

Schlunke's characters carry out farm work that serves different creative and narrative purposes, including as part of the structure of plot and theme, for example in the story called simply "Hay". As was often his practice, its opening paragraphs signal character, plot, and the structure of the narrative itself.⁴ Here again the ontology of emu and man is blurred, with the presence of the former signalling participation of the immediate bio-community in the seasonal process of hay-cutting as well as being symbolic of the human community with its varied habits and values:

The Kleinert boys, being keen of eye and devoted to the cheapest of blood sports, were the first to notice Weismann taking long walks in his big wheat paddock.

Because the crop was tall and dense, they could see little more than his head, and at first suspected that it was an emu. But emus are prone to stops and starts, to meaningless wanderings hither and thither, and circuitous pursuits of each other by means of which they knock down about fifty times as much wheat as they eat; and the object in the crop was obviously walking straight along a drill wheel-track, which indicated very positively to the Kleinerts that it was the owner taking stock of his crop and not breaking down one more stalk than was necessary. ("Hay" 22).

Though the reference to "blood sports" is directed at wildlife and hints at a history of violence, Schlunke's introduction is further complicated as the story progresses and the reader notes that the behaviour of Weismann, the central character, does in fact mirror that of the emus. He gets his hay cut and stoked as a result of his apparently guileless "circuitous pursuits" and "meaningless wanderings" among his neighbours, inducing them to compete against each other. These seemingly random interactions achieve his hay-cutting goal as directly as his walk along the "drill-wheel track." As the work progresses not only emus but spiders, beetles, horses, dogs, and a skylark witness or work in the operation.

Although the labour involved accords with Smyth's account of the georgic, a further question arises from the combining of Schlunke's farming, his natural world and his fiction—that is, "the question of managing the rapport with reality" (Kristeva 10). Ross Gibson, considering such a combination of art, country and work in a Pilliga Forest wood-cutter's camp, saw "some dynamic relationship within its parts" (24), and went on to coin the term "changescape" to describe

an aesthetic and practical system whose matter, method and thematics encompassed the fragility, mutability and fecundity of the habitable world. Predominantly meditative, albeit laborious, constructed, maintained and evolving in concert with a dynamic environment. (25)

In Schlunke's life and in his writings, as in a changescape "the edges between culture and cosmos are porous" (Gibson 26). The more degraded the ecosystem within the "dynamic environment," the more easily the abject is seen. The natural world might be included quite simply as metaphor grafting human and animal behaviour: in one example, when a visiting official attempts to co-opt the solitary, misanthropic farmer Schultz, the bureaucratic subject is shown to contrast starkly with the natural subject:

Heron stepped forward briskly and proceeded to address Schultz on the general outlines of the Greater South-Western Water Conservation and Land Preservation Scheme. Schultz stood there, with his head half turned away, like a horse that is being forced to face a hailstorm. ("The Psychologists" 80)

