

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

IMAGES AND VISIONS OF SOCIETY IN THE SELECTED FICTION
OF THREE NEW ZEALAND WRITERS

A thesis presented in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Philosophy at
Massey University

Shelagh Frances Cox
1981

But man is not an abstract being, squatting
outside the world.

Karl Marx:
'A Contribution to the Critique
of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'
1843.

ABSTRACT

Images and visions of New Zealand society, as they appear in selected works of fiction by John A. Lee, Frank Sargeson and Robin Hyde, are the prime concern of the thesis. The fiction selected for analysis broadly encompasses the decade 1930 to 1940.

The dominant image is of New Zealand as the respectable society. However, Lee, Sargeson and Hyde emotionally reject the bourgeois-puritan world they portray in their fiction; all three writers seek alternative societies in which the human qualities they see as denied in bourgeois-puritan life can find expression. The world of the dispossessed, a world seen particularly clearly in the light of the deprivation of the Depression, plays a large part in the fictional images cast by each writer; sometimes it is depicted as a world separated from the respectable society, sometimes it is depicted as a world inevitably locked into the dominant and respectable way of life. However, none of the three writers can find an imaginative resting-place in the world of the dispossessed as an alternative way of life.

Furthermore, the writers cannot extend their images of society as they experience it into a Utopian vision of an ideal society which is attainable within the existing social structure. The failure to create a practicable alternative persists in spite of a powerful interest, shared by all three writers, in the social world as they feel it ought to be as well as in the social world as it is.

In their quest for alternatives, two of the three writers create visions of potential societies, that is of societies seen as lying beyond the boundaries of the existing social structure. These are not realisable Utopias, as they would be if they were practicable alternatives; instead, they are wish-fulfilment Utopias. In other words they are compensatory in that they embody values repressed in orthodox society.

The analytical approach adopted in the thesis consistently views

both images and visions of the writers' imagined worlds as either direct or indirect portrayals of the New Zealand society to which the writers belong and which, in the end, shapes their fictional creations. Ultimately, it is argued, the writers' Utopias, like their images of existing society, lack the imaginative and social strength to stand on their own.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Professor Graeme S. Fraser, head of the Sociology Department at Massey University. From the beginning he encouraged me to do what I wanted to do. He edited each draft with a constructive ruthlessness combined with sensitivity as I worked towards a clearer view of my subject. His trust and his determination underlie the thesis as it appears here.

To my other supervisor, Dr Peter R. Beatson, of the Sociology Department, I am grateful for the rigour he brought to a shared interest in the interconnections between sociology and literature. His help in structuring the thesis was invaluable; his ability to see ways of introducing shape and order helped me to turn impressions into argument.

I am indebted to members of the Sociology, History, English and Anthropology Departments at Massey University for the mutual generation of ideas, particularly in the early stages; I am indebted to students and staff in the History Department for allowing me to try out ideas at a later stage. I am particularly indebted to colleagues in the Sociology Department for their support and to Jill Cheer who typed the thesis.

Finally I thank my husband and three children for their interest, their help and their understanding.

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	vii
Chapter I THE RESPECTABLE SOCIETY	1
Chapter II THE IMAGE-MAKING TASK	10
Chapter III THE BACKGROUND OF THE IMAGE	29
Chapter IV THE EXTENSION OF VISION	39
Chapter V THE WORLD OF THE DISPOSSESSED	50
Chapter VI THE SEARCH FOR A NEW ZEALAND UTOPIA	78
Chapter VII UTOPIA AS WISH-FULFILMENT	89
Chapter VIII CONCLUSION	114
BIBLIOGRAPHY	119