

Pioneering Socialist Realism: William Lane's *The Workingman's Paradise*

For their part in the 1891 shearers' strike, some eighty to one hundred unionists were convicted in Queensland with sentences ranging from three months for 'intimidation' to three years for 'conspiracy'.¹ It was to aid the families of the gaoled unionists that William Lane wrote *The Workingman's Paradise* (1892).²

'The first part is laid during the summer of 1888-89 and covers two days; the second part at the commencement of the Queensland bush excitement in 1891, covering a somewhat shorter time.' (iii) The materials of the shearers' strike and the maritime strike that preceded it in 1890 are not, then, the explicit materials of Lane's novel. But these political confrontations are the off-stage reference of the novel's main characters. They are a major unwritten, but present, component of the novel. The second chapter of part II alludes both to the defeat of the maritime strike and the beginnings of the shearers' strike, forthcoming in the novel's time, already defeated in the reader's time. Those voices preaching moderation in the maritime strike, are introduced into the discussion only to be discounted. The unionists who went round 'talking law and order to the chaps on strike and rounding on every man who even boo'd as though he were a blackleg' (144) have realized the way they were co-opted and used by the 'authorities.'

'The man who told me vowed it would be a long time before he'd

1 H. Kenway, 'The Pastoral Strikes of 1891 and 1894' in D. J. Murphy, R. B. Joyce and Colin A. Hughes, eds., *Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labor Party in Queensland 1885-1915*, Brisbane, 1970, p.118.

2 'John Miller' (William Lane), *The Workingman's Paradise: An Australian Labour Novel*, Brisbane, 1892; facsimile, Sydney, 1980. All quotations are from this facsimile.

do policeman's work again. He said that for him Government might keep its own order and see how soon it got tired of it.' (144)

And the details of the strike are powerfully evoked in memory:

She used to go down town, sometimes of an evening, to watch the military patrols, riding up and down with jingling bits and clanking carbines and sabres as if in a conquered city. She heard, in her work-room, the dull roar of the angry thousands through whose midst the insolent squatters drove in triumphal procession, as if inciting to lawlessness, with dragoon-guarded, police-protected drays of blackleg wool. Then the end came and the strike was over, leaving the misery it had caused and the bitter hatreds it had fostered and the stern lesson which all did not read as the daily papers would have had them. (134)

The shearers' strike was broken by shipping into Queensland non-unionist labour under armed guard. There was large scale enrolment of special constables to preserve 'law and order', and 1,357 troops, 85 officers, 765 horses, 3 nine-pounder guns and two Nordenfelt machine guns were deployed from the Queensland Defence Force.³ This military confrontation is predicted in the novel. 'They'd like nothing better than a chance to shoot a mob of us down like wild turkeys,' (147) says Ned, the union organiser.

The events of the strikes occur off-stage from the novel; but they are also assumed to be known, so vast, so public; mass action, mythic confrontation. 'The large numbers involved and the mass demonstrations, such as the meeting fifty thousand strong in Flinders Park, Melbourne, and the procession, a mile and a half long, through the streets of Sydney, were quite different from anything that had previously occurred in the history of Australian unionism,' Gollan writes of the maritime strike.⁴ But Lane was concerned in *The Workingman's Paradise* to widen the issues from specific defeats into a socialist

3 E. R. Drury, *Special Service by Corps of the Queensland Defence Force*, Brisbane, 1891, pp.1, 7. D. H. Johnson, *Volunteers at Heart: The Queensland Defence Forces 1860-1901*, St Lucia, 1975, pp.148-57.

4 R. Gollan, 'The Trade Unions and Labour Parties, 1890-4', *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand* 7 (1955): 22.

analysis of the society that generated the confrontations. His intention was to expound the basic ideas of socialism and communism in a readable and accessible form, to raise his reader's consciousness for the next round in the battle. And in writing his novel, he became a pioneer in the development of English language socialist realism. The socialist realist writer, as Alexander Ovcharenko put it,

so represents life in art that the work of art will have a definite influence on the reader. This lends our art purposefulness, 'a guaranteed future'. That is why we call communist partisanship the soul of socialist realism. The principle of partisanship is not something artificially attached to literature. It is an inseparable part of literature that is imbued with conscious historical perspective and with the conscious aspiration to remake life, a literature that is truly meaningful.⁵

The novel's protagonist, Ned Hawkins, begins with a very moderate position. ““We only want what’s fair,” he said. “We’re not going to do anything wild”.... And then he inconsistently proceeded to describe how the squatters treated the men out West....’(10) His naivety appals Nellie Lawton, the girl he came down from Queensland to visit in Sydney. ‘He was so satisfied with himself.’ The note Lane catches here is the note that D. H. Lawrence catches in *The Rainbow* (1915) with Ursula’s analysis of Skrebensky.

But somehow, as he stepped carelessly along, a dashing manliness in every motion, a breath of the great plains coming with his sunburnt face and belted waist, he and his self-conceit jarred to her against this sordid court and these children’s desolate lives. How dared he talk as he did about only wanting what was fair, she thought! How had he the heart to care only for himself and his mates while in these city slums such misery brooded! And then it shot through her that he did not know. With a rapidity, characteristic of herself, she made up her mind to teach him. (10)

⁵ Alexander Ovcharenko, *Socialist Realism and the Modern Literary Process*, Moscow, 1978, p.116. Socialist Realism was not promulgated as an official aesthetic in the USSR until 1934, but its origins reside in the literary practice of earlier committed writers.

And the novel consists of Nellie's opening Ned's eyes to the social conditions of the city, and directing his unionism into a committed socialism. Ursula loses patience with Skrebensky's blinkered vision of society and abandons him; she ends up with her own vision of proletarian revolution at the end of *The Rainbow*, but it is a vision experienced in isolation. Lane offers positive, co-operative action. The political education of Ned is both the moulding of the positive hero and Lane's political education of his readers.

Ned is the archetypal bushman. The components of what came to be known as the Australian legend are here perceived and recorded by Lane; and recorded, moreover, as something already becoming mythologised. But against the urban, intellectual bohemian version of the myth that was finding its way into the contemporary magazines, Lane is concerned to show in Ned the positive socialist hero bushman. The literary image is the focus of an ideological battle. Connie Stratton, one of the bourgeois intellectual socialists Nellie introduces to Ned, describes her husband's vision of the bushman. Her husband repudiates her account. It is a myth to which no one admits authorship, but it is strongly present.

Harry imagines every bushman as just six feet high,
proportionately broad, with bristling black beard streaked with
grey, longish hair, bushy eyebrows, bloodshot eyes, moleskins,
jean shirt, leathern belt, a black pipe, a swag—you call it 'swag',
don't you—over his shoulders, and a whisky bottle in his hand
whenever he is 'blowing in his cheque,' which is what Nellie
says you call 'going on the spree'. (60)

She is surprised that Ned doesn't smoke. ““Don’t you really! Do you know I thought all bushmen were great smokers.” “Some are and some aren’t,” said Ned. “We’re not all built to one pattern any more than folks in town.”” (60) The dignity of the individual working person is stressed against class caricature. Ned, the individual bushman, is established by the intersection and contrast of social myth. The literary urban bourgeois myth is one vision; the self-satisfied arrogance of the ‘aristocracy’ of bush-workers is the vision that annoys Nellie, daughter of a free-selector, an impoverished farmer.

Ned’s self-conceit provokes Nellie’s negative reaction of anger; but she confronts the negative reaction with the awareness of

Ned's unawareness. 'She made up her mind to teach him.' (10) The negativity is dialectically transformed into the positive aim of socialist education. Central to Lane's socialist vision is the aim of education, of consciousness change. As much as George Meredith's *Beauchamp's Career* (1875), *The Workingman's Paradise* is concerned with the theme of the change of the individual consciousness, with presenting the documentary evidence, making the case, showing that change is possible.⁶ And the narrative of the education and conversion of Ned allows the introduction of the materials of evidence and argument to educate and convert the reader.

Ned proposes a relaxed day beside the sea, but Nellie suggests that they 'see a little bit of real Sydney.' (13) The stress is on the 'real side', not the 'show side'. And the realism is a relentless proletarian realism for the first four chapters, a remorseless encounter with the over-crowded slums, sweated labour in the garment industry, the long hours of shop assistants and waitresses.

The streets, some wider, some narrower, all told of sordid struggling. The shops were greasy, fusty, grimy. The groceries exposed in their windows damaged specimens of bankrupt stocks, discolored tinned goods, grey sugars, mouldy dried fruits; at their doors, flitches of fat bacon, cut and dusty. The meat with which the butchers' shops overflowed was not from show-beasts, as Ned could see, but the cheaper flesh of over-travelled cattle, ancient oxen, ewes too aged for bearing; all these lean scraggy flabby-fleshed carcasses surrounded and blackened by buzzing swarms of flies that invaded the footpath outside in clouds.... (15)

But it is not only the external observation of the sight-seeing onlooker that Ned is offered, this 'realistic' day trip when 'he had been looking forward, rather, to the quiet enjoyment of a trip on a harbour steamer, or at least to the delight of a long ramble along some beach where he thought he and Nellie might pick up shells.' (14) Nellie takes him to visit Mrs Somerville and he is given a direct encounter with the exploitation of the garment industry, still as exploitative today as

6 Michael Wilding, 'George Meredith's *Beauchamp's Career*: Politics, Romance and Realism', *Sydney Studies in English* 8 (1982-83): 46-69. Reprinted in Wilding, *Social Visions*, Sydney, 1993, pp.29-55.

when Lane wrote. This is followed by Nellie's investigations into the conditions of waitresses when they go to a restaurant.

'How many hours do you work?' asked Nellie of the waitress.

'About thirteen', answered the girl, glancing round to see if the manager was watching her talking. 'But it's not the hours so much. It's the standing.'

'You're not doing any good standing now,' put in Ned. 'Why don't you sit down and have a rest?'

'They don't let us,' answered the waitress, cautiously. (23)

Ned's well-meaning suggestion is a mark of how much he still has to learn of urban conditions. Exhausted as he is by Nellie's showing him the 'real' Sydney, he still has a vast amount to understand. Her remorselessness is recognized; there is a wry note, an awareness that holds the potentially comic aspect of her obsessive preoccupation with human suffering in balance with the unavoidable realisation that the suffering is omnipresent.

They were dawdling over their tea—Ned and Nellie were, not the waitresses—having dined exceedingly well on soup and fish and flesh and pudding. For Ned, crushed by more sight-seeing and revived by a stroll to the Domain and a rest by a fountain under shady trees, further revived by a thunderstorm that suddenly rolled up and burst upon them almost before they could reach the shelter of an awning, had insisted on treating Nellie to 'a good dinner', telling her that afterwards she could take him anywhere she liked but that meanwhile they would have something to cheer them up. And Nellie agreed, nothing loth, for she too longed for the momentary jollity of a mild dissipation, not to mention that this would be a favourable opportunity to see if the restaurant girls could not be organised. So they had 'a good dinner.' (23–4)

Even poor, exhausted, stormdraggled Ned's expected moment of relaxation is intruded upon by more of Nellie's political education, educating him, trying to organize the waitress. And just as Nellie takes every opportunity to propagandize and agitate, so too does Lane; the restaurant episode allows not only a revelation of the working conditions

of the waitresses, but allows Ned to see dining together two of the financial establishment. Nellie identifies them: the ex-mayor who 'owns hundreds of houses' including 'the whole block where Mrs Somerville lives' (25) and

'the managing director of the Great Southern Mortgage Agency, a big concern that owns hundreds and hundreds of stations. At least, the squatters own the stations and the Agency owns the squatters, and he as good as owns the Agency. You're pretty sure to have worked for him many a time without knowing it, Ned.' (26)

It is an important incident, allowing the financial powers behind the exploitation to become momentarily visible; and allowing Ned to see that the bush and the city were part of the same pattern of exploitation, to realize that the differences were due not to some hypothetical opposition between urban and rural living, between the industrial and the pastoral; but that both were the product of the same financial system. One of the specific strategies of Lane's novel, as of Henry Lawson's writing, was to break down the false distinction between urban and outback labour and to demonstrate the shared basis for a socialist movement expressing the interests of all labour. So it is that at the end of these explorations Ned has developed a new insight.

If he could have persuaded himself that the bush had none of this, it would have been different. But he could not. The stench of the stifling shearing sheds and of the crowded sleeping huts where men are packed in rows like trucked sheep came to him with the sickening smell of the slums. On the faces of men in the bush he had seen again and again that hopeless look as of goaded oxen straining through a mud-hole, that utter degradation. That humble plea for charity. He had known them in Western Australia often in spite of all that was said of the free brave bush. It was not new to him, this dark side of life; that was the worst of it. It had been all along and he had known that it had been, but never before had he understood the significance of it, never before had he realised how utterly civilisation had failed. (44)

The culmination of Nellie's guided tour of urban degradation is a

visit to the markets. P. J. Keating has located the working-class market scene as central to Victorian fiction dealing with the working class, identifying the street-market in Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) as the *locus classicus*.

Kingsley's sole intention is to describe to the reader the horrors of working-class life; to recreate the feeling of repulsion experienced by himself ... he makes no attempt whatsoever to present it from a working-class viewpoint.... This kind of slum description is the most common in Victorian fiction before the eighties. They are not incidental but hold a central place in the novels, in that they are being used to grip the reader and stir his conscience. Almost everything else that happens in the novel depends upon such scenes for its vitality.⁷

Lane certainly knew *Alton Locke*. He reprinted a chapter from it on 'the start of the infamous sweating system' in the union paper he edited in Brisbane, the *Worker* in July 1890. But Lane's presentation of the market was more complex than the recreation of a feeling of repulsion. The repulsion is there, expressed through Ned's consciousness; a working-class consciousness, but a consciousness formed by the openness of the Western plains and here horrified at the oppression and constriction. And Lane has a political, a didactic purpose. He is not recoiling in disgust but analytically presenting the market as a manifestation of the exploitative nature of capitalism. But the capitalism presented is not the finance capitalism of the ex-mayor and the manager of the mortgage company, glimpsed together in the restaurant. The market is present not as representing the centre of capitalism but its ultimate grindings, the collapsing world of 'small capital': 'anything by which a penny could be turned by those of small capital and little credit in barter with those who had less.' (35)

Paddy's Market was in its glory, the weekly glory of a Sydney Saturday night, of the one day in the week when the poor man's wife has a few shillings and when the poor caterer for the poor man's wants gleans in the profit field after the stray ears of corn

7 P. J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, London, 1971, p.20.

that escape the machine-reaping of retail capitalism. It was filled by a crushing, hustling, pushing mass of humans, some buying, more bartering, most swept aimlessly along in the living currents that moved ceaselessly to and fro. (35)

The *Alton Locke* archetype is no doubt in the background here, as John Docker has suggested.⁸ The established set-scene, the expected episode, is here given its particular Australian manifestation. But there is another unstated reference that is there as an anti-type: the vision of organized commodity distribution in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1887). An immensely influential book on the early socialist movement, *Looking Backward* was serialized by Lane in the *Worker* from its first number, and included along with *Alton Locke* in the *Worker* book fund he established. As a model of how society could be rationally organized on the basis of co-operation rather than competition, it is the absent, unexpressed, but ever implied complement not only to the market episode but to the whole novel. Sydney in its slums, its poverty, its inequalities, its exploitation and its destructive competition is the counter-image to this possible society. Discussing *Looking Backward* in the first issue of the *Worker*, March 1890, Lane wrote

Industry has readjusted itself to the age of machinery; competition has been swept away by natural process; the state has absorbed all the means of production and distribution; equality of wealth reigns supreme, and in this equality individualism finds unlimited scope, and the ablest lead, and the weak are happy with the strong.

Woman, too, has won her equality, and shares fully with man in the abounding wealth and marvellous opportunities of a great community, where all are workers, and where no man robs another, where crime is unknown and immorality unthought of, where the dreaming of the good and great is realised at last....⁹

But it is important to stress that Lane's vision of the market is not a

8 John Docker, *In a Critical Condition*, Ringwood, 1984, p.137. Docker writes further on Lane in *The Nervous Nineties*, Melbourne, 1991, pp.132–63.

9 'Books Well Worth Reading. 1—Bellamy's "Looking Backward"', *Worker* (Brisbane) 1 i (March 1890): 14. Michael Wilding, 'William Lane and the *Worker* Book Fund', *Southerly* 41 (1981): 329–34.

simply or schematically negative one. For all the ‘grimy and frayed and sordid’ (24) quality, there is still a human energy, crushed and care-worn as practically everyone is. ‘Where was the “fair” to which of old the people swarmed, glad-hearted?’ (37) The jollity has been destroyed, but there is still an energy in the ‘living currents’. It is at the markets that Ned first encounters an organized opposition to the destructive capitalism, the attempt to regain the fair.

Looking Backward postulated that socialism would be established with absolutely no violence, by the natural process of take-overs and monopolisation, culminating in one, huge state monopoly. Rejecting violent revolution as a means of social change, Bellamy argued that the nineteenth-century anarchists ‘were paid by the great monopolies to wave the red flag and talk about burning, sacking and blowing people up, in order, by alarming the timid, to head off any real reforms.’¹⁰ Lane’s journalism in the *Worker* shows his awareness of the dangers and the existence of agents-provocateurs in the labour movement. But he utterly rejects Bellamy’s identifying the anarchists with the instruments of repression. At the markets Nellie introduces Ned to the amiable anarchist Sim, one of ‘the dynamiters’ (40) as she calls him. The bogey-image of anarchists is here dispelled by Lane; it is a further stage in Ned’s education. In this very extremity of alienation, a positive energy is engendered.

Jones hasn’t got any type and of course he can’t afford to buy it, but he’s got hold of a little second-hand toy printing press. To print from it he takes a piece of wood, cut across the grain and rubbed smooth with sand, and cuts out of it the most revolutionary and blood-curdling leaflets, letter by letter.... (41)

The example is based on Lane’s contemporary, the Sydney anarchist J. A. Andrews, who printed with just such hand-carved type. In the deepest of destitution, the indomitable human spirit can rise to resist. It is an example of positive political action that marks the beginning of the ascent from the depths. Though at this point Ned’s own consciousness

10 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1887) (Riverside Library), Boston, n.d., p.252. Chapter XXIV, containing this discussion, was one of the chapters omitted from the abridged serialization in the *Worker*.

is at a reactive, nihilistic stage; a stage that is in accord with the nihilistic, destructive rather than creative aspects of anarchist thought.

'Talk about Nihilism! Jones vows that there is only one way to cure things and that is to destroy the rule of Force.'

'He's a long while starting', remarked Nellie, with a slight sneer. 'Those people who talk too much never do anything.'

'Oh, Jones isn't like that', answered Sim, with cheerful confidence. 'He'll do anything that he thinks is worth while. But I suppose I'm horrifying you, Mr Hawkins? Miss Lawton here knows what we are and is accustomed to our talk.'

'It'll take considerable to horrify me,' replied Ned, standing down as Nellie straightened herself out for a move-on. 'You can blow the whole world to pieces for all I care. There's not much worth watching in it as far as I can see.' (41-2)

Nellie's 'slight sneer' is the reaction of the activist organizer to those people who talk too much and never do anything. It is a mark of her separation from the anarchists. But in its negativity it is in accord with that other destructive negativity of the anarchists, with which Ned is momentarily in accord, the nihilistic rejection of all society. 'You can blow the whole world to pieces for all I care.' And there is much in *The Workingman's Paradise* that gives support to such an attitude. The continuing despair at human society permeates Nellie's world view. Negative reactions are recognized as present and Nellie, for all her socialist commitment, is particularly prone to them: not only in her initial hostility to Ned's unawareness and self-conceit, but in her recurrent teetering on the edge of despair in the midst of the overwhelming misery of the slum conditions. The hard set of her mouth is expressive of her too ready, though fully explicable, immersion in the negative analysis of social conditions, of human suffering: 'a sad face and queer stern mouth—a trifle cruel, the mouth, if I recollect.' (49)

The description is given just as Nellie arrives at the Strattons with Ned in tow. After the four chapters of the 'real' Sydney, Nellie now takes Ned to see this household of bourgeois intellectuals 'interested in the labour movement'. The episode has been variously interpreted. Graeme Davison finds that 'the salon conversation of his radical intellectuals (Geisner, the Strattons) exposes, even as Lane himself

attempts to repair, their fragile alliance with the working classes,'¹¹ whereas John Docker claims 'the novel in these sections can be seen as offering a glowing account of Sydney's early 1890s radical intellectual life'; 'the house is surrounded by a leafy garden, and the inner spirit of the household is shown as at one with the natural world of the harbour.'¹² These opposed responses are not accidental. Both accounts have their truth. But neither account is true unless it includes the other. Lane saw and established the contradictions: this was how life might be, restful, beautiful, not obsessively preoccupied with the bleak and negative sides of society; and yet in its very coexistence with the horror of the slums and market, what falsities, what unawarenesses sustain it, what real alliance can there be between the middle-class intellectuals, the literati, the outback worker, the slum dweller?

Yet in the very asking that question, we see that Lane is answering it. It is through contact with this group that Nellie's negative reaction to social conditions is given a positive socialist orientation. It is by forging cross-class alliances that the socialist movement will progress. The gulfs are presented by Lane simultaneously with the means, and the underlined necessity, for crossing them. Socialism provides the means.

And so the episode sustains both Ned's suspicion of the comfortable life-style and the so ready resort to talk about art of these people, together with the radical discussions that build on and extend Ned's direct observational experience of the day in the slums. Direct observation of human misery can develop a social awareness only to a certain point; indeed, it has an ambiguous effect, and can produce nihilistic revulsion as readily as activist commitment. The observation is the necessary documentary, realistic, factual base; but the observations need to be interpreted, generalized from, related to a theoretical standpoint from which action can issue. The episode at the Strattons is the necessary generalizing episode, necessary for Ned's education, necessary for the novel's development and the reader's education. It underlines both the possibility of a better and fuller life, and the distance to be travelled before such a life can be made available to all humankind.

11 Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian Legend', *Historical Studies* 18 (1978): 305.

12 John Docker, *In a Critical Condition*, p.136.

'Mr Hawkins, this is Bohemia. You do as you like. You say what you like,' Mrs Stratton announces in an unmistakeable patrician, haute-bourgeois way. (57) Class divisions permeate bourgeois bohemia just as they permeate the rest of society.

Ned's thoughts were in tumult, as he sat balancing his spoon on his cup after forcing himself to swallow the, to him, unpleasant drink that the others seemed to relish so. There were no conspirators here, that was certain. (59)

The emphasis is on bourgeois taste and bourgeois property in this beautiful waterfront house on Sydney harbour. That they were not 'conspirators' is to assure the bourgeois labour sympathizers that responsible, cultured people can be socialists; it is positive propaganda. At the same time the distance of these people from political activists, dynamiters, conspirators (and the novel was written to aid the families of the unionists gaoled on conspiracy charges) is also stressed; to assure the proletarian unionist reader that in the area of materiality, in the basics of deeds rather than words, he has no need to feel threatened, inadequate, insecure in the company of these people. And the pressure on deeds is there in Ned: 'He sought intuitively to find relief in action and he began impatiently to look for it here.' (54)

The class tensions that characterize H. G. Wells' or Jack London's realistic fiction are here captured in a pioneering Australian specificity.

It was pleasant, of course, too pleasant. It seemed a sin to enjoy life like this on the very edge of the horrible pit in which the poor were festering like worms in an iron pot. Was it for this Nellie had brought him here? To idle away an evening among well-meaning people who were 'interested in the Labour movement'.... (59)

But the episode does more than contrast the middle-class comforts with the slums we have seen and the dosshouses and homeless sleeping out in the parks we encounter later. It additionally introduces the topic of the role of art. Mrs Stratton is an art-critic, her husband a designer, and there are also present a journalist, a cartoonist and a poet. They discuss music and the *Zeitgeist*. 'What a waste of words when the world outside needed deeds!' Ned fumes inwardly (60). Finally he explodes.

Is it by playing music in fine parlours that good is to be done? Is it by drinking wine, by smoking, by laughing, by talking of pictures and books and music, by going to theatres, by living in clover while the world starves? Why do you not play that music in the back streets or to our fellows? (66)

It is the culmination of his frustration at conversations about environmental vandalism—the sort of good, liberal causes that initially drew William Morris into political activism.¹³ Ned fumes at the ease, comfort and irrelevance of the Stratton's culture but in a sense answers his own question. Geisner's playing the Marseillaise, the then international revolutionary song of the world's workers, has brought tears to Ned's eyes, to everyone's eyes. Art has its radicalizing, inspirational role. And the discussion about whether 'puritanism crushed the artistic sense out of the English' (63) relates directly to the book's politics. Geisner points out 'the Puritan period produced two of the masterpieces of English Art—Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.' (64) The radical politics of the English revolution are here identified with the production of literary masterpieces. England may have 'no national music' (63) but there is a national literature that is also a radical, revolutionary literature.

The discussion about art is important to *The Workingman's Paradise* as it is to William Morris' *News From Nowhere*. It validates Lane's own activity in writing the novel, it is his justification for taking time from the immediacies of union journalism and direct organizing. The arts can be the transmitters of radical social messages; they work in alliance with the deeds of the activists. Ned is beginning to fret for immediate, active solutions; the discussion on art allows a wider perspective to emerge, stresses a continuity of radical tradition, allows a transmission of the tradition and a consolation and encouragement in times when direct action is impossible. But Ned's specific question, 'Why do you not play that music in the backstreets?' is significantly not answered by the bourgeois bohemians. They are shocked at Ned's ignorance in this house where 'you say what you like' in challenging Geisner who, everyone except Ned knows, spent years in gaol for his

13 See Jack Lindsay, *William Morris: His Life and Work*, London, 1975, pp.218–83.

socialist commitment. The question resonates through the Stratton's gathering. And Lane himself took up the challenge he has Ned deliver. He spread his socialism not through the rarefied high arts but through the columns of the radical press, applying his art to this novel that was sold through the labour movement and reached into those backstreets. The discussions of art, the reading of Arty's socialist poem, and the various artefacts adorning the house, create at the Strattons a positive aspiration after the degradation of the slum chapters. They offer a negation of that slum existence, itself a negation of human possibility; the positive of the better life envisaged in artistic production is generated by this negation of the negation. But the slum experience is not simply negated in the Stratton episodes. In no sense is it cancelled. The discussion at the Strattons draws on the documentary encounters and offers the necessary generalization and conceptualization from them.

What Nellie has shown Ned is the opposite of his bush experience not only in its being an urban experience, but also in its being a female experience, as opposed to the almost totally male segregated experience of the outback.¹⁴ It is the exploitation of working class women that Nellie shows Ned—the struggle of the housewife and mother in the slums, the exploitation of women workers in the garment trade, of waitresses in restaurants. This is underlined when the issue of women's rights is made the explicit subject of discussion at the Strattons. Lane was in advance of most of his contemporaries in his awareness of the women's movement, in his advocacy of women's rights in the labour movement, and of womanhood suffrage. And in the discussion, Nellie is shown to be markedly in advance of the male thinkers in this 'progressive' enclave. Stratton replies to Nellie's question,

‘What would my women be like? Full-lipped and broad-hearted, fit to love and be loved! Full-breasted and broad-hipped fit to have children! Full-brained and broad-browed, fit to teach them! My

14 ‘Nellie ... is a spokesperson of the women's movement.’ Marilyn Lake, ‘Socialism and Manhood: The Case of William Lane’, *Labour History* 50 (May 1986): 60. See also Bruce Scates, ‘Socialism, Feminism and the Case of William Lane: A Reply to Marilyn Lake’, *Labour History* 59 (November 1990): 45–58; Marilyn Lake, ‘Socialism and Manhood: A Reply to Bruce Scates’, *Labour History* 60 (May 1991): 114–20; and Bruce Scates, ‘Socialism and Manhood: A Rejoinder’, *Labour History* 60 (May 1991): 121–24.

women should be the embodiment of the nation, and none of them should work except for those they loved and of their own free will.'

'Sort of queen bees!' remarked Nellie. 'Why have them work at all?' (71-2)

And it is Nellie who makes the crucial point that it is for women to determine their future role in society, not for men to determine it for them.

'What women really want is to be left to find their own sphere, for whenever a man starts to find it for them he always manages to find something else. No man understands woman thoroughly. How can he when she doesn't even understand herself? Yet you propose to crush us all down to a certain pattern, without consulting us. That's not democratic. Why not consult us first I should like to know?' (72)

And just as Nellie has educated Ned in an awareness of social conditions, so she educates him in the women's movement so that 'he began to dimly understand how it touched the Labour movement.' (75) In Jack London's great socialist novel *The Iron Heel* (1907), the proletarian socialist hero Ernest Everhard converts Avis Cunningham, the middle-class Berkeley professor's daughter, to socialism. Both Lane and London stress the class-collaboration that can ensue from and strengthen a socialist position. In Lane's novel, however, it is the woman who converts the man. This propagandizing and inspirational role of the woman is reiterated in *The Workingman's Paradise* when we find that it was Mrs Stratton who first encountered Nellie and introduced her to the socialist circle. Lane was not locked into a male-dominated social or intellectual vision.

This was a quality of Lane's recognized by the anonymous 'leading Australian Woman Critic' who reviewed the novel for *The Worker*.

The author has recognized the fact that in woman's pulse throbs the secret of a nation's redemption or its degradation and his book, man-written though it be, is essentially a woman's book proclaiming aloud the gospel of redemption for her who shall

thereby redeem the world.

And it is to women that the book will chiefly appeal. There are magnificent passages in it which will wring every fibre of a true woman's nature; passages where the writer plays on the chords of slumbering maternity with the touch of inspired genius, where he reveals to woman her own love-nature and love-power as she herself seldom sees it.¹⁵

'You can't raise free men from slave women,' Nellie declares. (73) It is a central theme of the novel, stressing the inseparability of the women's issue from the socialist reorganization of society. And the recurrent theme of prostitution serves to emphasize this identity of economic exploitation and the exploitation of women. Ned encounters the prostitutes on the way to Paddy's market.

He had caught his foot clumsily on the dress of one above the town-hall, a dashing demi-mondaine with rouged cheeks and unnaturally bright eyes and a huge velvet-covered hat of the Gainsborough shape and had been covered with confusion when she turned sharply round on him with a 'Now, clumsy, I'm not a door mat.' Then he noticed that the sad sisterhood were out in force where the bright gas-jets of the better-class shops illuminated the pavement, swaggering it mostly where the kerbs were lined with young fellows, fairly well dressed as a rule, who talked of cricket and race horses and boating and made audible remarks concerning the women, grave and gay, who passed by in the throng. (39)

The scene is described in realistic detail, a pioneering account of Australian urban life. And it has its sharply analytical social significance: the class analysis there in the observation that the male clients are 'fairly well dressed,' it is a class exploitation of prostitutes; and the resonant irony in the assertion 'I'm not a door-mat.' In the story that Nellie tells of her sister's brief, wretched life as a prostitute in part II of the novel, this 'dashing demi-mondaine's' proud assertion is tragically belied.

15 'The Workingman's Paradise. What a Leading Australian Woman Critic Says About It', *Worker* (Brisbane) 3 xlix (9 April 1892): 3.

Prostitution recurs throughout *The Workingman's Paradise*. It is there at the Strattons in the discussion of journalism under capitalism. 'Why, we're nothing but literary prostitutes,' said George, energetically. 'We just write now what we're told, selling our brains as women on the streets do their bodies.' (87) It is a traditional analogy but it takes on a force here from the literal prostitution shown before; and it is reinforced on the way back from the Strattons when Nellie, in response to Ned's question 'What is socialism?' kisses the prostitute sleeping on the park bench. Lane's novel has often enough been criticized for this demonstrative, emotionally assertive quality. 'Stagey, sentimental and exhortative by turns, it has more than its share of technical faults,' Joseph Jones writes.¹⁶ But when Lane was 'stagey' he was consciously stagey; he was a self-aware writer.

'You want to know what Socialism is,' she said, in a low trembling voice. 'This is Socialism.' And bending down again she kissed the poor outcast harlot a second time. Seizing Ned's arm Nellie drew him away, breaking into a pace that made him respect her prowess as a walker ever after.

Until they reached home neither spoke. Nellie looked sterner than ever. Ned was in a whirl of mental excitement. Perhaps if he had been less natural himself the girl's passionate declaration of fellowship with all who are wronged and oppressed—for so he interpreted it by the light of his own thoughts—might have struck him as a little bit stagey. Being natural, he took it for what it was, an outburst of genuine feeling. But if Nellie had really designed it she could not have influenced him more deeply. (100)

The critic's 'stagey' is a reaction Lane has taken into account: he has accommodated, incorporated and situated it.

Prostitution has its dramatic role in the novel—in Nellie's emblematic gesture; and in the moving chapter describing her search for her missing sister, and gradual discovery of her fate—prostitution, disease, death in a paupers' hospital bed. But the leitmotiv of prostitution has its specific Marxist resonance. Marx concluded volume I of *Capital* with

16 Joseph Jones, *Radical Cousins: Nineteenth Century American and Australian Writers*, St Lucia, 1976, p.82.

an examination of the 'The Modern Theory of Colonisation.' Prostitution is specified as one of the direct consequences of the capitalist exploitation of Australia, a very specific emblematicalization of the otherwise abstract and less dramatizable economics.

The shameless lavishing of uncultivated colonial land on aristocrats and capitalists by the Government ... has produced, especially in Australia, in conjunction with the stream of men that the gold-diggings attract, and with the competition that the importation of English commodities causes even to the smallest artisan, an ample 'relative surplus labouring population', so that almost every mail brings the Job's news of a 'glut of the Australian labour-market', and prostitution in some places there flourishes as wantonly as in the London Haymarket.¹⁷

The stress Lane puts on prostitution in *The Workingman's Paradise* is the stress that Marx and Engels put on it in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeois. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.

It is self-evident that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i.e. of prostitution both public and private.¹⁸

Lane demonstrates this structurally. The only happy families are the bourgeois families—the Strattons, and Connie Stratton's sister Josie and her husband. Both are happily married with children. But with the proletariat we see the wretched life of the Hobbs, whose baby born in the first chapter of part I dies in the first chapter of part II, a direct

17 Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume I, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (1887) and edited by Frederick Engels, Moscow, 1978, p.188.

18 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, translated by Samuel Moore (1888), Moscow, 1973, pp.68, 71.

result of the social conditions of industrial capitalism. ‘The Slaughter of an Innocent’ Lane entitles the chapter of its death. Mrs Somerville’s husband has died in an industrial accident, leaving her pregnant and with three children.¹⁹ Nellie’s sister turns to prostitution to help send money to the parents struggling to pay the mortgage on the small farm. Family life is presented as without exception wretched amongst the working class—so wretched as to be a denial of ‘family’, a denial in the ultimate sense of either husband or child dying, the ‘family unit’ always broken.

The particular exposition of a Marxist analysis in the novel comes from Geisner. A Marxist mode of thinking pervades the whole work—the leitmotiv of prostitution, the very language—capital, capitalists, working masses, labour, even scum from the *Manifesto*. But it is from the piano-playing intellectual Geisner that Ned is introduced to a Marxist mode of analysis. After the documentary encounter of the urban exploitation, and then the anti-world of bourgeois comfort, emerges the theoretical analysis. Geisner, introduced at the Strattons, arranges to meet Ned the following day.

Lane discussed Marx in *The Worker* in July 1890. He wrote:

Karl Marx is the father of modern Socialism, that is to say he is the man who in his famous work *Das Kapital* first systematized into the nationalization of land and machinery the previously crude theories that somehow or other every man must get what he produces in order not to be a slave. He reaches the bed-rock principle that ‘interest is usury and usury is robbery’ and propounds in scientific and convincing method the economic truths which now begin to win recognition throughout the civilized world. For we workers are all Socialists nowadays, though some of us are so ignorant that we don’t know it. We follow Marx in the contention that Labour’s rightful share of Production is *all*.

But Marx is a recondite writer, a man who reasons algebraically and with pitiless disregard for the dryness of mathematical demonstration ...²⁰

19 On Lane’s focus on the plight of children, see Van Ikin, ‘Political Persuasions: “The Workingman’s Paradise”’, *Westerly* 28 (1983): 39–41.

20 ‘Books Well Worth Reading: Karl Marx Father of Modern Socialism’, *Worker* (Brisbane) 1 v (1 July 1890): 6.

The abstract manner of Marxist analysis is indicated in Geisner's dialogue with Ned, not so much in the paraphrases of Marxist positions, which Lane tries to make as comprehensible as possible, but in the contrast between the expository tone of Geisner and the colloquial idiom of Ned. Indeed, Ned's colloquialism is more emphatic in this exchange than elsewhere, creating a dialogue of tone, of distinct verbal registers. Answering Geisner's question about how he would go about getting work, Ned replies

'Oh! I'd kind of go down to the hut likely and see the boys if 'twas any use staying about and then, perhaps, or it might be before I went to the hut, that would be all according, I'd see the boss and sound him.' (104)

So that when Geisner introduces his theoretical concepts, they are quite unavoidably theoretical concepts. Lane confronts the taboo on introducing ideas into fiction not by disguising the intrusion, but by underlining it. The tonal disruption caused by the abstract conceptualization is here foregrounded. The distance between Ned's colloquial idiom and Geisner's exposition is the distance that has to be travelled in learning and comprehending abstraction; this distance is the theme of the novel, the journey that has to be travelled in the process of political education. It is not a matter of Ned's being lesser in our eyes or Geisner greater by talking the way they do; the irrelevant snobberies attaching to education or idiom are not Lane's concern. But a recognition of the differences in idiom, in expression, in abstract conceptualization are his theme. From the direct observation of the opening chapters Ned has to move to the theory that explains that pauperisation.

And so Geisner explains the theory of surplus value to Ned. In industrial society the self-employed worker is the exception.

'But if he cannot so work for himself he must go round looking for the man who has a shaft or a pump or a stamping mill and must bargain for the owner of machinery to take the product of his labour for a certain price which of course isn't its full value at all but the price at which, owing to his necessities, he is compelled to sell his labour.' (107)

In the background is *Capital*:

The fact that half a day's labour is necessary to keep the labourer alive during 24 hours, does not in any way prevent him from working a whole day. Therefore, the value of labour-power, and the value which that labour-power creates in the labour process, are two entirely different magnitudes: and this difference of the two values was what the capitalist had in view, when he was purchasing the labour-power.... The seller of labour-power, like the seller of any other commodity, realises its exchange-value, and parts with its use value. He cannot take the one without giving the other....²¹

And Geisner goes on to explain the developing monopoly stage of capitalism and the consequent proletarianization of the lower-middle classes:

'Things are getting so in all branches of industry, in squatting, in manufacturing, in trading, in ship-owning, in everything, that it takes more and more capital for a man to start for himself. This is a necessary result of increasing mechanical powers and of the economy of big businesses as compared to small ones.... All this means', continued Geisner, 'that more and more go round asking for work as what we call civilisation increases and the industrial life becomes more complicated. I don't mean in Australia only. I'm speaking generally. They can only work when another man thinks he can make a profit out of them, and there are so many eager to be made a profit on that the owner of the machine has it pretty well his own way. This system operates for the extension of its own worst features, the degradation of the working masses.' (107)

In the background is the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

The lower strata of the middle classes ... sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is

21 *Capital*, p.188.

swamped in the competition with the large capitalists....²²

And, Geisner continues,

'such a vast amount of industrial work can be held over that employers, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes deliberately, hold work over until times are what they call 'more suitable', that is when they can make bigger profits by paying less in wages. This has a tendency to constantly keep wages down, besides affording a stock argument against unionist agitations for high wages. But, in any case, the fits of industrial briskness and idleness which occur in all countries are enough to account for the continual tendency of wages to keep to a bare living amount for those working, as many of those not working stand hungrily by to jump into their places if they get rebellious or attempt to prevent wages going down.' (107-8)

These 'fits' are the 'epidemic of overproduction' as the *Communist Manifesto* calls them²³ and which Frederick Engels explained in *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*:

Since 1825, when the first general crisis erupted, the whole industrial and commercial world, production and exchange among all civilized peoples and their more or less barbarian appendages, have broken down about once every ten years. Trade comes to a standstill, markets are glutted, products lie around in piles as massive as they are unsaleable, hard cash disappears, credit vanishes, factories are idle, the working masses lack the means of subsistence because they have produced too much of them, bankruptcy follows upon bankruptcy, forced sale upon forced sale.²⁴

The increase in the numbers of unemployed, as Geisner stresses, creates further competition for the diminishing number of available jobs, and he explains to Ned that unionism can do nothing about this, for all

22 *Manifesto*, p.53.

23 *Manifesto*, p.50.

24 Frederick Engels, *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*, Peking, 1975, p.86.

Ned's naive hope in the power of the unions.

'There is no doubt that unions help to keep wages up. But, you see, so long as industrial operations can be contracted, and men thrown out of work, practically at the pleasure of those who employ, complete unionism is almost impracticable if employers once begin to act in concert. Besides, the unemployed are a menace to unionism always. Workmen can never realise that too strongly.'

'What are we to do then if we can't get what we want by unionism?'

'How can you get what you want by unionism? The evil is in having to ask another man for work at all—in not being able to work for yourself. . . You must destroy the system which makes it necessary for you to work for the profit of another man, and keeps you idle when he can't get a profit out of you. The whole wage system must be utterly done away with.' And Geisner rolled another cigarette as though it was the simplest idea in the world. (108)

Again, the analysis draws on the *Communist Manifesto*:

The essential condition for the existence, and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage labour. Wage labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers.²⁵

Geisner's exposition of socialism is the central episode of *The Workingman's Paradise*:

'I think land and machinery, the entire means and processes of the production and exchange of wealth, including stock, should be held in common by those who need them and worked co-operatively for the benefit of all. That is the socialist idea of industry.' (112)

But it is importantly not a cut and dried position. Geisner stresses to

25 *Manifesto*, p.60.

Ned that there is more than one possible model for socialism. He continues

'The State Socialists seek to make the State the co-operative medium, the State to be the company and all citizens to be equal shareholders as it were. State Socialism is necessarily compulsory on all. The other great socialistic idea, that of Anarchical Communism, bases itself upon voluntaryism and opposes all organised Force, whether of governments or otherwise.'

'Then Anarchists aren't wicked men?'

'The Anarchist ideal is the highest and noblest of all human ideals. I cannot conceive of a good man who does not recognize that when he once understands it. The Anarchical Communists simply seek that men should live in peace and concord, of their own better nature, without being forced, doing harm to none, and being harmed by none. Of course the blind revolt against oppressive and unjust laws and tyrannical governments has become associated with Anarchy, but those who abuse it simply don't know what they do....' (112)

There is more than one model of socialist development, Geisner stresses to Ned. And he stresses, too, the need to be on guard against the false 'socialism':

'But there are two Socialisms. There is a socialism with a little 's' which is simply an attempt to stave off true Socialism. This small, narrow socialism means only the state regulation of the distribution of wealth. It has as its advocates politicians who seek to modify the robbery of workers, to ameliorate the horrors of the competitive system, only in order to prevent the upheaval which such men recognise to be inevitable if things keep on unchanged.' (114)

More than that, even, Geisner stresses the inevitable set-backs that occur on the path to socialism. The undercurrent of despair running through the novel is here brought into the open, recognized so that it can be known, so that it can be seen for what it is and transcended rather than submitted to. The despair is a factor that has to be prepared for.

You are young and hopeful and will think again and again that the day of redemption is dawning, and will see the night roll up again. You will see in the morning the crowd repent of its enthusiasm of the night before. You will find cowards where you expected heroes and see the best condemned to the suffering and penury that weaken the bravest. Your heart will ache and your stomach will hunger and your body will be bent and your head grey and then you may think that the world is not moving and that you have wasted your life and that none are grateful for it. (115)

Ned's question 'What is socialism?' is answered both by Nellie's emotional gesture of kinship with the prostitute, and by Geisner's exposition of theory; both are necessary components of a commitment to socialism. As well as paralleling Nellie's definition of socialism, Geisner's dialogue is also paired with Ned's later dialogue with Strong, the manager of the Great Southern Mortgage Company, capitalism personified. Ned's, and the reader's, education is extended not only by an understanding of socialism, but also by a necessary understanding of the enemy. Lane is concerned to present a realistic picture of the enemy, not an easily undervalued caricature. As Jack London was to stress later in *The Iron Heel*, the exploiting class are not to be caricatured as vain, effete, corrupted, pleasure-seeking idle rich. Ned even experiences an attraction to Strong: compared with the fat ex-mayor he is dining with, 'he looks more like a man'. (25) 'Who'd think it to look at him? He doesn't look a bad sort, does he?' (26) But simply because Strong is a disciplined rather than a dissolute man makes him no less the enemy. His encounter with Ned at the novel's end is a precursor of Wickson's encounter with Ernest in *The Iron Heel* and of Winston's with O'Brien in *Nineteen Eighty-four*.²⁶ Strong sums up the unrelenting, unbending attitude of capital, the imperative of power:

'Rich!' sneered Strong. 'What is rich? It is Power that is worth having and to have power one must control capital. In your wildest

26 Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (1907), London, 1976, p.63; George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), Harmondsworth, 1961, p.211; see Michael Wilding, *Political Fictions*, London, 1980, pp.114–15, 239–41.

ranting of the power of the capitalist you have hardly touched the fringe of the power he has.' (204)

Even after this Ned still retains a sort of admiration for this 'masterful man'. He shakes hands with him at the end of the encounter as they both declare 'war'. But any sentimentalism about Strong as the noble gentleman warrior is immediately dispelled as Strong, having shaken Ned's hand, sends a coded telegram to arrange for Ned's arrest in Queensland. And it is Strong who hires the anonymous 'burly man of unmistakably bush appearance, modified both in voice and dress by considerable contact with the towns' to 'start another union against the present one' and to 'bring us evidence criminally implicating' the officials of the unions involved in the shearers' strike. (195–6)

Although there is talk about the possibility of armed confrontation between the shearers and the forces of 'law and order' the novel progresses on the level of consciousness development, not romantic, revolutionary action. As Ned approaches the Strattons' house for the first time he thinks 'Here a Mazzini might hide himself and here the malcontents of Sydney might gather in safety to plot and plan for the overthrow of a hateful and hated "law and order"'. (47) Revolutionary cells and armed confrontation are part of the novel's aura; they are a potential; they create a dialogue of possibility generated from the novel's concerns. Talking of the achievements of socialism, Geisner tells Ned

'It can only come by the utter sweeping away of competition, and that can only come by the development of the socialist idea in men's hearts.... Year after year the number of men and women who hold Socialism as a religion is growing. And when they are enough you will see this Old Order melt away like a dream and the New Order replace it. That which appears so impregnable will pass away in a moment. So! He blew a cloud of smoke and watched it disappear circling upwards. (115–6)

The puff of smoke illustrating the classic Marxist spiral ascent suggests the ease of melting away; but it suggests too the smoke of gunfire. And when Geisner talks of the role of the unionist, it is in terms of 'drill, organisation, drill'. (117) *Looking Backwards'* industrial army of socialism is in part in the background here; but the preparation for

armed confrontation, for revolution, is also implied. When Ned says to Strong 'There is war between us' (200) the Marxist class struggle is here consciously defined as class war, not allowed to slip into the non-dynamic 'class conflict.'

These, however, are only suggestions of confrontation, potentials, dreams of revolution. They are part of the argument of possibility; they are also the unwritten novel of romantic fantasy. Lane, indeed, had earlier written just such a novel, *White or Yellow? A story of the Race-war of A.D. 1908* (1888),²⁷ in which white working class unionists lead an armed uprising against the alliance of the Queensland establishment and Asian capital. But these romantic, revolutionary elements are deliberately not developed in *The Workingman's Paradise*. The debate between romance and realism, the argument between revolutionary activism and the slow work of consciousness change, require the context of revolutionary possibility. But plot, whether of conspiracy or fictional device, is rejected in favour of the slow, unromantic work of consciousness change. When Ned first arrives in Sydney he 'had made enquiries of the waitress, as he ate his breakfast, concerning the spot which the waitress would prefer were a young man going to take her out for the day.' (13) When Nellie later cross-questions another waitress about working conditions and encourages her to organize a union, the triviality and implicit sexism of Ned's inquiries are implicitly exposed. And then in the second part of the novel we see Ned talking to the youth in the doss house and recruiting him to union activity. (189) The sequence has shown Ned's political development, and it is around this sort of political development that the novel is organized.

Writing on 'Aesthetic Problems of the Development of the Proletarian-Revolutionary Novel in Nineteenth-Century Britain', Jack Mitchell pointed to the 'highly untypical "love-triangle" involving a worker, a man from the ruling class and a woman (from either class).'²⁸ Lane, significantly, rejects this 'almost universal' plot structure, though he still retains the love-relationship as central.

27 Serialized in twelve episodes in the *Boomerang* (Brisbane), (18 February–5 May, 1888), 'by Sketcher'.

28 Jack Mitchell, 'Aesthetic Problems of the Development of the Proletarian-Revolutionary Novel in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, (1963), reprinted in David Craig, ed., *Marxists on Literature*, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.262.

Up to Tressell, where, for the first time, man's relationship to his labour comes into its own as (alongside the love-relationship) the chief expression of the level of his human qualities, the English working-class novel (like the bourgeois novel) relied almost entirely on the love-relationship to epitomize the human quality of their heroes.²⁹

This is still the case with Lane. Ned's work as a bushman is not shown. Lane's own experience of urban journalism, of exposing the conditions of working-class life and work, provides the base for the work experience component of the novel, which is mediated through Nellie: the work and living conditions are those of the working-class woman rather than man.

And in the relationship of Ned and Nellie, Lane breaks from the established pattern. The love-triangle is not used, though it is present as a context: Ned wonders how Nellie comes to dine occasionally in the expensive restaurants, wonders how she knows the names of some of the rich there, wonders what her relationship is with the Strattons, wonders if there is a hidden romance between her and Geisner. The traditional plot triangle is present in Ned's fearful imaginings, his unspoken yet so unmistakable evoked jealousies. But it is purely a jealous imagining of Ned's, a fantasy.

At the same time as he rejects the untypical triangle as fantasy, Lane also rejects any fulfilment of a love plot between Ned and Nellie. Ned declares his love at the beginning of part II; Nellie is drawn to him, and then recoils, refusing marriage, refusing to bring children into the hell of this existence. The rejection of a marriage resolution to the novel serves to underline the rejection of this society: there can be no true fulfilment for the workingman or woman. From literary convention we have expected the novel will end with Ned and Nellie married: Lane denies that satisfaction. In the first edition of the novel a sequel was advertised, to be set in the communist settlement 'New Australia' that Lane was establishing in Paraguay. '*In New Australia: Being Nellie Lawton's Diary of a Happier Life "in New Australia"*' will not detail a mere dream. In a popular way, continuing the story of Ned Hawkins and Nellie Lawton, it will deal with the scheme of

29 *Ibid.*, p.262.

complete co-operation.' It never appeared.

Rejecting the marriage plot Lane rejects all plot. He dispenses with the laborious machinery of bourgeois realism and offers in effect two walks, two tours of Sydney with commentary and discussion. This is what Aragon did thirty years later in *Paris Peasant*, at the end of his surrealist phase, at the moment of turning to socialist realism.³⁰ Lane by negating bourgeois realism develops a new structure, a free form prefiguring the 'modernist', whose effects are gained from the collocation and contrast of tone. Like Jack London or D. H. Lawrence, Lane was concerned with ideas. At the moment that Henry James was laying total stress on the dramatization of consciousness within highly stringent formal conventions, Lane insisted on retaining content, on the communicative, social role of literature. And new formal possibilities emerged in the act of creation, the material determined its own form. The abandonment of arbitrary plot allowed a breakthrough into a new realism. So that instead of the novel's ending being all tied up, we are left with openness, choice. Ned sets off back to Queensland and will eventually be arrested and gaoled; yet Strong's telegram has been intercepted by union activists and Ned is warned to leave the train before the end of his journey and continue back overland. Labor is organizing. Yet the strike that Ned goes off to organize, the reader knows, was to be defeated. In the immediate perspective that could be tragedy; in the longer perspective that Lane establishes through Geisner, this is but an episode on the path to socialism. As with London's *The Iron Heel*, the Marxist perspective on the ultimate victory of socialism provides the positive context in which to situate the immediate defeat, so that the stress is on the positive movement of the future. Particular episodes may fail, but the understanding of socialism is spreading. The cumulative effect of the conversion of individual upon individual like Ned is preparing a mass movement. The stress on individual consciousness change is reiterated in Ned's discussion with Mrs Stratton at the end of the novel. Geisner, she says,

is moulding the world as a potter moulds clay. It frightens me, sometimes. I open a new book and there are Geisner's very ideas.

³⁰ Louis Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), translated as *Paris Peasant*, London, 1980.

I see a picture, an illustrated paper, and there is Geisner's hand passed to another. I was at a new opera the other night and I could hardly believe my ears; it seemed as though Geisner was playing. From some out of the way corner of the earth comes news of a great strike; then, on top of it, from another corner, the bubbling of a gathering rising; and I can feel that Geisner is guiding countless millions to some unseen goal, safe in his work because none know him....' (211).

It is a romantic vision, appropriately expressed through Connie Stratton. But though she puts the weight on the individual 'Geisner,' this is corrected in her own assertion that 'none know him.' He is deliberately unknown, his part in the novel important in the ideas he expounds to Ned, not in any 'personality.' And it is just this ceaseless propagandizing that Lane was doing in his journalism and through this novel.

As the novel approaches its end, it develops this combined vision both of the immediate defeat of the shearers' strike, the immediate suffering and despair, together with the steady, inexorable move to apocalyptic change, as the propagandizing continues.

All the world over it was the same, two great parties were forming, the lists were being cleared by combats such as this for the ultimate death-struggle between two great principles which could not always exist side by side. The robbed were beginning to understand the robbery; the workers were beginning to turn upon the drones; the dominance of the squatter, the mine-owner, the ship-owner, the land-owner, the share-holder, was being challenged; this was not the end, but surely, it was the beginning of the end. (221)

Yet resonant as the passage is, it is not the end. It expresses Ned's feelings as he heads north to the strike, a mood of aggression, but is soon replaced by a sense of the futility of aggression.

'As Geisner says, they don't know any better. A man ought to pity them, for they're no worse than the rest of us. They're not better and no worse than we'd be in their places. They can't help it any more than we can.'

A great love for all mankind stole over him, a yearning to be at fellowship with all. (221)

Just as Connie Stratton's vision of Geisner moulding the world is only a partial vision, so is Ned's vision of the ultimate death-struggle. In the end, Lane stresses, the shift in socialism cannot be put off onto some romantic figure doing the secret converting, or the violent destruction of ultimate confrontation. These may be necessary factors, but neither of them will prove successful unless we ourselves change.

Let us not be deceived! It is in ourselves that the weakness is. It is in ourselves that the real fight must take place between the Old and the New. It is because we ourselves value our miserable lives, because we ourselves cling to the old fears and kneel still before the old idols, that the Thought still remains a thought only, that it does not create the New Order which will make of this weary world a Paradise indeed.

Neither ballots nor bullets will avail us unless we strive of ourselves to be men, to be worthier to be the dwelling houses of this Thought of which even the dream is filling the world with madness divine. To curb our own tongues, to soften our own hearts, to be sober ourselves, to be virtuous ourselves, to trust each other—at least to try—this we must do before we can justly expect of others that they should do it.... (225)

The final stage of this education in socialism has come to the individual, the individual writer, the individual reader. Lane does not exempt himself. The various stages on the road to socialism are not rejected. It is not correct to say that Lane surrenders them in favour of individual consciousness development. His point is that none of the observations of suffering, none of the knowledge of socialist theory, none of the awareness of the strategy of the enemy, none of the energy put into propagandizing others, neither electoral nor revolutionary change will be worth anything unless socialism becomes a lived belief; socialism will not spread from converting the 'others', but from converting oneself. None of the traditional strategies are rejected: the whole book has been an exploration of the traditional appeals and analyses and understandings. But, rare for a propagandist, Lane concludes that it is

for the propagandist to make sure he or she is living the value system propagandized before any change can be effective. It is not a denial of public, co-operative activity. It is an assertion of the necessary base from which any true public or co-operative activity alone can grow.