique is illustrated at the same time. This structural aspect has its complement in the section on style in Chapter 5.

The narrator of COP in the preface expresses a "too human" inability to judge the boy he was. It is strongly suggested that the social system is to blame for the behaviour of the mother and the girl, and equally strongly suggested that the boy was virtuous: "I hand the balancing on to detached souls who, holding their noses, may condemn from respectable heights." (p7) It becomes clear by explicit statement and by implication as the story of how he became a thief unfolds that the narrator is on the boy's side against society, that Porcello guilty in the eyes of the law is in spirit innocent, heroic, and unjustly sentenced that while the narrator accepts responsibility for his actions he had, perhaps, "some slight environmental apology." (COP p28)

The first third of the book establishes the innocence of Porcello's infancy in natural surroundings. He chews the milk juice from green ears of wheat, stares at minnows and cockabullies, seeks out insects, spiders, worms, bees, butterflies and birds' eggs. He gathers pines,

chews blobs of gum, tramples on toadstools, listens to stories. It is a "marvellous baby age when to be sentimental is not to be thought a fool." (p36) The later remark, "Nature is scornful of convention," (COP p96 on discovering the bastard child is beautiful), also asserts natural innocence.

The association of nature and innocence is also found in TH (p74) where the boys are working in the garden in the season of "the miracle of growth" and during Porcello's pine-tree truancy (170). In CIS "poplars along the roads budded in response to the caress of spring but ungenerous war shot bud away," (p99) and Guy, looking across the river Lys, sees on one side unshelled, grass, wild flowers and apple blossom, serene and beautiful, and on the other, "vile chaos." (p211)

The second third of COP, in Dunedin, presents Porcello's delinquency as does the final section. His first truancy begins probably in standard two, to avoid being late for school as the fatherless family cannot afford a clock. At the end of the year in standard four he becomes a thief (p142). The exact chronological sequence of events is impossible to determine. We are told his first serious theft took place one severe winter to provide fuel for the home but that there was no compulsion from his mother and his brother did not join him. He was fortified by the approval of the mob.

The habit develops. Theft becomes easier than monotonous labour. He becomes courageous and feels superior. He steals boards for a hut, kerosine tins for a raft, metals and bottles for money, then he gets a job delivering newspapers to supplement the home income. He begins to steal money from his employer and stays out late at night. At school

he is flogged for not doing his homework. In the meantime an illegitimate sister has died and Rose has become a prostitute. He plays truant again and Nick pronounces him incorrigible. A new school is too easy for him. He plays truant again. He is sacked from his newspaper job and decides to stay away from home. His mother goes to the police, then to Minnell's and finds he has not been working for weeks. Porcello creeps back home and is punished. After a holiday with his uncle he leaves school. He has been in standard six for two weeks. By this time his mother has plenty of work and they gloss over his delinquency.

In the third section of the book, occupying about one year of time when Porcello is 13 or 14 he steals again to give his mother respite from the wash tub. "With guidance and no economic compulsion," he might have waited for a decent job but "truth is I would have found any regularity and discipline impossible. The only discipline to which I have ever been amenable is that discipline of self which comes when one serves with conviction." (p178). He next gets work in a boot shop but his industry and curiosity get him the sack. He drifts again and idles around the wharf. Next he gets a job in a printer's but leaves when taunted about Rose. He steals again, mutton tallow, scrap metal, horsehair. He acquires a revolver. He is arrested and flogged. He is dared to steal again. He takes nothing but points out easily negotiable materials. He is tricked into confession and sentenced to Burnham until the age of twenty-one.

The narrator wonders (p248) if the decision would have been any different if he had been as accommodating in lust as he had been

criminal in theft although he thought "absolutely incorrigible and beyond control" was a wise estimate of his position. (p 251) Earlier he summarised his motives by stating: "First I stole from compulsion and then from a desire to enjoy the fruits of theft... Stealing gave me financial security." Describing it provided psychological joy (pp 218-19). On page 243 he comments that "Children are realists, not moralists in making these decisions. The child who refused to do anything because the action was wrong would be so pure and saintly as to be abnormal. Morality is secondary to expediency."

To what extent choice is determined by heredity or environment is not clear in Porcello's case in COP. It seems that with his character in the particular environment in which he found himself he had no choice. It is clear in the preface of TH that environment is of extreme importance: "respectability is conditioned by environment ... given an intelligent task every evil doer has saintly possibilities." (p 5). In that book also there is strong evidence that the narrator thinks the will is free, to a large extent. Common to both books is the feeling and idea that Porcello's actions are essentially right, his theft in COP, his five escapes in TH. Guy's actions in CIS are also ironically and tragically established as right actions.

Porcello's character and actions as well as being explicitly defined are defined by contrast. Douglas is the antithesis of Porcello. "He never played truant, never bottomed class, never stole bottles to sell, never dreamt of bringing home a stick or a piece of coal in the bitterest winter. I never expected him to, never attempted to persuade him. I seemed charmed and fascinated by his respectability."

(COP p179). The element of contradiction intentional or unintentional emphasizes the case for character. Douglas is merely a foil, the embodiment of convention, and "he was not cursed with an eccentric imagination." (COP p206). In TH Porcello is described as "not very far from being a healthy normal boy," but his "exceptional imaginative power" is regarded as both gift and curse. (p13). The introspective doubt, however, is more characteristic of the narrator of COP as he attempts to find an answer to the perennial question. "I know that I am, rather than why or how I became what I am," he tells us early (p13) in COP. Nevertheless the stories show that both views of the imagination are valid.

There are about fourteen statements contrasting Porcello and Douglas in COP. Rose in that book is Porcello's female complement. Porcello's individuality is again set in relief in TH which is to be about "Albany who rebelled and not of Sydney who conformed." (p23). Porcello is contrasted variously, first with Sydney a glum conformist (pp10-11), then with Harry Morris who whimpers when punished, (p62) then with Philip McKinn whose nervousness spoils an escape (p78) and finally with Joe Roberts who betrays his hiding place (p89). The internal antithesis of Porcello's character is fully presented in Guy in CIS. Each protagonist is essentially alone.

That "the child" in the writings of modern authors is the symbol of concern with individual humanity, the symbol of dissatisfaction with society, the symbol of sensitivity, imagination and innocence is the argument of Coveney in his study of The Image of Childhood. Such symbolism is apparent in Lee's novels. But Porcello is a complex character and Guy has more than a touch of the beast within. Yet the

actions of both are acclaimed.

It is felt that Porcello, in the either or situation in which he found himself, was right to steal to help his mother and society wrong for making his choice inevitable, that Porcello was right to escape from Burnham and subsequent exploitation, not that punishment was undeserved but that it was unjust, the sentence too long, that Guy was right to adapt in time of war if adaptation means survival when the human family is reverting to the primeval slime, and society wrong to create the situation although there may be just wars, and perhaps "Guy should never have been a soldier" (CIS p12).

Actions are judged pragmatically by their results rather than in themselves. For Gorki there were no ideas beyond man. The novels of Lee suggest a similar view. Wrong actions are inhuman actions, the infliction of unnecessary suffering. The portrait of Guy suggests man is not entirely innocent but it is the human quality in man which is to be valued highly. Each novel in its own way stresses this value. COP in particular stresses the value of the poor, TH stresses the value of all fugitives, and CIS stresses the value of the whole human family. Each novel stresses the value of action, endurance, and revolt as a means to human betterment based on kindness understanding and tolerance. Blind loyalty is castigated (CIS p54). Individuality must not be repressed simply because it conflicts with orthodox opinion.

The attributes ascribed (there are over 180 explicit references) to the character of Guy-Porcello are consistent throughout the three novels. A main difference is that Guy has a sense of humour which

the young Porcello understandably has not developed. The picture which emerges is of a character of superior mental and physical ability, whose individuality combines boastfulness (not so noticeable in Guy) and shyness, extreme sensitivity and courageous audacity. He is abnormally curious, persevering, enthusiastic. He has the power of adaption in a crisis. He is both vocal and literary. He will not be driven and his love of freedom may be symbolised by his love of open country. He is entitled to leadership yet he is alienated and hungry for acceptance and friendship, a social something.

Many of the attributes become values in themselves. The most unusual feature of Porcello-Guy's character is his propensity to dream, or reflect or imagine. Yet he is both dreamer and actor. Porcello as a child is seen gazing fascinated at fish in flowing water, king of an aquatic kingdom (COP p45). Other significant dreams occur during school lessons, the dream of the womb (COP 103) and the dream of happiness occasioned by the reading of the heroic poem "Barbara Frietchie" (COP pp149-51); the dream of surrender occurs at a Salvation Army revival mission. (COP pp110-17) In TH "the dreamer whose face always reflected the sunshine and shadow of his soul" has "formed a great purpose" (p11) and his dream gives "sweet taste to his suffering" (p128). He dreams of the perfect physical fitness which he hopes <sup>is</sup> will enable him to escape. He/possessed by "the vision which compels endurance," (TH p143). Guy is caught in a great sadness as he gazes at a military cemetery in Etaples. The sun reflects from the white crosses so that each cross mirrors "a separate futility" (CIS p44). Before the "raid on the left" (CIS pp105-9) Guy dreams of peace and

war - of Fritz as a kindly fellow and Fritz as a fellow he would shoot. His dream of invulnerability is intimately associated with the main action of the story, the capturing of the German pill box. In each novel circumstance and dream or introspection are linked with action.

Stress has already been laid on the word imagination in connection with the fictive nature of the novels. Further implications will be developed in the section on style. The word has unusual importance in Lee's novels. In this section I am concerned with imagination as value. There are at least 15 sentences containing the word in COP about five in TH and six in CIS. When considered together with other terms used such as dream, vision, mind, soul, sensitivity, clairvoyance, it is realised that these words are synonymous and indicate consciousness itself, mental action or thought as distinct from physical action. The more imaginative one is the more one is understanding, sympathetic and intolerant of injustice. At this point one recalls that speech is the mind's first tool after perception. The prepositional emphasis indicates the true or primal order. This is affirmed in TH (p73) where the significant proverb "whatever a man thinketh so he is" occurs.

Paradoxically the imagination is a source of joy and sadness, of action and inaction; it may enable one to see how to act and yet prevent action. The narrator of COP writes of the conflict in his own person between "the internal observing philosopher" and "the internal coward of the man of action," and of "the dreamer in man" deriving satisfaction and sorrow from beholding the vacillations of the man of action" (COP p50). The dreamer appears to be both visionary and cynic (COP p137). Guy too was afflicted: "The soldier fashioned to kill and

the philosopher fashioned to doubt fought battles for his soul." (CIS p43)

What it is which translates knowledge into action is not clear.

The narrator of COP is himself uncertain: "Perhaps the mainspring of even physical motion is the imaginative dynamo within " (COP p118).

What is clear is that the translation is impossible without imagination.

Hence its importance. The moment of action would seem to be mindless and impulsive, spontaneous, born of feeling and passion following thought, all of which is derived originally from experience, the initial value.

Porcello broods over injustice and grows inflammatory (TH p209).

The coward always left him in the moment of action (COP p215).

Guy is singled out for "reckless gallantry" (CIS p197). In the paybox incident Guy "deliberately kept his mind from the task lest the internal cynic devastate his very subterfuge in advance" (CIS p215). On the other hand Guy simply grew aware "that if need be he could kill with exhilaration" (CIS p59). Clearly the imagination conditions one's response to the environment and in turn is conditioned by it. Place imaginative man in an environment of poverty and he becomes a thief, in an environment of unlightened punishment and he becomes a fugitive, in an environment of war and he becomes a man of iron, heroic but inhuman. In every unfavourable location he rebels and may, because of it, become fearful, alone, alienated, or permanently scarred. Hence the value of the right environment.

Imagination enabled Porcello to enjoy in COP and to endure in TH.

It enabled Guy "to see rare beauty in bestiality" (CIS p186) and then by making him aware of his humanity, induced fear and caused a nervous breakdown. Imagination is a gift in that it enables one to see clearly

a remedy or rise above circumstance. It is a curse in that it may bring suffering as a consequence of exercising it. And can one be sure that what is imagined is real? In each novel imagination has survival value.

Suffering itself has a primary value whether caused by the imagination or by direct experience because by increasing awareness of humanity it may serve as a stimulus to action.

The imagination is also allied to ignorance in that it may be productive of fearful or callous imaginings. Hence the value of education and empirical knowledge which has specific reference to CO and TH as regards sexual ignorance.

In one sense, then, Lee's novels may be regarded as novels of ideas.

The dominance of imaginative reality in the character of Guy-Forcello is a contributory cause of the pathos in the novels. The sequence of joy and misery, the discrepancy between desire and fulfillment, or between the inner world of the imagination and the outer world of fact is vividly portrayed. Some of the incidents have already been noted in other connections. In COP the period of happy rural infancy is followed by urban shame and despair when, for example, Forcello is eager to accept his new sister who dies and who he is told will not be received into the kingdom. There is his disillusion following an emotional conversion and his rude awakening following the poetry lesson. Hope soars and crashes to earth to be renewed. Eager to work in the boot shop there is little to do; his enthusiasm to excel and his desire to know get him disliked. He is sacked. He finds work at the printers: "From the moment I touched paper I knew that I was born to handle it." (COP p197)

By the time this ecstatic dissertation is reached such assertions forbode

the opposite. Knowledge of Rose's degradation comes like a thunderbolt. He leaves the job, contemplates suicide but finally resolves when caught by the law for theft, to escape. Thus Porcello who wanted primarily to help his family ends in Burnham.

In Burnham his first effort to escape is a failure. The reader witnesses a flogging. Porcello runs again but is caught and suffers for no reward. He runs again but too soon knows the moment of rapture for a telephone call warns his pursuers. That night bruised, wounded, and desperate he squeezes through a window and runs again and eludes the law for about three weeks. He is returned but not punished authority having realised its futility. He becomes head kitchen boy and is later sent to work on a farm. His enthusiasm is exploited. He is rejected with blows and escapes by train free but insecure.

The action of GTS is simpler (in the sense of plot) but no less intense. Here the pathos occurs not so much in recurrent waves as in one overwhelming wave when reaction sets in after the elation of battle.

Pathos, the quality in an artistic representation which excites the feeling of pity or sadness at the suffering and misfortune of another and prompts a desire for its relief, and fear, Aristotle's tragic pleasure, arise from the experiences of Porcello and Guy. It is partly due to a stock response to the kind of experience, the shame of poverty, frustration, the palpitant agony of being hunted, the inhumanity of war. It is the artistic presentation of that experience which gives it depth and intensity. The presentation is effective not because the basic situations are exaggerated but because the

reader is made to feel they are not exaggerated.

We are equal only in our essential humanity, by virtue of being human innocent or guilty. The humbling fact of this aspect of equality is a basic appeal, an appeal Aristotle surely had in mind with his assessment of Euripides. The tragic poets whom Aristotle admired had "a wonderful skill in aiming at the kind of effect they desire - a tragic situation that arouses the human feeling in one."<sup>2</sup> It is no exaggeration to claim this skill for Lee.

It may be said that the novelist who criticises some undesirable phase of the status quo is saying that man is his brother's keeper, that unless a social evil is destroyed man cannot survive but will become what Cain feared he would become, a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth. This would seem to be the implicit theme of Lee's novels. The value of humanity assumes the force of an ethic. It is not strange to find years later an article by Lee in Here And Now (Mr 1957) entitled "Cain And Abel Were Brothers". We have a duty to help each other. It is also significant that Guy, when questioned about his past life by soldiers who seemed to value his lack of social respectability and who seemed to think his life on the open road had been a long holiday replied that it was only in retrospect, that there were times when the road was hungry, lonely and wet and that a rolling stone gathers no moss.

Lee once remarked that some people help only when the blood splatters their clothing. People with no imagination on inners. Others learn the truth only in death as the narrator of CIS reflects: "Maybe as dying man saw dying man enemy discerned a brother and marvelled. For

hatred as well as love can ebb with blood." (p109)

The value of confession has been noted in the discussion of authorial purpose. Statements referring to the value of simplicity which is related to childhood, nature innocence and humanity, may be found in each novel, (COP 34, 37, 148; TH 233; CIS 285). Reading had significant value for Porcello and Guy.

The value of male-female relationships is established in each novel. It is particularly significant in CIS for Anne is the means to Guy's recovery. The glow of human love added to Porcello's infant joys; his love for his mother was a reason for his "crime". He finds solace in the arms of Milly in TH.

Lee still retains the same basic values, statements of which may be found in Delinquent Days and the N.Z. Weekly News article and in Simple on a Soap Box.

Asked whether he regarded Porcello as one of the unadaptable ones Lee replied: "Porcello intelligence, real intelligence in the artist is never adaptable or in the evangelist. He seeks to adapt, to change, not that he believes in paradise stabilized but because he revolts against unnecessary cruelties... there are always new horizons... as Wells put it in Eden:

God, "Matter I made and all things."

Devil, "Stable as a top save for the wobble I gave it."

The man who has that undying fire, that will to enlarge the circle he can't break out of is adaptable only when <sup>3.</sup> screwed down."

Few would disagree about the importance of Lee's values. But they have artistic significance only if presented in significant form. I have indicated the part played by Lee's narrative/<sup>technique.</sup> I would now like

to draw attention to Lee's style the definition of which is the topic of Chapter 5.

"EVERY POSSIBLE PLAY OF WORDS"

I think the most interesting question concerns Lee's style. Some critics have been unable to accept Lee's novels wholeheartedly because of a discrepancy they notice between style and matter. Lee's power may be admired but his artistry is questioned. The intention of this Chapter is to analyse Lee's style in order to show there is no potent effect without artistry.

Style may be defined as a characteristic manner of expression in prose or verse. Lee's style does not appear to have undergone any radical change. In each of his three novels published in the thirties the style is basically the same. This is not surprising when Lee's own view is considered: "I couldn't take an idea as Sargeson does in Memoirs of a Peon and use it as a peg on which to hang stylistically arranged words. I am only concerned with what I have to say. When I have nothing to say my pen stops... style in the craftsman's sense is a denial of spontaneity."<sup>1.</sup> This view, however, precludes neither premeditation nor Pope's dictum of true ease. The stories Lee tells were in his mind for years. Nor is it likely that the one who in Facts for Speakers advised "Use every possible play of words,"<sup>3.</sup> acquired his skill overnight. Lee's unchanging style is as individual as a voice print and is a source of his power. Probably his style was fully developed when he came to complete the writing of CIS.

The most unusual feature of Lee's style is the appeal to the ear. His novels, alive on the page, become more vibrant when read aloud. In The Lee Way to Public Speaking are found many illuminating remarks

including, "after perception speech is the mind's first tool."<sup>2.</sup> COP and TH were written against a background of active campaigning in both speech and writing. CIS was written with the pen of one who had such a background. Under the heading of, "My Guttersnipe Style", an ironic thrust<sup>4.</sup> at Schramm in I Fight For New Zealand, Lee writes: "I did a lion's share of our written propaganda." Lee is referred to as "a powerful propagandist with the written and the spoken word by Sutch in The Quest for Security in New Zealand and as the "most articulate spokesman" of a monetary reform wing, in An Encyclopedia of New Zealand, (vol 3, p176). Lee's record polling in 1935 and again in 1938 would also indicate oratorical power. It is natural to assume, therefore, that the daily activities of the politician would influence the writing style of the novelist. This is not to deny the importance of earlier influences and a vast amount of reading. But no matter how one accounts for the origin of the style its dominant characteristic, as analysis shows, is aural. The importance of sound as a means of communication is made most explicit by the narrator of COP who declares that there is no worse barrier in the world than deafness (p 87).

While CIS is the most speech based in style it is also the most literary as it contains most metaphor, and appropriately so, for the description of a mental state in an atmosphere of awful sound is an intention of the book. The opening parts of "Comedy or Tragedy" and "Tragedy or Comedy" in CIS are good examples of writing that may seem lacking in literary style but which when read aloud are found to be extremely effective. Even in the introspective and lyrical passages of COP and TH there are appeals to the listening audience. Sincerity

not sentimentality emerges. Realism not untamed romanticism grips the reader. One hears "the ring of truth".

Before examining a particular passage it is necessary to show how each novel is characterised by oral influences or speech mannerisms. Important aspects of the style are repetition and contrast. Even lucid exposition of event seldom occurs without some sign of the listening ear, for example, in TH (pp 167-8) where Porcello discovers a hut and his culinary activities are described the narrator comments: "Yes, he would stay for at least a day." This characteristic affirmation is repeated in the succeeding paragraph: "Yes. He would stay for a few days in the shelter."

In each part of the novels the art of assertion may be observed: in the single word, the phrase, the paragraph, the chapter headings, preface and epilogue. One example often illustrates a number of devices and out of context may seem ordinary but in context it is always right and contributes to the total effect. The frequency of each device has not been counted but they are numerous enough to be remarked. Some may jar when one becomes aware of them. The frequency of the introductory "maybe" or "perhaps" can become irritating as can the often unnecessary "Verbal", itself possibly a subconscious approval of the power of the spoken over the written word. Overall, however, recognition of the patterns gives rise to aesthetic pleasure; intellectual pleasure is derived from the sense of control over thought and feeling conveyed by the style of a special type of craftsman. Penultimately the style will be examined with reference to the auditory imagery or direct appeals to the ear, and finally as narrative statement.

As a first consideration, the use of emotive words is of interest and shows few if any are carelessly used. Favourite words such as vagabond, desperado, outlaw, jailbird, poverty, gutter, cruel, vicious, spellbound are generally used with full knowledge of their meaning and effect and, from the point of view of the narrator, are seen not to be exaggerations but the only suitable words. Take, for example, "doomed" in, "And I knew I was doomed to restraint for seven or eight years." (COP 242). Such a sentence would indeed seem like death to a boy of 14. But the imagined horror of the boy is tempered by the attitude of the remembering narrator, the present ironic detachment implied by the tone of "restraint". A feeling of controlled bitterness results.

The use of "vicious" is instructive: "Clannishness is as old and as vicious and as virtuous as the herd." (CIS p57). Here it is used literally, In, "So vicious am I that out of the gutter I see virtue shining through filth," (COP p7) it is used ironically. If one can ignore the antithesis and the alliteration one can remain uninvolved. From TH there is this sentence: "Such vicious persistence had a contagious influence upon the school." (p177). Here at least two senses are obtained, the one suggesting the disapproval of the school authority (a literal use) and the other suggesting the approval of the narrator - Porcello has escaped from Burnham for the fourth time.

Certain combinations such as "spiritual blisters" in CIS (III) may disturb some readers but in context such inelegant phrases are appropriate. One wonders if Lee is the first to use this phrase. His use of cliché itself is interesting and original. If there is some straining after effect in CIS the question "could it be done

better?" always arises. The narrator asks: "Can anything be described to virgin ears when there are no comparative standards?" (p43). Cliche may be observed in CIS (p138) where tanks are described as "ugly ducklings." "A hive of activity" (p80) is also used in a context which gives it significance, a context of insectivorous and metallic malice. (Example 5. in paragraph illustrating imagery in the notes). In TH, "Into the arms of the law he went merrily" (171) describes exactly what then happened.

If, however, the craftsman would eschew the frequent use of "mental" and "physical" and their derivatives such matter is of small importance to the speaking narrator who sees the "strong stark grain of growth untitivated," as having a "hundred fold the strength of verbal inlaying." 6.

Usages such as "ingest" for "eat" found in the early parts of TH and "to erect" for "to stand" found often in CIS seem at first eccentric, but those who have ears may hear the irony. Elsewhere it is clear that learned literary words or Johnsonese expressions are used only when irony of varying intensity is intended. Examples are:

COP 241 My two uncles were adding a modicum to the family exchequer.

TH 137 The champion was dethroned contumaciously

CIS 79 He encouraged the loquacity of the unreticent.

"Verbal" or "verbally", found about 13 times in COP, may be objected to. Admittedly the same combination is never used twice and some show originality but often the word is unnecessary even for the purpose of emphasis. They do occur naturally and it is possible that only through analysis one acquires an awareness of them. A complete list is given in the notes. 7.

Examples are:

COP 16 verbally acceptable

TH 19 Verbal response

CIS 14 Verbal braggadocio

In contrast to the ironical use of Johnsonese are such plain, lucid, and direct statements as the following. Their simplicity may be typical of whole passages or may come surprisingly at the end of a polysyllabic exposition as does the example from CIS:

COP 23 They were betting on which horse would dung first

TH 154 The bed was broad and soft and warm, his skin soothed by warm water and soap.

CIS 205 Yet it was that his comrades were unaware that he was sick, so did he conceal his state.

The variety of tone which emerges is another aspect of the style's power.

A most direct appeal to the listening audience is signified by the rhetorical question as in:

COP 52 Are not most of the dragons we slay of our own creation?

TH 148 Do ears hear what they fear to hear?

CIS 79 Was the soldier so vicious when he escaped wittingly from the shed to the brothel?

Exclamation and apostrophe are not infrequent:

COP 32 Here was sensation!

TH 37 Woe to the weak-jawed.

CIS 120 Oh optimism of brazen heads in brass hats!

Exclamation in the form of commands gives rise to grim humour when the Burnham boys are put to bed by numbers (TH 32) and to satirical mirth in COP (p67) when the narrative is interrupted to praise the lord for internal combustion and pneumatic tyres. Dialogue generally is faithful to the ear. There is little attempt to qualify statements adverbially.

There are some qualifications in the early pages of CIS. There are few noun subject indicators yet, such is the nature of the dialogue, identification of speaker gives no difficulty. Any passage of dialogue taken at random will illustrate direct, sometimes blunt, natural statement with, in the main, no adornment but always dramatic and effective. It would seem as typical of New Zealand speech as anything to be found in Sargeson. (Examples are given in the notes).<sup>8</sup> Where rhetoric occurs it is generally in the form of a key word, phrase or sentence repeated for dramatic emphasis. Particularly vivid examples occur at the following places:

COP 126 Rose's name is repeated a number of times both as a question and as an exclamation. Porcello is afraid. The sound echoes back.

249 et seq. "I don't care," and, "I'll run away," are significant here.

There are fewer examples in TH which is less episodic; "I won't be caught" (p156) is one. Effective examples in CIS concern the repetition of "Counter attack", 12 times, in the chapter of the same title (p183), where nervous tension is underlined, and, "How quiet it is", (p105) which suggests foreboding. Such repetitions are like and have the effect of musical themes.

As can be seen many examples not only illustrate more than one device but simultaneously effect more than one intention. The repeated dialogue statements, for example, may convey atmosphere and establish character. When emotive words are involved the statements are trebly effective. It will be seen later that each novel can be classified and its meaning intensified by the tones which sound through each.

Other types of word and phrase repetition are primarily idea refrains

such as, "They can do anything to a man except put him in the family way," (at intervals throughout CIS) and, "A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the lord," (Chapter entitled, "Death of a Bastard", in COP). There is the emphatic, "I know...", and, "I have..." of the preface to TH, and the "I was..." sequence of the vision splendid in COP (p38).

The repetition of adjectives and adverbs is typical:

COP 38 I was thin, thin, thin, dangerously frail.

TH 85 Yes, the door that had swung shut was open again and Albany was away, away, away.

The use of "on" to stress determination is as effective in a climax of TH (p85) as it is in CIS in the chapter entitled, "Up and Over."

The objection to the "maybe" of the reflecting narrator has been noted. Examples are:

COP 105 Maybe it was an instinctive rat-like loyalty.

TH 153 Maybe one of her own race had once fallen foul of the law.

CIS 256 Maybe we value most that which is denied to us.

Again the question of an alternative is relevant. The quality of the reflection is not in doubt and "maybe" is a natural utterance.

The characteristic of listing has an oratorical sound:

COP 143 Trains, ships, horses, goods inward and outward, there was variety in that world.

TH 129 He was ambitious to be steel, wire, rubber, twine resilience, purpose.

CIS 56 What did a man who knew nothing of the trench know about politics, wine, food, of art or science, or literature, of life?

Inversion can be illustrated by:

COP 214 Through the dark came that impassioned injunction.

TH 84 Blinded with pain and torn with thorns he lay.

CIS 150 Never had life for him so great a purpose.

Lee's use of antithesis is a significant aspect of his style. It combines both rhetorical and literary elements, appealing thus to the public and to the private mind. The rhetorical element persuades, the literary stimulates reflection. The one tends to hyperbole, the other to the proportioned view. The contrary polarities are multifarious and symbolise the essential duality of the man. All give rise to a sense of sincerity and truth and controlled passion. When sentence antithesis is considered in conjunction with situation and character antithesis, it will be seen that the opposite tendencies of the parts paralleled in the whole are complementary, rivet the attention to the situation presented and accurately convey the thought and feeling intended - an experience is communicated to the reader. Examples of sentence antithesis are as follows:

COP 241 The sum of my iniquity was paradoxically the totality of my greatness.

TH 255 His body was free but his mind knew the insecurity that dominates the life of all that is hunted.

CIS 11 Sling had its beauty as well as its bestiality.

There is <sup>an</sup> unusual degree of rhetorical complexity in many examples. Both humour and seriousness are sometimes conveyed simultaneously giving rise to a peculiarly vital intensity as in: "Military cosmos grew ambitiously pregnant with martial chaos, for the machine laboured to give birth to death." (CIS p99) The dramatic paradox is typical of CIS.

Direct comparison or simile is infrequent and I hope to show that the relative scarcity of visual imagery is determined by the conceived

importance of auditory imagery.

Examples of direct comparison are:

- COP 23 As a coal-fed furnace belches flames and smoke of coal, so was Sandy's passion believed to be an eruption of all the hot things he had injected.
- TH 128 As a flagellant scourges himself to ecstasy so did he run on swift-moving dream feet.
- CIS 158 Ahead on the left there was a strong point and Hunnish machine-guns were mowing down men as a swinging scythe mows tall grass.

The influence of political writing on Lee's style (advertising, article, leaflet, pamphlet or report) is, apart from emotive statement open to question. If it does exist it would be revealed in the habit of metaphorical concision but it would be the compression or terseness rather than the originality or gnomic quality of the figure and other reasons are equally possible for the characteristic concision or slogan-like features of:

- COP 64 Blank despair ousted vainglory.
- TH 166 Imagination always stalked fortitude.
- CIS 56 Exposure to shells made opinion oracular.

Lee's pamphlet on Hitler gives another indication of his knowledge of how words may be put to work, or of his clear consciousness not only of what he wanted to say but also how best to say it. On page ten of the Hitler pamphlet is found the following comment: "Assertion is the essence of any first class propaganda. G.B.S. says assertion is the essence of any worthwhile literary style."

Assertion or the explicit statement of ideas may also be regarded as part<sup>of</sup> Lee's oral technique. It would not be difficult to compile an anthology of Lee sayings. There are three main categories: the assertion

of general ideas; the assertion of ideas about society; and the assertion of ideas about character. As the main rhetorical features of the style have now been identified the examples of idea assertions will be listed without comment. It must be pointed out, however, that the principal ideas are not only emotively asserted but in the novels they are also illustrated in action. The observations grow out of particular situations or experiences. Thus every point is doubly emphasised. Not one of the ideas exists in a vacuum. Porcello is not only called a rebel. We witness his rebellion. Comments from the narrator indicate the rightness of rebellion which is also implied by character contrast and other means so that eventually the value of rebellion is established intellectually and emotionally.

Examples of the assertion of ideas on various topics (the count includes social and 'focus' statements):

- COP 239 Children are born liars, but their lies are not very vicious. Adults tell fewer but more harmful lies frequently by implication and insinuation or malign silence. (over 70)
- TH 255 For fear is of the soul and not of the world about. (over 60)
- CIS 118 The organisation of war is like the organisation of a Mill's bomb as it is fashioned to destroy itself in its act of life. (over 50)

Examples of assertion of ideas about society:

- COP 122 Society is organised to victimise the very poor. (about 14)
- TH 66 Authority commits no greater crime than the act of pardoning someone to implicate another. (about 13)
- CIS 280 The whole populace had a financial interest in murder. (about 6)

Examples of character assertions:

- COP 14 I was a rebel from the dawn of consciousness. (over 80)
- TH 50 He was as literary as anyone in the school. (over 60)
- CIS 7 He hated militarism and was committed to it body and soul. (over 40)

I cannot guarantee the accuracy of the figures. The consistency of Lee's method and the general proportions are significant and indicate differences about the nature of each novel. The minimum figure can be substantiated. The same may be said of another type of assertion which also implies an audience. Generally they emphasize alienation or innocence.

Examples of "focus" statements:

- COP 99 God and the world were against us. (about 9)
- TH 226 He saw himself alone against the world (about 16)
- CIS 285 He was more of a boy than a sinner and Anne more a girl than a whore. (about 4)

Focussing may also be regarded in terms of image or symbol which in relation to Lee's rhetoric may also be regarded as a form of antithesis. The rat's - eye view is only one aspect of COP but is significant where it occurs (pp 105, 140, 141, 144, 233, 236). The symbol changes to a hare in TH (it was introduced at the end of COP - all the world after a human hare -) and is a dominant motif. In CIS images of iron and blood abound; we have the worm's eye view (p 121) and the rat is praised (p75). Anvil and worm mix in a devil's paste. (p87).

It is, now, of interest to note some of the aspects of Lee's style exhibited in the chapter headings, COP offering the most variety. A table follows:

<u>COP</u>	57	literal statement,	"Family Squalls"
	89	Irony,	"Our Happy Christmas"
	110	arresting antithesis,	"The Bum at the Throne of God"
	118	pamphlet style,	"Sex: a study in economic determinism."
	154	satirical and learned literary	"The incompatibility of the Temperament of St. Nicholas"
	162	bold confessional assertion,	"I was a thief"
<u>TH</u>	74	exclamatory sarcasm	"Tally ho! to the kill"
<u>CIS</u>	64	repeated word	"Talk, talk, talk."

Sentence length is also relevant. Lee's sentences generally are short and readily split up into rhythmical breath groups. The following passage from COP (p34) will illustrate this and at the same time show the impossibility of labelling Lee with finality by, for example, labelling him of the social realist tradition which originally, at least, denied the lyric cry:

I remember sunsets even more clearly because they were shared. The glow of human love was added to the beauty of departing day. Childish mouths opened like the wide beaks of birds in awe at the glory and ache of parting day. Childish hearts throbbed with ecstatic pleasure. If we could but have 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?

Possible listener embarrassment is averted by an arresting rhetorical question which invites mature reflection. The passage ends on a rhythmical and passionate note of denunciation:

"All is categorised and analysed until a sound is only music if it accords with convention. Even God is an involved complexity."

The influence of speech techniques may also account for the prefatory enunciations of the novels. The preface of CIS does not appear in modern

editions. The first and last sentences of the episodes of COP and TH often show either one of the devices mentioned. Those of CIS are mainly in the form of narrative statement. Also noticeable in COP is the tendency to recapitulate. This may be said to parallel the peroration. It is another form of repetition.

The next topic for consideration is the purely auditory imagery, onomatopoeia, and the inclusion of songs, hymns, and lines of poetry all of which further emphasise the importance of sound or the predominantly aural emotive nature of Lee's style.

The narrator of COP (p42) states: "I can ride out of life on a flood of music", and "music of all sorts sets my soul riding willow sticks" (p42). Elsewhere he talks of "the rhymed physical music of words" (COP 148). It is not surprising, therefore, to find an unusually high proportion of auditory imagery and verse in each novel. Ideally COP would have been in a Scottish dialect (p7). The narrator also tells us that one of his first memories was the "clank clank, chink chink of the picks and shovels, the hand carts' wheels rattling against macadam and the shuffle-shuffle of feet," of a parade of prisoners near Athol Place (pp18-19). The story ends with shouting. But the sounds which echo through COP in the main are joyous sounds, the sounds of nature in the period of Porcello's infancy, the quivering nocturnes of insects, and the swelling song of bird; there are sounds of people singing, narrating, reciting, talking, preaching; there is the sound of machinery in the printer's "tower of mechanical babel" ., "where my soul sang in unison with the crash and swing of wheels" (p195). But there is also the sigh of rollers on the beach

when Porcello momentarily contemplates suicide. Finally, the speeding train wheels sang of a purpose, the song of the heart: "I'd run away." (p253). It could be said that in COP the sounds are mainly the sounds of innocence gradually and continually modified by the sounds of experience which induce the sound of pathos, and, occurring over a greater period of time (about 14 years), give a greater complexity of sound than exists in the other two novels. I know of only one literary parallel to Lee's association of music and meaning outside of Shakespearian drama: that in The Pearl by John Steinbeck.

The number of actual sounds in COP is comparatively small, the number of metaphors involving sound is average, the number of quoted verse lines is high: hymns 41, song 14, poetry 49.

The predominant sound in TH is the sound of violence: the thud of flogging, the crash of breaking glass, the crunch of gravel under foot, the palpitant agony, the blast of whistle and the bawl of command all of which contrast ironically with the 52 quoted lines of hymns and the stutter of the manager. There are only four lines of poetry quoted in TH. Again the felt sound of pathos is important and moves in the quiet climax of the concluding statement: "For fear is of the soul and not of the world about." (p255).

The dominant sound of CIS is laughter against a background of gunfire. "Birth and life and death were laughable in war," (p9) and "rhymed obscenity had survival value," "it was a protective colouring to tenderness," "it kept the civilian a soldier. The soldier could spit on what the civilian yearned, for." (p112). The story opens with a command for silence. Next a joke is made

about the "click! click! click!" (p6) of the guard sloping his rifle. As soon as page 7 Guy bursts into song. The book ends with a song which seems to equate with the satirical madhouse laughter which the narrator declares is the end of everything in war (p286).

There is a sprinkling of musical metaphors throughout such as, "hymn of hate", (p47) "the song of the guns" (p48), "the music of the cut" (p113). The number of instances of onomatopoeia is high. The most outstanding example is the use of "Whizz Bang!" which between pages 232 - 239 occurs 26 times. It has the force of concussion. All this contrasts with the groans of dying men and with introspective passages and the ultimate weeping of nervous disintegration. The following table gives an idea of the relative proportions of auditory imagery in each novel: ("Event" refers to a sound or speech associated with a happening such as an order or bugle call or an emotional conversion as in COP)

	Onomatopoeia	Metaphor	Event	Quotes
<u>COP</u>	7	8	5	104
<u>TH</u>	15	3	10	56
<u>GIS</u>	30	7	7	46

In one sense then, the novels may be regarded as symphonies of sound.

The question of visual imagery is a complex one. It involves a mode of consciousness. Its literary manifestation, although there are passages of photographic clarity, is a general lack of visual realism, or the expression of it in terms of aural statement, either by means of auditory imagery or any one of the forms of oral techniques already discussed. The reader-listener sees with the inward eye of the imagination of the narrator which is stimulated by sounds and actions

associated with what is actually seen.

The narrator of COP (p33) says "sometimes it is the quality in a happening that is recalled, and ocular details are blurred in the glow of such a quality." The first thing he remembers "is not an event but a quality, an awareness of poverty, the everlasting clamour for bread." (p14) On page 33 the narrator said "city adults rarely see sunrise," but in this episode entitled "Song at Twilight" sunrise and sunset are described in aural terms: a melody of tone. Mentioned are birds chattering in "a kind of scale practice". The city child hears the "rattle of a milk van, the thud of the morning paper." Again Porcello in a lyrical passage in IH (p158) at sunrise "saw colour not static, but alive, careering through its rainbow gamut, a parade of heavenly emotions." Here vision is expressed in terms of feeling intensified by rhythm and emotive words. The passage begins, "The sun came to a dawn that in his mood heralded the arrival of all his heart desired." This statement is followed by an auditory image, "For the sun exploded its rays upward and eastward out of the ocean..."

At an early age Porcello is said to have been unconcerned by solitariness as, "the absence of matter of fact people who saw only what existed liberated my mind." (COP p62)

It seems in most instances visual detail is left to the imagination. Objects, places, events are referred to, pointed out, just named rather than described in detail. On page 150 the narrator declares: "Oh, I saw it all, all, and I was all...." The lyrical passage which follows is as much concerned with feeling as with seeing literally, the feeling of romantic unity with existence. About the poem (p78) "dip, boys,

dip the oar", the narrator states: "As we sung that chorus I could always see the row-boat leaving Africa ..." but can the reader and does the narrator mean physical vision? He goes on to say, "These verses gave me an expanding sense of the sea. I would be able to feel the quality of space while I still visualised an ocean spanned by a succession of sturdy strokes... I toyed with qualities though not the appearance of the map." The type of sparse visual imagery generally used is related to the listing device. The interesting list of statements concerning what Porcello did as truant (pp159-160) includes "I saw peanuts, bananas, resin unloaded... I got the quality of geography." Only the bare physical outlines of people are given usually to indicate character or draw attention to a quality.

Porcello "was born, dark-eyed, lean, restless, hungry as an unfledged bird, imaginative" (p13). He is compared with his brother on page 27: "my hair was straight, jet, his was curly and golden. I was pale and swarthy, he was rosy-cheeked and fresh." On page 88 "Douglas was still as plump as I was thin." The characters are identified mainly by what they do and say. The galatea trousers (p131) are hard to visualise but one feels the shame of having to wear them. The concluding rhetorical question of "The bum at the throne of God" is: "If all had honourably shut their eyes and let that voice assail their ears, what then?"

In TH at the first major climax one feels rather than sees Porcello running (pp84-5) through a gorse hedge. One feels "the blind physical pain" rather than sees the blood trickling seconds later. He runs on "with the senses growing dulled so that the fog in his mind made hedges and gates and green fields blur and blend and stagger

drunkenly from vision. On, on, on, fatigue fitting sight with smoked glass."

9.

Physical vision implies detachment - one is more involved through sound and rhythm. There is little detail of the contents of the recreation room or its appearance. What is important is the enforced silence. The hut which Porcello finds is detailed but objects are simply stated by name: bacon, frying pan, billy, oven, hearth, dripping, potatoes.(p167)

In CIS one also feels and hears and moves rather than sees, but there is some vivid visual detail never-the-less. It occurs, I would say, when the narrator is not identifying with Guy. Vivid visual descriptions include:

P 142 the "swinish figures" of the men in gasmasks

146 Guy waiting to charge

162 the thing in grey

167 the wounded Australian

260 the clean bed in the club dormitory

To Guy, "From the moment of zero until the incident in the shell-hole had seemed a flickering succession of incidents" (p164). And on page 152 "Guy saw all these things incidentally, un pityingly, scarcely understood them as yet. They were impressions that were to be delayed in their effect... Friendship was a meaningless thing with red in his eyes." Again physical sight implies detachment. It is the internal vision stimulated through sound which is important whether immoral in the incident just mentioned or moral as in the vision that compels endurance (TH p143). The internal vision is described by rhetorical

assertion, metaphor, or by the narration of actions. External details often indicate distress: "Thus did the starving, barefooted, cut and bruised fugitive reassure himself, while the well-clad and mounted police force rode home for evening meal and warm bed." (TH p148) When Porcello finally sees with clear eyes the town is puny, mean, the houses like scarecrows rather than human shelters. (TH p245) They, (Porcello and Milly) saw only the human in each other (TH p246) as did soldier of prostitute. (CIS p235)

The vision Lee desired to describe required more than visual detail. Appearance, as art for its own sake, was unimportant.

Lastly, Lee's style may be considered in terms of narrative statement. A dominant feature is antithesis or contrast. As the contribution of situation and character antithesis has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter in relation to character and values I shall only emphasize here that effective if simple structural arrangements together with a unique style form the literary power source of the novels. Pathos does emerge from the stock response to injustice and cruelty but it is deepened by the way experience is presented. Basic idea contrasts also contribute to the total effect: economic poverty and wealth of imagination in COP, freedom and imprisonment in TH, life and death in CIS.

The device of the "flash forward" is of interest. It is used as a means of maintaining interest or arousing curiosity by hint and insinuation. It is a marked feature of CIS but is also found in TH and COP. The event referred to may be in ironic contrast to the present situation:

COP 161 In time I crashed in a humiliating manner.

TH 149 When his mind slept, when his foot faltered, when he was profound in his conviction of escape, then would he know the greatest danger.

CIS 48 They were to meet once again while Robbie's smile was taking wings and leaving his body forever.

This habit also has the effect of giving the authenticity of foreknowledge, as does the comparison of contemporary time and historical time in such statements as:

COP 10 Even now in the year 1932 Dunedin...

TH 8 In the days when this train was speeding north, train travel was an event.

Questioned on how his novels were put together Lee replied: On the whole I did begin my novels as you say at the beginning and wrote on. Then I take a chapter and rewrite before I do the next. This I suppose tends to give each chapter a life of its own. I suppose it does give my books an episodic quality although they all relate to the purpose.  
10.

It may be seen that the discussion of style has now merged with that of structure. What I consider are the main objections to Lee's novels have now been explored. I have not attempted to deal with "topographical padding." I regard such parts as integral to the total structure. Nor has there been space to examine in detail the relation between time and structure, a contributory cause of the impact of the novels. It remains to summarise the conclusions of my investigation and examine the tongs' metaphor.

"THE NOVELIST'S PAIR OF TONGS"

It has been my purpose to investigate the literary significance of Lee's novels COP, TH, and CIS. My evaluation is not governed by any particular critical approach or school. I find Lee's novels have significance on each of the five premises which I have implied throughout the thesis and which I now state explicitly. My particular conclusions as regards the central issues, and the five premises may be put as follows.

Although rooted in personal experience the novels are not completely or naively autobiographical. Consequently they are to be judged as fictions. I see them as both tragic and satirical. But in so far as they represent the basic experience of the author they are important historically as records of the early life of an interesting, important, and legendary New Zealander. The novels also have historical importance in the sense that they are the first realistic accounts of their kind in N.Z. literature, and in the sense that they cast a sensitive light over certain areas of N.Z. history.

I would say that it is the critic who is most bothered by the questions of propaganda. I would assert that the novels in question although written by a propagandist are not propaganda unless the word is used in the sense that all art is propaganda as discussed in Ch. 3. Because the main themes of war, poverty, injustice or unnecessary cruelty are not restricted to one time or place, and because they are presented in such a way as to awaken a sense of social responsibility the novels are also

important as influences tending towards changes in men and society. In this sense they are significant sociologically.

The values expressed (I discussed them in Ch. 4) are also of permanent and universal significance. I restate them here: experience, action, endurance, imagination, industry, enthusiasm, simplicity, individual freedom, human welfare. The novels are thus significant morally as conveying judgements on life.

Lee's novels also have significance cognitively as kinds of knowledge giving insight into human behaviour. To read Lee is to know what it feels like to be poor, hunted, or at war; to know the vision that compels endurance; to know the joys and sorrows of the imagination.

Lee's novels are also significant artistically as images created by the free play of the imagination on experience. Whereas the early critics were concerned about the propriety of the subject matter later critics while acknowledging a certain power have been worried about the artistry, the "carelessness", the "propaganda" or the presence of strong feeling; there have been contradictory opinions about the same novel. Yet I find more art in Lee's novels than has been admitted or recognised. Clearly the potent effect of the novels although not independent of the stock response is by no means gratuitous. It depends to a large extent on an aural-emotive or speech-based style (as analysed in Ch. 5.), and on ironical contrasts of situation and character. Ultimately the style and the content is the man.

Lee wrote of Porcello: "You can scarce touch such a fellow with the novelist's pair of tongs...this boy was poor." (COP p6). How to give universal significance to a non-Aristotelian hero, to the commonplace events of a particular time and place, how to cause people to care was Lee's artistic problem in COP and TH. In CIS the problem was how to make the unfamiliar credible. As instrument of approach to touch the untouchable, to make the invisible visible, to fashion an object of permanence in the fire or forge of the imagination, tongs were words and their purposeful arrangement. The novelist's pair of tongs means technique. Imagination is an aspect of technique. It gives significant form. Measured in terms of the novels of Henry James or even Sargeson, Lee's novels will be found wanting. Judged in terms of their own logic, the effective communication of an experience, Lee's novels are artistically satisfying. It seems to me that such terms as "crude emotionalism", "lack of classical restraint" are irrelevant even if they were true of Lee's novels. Change the form, remove the "defects" and the power would be diminished. Lee's "defects" are those of a writer who had no desire to divorce art from life, no artistic desire but to express as vividly as possible his deepest convictions born of experience.

The novelist's pair of tongs is also the symbol of Lee's integrity and honesty of purpose, of his boldness and modernity in the context of his time, of his intention to give at all costs a representation of the rawness of life in colonial N.Z. and on the battlefields of France, rather than an idealised portrait of

civilised refinement as it existed in the immaculate conceptions of the safe and secure. It is the symbol of the uncompromising revelation of unpopular truth and of the way he tried to open the eyes of the blind. It is the symbol of his humanitarianism.

Thus the tongs are symbolic of Lee's attitude to the craft of writing and symbolic of his choice of subject matter. The image is an epitome of his concision and originality. It is illustrative of his dual role of spectator and participator, writer and politician. It is a practical and imaginative image simultaneously conveying the figurative meaning of repugnance and the literal meaning of difficulty; the public repugnance of others and a private difficulty. Yet the tongs, both singular and plural, represent the essential unity of the man, and the essential unity of the form and content. It follows that the novelist's pair of tongs can symbolize all the controversy which has surrounded Lee's novels: the questions concerning autobiography, propaganda, values and artistry. The novelist's pair of tongs also symbolizes the resolution I have argued. As well, the novelist's pair of tongs may symbolize Lee's achievement and thus the total literary significance of the novels in question.

It is my contention that John A. Lee's novels are of such significance separately or together as to constitute a major contribution to New Zealand literature; that COP is a New Zealand classic - there is no other statement of such significant and compelling importance on poverty; that TH is the most significant

New Zealand statement of injustice; that CIS is the first authentic New Zealand war novel and the most significant one; that an association of action and introspection, thought and disciplined emotion gives rise in each novel to a profound pathos which is the central emotion and affective power. I also affirm that the explicit statement of values or ideas and the explicit method of characterisation is as artistically valid as the method which states by implication and suggestion. Nor do I hesitate to claim significance on world standards, in their own class, for Lee's novels.

We are very slow to acclaim our own. That was said of Lee as early as 1936 by the Rev. Clyde Carr (Truth 26 Aug). We are still slow to acclaim our own. Lee was no "fretful sleeper". Far from merely exposing the rot, however, Lee has established in fictional form values of permanent and universal significance. He has extended the subject matter of the New Zealand novel. Nevertheless he is to be judged not only by his originality but also by the quality of his example. If Lee has no equal in N.Z. writing it is because no other New Zealander has the same degree of mental or imaginative power required to generate and direct the flow of thought and feeling. Some may say Man Alone has stature. It remains to demonstrate what that novel owes to John A. Lee. Ian Cross once wrote to Lee "When folk say N.Z. writing started with Katie M. I say it started with John A. Lee." <sup>l.</sup>

It is time the realistic qualities of Lee's writing, the authenticity, the lucidity of exposition, the narrative power, the pathos, the whole work as it is with its "imperfections" drew from all critics unequivocal acceptance.

## APPENDIX

The principal objective measure of literary significance is continuity of readership - Dr Johnson's time test. Although this thesis has investigated from an academic point of view the survival power of Lee's novels has been confirmed by N.Z. Public Libraries in the four main centres. I wrote to each one. Sample replies follow: "Authors of the calibre of Dan Davin, Sargeson, Ian Cross, Samuel Butler are read to the point where books are worn out and replaced, and this is certainly also true of John A. Lee." (Dun., 12 Aug. 1969). The City Librarian of Christchurch wrote: of Lee's books: "They are seldom sitting on the shelves." (30 Jul. 1969). The Auckland City Librarian wrote: "Mr Lee's works more than hold their own and those which are on the open shelves continue to issue in a manner which suggests that his works are known about and looked for and not picked at random. COP is apparently the most popular still. Our catalogue lists 4 copies none of which have been in long enough to be sighted in past weeks." (19 Sept. 1969).

"His novels and short stories are also on the shelves in most secondary schools. COP is probably the most popular." This statement was received from an inspector in the Wellington region (9 Dec. 1969). A statement from an inspector of the Auckland region indicates that COP has been used as a class reader. He concludes: "Most school libraries have at least COP on their shelves, and many have several of his other books as well." (10 Dec. 1969). In Comment Dec. 1967, p.18. Lee states: "Today I am receiving orders from schools for 100, 200, even 250 of my paper covers for use as readers." Letters from N.Z. Universities indicate a growing awareness of Lee's fiction. As has been seen COP has been studied at one overseas university, (Leeds). A recent communication informs me that Dr John Reid said that one New Zealander they knew at the Danish university he lectured at was Lee. He had also found they could discuss Lee's books at Toulouse University in France. (L, 23 Mar. 1970).

Lee's novels still sell. They are still in demand. They are still, unlike best sellers which have only transitory appeal and flawless masterpieces which have minority appeal, read and sold nearly 40 years after their publication. ("Novels born of experience have a value beyond the moment of creation." LF, fn. review CIS). Lee makes no apologies for trying to sell as well as write his own books. This opinion is expressed in the article previously referred to in Comment. The article also includes sale figures. Mr Lee has mentioned sales figures at various times. A sales sketch of the novels in question follow:



(N. B. Where Mr Lee's file is concerned the abbreviation LF has been used; L, designates "a letter to the author from Lee, Auckland," or, "letter to the author from" where the correspondent is named.)

### CHAPTER 1

1. E.H. McCormick, N.Z. Literature, (London, 1959), p.126.
2. L, 22 Jun. 1969.
3. Werner Laurie to Lee, 8 Oct. 1934: "I supplied 800 copies to Whitcombe and Tombs on sale and return basis and since they have cabled a repeat order for 50 copies so prospects are bright as far as N. Z. is concerned." (LF; COP reprinted with Lee's name on it probably in 1935).
4. In letter of n. 2. above Lee states: "Don't know numbers of anonymous sold in England, all anon. in U.S.A."
5. H. Winston Rhodes, N.Z. Novels (Wellington, 1969) P.41.
6. L, L.G. Anderson, Wellington, 7 Aug. 1969.
7. L, E.H. McCormick, Auckland, 16 Aug. 1969.
8. L, H.W. Rhodes, S.S. Orcades, Indian Ocean, 5 Sept. 1969.
9. Fn. L, Hawera Public Library, 21 Dec. 1935, LF.
10. L, 4 Feb. 1970.
11. Report, 27 Sept. 1933, LF. "Gollancz was going to do the book when Gollancz was at the pinnacle of the publishing world. He asked someone in London, a New Zealander, to read the text. The N. Z. er (I don't know who) said that such things couldn't happen in N. Z. and in consequence of the advice I lost contact with the world's then top publisher of radical books." L, 1 Dec. 1969.
12. Letter, LF.
13. Letters, LF.
14. Shaw's letter was written on board the R. M. S. Rangitane, returning to London, 15 Ap. 1934, 3 days out from Wellington. I wish here to express my thanks to Mr Lee for allowing me to read this sealed letter.

15. Letter, LF.
16. Clipping LF.
17. Alan Mulgan, intro. N.Z. Book Week, (Wellington, 1936).
18. Letter, LF.
19. Fn. Inglis review, LF.
20. Clipping, LF.
21. Tomorrow 5 Dec. 1934. I have no record of my query but Lee's silence would not, I feel, mean consent. The narrator of COP wrote: "More cruel than Red Indian Savagery is the cruelty of Christian civilisation." (p. 124).
22. Clipping, n. d. LF.
23. Letter, 31 Aug. 1935, LF.
24. Clipping, N.Z. Ladies Home Journal, 7 Dec. 1934, LF.
25. Jane Mander, The Mirror, June 1936.
26. 7 Jul. 1934, anon.
27. 1 Ap. 1934, Mary Rose.
28. 5 Dec. 1934.
29. 21 Jul. 1934, anon.
30. N., LF. See also sales figures appended.
31. Shaw's letter as for n. 14.
32. L, 7 Jul. 1969. Downie's opinion is also recorded in Rhetoric at the Red Dawn (Auckland, 1965) p. 99.
33. This review was mentioned by Lee when I was at "Vital Books" Ltd. in November, 1969.
34. L, 16 Jun. 1969.
35. Clipping, n. d., anon., LF.
36. Clipping, n. d., LF.
37. 22 Oct. 1936, anon., LF.
38. Clipping, n. d., LF.

39. LF.
40. "Cain And Abel Were Brothers," Here and Now, Mr. 1957.
41. Closing date Burnham, L, L.G. Anderson 1 Aug. 1969  
Wellington. The affirmation referred to is in N.Z. Encyclopedia  
vol. 1, p.176.
42. Letter as in n.41.
43. Clipping, 13 Jul. 1938, LF.
44. Clipping, 13 Aug. 1937, LF.
45. Clipping, 1 Sep. 1937, anon., LF.
46. Clipping, n.d., anon., LF.
47. n.d., prob. 1937, n.p., LF.
48. As above.
49. fn. Sargeson review, as in n.47.
50. J.C. Reid, Creative Writing in N.Z. (Auckland, 1946) p.54.
51. H.W. Rhodes, N.Z. Libraries, (Wellington, 1947) Vol. 10,  
p. 230 et seq.
52. As above.
53. Asked whether he was now prepared to say whether the effect of  
Lee's books was due to the theme or its treatment I received  
the reply quoted. Letter documented in n.8. COPis now a set  
book at CU Stage III English.
54. Letter LF.
55. Ormond Burton, Spring Fires, (Auckland 1956), p21.
56. D.M. & W.K. Davin, The N.Z. Novel, P.P.S.B, vol. 10, No.2.,  
p.39 (Wellington 1956).
57. M.H. Holcroft, Islands of Innocence, (Wellington, 1964), pp 20,30.
58. W.H. Pearson, "Fretful Sleepers," Landfall Country,  
(Christchurch, 1952). Perhaps not as explicitly as suggested.  
The essay condemns the "social realists", poses an idealistic  
approach for writers yet seems to ignore the values Lee has  
expressed.
59. Ian A. Gordon, Oxford N.Z. Encyclopedia, (London, 1956) p.269.

60. Joan Stevens, The N.Z. Novel, 2nd ed., (Wellington, 1966) pp. 51-2.
61. E.H. McCormick, Writing in N.Z., P.P.S.B. vol. 1, no. 23, (Wellington, 1947) pp. 386-7.
62. E.H. McCormick, N.Z. Literature, (London, 1959) p.126.
63. E.H. McCormick, A.U. Gazette, no. 1, vol. 6. (Auckland 1964) p. 3.
64. Maurice Shadbolt, The Shell Guide to N.Z. (Christchurch, 1968) p.294.
65. Ian Cross, N.Z. Listener, 11 Oct. 1968.

## CHAPTER 2

1. Could Dostoevski have written as he did of suffering without imprisonment or epilepsy? Prof. Martin Seymour-Smith writes: "for all fiction may now be legitimately seen as disguised autobiography." (Spectator, 17 Jan. 1969). Other statements of interest concerning "Autobiography" and the definition of the novel are made in the following places: Holcroft, Islands of Innocence (Wellington, 1964) p.40; Chapman, "Fiction and the Social Pattern" Landfall 25 (Christchurch, 1953) p. 32. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 1957, p. 308; Burgess, The Novel Now, (London, 1967) pp. 16-18; Watt, The Rise of the Novel, Peregrine, 1963, p. 139.
2. L, L.G. Anderson, Wellington, 7 Aug. 1969.
3. L, 9 Dec. 1969.
4. L, L.G. Anderson, Wellington, 1 Aug. 1969.
5. L, 9 Dec. 1969.
6. See n. 14, Ch. 1.
7. LF.
8. L, n.d. 1969.
9. Delinquent Days (Auck. & Lond., 1967) p. 33;  
N.Z. Listener 17 Nov. 1967.
10. Ormand Burton, Spring Fires (Auckland, 1950), p.21.

CHAPTER 3

1. The questionnaire I sent to Mr Lee included: "Did you regard your first three novels primarily as a means of stirring the reader's social conscience? Was the exploration of Character a subordinate intention?" The first and penultimate statements occur in LF, the others were received at various times.
2. N. on leaflet, L, n.d. 1969.
3. Guy "never recovered from sight of horses and men plunging in shell-holes as they were shot down." (CIS 205).
4. L, leaflet issued to rebut "hawking" of COP, n.d.
5. Joan Stevens, N.Z. Novel 2nd ed., (Wellington, 1961) p.10.
6. L, Noel Hilliard, Wellington, Aug. 24 1969.
7. See pages 97-99

CHAPTER 3 n.7.EXPLICIT SOCIAL COMMENT AS IN COP

- 64 Children of the poor are merely quantitative authorities.
- 66 Presbyterianism was hostile to jollity.
72. There was a smugness about the way God's grace was taken for granted.
- 87 Our table manners and habits were determined by economic considerations rather than by polite society.
- 89 Charity must taste bitter to prevent aspiration.
- 95 I see my mother selling herself to keep us clothed and fed and to pay the rent. Does it matter what society's verdict was?
- 99 God and the world were against us.
- 116 Patriotism is of the herd. Evangelism is of the herd. Manners are of the herd.
- 122 Society is organised to victimise the very poor.
- 124 More cruel than Red Indian savagery is the cruelty of Christian civilisation.
- 156 Like one of his pupils he was the creature of an impossible environment.
- 183 We live in a tooth and claw industrialism.

## Preface

- 6 Forgive me if at times I imply that the social system has also a taint that is reflected in these gutter children.
- 7 At the moment, the overseas Dominions starve to pay John Bull, the modern Shylock, his pound of flesh, and to worship that God of chaos called deflation.

EXPLICIT SOCIAL COMMENT AS IN TH

- 42 the daily savagery.
- 44 Education was slurred in that school.
- 48 Soulless monotony.

- 65 Ignorance was the foundation of the school's sexual morality.
- 66 Authority commits no greater crime than the act of pardoning someone to implicate another.
- 68 How they were taught to spurn manhood's urges.
- 61 Was this beyond the understanding of the school rulers?
- 71 What a school for citizenship.
- 88 Alone against the world.
- 90 A community of enmity.
- 101 The main concern of the state was to prevent evil doers from preying upon the law abiding... The manager not only had to practice the cult of repression but he had to make repression economical.
- 156 Laws can forbid succour to outlaws, and half the human family will join in the chase, but the other half have a kinship for all that is hunted.
- 174 Detectives are born and subsequently educated sceptics.
- 199 Foreman was a pillar of the church... he preached charity and practised stinginess.
- 204 A community where religion had custom winning power.
- 233 Cynicism is an adult disease.
- 243 Jailbirds have no rights.

Preface 5

Given an intelligent task every evildoer has saintly possibilities... Society is happy when the crook is seen through iron bars only.

EXPLICIT SOCIAL COMMENT AS IN CIS

- 42 The Church justified the war. The army's job was butchery.
- 179 Generals knew as little of war as correspondents. (Two paragraphs illustrating their stupidity).

- 216 For no member of the High Command knew what it was he asked the other ranks to do. Thus was the British army put to death in its own midden by incompetents enhaloed by propagandists.
- 218 For from end to end of that Ypres offensive thousands of British troops perished to commemorate the stupidity of generals who should have been hung, English generals valued for their accents and their breeding.
- 279 Half a page on the profitability of war... For war was a vested interest to all except the soldier.
- 280 The whole populace had a financial interest in murder.

CHAPTER 4

1. Maxim Gorki, Literature and Life, trans. Edith Bone. (London, 1946) p. 56.
2. Aristotle, The Art of Poetry, trans. Bywater (London, 1954) p. 65.
3. L, 2 Jul. 1969.

CHAPTER 5

1. L, 27 Aug. 1969.
2. LWPS (Auckland, 1956) p. 18.
3. N. Z. Labour Party Notes for Speakers 1938 (GAL).
4. Schramm moved Lee's expulsion and said he had the pen of a guttersnipe - Lee's account, SOSB (London 1963) p. 193; account also in Tomorrow, (3 Ap. 1940,) p. 325.
5. See *page 101*. (imagery).
6. L, 16 Jun. 1969. This idea also in LWPS.
7. See *page 102*, listing "verbal".
8. See *page 103*, dialogue sample.
9. As for n. 5.
10. L, 2 Jul. 1969.

CHAPTER 6

1. LF, Auckland Library.

CHAPTER 5 notes 5,9PASSAGE FROM CIS SHOWING AUDITORY AND VISUAL IMAGERY  
(p.80)

Above Romarin the air was always throbbing with planes. Like huge dragon-flies they soared and circled and stung and spat at other planes that swooped down out of the ether to sting and spit. Engines throbbed and droned and buzzed, planes were driven down by tracer bullets shot from enemy planes, bullets that threaded a silver streak in the twilight sky. Planes were driven up into the blue away from the angry burst of aircraft shrapnel, planes flew low, defying point-blank fire of machine gun and hundreds of trench rifles, to map out trenches for enemy artillery. Romarin was a hive of activity that radiated toward the German line, so over Romarin hung the eyes of two armies. Mankind climbing in the air caused mankind to grovel and burrow feverishly deeper into the safety of mud.

(An extremely powerful passage combining involvement and detachment. The image of the eyes is a perfect example of the latter.)

CHAPTER 5 note 7

## INSTANCES SHOWING USE OF "VERBAL"

COP

16	verbally accepted
27	verbally emphatic
33	verbally recapitulate
52	verbally clear
64	verbal acknowledgement
73	verbal contrition
86	verbal communion
87	verbal deceit
138	verbal unbelief
149	verbally faulty
159	verbally spellbinder
252	verbal hero

TH

19	verbal response
31	verbal step
39	verbal outpouring
63	verbal salve
90	verbal braggadocio
104	verbal ferocity
137	verbal hazards
182	verbal tribute
186	verbal glamour
225	verbal abuse
242	verbal innings

CIS

14	verbal braggadocio
42	verbal pills
53	verbal truant
56	verbal pool
70	verbal licence
73	verbal changes
104	verbal front
120	verbal tactic
127	verbal brawl
129	verbal antagonists
135	verbal enemies
196	verbally a crushing victory
228	message gathered verbally

CHAPTER 5 note 8

## DIALOGUE EXTRACTS

COP "Sex: a study in economic determinism" (p. 122-3)

Rose and Porcello

"Think of the toffee we could buy. "  
 "You don't know what you are asking. "  
 "I do. I do. Bananas, two a penny. "  
 "Oh, go away. "  
 "And lemonade. "  
 "Leave me alone. "  
 "And stale hot pies a penny each. "  
 "I won't! I won't!  
 "If I was a girl and someone gave me money I would. "  
 "I won't. "  
 "You won't always be able to get money like this. "

TH "Enter the serpent" (p. 240).

Jim and Alexander Foreman

"That kid worked hard all summer and gets nothing to spend. I sneaked more myself when I was a boy. "  
 "This boy is different. It's bred in him. He'll steal money next.  
 "Good god, he's not that bad! I like him. "

CIS "Pagan death but Christian burial" (p. 208).

Sergeant, Guy, and another Soldier.

"Christ! He smells like a Hun. "  
 "Another too green to burn, and all Huns are for Hell. "  
 "Shut up, " said the sergeant.  
 "Cook first, Burn afterwards. "  
 "Shut up, for Jesus' sake. "  
 "Why burial by parsons anyway, Sarge?"  
 "Military Orders. "  
 "Wish the Kaiser had to sleep with this one. "

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