

HSC English Extension Course 2

MAJOR WORK

Critical Response

Ray Lawler's *The Doll Trilogy* as a Social Timepiece

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Ray Lawler's *The Doll Trilogy* as a Social Timepiece

Introduction

The text being studied is *The Doll Trilogy* by Ray Lawler. The investigation concerns the ways in which it reflects its Australian social context. *The Doll Trilogy* comprises *Kidstakes* (composed 1975), *Other Times* (1976) and *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1955). All three feature the Leech family home, in Carlton, Melbourne. They are set, respectively, in 1937, 1945 and 1953, each year being of particular significance in the history of Australia. In 1937, the country was recovering from the Depression of the early 1930s¹, and there was the threat of war in Europe. 1945 marked the end of the Second World War, in which Australia had significant involvement. 1953 was a period of mass immigration and economic stability, when Australia “became a modern society.”²

Ray Lawler began to write *The Doll Trilogy* at a time when the Australian identity was becoming increasingly important - “The period after the Second World War was marked by the need to explore an Australian identity distinctive from that of Britain.”³ In writing the plays, Lawler answered this need;

“All this exciting playwriting has been, of course, part of a new national awareness in Australia. Australians...have become more interested in identifying themselves as a unique people, and in seeking to examine and understand both their past history and traditions and their present society and values.”⁴

Lawler has succeeded in presenting his plays as timepieces of Australian history. He reflects the social conditions, attitudes and stereotypes of Australia in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

¹ Kenny, 1987, p. 2

² Lees & Senyard, 1987, p. 6

³ Chynoweth, 1996, p. xii

⁴ Reid, 1977, p. 1

Social conditions

Each of the plays mirrors the social climate in which it was set, particularly *Kidstakes* and *Other Times*, which directly reflect the major upheavals of depression and war. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, set during a time of relative financial stability, reflects its climate to a lesser extent.

Kidstakes and the 1930s

Kidstakes is set in 1937, “the aftermath of the Great Depression and the eve of World War II.”⁵ During the early 1930s, Australia suffered economic depression, “gone were the heady days of fun, hope and progress. In their place were days of misery, helplessness and unemployment.”⁶ As the Depression had ended by 1937, it is not directly reflected in *Kidstakes*, but the responder is reminded of it, and shown its effects; Emma tells her daughter Olive, “it was me who had to pinch and scrape to get you through your millinery” (p. 32)⁷. It is suggested, too, that the Depression forced Emma to “turn this place into a boarding house.” (p. 83) Due to this economic instability, Roo cannot turn down his good job in the North and stay with Olive in Melbourne, with its employment uncertainties. Throughout *Kidstakes* Lawler portrays aspects of the Depression with which people of the 1930s would have identified. There was concern, however, about the empathy of audiences of the 1970s, when the play was written. “Would a young audience in 1975 – with no experience of the Depression – appreciate the seriousness of throwing up ‘a good steady job in millinery’ as Emma termed it?”⁸ Lawler’s social comment is specific to the period, with unmistakable “nostalgia for the 1930s”⁹ which

⁵ Brisbane, 1978, p. xii

⁶ Eshuys et al., 1995, p. 93

⁷ all quotations from Lawler, 1985, Currency Press edition

⁸ Harrison, 1977, p. xvi

⁹ Rees, 1978, p. 204

was not entirely unappreciated by modern audiences, “[*Kidstakes*] charms audiences with its gentle grip of Australian working class vernacular of the 1930s.”¹⁰

Other Times and World War II

Other Times is unmistakably about the Second World War and its influence on Australian society. Lawler examines many of the effects of war, from its direct impact on soldiers such as Barney and Roo, to its effect on those remaining in Melbourne, “anyone could see the war was goin’ to make a lot of shortages” (p. 132). Roo and Barney show an opposition to the war and the army. Roo claims “I hated every minute of the crap and kowtow that I had to go through” (p. 193). This reflects the resentment of Australians at having to be involved in a war which seemed hardly to threaten the country. Nancy’s rebuke of Olive, “As far as you’re concerned there hasn’t been a war these past five years at all” (p. 178), highlights the distance many Australians felt from the action of the war, also examined in other texts from the period, “...and Aunt Kath loses her ration of beef and realises there’s a war on!”¹¹

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll and Economic Growth

The 1950s was a period of unrivalled economic growth, with the wool industry alone increasing its revenue four-fold during the decade.¹² “National development became the slogan”¹³ of the government as the average Australian family realised its dreams of owning a house and car. The 1950s were undoubtedly more economically stable than either the 1930s, with its Depression, or the 1940s, with the War. Interestingly, however, of the three plays in the *Doll Trilogy*, it is *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* that reflects economic hardship. In *Kidstakes*, Barney and Roo can afford five months’ rent, with money to spare, “we got some money in the kitty” (p. 39). They can also afford expensive new appliances, including a fridge

¹⁰ McLean, R., 1996

¹¹ Cleary, 1947, from Murdoch & Drake-Brockman, 1959, p.440

¹² Eshuys et al., 1995, p. 211

¹³ Lees & Senyard, 1987, p. 5

for Emma. Even in *Other Times*, Barney and Roo can still afford their expensive holiday with money from their demobilisation, and Roo buys Olive an expensive “silver fox” jacket. The financial desperation of the time is shown, however, through Emma’s loss, “He [Mr Bromige] rooked me... can’t even get my money back from him” (pp 195-196).

In *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, from the outset, there is a mood of financial desperation when Barney reveals that Roo is broke (p. 224). This is further emphasised by the fact that he must work in a paint factory in order to survive. Later, Barney reveals that he is also in financial difficulties, “me with me money runnin’ out” (p. 257). Throughout *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Lawler does not reflect the economic optimism of the 1950s, but rather, the financial difficulties of one particular household.

Suburbia

The trilogy reflects the very Australian tone of suburbia, through the setting - Carlton, a working-class suburb of Melbourne.¹⁴ Throughout the three plays, there is a gradual progression from the neat, proud suburb of the 1930s, to a more unkempt, disreputable suburb of the 1950s. Lawler makes clear in his opening stage directions for each play the image of suburbia which he wants to portray; in *Kidstakes*, the house “*does not show... depressing shabbiness*”, and the garden has a “*profusion of green shrubbery and ferns*”, with “*a back fence separating the property from Bubba’s place next door*” (p. 5). This typifies the Australian suburban image of “a block of land with the lawn out the front and a garden out the back”¹⁵ and “high grey paling fences”.¹⁶ Throughout the trilogy, however, the suburb of the setting begins to take on some of the idiosyncrasies of Carlton itself. During the Second World War, the social status of Carlton declined significantly. “Brothels were concentrated in Carlton

¹⁴ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 131

¹⁵ McGregor, 1980, p. 129

¹⁶ Grant & Serle, 1978, p. 293

and Fitzroy”¹⁷, reflected in *Other Times*, with Barney noting, “The streets are full of sexy devils hoggin’ for it” (p. 197). The appearance of the house, too, reflects the decline of the suburban image over time, “crumbling into disrepair”¹⁸; in *Other Times*, “*The plants, shrubs and trees have been let go their own way and badly need trimming*” (p. 109), while in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, “*The garden has been allowed to become a wilderness and...enshronds the house in a tangle of plant life*” (p. 205). The garden is as much of the suburb as Ray Lawler allows his audience to see, and it is this that reflects the changes occurring in the suburb outside the house.

Icons of the periods

Each play contains items typical of its period. In *Kidstakes*, Roo and Olive buy Emma a refrigerator to replace her icebox (p. 75), reflecting the increasing move towards refrigerators in the home.¹⁹ Also, in *Kidstakes* and *Other Times* there is an outside toilet (pp 7, 138), a common fixture in Melbourne during that period.²⁰ In the stage directions for *Other Times*, “*the Biblical text has been replaced by a fading wartime poster emphasising the carelessness of loose talk.*” (p. 109) This item was typical of the Second World War, when there was a great awareness of the danger of spies.²¹ One noticeable change throughout the plays is the mode of transportation; in *Kidstakes*, Barney and Roo travel from Queensland to Melbourne by train (p. 92), while in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, they arrive by plane (p. 220). This reflects the progress in aviation over the two decades and its increasing availability to the general public. In *Kidstakes*, Roo expresses surprise that Dickie Pouncett does not own a car, indicative of the growing possession of cars; in the late 1930s, about half of all families possessed cars.²² Within the plays there are a number of references to popular items. For example, in *Summer of the*

¹⁷ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 182

¹⁸ McGregor, 1980, p. 129

¹⁹ Kenny, 1987, p. 32

²⁰ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 100

²¹ Eshuys et al., 1995 pp 144-145

Seventeenth Doll, icons from the 1950s²³ are mentioned, including the “chromium smoker’s stand,” (p. 205) “double string of artificial pearls” (p. 207) and “the community singin’” (p. 222). Kewpie dolls, an integral part of Australian fun-fairs, were brought into the Australian consciousness by their use as a significant symbol in Lawler’s plays. This was reflected by their inclusion in the closing ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.²⁴

Attitudes

The Glory of the Bushman and the Digger

One unchanging Australian image throughout the history of European colonisation has been the bushman. By the late nineteenth century, “the bushman was established firmly enough as the typical Australian”²⁵, with Francis Adams writing, “the true Bushman, the Bushman pure and simple, the man of the nation.”²⁶ The bush, “the most complex, most mysterious, and most powerful of all forces which have shaped Australia,”²⁷ and the glorious bushman, are explored in many Australian poems. Banjo Paterson, in “Clancy of the Overflow”²⁸, expounds the glory of bushmen like Clancy,

“In my wild erratic fancy visions come to me of Clancy
Gone a-droving ‘down the Cooper’ where the western drovers go;
As the stock are slowly stringing, Clancy rides behind them singing,
For the drover’s life has pleasures that the townsfolk never know.”

By the 1950s, the definition of the bushman encompassed the “typical Australian” living from the land. Russel Ward, in his *Australian Legend*²⁹ summarised this stereotype,

²² Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 40

²³ Reid, 1977, pp 29-34

²⁴ Sydney Morning Herald, 1st October 2000

²⁵ Burgmann & Lee, 1988, p. 162

²⁶ Adams, 1893, as cited in Burgmann & Lee, 1988, p. 162

²⁷ McGregor, 1980, p. 174

²⁸ Paterson, 1987, p. 48

²⁹ Ward, 1958, as cited in McRoberts, 1994, pp. 24-25

“According to the myth, the ‘typical Australian’ is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others...He swears hard and consistently...and drinks deeply... He is a fiercely independent person... Yet he... will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong.”

This stereotype of the bushman is closely associated with that of the digger, an Australian symbol adopted during the wars, and reflecting the same aspects of mateship, hard drinking and independence.

Barney and Roo typify these images, and adhere to Russel Ward’s stereotype. As canecutters, they are portrayed as hard workers, deserving a break, “the thing about cutting cane is that it’s a pretty tough season. Seven months hard yakka. Afterwards you look around for a bit of fun...” (p. 25) Barney and Roo possess many qualities of the stereotype; they are “hard drinkers”. Roo shows that he is “fiercely independent” in his rejection of Emma’s offer of financial assistance, “Don’t reckon I’d better, Emma. Start taking oscar from women and don’t know where you’ll end.” (p. 235) Barney and Roo show great loyalty to one another, “through thick and thin”, with Roo rejecting promotion in order to stay with Barney, “If I’d been promoted, me and Barney woulda had to split up.” (p. 192) In *Other Times*, too, the digger myth is most prevalent, as Roo and Barney are soldiers, fighting for their country, “you always took such pride and trouble, bein’ in the Army” (p. 170).

In *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, there is evidence of a subversion of these values; Barney does not leave the canefields with Roo, “I think he’s got a spite on me for not walkin’ out with him” (p. 227), and questions Roo’s sense in leaving, “I’ve never seen him in the wrong before” (p. 226). Roo’s pride also suffers when he has to work in the paint factory, a city job, a far cry from outdoor jobs, the realm of the bushman, to which he is accustomed. Perhaps this

failure to maintain the Australian stereotype is part of the decline of Roo and Barney and all that they meant to Olive.

While Roo and Barney may be typical Australian bushmen, Lawler has presented them in the Leech home, in Melbourne, far from the canefields of Queensland. The incongruity between these bushmen and the urban way of life is presented, a juxtaposition also explored by Banjo Paterson³⁰,

“And I somehow rather fancy that I’d like to change with Clancy,
Like to take a turn at droving where the seasons come and go,
While he faced the round eternal of the cashbook and the journal –
But I doubt he’d suit the office, Clancy, of ‘The Overflow’.”

In this suburban Melbourne setting, Roo and Barney manage well – as long as their only activities encompass alcohol, parties and women. Throughout the trilogy, they are seen to not quite fit in; “Thousands of fishes in their tanks...and only these two out of water.” (p. 23). In *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Roo is also ashamed of his new lifestyle, “You just had to show him [Dowd] how low I’d sunk.” (p. 273) There is great contrast between the Roo of much of the trilogy, the strong ganger, and Roo at the end, offering marriage to Olive, in an apparent “rejection of his bush heritage.”³¹ Perhaps, through this, Lawler is highlighting the incongruity between the heroic stereotype of the bushman and the reality of urban Australia. Davison³² suggests a subversion of values in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*;

“[It] reveals, beneath its simple story, an awareness of the contemporary significance of the legendary prowess, strength, masculinity, and exclusiveness of the Australian bushman...In its presentation of Roo’s predicament, [the play] questions the validity of

³⁰ Paterson, 1987, p. 48

³¹ McRoberts, 1994, p. 25

³² Davison, 1963, as cited in Holloway, 1981, pp. 117-118

the myth of the Outback in contemporary Australia – its loyalties, its values, its assumptions of the preeminence of physical strength .”

Social Attitudes

Marriage and Sexuality

The trilogy depicts the formation and maintenance of an extra-marital understanding between Barney and Nancy, Roo and Olive. While it is more casual for Barney and Nancy, the relationship between Roo and Olive is almost de facto, carefully planned, “You spend the seasons up there, and you come down here for the lay-offs” (p. 100). It is, however, not marriage, a situation which would have demanded different responses in the three periods of the trilogy. While the arrangement was fairly normal in the 1970s, when *Kidstakes* was written, it would have been a shock to those of 1937. “How many young people today realize the embarrassment of Olive’s first real kiss with Roo or her bravery and daring in suggesting that ‘People do have kids without them being married’?”³³ Emma expresses the more “appropriate” arrangement for the time, “Serious to him [Dickie] means marriage and a home and bein’ around when she might need him” (p. 85).

This relationship is sustained into *Other Times*, where, even after eight years, Emma still expresses her shame, “I don’t want people goin’ off to other places sayin’ that I run a doss house.” (p. 137), and even contempt, “fornicator ’ardly out of bed” (p. 113). This reflects the high moral standards expected by society despite the rampant prostitution during the war, “the police still retained the power to burst in upon a couple in a hotel room and demand that the woman produce a marriage certificate or a nightdress as evidence that nothing ‘improper’ was occurring...virginity at marriage was still expected for women”.³⁴ Josef Hultz, too, is not

³³ Harrison, 1977, p. xvi

³⁴ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 183

happy with Nancy's promiscuity, "Things had been said about your -- way of life -- that made me very angry" (p. 182), again emphasising the high moral standards of 1945.

In *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, it is Pearl who disapproves of Roo and Olive's arrangement. She promotes marriage, "I meant decent like marriage. That's different, you said yourself it was." (p. 215) and shuns public displays of affection, "I know one thing, he'll never lay hands on me like that in public" (p. 211). Olive, however, protects herself and her relationship. Despite this initial opposition, the situation is generally accepted, with Bubba trying to imitate it herself with Johnnie Dowd. This reflects the increasing flexibility in the 1950s concerning marriage and sexual relationships, and the growing awareness and acceptance that such practices were taking place. An English survey of 1953 reported that "half of the 6,000 women questioned admitted to having intercourse before marriage."³⁵ Even then, however, such long-term de facto relationships were regarded as out of the ordinary. "Of course, in the early fifties, when it was written, this [relationship outside marriage] was fairly unusual."³⁶

Also explored throughout the trilogy is the issue of Barney's illegitimate children, reflecting similar social attitudes. In *Kidstakes*, this news shocks everyone, particularly Emma, "But what can anybody say for a young bloke who has two sons in a country town by different mothers, both kids born the same month?" (p. 67). The subject is discussed between Barney and Nancy, with less condemnation, yet acknowledgement of Barney's duty, "I never dodged it with a dirty cop out. Even if they were mistakes, my kids, the least I felt I owed 'em was a fightin' chance." (p. 187) In *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, it is again Pearl who condemns his actions, "while you was waitin' you should have behaved yourself" (p. 241), showing that in the 1950s, some people still disapproved of illegitimate children.

³⁵ Lewis, 1978, p. 47

³⁶ Lawler, as cited in McRoberts, 1994, p. 30

Views of Alcohol

“White Australians have always been known as great, if not necessarily sophisticated, drinkers of alcoholic beverages.”³⁷ This view of alcohol, and pubs, as part of Australian life, is reflected throughout *The Doll Trilogy*. In *Kidstakes* it is revealed that Olive’s late father was a heavy drinker, “Dad was mad on the free booze” (p. 37), and Emma suggests that he passed this habit to his daughter, who saw “her father wreck his chances coz he drank more as a barman than he served out to his customers” (p. 56). Throughout the play, the four visit pubs and drink at home, “them blokes crowdin’ out me ice chest with their bottles of booze” (p. 79). In *Kidstakes*, Nancy and Olive leave their “real good steady job” (p. 85) as milliners to work in a bar. Bars were traditionally seen as the haunt of men; in the 1920s, it was forbidden by law for women to drink in bars.³⁸ In the 1930s there was much serious debate about whether a prohibition act should be brought in to close bars entirely, with “no-license” referenda held in 1930 and 1938.³⁹ At the same time, however, laws were being loosened, with Tasmania the first of the states to move closing-time for bars from 6pm to 10pm in 1937.⁴⁰

In *Other Times*, Nancy has become an incipient alcoholic, dependent on her regular drinks of whisky. This is discouraged by all close to her, including Barney, “You drink any more of that stuff and I’ll hit you with the bottle” (p. 188). The four still, however, drink a great deal, and Barney and Roo frequent the pub. This again reflects the society, with increasing patronage of pubs during and after the war, to such an extent that in 1942, new alcohol reforms were enforced to restrict drinking.⁴¹

Summer of a Seventeenth Doll continues this theme. When Roo left the cane-fields, he squandered his money drinking (p. 227), and it is from the pub that Olive tries to find a replacement for Nancy, in Pearl. Alcohol and the pub continue to play an important role in the

³⁷ Burgmann & Lee, 1988, p. 96

³⁸ Burgmann & Lee, 1988, p. 103

³⁹ Burgmann & Lee, 1988, p. 120

⁴⁰ *Events in Australia in 1937*

day-to-day life of the characters, reflecting the continued, even escalated emphasis which society placed on drinking. Now, women were also welcome in pubs, and almost all states had embraced ten-o'clock closing.⁴²

The Working Class

All characters in *The Doll Trilogy* represent the working class. *Kidstake* is based on a time when apprenticeships were common for those leaving school;⁴³ Nancy and Olive were apprenticed as milliners. Emma recalls “how hard it was to get a girl apprenticed to a decent trade” (p. 32). Apprenticeships provided secure jobs for life, the reason for Emma’s disappointment when they left “the millinery”, particularly in the light of the Depression. Dickie Pouncett is one who was trying to improve his social status by going back to “night school” (p. 28) to become a designer, “there’s big openings now in advertising.” (p. 51) This is the first of a number of references that Lawler makes throughout *The Doll Trilogy*, highlighting the importance of education as a means for class mobility, a fact true of Australian society. “Education plays a large part in determining the social class of Australians.”⁴⁴

In *Other Times*, Nancy hopes that Bubba will be able to improve her social standing through education, by winning a scholarship. In this way “she can do a lot better for herself than a job in a pub bar” (p. 130), “factory work or bein’ in a shop all day” (p. 176), the typical jobs for a working class woman. This reflects the increasing class mobility of the 1940s, escalated by the war and post-war immigration.⁴⁵ One main indication of the working class at the time was limited education; Nancy tells Josef Hultz, “[I’ve] never known anyone been to University.” (p. 126)

⁴¹ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 170

⁴² Lees & Senyard, 1987, p. 81

⁴³ Burgmann & Lee, 1988, p. 30

⁴⁴ McGregor, 1980, p. 88

⁴⁵ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 81

In *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Bubba has entrenched herself in the working class – having decided not to continue her education, she “left school” (p. 235) and is now working at Woolworths (p. 235).

The Role of Women

In *Kidstakes*, Emma clearly defines the role she expects Olive to fulfil; she will have a “real good steady job” in the millinery until she marries a “clever young feller” like Dickie Pouncett (p. 85). This reflects the dominant social view that a woman’s chief role was to marry; she would then leave her job, and start a family.⁴⁶ Olive and Nancy subvert this view; they leave the millinery to work in a pub, and reject marriage for an alternative, extramarital arrangement. This reflects the growing move towards women’s rights in Australia; in 1937, there was a strong campaign for equal pay, and women were rapidly moving into the traditional “man’s world.”⁴⁷ The subservient role of women is also shown by the fact that Barney could leave Norma and May, the mothers of his sons, in Makarandi “waitin’ for him” (p. 67), while he was able to continue his life relatively untrammelled.

In *Other Times*, Nancy and Olive continue their job in the pub, and have not married. During the Second World War, it became much more acceptable for women to work, even after marriage.⁴⁸ Nancy reflects the increasing opportunities for girls, through her ambitions for Bubba, “If she put her mind to it... she could wind up eventually with a decent sort of possie” (p. 178).

In *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, following the marriage of Nancy, who “got tired of waiting” (p. 207), Olive tries to find a replacement in Pearl, almost as if Barney and Roo each “need” a woman. This is contrary to the general move away from the patriarchal society; “with the modernisation of Australia, the traditional division between men and women was

⁴⁶ Burgmann & Lee, 1988, p. 4

⁴⁷ *Events in Australia in 1937*

⁴⁸ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 57

challenged.”⁴⁹ Yet, at the same time, there was still much emphasis on women being men’s assistants and companions.⁵⁰ Olive also adheres to a stereotype of Australian women during the 1950s, as fun-loving and “so independent, so self-reliant, so strong. They can do most things...”⁵¹

Jack Hibberd states the following about *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, which could apply to the entire *Doll Trilogy*;

“*The Doll* still vividly documents, among other things, a special kind of Australian heterosexual sterility, a discrepancy between the sexes: the competitive pseudo-independent male with his myths of mateship and virility; the patient, passive waiting world of the female who fantasises half her life away.”⁵²

Racism

The issue of racism is not explored in either *Kidstakes* or *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, but is evident in *Other Times*. This racism is directed against Josef Hultz, Nancy’s friend and an Austrian Jew, and reflects the antagonism towards Germans during the Second World War. Josef was “interned when war broke out” (p. 124), like many Europeans living in Australia at the time⁵³. Emma summarises the general sentiment towards such men as Josef, “they [Australians] don’t ask questions. They just hear the accent.” (p. 136), and Barney makes a number of racist comments towards Josef, such as “Greasy Continentals” (p. 157). These opinions reflect the skepticism and uncertainty towards Europeans during the war. “Existing

⁴⁹ Lees & Senyard, 1987, p. 74

⁵⁰ Lees & Senyard, 1987, p. 77

⁵¹ Tom Clarke, as cited in Grant & Serle, 1978, p. 269

⁵² Holloway, 1981, p. 153

⁵³ Eshuys et al., 1995, p. 152

beliefs in Anglo-Australian superiority were strengthened during the war”⁵⁴ and “war placed all non-British people under scrutiny.”⁵⁵ It is also significant that Nancy met Josef Hultz at the bar where she worked; it was to bars that men came to meet others and relax⁵⁶, and it was here that Josef, although a foreigner, was able to make friends.

Shunning the Intellectual

Throughout the three plays, society’s attitude towards the intellectual is explored. In *Kidstakes*, Nancy places importance on being well-read, and feels discouraged, “you didn’t even know that I could read” (p. 54), a feeling of superiority which Barney notices, “You think you’re the only one ever shoved your nose inside a book.” (p. 61). Indeed, Roo’s recitations of Biblical passages are somewhat incongruous, “[he] embarked on the psalm in the same spirit of shame-faced levity as before” (p. 63).

This theme is continued in *Other Times*, with the bond between Nancy and Josef Hultz being through “books and poetry” (p. 182), and with Nancy’s longing for “a feller who’s not only seen it [*Fanny by Gaslight*], but who’s read the book” (p. 197). Her emphasis on the intellectual is further shown by her repeated encouragement of Bubba to study for her scholarship.

Olive, Barney and Roo, on the other hand, reflect possibly a more typical Australian sentiment at the time, of anti-intellectualism; in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, they scorn Nancy’s “book bloke”, a poor substitute for Roo and Barney, whom Olive describes as “not two professors from the university” but “a coupla kings” (p. 211). These sentiments are a reflection of the aversion to intellectualism that typifies an “Australian”, “skeptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally.”⁵⁷ Andrew Milner⁵⁸ states

⁵⁴ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 31

⁵⁵ Darian-Smith, 1990, p. 28

⁵⁶ Lees & Senyard, 1987, p. 87

⁵⁷ Chynoweth, 1996, p. xviii

⁵⁸ Burgmann & Lee, 1988, p. 260

that “the word ‘intellectual’ has unfavourable connotations in Australian English” for a number of reasons, particularly its overtones of elitism.

Language

The language of the trilogy is typically Australian. Throughout the three plays, most characters have an Australian accent, denoted by the omission of ‘g’ in words, for example, “singin’” (p. 9), contractions “s’posed” (p. 154) and other abbreviations, “‘S cold” (p. 112). The characters, too, use colloquialisms and slang peculiar to Australia⁵⁹, “righto” (p. 140) “old girl’s taken a loan” (p. 208), “fair dinkum” (p. 284). Lawler reflects accepted patterns of speech, “everybody says me this, me that.” (p. 130) He also uses some language typical of a particular period, and even confined to Melbourne; in *Kidstakes*, Barney does not understand the meaning of the phrase, “Up there, Cazaly” (p. 101), which refers to a Melbourne football player of the time.⁶⁰ In writing in such a way, Lawler’s work was “considered an amazing breakthrough because it foregrounded ordinary working class people, speaking real Aussie slang.”⁶¹

The characters themselves are distinguished by differences in their speech patterns. This is particularly evident for Dickie Pouncett, who, although he has an Australian accent, “droppin’ in” (p. 8), does not use slang, “these socials can be useful ways to keep in contact” (p. 56), earning him the respect of Emma, who refers to him as a “clever young feller” (p. 85). In *Other Times*, it is Josef Hultz whose language is noticeably different, “It is true I used to bring a book with me – I did not know in those days” (p. 123), the formality of his speech reflecting his unfamiliarity with the language. In *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Pearl, who feels that “*the pub game is rather crude*” (p. 207), attempts to estrange herself at the beginning from her working class reality by adopting a non-typical accent; “didn’t mind her getting

⁵⁹ McGregor, 1980, p. 37

⁶⁰ Reid, 1977, p. 31

⁶¹ McRoberts, 1994, p. 9

married” (p. 208), however as she settles in, she begins to speak more “normally”, “I was thinkin’” (p. 244). At no time, however, does she use slang. The language of the trilogy enhances the portrayal of Australia, with the plays “never merely pretending that Australiana is a few well-placed bonzas, too-rights, strike-me-luckies and good-o’s.”⁶²

Conclusion

From this investigation, it has become evident that while *Kidstakes* and *Other Times* portray their times quite accurately, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* does so to a lesser extent. It is interesting that of the three, it was *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* that was written at the time during which it was set, perhaps reflecting the fact that Lawler felt less compelled to accurately represent the 1950s, but rather wanted to concentrate on his story. In writing the other two plays in retrospect, in order to accurately portray the times, he would perhaps have needed to adhere more closely to characteristics of society as it was.

The Doll Trilogy has been widely hailed as an Australian play portraying Australia; “A play as Down-Under as a kangaroo.”⁶³ Lawler has, indeed, succeeded in presenting an accurate image of Australia in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

⁶² Browne, 1956, as cited in McRoberts, 1994, p. 34

⁶³ *Daily Mirror*, 1957, as cited in Reid, 1977, p. 43

Bibliography

* Texts referred to in Major Work

- * Brisbane, K., 1978, *Growing up in Australia*, as preface to *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*,

Currency Press, Sydney

This was useful in getting ideas for subject areas, as it was specifically about the ways in which Summer of the Seventeenth Doll reflects Australia in the 1950s.

- * Burgmann, V. & Lee, J., 1988, *Constructing a Culture*, Penguin Books, Fitzroy

This had very good sections on many aspects of Australian society over time, in particular the role of women, alcohol and the working class.

- * Chynoweth, A., 1996, *Programme Notes to Summer of a Seventeenth Doll*, Australian

Playhouse, Melbourne

Again, there were some very helpful comments made on the place of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll as a reflection of Australian society.

- * Darian-Smith, K., 1990, *On the Home Front – Melbourne in Wartime*, Oxford University

Press, Melbourne

This was particularly helpful for Other Times, set in Melbourne in wartime – it had good information on both social conditions and expectations at the time.

- * Eshuys, J., Guest, V. & Lawrence, J., 1995, *Australia Emerges*, Macmillan Press, South

Melbourne, 1995

This gave a good general overview of the three period from an Australian point of view, and I was able to use the information well for a number of sections.

- * *Events in Australia in 1937*, http://www.pcug.org.au/~mjsparke/mj_pag1a.html#1937 (25th

November, 2000)

I had had some trouble finding good information on the 1930s, but this had some good specific information on Australian events in 1937, which linked closely with Kidstakes.

Gerster, R. Bassett, J., 1991, *Seizures of Youth: The Sixties & Australia*, Hyland House, Melbourne

Although there was some mention of the 1950s in this book, it was not very helpful.

* Grant, J. & Serle, G., 1978, *The Melbourne Scene, 1803-1956*, Hale & Iremonger, Neutral Bay

This book had good information on Melbourne, from a 1950s point of view.

Guild Theatre Production of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Ray Lawler, produced by Chris Searle, 7th April, 2001

This production was true to the script; it was helpful in giving an idea of the play on stage, particularly in making clear the stage directions.

* Harrison, W., 1977, *For a Special Occasion – Programme Notes on The Doll Trilogy*, Melbourne Theatre Company, Melbourne

This was helpful in linking together the three plays from a social point of view.

* Holloway, P., 1981, *Contemporary Australian Drama*, Currency Press, Sydney

There were some helpful critiques of the three plays, some with reference to aspects of Australian society.

Hornadge, B., 1997, *The Hidden History of Australia (Ch. 9)*, Imprint Book, Watson's Bay, Sydney

This book talked about some aspects of Australian society – none were completely relevant to what I was studying.

* Kenny, J.M., 1987, *Slices of Time – Australian Family Life in 1938*, Nelson Books, Melbourne

This was a simple children's book, but did give me an indication of what life was like in the late 1930s, which I could then compare to Kidstakes.

Kent, J., Elder, B. & Willey, K., 1988, *Life in Australia Since 1900*, Child & Associates, Brookvale (NSW)

This book gave a simple overview of life in the three periods, which gave me an idea of how closely the three plays followed this.

Laidler, R. & White, S., 1991, *Australia: 1900-1950*, Edward Arnold, Caulfield East, Victoria

This book did not look at the aspects of Australia which I was studying.

* Lawler, R., 1985, *The Doll Trilogy*, Currency Pressy, Sydney

This was the text being studied, and was the edition from which all quotations in the Major Work were taken. The two introductory essays were also of interest and use in the production of the Major Work.

‘Lawler’, *Encyclopedia Britannica CD ROM*, 2000

There was not very much useful information on Lawler, or his three plays.

‘Lawler’, *Microsoft Encarta CD ROM*, 1996

I found out about Lawler’s life, but little else.

* Lees, S. & Senyard, J., 1987, *The 1950s – How Australia Became a Modern Society, and*

Everyone Got a House and a Car”, Hyland House, Melbourne

This book was very useful in studying Summer of the Seventeenth Doll as it addressed relevant aspects of society.

* Lewis, P., 1978, *The Fifties – Portrait of a Period*, The Cupid Press, London

This book was mainly about the UK and US, but was useful in giving a general impression of certain aspects of society in the 1950s.

McGarvin, P., 1997, *Review of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*,

<http://technoculture.mira.net.au/storm/storm7.htm#threv1> (15th October, 2000)

This was only a short critique, containing interesting views, but not as useful as other texts in the investigation.

- * McGregor, C., 1980, *The Australian People*, Hodder and Stoughton, Lane Cove

The information was mostly from the 1970s, but there was some information about Australia in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, which was particularly useful for the section on suburbia.

- * McLean, R., 1996, *Review of Kidstakes*, <http://axs.com.au/~onstage/shows/96/osmkidst.html>
(15th October, 2000)

I found very little information on Kidstakes on its own, so this was helpful in reading about the play on stage.

- * McRoberts, R. (ed.), 1994, *Wizard Study Guides – Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Wizard Books, Melbourne

This book gave me some useful ideas about society which I could then expand upon, and also some important quotes by Lawler and other critics.

- * Murdoch, W. & Drake-Brockman, H. (ed.), 1959, *Australian Short Stories*, Oxford University Press, London

This collection of 50 short stories from the period of 1920-1950 gave a very clear idea of the period. Jon Cleary's "Hullo, Joe" was of particular use in exemplifying attitudes during the war.

- * Murphy, J. Smart, J., 1997, *The Forgotten Fifties*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne

This book did not really examine the aspects which I was studying, but I was able to get some useful information from it, and also a general overview of the 1950s.

National Museum of Australia, Canberra, visited 21st April, 2001.

The sections particularly on Australian "Feelings", the Depression and Wartime were helpful in accentuating various aspects of Australian society.

- * Paterson, A.B., 1987, *Poems of the Bush*, Weldon Publishing, Willoughby, NSW

I used this for my quote from "Clancy of the Overflow".

The Playwright's Intentions, <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/arts/dr-int-1.htm> (15th October 2000)

This speculated on the intentions of Lawler, which was interesting, but not very useful.

* Rees, L., 1973, *The Making of Australian Drama*, Angus and Robertson Publishers, Sydney

* Rees, L., 1978, *A History of Australian Drama*, Vol. 2, Angus and Robertson Publishers, Sydney

These two texts gave some important quotes from critics, and also discussed a little about the plays as a reflection of Australian society.

* Reid, D., 1977, *Brodie's Notes – Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Pan Books, Sydney

This book gave some aspects of Australian society reflected in Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, which I could then examine in the other two texts. It also studied the language of the play in detail.

Review of The Doll, <http://www.ramin.com.au/online/newtheatre/doll.html> (15th October 2000)

This was a very short review, and not very helpful.

Scott, D. & Dann, L., 1995, *Australia in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne

This did not examine closely the aspects which I was studying.

* Sydney Morning Herald, 1st October 2000, *Closing Ceremony of the 2000 Sydney*

Olympics <http://www.olympics.smh.com.au/news/2000/10/01/FFXLESVTRDC.html>, (15th December, 2000)

This discussed briefly the kewpie doll as an Australian icon, as seen at the Olympics Closing ceremony.

Terrill, R., 1987, *The Australians*, Simon and Schuster, New York

This book was about Australians from an American point of view, and did not specifically focus on the periods that I required.

Tudball, L. (ed.), 1988, *Australians – Our Lives Through Time* Vol. 2 (1930-today), Rigby Publishers, Melbourne

While this book had interesting points on Australian society, there was little on the aspects being studied.

Ward, R., 1964, *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, Penguin Books, Sydney.

There were ballads about various aspects of Australian society. Most were earlier than the 1930s, but Banjo Paterson's ballads in particular explored areas of Australian identity being studied.

Ward, R. & Robertson, J. (ed.), 1986, *Such Was Life* Vol. 3 (1914-1983), Alternative Publishing Company, Chippendale, Sydney

This book was helpful in developing an overview of the periods, but did not have specific information on the aspects which I was studying.

Wenborn, N. (ed.), 1995, *Hamlyn Pictorial History of the Twentieth Century*, Reed International Books Limited, London

This book contained detailed year-by-year analyses, however was not specific to Australia, and could not be linked directly to Australian society.

Wilde, W.H. (ed.), 1994, *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne

There was a short section on Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, but it was not very helpful with respect to Australian society.

HSC English Extension Course 2

REFLECTION STATEMENT

Ray Lawler's *The Doll Trilogy* as a Social Timepiece

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ATTACH THIS LABEL TO THE FRONT COVER OF THE BOOK

Reflection Statement

In my Major Work, I studied Ray Lawler's *The Doll Trilogy*. The first of the trilogy, *Kid Stakes* (composed 1975), is set in Australia in 1937 - post-Depression, pre-World War Two and *Other Times* (1976), in 1945 - post-war. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1955) is set in 1953 - the period of "settling down", and immigration. My purpose was therefore to explore the extent to which *The Doll Trilogy* is a reflection of Australian society, and to present a convincing, thorough and well-evidenced report discussing the conclusions which I reached.

The intended audience is educated adults, composed primarily of those interested in theatre, and probably of Australian descent. This audience had a significant effect on the composition of the Major Work. The investigation had to be thorough, and all claims substantiated, as I could assume that they would have some knowledge of the periods. At the same time, however, I could not assume that this audience was familiar with the plays, so I needed to clearly explain any specific incidents being discussed.

My experiences in other English courses have significantly influenced both the topic and composition of my Major Work. In the Preliminary Extension One course, I examined Eugene O'Neill's modern drama *Mourning Becomes Electra*, studying how the play reflects social attitudes. This study sparked my interest in the concept of drama as a social representation, and led to my choice of investigation for this Major Work. The HSC Extension One course involved study of the individual and society in literature, which also forms the focus of this Major Work. In HSC Advanced English, I studied *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* as a reflection of modern society. This assisted me in drawing similar parallels in *The Doll Trilogy*.

There were two main areas of independent investigation: Australian society from the 1930s to the 1950s, and the three plays themselves. When conducting research into Australian

society over the periods of the three plays, I read both non-fiction and fiction texts, viewed visual texts and visited the Australian National Museum in Canberra. Investigation of the plays included reading critical analyses and play reviews of *The Doll Trilogy* and watching the play *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. Through this research I gained a thorough knowledge of the periods and plays.

I incorporated the results of my investigation into the Major Work through quotations from these texts, as evidence for the statements that I made. For example, I could quote fiction texts - primary sources from the period - as examples of prevalent social views and values. Quotations by drama critics, found in critical analyses and play reviews, were useful as evidence concerning *The Doll Trilogy* itself. Pictorial texts, including photographs of "typical" Australian suburbs, advertisements and war-time propaganda posters, were of particular use in emphasising the link between the plays and their social context, as the visual aspects of drama are highly significant.

After the independent investigation was completed, I planned a general outline of the form of the report, separating the material into different sections. I dealt with each section separately, analysing and synthesising the information to produce the first draft. I conducted further investigations to refine specific details. After a number of revisions, the final draft was complete.

The language used in the Major Work, the language of academic discourse, was appropriate to a report. This entails formal language, with use of the third person and passive tense throughout. Through the writing of the Major Work and the reading of other literary reports, such as critical analyses of *The Doll Trilogy*, I learnt much about the language and form of an academic report, and developed my skills in this area.

The structure is that of a written report, with five main headings and twelve sub-headings referring to the different aspects of society being studied. This structure was of particular use throughout the composition of the Major Work, as I could research and write each section independently. Within each section all three plays of the trilogy were discussed, ensuring that the plays, as well as the societies which they represented, could be contrasted with one another. I retained the headings in the final product for clarity and ease of reference.

The most important concept realised throughout the production of the final product forms the conclusion. I had expected to find that the entire trilogy significantly reflects its social settings. While composing the Major Work, however, I discovered that although *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is far better known than its companion plays, it is least representative of the social mores of its setting. This led me to consider the possible reasons for this difference.

As well as reaching this conclusion, I learnt much through my independent investigations. When beginning the research for my Major Work, I knew very little about Australian society from 1937 to 1953. In particular, I thought that there was very little change in social climate and social attitudes over this period. Through detailed research, however, I have learnt that while many Australian icons and images were common to the three periods, views of marriage, women and the working class changed considerably over the two decades. My research also highlighted the importance of national and international events, particularly the Depression and the Second World War, in shaping Australian society. As well as challenging my existing ideas, my investigations also highlighted aspects of Australian society of which I was previously unaware. I gained a broader understanding of the chosen periods, including the concept of "suburbia" and the place of certain Australian "icons" - the kewpie doll, alcohol and the bushman.

I also learnt much through my study of *The Doll Trilogy* itself. Upon first reading the plays, I was unable to appreciate some of the subtle themes and social comments. These included the language of the characters, and the attitude of anti-intellectualism. My research provided insight into these areas.

My undertaking of the Extension Two course, and the production of the Major Work has been very enlightening. I have gained a much better understanding of drama and Australian social history, particularly of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s - decades which shaped Australia's identity. Through the process, I have also developed skills in extended composition and academic discourse.