

Volume Two, Exegesis

Blue-Collar Work

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This is to certify that-

- (1) this exegesis comprises only my original work;
- (2) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used;
- (3) the exegesis is 20,000 words in length exclusive of bibliography.

Dennis McIntosh

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Introduction

After being kicked out of year nine in 1973 and spending two years on a farm school, milking cows and carting hay, I found myself in 1999 starting an undergraduate degree at university. I had a story I wanted to tell. I wanted to learn how to write. Standing in the large cafeteria, I felt old. I was surrounded by mostly cool, casually dressed—with the occasional spikey haired, purple petticoat wearing—students acting out a lot of nervous energy. I was forty, dressed in new shorts and lace-up boots. I thought back to when I was their age. The factories, shearing sheds and tunnels I'd spent many years in replayed in my head like an old movie reel. Sick in the stomach, I thought they were the wasted years of my life, and what a waste of a life I'd had. I have since read similar emotional responses by blue-collar workers in studies of masculinity and in works such as Richard Cobb and Jonathon Sennett's *Hidden Injuries of Class* and the interviews by Stud Terkel of working class people. Living it was hard; studying it has been liberating.

In the beginning I tried to hide my past working life from the teachers and students because I was ashamed. I usually said I'd been a shearer, which had some romantic and masculine credibility. The sense of failure I had carried was felt more acutely at university. Part of my development as a writer was to plumb those feelings of inferiority and shame. As socialism educated workers into revolutionaries, university has educated me as a writer, but education has not tamed me or gentrified me. I hope I have maintained my distance and my rage.

In the courses, a trickle of articles started appearing that I intimately understood in a way the other students and teachers, by their very lives, couldn't have understood. The articles were on manual work and men. To say those texts changed my life is an understatement. When I read stories from realist writers like Gavin Casey and John Morrison that were often about manual work, I identified.

Studying blue-collar lives through creative writing and academic texts has given me new and different insights into my working life and cultural background. It was a look into how I was constructed and how the middle-class viewed working people. It was life-giving knowledge. I even felt lighter, more alive and out of the darkness. There would not be a shearer or a tunneller who would believe me if I told them there were books and articles written about the effects of work on their emotional lives. Their mates on the next stand down the line didn't know how they felt. Any honour or pride in performing as a labourer in shearing sheds or tunnels had no currency in the university cafeteria. However, the subject of men, masculinity and the working class had a serious place in research and literature.

University provided a different culture and mind set to view my past. Even using the lift in a university department can be compared with using a cage to go down the tunnel at work. But there is a different etiquette in an elevator at university than in a cage lowering men into a tunnel. Recently, a postgraduate student returning from a break asked me how I got into the building. I was taken aback until I realised she thought I had snuck into the building illegally. I still look like a truck driver. I am broad and built for work; when I'm thinking about my writing, I wear a scowl that resembles a pub brawler. After a dozen years at university it is still a prickly fit.

My point is I didn't write *Tunnelling* from inside the tunnel. I wrote it looking back through the window in the physical comforts and emotional discomforts of the English Department. My body shape in the tunnel was an asset. At university it signalled a threat. My clothes assign me to a certain culture. Working class at university is not exotic. The uncertainties I feel at university position me as a writer. These experiences have taken me out of the subjective positioning I had working in the tunnel. I am not actually an 'insider' as a worker anymore; rather, I have the knowledge of an insider, but now I'm informed. Maybe I'm an informer, too, something like a 'whistle-blower', breaking the codes of silences we lived by.

Work consumes most of a working man's seventy or so years on earth. For my friends and me, becoming workers was a cultural rites-of-passage to manhood. At school, by fifteen, I couldn't spell, couldn't read my own handwriting, and didn't have an understanding of grammar; and I was one of the better ones. School had also prepared us for a life of hard manual work. Our emotions and language are further shaped by what we do at work. We marry someone who is compatible with or tolerant of our working lives. Deliberately or inadvertently, we often steer our children into similar industries as ourselves. Yet, blue-collar workers have become almost invisible; their moral standing has been eroded and their feelings ignored (Honneth xiv).

Despite their contribution to society, workers have had, directly or indirectly, little representation in the arts or the media, particularly in recent years. Many people believe the working class to be incapable of producing art or literature (Tsokhas in Syson, 'It Just', 13). It wasn't always that way. From the 1920s up until the 1960s writers who were either members of the Communist Party of Australia or sympathetic to the working class produced a variety of texts that included narratives from the battlers to the political radicals.

Reading texts that were dedicated to work and class, I could see particular experiences I encountered in my labouring life that were not represented. Also, the critical essays and books that discussed and unpacked realist writing, blue-collar work and masculinity have given me insights beyond the personal. Improving my English, diverse university experiences, and actual study have been critical to the development of my manuscript beyond that of a pub yarn or family story.

Katharine Susannah Prichard and Jean Devanny were two seminal figures in writing about work. When I first read *Working Bullocks* (1926) and *Sugar Heaven* (1936) I hated them both. Despite their content being about blue-collar struggles and triumphs, I thought they were bullshit. I found *Sugar Heaven*'s utopian ending after a failed strike difficult to stomach. I have been part of several failed strikes and it is a bitter experience. Also I took offence at the lack of feeling displayed by the workers in the mills in *Working Bullocks*.

One thing I didn't realise at the time was that Prichard's and Devanny's depiction of timber workers and cane cutters was about a different kind of work to what I did in the tunnel. Over the course of the twentieth century work had changed. That was my revelation in writing this exegesis. That partly accounts for the strong feeling that my experiences of work were not represented in their novels and it gives further relevance to telling the story of the men in the tunnel. In chapter three I draw on and discuss both writers and their respective observations of blue-collar workers when discussing the men in the tunnel. Over the ensuing years of study I have come to a broader appreciation of the enormous task both writers attempted.

Although *Tunnelling* is a memoir and the other works discussed are fiction, they are all based on real events in a real industrial setting centred around real strikes. The

difference between their texts and mine is that I write from an experiential point of view about the politics of men at work. I have used my memoir partly to address aspects of men's lives at work I thought were missing in *Working Bullocks* and *Sugar Heaven*: for example, the depiction of actual work, the pain, the mindless repetition, and the complexity of workplace relations. Also, thinking is discouraged in the tunnel and workers have no intellectual input into their work; I have tried to show that. It is a workplace where the speed of the worker is assessed in machine-like terms, and where you have to front up to work and face the prospect of doing the same thing every day for the rest of your life. *Tunnelling* does not revel and glory in the political and physical struggle of workers as Devanny's and Prichard's characters do, or as the men who I have represented may hope it does. In this way I feel a sort of traitor to the men and their lives.

Writing about work

Clearly the creative component of this thesis, *Tunnelling*, covers not just life in the tunnel but also my daughter's story and other aspects of my own story. However, the exegesis restricts itself to the first of those things.

It looks at three different approaches to writing about blue-collar workers. In the end, I show that the men in *Tunnelling* have less agency than either the timber workers in *Working Bullocks* or the cane cutters in *Sugar Heaven*. Katharine Susannah Prichard's commitment to the working class was from a sympathetic outsider's position. Her social realist novel's aim was to reveal Australians, as she saw them, to themselves. Jean Devanny's commitment in *Sugar Heaven* was to the Communist Party. Her utopian novel was an expose for a new socialist order. In writing about blue-collar workers,

Tunnelling's internal narrative focuses on the politics of men at work, not the politics of work in society. I want to show how men live at work and what they endure. The workplace politics in *Tunnelling*, in part at least, are driven by the lack of autonomy the men have over their bodies and the lack of agency in their work. As a result of using first-hand experience in writing *Tunnelling*, I show the tunnellers experience less purposeful lives through their work than the workers in either *Working Bullocks* or *Sugar Heaven*.

Chapter one looks at Prichard and *Working Bullocks*, chapter two, at Devanny and *Sugar Heaven*. Chapter three discusses *Tunnelling*. In chapters one and two I look at the early influences on the writers and how those influences manifested in their text. Also, through the analysis of a couple of characters, I also look at how each writer chooses to represent the working class in their broader narratives. In chapter three I discuss the men's lives in the tunnel. I look at the management strategy termed Taylorism that was imposed on the workers in the tunnel.

The representations of masculinities are a connecting theme in all three texts discussed. I look at the myth behind the performance of a certain type of Australian masculinity. Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* explores the origins of this myth and how it has been passed down through, among other institutions, militant trade unionism, and familial relationships since the original bush convicts. It is a symbolic masculinity that, on the one hand men—particularly working men—attempt to act out. On the other hand, blue-collar workers in management-controlled jobs use the image to shield themselves against the gaze of the outsider, hiding their less-than-noble lives. The image of Australian masculinity that originated in the bush is the same masculinity that was in action when Prichard and Devanny observed their timber workers and cane cutters. It is

also the same masculinity on show in the tunnel, but that is where the similarities end. The men in the tunnel are roboticised.

Realisms

In this section I will briefly discuss what realism means and the different fields of realism that developed from the beginning of the twentieth century. The three terms I will discuss and explain are social realism, socialist realism and working-class writing. Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Working Bullocks* is an example of social realism. Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* is a socialist realist novel and *Tunnelling* is a working-class text.

Raymond Williams in *Keywords* points out realism is a difficult and complicated word (257). One way to get an understanding of it is to look at genres that are different to realism, such as naturalism and modernism. Williams says realism as an art form attempts to include or to emphasize 'hidden or underlying forces or movements which simple "naturalistic" observations could not pick up' (261). Naturalism as a literary form has a more scientific approach with 'detailed representations' in the writing (218). Modernism according to George Lukács (1885-1971) represents man as an asocial being as opposed to realism where man is essentially a social being connected to the historical movements of his time (17-18).

The rise of realism as a specific style of writing coincides with changing dynamics during the industrial revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century. For example in 1848, the same year Karl Marx and Frederick Engels published the Manifesto of the Communist Party, European countries were besieged by a series of

challenges to regimes, starting with the French and then German uprisings. While they were not directly linked to socialism, the rebellions were in part about greater freedoms and empowerment for people, including those born into varying types of servitude.

Realism was not so much a literal interpretation of the 'real' but a code word to signify certain characteristics represented in art and literature that reflected that period of time. Writers such as Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), Charles Dickens (1812-1870) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) are regarded as classic realists from that era. They wrote about the effects of capitalism on society, particularly the underclass and the oppressed. Work was not overtly a subject in their narratives, not in the way it is in *Working Bullocks*, *Sugar Heaven* and *Tunnelling*. The key difference between the earlier realist texts, such as Balzac's, Dickens's, and Dostoyevsky's, and a realism that dealt with the concerns of the working class was an interest in the struggle for socialism (Lukács, *The Meaning*, 93).

As Ian Syson suggests, to define literature that deals with work 'is fraught with immense difficulties' ('Approaches', 65). One reason is the small body of theory available. Syson further says 'that many Marxist theorists spent most of their time 'examining the bourgeoisie' rather than defining and promoting workers' texts ('Approaches', 65). Lukács was one theorist who did contribute to workers' literature. One of his key points was that worker's literature needed to be written from an insider's point of view. While Lukács used the term critical realism, for the purpose of this exegesis, I use the term social realism.

Social realism is journalistic in style, often set in the context of real historical events, with the writer having creative freedom over the narrative. But the writer is usually an outsider to the world of the working class. The writer may be able to classify

the individual and identify his personal conflicts, and from this point work towards wider social perspectives (Lukács, *The Meaning*, 94). The writer may also write a novel about socialism and be sympathetic to the issues of the working class. Critically, Lukács says this type of writer may come to understand the struggle of his own times but he will not be able to conceive the future of the working class from the inside (*The Meaning*, 95).

Socialist realism, for the purpose of this exegesis, will refer to the prescriptive texts associated with the Soviet Union's propaganda. This socialist realism was also journalistic in style and often based on real events connected to the historical movements of the time. However, it had to be utopian and uplifting, aspiring to the ideals of a political policy (Ellis, 'The Triumph', 39). This literature became known as romantic revolutionary literature. It was later termed Zhdanovism, after Andrei Zhdanov, the secretary of the Communist Party, following the first meeting of the Soviet Union of writers in 1934. Zhdanovism was designed as a propaganda strategy to sell socialism to workers in capitalist countries.

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and several of his short stories, are good examples of social realism. Steinbeck used real events and depicted typical characters to show the suffering of the working-class during the Great Depression. His political commitment did not negatively impose itself on his creativity. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath*.

As a political narrative that provides redemption for workers in capitalist countries through socialism, Upton Sinclair's (1878-1968) *The Jungle* is a good example of a socialist realist novel. Written at the turn of the twentieth century it depicts the terrible lives of migrants working in the unregulated meat industry in America. Sinclair

was a committed communist and agitator. Towards the end of the story the protagonist stumbles into a communist meeting being held in a back room of a hotel in the industrial slums. There he experiences an ineptly described evangelical conversion to socialism (20).

Working-class writing is experiential writing, illuminating aspects of working-class life or of the class struggle from the inside. In the 19th century, working-class writing consisted of pamphlets, life writing, poetry and speeches. In the 20th century it acquired a socialist connotation (Klaus ix). Social and socialist realist narratives could also be written by working-class writers. While Prichard was a middle-class writer, Devanny was from the working class. She chose to follow a socialist realist formula in *Sugar Heaven*. The only insiders when writing about work are workers. So a key point, I think, in defining working-class writing for the purposes of this exegesis is that its story can provide insights into the future, or lack of it, for its characters from an insider's position (Lukács, *The Meaning*, 95). This is a position that Prichard did not have access to and that Devanny chose to suppress.

American writer Tilley Olsen (1912-2007) is an example of a working-class writer. *Tell Me a Riddle*, Olsen's book of short stories is a great example of the rarely-portrayed life of the unpaid housewife and mother in a blue-collar family. What distinguishes her writing from other realist writers is that she deals with the primary source of the experiences. In Olsen's case it is the effects of housework and child rearing on her self-esteem and the thwarting of her ambitions beyond that of being a mother and housewife.

Raymond Carver (1938-1988) is another well-known working-class writer. Best known for his short stories and poetry, he started his working life in a saw mill with his

father. An early story called 'The Hair' captures the beginnings of his oeuvre, the dis-ease in absolutely ordinary lives (Gallagher 12). Carver like many other writers, however, rarely wrote about the actual work and the workplace.

Australian realism

This section will give a brief overview of the realist tradition in Australia. It will discuss the early bush realists and the Australian realist writers who wrote about work and the working-class. I will briefly discuss Prichard and Devanny. I will then look at Frank Hardy and the Communist Party's realist writers group.

Australian writers who used socialist ideals in their literature were building on an existing tradition of bush realism and observations of the Australian bushman. Joseph Furphy (1843-1912) was a bush realist and a convert to socialism in the late 1880s but that commitment did not translate into a socialist narrative. He created his own narrative structure from an eclectic framework. Julian Croft in *The Life and Opinions of Tom Collins* suggests Furphy based *Such Is life* in part on Stern's *Tristram Shandy*. The other influence suggested by Croft is the French anarchist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) who was a prominent politician and philosopher of his time. His statement, 'property is theft' (meaning ownership is a form of robbery), 'shines through' Furphy's narrative (8). After Furphy returned from the Riverina where he ran and lost his own bullock team, he wrote his classic novel.

Henry Lawson's (1867-1922) bush realism captures the character of the individual. Lawson traces the engagements between the local and the national, set in 'events', without 'surrendering the particularities of the one to the universal dream of the

other' (Lee, *City*, 13). He was an early republican and strong advocate for an Australian identity distinct from Britain. Many later realist writers attempted to appropriate and transform his bush realism (Ferrier, *Jean*, 103).

Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969) consciously positioned herself as Lawson's heir. She wanted to continue his legacy, as she saw it, of revealing Australians to themselves (Indyk v). *Working Bullocks* is a social realist narrative and has the first communist-inspired hero in Australian literature. The text is a more organic novel depicting class conflict and less prescriptive than her later works (Moore, 'Introduction', 13). I draw on Prichard's observations of workers to compare with the men in the tunnel. The images of the characters in the novel came from direct observation but not from direct experience.

Eve Langley's (1908-1974) *The Pea Pickers* (1932), Kylie Tennant's (1912-1988) *The Battlers* (1941), Eleanor Dark's (1901-1985) *Sun Across the Sky* (1937) are examples of social realist texts that followed *Working Bullocks*. These novelists wrote from different points with 'varying degrees of socialist realist theory' (Syson, 'It Just', 13). I identify the novels as social realism because the texts lack the radical edge required in the political policy driven Zhdanovism.

Langley was different to Tennant and Dark in that she was not a middle-class writer. She was a female artist who could also be described as a working-class writer. *The Pea Pickers* (1932) is a fictionalized memoir of rural itinerant life. Tennant's middle-class sympathies for the working class led her to live with 'battlers' and 'down-and-outers' to get a feel of what it was like. Tennant's *The Battlers* (1941) was written after witnessing the deprivation of the Depression. Eleanor Dark was also a middle-class left wing sympathizer who for a time dabbled unsuccessfully in social realism in *Sun*

Across the Sky (1937) and *Waterway* (1938) before she returned to her preferred subjects: vacuous middle-class characters and suburban lives.

Dorothy Hewitt's (1923-2002) *Bobbin Up* (1959) is, in my opinion, a social realist text, although it has elements of socialist realism. Despite its political discourse, it is written with 'the internal richness usually reserved for the bourgeois novel' (Knight in *Bobbin Up* 214). And that is my point: while the political conclusion is utopian and prescriptive as suggested by a *Bulletin* reviewer (Hollier 230), it is also tokenistic and that is what redeems the novel from being positioned as a socialist realist text. Hewitt later said it had some narrow-minded Stalinism, but the Party at the time accused her of writing a naturalistic novel. She said herself that she couldn't write under such prescriptive requirements (Ferrier, *Gender*, 114).

Jean Devanny (1894-1962) was more clearly a socialist realist writer. Devanny set out in *Sugar Heaven* to produce a more positive view of working people than Prichard's depiction of the working-class in *Working Bullocks*. *Sugar Heaven* is based on the real strike over Weil's disease by cane cutters in North Queensland. The political requirements of this Zhdanovistic style of writing mean that it lacks credibility (Moore, 'Introduction', 7). It is a good example of the problems communist writers faced trying to write revolutionary literature about the class struggle in a wealthy democratic country. The Russian Revolution was an imported struggle that didn't translate into Australian culture (Ferrier, *Jean*, 102).

The more prescriptive and radical socialist realism in Australia—texts like J.M. Harcourt's (1902-1971) *Upsurge* (1934)—was short lived. *Upsurge* had the same early fate as *Sugar Heaven* and was 'out of print and more or less forgotten' by the 1950s (Carter, 'The Story', 90). *Upsurge*, as one of the early experiments in socialist realism,

has not received the renaissance *Sugar Heaven* has enjoyed of recent years. Harcourt was charged with obscenities and his book was banned in Western Australia and later in the Commonwealth (Jose 473). While he relished the realistic depiction of corruption amongst the unions, employers, police, the judiciary and businessmen, it was regarded as not entirely believable (Cowan 94).

Gavin Casey (1907-1964), Mena Calthorp (1905-1996), Betty Collins (1921-2006) and John Morrison (1904-1998) are examples of writers who drew on their working-class experiences in the development of their narratives. The texts they produced are free of prescriptive political instruction. The representations of class conflict are based, in most cases, on the internal politics of the workplace. Morrison, though, like Carver, also captures the deeper human struggles within the working class.

Casey's collection *Short Shift Saturday*, particularly the short story of the same name, captures the internal machinations and intricate non-verbal communication between the men at work. Men work in dangerous unstable ground on the gold fields of Kalgoorlie and gamble an early death from emphysema against earning a living. Casey died at fifty-five with only a quarter of a lung. He didn't write his story while working in the mines; however, his credentials as a working-class writer are in his experiential knowledge.

Mena Calthorpe's *The Dye House* (1961) is set in a textile-dyeing factory while Betty Collins's *The Copper Crucible* (1966) is a fictionalized account of the famous Mount Isa strike in the 1960s. Both stories explore different themes within working-class life, based on their experiences. *The Dye House* tracks, in part, the conundrum that young working-class boys face, having to choose between their freedom or their bondage to meaningless and difficult work which comes with love and marriage. It also

explores the difficulty young women encounter in a male-dominated factory. Collins's *The Copper Crucible* tracks the demise of the relationship between a young union organiser and his wife. The effect of men's lives on women, earlier examined by Lawson, is a key theme in the story. Instead of the bush, the squatter and the bushman, we have a mining town, an American company and a multi-cultural work force.

John Morrison (1904-1998) is one of the very few writers who held a manual job until he retired at sixty-five. He wrote into his early eighties. He worked on the wharves and later as a gardener. He was a communist whose literary efforts were dedicated to 'the deep rooted facts of the individual and social experience' of the working class and their families (Reid vii). He is best remembered for his short stories, although he wrote several novels. At the same time that *Port of Call* (1950) was published, depicting life on the wharves, Frank Hardy's most famous book was published.

Frank Hardy (1917-1994) is probably the best-known member of the communist-inspired realist writers group. *Power Without Glory* (1950) is his most famous text. It is an urban story involving the Catholic Church, the Labor Party and an underworld that emerged out of poverty in the back streets of Collingwood. It ends with one of the characters going off to fight in the Spanish Civil War. While Hardy was a communist writer and saw himself as a socialist realist, he has since been re-positioned as a social realist by some critics (McLaren 55). His novel is more an exploration of the underbelly of capitalism than a systematic socialist realist narrative.

Hardy grappled with how 'best to represent the class struggle' (Syson, 'Approaches', 70). I think Jack Beasley is harsh in accusing him of displaying bourgeois ambitions because he enjoyed the celebrity status he acquired; it is an assessment that doesn't take account of Hardy's contribution to workers' stories (Adams and Lee 18).

His larrikin yarns such as the Billy Borker series are peopled with ‘complex characters’ as opposed to the propaganda cut-outs of many other similar stories (Adams and Lee 28).

David Ireland (1927-) published *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* in 1971. The Miles Franklin award winner was hailed at the time as a blue-collar hero. This was only a few years after the decline of the realist writers group (1940-1960s) that had supported writers in publications such as the *Realist Writer* and the *Realist* (Syson 5). Ireland won the sort of acclaim the realist writers had craved. However, I found the story alienating and unreadable and regard him as an experimental writer. That is because his narrative of men at work is closer to science fiction rather than an account based on experiences of work. His status and the way he was seen reveals more about critics than it does about his writing. Frank Hardy’s words about Patrick White are applicable to *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*: ‘the illiterate speech in White’s so-called working-class characters is a travesty of their speech and a travesty of their behaviour. One is not to blame him for that. He doesn’t know, but I just wish that people could see that he doesn’t know’ (Syson, ‘Approaches’, 70). In the case of *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* it was the critics who couldn’t tell the difference between real working-class lives and imagined characters and made up plots.

Overall, Australian realist writers from the 1920s to the early 1970s attempted to develop a broad body of literature about work and the working class. From Communist Party members, left wing academics, middle-class sympathizers and the rare workers on the shop floor, men and women have tried to find a space that would allow voices that were not from the dominant middle-class culture to be expressed. In a time of silences around the subject of work—and what feels like writing in front of an empty stand after

the game has been played—I have tried to complement this body of literature with my creative component, *Tunnelling* and my earlier text *Beaten by a Blow*.

Although I did actually do the work and live the life, I could not have written publishable works when I was employed in the tunnel. I wore gloves, laboured in wet, dirty conditions, did double shifts and worked Saturdays. I couldn't write proper sentences, spell properly or read my own handwriting. I had never used a typewriter and couldn't use a computer. But my biggest retardant was feeling inferior when it came to anything to do with education. I have had to improve my English, learn middle-class skills, such as their codes of storytelling and literary techniques, as well as learn the process of wooing a publisher and selling a manuscript so as to get my story to a wider audience beyond the men in the tunnel and their families.

Left wing political narratives, working-class stories and industrial settings have minimal representation in contemporary literature. Middle-class culture is a brutal censor. Work as a subject had started to disappear from Australian literature by the mid-1970s (Edmonds). I believe my story addresses the absence of working class stories generally in writing today. Most importantly, the tunnel section of my story deals with men at work. I would like to think that *Tunnelling* fulfils the aspirations Lukács set out to achieve nearly ninety years ago—that it is writing that re-humanizes those who have been de-humanized by work (Livingstone, *German*, xxii).

Chapter one

Katharine Susannah Prichard and *Working Bullocks*

Introduction

This chapter examines Katharine Susannah Prichard's approach to writing about blue-collar workers and the workplace in *Working Bullocks*. It looks at her life and literary experiences and how those influences are manifested in the text. Prichard was sympathetic but she was an outsider and her representations of some of the men, and particularly the timber mill workers, are underdeveloped and one dimensional. However, she has also managed to depict some of the timber cutters and bullock driver's agency, which I look at further in chapter three.

Working Bullocks derives from observation rather than from experience or prescriptive direction. Prichard's acute observations have given the text a believable and 'typical' working-class setting. However, the lack of depth in the men's characters and the tokenistic representations of the politics of men at work highlight the difficulty of penetrating the culture of blue-collar workers from outside.

The story was developed by watching real timber workers perform. On Boxing Day 1919 Prichard attended the bush races and a wood chopping competition on the outskirts of the great Karri forest outside Perth. The opening scene in the book with bullocks jostling and the bullock driver, Red Burke, 'swinging his whip' (5) was straight out of the note book that she had used on her visits. She recorded that 'the most tragic thing in the bush [was] the working bullocks' (Throssell 44-45). She also went to the

mills at Big Brook in the heart of the Karri forest. It was there she heard the ‘screams of the logs’ being sawn in half.

In 1924 Prichard was sent by the Communist Party to address a group of striking timber workers. She thought the strike was a gift from the gods because it was a real dispute that she could use to centre her narrative. At that stage, she only had a compilation of notes from her visit to the Karri forest years earlier. After the strike meeting, she was able to write the novel.

The making of a socialist writer

Prichard was born into a family facing a set of complex social and emotional issues. They were more than a middle-class family; they were part of the educated classes. Her father was a newspaper editor and from an early age Prichard aspired to be a writer. She also experienced the bitter lessons of middle-class poverty when her father was unemployed (Throssell 9, 11). She was misguidedly ‘outraged’ at her mother seemingly giving away all their furniture after being evicted from their house. She watched the family’s precious treasures being hauled away on top of a grocer’s cart. This trauma, early in her life, left Prichard trying to find a way to fix her parent’s problems. An early example of this is when, at sixteen, she gave her winnings of one guinea from a writing competition to her struggling family.

Her father’s inability to secure long-term employment left him and the family vulnerable. As editor of the Melbourne *Sun*, Tom Prichard found himself out of work when it changed hands. When his move to the *Daily Telegraph* in Tasmania failed, he sank into a depression from which he never really recovered and, although he had

sporadic employment after that, he largely lived off his children's godmother and handouts until 1907, when he committed suicide (Throssell 19).

In 1908, a year after her father died, Prichard went to England. As much as she was deeply affected by his death, it was her inability to comfort him—her feelings of powerlessness in his depressed years—which stayed with her. It is not too hard to make the jump from her own experiences of misfortune to her horror at the poverty she witnessed as a young woman in England. The juxtaposing of the extreme wealth of Londoners and starving men outside soup kitchens on the streets, according to her son, was 'her bleeding in the stuff of revolution' (Throssell 21).

The First World War and the death of her brother inspired Prichard to the cause of peace and encouraged her to find an answer to humanity's suffering, beyond religion. She had abandoned the idea of god when she witnessed her family sincerely praying every night to be emancipated from their poverty and misery. Why should faith require such humiliation, she had asked (Throssell 19-25).

Prichard's call to arms came from the hope that was generated by the Russian Revolution of 1917 (Cowden 11). She was also guided by the theories of Marx and Engels; after reading them, she said she 'knew where she was going' (Throssell 34-35). In 1919 Prichard wrote in a pamphlet titled *The New Order* that socialism brought hope to the world. It was a chance to 'put our shoulder with the workers to the wheel of progress' and make a new order in the world based on the principles of 'justice and love' and 'the welfare of the community as a whole' (9). Prichard, the socialist, was born.

In the 1920s she became a founding member of the Western Australian branch of the Communist Party (Ferrier, *Point*, 13). This association lasted the rest of her life. It also impacted on her writing through the expectations of the Party that she would adhere

to subversive tactics in her narratives and would sell the ideals of communism to the workers. Her early experimentation with socialist narratives can be found in *Working Bullocks*.

Uses of literary traditions

Observation of real life events may have inspired the writing of *Working Bullocks*, but she also drew on a range of literary forerunners, which had implications for the ways she represented working men. She was influenced by Henry Lawson's writings, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (Indyk v), D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and the teachings of Karl Marx. But that is not to say that her work was derivative. *Working Bullocks* is something of an 'unguided experiment into committed literature, revealing in sharp relief the provisional strategies and makeshift solutions with which political purpose seeks to constrain the indeterminacy of writing' (Buckridge 86).

Prichard followed the tradition of Henry Lawson's bush realism and developed it into a new genre. She saw her task as one of revealing Australians to themselves. This, she claimed, was Lawson's 'supreme achievement' (Indyk vii). She added a political dimension to the narrative with the first communist-inspired hero in an Australian text (Carter 91). She also elevated romance and passion over work for the first time (McLaren 65). While Lawson's characters cut their personalities against rugged and often hostile terrain, Prichard's characters celebrate the vitality of a people who are at home in the landscape and draw their strength from it (Indyk v). The bush workers, particularly, are portrayed as men relishing their work.

Critics have argued that Prichard was the Lawrentian romantic of the 1920s in Australia (Mitchell 117), suggesting that she drew on elements that Lawrence had

inherited from a tradition of Nietzscheanism: affirmations of the body, beast, and vitalistic nature (Cowden 17). *Working Bullocks*, as the title suggests, is heavily punctuated with the power, beauty and beastliness of nature and man. Prichard acknowledges the 'brilliance' of *Sons and Lovers* but refutes the claim that it was a direct influence on her (Throssell 43). However, there is a prominent tension in the text between the natural world of the forest and the unnatural world of industrialisation, as is the case in much of Lawrence's work. By using this Lawrentian opposition, Prichard has positioned some of the workers (and the timber mill) on the side of the unnatural and has therefore represented them, in part, as outsiders in their own story.

Prichard's Lawrentian narrative and the contrasting responsibility of social realism to depict 'typical characters' from the working class has its emotional showdown in the mill scenes. The mill 'always looked dark...in summer and in early winter...lights in the mill made everything brighter...than the world outside' (221). The mill is depicted as a slaughter house tearing the flesh off the trees. And the mill workers can only 'grunt' and are 'well-oiled and sprung' for work (227, 228). The mill and its workers are depicted as evil and sinister. The idea of social realism was to represent the working class—under-represented in literature—as real people in the context of their real struggles.

Scenes, characters and discussions within the text can be divided basically into two camps: the natural and the unnatural world. The 'inhuman machinery' (229) and artificial light in the mill is contrasted to the trees which appear to Deb to be like people she knew. The men in the mill were machine-like, 'sprung for the job' (229), while bush workers had a natural gait. The grubby, huddled wooden boxes for houses are set against the sensually described 'great trees with their power, the flames of their lives' (312). Tessa and Deb are another set of opposites. Tessa's voice was

almost natural. She is a cultured and domesticated woman, corseted with her face nicely powdered, while Deb is ‘untamed, virgin, primitive’ with something of an underground river, dark, within her (278). The contrast between the opposing forces is convincingly portrayed. However these opposing forces argue out their ideology in the narrative, it comes at a cost to the workers’ story.

Critics have found that Prichard’s use of themes and symbolism are tokenistic rather than contributing to a deeper analysis of class and capitalism. An example is the character ‘Aggie’ which is a reference back to Agamemnon from Homer’s *Iliad* (321). The only reason given in the text for the name is the hope the person will grow up and protect his brood when times are tough. Another example is the communist hero, Mark Smith. Buckridge asks whether the name is a play on ‘Marx’s myth’. Is it a reference to the fact that his only convert to socialism was Mrs Colburn (89)? Or is it meant to be a wake-up call to the reader that no one is listening to the voice of wisdom? Either way the character, Smith operates like a prop giving the setting the look of authenticity. The name ‘Mrs Colburn’ refers to ‘coal-burn’, the main fuel supply of industry. Buckridge argues that it is meant to strengthen the socialist narrative, but it doesn’t lead to any further references. There is no follow up (89).

Outsiders, workers and the workplace

In this section I discuss the position from which the workers and the workplace have been written. I draw on George Lukács’s theory of writers using the inside and outside method. Red Burke and the timber mill and its workers are examples of characters and scenes that have been written using the outside method. Conversely, I use aspects of Mary Colburn as an example of a character being written with insider knowledge.

I agree with Lukács's point that a writer's social class is important in determining whether they write using the 'inside' or 'outside' method. I think this is particularly relevant for social realism because its narratives are meant to be fictional accounts of real working-class experiences. Blue-collar workers have been an impenetrable culture for outsiders to understand and, historically, have frequently been misrepresented or absent in literature—literature that has been written mostly by middle-class writers. I am suggesting a writer has natural preferences that have come from their life experiences and those experiences will help them to penetrate a little deeper into characters who have come from the writer's particular class. I also take note of Terry Eagleton's point that one of realism's difficulties is trying to imitate reality and impose a wholeness on life when it is chaotic and fragmentary (Eagleton in Arthur 37).

Lukács says that a writer using the inside method captures the social contradictions of that class. Dickens's 'plebeian' protagonists are examples of characters written with insider knowledge and his aristocratic characters are examples of those written more from outside observations. Karl Radek, a member of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and keynote speaker at the First All Congress of Soviet Writers, said the Soviets not only rejected bourgeois literature, they also disregarded other social realist writers such as Dickens, Balzac and Dostoyevsky. Radek argued that while these social realist writers portrayed harsh realities of capitalism in their writings and showed the contradictions of the capitalist system, in the end 'they believed in the future of capitalism' (Radek 123). However contentious Lukács's positioning of Dickens's point of view may be, the distance between Dickens's life and what he wrote was a lot closer than Prichard's middle-class, city life and the narrative in *Working Bullocks* about male, blue-collar, rural workers. I think under these circumstances,

Lukács's ideas about whether writers were insiders or outsiders are useful for discussing the representation of the men in *Working Bullocks*.

The writer using the 'outside' method forms an idea of the character and their personal conflicts and works towards wider social significance. In this instance, Lukács says, Tolstoy's critique of the exploitation of peasants and serfs is from the outside. Conversely, Tolstoy's portrayal of the gentry and aristocracy has the intimate and contradictory dilemmas that only an insider could express. Writers using the 'outside' method, Lukács says, will not be able to conceive a future for their characters or that class 'from the inside' (95). Tolstoy was able to foresee the demise of the Russian Aristocracy but not the future of the Russian working class.

Fellow writer and activist Jean Devanny is particularly critical of the main protagonist in *Working Bullocks*, Red Burke. The horse race scene is an example of how she believed Red was unconvincingly portrayed. Red makes his horse lose in the local races for the sake of Tessa, an old girlfriend he despises. He does this because Tessa is pregnant to the horse's English owner, who won't marry her unless his horse wins. (169). Red, in agreeing to throw the race for her, alienates himself from the girl he wants, from her family and from the community that he knows is backing his horse. Devanny said, 'he would have told her to go to hell or punched out the Englishman, but he wouldn't have succumbed to their little game of black mail' (Ferrier, *Jean*, 17). Devanny wanted a more positive working-class hero and better representation of the circumstances in which working people lived and toiled.

Red looks like a worker on the outside but doesn't really have the internal traits required to represent a believable worker. I couldn't empathise with him; I couldn't connect with his struggle. But I could identify with his physicality and his type of work.

His body had a ‘thick trunk, well slung limbs’ with ‘broad shoulders’; he was built like his ‘bullocks (6).

The book starts with Red Burke dragging a log out of the thick scrub onto the track with his bullock team. He wheels his whip and sings out to his bullocks:

‘Lively!

Lively! Snowy!

Boxer! Rogue!

Gee be-ack, Nobby!

Gee be-ack, Nobby!

Lively! Come up, Lively’ (5).

As the bullocks emerge from the thick bush scrub, Red also comes out ‘from the trees, striding out beside the team whirling his whip’ (5). Red is a man in full control of his actions and his body. He has both agency and autonomy within the limitations of a worker in an industrialised setting. Red yells out orders to his swamper, Chris Colburn, and sways from his midriff cracking his whip over his bullocks. There is a joy and majesty in Red. Prichard has obviously marvelled at the bullock driver in action. Man and beast are working together. He is a man being a man through performing his duties. Prichard’s observations ring true of a young man in the prime of his manhood playing a vital role within his working-class community. Autonomy for a working man is to be beyond judgement, to be free of the anxiety of the market place where a man is ‘put to the block and assayed’ (Cobb & Sennett 240). While Red has not escaped completely from judgement, as a bullock driver he has greater autonomy in the text than most.

While Red might have the physical attributes of a working man his character takes a different trajectory in the narrative. Red is portrayed as a hero when he returns to the 'six mile' to get the workers logs out of the bush (84). His arrival is seen as proof of working-class solidarity. Then he works his assistant, Billy Hicks, to death. Hicks was 'in as much fear of [Red] as the bullocks' were (184). Hicks works beyond his physical capacity 'pulling heavy loads,' and more often than not, takes a lashing from Red's tongue. Prichard writes that 'No one knew better than Red how he had worked Billy and broken his spirit'. Yet he refuses to donate to Hicks's widow in a public whip around, making Red look worse than he already does. The fact that Red secretly gives Billy's wages to Hicks's wife after her husband dies is an example of the inconsistencies in the character. Red's actions are romantic depictions of the stereotypical rough diamond or the silent good bloke hiding his true emotions from the public arena, but he is almost psychopathic in many of his actions in the text. Red giving Mr Hicks's wages to his wife is neither 'typical' nor realistic. It is also unrealistic that, in a union stronghold, there was no criticism of him and no action taken against his intimidation and bullying. We get an observer's view of the physical Red; we don't get the internal machinations of his grief over Billy's death and, earlier, Chris's death, and we don't get the struggle he has with himself and his failings.

On the other hand, Mrs Colburn, a key character, is written to some extent from the inside. The story is loosely bookended with the deaths of Mrs Colburn's two sons. Chris, her eldest, is killed at the start of the story: he dies working as Red's assistant hauling logs in his bullock team. Billy, her youngest, is killed in the timber mill. He was fifteen and still a year too young to be working. This insider knowledge, Rick Throssell says, in *Wild Weeds and Windflowers*, came from Prichard drawing from the grief that she felt at her own father's death and using it to express the grief Mrs Colburn felt at the

death of her son, Billy (18). Mrs Colburn's grief in the narrative is inconsolable, dramatic and feels real (240). Prichard is the insider telling this part of the story. While there might be a difference between Prichard and Mrs Colburn's class positions, it is lessened by the similarity between their experiences as grieving women. We get an internal view of Mrs Colburn's feelings and struggles.

The inconsistency with which Prichard drew Red's character is also evident in her depiction of Mrs Colburn. After images, earlier in the text, of a herd of children, a small farm to run, and a husband who was never fully employed or a good provider, we find out she had quite a 'hoard' of money put away. In spite of this, she had continued to let Chris, her eldest son, slave on for the family under the guise of their poverty (24). When her children also screw everything for the money in it, she blames their greedy attitude for their premature deaths. This depiction of a little money-hungry, conniving working-class mother and her money-hungry children is a view of the working class that serves bourgeois interests. Prichard is in effect saying here that what happens to the working class is their own fault. While she was able to harness her life experiences to give greater insights into aspects of Mrs Colburn, she reverts back to depicting Mrs Colburn and her children from the outside.

The end of *Working Bullocks* brings us to the question of the future direction of the working class. Towards the end of the story, Deb, while walking through the forest, is intoxicatedly happy (313). Red meets her in the bush and they exchange glances as a form of a commitment ceremony. The 'scrub blossoms' she is carrying become her bouquet and she and Red head off to say goodbye to Mrs Colburn. They are ready to start their own life. Deb has got her man. Mrs Colburn says they are no better than the beasts they are driving (315). Deb, armed with the power given to nature in the narrative, rejects her mother's warning about the life she has chosen and follows Red off

into the sunset. There seems little reality in that ending, except the denial of a daughter who thinks she will be somehow different to her mother—as if she can escape the cumulative cost to a life from hard manual labour.

Conclusion

In conclusion, for Prichard to write about rural blue-collar workers and their workplaces, even though she was sympathetic to the cause, was an ambitious task for a middle-class, city woman in the 1920s. Her difficult upbringing, the effects of the First World War, the Russian revolution and her conversion to socialism led her to produce the first social realist text in Australian literature.

However, her observational techniques produced mixed results. In literary terms her ‘unguided experiment’ into political narratives are less prescriptive and more inventive than the socialist realism that later followed. Also her technique allowed some of the chaos and fragmentary realities in life, that Eagleton spoke about, to exist in the text. We also get a visual insight into men at the turn of the century performing with some ownership over their labour. The bullock drivers and axe men have pride in their work and relish the forest. Prichard’s observations of, and obvious fascination with, this aspect of men is conveyed to the reader. Yet at the same time, her depictions of the men in the mill are one-dimensional and unreliable as realistic representations of workers.

Jean Devanny describes the Blue Flowers Race day scene in *Working Bullocks* as nothing more than ‘cheap theatricalism’. Devanny said that Red Burke throwing the race was ‘something a working man would never do’ (Ferrier, *Jean*, 17). The unflattering—and to her mind unrealistic—depiction of working men is a point she takes up in *Sugar Heaven*.

Chapter two

Jean Devanny and *Sugar Heaven*

Introduction

Sugar Heaven's optimism was, in some respects, a counter point to the political pessimism implied in *Working Bullocks* (Moore, 'Introduction', 13). Devanny claimed that *Sugar Heaven* was the 'first really proletarian novel' written in Australia ('Workers' 261), despite that title having already been given to *Working Bullocks* several years earlier (Moore 13). Either way, *Sugar Heaven* marks a shift historically from Prichard's first social realist narrative to a more prescriptive Zhdanovian form of socialist realism in Australian literature. Zhdanovism, itself, marks a shift from the likes of Gorky's revolutionary writing at the turn of the 20th century to propaganda literature. Despite these differences, Devanny's observations of men at work, like Prichard's, are useful for an evaluation of the men's autonomy at work. This is a point I take up more fully in the next chapter.

This chapter discusses Devanny's early social and literary influences followed by a textual analysis of her depiction of Hendry, the communist leader, Hefty, the cane cutter, and his wife, Dulcie. I conclude that the restrictive requirements of socialist realism's propaganda hinders a more accurate exposition of blue-collar workers' lives, and, on a personal level, Devanny's desire for feminist emancipation overrides the working-class narrative.

The making of a socialist realist writer

This section will look at the influences that inspired Devanny to become a socialist writer. I discuss her difficult childhood, her alcoholic father and puritanical mother, the influence her radicalised brother, Charlie, had on her, and the lessons imparted to the young Devanny both positively and negatively by her school teacher, Rose. I also discuss the effects of growing up in a working-class mining town in New Zealand and her renunciation of religion, like Prichard, as a result of her childhood experiences.

Devanny was born in 1894 on the South Island of New Zealand. She was one of twelve children. Her father was uneducated and at ten years of age trained as an apprentice boilermaker in England. He did a variety of manual jobs throughout his life but most of his time in New Zealand was spent working in coal mines. Her mother was the daughter of a Colonel in the Imperial Army and her grandmother, the daughter of an aristocrat in Ireland (Devanny, *Point*, 9).

Two devastating elements stand out in her childhood. One is her father's life and the other is her mother's attitudes toward her. During her father's sporadic but severe bouts of drinking, Devanny, at times, hid in a dark cupboard from him. She would hear his raging and pray, for her mother's sake, that he died. She said she was left with feelings of dreadful apprehension (Devanny, *Point*, 10). Some years later, she softened her feelings towards her father when she saw the effects of his lung disease from the mines slowly grind away his life. She saw the injustice of a man in his condition being compelled to continue working (Devanny, *Point*, 46). Yet, it was her mother's failure to return her love that she saw as the major tragedy of her young life (Devanny, *Point*, 15). It was also her mother's puritanical view of sex that led her to feelings of shame.

Two positive experiences in her formative years are also worthy of consideration. Devanny says that Charlie, her oldest brother, had a ‘profound’ effect on her life (Devanny, *Point*, 9). He was an emotional parent to the young Jean and he organised the first trade union in their district. Her father was a leading hand—a ‘tinpot boss’. He was anti-socialist, though he was pro-union. Charlie, her adored brother, however, was a radical socialist and it was from his bookshelf that she began her scientific analysis of the human condition. Writers such as Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley were her early influences. The other positive experience came from Rose, her schoolteacher. She inspired the writer in Devanny by introducing her to new books and authors. When Devanny left school to work, it was Rose who provided her with a book a day to continue her education. Through discussing books they developed a close relationship and Rose lavished a motherly love on Devanny.

However, Rose had another lesson for Devanny to learn away from books. Rose’s beauty was ‘like a magnet to men’, and this powerfully informed the younger woman in two ways. Devanny saw the power Rose commanded over married and single men alike, and she saw the social cost of Rose’s ‘dalliances’ (Devanny, *Point*, 38). Devanny witnessed the power of female sexuality on men but also the power of a community (including those very men) to shun and isolate Rose for her sexual choices. Devanny saw the injustice of the sexual double standard that treats men and women differently. It is an issue that dominated her life and writing.

Her credentials as a working-class writer are etched in coal. Her working life began when she was forced to leave school at thirteen to take up the role of maid in a boarding house. At sixteen, while living at home, she was ‘filled with passionate pride’ when she watched her father kick a scab off his plot of land. She was also proud of her father for supporting the strike, considering that, as a low-level boss in the mine, he

didn't have to be on strike. She married a miner at seventeen and had her first child, Karl, named after Karl Marx. By 1912 she was studying Marxism in evening classes run by local socialists.

Her conversion to socialism was completed after reading *God and My Neighbour* by Robert Blatchford. He was a well-known British socialist, atheist and instigator of a branch of the Fabian Society in England. By twelve years of age, Devanny had relinquished the ideas of religion. But it wasn't until she read Blatchford's book that she replaced her lack of faith with, as she wrote, a 'hope that somehow, somewhere, sometime, the horror of family life as I knew them might be eradicated' (Ferrier, *Jean*, 14). The stage was set for her socialist life. She was married, a mother, and a radicalised working-class young woman on a mission. In 1929, after arriving in Australia, she joined the Australian branch of the Communist Party.

Literary influences and personal motivations behind the writing of *Sugar Heaven*

Devanny's reading at home became more than escapism when she started work. She especially liked *The Origin of Species* (Devanny, *Point*, 28). But it was Frederick Engels's *The Origins of the Family* that most interested her—so much so that she spent many years developing an unpublished thesis on the 'Evolution of the Sex life According to the Materialist Conception of History'. According to the books she studied, each epoch had produced its own family structure (Devanny, *Point*, 97). What she took offence at was the suggestion that women instigated monogamous relationships and that men were polygamous by nature. Disproving this nonsense, as she saw it, became her life practice. Her attitude to women's sexuality and freedom is based on the concept that a society produces or creates its own social structure and therefore it can be influenced.

This is a significant belief, one that fits seamlessly into socialist realism's social engineering approach to writing.

D.H. Lawrence also is a significant writer in her life in a number of ways. Devanny had mixed views on his writing and on Lawrence, himself. She was unimpressed with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and positively disliked *Kangaroo*, a novel he wrote from his Australian experiences. However, she was impressed with some of his other works such as *The White Peacock* that championed the potential of the miners and the 'grandeur' of the workers as a class (Devanny, *Point*, 137). However, like Prichard, she does not attribute the sexually explicit and sensual evocations in her writing to Lawrence's influence.

In her biography, Carole Ferrier claims there are many parallels between Lawrence and Devanny. Both grew up in mining towns, and both had fathers who were drunkards and a source of family embarrassment. Both had mothers who came from middle-class families and who tried to instil some refinement into the children. Devanny, for example, had piano lessons. Like Lawrence, she sided with her mother when she was young and developed sympathetic feelings for her father later in life. Devanny, like the character Gertrude Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, met her fate at a dance when she fell in love with Hal Devanny at seventeen. Cancer also claimed both their mothers, and both writers were published by Duckworth in London (Ferrier, *Jean*, 34). Of more significance is that both wrote from a working-class perspective, with notions of romance a central theme, and both had their books banned. Lawrentian aspects, such as animal energy and vitality embedded in the characters and landscape, have been found in *Sugar Heaven* (Ferrier *Gender* 115).

Egon Kisch, the international socialist realist writer, came to Australia in November 1934. Devanny claimed it was Kisch who inspired her to write *Sugar Heaven*. She said her new association with Kisch ‘deeply informed as he was in world literature and writers, woke me to a new life’ (Devanny, *Point*, 179). Kisch was promoting a more extreme propaganda style of creative reportage that became known as Zhdanovism. *Sugar Heaven*, she said, ‘went far beyond the new vogue in writing at that time’ (Devanny, *Point*, 190).

The elation she experienced from Kisch’s visit may have been part of a coping mechanism, a complicated response to her eldest son Karl’s death six weeks earlier (Devanny, *Point*, 179). Her son died in September 1934, a few months before she started working on *Sugar Heaven*. After the debilitating grief she endured years earlier when her daughter, Erin, died, she decided to keep working through her grieving for Karl. Along with the support of Prichard, her focus on the recently arrived Kisch, and a new project in *Sugar Heaven*, Devanny kept her grief ‘clamped down’ by dedicating her new work to all the young comrades of her dead son’s era. While socialist realism required an uplifting story, it may also have been true that her grief was transformed into a utopian text to give hope to the next generation of socialists. *Sugar Heaven* was partly a homage to her deceased son.

The Writer’s League in Australia was set up by Kisch, Prichard and Devanny. If Devanny had an audience of peers in mind apart from the workers when writing *Sugar Heaven*, then it was the Writer’s League. The idea behind it was to aid the development of writers and elevate their work to international standards and, as Devanny put it, ‘knit us up’ with people around the world in a common ‘brotherhood of man’ (Devanny, *Point*, 180). Devanny was leading the way, showing how it was to be done: *Sugar Heaven* was to be a prototype for socialist realism in Australia.

Devanny's rivalry with Prichard is evident in the way *Sugar Heaven* challenges and ultimately transforms many themes from *Working Bullocks* (Ferrier *Gender* 115). Both narratives contain a communist-inspired revolutionary hero in a rural setting, and both deal with itinerant workers. There is an industrial dispute in both narratives involving the right-wing Australian Workers Union against the Communist Party. The landscapes in both provide an erotic backdrop for the development of romantic relationships. Both texts contain passion overshadowed by the circumstances of work (McLaren 65). According to David Carter, both *Sugar Heaven's* and *Working Bullocks'* political transformations are emotionally tied to the erotic, and political discourses are juxtaposed with novelistic ones (91). Also Devanny preferred to compare *Working Bullocks* to *Sugar Heaven* rather than with some of Prichard's more contemporary work, when 'arguing over suitable socialist heroes', reinforcing the textual relationship between the novels (Ferrier *Jean* 79).

The biggest shift in *Sugar Heaven* from *Working Bullocks* is in the feminist narrative. Devanny's romantic hero, a version of the literary 'new man' required by socialist realism, is in fact a woman called Dulcie. She is embraced by the strikers and ultimately emancipated through the strike. The alienated and disconnected female relationships at the end of *Working Bullocks* are replicated at the beginning of *Sugar Heaven*. The women in *Sugar Heaven*, particularly Eileen and Dulcie, who are at odds throughout most of the narrative, eventually find union and solidarity with each other (226), while Mary Anne Colburn and her daughter, Deb do not reconcile their differences in *Working Bullocks* (315).

Utopianism, women's emancipation and dumb blokes.

There are three main characters I will discuss in this section. Hendry, the Communist Party official, is an example of the influence of Zhdanovism. He is a charismatic, romanticised figure, as are all communists in the story. Hefty is the dopey husband who doesn't have a bad bone in his body. He isn't jealous that his first wife took off with his brother, doesn't mind if his new wife has an affair, and, at the end of the story, celebrates after losing a protracted strike. Dulcie is the main protagonist. She represents the potential for personal growth through socialism. She is the 'new woman' who awakens to class consciousness through the strike.

Devanny draws her narrative from first-hand experience of the cane-cutter strike in 1935 over Weil's disease in North Queensland. However, she uses her experience to produce a futuristic rather than realistic text. She was involved in producing propaganda, in relief work, in the organisation of the strikers' wives, in concerts and in other activities (Ferrier *Jean* 133). It was a real-life battle for the worker's lives, with over twenty men already hospitalised because of Weil's disease (Ferrier, *Jean*, 132). The workers and the Communist Party battled against the Australian Workers Union, big business and farmers over whether to burn the cane prior to cutting. Burning cane eliminates rats in the fields and subsequently eradicates accompanying Weil's disease.

Despite the lack of images and passages of descriptions of men at work, what is recorded by Devanny, like Prichard, is vivid. Hefty, the only cane cutter we get to know, in answering Dulcie's question as to why he returns to cutting when he seems to hate it, says, 'a man's a cutter, isn't he? When a man's a cutter he naturally cuts' (23). It is what Hefty does at work that defines him. Cutting cane is Hefty's way of being a man and work has been his right-of-passage to that particular manhood. He has mastered a skill and it is in enacting that skill that he gains his esteem. Hefty's personality, as with the

working class, has been emotionally blended into his role at work. He is an industrialised blue-collar worker psychologically, physically and emotionally.

Despite the esteem garnered from such work, the reality is that Hefty, like all cutters, spends his days, weeks, months and years repeating five or six moves. The left hand grasps the stalk, the blade is wielded to sever the stalk, another blow severs the top of the cane, two downward strokes clean the trash from the stalk and the final movement heaps the stalk onto the pile (47). It was not the actual work that sustains Hefty. It is his performance under duress and efficiencies in a fatigued state in front of his work mates that sustains him. It is the shared experiences of struggle and hardship that they honour amongst each other. His regret or resentment at what he does confuses Dulcie. It is not the actual work that gives him esteem. It is the other men's acknowledgement of his performance that sustains him. It is an acknowledgement that can only come from other men. Despite having a machete to wield furiously, which is a skill, he does not have the range of freedoms and control over his destiny that Red Burke does in *Working Bullocks*. But he does garner esteem from his work and achieves some autonomy and a measure of agency over his life as a result of his work.

What seems most unlikely after losing a strike as well as being let down by both the AWU and the Party is the idea that such hard working men would return to work victoriously claiming that the strike had put them on a higher plain of thinking. At the end of the story Hefty and Dulcie walk off under a cloudless sky surrounded by the 'heavy scent of the cane' (255).

Support for a genre that was propaganda for communism within communist ranks was not unanimous, and the facts of *Sugar Heaven* were also questioned. In the Writer's League, an 'unconverted' member said 'Marx seems to have filled the world

with more parrots to the yard than there are in a square mile of tropical jungle' (Ferrier, *Jean*, 127). Despite criticism such as this, Party officials, who were well positioned as heroes in Devanny's story, liked the book so much they overlooked the sexual components that usually gave them concern with her writing (Devanny, *Point*, 196-198).

In *Sugar Heaven* the AWU succeeds in keeping the arbitration court in control of the outcome of the strike and in keeping control of the union from the Communist Party. Jack Stephens considered that what happened after this showed that the book had an 'extraordinary naiveté in it'. When the Communist Party fails to get control of the union they tell the cutters to go back to work and, as Stephens puts it, 'die of Weil's disease and work for control of the AWU' (Ferrier, *Jean*, 135). The Party abandons the strike to strategically regroup and prepare for the following year. Meanwhile, the workers lose their work to scabs. They lose money from being on strike and when they finally go back to work they still have to face the rats and Weil's disease in the cane. Both tiers of leadership have their own agenda, neither of which is the cutter's health.

Socialist realism's structure did not benefit representations of workers. As with social realism, the structure could include reporting the facts of a real dispute in the form of fiction. But the writers in socialist realism were to be engineers of the human soul. With the defeat of the bourgeoisie, the Soviets thought a 'new man' would emerge in the new social order. Out of the cauldron of socialism a combination of a worker, writer and socialist would emerge in one person. Maxim Gorky, a revolutionist and working-class hero, was the prototype. Socialist realism was to represent this new man in the narrative to foster and inspire the working class. While social realism attempted to represent real people or a combination of the 'typical traits' of working-class people, the 'new man' was an imagined character, an alien within texts.

Hendry, the Party leader, is an example of an unreal character, who has been constructed as an ideal. We don't experience his growth through the narrative; we hear about it. Hefty recalls, 'You know I remember when that guy [Hendry] was as rough as they make' em. And look at him now, a living example to the moulding influence of knowledge. A big man' (118). Later Hendry tells Dulcie he doesn't know much about 'love, hate, [or] dislike'. He only knows the class struggle. And she notices that his quietness and repose has a magical effect on her (190-2).

Hendry reveals the Party's motivation as the strike falls apart. He says its objective was to take control of the AWU (234). The men want to fight on because they still have to face the real possibilities of contracting Weil's disease, but Hendry is adamant. He wants them to go back to work with the scabs and volunteers who took their places during the strike and recruit them to the Party. By the next year they will have more men and will try again to take control of the union. Always quietly spoken, Hendry wins the vote to abandon the strike. Rather than seeing him as a leader who betrayed the men's wishes for Party objectives and a person who put politics over the cutters' health, he is positioned as saving the men from themselves.

Devanny claimed that workers told her they loved the story, that it reflected their heroic nature (Devanny, *Point*, 198). But it doesn't. It is Hendry, the Communist Party leader, who is the heroic figure, rather than any of the workers. 'It's written like you speak' a cane cutter told Devanny (Devanny, *Point*, 198). But actually the language in the text moves in and out of different registers. It is not the voice of the worker that has power. The men were beaten at the strike meetings by Hendry's magical and charismatic speeches. Hendry's generalship was natural. The narrator says, 'He's so clear' when he speaks (213). It is Hendry's voice and words that dominate the dispute.

In fact all Party leaders are romanticised. An example of this is when Dulcie is asked by one of them to dance at a party. Dulcie consults her female friend who tells her she would be safe with him: 'He's a communist you know' (60). They were morally righteous as well as having all the refinements of an evolved social class. The Communist Party leaders seem to have all the sensibilities of a character out of a Jane Austin story. It is as if Devanny took her instructions for representations of ideal men from nineteenth-century romance novels. While there is much romance in the text, there is also romance in the idea that socialism could succeed in capitalist countries throughout the 1930s and beyond, despite the Russian revolution collapsing by the mid-1920s (Ferrier, *Jean*, 103).

Having read *Sugar Heaven* many times, I am still left with the feeling that a story about real workers in a real setting over a real strike was stolen from them. The book begins with complimentary images of a worker. Like Red in *Working Bullocks*, Hefty is described as having 'great muscles and knotted fists' and 'a powerful physique' (23). When 'a secret jubilation' seizes his soul after returning to the sugar lands, it seems that a man's story is about to be told (24). Later, Hefty returns home from the cane-fields for lunch, his face 'criss-crossed with cuts' (49). His 'whole manner had altered' after he started working. His manliness through work was on display for his new wife, Dulcie. Work, men, the cane, the struggle, the politics of work, this is what he was good at. Hefty can be more of a man at work than in any other role he fulfils in his life. Devanny's observations were undiluted but, that is as far as the narrative extends into a cutter's life. Dulcie's development takes over the story. Her life is as much about outgrowing Hefty as it is about his limitations beyond that of a cane-cutter. Working men engaged in the class struggle under the prescriptive direction of communism had to

be represented as powerful and strong, but that is where the positive images end for Hefty (Ferrier, *Jean*, 128).

Hefty regresses while Dulcie progresses. Hefty's role as a cutter changes in the narrative, and he operates as Dulcie's educator. He introduces her to a new way of life and shows an interest in communicating, wanting to express his personal feelings (32). He is open-minded about his first wife being more suited to his brother, and has an evolved view of the world and people. Despite Dulcie's rejection of him he remains considerate and tender towards her (44). As the strike begins to take hold Dulcie realises Hefty is not a good leader of men and, later, the once magnanimous communicator found he could only 'mutter' at her response (114). As Dulcie develops she re-evaluates Hefty as only a 'militant' and grows to hate his chauvinistic attempts to keep her in her place. Dulcie decides not to talk politics to him again. By this time she is referring to him as the 'idiot' (189). Devanny leans the narrative towards her preferred thesis that social relations are man-made, and she uses the utopian genre of socialist realism to enact her idealism.

The images of the cane cutters at work are brief. In the union meetings their voices are without power and influence. It is Hendry's voice that has power. Hefty, the only cane cutter we get to meet starts the story with a voice yet he is systematically silenced. He plays no role in the power relationships within the strike. On the other hand, his wife, Dulcie, evolves from a strike breaker, in her early years in the city, into a militant worker, raising the role of women in industrial disputes.

Conclusion

We do get a glimpse of the cutters' lives through some of Devanny's observations. When each man takes his place at the head of the row of cane, we get that strange juxtaposition only workingmen really understand, between pain, hardship, dirt and grime, and the thrill working men experience of practising their skills with other men at work. Devanny has used her story to cast a vision of a working-class future with an uplifting message of hope. Many writers knew the problems faced by the working class but, through *Sugar Heaven*, Devanny offered a solution (Devanny, 'A Workers', 257). But it is a hope few can believe in.

Although from an early age Devanny was deeply concerned for 'her own sex, and far and away beyond that, for the child' (Devanny, *Point*, 66), in this novel she misses a great opportunity to represent the unpaid domestic labour of working-class women. With no money coming into the family, particularly in a strike, the home of the unpaid housewife can quickly turn from a 'refuge from the labour market to a prison of unpaid labour' (Donaldson 60). After all, unlike Prichard and many other socialist realist writers of her time, Devanny had first-hand experiences of all these issues, but she didn't write about them, at least not in this novel. Nevertheless, Devanny did fulfil some of the aspirations of Marxism in the narrative through Dulcie. As Terry Eagleton said, 'Marxism is the story of the struggle of men and women to free themselves from exploitation and oppression (vii).

Chapter three

Tunnelling

Introduction

When I set out to write *Tunnelling*, what I wanted to do most of all was to tell my story and to tell my daughter Nicole's story. As an important part of that, I wanted to write about my experience of work. The novels I had read about blue-collar workers, such as *Working Bullocks* and *Sugar Heaven*, had frustrated me. I wanted to get down on paper what it had been like for me. This chapter focuses on the background to the kind of work I was doing in the tunnel.

Though we are using different forms, I think it is valid to set Prichard and Devanny's approaches to representing work and working men alongside mine. The boundaries between the genres are not absolutely rigid. On the one hand, memoir uses many of the same writing techniques as fiction; on the other hand, novels draw from real life. Prichard's and Devanny's texts were inspired by actual strikes. In *Tunnelling* the strike is real, and so are the characters. The AWU is still outsmarting the workers. With the Communist Party largely consigned to the history books by the 1970s, now the union is at war within itself. Following the urbanisation of the workforce after the Second World War, not surprisingly the tunnel is set in an urban worksite as opposed to the bush. But even if it doesn't have the traditional bush landscapes of *Working Bullocks* and *Sugar Heaven*, the underground work is still dealing with the natural world. The tunnel could be seen as a metaphor for an inner reflection, just as Prichard uses the Karri

forest to include a spiritual dimension in her text and Devanny uses the tropical rainforest for erotic effect in hers.

But these similarities between our approaches didn't stop me from being unhappy with aspects of Prichard's and Devanny's representations of work and workers. Prichard chose to represent the men in the mill as being without feeling and as machine-like. For example they laugh at the number of young men losing digits on the saws. We get some observations of the work they do, but nothing of the complexity of their emotional lives. Instead they have been depicted as one-dimensional figures. Red Burke, a character we do get to know, has all the outer characteristics of a working man but lacks credibility as a worker, particularly a worker in a union stronghold. As one of the protagonists, he is at times psychopathic in his motives, and he considers scabbing during the strike. Prichard's conflict in the Lawrentian narrative between the natural and unnatural worlds positions the mill workers on the side of the unnatural. As a consequence, we do not get compilations of real and realistic people. The mill workers have not been de-humanised so much by work, but by Prichard for literary effect.

Devanny wrote under prescriptive direction, giving the manuscript to the Party for approval before publication. In doing so, she uses the workmen as window dressing and also omits the real story and struggle of working women during a strike. While she was promoting communism as an alternative social structure, she was also raising the possibilities for women in that structure. As a result, the feminist narrative overrides the working-class story. Hefty, the cane cutter, regresses in the narrative and becomes a literary device to show the development of Dulcie. What riled me in the story the most was the upbeat nature of the men after they had just lost a long and protracted strike. It was void of any of the real agonising experiences of men's and women's feelings. Devanny also uses literature to mount her argument against Prichard for better

representations of women in texts. This, too, detracts from representing the working class in more realistic terms.

In other words, Prichard and Devanny's treatment of blue-collar work was affected partly by the fact that they didn't write from direct experience, and partly by the fact that they each had pre-existing models shaping their writing—in Prichard's case, it seems to have been Lawrence; in Devanny's it was Zhdanov. I slogged my guts out in the tunnel, hour after hour, day after day for seven years. I tried to write it how I lived it.

But at University, I came to realise that the biggest reason that Prichard and Devanny's depiction of work didn't represent my experiences was that work, itself, had changed. This chapter examines that fact. In the ensuing years from the early 1920s to the 1990s, when I worked in the tunnel, work had largely been transformed. My work in the tunnel was a different kind of work. I had assumed some of my painful work experiences in the tunnel that are missing from those novels had been occluded through a middle-class writer's ignorance of working-class lives and through communist utopianism. Actually it has been the advancement in technology and management of workers that has come at a cost to men's autonomy and agency.

To help understand how masculinity works in the tunnel, I discuss Russel Ward's research in *The Australian Legend*. Ward shows the evolution of the masculine image Australian men portray. For him, the Australian legend made famous by Furphy's and Lawson's characterisation of bush workers was an image of masculinity used for cultural identity, as opposed to a necessarily authentic depiction. Prichard and Devanny draw on the real performances of Australian bush workers that they witnessed. The men in the tunnel also act out this image. I show, however, that today it is experienced on the one hand as an anxiety, because their work fails to live up to the image. On the other hand, it

is also a cover to present to the outside world that protects them from the shame they feel towards their working lives. Bringing an understanding of the mindless work of the workers while they act out a particular image of masculinity is where I offer a different representation of blue-collar workers. *Tunnelling*'s internal narrative deals with the politics of men at work, rather than the politics of work in society, as *Working Bullocks* and *Sugar Heaven* attempt.

I also discuss scientific management, commonly known as 'Taylorism', to give a better understanding as to why the work in the tunnel is different. Frederick Taylor's research into controlling the time and movement of workers was attributed with instigating the second wave of the industrial revolution. The loss of agency in the tunnellers can be attributed to the introduction of his scientific management. Taylor, a mechanical engineer, developed his theories working as the general manager of the Bethlehem Steel Company in Philadelphia between 1890 and 1893 (Taylor). He aimed to stamp out what he called 'soldering'. This was a collective 'go slow' amongst workers. He instigated the separation of the worker's thinking from his actions. I argue that this effect is seen and felt deeply by the tunnellers, and understanding that point brings a new insight into the underbelly of blue-collar workers.

Taylorism and the Tunnel

Comparing firsthand experiences of being amongst other things, a shearer and a construction worker with the representations of work in *Working Bullocks* and *Sugar Heaven* informed me of what seemed to be missing in Prichard and Devanny's accounts. For me, the fear of poverty if I missed more than two weeks work was an ever-present threat. Also the emotional pain I felt performing mindless, repetitive jobs and the

physical pain of hard manual labour was not really revealed in Prichard's and Devanny's texts. The discomfort of dirty, grimy work and the disorientating effects of noise were sketched rather than given the weight of a daily struggle to be endured.

I have felt the power of some personal autonomy through shearing. It is an occupation that has changed little in the last one hundred years and so it has traces of the labour of timber workers and cane cutters that is shown in *Working Bullocks* and *Sugar Heaven*. However, that is not to say that the shearing shed had not been refashioned as much as it could be through scientific management in the early part of the 20th century. Shearing went from blade to machine shearing, and the best shearer in the shed went from being the cleanest shearer to the fastest shearer. Speed had been introduced to a craft. But that is as far as the changes could go. The shift from shearing sheep to working in the tunnel represented a further shift from having some autonomy over my work and body to the destruction of any independence and ownership over what I made and created at work. The tunnel was a new low—lower than cleaning up rubbish on construction sites, which was work I did in the off-season from shearing. Deciding how to shovel the rubbish on to a truck, where to start, and how to load the truck had greater autonomy than the work in the tunnel. But cleaning up construction sites had no image and was regarded as low status amongst men and amongst society more generally. The tunnel, in masculine terms, was high status. But it was high status in image only, because the reality was we had no responsibility over the work we did. We were treated like irresponsible children. I wasn't able to comprehend the origins of my mental agony in the tunnel. In the end I thought I must be dumb. I was the problem. It was at University that I unravelled this mental anguish. The work in the tunnel was structured around the principles of Taylor's scientific management. This is a point I will get to in a moment.

The masculine posturing in the tunnel didn't match the skill required of the workers. The tunnellers live out a macho image that includes being physically tough, not showing pain, working under duress and being uncompromising in getting the job done. They see themselves as innovative can-do type of men. These are traits often associated with our frontier itinerant bushman, but it is not true of the tunnellers. There is no thinking in their work. This creates several responses. At one level the men garner honour and respect amongst each other for the work they endure, and that acknowledgement is emotionally sustaining. Mike Donaldson says that manual work performed under economic pressure and management control is destructive work compared to manual work that provides esteem through physical assertion and skill (10). The destructive work however, demonstrates the toughness of the worker and is used to legitimise himself through his sacrifice rather than his skill (Sennett & Cobb 149). This type of legitimising forms part of a working-class masculinity forged through industrial work (Donaldson10). On the other hand, the tunnellers' masculine performance is experienced as an anxiety. They are acting out of a different stereotype than 'being a great sacrificer', one that originated in the bush and has been passed down through generations of fathers, familial relationships, unionism and sporting institutions.

According to Ward this masculine image has its genesis in the early Australian bushman. The myth of the Australian male emerged from the exploits of the early convicts in the remote and hostile interior. The mystique worked its way upwards and outwards within society (12). The rugged and uncompromising vastness of the geography played a key role in the formation of these frontiersmen. Ward says the mystique of our national image, attributed to these bushman originated from the true Australian bushman—the Aboriginal bushman. The idea of the 'noble savage' re-emerged as the 'noble bushman' in white Australian convicts and it is still strong in

Australian culture today (12). The bushman's ethos provided a point of difference that the first generation of white Australians could use to differentiate themselves from the later British immigrants (11).

Ward says these frontiersmen were practical men, rough and ready in manners and quick to decry any appearance of affection in others. They were great improvisers, willing to have a go at anything and content with a task that is 'near enough'. They were capable of great exertion in an emergency and equally wouldn't work hard unless they knew why. They swore, drank and gambled hard; they kept their mouths shut about their mates, and could endure stoically. They were sceptical about religious and intellectual pursuits and, in their eyes, every-one was equal. They knocked eminent people except sporting heroes and admired physical prowess. They were fiercely independent and essentially nomadic (2). The image of these original nomadic drovers, shearers, shepherds, sheep washers, bullock drivers, stockmen and boundary riders—immortalised by the likes of Furphy and Lawson, and drawn upon by Prichard and Devanny—was also being acted out by the men in the tunnel.

In reality, though, those elements of Australian masculinity had been undermined and eroded by the introduction of scientific management at work. Taylorism's increased production was achieved through deskilling workers and as a consequence, leaving them with an impoverished autonomy. This description fits the men in the tunnel. Taylor's manifesto introduces the reader to a now famous working-class character he calls Schmitt. The men are picking up pig iron in the 1890s and Schmitt is chosen for the experiment because of his energy, strength and money-hungry attitude. Through studying, for example, the exertion required and speed of movements of Schmitt, then retraining him to their new physical requirements, Schmitt goes from picking up twelve and a half tons of pig iron a day to forty-seven tons a day. Taylor believes he could train

an intelligent gorilla to do the job even better than a man (40). Part of Taylor's strategy was to look for ox-like men, both physically and mentally (137).

Managers think and plan; workers essentially execute orders (Pruitj 1). The central features of Taylorism are the separation of the worker from conception and execution in three stages (Pruitj3). This involves decoupling the labour process from the skills of the worker; all brain work is removed from the shop floor and centred in the planning department, and management decides how workers go about their tasks and how fast the task should be performed (Braverman 112). Each engineer in the tunnel had a role. One oversaw the worker's thinking; another was in charge of the actual actions performed in lifting bags, shovelling in the sludge, turning the vibrators on and off and placing them in their right positions. There was an occupational health and safety engineer. There was even an engineer in charge of creating and maintaining competition amongst the crews. In the tunnel though, we only saw a troop of engineers in ironed blue overalls wearing shiny, clinically-clean hard hats, with pristine orange earmuffs tucked up on the hat and a tie noticeably sticking out the top of their overalls, just in case they were mistaken for workers.

Taylor's work practices devalue the person. His destructive management-run workplaces leave the worker with a damaged sense of what it means to be a man. Men who are under economic pressure to feed their families will dumb themselves down in order to survive at work. This can have devastating effects on men's self-esteem. Sennett and Cobb's research reveals that men blame themselves for doing this type of work and for not being good enough. The employer says through non-verbal cues or through not promoting employees: 'you are not condemned for what you do; you simply failed to be noticed' (157).

Braverman directly attributes the demise of the potential in the working-class to Taylorism. He points out that in the 1800s in England, to protect industrial knowledge, it was illegal for mechanics to work abroad. 'The working craftsman was tied to the technical and scientific knowledge of his time in the daily practice of his skill' (133). He gives further evidence of the decline in workers' Patent claims. He says that prior to Taylorism, most inventions at work were made by tradesman and craftsmen but, by 1953, a random sample of Patents held in the USA showed 60 % were owned by engineers, chemists, metallurgists and directors of research and development departments. The remaining 40% were held by boardroom executives. Almost none were held by workers (133).

My father experienced the very same theft of an invention. In the 1970s, while working as a boilermaker, he invented a device to automate the plastic coating of curtain brackets. Prior to his invention, working women (all migrants) would pick up a bar with thirty curtain brackets on it specially wired, put it in a toaster-like furnace and then manually pick up the bar and dip the brackets into the powder. The tool my father invented cooled the hooks that held the curtain bracket during the process of heating and then fusing the plastic powder. This allowed the curtain bracket to be plastic coated and the hook holding them to remain uncoated. Importantly the curtain bracket came out as a finished product. The company he worked for patented and owned his invention. The company cornered the world market in the plastic coating of curtain brackets and held that position for several years. My father's invention displaced Japanese industrialists from the number one position when the Japanese were at the zenith of their industrial power. He retired with no superannuation, no royalties and worked bit jobs until he was incapacitated in his late seventies. Once it was over at Plasdip Industries, he tried to

develop another invention on his own. He eventually gave up. He didn't whinge about it; he just picked up his tools and moved on.

Boots, Monty and the crew

Monty, the machine operator in Boots's crew, fits the image of the male itinerant bush proletariat in his attitude and outlook, as do Red Burke and Hefty. After Monty drives from the Starship Enterprise to pick up the men working in the tunnel, he appears, 'emotionless', and nods his head upwards, which means, 'get on, fuck ya' (86). Monty never talks much and if he does speak, he only says what he has to. When he drives out of the tunnel to ask if I dobed the men in for drinking, he only wants a 'yes' or 'no' answer. He doesn't judge, thus following the script of the 'noble' bushman. Monty, Boots and the crew get behind me, even though I had broken a working-class code. They stood by their mate (167). 'Mateship' houses much of the noble bushman's ethos.

The politics at work has its origins in the striving for autonomy and agency. Monty and Boots have a major dispute over pulling the form work off earlier than normal, due to break downs in the production line during the day (117). Monty doesn't want to lose time that will have to be made up by night shift. An unwritten rule in the tunnel was to leave as little work as possible for night shift, so all the men, when it was their turn to do night shift, would get a sleep. Boots, though, doesn't want to damage the concrete by pulling the form work off before the concrete is properly set. This has multiple layers of meaning in it. Monty is acting out of the traits of the noble bushman's ethos of not following formalities, bucking authority, looking after your mates, and 'close enough is good enough'. But there is another battle going on. It is for ownership of the work. It is for agency. Boots is regarded, by the senior engineers, as not being a

competent enough shift boss and he wants to prove his worth and be reinstated to his former rank. When he makes a mistake it reinforces their negative attitude towards him. He has pressure from above and needs to keep the respect of the men on his shift. Monty, on the other hand, wants control over his creation, but he can't have it. When Boots pulls rank on him, it has an air of life and death about it. Monty had more job satisfaction than most in the tunnel. He was the machine operator when we were digging and he operated the form carrier when we were concreting. He orders the concrete, maintaining the right flow of concrete trucks coming during the day and presses the buttons to control the flow going into the form work. Despite his twenty years of experience, his maturity and competency, his opportunity to fulfil his masculine potential is thwarted by a naive engineer in an office on the surface.

The rest of the men had much less agency. This is illustrated when I explain how Manfred hides his subtle movements when he is putting the bolts in the form to join up two sets of forms (93). His only badge of ability, as with most of the men, amounts to having the ownership of their own skill dwarfed to the level of having the 'knack' of doing something. The bolt might need wiggling or being put on a certain angle, depending on where the moveable form is situated. It was the same with filling a hessian bag with runny sludge. We had to use a certain shovel for different shovelling jobs. We had several shovels with different designs for different materials. Interestingly, Taylor instigated variation in shovel heads in the 1890s to maximise the shoveler's capacity to lift the weight on the shovel for longer periods. Big Bad Dave would also hide the manoeuvre of plugging the electronics into the torpedo agi trucks to spin them, in the junction on the Starship Enterprise, so other workers couldn't see how it was done. The men played the game of trying to win the reward of having their badge of ability noticed,

replicating the education system, as if a higher authority was judging them (Sennett & Cobb 157).

Using the pelican pick required skill; human work, though, lies in the power of conceptual thought beyond the instinctual skills such as a bird which builds a nest or a rabbit that digs a warren (Braverman 47). Manipulating a two tonne boulder with a crow bar or using a pick to dislodge a rock from the suction of mud and water require learned skills. Using a shovel in a range of circumstances is skilful in its own way. However, once the concreting or digging began even these skills were not required. Each phase, such as the concreting, went on for five continuous years. In those phases we were like parts of a machine, robotic in our actions and without job rotation; the mindlessness was physically painful. The Croatians and older Australian tunnellers did not have a troop of engineers overseeing each phase of the work when they were young. They had engineers, surveyors and rock doctors, as we called them, but not in the same capacity as we had them in the tunnel. Tunnellers in an earlier era learned their trade on the job from older tunnellers. They had multiple skills such as marking out a shaft and digging it, putting up the rings and timbering the walls. Each person could drive all the machines. The men drilled and detonated their own explosives. All these roles were compartmentalised in the tunnel. Understanding your job from a conceptual point of view, as well as having the skills to build it, make for crucial differences beyond using un-mechanical or mechanical tools skilfully.

Prichard and Devanny might have been writing as outsiders, without first-hand experience—and they might partly have been representing a myth—but their novels do manage to capture something about the state of work in industries that had not been fully affected by Taylorism.

The tunnellers had less freedom and agency than Red Burke, the freelance bullock driver, or Hefty as a cane cutter. Each narrative in this exegesis represents the progressively diminished agency of the workers. Bullock driving in the bush was regarded as a science, according to Ward (69). And good drivers were paid at higher rates of pay than the other men for their skill. In Prichard's novel, Red was positioned as a worker with agency. A bullock driver was needed by the men to get the timber from the bush to the mill. The bullock driver delivering the timber to the mill would also ensure the wood choppers received their piece money. Red, having no ownership over his production, still had to sell his physical labour to live. However, he had a measure of agency over his work and his body and therefore some job satisfaction. He also, before the war, owned his own bullock team and was working towards owning another team. Red was respected beyond his physical capacity amongst the men. Working in the bush, he was not as constrained by a factory production line as Hefty was as a cutter.

Despite Hefty not owning the means of production, his work provided esteem within his culture. Hefty was in a bush production line. Each cutter 'took his place at the head of the row of cane and with automatic precision the knives rose and fell' as they cut the cane (47). His wife eventually refers to him as the 'idiot'. He was no idiot at work. On the contrary, there was an air of respect towards Hefty amongst other cutters. Despite the repetition and harsh work as the season started a 'secret jubilation had seized upon [Hefty's] soul' (24). As well as being well paid, the work allowed him to fulfil his masculine potential. Hefty had the camaraderie and competition that men enjoy through work and, therefore, had an avenue to the mastery of his masculinity, unlike the men in the tunnel.

Raewyn Connell says that 'economic circumstance and organisational structure enter into the making of masculinity at the most intimate level' (*Masculinities*, 36). The

field of sport is the precursor to the field of work. Both fields are set inside an organisational and hierarchical structure. Sport is the young man's first public foray into controlling his body. Cane-cutting, as with other rural piece-work jobs such as shearing and wood chopping combines the production line of the factory and the satisfaction masculine hierarchies provide on the sporting field. The masculine treasure men strive for in hard competitive work in *Working Bullocks* and *Sugar Heaven* is absent in the tunnel.

The wage slaves in the tunnel were roboticised. Life on the concrete loading bay, for example, consisted of approximately seven or eight movements (166). There was no relief. The other jobs were not much better. Some roles were worse than the concrete loading bay. These work practices were designed in an office by engineers for efficiency and speed. I did the same seven or eight movements every day for about two years. Importantly, the psychological deprivation came from the reality that there was no end in sight. Compare this to wood chopping, shearing or cane cutting and these jobs may seem to an outsider to have similarly repetitive movements. The big differences between repetitive work in the tunnel and the repetition of jobs, such as I have discussed, is the skill required in the task. These cutters, woodchoppers and shearers all had a dangerous tool to master: an axe, a machete or a handpiece in shearing. This required, for example, great eye to hand coordination. It also required them to have mastery over their bodies to perform a dangerous skill with power, force and speed. Also, the workers could determine, to a degree, how hard they worked. They could stop for a smoke, for example. In this regard they did have some control over their lives, which translates to some job satisfaction and self-respect. This physicality allows for the men's badges of ability to shine, free of the judgement of superiors, such as teachers when they were at school, or engineers and supervisors at work. Men in these circumstances, with no ladder

of progression at work, perform for each other. Again, this is an insider's narrative. I don't wish to romanticise these hard physical jobs. As I say in *Beaten by a Blow*, there is nowhere for an old man to hide in a shearing shed. Once a blue-collar worker's body ages or weakens he lives in a measure of pain and hardship for the rest of his life.

I found the intellectual deprivation that accompanied the work in the tunnel one of the most painful experiences of my life. And this is one of the insights I bring to the tradition of realist writing through writing from experience. It is a more complex view of the workers' lives than either the sympathetic outsider or the idealist. *Tunnelling* also reveals the tenderness in the men towards each other that defies their competitive lives and 'redneck' perceptions.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this exegesis I said I felt that getting an education humanised me. It was the insights into the construction of blue-collar masculinity and the lives of the working class that helped me see where I had come from, and how I was constructed. The working class, especially blue-collar workers, are inculcated into their lives through work, the very thing that will devalue them later in life and limit their opportunities for advancement. They are also equally influenced by their fathers, neighbours and friends.

The educated middle class took the thinking and many of the important rituals working-class men in an industrial society have used to complete their rites-of-passage to manhood. Taylor described the working-class as ox-like and as a 'very complex organism' to experiment with (119). Prichard said they were no more than working bullocks. Devanny called her male protagonist, Hefty, 'the idiot'. In writing my memoir

I have tried to show the complexity of the make-up of blue-collar workers and some of the hidden costs that work has for blue-collar workers. It is worth noting that the removal of conceptual thinking from the skill of the worker proposed by Taylor also limits a person's academic potential. This lack of conceptual thinking is regarded as a hallmark of the working class. It is their perceived concrete thinking that is an inhibitor to tertiary education. Governments and educational institutions are still trying to educate the working-class and they wonder why they can't do it. Nobody looks at the debilitating effect work has had generationally on working men and women.

Prichard, using her social realism, shows us the lives of workers in the bush at the turn of the 20th century in Australia. Despite the constraints of being an outsider in that culture and the literary choices she makes in what I think are misrepresentations of the working class, Prichard has captured Red Burke in a transcendent moment. Her 'unguided experiment' into a political narrative, using observational techniques in depicting workers has also given some positive insights into the working class of that time.

The requirements of socialist realism have meant Devanny's text was always going to be flawed. Also the feminist narrative, part of her personal conviction, limits the representation of the male workers' lives. Despite these limitations we do get to see Hefty's 'great muscles' and we see the joy on his face at being back with his work mates performing heroic deeds through work. His physically exhausted state, his cuts and welts from the work, when he comes home for lunch, are worn like a badge of honour. He is a man being a man as he knows it.

Working-class writing has an insight into the future of the working class that Lukács thought only insiders could deliver. My memoir has that advantage over

Prichard's social realism and Devanny's socialist realism. Work in an industrial society for men is part of their maturation process. Void of any skill development and meaningful engagement in their work, men grapple with any small way to differentiate themselves in the vain hope of being acknowledged and valued. This drive is in part for status amongst peers, family and friends. It is also to have their badge of ability acknowledged and their manhood validated by the work-appointed judges or engineers. Taylor claimed in his manifesto that working-class men would directly gain from the introduction of scientific management (143). *Tunnelling* shows a different story. Blue-collar work under management direction is a disease that eats away at workers' self-esteem. It snares them with the lure of the command of their masculinity and it entraps them in self-blame for their perceived failed lives. They are forced to accept the premise that they don't personally believe; that is, if you are good enough you can reach your right station in life (Sennett & Cobb 250). They blame themselves for their failures, but they have been dumbed down by work. Diminished and humiliated, they dare not dream for themselves. Autonomy for a blue-collar worker is the transcendent moment they strive for in this life. Sennett and Cobb said it was akin to a religious conversion (241). But it is out of reach for most men.

In closing

If working in the tunnel was the most painful job I ever did, writing my Honours thesis was the hardest. After several essays were handed back, they said I couldn't write academically—said I couldn't write in a conceptual way. My undergraduate degree had consisted of a combination of smaller essays and creative writing projects. An honours degree was a fifty percent rise in the academic writing standard. Rather than give up I

researched, with direction and support from my supervisors, why I couldn't write academically. My eventual thesis was called 'Declining into Silence: The Language of the Workingman'. I sort of hoped I would just get a pass and it would be over, and I would write my story. I didn't think I could go through that process again. After all, if I had of got the job with Deep Sewer Maintenance back when I worked in the tunnel, I would have been cleaning shit off the pipes under the city for the next thirty years. And before that I was 'Dippy' the truck driver. Failing Honours was the best problem I'd ever had. If this was as far as I went, I couldn't complain. Nicole had recovered and I had been given opportunities beyond my imagination. As it turned out, I received a 90 and an 82 and an opportunity to do a Masters Degree in the English Department at the University of Melbourne.

I was chuffed and thought if I could go one more round in the academic bull pit I would become a better writer. And a Creative Writing Masters would not be as academic as my literary Honours thesis. I hoped rather than believed that I might have improved, as if adaptation might have occurred after all my studies. It hadn't. My creative work was fine, but my supervisor said my exegesis had good thinking in it, but the writing was 'shocking'. Driving home after leaving a meeting with my supervisor after more than a year working on my thesis I just wanted to drive into a tree.

I started testing myself. I wrote down 'doctor' and 'butter' six times and practiced spelling them in my head, just like in primary school. The next day I went into the university and tried to spell them. I couldn't remember if they ended in 'er' or 'or'. With great reluctance I had to accept I had a learning problem—something my previous supervisor had alluded to. He said I had a problem with homophones. The other possibility was my dysfunctional childhood education in the 1960s had left me with disfigured neurological pathways and I couldn't change them. I was shattered when I

realised my learning difficulties extended beyond working class cultural and linguistic differences. I was more comfortable saying I had been an alcoholic than saying I had a learning problem. In any case, the answer was I just had to do lots of drafts. Sometimes I couldn't see what was wrong with the sentence and I would stare at it all day until I worked or guessed it out, and I had to do the grammar manually. I had researched and was familiar with all the grammatical rules. While I could see the problems in others' work, I couldn't always see them in my own words and sentences.

My Masters thesis produced *Beaten by a Blow*. While I could be well pleased with that result, I still hadn't written my daughter's story. Receiving a scholarship to do my PhD allowed me to finish what I started in 1999. It felt like I had won a chance at a world title fight. Doing it has felt like I have gone the full twelve rounds. I am convinced, after my own experiences and the experiences of working with my daughter, that working-class boys can adapt to academic English. If they have intervention at a young age, I think their neurological pathways can be developed, and in months rather than the dozen years it has taken me.

On a lighter note, I believe several of my supervisors thought of throwing themselves off their balconies after reading early drafts of my work. Fortunately they didn't, and they put up with me as well. My early drafts didn't kill them and their rejection didn't kill me either. I came to university with the idea of writing my daughter's story; along the way I have received a great education.

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