‘You Lucky People!’ Tommy Trinder on Stage and Film as a Public Vector of Post-War Anglo-Australian Projects of Land, Food and People

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Thomas Edward Trinder (1909–1989), a foremost British variety entertainer of his age, is a major twentieth-century cross-over multi-mediated entertainer. His seven-decade career stretches from music hall and concert party origins to embrace variety, radio, films and television. He also toured Canada, the United States and South Africa. A master at the art of brash self-promotion (Farmer), his lantern-jawed visage and voluble improvisatory skill were encountered in Government Houses and hospital wards, pantomime stages and on the Nullabor Road, which he crossed in his ‘TT1’ registered Rolls (‘Worth Reporting’). Trinder made three Australian visits: October 1946 to February 1947; April to August 1949 (this was mostly occupied with filming Ealing Studio’s *Bitter Springs*); and the last—June 1952 to June 1954—encompassed the also-strenuous royal visit. Trinder is deserving of historical attention in his own right as an important public presence within the rich cross-influences of post-war Australian popular culture, and is a useful vector for exploring the complex intertwined public networks of transnationalism. The Trinder vector thus takes us across post-war immigration from outside the nation and the internal migration of an involuntarily displaced people within it; and encompasses both the two-way circulation of peoples and largely one-way transfers of technology, money and, in particular, food.

A key insight about twentieth-century Australian culture is made by Neville Meaney in his 2001 article ‘Britishness and Australian Identity.’ He distinguishes ‘communities of culture’ and ‘communities of interest,’ the latter comprising the linked public spheres of internal and foreign policies (85). Meaney pursues the public and political relationships between national culture and the public sphere, which are explored here through their operations in the popular stage, radio and screen cultures of Australia’s post-war decades. The Australian popular success of the London-born comedian Tommy Trinder, which coincides with the presence of many other visiting British entertainment luminaries, works to endorse Meaney’s understanding of the ‘two views’ that Australians in the post-war era held of Britain and the Empire:

> One treated Britain as the metropolitan superior, the heart of the Empire, and Australia as a colonial subordinate, a peripheral adjunct. The other saw the Empire as a multi-polar structure, and alliance of British peoples in which the white constituent elements were entitled to consideration and dignity, Australia equally with Britain. (83)

Trinder’s warm Australian reception, his role in the 1950 Ealing film *Bitter Springs* and his own civic energies as a fund-raiser for Australian imperial and national charities are readily identifiable as examples of the enduring strength of the post-war Anglo-British ‘community of culture’: what Danks (226), in his consideration of Ealing Studio’s Australian films, calls the ‘continued relevance of pan-British value and identities in a country like Australia at the time.’ But as Meaney further argues (85–87), the disjunctions between the two ideas of

British 'community,' and the pragmatic force of Australia's security 'interests,' were characteristically compromised by questions of the half-century-old British reluctance to guarantee Australia in the matter of Pacific defence. These tensions were further exacerbated in 1942 by the surrender of Singapore. Prime Minister Chifley, though pursuing the anti-communist mutual regional defence initiative of the Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS, 1951), also endorsed the markedly non-mutual British Guided Missile Project. Thus, in mapping the wider issues raised by Trinder's Australian variety tour in its largely urban, and both live and mediated ambiances, there are also partly occulted inland sites: the location site of Quorn in the Flinders Ranges where *Bitter Springs* was filmed in 1949; the Ooldea Mission; and the various remote test sites of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The Anglo-Australian nuclear tests which ensued in 1952–63 not only adversely affected the film's greatest star and selling point—the land itself—but also caused decades of further land-loss, dislocation and illnesses for many of its Aboriginal performers and for thousands of servicemen of both countries. My contention is that the totality of the post-war Australian public culture, in which Trinder is one specific but very visible agent, is less chronologically confined than hetero-temporal. Rather like the nuclear clouds of radio-active dust caused by the multiple explosions, it diffuses its histories, teleologies and geographies, suggesting that 'Modernity is multi-temporal and its spaces are heteronomous, an amalgam of the past, the contemporary and the future' (Dixon and Kelly xv).

Post-war British incomers to Australia included entertainers, migrants, the royal couple, film-makers from Ealing Studios, British nuclear scientists, and luckless British national servicemen who became military test subjects in the central deserts. Tens of thousands of British and Australian national service troops, mostly lightly-clad young men, were ordered to face the detonations at a few miles distance and be monitored by detection equipment whose purpose was never clarified, or to fly repeatedly through the toxic explosion 'mushrooms.' Aboriginal inhabitants of the remote sites who had not been relocated were exposed to the dust, which sickened them and poisoned and alienated their lands. The Anglo-Australian nuclear tests took place at the Monte Bello islands off the coast of West Australia, and subsequently at the Emu Field and Maralinga sites in north-west South Australia. These submarine and atmospheric tests ran officially from 1952 to 1957, but were also unofficially undertaken from 1955 to 1963 in over seven hundred highly contaminating Minor Tests. The tests were administered, not as scientific research, but as top priority military operations entailing the full weight of secrecy and discipline for their enlisted participants. Australians, whether elected representatives or in general, were barred from knowing what this participation involved or sharing of any scientific benefits (Tynan n.p.; Walker n.p.). The cold-war security black-out surrounding this particular group of British incomers contrasts poignantly with the saturation publicity enjoyed by Trinder in Australia, and by the royal couple who visited in February 1954.

A permanent record of one aspect of Trinder's Australian work is the 1950 Ealing film *Bitter Springs*. Its director was Ralph Smart who also wrote its original screenplay, which was subsequently revised from London by W. P. Lipscomb and Monja Danischewsky. This ambivalent text encodes transnational significances linking the cultural with the world-historical, while its conditions of production and its overt thematics mesh both with larger national histories of Aboriginal displacement, old-world migration, and, in a more extensive view, with the 1950s British–Australian nuclear tests in central and northern Australia. A hetero-temporal account of Trinder in Australia responds to the enquiry outlined by Robert Dixon in his study of the international intermediated career of the photographer Frank Hurley:

'What kinds of intellectual, social and institutional formations allowed individuals to move through the increasingly transnational flows of imperial culture?' and 'what were the *spaces* or sites of colonial modernity?' (Dixon xxx–xxxi). In this account, the urban sites of the theatre, radio or film studio, Town Hall and Parliament House can be culturally cross-read with the remote sites of the desert military/scientific test ground, the film location and the outback mission.

During the critical post-war years of national reconstruction in Britain and Australia, Trinder, then at the peak of his considerable career on stage and film, commanded popular Australian enthusiasm as a public figure and a performer on variety and radio. In this, he had stiff competition from fellow British stage stars. A few of the multitude of British entertainment identities who toured Australia upon the post-war re-opening of travel include top-billing Lancastrians: the singer Gracie Fields and the ukulele player George Formby. Comic musical actors were Arthur Askey, Stanley Holloway, Cicely Courtneidge, Jessie Matthews and Joyce Grenfell. Also on tour were major dramatic companies: the Old Vic Company with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in 1948; the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company with Antony Quayle and Diana Wynyard in 1949; and some British big-name popular entertainers of the 1960s including instrumentalist Winifred Atwell and vocalists Shirley Bassey and Tommy Steele.

Amid this influx of post-war British actors and variety performers, Trinder, fresh from energetic entertainment of those Allied troops still marooned in Asia, was a comparatively early arrival. The London-born variety comedian, already a veteran of stage, film and radio, immediately won over Australian family audiences and officialdom alike. His catch-phrase, repeated in variety theatres and on radio, picked out in marquee lights and pasted on the back of buses, was 'If it's laughter you're after, TRINDER's the name. You lucky people!' (Double 14). Arriving in Double Bay by flying boat in November 1946 and bursting with brilliant, indefatigable and vulgar energy, Trinder became ubiquitous on Australian stages and important to Australia's various social and political projects. 'I'm just a Pommy trying to make good,' he announced to a dazzled press upon his arrival in Sydney ('Tommy Trinder—He's Funny All the Time'). In thus identifying himself as a 'Pommy' new chum, Trinder speedily situated himself within the key Australian policy, commencing in 1947, of encouraging and managing British migration. He also supported various Anglo-Australian official interests by deploying those arts of soft power—rallying, focussing, enthusing, leading—peculiar to popular entertainers.

There is little doubt, as Meaney affirms, that Britishness in the wide sense was a 'powerful national idea' (81) in 1940s and 1950s Australia, and would so remain until the 1970s. I assert that the always loose fit between the distinctive British and Australian communities—of culture and of interest—ensured that either country could focalise its strategic and affiliative allegiances by investing strongly in cultural connections or security interests, or else by denying contradictions.

> Australian leaders' Britishness led them, as cultural nationalism requires, to persist in looking for common policies which could unite all British peoples. But commonality tended to founder upon the need to defend Australian interests against competing interests within the Empire. (Meaney 88)

In the latter half of the twentieth century, British–Australian relationships were continually being strained as imperial military and financial priorities clashed with Australians' strong

sense of nationhood: contradictions within the 'community of interest' are displayed. By contrast, visits to post-war army demobilisation camps, hospitals and orphanages in the Pacific area by such headline and genuinely popular British entertainers as Gracie Fields in mid-1945, or later Trinder, did a lot to counter any community disaffection In Australia through their mobilisation of the dominant Anglo-British formation of popular culture, distributed on the networks of radio, records, stage and cinema.

By 1946 Australians had already seen the film-mediated Trinder in his British war-time comedies *Sailors Three* (1940), *The Foreman Went to France* (1942), *The Bells Go Down* (1943), *Fiddlers Three* and *Champagne Charlie* (1944). But in considering the matrix of interests, discourses and imagery that go to constitute modern transnational culture, we must also factor in the dominant presence of American film and radio. In addition, when Trinder arrived in Australia late in 1946, the last of the huge American army occupying Australian soil since 1942 had barely moved out (Kelly 179–98). In this field of popular culture, the dyad of Britain–Australia is in fact always triangulated by the large and diffusely mediated American influence upon both parties. Trinder's style of brash comedy and his stream of seemingly (and also genuinely) impromptu patter were, as we shall see, identified less as British (unlike the recitals of Formby or Holloway, who repeated onstage their popular radio and recorded repertoires) than with adaptable American and Australian troop favourites Bob Hope and the radio star Bob Dyer. Neither party's culture confronts the world as a monolith, nor without some degree of the local cross-cultural and cross-platform mediations which define international modernity.

Let us now consider Australia's Trinder as an exemplum of transnationalism, and how the three-way dance of national cultures was played out in the genre of popular variety. What sort of comedian was Trinder, and what were identified locally as his theatrical and technological traditions, practices and influences? Newley considers that Trinder's Australian success was because 'audiences found his egocentric cockney humour akin to their own' (70). When in 1954 the Queen and her consort visited Australia, the compere of the Royal Gala Performance at Sydney's Tivoli was Trinder, that organisation's star import, in a bill alongside conductors Bernard Heinze, Eugene Goossens, Arthur Benjamin's short opera *The Devil Take Her*, and the ballet *Corroboree* choreographed by Beth Dean to John Antill's music. Trinder was already a firm favourite with the royal family, and in the United Kingdom he compered many a Royal Variety Performance or official charity drive (Newley 61–63). 'I am led to believe there are a number of Pommies here tonight,' was his opening observation at the well-gowned Sydney event ('An Uninvited Guest').

The writer of a long piece titled 'Trinder and the Theatre' in the *Sydney Morning Herald* considers him a typical Cockney, a 'facetious leg-puller' deflating class pomposity:

> This jaunty, irrepressible Trinder is an ambassador without airs who represents the people in the chief city of the Empire. He is of the breed which 'grins and bears it,' which has always a cheeky answer for adversity, a rude tongue out for pretence, and a hand in the pocket when a pal is down-and-out.

The comedian is not however seen as a revolutionary: he is 'the proletarian without spite' who 'gives the people back to themselves,' and the variety audience is compared with the Globe Theatre crowd as depicted in Olivier's film *Henry V*: 'applauding, hissing, exchanging witticisms, a lively, critical audience which knows what it wants, and demands the goods of dramatist and actors.' The writer then alludes to the project, then gathering force, to create an

Australian national theatre: 'If the legitimate theatre is to return to a commanding place in democratic life, it must respond to what is going on in the hearts of the people, and not to the limited viewpoint which is represented by the stiff shirt-fronts of the stalls.' Thus, Trinder is adroitly drafted by local cultural interests as an early conscript in the long-running Australian national theatre debate, which in the 1970s would indeed shift its focus from the tastes of the 'shirt-fronts' to the improvisatory, physical and demotic traditions exemplified by the popular variety comedian. The diminutive Lancashire musical clown Arthur Askey, touring Australia at the time of Trinder's third visit, made his own perceptive comment on the embryo national theatre: 'Your impresarios bring out 'erbs like myself and Tommy Trinder and Formby, but I wonder where it is getting your Australian theatre if your people always have to play supporting parts' ('Askey "Notches His Gun"').

Writing in the *Argus*, Geoffrey Hutton ('Of Comics and Their Technique') also places Trinder, despite his cosmopolitan performance techniques, as the quintessential Cockney:

> He breezes on, tips his hat over his nose, chats to latecomers, chats to the band, chats to babies which howl in the darkness (I was watching at an afternoon session), tells a few stories, and sings a song. The whole thing takes 10 minutes flat, and he is back half an hour later dressed in his Norman Hartnell gown as Carmen Miranda, or as Frank Sinatra to do a little well-timed fooling.

While Trinder's Miranda drag act is preserved in the 1944 farce *Fiddlers Three* (Newley 53–56), his version of Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), which must have been equally skilled and hilarious, is not so recorded. Yet as a stand-up comic, Trinder identifies his wise-cracking technique with American comics like Bob Hope: 'My style is American, you see, English humour and American delivery.' Trinder does not 'fire off a few well-rehearsed asides' but is a genuine music-hall type improvisor. Hutton concludes his piece with a perfect interpellation of the post-war community of Anglo-Australian culture:

> It seems that Australians are liking Trinder. If they did not it would mean that they had got out of touch with the English people, because Trinder is one of their loyalties . . . The style may come from New York, but the rest comes from somewhere around Covent Garden or Clapham Common. ('Of Comics and Their Technique')

Despite these 'Cockney' labels, it should be stressed that the Streatham-born son of a tram driver was not a regionally-identified comic in the way that Formby or Fields are identifiably Lancastrian by both birth and stage personae, or Harry Lauder Scottish. Trinder was born and raised not in the East End but in South London, and did not employ the kind of stage Cockney or Yorkshire dialects used, for example, by Stanley Holloway. Newley (18) assesses that, while being nominally a southern comic—a group whose humour did not often travel well in the north of the country—Trinder was equally warmly received in northern urban centres: this fluidity of regional identification meant he was equally able to transfer abroad to other English-speaking countries, and mobilise very successfully in Australia. From its nineteenth-century inception, variety is itself a generically hybridised and transnational cultural formation. Trinder's identification is metropolitan in a modernist way, one which travelled along the modern vectors of radio, recording and cinema: a style—transcending specific localised content—equally intelligible in New York or Sydney as at the London Palladium, or in cabarets, nightclubs, urban hotels or on national television. Hutton recognises this in a subsequent piece ('Are Comics What They Were?'), calling Trinder a 'modern comedian,

because his technique is slick and based largely on the intimate film close-up, his tempo is fast, and he packs his gags with local topical allusions. He even makes up wisecracks.' Compared with the staid and non-physical interwar music-hall star Wee Georgie Wood, then touring Australia, the author sees Trinder as fitting in in more with the contemporary anarchic worlds of the Marx Brothers, the local star Roy Rene ('Mo') or the British comic stage group the Crazy Gang.

The Tivoli Collection of 'Show Files' in the State Library of Victoria (*Records of the Tivoli Theatre*) contain the pressbooks, promptbooks, timesheets, scripts, box office, expenses and other material for Trinder's Australian shows *You Lucky People* (1946: Series 3, Boxes 18, 60), *Cinderella* and *The Tommy Trinder Show* (1952: Sub-Series, Series B). These help to fill out the details of his kinesic practices. The promptbook for *You Lucky People* indicates a carefully-scripted performance of kinesic informality while catering for the necessary lighting and musical cues: long radio as well as stage experience meant that Trinder could time his own act to a second. In *You Lucky People*, as in most of his shows, Trinder characteristically deserts 'his sweetheart—the "mike"' (*Timaru Herald*) centre stage, clambering into the boxes and into the audience, or, in populist mode, bringing out the theatre cleaner for applause. Signifiers of cosmopolitan modernity such as strobe lights, Balinese dance acts, jazz and Latin music ('St Louis Blues,' 'Tico Tico,' 'Rhapsody in Blue') indicate that, unlike Formby or Holloway, these are not celebrations of cosy provincialism but of internationalised modernity. The promptbook, while notating every sound, lighting, musical and chorus cue, shows that Trinder's own act was athletically physical and his patter unscripted, thus avoiding censorship attempts by the Tivoli management who were careful to preserve their broad 'family' audience appeal. Trinder could however direct and amplify an uncertain audience laugh response with such prompts as 'Don't laugh in the wrong places please, it makes the jokes sound dirty' (Double 152), and altogether played the audience like a virtuoso pianist. The star's comedy feeds—by tradition female—were the then tyro Australian comediennes Toni Lamond and Gloria Dawn. For *The Tommy Trinder Show*, critic Frank Doherty considered 'Tommy the Pommy' gave his audiences what he himself appeared to be having, the 'time of his life' (Doherty).

For performers such as Trinder, commercial entertainment activities for the Tivoli circuit are intimately meshed with social and/or political projects undertaken, not only by commercial entertainment, but tacitly in concert with Anglo-Australian national, State or municipal officialdom. During the London Blitz, entertainers typically ad-libbed for hours at a time during prolonged black-outs for live audiences in theatres and underground stations. Trinder dashed around London in taxis in order to cover up to twenty-seven theatres in a night to keep the flow of amusement going (Baker 124). Like entertainers in all genres, Trinder enthusiastically threw himself into civilian and troop entertainment in various remote theatres of the Second World War, chatting to soldiers in camps, on the frontline and in hospitals, generally easing their fears and isolation with humour much racier than the fare that family audiences were favoured with. Audiences both military and civilian enjoyed his outrageous self-promotion, his catch-phrase 'You lucky people!' and his ability to improvise solo at length if required. War-time solidarity between Australian and British people, if not their official governments, formed their community of culture discursively disseminated by popular entertainers in radio, recordings, literature, press, film and stage, and augmented by recent troop experiences in common theatres of war.

During wartime and the post-war decade, a deluge of individually compiled food parcels and official food aid flooded northward. These are public and civic counterparts to the south-

bound flows of British scientists, troops and technology in the covert military co-operation of the nuclear tests: 'culture' and 'interest' did not always coincide. Additionally, more British people increasingly streamed southwards. Accompanying the influx of post-war popular performers was the increasing volume of British migrants seeking to escape scarcity, cold, rationing and drabness. By mid-1946 the UK butter rationing was cut to 2 ounces per week ('Tommy Trinder Tells'). Trinder, whose vast weekly earnings were swallowed up in double taxation on the local earnings of British residents (K. M.), made himself the public face of food-related post-war charities, with the full collusion and co-operation of the press and of Commonwealth, State and urban leaders. The practice of entertainers acting whether passively or—in the case of Trinder—hyper-actively as national ambassadors abroad, becomes of prime political importance both under wartime conditions and in periods of post-war recovery. The raising of civilian and military morale and the mustering of financial aid or of food and *matériel* is a key part of the popular performer's wartime duties. Trinder's role in *Bitter Springs* is a natural extension of his Australian stage presence in publicity and fund-raising: promoting land, food resources and immigrant opportunities. Whether clowning on film as the Pommy new chum, or cavorting on Australian stages for purposes of fund-raising, this Pommy 'making good' served as a significant promoter of joint Anglo-Australian public projects.

Prominent amongst these quasi-civilian enterprises was Food for Britain, the Melbourne Lord Mayor's favourite food parcel charity. The Lord Mayor was salaamed by Trinder at a social event of 14 August 1946 'because he sends food to my people' ('The Life of Melbourne'), and told audiences how he'd seen Melbourne food parcels distributed to the blitzed populations of Liverpool and Plymouth ('Tommy Trinder Tells'). Trinder compered stage shows, radio appeals and Town Hall receptions to garner tinned meat, sugar, fats and dried fruit for a Britain ravaged by war, freezing weather, and two resulting successive bad post-war harvests which affected combatant and neutral European countries alike ('Appeal to the Heart'). In all, he raised over £30,000 for this charity. A strong Labour supporter in Britain—which like Australia had firmly ousted its wartime Conservative government—Trinder chatted freely with Prime Minister Ben Chifley, who had won the 1946 election in a comfortable victory, and also the retiring Robert Menzies ('Tommy Trinder Arriving Today'). On his third tour to Australia (June 1952 – December 1953), he turned his lively attention to Australians in need, especially regarding emergency wards in hospitals and children in orphanages.

Despite the support of Melbourne's Lord Mayor O. J. Nilsen, his reception by some elements of Victorian officialdom was as frigid as the late-forties weather. It was Nilsen's project to curate a special multi-denominational performance for 1,600 orphanage children in his own domain, the Melbourne Town Hall, and he enlisted Trinder's aid ('Here's a Party'). Despite his social familiarity with Victorian parliamentarians, the reception given Trinder by W. Gordon Sprigg, Secretary of the Sunday Observance Council, was considerably more chilly. He declared the Sunday Command Performance of 3 August 1952 'unworthy of our city' and admonished Trinder to 'remember he is a guest here' ('Don't Butt In'). When William Salter, President of the Council of Churches and Victorian Chief Secretary, also weighed in for Sprigg's party and against Nilsen, a public feud of challenges and counter-challenges simmered on for some weeks. A compromise was reached when the glamorous show-girls and ballet dancers were excluded from a Town Hall charity performance on 28 September ('Glamor Girls'). Trinder riposted by accompanying the banned women, dressed in their best furs and gowns, to entertain the soldiers at the Caulfield Repatriation Hospital ('Tommy's Show for Diggers').

Melbourne charity night programme cover, 9 May 1954. Author's collection.

While the managers of pre-televised variety proclaimed their clean family entertainment, most popular comedians were experts at innuendos and double meanings, setting up a community of naughty knowingness with their audiences in which both evaded the censorious laws of managers and broadcasters. The BBC, which required every word scripted, adhered to, double-checked and read out, did not long accommodate Trinder, nor he it (H. S.) Working with the 'guvnor' while cheeking him publicly made Trinder prominent in Australian community and official causes, as it had in Great Britain (Double 54). It often involved clashes with official entities such as the BBC, whom Trinder walked out on when they cut one of his jokes: 'I was walking down Whitehall the other day when an American soldier came up to me and said "What side is the War Office on?" I said "Our side, I hope"' (Baker 42). David Martin, the dour Tivoli chief whose pet hates were 'off-colour comedians and fat chorus girls' (Rutledge, n.p.), was another 'guvnor' who took a dim view of performer autonomy, and after the final tour of *The Tommy Trinder Show* through Australia and New Zealand, its star returned to England. In 1958 Trinder succeeded in irritating another despotic entertainment magnate, the head of ITV Lew Grade, who had him fired from *Sunday Night at the Palladium.* While radio and records collaborated with popular stage variety to the advantage of both, television absorbed its acts and eventually killed its host (Baker 38). Trinder's temporary fall from prominence in the late 1960s is contemporaneous with that of live variety itself: 'A popular theatre tradition that had lasted for 100 years or more fell apart in little more than a decade,' and television was its plagiariser and inheritor (Double 69).

Trinder in Australia demonstrates how the proficiency and professionalism of the entertainer can be readily directed to other public activities demanding extrovert social skills: the ability to rally popular enthusiasm; and an adaptable readiness in the pursuit of national or international enterprises, thus channeling his anarchy within large organisational structures. More than his strictly professional stage work, Trinder's energetic involvement with official projects such as hospital funding, troop entertainment and food charities is analogous to, and feeds into, the acculturated industrial structures and skills of the film production crew, whose remote locations resembled front-line army camps. Trinder's reported off-camera function for the location filming of *Bitter Springs* seems to have mainly comprised team-building through fooling and well-publicised interactions with the Aboriginal performers: roles where his traditional skills as a front-of-cloth performer were readily adaptable to industrial-age enterprises such as cinema-making (Young). The *Bitter Springs* visual records held by the National Film and Sound Archive exhaustively document Trinder's off-set clowning in the company of the crew's children, its Aboriginal cast, and (at the time) former Prime Minister Menzies ('Sweet Music in Bitter Springs'; 'Film Unit Brings Excitement'; 'Tommy Trinder Tap Dances for Political Visitors'). In filming as in public charity work, ebullient or anarchic personalities must work harmoniously with larger international objectives commanded by strong industry-professional entities comprising teams of specialised technological and artistic experts.

The luminous monochrome Ealing film *Bitter Springs* was shot in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia in late 1949, thanks to the astute manoeuvring of South Australian Premier Thomas Playford. Murgon in South-East Queensland was considered for the location since the Cherbourg Mission was nearby, but the Aboriginal people there were considered too 'sophisticated' to play first-contact people ('135 for Film Unit'). The film was an elaborate project with many international as well as industrial investments. Directed by Ralph Smart with a fine orchestral score by Ralph Vaughan Williams, the film's cast contains the already-iconic Chips Rafferty and the Scottish actor Gordon Jackson, both of whom had starred on Australian location in Ealing's 1948 *Eureka Stockade*. Trinder was the comic relief, and two

hundred or so Tjatjara people were brought in from the United Aboriginals Mission at Ooldea in South Australia. As a cultural artifact *Bitter Springs* both replays and foretells stories of Aboriginal displacement, and moreover uses as actors some of the very people who would within half a dozen years be again ejected from their land as preparation for the nuclear tests.

In his informal role as a vocally pro-Labour immigration ambassador, Trinder had already commented disapprovingly on the 'kangaroos, Bridge and Bradman' literary and cinematic images of Australia being officially promoted in London to potential English emigrants—the chief feature of the latter (besides the Harbour Bridge) being 'sheep, sheep and more sheep' (Hinchley). This pastoral image had been little challenged by Ealing's international 1946 hit *The Overlanders* with Chips Rafferty—again in the outback, but now with cattle. According to Deb Verhoeven's astute analysis (184–85), *Bitter Springs* can be read 'in relation to the question of origins and agency, of (agri)cultural production and consumption . . . and especially in terms of broader debates over the emerging policies and practices of assimilation.' Like the sheep, the Aboriginal people 'are depicted in such a way as to resist interpretation (such as when they are presented as a "natural feature of landscape").' The land and its precious water, its conflicting peoples, and who is entitled to eat either the kangaroos or the sheep, become the film's major stakes: questions which it raises but which are difficult to neatly resolve.

In the opinion of Ealing Studio, the sheep factor did in fact help support the international appeal of Australian landscape and stories, and to confirm the iconic status of the Rafferty star persona: 'rough and unschooled but cunning, steadfast and resourceful, like the blacks with whom he was friends' ('Chips Rafferty'). To *Bitter Springs* this actor brought the ghosts of his characters in *The Overlanders*; the First War Light Horse cavalryman in Chauvel's story of the Battle of Beersheba *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940); the more immediately topical *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944); and Peter Lalor, revolutionary turned parliamentarian, in *Eureka Stockade* (1949). Rafferty, the performer of soldier and outback heroes, thus imports to *Bitter Springs* his screen personae which had him 'embody the spirit of an entire nation' (Larkins 1). Memories of the Depression struggles and of the returned Digger layer into the character of Wally King the ghosted images of the servicemen of both conflicts: resolute and versatile, possibly brutalised by war, determined to at last secure his family's welfare and their place in the country he ostensibly fought for, and not too scrupulous about means and ends. In 1950 J. Clifford King published a novelisation of the film which finishes with the revised Wally's decision to invite the Aborigines into a co-operative enterprise: 'Wally's voice sounded stronger. He sounded like a man who had given a lot of thought to something and finally convinced himself. "Somebody gotter give it a go" he said' (112).

As the comic relief, Trinder accompanies Rafferty along with the too-familiar cinematic sheep thought by officialdom to appeal to British immigrants—which indeed during the hungry forties they may have done, but more as potential sources of warm clothing and mutton than as picturesque local fauna. Trinder's own inclusion, though playing into his undoubted Australian popularity, owes less to local choice than to the positioning of British film within globalised economics. As Larkins explains, the Quota Act of 1927 was designed for the partial sequestering of the post-war British film industry from United States competition, aimed to protect the proportion of employment of British actors and technicians (60). More recently, the import duty levied by the British Labour government in 1947–48 caused Anglo-American friction and minute scrutiny by the Board of Trade of film productions deemed 'British,' irrespective of their filming location (Fisher, n.p.). The casting of *Bitter Springs* was closely affected by these contemporary international industrial disputes.

In response to the post-war conditions of food shortages, emigration and slow post-war national recuperations, *Bitter Springs* also centres on the internal emigration and land-hunger of pioneers and of their 'sheep, sheep and more sheep.' Its immediate ghostly reception context comprises the hungry wartime and post-war years and the responsibility of the agricultural colonies to supply exhausted Europe with food; the British influx of hopeful new immigrants; and also the trauma as well as the hopes of those servicemen recently returned from overseas service in Europe and Asia. The triangulation of land, food and peoples gains particular force in *Bitter Springs* by its focus on the Aboriginal occupants of the 'Outback,' and while at the time the film achieved only moderate success, it retains immense cultural value in foreshadowing the catastrophic costs of the Anglo-Australian relationship borne by black and white Australians alike, and also by the object of their mutual desire: the land itself.

The gold rush of Ealing's previous film *Eureka Stockade* is now a rush for land, water and food. In the 1890s, Wally King and his pioneer family (Jean Blue as his wife; Nonni Pfeiffer as his daughter) drive their animals north from Adelaide into the Centre, searching for permanent water supply. His destination is Bitter Springs, a waterhole in the territory of an Aboriginal tribe. Along the way they pick up an out-of-work British variety performer (Trinder) with his young son (Nicky Yardley), and a Scot (Gordon Jackson). The Trooper (Michael Pate) warns Wally that here is being set up an irreconcilable conflict: 'Two tribes can't survive on one waterhole.' Raids and reprisals break out, shots are fired, spears are thrown. Wally tries to drive the Aboriginals by force off 'his' waterhole, but when the local people turn the tables and deprive the desperate pioneers of drinking water, Wally starts to see their point. The re-written *dénouement* is a decision to work together and employ the Aboriginals on the sheep station, and the film's brief final image shows this co-operation in action. This does not and possibly cannot really resolve the crucial resources dilemma posed by the Trooper: how the waterhole can sustain in perpetuity not only two 'tribes' but also mobs of thirsty sheep and horses. Ralph Smart's original story was to end in the ousting of the local people, but his script was revised by Ealing headquarters to emend this ending. The critic Keith Manzie considered that the Aboriginal performers '"stole" the show with intelligent, enthusiastic, and realistic performances' (Manzie). Trinder looks uncomfortable in his role and, as a professional, seems aware of his miscasting and that his comic skills, so evident in *The Foreman Went to France,* do not translate well to this particular film.

The forced and displaced intra-national movement of peoples in Australia's continental centre, which for the duration of the Anglo-Australian tests (1956–1963) became in effect exclusive British property, echoes and parodies the more hopeful transnational movement of post-war British migrants, film-makers and entertainers. Theirs were the hope and promise of making a new life or fortune in new territory, rather like *Bitter Springs*'s King family. The Tjatjara people whom we see in the film came from the Ooldea Soak, sited forty kilometres south of Maralinga. This Soak was also vital to many other nomadic desert groups who came for meetings and ceremonial purposes. Daisy Bates, the anthropologist, established herself there in 1918. When she left in the mid-thirties the settlement was taken over by the United Aboriginal Mission, which operated until 1952 when the mission was closed down—the Soak was drying up due to overcrowding—and also in preparation for the British atomic tests. The Tjatjara were moved 120 kilometres south to the Lutheran Mission at Yalata, where they suffered the ugly outcomes of loss of land and culture. Not until 2009, after a series of incomplete nuclear waste clean-ups, did their descendants return to Ooldea. The cultural artefact *Bitter Springs* suggests that image-making, fabulation and cultural dream-work—the stuff of communities of culture—underpin the imaginaries of the transnational and national alike. A transient but telling example of ghostly cultural processing of the nuclear spectacle

was undertaken by an Adelaide journalist who witnessed the aftermath of the first mainland test, the Totem 1 test at Emu Field on 15 October 1953: 'After the huge head, unmistakeably [sic] that of a Myall black, had temporarily faded from the 15,000 feet high smoke column, it reappeared as clearly once again, before the smoke column flattened and drifted slowly away' ('Atomic Cloud').

After Trinder compered the Tivoli's Royal Gala Performance in Sydney on 6 February 1954 he returned to England in June after a blazing public row with his manager, David N. Martin, and resumed his British career in television. Initially, and despite his ongoing starring in the London Palladium Christmas pantos, he believed that he had been too long away from the UK where popular tastes had moved on from variety to Elvis and cappuccino machines. However in 1955 Trinder's national eminence was confirmed by televised variety, with a ten-year stint as compere in Val Parnell's *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* for Lew Grade's ITV: the first British commercial television network (Marcus, n.p.). The last twenty years of his long life saw Trinder working in suburban and regional pantomime and cabaret nearly up to his death in 1989.

Personable and energetic post-war English entertainers like the solidly pro-Labour Trinder are more than showbiz phenomena, but are of symptomatic significance in studies of Australian post-war culture. They are amongst the most notable of the various other multi-purposed cultural ambassadors—sportsmen, scientists, soldiers or immigrants—who form prominent vectors of transnational communities of culture within specific historical moments. Whereas *Bitter Springs* remains an enduring artefact encoding the complexities of Australian post-war politics and culture, Trinder himself should be placed within his immediate industrial contexts of live variety and civic showmanship. The Australian Trinder's extra-textual public signifiers of the Pommy immigrant and the tricky clown who offers to form links between groups of people (white and black Australians, British and Australian) depend for their now-obscured contemporary cohesion upon his post-war live-stage presence, and upon the genuine popularity that he (mostly) enjoyed thanks to his hyper-energetic participation in its public enterprises.

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