Title

'Stepping out of the Shadows': an examination of female larrikins in Melbourne and the influence of popular culture on their behaviour (1878-1888); an Exegesis and Documentary Theatre play, 'Flash Donahs'.

by

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Abstract:

This thesis is a two-part practice-based research project comprised of a Documentary Theatre play-script, 'Flash Donahs', and an accompanying exegesis, entitled, 'Stepping out of the Shadows': an examination of female larrikins in Melbourne and the influence of popular culture on their behaviour (1878-1888)'. This thesis is also comprised of a live performance and recording of 'Flash Donahs' (20/4/18).

Despite the best efforts of a patriarchal 'Victorian-era' society to suppress female dissent and activism, the defiant and often confronting behaviour of larrikin women was a contributing social factor in the struggle for increased equality for women. 'Flash Donahs' embodies and performs the research undertaken into the lives of female larrikins. The Exegesis elucidates the choices taken in the construction of the play and provides an historical perspective to the research It also evaluates the use of Documentary Theatre when re-presenting archival artefacts in a contemporary theatrical context. Contrary to the derisive content of contemporary publications such as the *Bulletin*, young women were active participants in larrikin culture, and not merely the property of male larrikins (Bellanta 2012).

In recent years, the work of Australian historians, particularly that of Melissa Bellanta, have initiated a change in our awareness of female larrikins by revealing that they were not simply subordinates of their male counterparts. Bellanta's work, *Larrikins: A History (2012)* has informed the analytical and creative components of my thesis by showing that amidst the everyday aspects of their lives, young larrikin women were active participants in a broader struggle for female emancipation. 'Flash Donahs' is a re-presentation of gender-related issues in Melbourne during 1878-1888, and of two significant events[1] affecting women during this

[1] The two events were; the formation (1883/1884) of the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne (and the subsequent labour strike over poor pay and conditions for female 'piece-workers'); and the 1886 'Early-Closing' riots in the inner-suburbs of Melbourne (over the failure of shop-keepers, after a Royal Commission, to implement changes to the working conditions of their employees).

period. In order to accentuate the female characters chosen to 'people' the world of the play, an all-female cast playing all the roles (including male roles), has been utilized. The characters in the play are based on actual people and events. They are mostly strong and independent women from a broad cross-section of life, including from the religious sector. They highlight the often oppressive socio-economic and cultural factors affecting young larrikin women from this period, and their responses to critical social issues such as inequality in the workplace and danger in the family environment. Because of the significant influence of popular culture in reinforcing gendered social values, their lives are shown in a theatrical and performative context using aspects of Victorian-era melodrama and burlesque (Bellanta 2012).

Drawing upon a diverse range of archival sources and material, the research methodology was the creation of a Documentary Theatre play featuring popular songs and music. 'Verbatim' material was incorporated into the playscript but this was often disassembled and then used in a different setting. Wherever possible, the structure and syntax of the original textual material has been kept intact, even when using the technique of bricolage to construct dialogue between characters. The Exegesis situates 'Flash Donahs' within the history of Documentary Theatre, and also positions itself in relation to recent examples of the genre. Its aim is to examine and present new information about female larrikins and to do so in the context of feminist history, including recent feminist theatre practice. Within this practice, female writers, performers and producers have sought to highlight the roles played by women throughout history. It has also been argued that feminist theatre offers an opportunity to reverse the historical marginalization of women. .

Victoria University

Doctor of Philosophy Student Declaration

‘I, Graeme John Dale, declare that the PhD thesis entitled,

'Stepping out of the Shadows': an examination of female larrikins in Melbourne and the influence of popular culture on their behaviour (1878-1888); an exegesis and documentary theatre play, ‘Flash Donahs’,

is no more than 40,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.’

Signature: Date:

‘I hereby release the University from any responsibility should the nominated examiners adversely appraise the thesis’.

Signature: Date:

Acknowledgments

I would firstly like to acknowledge the College of Arts and Education for providing me with a place at Victoria University. I would also like to thank the staff at the Office of Researcher Training, Quality and Integrity, particularly Ms Parisima Nassirnia.

As I have been a PhD candidate for longer than would normally be the case I have had a number of different Associate Supervisors. They were the erudite Emeritus Professor John McLaren (dec.), Dr. Paola Bilbrough, and Associate Professor Robert de Young. Lastly, and quite late in the scheme of things, Dr. Jay Thompson (who has kindly helped me get to the finish line). As well as her generosity as a supervisor, Dr. Bilbrough provided support and care through her involvement in the academic support program for creative PhD students at Victoria University, for which I am very grateful.

Importantly, in my extended period of time at this university, I have had only one Principal Supervisor, Dr. Karina Smith, and I am fortunate that this has been so. Dr. Smith's knowledge and advice has always been timely and incisive and I have been very fortunate to work with her. Her patience and forbearance have also been greatly appreciated and I would like to offer my sincere thanks for her support.

I would also like to thank La Mama Theatre Inc. for giving me the opportunity to do a full performance season of the creative component of my PhD, 'Flash Donahs'. Thank-you to Ms. Liz Jones and to Ms. Caitlin Dullard for doing so.

Thanks for the love and support given by my family, particularly my sisters, Elaine and Pamela. I would also like to offer my grateful appreciation for the invaluable support (particularly during the La Mama season), provided by my friend, Mr. John Penman.

Introduction:

Discovering larrikins

My interest in larrikins began in the mid-1980s, but my affection for parts of Melbourne's inner-suburbs (Carlton, Richmond, Fitzroy and Collingwood, in particular) goes back further than that. I grew up in the inner-suburbs of Melbourne in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1960s, every Sunday morning, the local Salvation Army band would arrive in force in the car-park of the Housing Commission flats in Northcote (next to Merri Creek) where we lived, to play and sing for the benefit of our immortal souls, while I watched in fascination from my window. My affection for the earnest nature of their preaching was probably formed then. I did not go down and join in; they were too different from anything I had ever encountered in church. I was brought up in the religion of my father: the congregation of the Church of England, where we kept our singing strictly indoors.

One of my fondest memories from the early 1970s was living in an old double-story bluestone building in Union Street in the suburb of Richmond, one of the first areas settled after the foundation of the City of Melbourne in 1835. The building I lived in was the first police station in Richmond. From the tower atop the building, looking down at what later became known as Punt Road, the police constables could see down to the Yarra River and observe anyone taking the punt service to the other side.

Later, I read a number of fascinating accounts of the rivalry that existed between the Salvation Army and the so-called 'Skeleton Armies' of Melbourne. In direct opposition to the Salvation Army, the 'Skeletons' originated in England but were quickly embraced by local larrikins ('The Skeleton Army', *Brisbane Courier* 23/4/1883, p.2; 'The Skelton Army', *Evening News* 29/3/1883, p.4). Young male and female larrikins would gather together in

large numbers and make life as difficult as possible for Army members. A favourite location was Queensberry Street, which runs from the Royal Exhibition Buildings in Carlton to North Melbourne (where the 'Hotham Corps' of the Salvation Army would conduct their public meetings). Gaudily dressed crowds of larrikin 'roughs' (on one occasion between two to three thousand), would gather to dress up in outrageous fancy dress, sing lewd versions of Salvation Army hymns, charge at the Army cadres and pelt them with anything that came to hand. Scene Eleven of 'Flash Donahs' is built around these encounters and the resentment that was displayed by larrikins toward the Salvation Army. Their ill-will was shared by the various church denominations, civic authorities and other respectable citizens of Melbourne (Ussher 1985, pp. 133-134). It is very surprising that this extraordinary behaviour could be completely forgotten. I was not able to look at the quiet and respectable streets of inner-suburban Melbourne in the same way again.

But, it was apparent that something was missing from amongst these reports. And that is, we do not hear from the women who were 'in the thick of it'. An emphasis on the actions of young female larrikins in *Larrikins: A History* (Bellanta 2012) encouraged me to consider a theatrical creative project as a mean of having them 'step forward'.

Documentary Theatre background

In 1999, I directed a revival of the John Romeril play, 'Carboni'[2] (1980), at the Courthouse Theatre in Carlton. Raffaello Carboni was at the Eureka Stockade in 1854 and wrote the only first-hand account of the 1854 revolt by the gold-miners of Ballarat. It was my first experience with a Documentary Theatre play. Carboni's book, *The Eureka Stockade* (1855), was used as verbatim source material. Music, songs and various pieces of comic 'business'

[2] Not published.

were added to the content of the book to augment the text and develop the theatricality of the play. This included using a three-piece band on-stage playing an original musical score.

In 2006, as part of the requirements for a post-graduate diploma in theatre and drama, I wrote and co-produced the script for a short film about this topic, which featured a female larrikin bragging about going 'on the bounce'[3] at a local pub after being flooded out of her house on a flood- prone area in the suburb of Collingwood, known euphemistically as 'Mud Island' or the 'Collingwood Flat' (McConville 1985, pp. 72-76). The character in the film was played by a woman when, in fact, the original letter was written by one male larrikin to another. Later, as part of my Honours year in 2007, I wrote a Documentary Theatre play based on the letters of the artist, Theodore Penleigh Boyd. There were seventeen letters in all that were obtained from the War Museum in Canberra. As with the script of 'Carboni', I added some non-naturalistic action to the disclosure of the letters in order to present the archival material theatrically.

It was something of a revelation to discover that there is a significant body of academic interest in exploring and expanding the parameters of this theatre genre. It was fascinating to note that many Documentary Theatre plays utilized traditional theatre practices. In fact, many of the plays I have seen (including those that were staged in large mainstream theatre venues, in contrast to smaller or less traditional theatre sites), could now be classified as Documentary Theatre. In an historically based play such as 'Flash Donahs' there are contending factors to consider; but, as Stephen Bottoms suggests, we must ensure that we are always 'reminding audiences that history itself is necessarily complex, uncertain, and always already theatricalized' (Bottoms 2006, p. 67).

[3] Refusing to pay for drinks.

Creative Component: Research question and Scope of the Thesis

To what extent, in the period 1878-1888, did the participation of women within Melbourne larrikin gangs (or 'Push'); challenge an established and restrictive order of gender relations in Australia, and within the Push? Can a Documentary Theatre play (utilizing a practice-based research approach based on historical documents), be used to theatrically re-present the lives of young larrikin women.

The creation of any play that is based on factual material is an experimental process. According to Skains: 'We experiment with our art in order to push boundaries, to ask questions, to learn more about our art and our role within it' (2018, p. 86). In practice-based research, Candy & Edmonds propose that the questions that need to be asked are, 'Where do ideas emerge, how does the imagined work translate into the final artefact, how do the artists' thoughts and experiences shape the creative work' (Candy & Edmonds 2018, p. 88).

Practice-based research (in this case, a Documentary Theatre play) is a unique mode of explorative research, adding to existing knowledge by incorporating the creative output of the project (in this case, a playscript plus a recorded live performance[4]), as a representation of the findings of that research (Candy & Edmonds 2018, p. 63). The 'newly constructed creative artefact' (as in the case of 'Flash Donahs'), becomes the primary source of any new contribution to knowledge. This contrasts with 'practice-led' research, where the desired outcome is an original understanding or application of the 'practice' itself. The term practice means, 'the actual application or use of an idea, belief or method, as opposed to theories relating to it' (p. 64).

[4] A full recording of a live performance of 'Flash Donahs' can be found on 'Youtube': **https://youtu.be/HpOKHBLvjeY**

Original primary research[5] into the interrelationship between larrikin girls and the figure of the Salvation Army's 'Hallelujah Lass', as well as the published diaries of Dr John Singleton, has been interpolated into 'Flash Donahs'. Extensive research into the theatre culture of the day has provided new insights into 'female to male' cross-dressing performers. The stylised performances in a number of scenes have been directly inspired by the results of that research.

A lengthy investigation into the factors affecting young larrikin women was an essential step in deciding upon the structure of 'Flash Donahs'. This is demonstrated in the development of the characters which originated from research into press publications of the day. The young larrikin girl as 'social activist' has not, to the best of my knowledge, been represented on-stage, yet we know that they would have actively been contributing. Certainly, there are reports of actions by the members of the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne and we see their names in newspaper 'Trades Hall' reports of attendees at meetings, but we do not hear their voices. There are a number of other new representations of young larrikin females in 'Flash Donahs'. They are the 'pugilists' (young women fighting against gendered expectations), and a principal character (Cecilia Anthony), desperate to break free of domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

In *Recovering History through Fact and Fiction: Forgotten Lives*, Donna Lee Brien describes 'Speculative Biography' as a form of writing that 'proclaims the central role of authorial interpretation in biographical writing'. Brien proposes that our knowledge of the past can be dependent upon the minutiae contained in historical documents that 'embellishing' the narrative (based on the author's knowledge of a period of history), has the potential to provide an understanding of the characters within it (Brien 2017, pp. 15-22). This was

[5] That expanded on the principal aspects of Bellanta's research in, *Larrikins: A History* (2012).

certainly the case when using archival material from a variety of sources[6] to create 'composite' characters.

Timothy Youker refers to what can occur when the meaning previously ascribed to an archival source of data is modified (if it is used in a different context) as being, 'at the point where theories of signification in documentary media intersect with critical readings of avant-garde collage and photomontage' (Youker 2018, p. 11). By this he is alluding to a long-held belief that Documentary Theatre is shaped by the overlapping of archival data sources in order to create a 'three-dimensional' construct (Nussbaum 1981, pp. 239-240). Every aspect of the form may not be present but there is enough of the structure present (in theatrical terms) to facilitate the growth of character or narrative 'actions'.

In this case, the shaping of the final 'artefact' was an accumulative, indirect and often fragmentary process. The play's narrative was based on a utilitarian methodology; in that, the play needed a structure (when appropriate) for the characters to operate within. The question of whether larrikin behaviour was influenced by popular male and female stage personae, including female to male cross-dressers was successfully answered (in the context of the play), by the regular use of songs, music and the broad re-imagining of the performance styles of the period.

The history of larrikins in Australia

Male and female larrikins faced similar economic circumstances, including poverty and associated class discrimination. The history of the larrikin in Australia during 1878 to 1888 is rich and varied. Within this history there were distinctly different contributions made by male and female larrikins. Importantly, it was also a time of change, particularly for young women, who were beginning to expand their opportunities in life, beyond the constraints and strictures

[6] Such as combining sentences or phrases into the speech or commentary of another stage character.

of the domestic environment (either in the family home, as daughter or wife, or as a servant in a non-working-class household). It may be a truism to say that women and men experienced life differently in Melbourne in the 1880s, but it must be said. This is because, in the Australia of 2019, the history of the larrikin remains an almost entirely masculine domain. This mono-gendered interpretation of a primary source in the development of the heroic ethos of the Australian male (and therefore, by extension, an intrinsic component of the Australian national character) continues to this day, despite the recent efforts of a number of female historians to challenge this state of affairs.

From mid-way through the nineteenth century, the term 'larrikin', has been strongly associated with an Australian concept of masculinity. It has acquired an affectionate place in the Australian lexicon (Bellanta 2012, p. xii). Males of all ages have been given this epithet when demonstrating the requisite level of public outrageousness and bravado. Who could forget the 1983 remarks of the 'Silver Bodgie': Prime Minister Bob Hawke (televised nationally in Australia on 23/9/1983), after the Australian yacht, 'Australia 2', won the 'America's Cup' yacht race). 'I tell you what', Hawke said to an adoring crowd of well-wishers, 'any boss who sacks anyone for not turning up today is a bum!' Or, the taunting arrogance of Australian cricketer Shane Warne's 'victory dance' (standing on the balcony outside the players' change-room, overlooking a crowd of Australian fans), at Trent Bridge[7] cricket ground in 1997.

In Bellanta's opinion, the term larrikin plays a large part in how Australians view themselves because, 'to be a larrikin is to be sceptical and irreverent, to knock authority and mock pomposity (p. xii). I will look briefly at some aspects of the development of the male larrikin persona and how it has been accorded a place in the Australian cultural pantheon. The larrikin's reputation has grown and changed over the decades and it has become firmly

[7] Trent Bridge cricket ground is located In Nottingham, United Kingdom.

ensconced in how Australians discuss and evaluate their national identity, or at least those male Australians of a white, Anglo-Saxon heritage.

Henry Lawson was the champion of the Australian colonial 'Coming-Man' and the 'Lone Hand' (Lake 1986, pp. 116-117), and had no misgivings about the future of the young Australian. There can no doubt of Lawson's affection for the larrikin male, when we read his description of a literary figure he created, 'Billy Anderson'. Billy is a character in the short story *Jones Alley,* which was published in a series of short stories by Lawson entitled, *While the Billy Boils: 2nd series* (1896), and set in a run-down part of old Sydney. Along with the members of his 'Push' (a group of larrikins), Billy comes to the aid of his impoverished neighbour, Mrs Aspinall, a destitute and careworn woman with a clutch of children to support and a drunken husband to contend with. In the dead of night, to avoid the unfeeling bailiffs that will soon appear at her door to evict her, Billy and his pals help remove all of the family's meagre belongings from out of the run-down hovel they rent. Lawson clearly admired his fictional creation and perhaps considered him to be a worthy role model for other young Australians struggling to survive in an uncaring world. To Lawson, the typical larrikin was a 'cut above' the people around him,

> He was one of those sharp, blue or grey-eyed, sandy or freckled complexioned boys-of-the-world whom we meet everywhere and at all times, who are always going on towards twenty, yet never seem to get clear out of their teens, who know more than most of us have forgotten, who understand human nature instinctively - perhaps unconsciously - and are instinctively sympathetic and diplomatic; whose satire is quick, keen, and dangerous, and whose tact is often superior to that of many educated men-of-the-world. Trained from childhood in the great school of poverty, they are full of the pathos and humour of it (Lawson 1896, qtd, in *Prose Works of Henry Lawson* (1935), p. 169).

We can also speculate on the 'larrikin streak' (Bellanta 2012, p. xii) that Australians supposedly possess and what this has meant in the formation of the 'Anzac' legend. In *Bad Characters: Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force* (2010), Peter

Stanley claims that Charles Bean, as the 'creator and guardian of the Anzac legend, thought that the adulation of the larrikin went too far'. This included a tendency to celebrate 'the life of the "dinkum Aussie" as one of drunkenness, thieving and hooliganism' (Stanley 2010, p. 241). By the time the last Anzac died in 2002, the larrikin myth had become entrenched within the Anzac legend. In his sentimental celebration *The Spirit of the Digger*[8], Lindsay identifies 'larrikinism' as part of 'the essence of the spirit'. Respectful, even reverential, Lindsay and other adulatory writers either portray Australian misbehaviour as benign larrikinism or ignore it altogether. This sentimentality is far removed from the tough reality of the original Sydney 'pushes', or the estaminets[9] and billets of France (Stanley 2010, p. 241).

Origin of the term, 'larrikin'

There are a number of different stories about the origin of the word 'larrikin'. Bellanta's detailed study of the varied origins of the term has traced its beginnings (and the regular use of the word 'larrikin' in 'the colonies'), to a newspaper article from 1870[10] (Bellanta 2012, p. 3). Bellanta also speaks of a 'lack of reliable evidence' in the 'luxuriance of DIY etymology' when discussing the origins of 'larrikin', but is confident the term was a broadly-based 'dialect word' from England that was carried to the Australian colonies on ships from an earlier time (pp. xviii-xix).

During my research I encountered the first of a series of four lengthy articles from early 1882 on the invidiousness nature of 'larrikinism' (entitled 'Larrikinism 1')[11]. The *Argus* newspaper speculated that the term larrikin originated from the word 'lerichaun', which itself was apparently 'a corruption of the word leprechaun – an Irish fairy of a very slippery character'. It was also proposed that the word may have been created by a police constable: a Sergeant

[8] *The Spirit if the Digger: Then and Now* (2003), in Stanley 2010, p. 241.
[9] A small French bar or café
[10] 'A Night at the Lock-up', *Age* 7/2/1970, p. 3
[11] The author of this article also believed that 'many explanations are offered' as to where the term originated ('Larrikinism No. 1', *Argus* 18/1/1882, p. 6

Dalton is credited with using the words ‘larriking about’ in the Melbourne Police Court, as a conjoining of the words ‘larking’ and ‘frolicking’[12]. Social pundits from this time believed that the term larrikin was a ‘corruption of the well-known slang term "leary kid". In support of this theory there is the fact that amongst our criminal population it is not and never was, pronounced “larrikin", but always "leary kin" (‘Larrikinism No. 1’, *Argus* 18/1/1882, p. 6).

Bellanta also makes a strong case against the word ‘Donah’ (or young woman), being in widespread use during the 1880s and is adamant that the use of the word was widely popularised in the press from the early 1890s onwards. The portrayal of a dour, badly-dressed larrikiness towering over her weedy, arrogant and often violent male counterpart (in publications such as the *Bulletin* and the *Melbourne Punch),* were mischievous and inaccurate representations,

> Any account of larrikin girls which relies on turn-of-the-century cartoons and fictions which were themselves heavily dependent on Tivoli larrikin acts and stage-Cockney songs must now be taken with a pinch of salt (Bellanta 2012, p. 38).

In defence of the use of the word ‘donah’ in ’Flash Donahs’, may I mention (as a very thin piece of evidence), that the song ‘Never introduce your Donah to a Pal’, (A.E. Durandeau and Albert E. Ellis), a jaunty and engaging music-hall favourite, was published in London by Charles Sheard between 1887 and 1890 (National Library of Australia Catalogue: Bib. ID: 2844580). I could have chosen ‘clinah’ or ‘bart’ (presumably, to rhyme with ‘tart’), but neither choice has the same resonance. The combination of ‘flash’ and ‘donah’ has more symmetry than ‘flash bart’ or ‘flash clinah’. Also, the text attached to a drawing in *Melbourne Punch by* Thomas Carrington mentions a larrikin with ‘a new dona’ (‘The language of the larrikin’, *Melbourne Punch* (1874), in Lindesay 1970, p. 9).

[12] Bellanta also mentions Sergeant Dalton as an often quoted source of the term (Bellanta 2012, p. xix).

Construction of Femininity in 19th Century Australia

It was not uncommon to see images of Australian woman-hood in the Colonial press comprised of symbols of purity and virtue. For young larrikin women, the inherent standards commonly displayed in these images were, in all likelihood, unattainable and distant. They served a dual purpose. Not only were they representations of Australia's solidarity with the rest of the British Empire but they also served as part of a broader hegemonic practice; as an example of what was considered an appropriate standard of behaviour for young women.

As Cindy McCreery puts it,

> Women played an important role as social gatekeepers. ... interest in [and concern about] women's social influence insured a constant stream of commentary on female behaviour in the colonial press (McCreery 2013, p. 439).

Although it falls outside the period of research, the press coverage of the extended visit to Australia by the Prince of Wales in 1867/8 is an interesting example of the commentary McCreery is referring to. An unsuccessful assassination attempt on the Prince's life ensured that the visit was widely covered by the press. As part of their efforts to build an appropriate level of patriotic and regal fervour, publications such as *Melbourne Punch* and *Sydney Punch* regularly used images of young, modest and classically dressed women as representations of the Australian Colonies. The images suggested, 'Britannia, the much-admired symbol of both the British state, and its tradition of political independence and liberty' (p. 441). The female body was freely interpreted as a symbol of the socialized chastity inherent in their demonstrated obeisance to the Queen of England and the Empire. In doing so they reinforced the strongly held belief that the correct course for young women to follow was that of supplicant to the male figure. The social proposition most likely to be put forward was that the correct place for young women was in the home, serving their parents, or as a wife, serving their husband. Commentary on the emotional weakness of women also appeared

during the coverage of the assassination attempt. There were written accounts of 'overwrought' and emotional female responses at the scene of the shooting. Afterwards, *Sydney Punch* published an image entitled 'Australia Videx' showing a bare-breasted 'bloodthirsty-looking hag' one hand gripping the assassin tightly by the throat and a length of rope in the other, ready for a hanging (pp. 445-458).

Miriam Dixson, in *The Real Matilda, Women and Identity in Australia – 1788 to the present* (1976), bluntly proposes that a discussion about the role of the working-class woman in the shaping of our national identity is nonsense. This is because a female working-class presence in the debate would not have been identified, except by 'inference' (Dixson 1976, p. 78). Dixson strongly believes that 'those on the top rungs of the status hierarchy' disallowed the casual working poor the opportunity to advance out of poverty and uncertainty. The acceptance of the status quo meant an inevitable devaluing of the lives of the working-class. Regrettably, as Dixson proposes, there was always room for more at the bottom of the pile and it was there that working-class women would take their allotted place in society (p. 79).

Inner-suburban demography

In the latter part of the 19th century, in the years leading up to the economic depression in the early 1890s, Fitzroy acquired an unsavoury reputation that was based on the perception of the suburb as a 'slum'. Tony Birch has said that this viewpoint ensured that Fitzroy was seen as a 'locus of social evil' in the inner-suburbs of Melbourne. This perception carried over into the 20th century (Birch 2004, pp. 1-2). In Chapter Two I look at some of the circumstances behind how this reputation was earned. In the 1960s, much of Little Napier Street was claimed for the construction of a large public housing estate (which exists to this day), resulting in all of the houses shown in Figure 2.1 being demolished.

A short exploration of the demography of Melbourne's inner-suburbs may assist the reader in their understanding of the larrikin. In Scene Four of 'Flash Donahs' the action is set in a Little Napier Street opium-den in Fitzroy, one of the earliest settled areas of Melbourne (Barrett 1971, pp. 14-36). Later, in Scene Ten, the focus of the play moves to an area of open ground in an area bordering Fitzroy and Collingwood. Figure 2.1 is a north-facing photograph of Little Napier Street (taken around 1910), near the intersection of Gertrude Street. The street ended at the intersection with Webb Street. The bluestone paving along this narrow street can be seen clearly. The houses are close together and there are factories among them, such as 'White's Boot Factory' (on the left). Little Napier Street ran parallel with Brunswick Street on the western side and Napier Street to the east.

It is easy to assume that the population of the inner-suburbs was solely of Anglo-Saxon heritage, and this is largely the case, as can be seen from the history of migration in this country. A 1989 study of the birthplace of parents in the suburb of South Melbourne during the 1880s confirms that the largest component of the population were from the United Kingdom (approximately 60%), with over 30% originating from within Victoria and the other Australian Colonies (Beer, Fahey, Grimshaw & Raymond 1989, pp. 92-93). However, commenting on this predominance can obscure the fact that indigenous Australians were the original residents of Melbourne and strongly maintain their presence to this day.

In relation to the Fitzroy area, Bronwyn Fredericks alerts us to the on-going indigenous connection to the land on which the laneways and streets of this area are placed, as was the case in the 1880s, providing 'messages of belonging and welcome or exclusion and domination' (Fredericks 2013, p. 6). People from countries other than the United Kingdom also migrated to the Australian Colonies, including what was then known as the British West Indies. .

One instance this migration involved the case of two 'half-caste' boys being brought to court as 'neglected children'. Their names were George Johnston and Thomas Johnston, which immediately caught my attention (because of the surname), and I carefully read the remainder of the lengthy description of the court proceedings. Apparently the boy's deceased father was employed as a private secretary to David Henderson, an African-Jamaican man also colloquially referred to as 'Henderson Africanus' ('Neglected Children', *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier* 30/6/1883, p. 2). David Henderson immigrated to Australia in 1865 and moved into Gertrude Street in Fitzroy. He established himself as a celebrated political pundit commenting widely on the events of the day. Henderson also spoke of a community of Jamaicans (we're not told how many there were), who lived in and around Fitzroy and Collingwood (Smith K 2014, p. 14).

Structure of the Exegesis

Chapter One contains a broad account of the world of male and female larrikins. Newspaper reports indicate there was a noticeable rise in larrikin criminal behaviour during the 1880s and, as a consequence, there was a reciprocal and determined effort to eradicate the threat of the 'larrikin menace'. The underpinning tenet of this exegesis is that, just like their male counterparts, young larrikin women contributed to the development of larrikin culture. It is impossible to consider the influence of one without the other. A discussion about the origins of the word, 'larrikin', is also included.

In Chapter Two, I propose that there were parts of public life in which women could openly challenge the dominant masculinist values of this period. I look at a variety of important gender-based issues, including what the renowned historian Marilyn Lake has described as the 'men's press'. The role of women in the formation of Australia was publicly discussed. The press played a large part in perpetuating female cultural stereotypes (based on a model of

chastity, modesty and service), and were quick to condemn any form of aberrant female behaviour. The extent to which popular culture influenced female and male larrikins (Bellanta 2012), and a description of the stage work of three prominent female actors (renowned for their on-stage portrayals of young males), is included. The formation of the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne in December 1882, and the 'Early Closing' street demonstrations in Melbourne in April, 1986, are also looked at in detail.

What is meant by the term, Documentary Theatre? Chapter Three does not attempt to define the different formats of this genre (because that has been undertaken elsewhere[13]), but instead to focus on its origins. Creative decision-making choices are the focus of this chapter, particularly those made by two Documentary Theatre makers: *version 1.0* and Alex Ferguson. Broadly speaking, their plays share a similarity with my own writing and my efforts as a theatre director. By this I am referring to the theatrical methodology they employ when comprising and presenting their work. They have been unabashed about making creative and theatrical decisions when the need to do so presented itself.

In Chapter Four I examine how feminist theatre has been defined over recent years, particularly in relation to feminist issues in historically-based plays. The chapter begins with my thoughts about the search for suitable archival material. The question of how characters are used in a Documentary Theatre play is also looked at in some detail, particularly the way that the composite characters in 'Flash Donahs' were constructed. The term 'composite' in this case alludes to the practice of combining various pieces of data (some of which may be directly related to the theme of the play, and some that are not), in order to create a theatrical character. I also look closely at Feminist Theatre practice and some of the contemporary

[13] For a definition of 'Verbatim Theatre' and 'Tribunal Theatre' (also known as Theatre of Testimony), see *Documentarism on Stage: Documentary Theatre in New Times (*Paget 2008, pp. 129-141. For a definition of the increasingly popular Documentary Theatre format, 'Headphone Verbatim Theatre', see *'Headphone Verbatim Theatre: Methods, Histories, Genres, Theories'* (Wake 2013, pp. 321-335).

definitions of the genre. As the choice of material found in the press was often centred on descriptions of female street violence, the final section of this Chapter is devoted to the representation of comedic caricatures of female violence on-stage.

As the title ‘Reflections’ suggests, in the fifth chapter, the performance season of ‘Flash Donahs’ is examined in detail. Regrettably, constraints of space did not permit me to discuss every aspect of the staging of my play and therefore I have chosen a small number of scenes (and particular actions within them), covering a wide range of theatrical techniques, to be examined fully. The discussion will include some of the staging decisions that were implemented both during rehearsal and during the performance season. Consideration is also given as to how the play might be performed by another director and/or another troupe of actors

Preface to playscript:

'Flash Donahs', was first staged by La Mama Theatre Inc. at the Courthouse Theatre in April, 2018. La Mama Theatre, in the inner-suburb of Carlton in Melbourne, was the inspiration of the Australian artist and administrator, Ms. Betty Burstall. The name 'La Mama' was inspired by the original La Mama Theatre in the city of New York. When Melbourne's La Mama opened its doors in 1967, the Australian theatre scene was in the midst of a cultural renaissance. La Mama, and Betty Burstall, became the epicentre of that renaissance, dedicating itself, as it does today, to the development of new Australian plays.

'Flash Donahs' is a work of Documentary Theatre that combines factual information from a wide variety of sources. It is primarily concerned with the life of Cecilia Anthony, and more broadly, of everyday issues affecting the lives of young larrikin women. Larrikins and larrikin gangs were seen as trouble-makers and criminals, of the lowest social order and a threat to decent people. Their flamboyant dress added to the notoriety of the gangs. But in contrast to a flamboyant masculine larrikin culture, the female larrikin was usually consigned to a shadowy background (Chris McConville 1985, Melissa Bellanta 2012).

Between 1878 and 1888, the City of Melbourne was in the midst of wide-ranging social and economic change. The discovery of gold two decades earlier and the expansion of the primary sector meant increased immigration and rapid urban expansion. Work opportunities for men, the traditional family breadwinner, were often seasonal and unpredictable and many men left their families behind to find work in regional areas. Consequently, maintaining the family unit often became the sole responsibility of women. Without the resources of a broadly applied welfare system to tackle disruptive social issues, economic growth was accompanied by changes to the cultural fabric of the city and the living conditions of the working-class, particularly women and children. Large families, alcoholism, sub-standard housing and poor

sanitation, unemployment, street crime and child neglect were all contributing factors in the rise of larrikin gangs.

The characters in the play were almost all 'real' people and many of the events in the play did occur. Cecilia Anthony, at the age of sixteen, really was dragged out of a 'disreputable' Chinese household. The matter was widely reported in the press because of the perceived scourge of the 'degraded Chinaman' (*Argus* 2/6/1880, pp. 4 -5). Cecilia had been seen smoking opium (which was quite commonplace), and when challenged to come outside steadfastly refused to return to her mother's house in Bouverie Street, Carlton. This was hardly surprising given the fact that her mother ran an 'immoral' house and that Cecilia and her younger sister Rebecca were made to live there. Edwin Peddy was indeed a reckless criminal recidivist with a penchant for robbing licensed premises. Did Cecilia and Edwin know each other or become lovers? They both moved within the local criminal underworld which would have increased the odds of having come into contact with each other, and in an area as parochial as the inner-suburbs of Carlton, Collingwood and Fitzroy who's to say they didn't?

List of characters:

Cecilia Anthony	**(CA)**	A young woman, and acquaintance of the larrikin, Edwin Peddy.
Kate Anthony	**(KA)**	'The Amazon of the Swamp', habitual criminal and mother of Cecilia Anthony.
Jennie Lee	**(JL)**	Acclaimed English stage performer, well-known for her portrayal of the character 'Jo' in the play of the same name (based on *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens).
Bessie Johnston	**(BJ)**	Member of the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne.
'Happy Dinah'	**(HD)**	Lt. Dinah Hayes of the Salvation Army
Edwin Peddy	**(EP)**	Notorious criminal and member of 'The Hoddle Street Lairies' larrikin gang.
Harriet	**(H)**	A member of the 'demi-monde'
Jane	**(J)**	A member of the 'demi-monde'
Street orator	**(SO)**	A speaker outside the Theatre Royal.
Mr Gordon	**(G)**	Secretary, Victorian Shop Employé Union
Mr Deakin	**(D)**	Victorian Member of Parliament and future Prime Minister of Australia.
A seamstress	**(S)**	A young female clothing industry worker.
A Magistrate	**(M)**	
Mr McKean	**(McK)**	A Barrister.
Constable Cane	**(CC)**	A policeman.
Elizabeth 'Curly' Fry:	**(EF)**	A larrikiness from Williamstown, aged 16.
Ettie 'Croppy' Dickens:	**(ED)**	A larrikiness from Collingwood, aged 18.
'Yorkshire Relish'	**(CG)**	Staff Captain Thomas Gibbs of the Salvation Army.
A young male larrikin	**(YML)**	
'Jo'	**(J)**	The young male street-sweeper in *Bleak House* .
Miss Stobbs	**(MS)**	A 'case-worker': Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society.

Approaching the characters:

'Flash': Ostentatious, showy, belonging to or connected with the underworld, fashionable, chic, aping the manners of one's friends.[14]

The choice of an all-female cast is an abstracted and nonrepresentational theatrical tool meant to focus the attention of the audience onto the issues faced by Cecilia Anthony and her pals. 'Flash Donahs' was originally written for five versatile actors and will involve some 'doubling-up' of roles; however this is not a hard and fast rule. If a theatre company, say a youth theatre group, has a sufficient number of female actors to undertake all roles individually then this would be very practicable.

When portraying male characters it is important not to overstate the concept of 'maleness'. We are, in fact, looking for the 'inner-man'. Far better to make use of a signifying gesture or two, specific to your exploration of the character, than to recreate the hyper- masculinity of, for example, the Australian film *The Last of the Knucklemen (*1979).[15] Achieving this goal will be greatly assisted by employing choreographed movements for the male characters that are repeated and easily recognized in a fast-paced environment. Posture and gesture become highly significant in these circumstances.

As with the female characters, look for the 'flash' qualities of the male larrikin. Their unique and peculiar clothing will be an invaluable tool for the actor. Equally as important will be the quality of the 'male' voice. It will be more appropriate and more effective to avoid focussing on a stereotypical male vocal range (such as using a lower vocal register), but to rely upon the character's motivations and intentions as a springboard into the male world (Jessica Walker, 2012). Capturing the essence of male behaviour will be a challenge for the director and each cast member. The audience will have already made a leap of faith by accepting the inherent

[14]Green, 1998 *Cassell Dictionary of Slang,* p. 425.
[15] Directed by Tim Burstall.

gender issues they encounter when viewing a female playing a male and will not welcome overstatement in the performance. They will be looking for insights, and possibly humour, in the male character's intersection with a female actor.

'Flash Donahs' occasionally draws upon the traditions of nineteenth-century melodrama. The scenes that are located 'on-stage' at the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street, for example, call for a broad, occasionally bombastic performance style. Performers during this period had a close and familial relationship with their audience. Do not be timid about coming forward to the edge of the stage, so to speak, but remember, a 'big' performance style is not the same as melodrama. It will be the task of the director to bypass long-held sentiments about this venerable performance style by respecting the capability of the modern audience (as in the 1880s), to embrace their role as 'as participants in live theatre' (Kelly, V 2000, p. 256). When approaching the more naturalistic passages in the script (such as Scene Three between Edwin Peddy and Cecilia Anthony), the company should be especially conscious of not 'acting' in a manner they think is appropriate for the period. It will be far more important to convey a clear and simple understanding of what is said.

‘Flash Donahs’

by

Graeme Dale

‘Flash Donahs’ is set in Melbourne, the capital of the Colony of Victoria. The action takes place in the suburbs of Collingwood and Fitzroy, and in the cultural and social hub of the city, Bourke Street.

Link to video-recording of performance: 20/4/18 (‘YouTube’)

https://youtu.be/HpOKHBLvjeY

Scene 1

Setting: **The stage at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne.**

Background image:

A publicity photograph of the English actress, Jennie Lee, in character as the young male street-sweeper 'Jo'.

(A black curtain extends across the stage. A single overhead light (a street lamp) comes up to reveal Jo, a character from the novel Bleak House, by Charles Dickens. Jo is dressed in rags and carries a threadbare straw broom. In silence, 'Jo' begins sweeping around his feet. He stops to extend a grimy hand towards his 'client', who has used the narrow pathway across the street that Jo has cleared with his broom. The position is held, in tableau, as the light slowly fades to black.)

End.

Scene 2

Setting: **The Salvation Army Hall in Smith St., Collingwood.**

Background image:

A photograph of Lieutenant Dinah Hayes: 'Happy Dinah', in her Salvation Army uniform.

(A young woman enters from behind the closed curtain. She is dressed in a sombre dark-coloured dress and bonnet with a large crimson-coloured sash emblazoned with the word 'RESCUE' in white lettering.)

HD: *(Building in intensity)*

Good evening, I am Lieutenant Dinah Hayes of the Salvation Army. While I awaited my moment to come forth and speak to you I recalled a little girl in Mother England asking Jesus to save her and make her good and worthy of His trust[16]. I was only fourteen when first asked to travel south to the next main town of Cheshire, from my home in Runcorn, to conduct Salvation meetings there, as a 'Special'. [17] Then, I did not know in my mind what He had for me to do in His service, but I just went on![18] I knew in my heart that our Lord Jesus had something else set aside for me to perform. I knew then that my future lay in a distant and unruly land on the other side of the world. The 'Special' I would perform was not to sing prettily for the praise of others but to take the salvation and redemption message to the needy.

(The hymn Oh, Bless His Name He Sets Me Free![19] commences (on a piano-accordion), to the tune of the popular music-hall song Champagne Charlie[20] - played quietly and sombrely in a slower tempo.)

(Half spoken/half sung -'recitative')

Comrades, I was a slave for many years, and conquered by my sin, I tried and prayed, in doubts and fears, but still was wrong within. I heard that Jesus died to save, from every sin set free, I gave up trying there and then and Oh, He Set Me Free!

(Happy Dinah exits. The song Champagne Charlie starts up at the correct tempo and with 'gusto'.)

[16] Cox 2010, p. 3
[17] p. 4
[18] p. 3
[19] *'Oh, Bless His Name He Sets Me Free'* (1882) by Salvation Army Captain, William Baugh.
[20] *'Champagne Charlie'* by George Leybourne (1866)

<u>Setting</u>: **The stage at the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street.**

(Cecilia Anthony enters and moves to Centre Stage. She has assumed the character of a tipsy, risqué gentlemen dressed in 'top hat and tails', clutching a cane in his 'paw'.)

(**Song:** *Bless His Name He Sets Me Free!*)

And now I live to God alone, I live to do His will;
I give myself to God away,
That He my soul may fill today
He takes the offering as it is,
And makes it as He will,
And through the Lamb I've constant peace,
For Jesus says "Be still!"

Oh, Bless His Name He sets me Free
Oh, Bless His Name He sets me Free
Oh the blood, the precious blood,
I'm trusting in the precious blood.

Oh, Bless His Name He sets me Free
Oh, Bless His Name He sets me Free
Oh the blood, the precious blood,
I'm trusting in the precious blood.

(Cecilia Anthony exits, curtsying and responding to applause from the audience.)

End.

Scene 3

Setting: **A shipping dock in Melbourne, perhaps the 'Turning Basin' in Flinders Street.**

Background image: 'Queen's Wharf' (1887): a painting by Ugo Catani.

(Cecilia Anthony, aged 16, is standing alone - under the same street lamp in Scene 1, looking up at a passenger ship. In the background a brass band can be heard playing a jaunty tune.)

Cecilia Anthony: *(Desperately)*

Jennie, where are you?

(The notorious Collingwood larrikin, Edwin Peddy, steps out of the shadows and takes her roughly by the arm. She struggles to free herself.)

CA:

Paws off Pompey!

Edwin Peddy:

I told yer it weren't any good but you don't listen, do yer? What does someone like that want with the likes of you? You've got nothing she needs, so she don't want yer around. (Soothingly) Everything is just a lark to these stage types Cecilia. I bet she's on the spree already with that ponce[21] Burnett[22], and forgotten all about yer.

CA: *(Struggling)*

You let go of me Edwin Peddy! She's good, I tell yer. She'd never go off without telling me. Eddy, please, let me go. I need to see her and tell her that I've changed my mind.

EP:

(Angrily) Do as I say. Yer nothing but trouble to me and yer Ma and I won't stand for anymore of your skittering. Yer need to learn some manners. *(He roughly takes her by the wrist)* Come on, it won't be good if you try and cut away![23]

[21] 'Ponce': A man living off the earnings of a prostitute (Late 19C).
[22] John Burnett, husband of Jennie Lee and the author of the play, 'Jo'
[23] 'Cut away': To leave, to run off.

CA:

I'm going on-board and yer can't stop me! Jennie, please help me!

(Edwin produces a chloroform soaked handkerchief from his pocket and roughly covers C's face. After a brief struggle she collapses against him. Pleased with his handiwork, Edwin whistles a few notes from the popular music-hall song, 'Champagne Charlie'. He puts the handkerchief away and begins to carefully rifle through her pockets. He smiles and holds up a purse: he shakes it and hears the sound of coins rattling within.)

EP:

My, my, you 'ave been a busy girl!

EP:

Come on then, Mrs Mac wants a chin-wag and she don't like to be kept waiting.

(Cecilia remains semi-conscious as she is shuffled off-stage by Edwin Peddy.)

End.

Scene 4:

<u>Background image</u>:

And when Thou comest on Thy throne,
Oh Lord, remember me.[24]

<u>Setting</u>:

The front room of an opium den in Little Napier Street, Fitzroy. A young woman (Harriet) is sitting on a chaise-lounge. Edwin Peddy enters with Cecilia Anthony; still groggy, but determined to free herself. Eddie releases his grip on her arm and she collapses onto the chaise lounge.

H:

Why d' ya have to be so rough with her Eddie? She looks like she breaks easy.

EP:

I used the chloroform like yer said; she was easy to handle. Where's her Highness?

H:

That half-wit husband of hers had some business to attend to in Fitzroy. I pity the poor bastard that tangles with him.

EP:

Shut yer gob!

Mrs Mac wants her to be looked after and that means keeping 'er 'ere until tomorrow, by any means necessary, get me?

H:

(Soothingly) Of course darling, anything you say. I have just the thing to keep our pretty Poll happy.

EP:

Just see that yer do.

[24] From the hymn, *Alas! And did my Saviour bleed, and did my Sovereign die?* (Isaac Watts: 1707)

(Edwin Peddy exits. A young woman, Jane enters with a long opium pipe and sits next to Cecilia.)

Jane:

Mr. Fong says this will give her very pleasant dreams.

(Cecilia is encouraged to inhale deeply from the pipe.)

H:

That's right darling, lie back and think of a peaceful garden full of beautiful trees and flowers.

CA:

(Drowsily) Who are you?

H:

I'm Harriet, and that's my friend Jane. We want what's best for you. Isn't that right Jane?

J:

We're your friends Cecilia.

CA:

(Groggily) I have to get to the Theatre Royal.

H:

I'm sorry dear, but Her Highness wants a word and she may not be back for some time. So you might have to 'cop the bullet'[25] this time, but don't worry, it's a good squeeze here too, right Janey?

J:

Just like bein' at the fair, Harriet.

H: *(To Cecilia)*

They don't care about yer at the Theatre Royal sweetheart; they only want to take advantage of yer special talents.

J:

That's right Harriett. But you can make things right Cecilia.

[25] Take the consequences.

H:

Mrs Mac can help you make the most of yourself.

J:

That's what she did for us.

H: *(with pathos)*

I confess that I was seduced early in life; I became a slave to strong drink and was frequently put into gaol. Mrs Mac found me wandering aimlessly along Brunswick Street and rescued me like a child lost in the bush. As we came nearer to this place I could hear the strains of Janey's favourite hymn, coming from this very room. It touched me very deeply.

CA:

Oh Harriett!

(Slight pause)

J: *(with pathos)*

I'm an orphan, Cecelia, and once had a respectable situation in a religious family, but my mistress discovered that I had been seduced by a young man in New South Wales. When Mrs Mac found me I was in the front bar at the Champion Hotel in Gertrude Street. I was not yet eighteen years of age but had already lived a wicked, reckless life, and had been in prison several times. She was like a mother to me, Cecelia.

(Smirking)

Better than a mother if the truth be known; at least she only beats me when I 'go on the dose'[26] and can't entertain the clients.

H:

Jane, tell Cecilia about your dear friend Mary. It's a terrible sad tale Cecilia. Mary spurned Mrs Mac's offer of help and Janey still hasn't forgiven herself.

J: *(Forlornly)*

Poor Mary was just seventeen when she was deceived by a promise of marriage and fell into the snare laid for her. She lost all self-respect; and, friendless and hopeless, Mary sought help at the Abbotsford Refuge but was discharged on their finding she was pregnant. When she took ill she was removed to the Lying-in-Hospital, where she and her unborn child were struck down by typhoid fever. At the very end she told Doctor Singleton that she had placed her trust in Jesus and asked, "Will He remember me?"

[26]Drink heavily.

(*Jane inhales deeply from the pipe.)*

J: *(Singing, quietly)*

Help me, Oh Saviour, Thee to own,
And ever faithful be;
And when Thou comest on Thy throne,
Oh Lord, remember me.

(Pause)

CA: *(tearfully)*

Oh, Jane, I'm so sorry for the loss of your friend!

J:

If only she had listened to Mrs Mac she would still be with us today.

H:

Mrs Mac's goodness has saved many a destitute soul from the precipice.

CA:

You are both so good.

J:

You mustn't believe the lies the newspapers publish, Cecilia dear, they want to make opium smoking by girls under 21 a crime. The truth is these places are owned by wealthy men who receive exorbitant rents for them. Mr. Fong and Her Highness are not the monsters they are made out to be.

(The sound of someone banging on the front door and yelling loudly can be heard. The 'Amazon of the Swamp', Kate Anthony, ***(KA),*** *has arrived to rescue her daughter.)*

KA:

I know you're in there missy. Come out now or I'll drag you out by the hair!

J:

Jesus Christ, that woman is like a banshee when she gets worked up! She took to poor John Maloney with a fuckin' iron poker!

H:

Stay where you are! She can't take the girl, you understand, not till we find out what we need to know.

CA:

I've got to get back to the Royal, they need me there.

J:

I won't be hanging about to cross swords with her. If she keeps it up we'll have the law down on our heads! I say, that fuckin' evil bitch, Ellen McLennan, can fight her own dirty battles. Do you hear me girl? I had nothin' to do with you being brought to this place!

(Kate can be heard crashing through the door))

J:

Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

(Cecilia screams! Harriet and Jane make a hasty exit.)

CA: *(On her feet, alert and ready for a fight)*

Yer can't make me go with yer! I won't go back to that place!

KA: *(voice only)*

By all the blessed saints! Poor Eddie was right: look at the state you're in.

CA:

I'll go to gaol or anywhere else. I won't do what you want. I won't end up pregnant and deserted in some dive[27] like this!

KA: *(voice only)*

Fuck that, yer comin with me!

End.

[27] A slang term for a 'down-market' place of entertainment [Mid 19C+].

Scene 5

Setting: **The stage at the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street.**

Background image:

'Youth at the Helm': A satirical drawing of Alfred Deakin standing in the prow of a small boat.[28]

(Jennie Lee enters dressed as a heavily bearded Alfred Deakin (D) in a 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' costume with a sash across his chest that proclaims: 'YOUTH AT THE HELM'. Mr Deakin is carrying a very large dust-covered book with the word 'MANIFESTO' in large lettering on the cover.)

Deakin:

Anarchy prevails in the suburbs. The larrikin and factory classes attend in their thousands. Despite the noble efforts of our courageous constabulary and mounted troopers; reckless, unsexed women and girls, smooth-faced, snub-nosed rogues, and 'counter-jumpers'[29], have assaulted helpless women and children!

(A brazen 'burlesque' tune commences.)

D:

What will become of us? Who will come to our aid?

(From behind the curtain strides our 'hero', Mr Gordon **(G)***, Union official, wearing a metal breastplate and a sash with the words 'COUNTER-JUMPER' across his chest.)*

G:

Friends, when the Salesmen's and Assistants' Union began we held public meetings, had torch-light processions, and distributed bills by the thousand. Only last Christmas we distributed 80,000 bills and had advertisements in all the pantomimes, but with no good results!

(Mr Deakin ceremoniously places the book on a lectern in front of Mr Gordon. The rear curtain parts to reveal an empty 'throne' Mr Deakin saunters provocatively up-stage and takes his seat. Mr Gordon thumps the dusty tome.)

[28] '*The New Boat*'(Tom Carrington), *Melbourne Punch*: 18/2/1886, p. 64
[29] Someone acting above their 'station' in life.

G:

An attempt to defeat the early closing movement, and return to the old hour of nine o'clock, is now being made by a few shopkeepers**.** The Tailoresses Association of Melbourne is leading the way, assistants!

*(Bessie Johnston **(BJ)** enters and joins Mr Gordon.)*

BJ:

Comrades, my name is Bessie Johnston. The workwomen of the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne know well enough that if you approve of slavery you will support those unprincipled shopkeepers, but if you do not you should resolve never to patronise their establishments, for ever**!** Those that are men don't cringe to a modern slave-driver. We say; no piece-work after-hours!

D: *(heckling)*

Down with long hours**!**

G:

The movement was successful for about six weeks. Both employers and employees were beginning to congratulate themselves upon their good fortune when a few of the small traders began to leave their doors open, thus spoiling the whole movement, after six months hard and determined struggle.

BJ:

Much has been said about seats for young saleswomen in shops but we say, 'Give 'em the short hours, and they will do without seats'.

D: *(heckling)*

Why don't you go home and put yer feet up? *(Smirking)* If you want a seat, why not women members of Parliament?

G:

It is said that during the recent protests the proprietor of 'Solomon's' came rushing out of his shop with an axe-handle in his hand and began to lay it about those who were crowding on the footpath; and not a policeman was to be seen!

D: *(heckling)*

Shut the shop; and be sharp about it!

(Mr Gordon strikes Mr Deakin on the head with the dusty tome. The curtain closes abruptly. The lights begin to dim to a single spot Down Stage Centre. The music changes to a poignant melodramatic tune: <u>The Lament of the Weary Tailoress</u>.)

BJ:

Cases are not unknown where the suburban shopkeeper has grown rich by working his unfortunate employes for 14 and 16 hours a day. A great number of young girls get nothing at all for the first twelve months but young boys start at five shillings a week. Is this fair?

(Pause)

*(Cecilia Anthony (wearing a shabby dress) enters as 'The Weary Tailoresses' **(T)**, along with Bessie Johnston and Mr Gordon. They adopt a tableau: a poor hardworking young seamstress forced to work in unhealthy and inhuman conditions, by a cruel and greedy factory owner.)*

T/CA: ***(****Sighing pitifully)*

Ah, sweat the blood of the poor helpless woman**!**

BJ: With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
Our heroine sits in unwomanly rags,
Plying her needle and thread.

T/CA: Oh! but to breathe the scent
Of the wattle blossom sweet -
With the sky above my head,
And the grass beneath my feet.

All: Work, work, work!
Hard labour never flags,
Low wages 'on the never'[30]
For crusts of bread and rags.

[30] To not receive money because of a 'con trick' [Late 19C: Aust.]. Green 2011, *Crooked Talk,* p. 16.

T/CA: The Spectre of Death awaits me
That Phantom of grisly bone,
But I do not fear its terrible shape,
It seems so like my own!

BJ: Oh, Men, with Sisters dear!
Oh, Men, with Mothers and Wives!
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives!

All: Work, work, work!
Hard labour never flags,
Low wages ‘on the never’
For crusts of bread and rags.

End.

Scene 6

Setting: **The stage of the Theatre Royal, Bourke Street.**

Background image: **The Theatre Royal, Bourke Street.**

(Cecilia Anthony is reclining on some cushions, Jenny Lee stands next to her holding a playscript.)

JL:

When I had the honour of reading the original manuscript of Bleak House I was touched by Mr Dickens' great empathy and sensitivity but, we are in a theatre and you must project Cecilia! Imagine you are speaking to your friends in the back row of the Gods. Again, please!

CA:

It's turned very dark, sir. Is there any light a comin?

JL: *(Jenny Lee is quite 'matter-of-fact' in her delivery of Woodcot's lines)*

It is coming fast, Jo, my poor fellow!

CA:

I hear you, sir, in the dark; but I'm a gropin - a gropin - let me catch hold of your hand

JL:

You don't literally have to grope Woodcot, Cecilia; just lay your hand on his arm.

CA:

Like this? *(CA reaches out with a wavering hand.)*

JL:

A little quicker dear. Mr. Burnett does not like to be kept waiting for his entrance. Let's continue.

Jo, can you hear what I say?

CA:

I'II say anythink as you say, sir, for I knows it's good.

JL:

Speak up dear! Our Father...

CA:

"Our Father! Yes that very good, sir"

JL:

Good, now rest the back of your hand on your forehead, like so *(she demonstrates)*. Which art in Heaven...

CA:

Art in Heaven - is the light a comin, sir?

JL: *(Beginning to hurry the piece along)*

It is close at hand, dear Jo; hallowed be thy ... (shouting) for pity's sake, there is too much shadow on Jo's face! Sorry, love, let's hear the death rattle! All eyes in the theatre are on you Cecilia so you mustn't squander your moment, draw it out. That's right... good...; very good!

(A single light illuminates the angelic features of the poor dying urchin)

CA:

(*Falteringly*) Hallowed be - thy - ...

JL: *(Quickly without emotion)*

The Light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead. Dead, you're Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen,[31] and so on and so forth!

(Raising her voice for the benefit of the backstage workers)

Let's try again from the beginning.

End.

[31] *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens: pp. 648 - 649.

Scene 7a

Setting: **The corner of Swanston and Bourke Streets.**

Background image: **Photograph: 'Swanston Street, looking south (Nicholas Caire, c1880).**

(Cecilia Anthony and Bessie Johnston are standing at a coffee stall. Cecilia is eating a large slab of currant cake.)

CA: *(Over-acting for Bessie's' amusement)*

I thought I was amost a starving, sir, but I don't know nothink – not even that. I don't care for eating wittles nor yet for drinking on em.[32]

(Pause) Well, do I get the part?

BJ:

Mr Gordon said he'd meet us at the Royal later on.

CA: *(Laughing)*

You can do much better than Mr Gordon, Bessie.

BJ:

He's willing to provide for my baby and there aren't too many blokes'd do that. D'yer reckon that rat, Edwin Peddy, would do right by you when it's hard tucker[33] for you and your sisters?

CA:

He's got 'is claws into me Bessie and won't let go.

BJ: *(Changing the subject)*

Did you 'ere what happened to poor Cathy?

CA: *(Excitedly.)*

What?

[32] *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens: p. 636.
[33] 'Hard tucker': meagre rations [mid-19C+: Aust./N.Z.]

BJ:

Her Pa come home stinking drunk and there was a terrible row between him and Cath. He got violent, and she ran into the street to get away, but the bastard followed her, so she picked up a stone and stoushed 'im on his bonce[34].

CA:

Is he awright?

BJ:

Nah, he snuffed out[35] in the hospital so Cathy pissed off to Gippsland.

(Pause)

CA:

Serves 'im right!

(They both laugh loudly and continue drinking and eating. The Bourke Street nightlife is swirling around them. The sounds of a Salvation Army speaker can be heard in the background along with shouting, blowing trumpets, ringing bells, tambourines, singing and police whistles. The mood is one of uproar and confusion.)

CA:

Look, the bloody Salvos are coping a hiding tonight. Was that a dead cat, fer Christ's sake? There's that Salvo donah, Happy Dinah. She was kind to me when Ma threw Becky and me out and took us to that refuge place run by what's his name?

BJ:

Doctor Singleton.

CA:

Yer, that's him. He's an old duffer, but she's a square Jane[36].

BJ:

Don't let Eddy hear you say that. He's got a down on the Doc, and the Salvos, 'cos he reckons they interfere with his business opportunities.

---

[34] 'Bonce': the head.
[35] Snuff out: To die [Mid 19C – 1910s]
[36] 'Square Jane': A respectable woman

CA:

Blimey, I hope that's just red paint. Looks like the mob's heading this way! *(Shouting)* Hey Snowey; get work, yer loafer!

(Pause)

Scene 7b

Setting: Later, outside the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street.

Background image: The Theatre Royal, Bourke Street.

(An elderly Street Orator enters, slim volume in hand, wearing the 'blue ribbon' of the Temperance Movement. He moves onto a low soapbox.)

SO: *(Loudly)*

Observe the depravity of the larrikin mob as they carouse around the door of the Royal and smoke their vicious tobacco and drink their poisonous spirits. Must we be forced to endure the loud, vulgar language of the bedizened young women in their midst and the oppressive odour of stale, inferior *eau de cologne*? There are among them pleasant faces, and phrenologically speaking, well-balanced heads, but there is also well-represented the 'sugar-loaf head, the shapeless coarse-lipped mouth and the large out-standing ears.

(Pointing at Cecilia and Bessie)

Do you see this pair of giggling and conceited girls? Look at the shorter one's hair, *(pointing to Bessie)* frizzled so absurdly as to resemble an ill-used mop; and the other's blonde ringlets tossed about her shoulders with each shake of her head. Note the exaggerated swagger as they fancy every male eye in the vicinity to be upon them, and wonder with me what on earth the mothers of Australia are about!"

CA:

Too right chummy, my Ma sure is an old soaker[37]

BJ:

Like mother, like daughter.

(They both laugh raucously. Cecilia stands in front of the orator and brandishes a long hat-pin.)

[37] Drunkard.

CA:

You come here and preach to us girls and want to stop us going into the theatres. Why don't you preach to the men? If yer dare to say anything more about me, I'll sticker[38] yer, good and proper.

SO: *(Flustered, but determined to state his point of view)*

I think you prefer idleness, and the indulgence of your passions, following out your natural instincts. But think what you will be in a few years when you return to the gutters from which you sprang.

(Cecilia bumps into the Orator, pushing him off his soapbox and into arms of Bessie.)

CA:

If you are going there you'll only be insulted; she's an awfully bad girl.

(Bessie knocks the Orator's hat off and stomps on it.)

BJ:

You should have come preaching when I was a chicken, five years ago.

CA:

Do you think I'm a bloody fool? I'm bad! All right! It pays don't it? It's the way we are treated that makes us what we are.

(The Orator hastily exits. As he disappears down Bourke Street Cecilia proudly shows off a gentleman's pocket-watch to Bessie and the assembled larrikins. The stage darkens.)

(Pause)

<u>Scene 7c</u>

Setting: The top level of the Theatre Royal, commonly known as the 'saddling-paddock'.

(The raucous sounds of the 'music-hall' can be heard. When the lights come up Cecilia and Bessie are seated at a small round table.)

[38] 'Sticker': A pointed stabbing weapon (Mid-late 19C).

BJ:

Eddie's problem is that he thinks he's 'Gunny Hughes'.[39] He can knock an occasional Vegetable- John'[40] skew-wiff[41], but he's all swagger and blow.

(Cecilia impersonates Edwin Peddy doing a dance move, a 'double-shuffle'[42], while gnawing on an imaginary stick of tobacco.)

CA:

Too right, my rorty[43] pip! Collar[44] yer mutton[45] for the lancers[46]!

(Cecilia spits over the balcony onto those in the Stalls below.)

CA:

(Grinning stupidly) They'll be sure to wear a fuckin' mackintosh next time!

BJ:

Oh look Cecilia! Mr Gordon said that a message would be made tonight.

(Bessie moves to 'the edge of the balcony' and takes off her coat to reveal a large red number eight displayed over her blouse. She begins to sing and hand out cards to the audience members closest to her.)

<u>Background image</u>:

Eight hours men, on you we rely.
Roll up, to the Trades Hall Meeting,
Friday next, for the Glorious
Emancipation of Australian men and women.

[39] 'Gunny Hughes': Infamous leader of the 'ancient Little Bourke Street' push renowned for his fighting skills. Hughes was found dead at the base of the 'Shot Tower' (at the corner of La Trobe and Swanston Streets), and was believed to have been killed for being a police informant.
[40] 'Vegetable-John': A Chinese vegetable seller.
[41] 'Skew-wiff': Crooked, aslant [Mid-18th C+].
[42] 'Double-shuffle': A 'fox-trot' or 'cakewalk', perhaps?
[43] 'Rorty': boisterous, rowdy, coarse, earthy (Late 19C+).
[44] 'Collar': To grab or appropriate.
[45] 'Mutton': A promiscuous woman.
[46] 'Lancers': a square dance (a variant of the Quadrille), performed by four couples.

BJ:

Friends and comrades! We must resist the efforts of employers to take away our right to a fair day's work, rest and recreation. Man should labour six days, not six days and nights. Twelve hours work is down-right slavery *(Booing can be heard.)* I believe in my soul that eight hours work is enough for any man or woman.

The Tailoresses Association of Melbourne has printed a number of pledge cards. Let each friend take one and sign it. If we have three or four hundred signed, we could start an association that may spread throughout the colony.

BJ: *(Singing loudly)*

Background image:

This tonight, our battle cry
Six o'clock for ever;
After six we'll never buy,
Never, never, never.

CA:

Bessie don't, come away!

BJ:

This tonight, our battle cry
Six o'clock for ever;
After six we'll never buy,
Never, never, never.

CA: *(Suddenly afraid)*

Bessie, its flamin Eddy, he's seen us. We have to get out of here now. Do you hear me? He's comin' up the stairs!

(Cecilia grabs Bessie's shawl, turns on her heels, and exits speedily.)

(Pause)

(On the footpath in Bourke Street, Happy Dinah is standing on a 'soapbox'.)

HD:

Soldiers of the Lord, give me a volley loud enough for the Old Man to hear! Hallelujah Jesus!

(Cecilia rushes up to Happy Dinah and flings herself onto her knees and covers her head and shoulders with the stolen shawl.)

CA: *(Whispering)* For God's sake, help me!

End.

Scene 8a

Setting: **Backstage at the Theatre Royal.**

CA: *(To the audience)*

Ma never keeps out of it. She never does mind her own business. Always has to stick her beak into other people's affairs, as if she knows what's what.

Just the other day she gets involved in a stoush between that 'rag' Ellen McLennan from Little Napier Street and a coloured man, Jackson I think 'is name is. She had to be there when the coppers come to arrest 'im and ends up having to give evidence at the fuckin' trial.

I read about Ma in the newspapers and I know that people laugh at her and make jokes about her when they think I don't hear. She don't care, but I'm the one that has to explain the shame of it to poor Becky and Maryann. Young Amazonian, I ask yer? No-one at the Royal will ever take me seriously with a monniker[47] like that.

(Becoming visibly upset) Ma says that a girl should never dress flash because it's an invitation to the Devil and that my beautiful new hat and the glass beads Jenny give me to wear during my 'special' were "tokens of vulgarity". Where did she hear that, I ask yer?

(Pause)

(Angrily) I'll wager it was at a fuckin 'Hosanna meeting', waving a red hanky around and wailing at the top of 'er lungs just to get some tin[48] from Captain Quick. *(Laughs bitterly)* He can't be too quick if he believes the lies Ma comes up with.

Scene 8b

(Jennie Lee enters)

JL:

Cecilia dear, there is an important matter I wanted to discuss with you. Johnny and Ada[49] thought your impersonation of pugnacious Kate was just the ticket. The description of naked women and drunken school children cavorting in Little Napier Street was just too delicious. Johnny is very jealous of you because he simply does not have your knowledge of the slums Cecilia.

[47] 'Monniker': Name. Therefore, *'tip someone one's monnicker':* to tell someone one's name. [Mid-late 19C]
[48] 'Tin': Money
[49] Jenny Lee's husband and her younger sister.

CA: *(Appalled)*

I had a drop too much Jennie; promise me you won't breathe a word of this to anyone! If Ma found out I was talking about 'er she'd thrash me within an inch of me life.

JL:

You know I wouldn't betray a confidence, but, Mr. Burnett and I think it would be just the thing to include a 'special' in our next burlesque, 'The Push', about your dear old Ma.

(Seeing the look of dismay on Cecilia's face)

John may not have many attributes but he does know what the audience in the 'gods' wants Cecilia, and with a liberal application of make-up and a costume that puts some meat on my bones, no-one will be any the wiser. It will be the best thing in the third Act; a real jammer[50], you mark my words. Mr Burnett has already shown the sketch to the 'gaffer'[51] and he has agreed. I'm sorry Cecilia, but Mr Williamson does not brook any dissention.

End.

[50] A large audience, full house *The Lorgnette*: 8/1/1883, p. 4.
[51] A boss or master, especially of a show or circus [Mid-19C].

Scene 9

Setting: **The offices of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society (MLBS)**

Miss Stobbs:

My name is Miss Stobbs and this is my fortnightly 'Visitor' report, detailing relief payments to females for the past fortnight.

Background image: **Russell:** **No relief**

Russell has lately taken up with bad characters and become very intemperate in her personal habits which has lead to her being taken by the police. There is an idiot son, who should be in the Lunatic Asylum but the mother does not like to part with him.[52]

Background image: **Marriott** **5/-** [53]

Vest finisher, very industrious and deserving family. Marriott is very thankful for the aid received. The husband is very ill, and she would be very grateful for 2/6 weekly towards her rent as her 3 children are very young.[54]

Background image: **Black** **No relief**

Black has gone into the Lying-in Hospital for her confinement. She has previously stated that she was a widow, but Mrs Beeton finds she is single, and this is her second child.[55]

Background image: **Goldsmith** **3/-** [56]

I think Goldsmith's sight is not as bad as she pretends. A man was found in the house who turns out to be her son. He was lying in the bed quite intoxicated. He works on the wharf but his employers did not speak well of him.[57]

Background image: **Anthony** **No relief**

Aid continued to old cases, except Kate Anthony, who came for her goods intoxicated. Miss Bennett finds Anthony is identical with a Miss Columbo, formerly relieved, and is unworthy of relief having failed to go to a situation obtained for her through Mrs. Jamieson.[58]

Background image: **Phillips** **£1** [59]

[52] MLBS minutes: Vol. 1, p. 25, 25/2/1879.
[53] Five shillings
[54] MLBS minutes: Vol. 3, p. 60, 17/10/1882.
[55] MLBS minutes: Vol. 3, p. 62, 11/7/1882.
[56] Three shillings
[57] MLBS minutes: Vol. 3, p. 62, 11/7/1882.
[58] MLBS minutes: Vol. 4, p. 91, 8/1/1884. Please note: I considered it necessary to insert a record for Kate Anthony, based on a recipient named, 'Noble'.
[59] One pound

Phillips has 2 daughters with her. The Salvation Army have given them a new sewing machine. Mrs Dickerson stated the home is quite changed since the husband reformed through the Salvation Army. They have taken the wife's aged mother to live with them. She is almost childish, 2/- granted weekly to the aged widow on Mrs Dickerson's suggestion.[60]

Background image: **Forrest:** **No relief**

Mrs Smith stated that Forrest was very ill was and was left in an empty house. Mrs Smith provided food and sent to the Police respecting Forrest, but when they went to the house she had disappeared, they are trying to find her. She has not applied for aid this fortnight.[61]

Background image: **Solomon** **4/-** [62]

Baby has died.[63]

End

[60] MLBS minutes: Vol. 4, p. 134, 15/4/1884.
[61] MLBS minutes: Vol. 5, p. 8, 17/2/1885.
[62] Four shillings
[63] MLBS minutes: Vol. 4, p. 135, 15/4/1884.

Scene 10 **'The Stoush at Merri Creek'**

Setting: **The stage of the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street.**

Background image:

"In the watchhouse they behaved like infuriated beasts. In all my experience I never saw females in such a state." – Sergeant Rennie, Fitzroy Police.

(The sounds of an excited crowd can be heard in the background.)

JL: *(backstage: in the manner of a boxing announcer)*

Ladies and gentleman; in the red corner weighing fourteen stone, a veteran of innumerable stoushes across the length and breadth of Collingwood and Fitzroy, and fresh from a fight in Bouverie Street that saw her admitted to hospital with a grisly gash to the head, the Management of the Theatre Royal is pleased to present the one, the only, 'Amazon of the Swamp'; Kate Anthony!

(Jenny Lee, made-up to look like Kate Anthony, enters from behind the curtain, and stands under a stark single overhead light, dressed in the garb of a boxer, including padding to her hands, a red handkerchief around her neck. Kate 'shapes up', on her toes, ducking and weaving in a slow and obviously drunken manner.)

JL/KA: *(to the audience)*

No-one ever gets the better of Fighten' Kate Anthony, drunk or sober, and pity the ponce[64] that tries it on! That goes double for them bleedin lawyers and fuckin' Magistrates, I can wrap 'em round me little finger. Last week I give evidence about a stoush in Little Napier Street because of a cowardly attack by *(slowly)* Mr. John Joseph Jackson.

There were plenty of people in the street but I was the only witness.

(As if in the Courtroom),

(Pleadingly) Mrs Mac didn't say Jackson was a dirty bastard and that his father was layabout yer worship. He just up and took offense for no reason I could see and struck her a mighty blow that turned her nose on one side. I helped poor Mrs Mac off the road, but I heard no bad language from her. I did not see her breaking windows either, not that I know of yer worship.

(To the audience),

During the trial, Constable fucking Cane stood in the box and said,

(As the policeman, in court),

[64] A man living off the earnings of a prostitute [Late 19C].

"Mrs. McLennan has been before this court upon several occasions for drunkenness, for insulting behaviour, and for obscene language. In fact, I know the whole lot",

(To the audience)

Meaning me, the cheeky bastard,

(As the policeman, in court),

"It is like the toss- up of a two-headed shilling which is the worst".

(To the audience, proudly)

(Pointing to the left side of her head) Raised Anderson, all of 16 years old, gave me that scar. Threw a lump of road metal at me and I get charged at City Court for using obscene language and fighting in Bouverie Street; and copped a £10 fine for good measure!

(Pointing to the right side of her head) This one was put there by John Maloney. He's only 17 and lived in me own house! He stoushed me with an iron poker and I come through that as strong as a bull. Give 'im a wack on the bonce[65] with me frying pan, I did.

Sometimes I offer me services as a referee; for the right fee mind. Last Thursday I was called to a ding-dong stoush near the Sisters of the Good Shephard between Lizzie Fry from Williamstown,

(Lizzie Fry enters Stage Right and assumes the 'Marquis of Queensbury' style)

JL/KA: And one of our local lasses, Ettie Dickens.

(Ettie Dickens enters Stage Left and does the same)

Little Lizzie goes by the monniker of "Curly" and, confidentially, poor Ettie gets called "Croppy" cause the 'Good Shephard mob' shaved 'er head when they locked her up.

The pair met in Gertrude Street, with their seconds, where Ettie accused Lizzie of saying unkind remarks about her to another donah. They agreed to meet later at a more secluded location, near Merri Creek. Cecelia thinks Ettie took offence at being tripped at a dance in the Oddfellows Hall in Willy. I reckon it was Ettie putting the hard word on a certain young man. It's always because of a bloke; I say fuck the lot of 'em, they're only good for one thing.

(A 'squeeze-box' can be heard playing a jaunty tune.)

[65] The head [Late 19C].

JL/KA:

There was singing going on and at least 250 larrikins and larrikinesses crowding about, including five coppers on the ground in plain clothes, 3 of which pretended to be drunk and fell down. One girl started pulling the hat off one, and another 'mashed' Constable Sims on the back with a piece of fence paling.

(The fighters face forward and as KA's description of events unfolds they take turns to display, in slow motion, their pugilistic prowess.)

JL/KA:

The stoush was conducted with all the formalities of a prize fight. Blood commenced to flow and passions increased. Coats were thrown off, and the fighters stripped to the waist. They both 'wired in' for an hour and 20 minutes. After ten rounds Ettie was "knocked out" but soon revived under the combined influence of Merri Creek water with a dash of brandy. "Croppy" was the most scientific in the use of her fists and went right for the face. "Curly" used the cat tactics of scratching and "tapped the claret"[66] profusely. But poor "Curly" had several falls, and when grounded for the fourth time, from sheer weakness and loss of blood, had no other choice than to throw up the sponge.

(Jennie Lee takes the red handkerchief from around her neck, shouts Hallelujah and waves it about enthusiastically, bows to the audience and exits. The two fighters make a great show of shaking each other's hand in the true spirit of English gallantry and then strut off-stage.)

End.

[66] To bleed.

Scene 11a

Setting: The Salvation Army Barracks in Wellington Street, Collingwood.

Background image: Inside a Salvation Army Hall.

(Cecilia Anthony and Bessie Johnston are seated in the front row. Cecilia is dressed in the full regalia of the 'Skeleton Army'[67] with a Skull and Cross-Bones flag and a Skull and Cross-Bones on her dress; her face covered in white make-up. Cecilia has brought a small trombone with her. She jumps to her feet and blasts out a few bars of 'I'll Drink When I'm Dry'.)

BJ:

Sit down, for Christ's sake, they're about to start.

CA: *(Excitedly)*

Come on chummy, cheer up! You could meet the man of your dreams, in a Salvation Army uniform!

(Laughing) Ma says that the Salvationists are nothing better than whores, thieves, vagabonds, and everything that is low and bad and that the blokes are big, fat, hulking, humbugs, only too glad to get a living with precious little to do for it, and that when they find the Salvation business was not paying they could take up the profession of bushrangers.

BJ:

What does your Ma know about workin' for a livin'? Where did you get to last Sat'dee? You should have stayed to see me and Mr. Gordon thrown out of the Royal.

(Happy Dinah strides onto the stage.)

HD:

I've got a **H**allelujah ticket, and I'm booked for glory. The Devil won't get me because I mean to fight**!** The Devil and me we can't agree, I hate Him, and He hates me; He had me once, but He let me go, He wants me again, but I will not go,

(Singing, unaccompanied)

Oh, we'll roll the old chariot along,
And we won't drag on behind.

[67] An anti-Salvation Army gang consisting of male and female larrikins.

Come, brothers, and help us to drag it along,
And don't drag on behind.

'Now, friends, why don't you join in? Don't be afraid to sing up!

(Staff-Captain Gibbs, known affectionately as 'Yorkshire Relish', 'bounds' onto the stage and stands next to Happy Dinah. He is a fine specimen of a man with wavy blonde hair and a swashbuckling moustache - waxed at the ends to look even more dashing).

CG: *(With a trace of a Yorkshire accent)*

Well Done! Well Done!

CA:

Isn't he gorgeous Bessie?

CG:

I know that larrikin gang members are with us today and I want to talk directly to you tonight because all your trumpeting, drumming, preaching, psalm-singing are part of the final struggle of 'The Old Man'[68].

HD:

Amen, Comrade!

CG:

'The Old Man' is standing shoulder to shoulder with the poor lost souls of the Larrikin Push, Happy Dinah.

BJ:

What a load of bullshit!

CA:

Shut up will yer, this is me favourite part

CG:
Happy Dinah, its hard going out there on the 'Front Line' of the Lord's defences!

[68] 'The Old Man': The Devil.

HD:

Yes, Yorkshire Relish. Last Monday the full Hotham 'Death and Glory' Company[69] gave an outdoor meeting in North Melbourne only to be set upon by an unruly mob. We escaped by the skin of our teeth!

Background image: A North Melbourne or 'Hotham' streetscape

(Happy Dinah and Captain Gibbs ceremoniously point to the streetscape, and, with a change of lighting to isolate her, Happy Dinah, moves to the centre of the 'stage' in the Salvation Army Hall – allowing Captain Gibbs to quietly 'slip off' stage.)

HD:

As usual, there was a very large crowd including a motley company of idlers whose interests the army has most at heart. Our singing and devotional exercises were drowned out by the hideous and outrageous noise, vulgarity, blasphemy, and indecent remarks made by these skeleton-army roughs.

CA:

Eddie and me was there!

HD: *(firmly)*

If the behaviour of the larrikins last Monday is typical of the 'Young Australian', the future prospects of the Colony are bleak!

CA:
What have you got against the 'Young Australian'? How many bloody 'Young Australians' do you know, you ugly old crone.

BJ: *(Exasperated)*

She's not much older than you are Cecilia.

HD*:* *(As if at the meeting)*

Come forward, Comrades, come forward and offer up your immortal soul to be cleansed in the Blood of the Lamb!

[69] *The Outcasts of Melbourne* (1985), p. 134.

Scene 11b

(Captain Gibbs saunters back on- stage dressed as a young male larrikin: broad-brimmed hat, crimson red neckerchief, pipe in 'his' mouth. He is clearly 'playing it up' for the benefit of the audience)

Captain Gibbs / YML:
Now old woman, shut yer gob. You remember the night I picked yer up out of the gutter.

HD:
You won't stop my praising the love of Jesus my lad no matter what you do to make your comrades laugh. I advise you to leave off swearing and do what is manly and right.

Captain Gibbs / YML:

Yer, and sing Hallelujah, and psalms; just like a pack of bloody galahs.

CA:
Too Right Captain!

(Cecilia rushes forward but is blocked by Captain Gibbs.)

HD: *(To the audience)*

(Proudly) I hope that my children will never grow up to laugh at any woman who tries to tell them how they should walk.

CA: *(Excitedly)*

We don't believe in you or your fuckin' bible.

HD:

Now no jostling, if you won't hear me and respect me, respect at least the glorious promise of salvation I bring. *(To the audience)* At this juncture the larrikins were reinforced, and as the toughs were crowding in, I was forced to beat a strategic retreat!

(Captain Gibbs strides to Centre-Stage, next to 'Happy Dinah')

(Pause)

CG: *(With gusto, divesting himself of the his 'larrikin' garb)*

Hallo! Hallo, Jack! What's up! Look Here!

I've been a black-hearted sinner, just like some of you here tonight. I've been a drunkard and a wastrel. I led a wild life in Yorkshire: I was a noted pugilist, and fought many a battle within the ring. *(His voice rising with emotion)* I tried to throw my wife into a canal in England and received two floggings of 18 and 36 lashes each.

CA: *(Shouting Excitedly)*

But you stuck to her Chummy! Well, he did Bessie, don't say otherwise!

CG:

If God could save me I was convinced that God could save anyone. Beware young women! Do you know where you're going? You are travelling faster than an express train. Where to? Hell!

CA: *(Mesmerized)*

Amen, Amen!

BJ:

I'll give 'im bloody express trains.

(Bessie stands and walks toward the stage.)

CA:

Sit down you stupid tart.

HD:

Another golden 'nugget' for us to uncover, Captain.

CG: *(Summoning Bessie onto the stage)*

You are precious in the eyes of the Lord, dear girl.

HD & CG: *(Repeating with gusto)*

Hallelujah! Give me a volley! Amen! Fire away!

BJ: *(monotone)*

I am weak Captain Gibbs! I have succumbed to the demon drink and the vile influence of the larrikin push. I fell under the influence of a wicked and scheming scoundrel and I gave myself to him willingly and conceived a child outside wedlock...

CA: *(Interrupting)*

But, born into a loving family, chummy.

BJ: *(Ominously)*

Look what I found in Mr. Berry's Gladstone bag on the night the bastard threw me and my baby onto the Street!

(The music stops abruptly. Bessie reaches into her coat, takes out a revolver, and points it at her temple.)

BJ: *(Singing)*

Background image:

Fire away! Fire away! Fire away!
With the gospel's guns we'll fire away.
Mighty victories have been won
With the great Salvation gun,
So; stand your ground and fire away!

CA: *(Shrieking with laughter)*

Hallelujah!

End.

Scene 12

Setting: **The street outside the Collingwood Magistrate's Court.**

Background image:

"The law will not, and individual citizens cannot, protect themselves and their families from this species of outrage." - The Argus newspaper: January 4th, 1882.

(Bessie Johnston and Cecilia Anthony are sitting on the edge of the bluestone gutter. Hidden under Bessie's jacket is a bottle of spirits. Bessie is reading from a newspaper.)

BJ: *(Reading)*

Great indignation was felt when the full circumstances of the rescue of a young girl named Cecilia Anthony from a Chinese opium den in Little Bourke Street were revealed. The matter was placed in a very different light this morning, when Mrs Anthony appeared at the City Court, charged with keeping a disorderly house, and her daughters, Cecilia and Rebecca, with having no visible means of support.

CA:

Bastards.

BJ: *(Reading)*

The police said the girls were bad characters, and the house was frequented by the lowest class of men. Mr. Call was shocked at the enormity of Mrs Anthony's offence in encouraging her daughters in sin.

CA:

Eddie collared me after the Hallelujah meeting we was at. When people in the crowd tried to stop 'im he said we was married and that he would swing for me. I only just managed to get away in a cab.

BJ:

You have been a busy girl.

CA: *(Angrily)*

Give it a bone[70], will yer! I'm scared Bessie; I reckon he was mixed up with the Ellen McDonald case, I mean; she was cut up bad...

BJ: *(Interrupting)*

Who knows Cecilia, the inquest is still goin'.

CA:

Do I have to spell it out for yer?

(Cecilia takes the newspaper from Bessie.)

(Reading) At the inquest on the body of Ellen McDonald, who died under suspicious circumstances, the coroner said that an illegal operation had been performed on the deceased, Indications were that violence had been used, and that the woman died in consequence.

(Cecilia takes a 'swig' from the bottle)

She had kept house for her father in Little Napier Street, but had lately been living with a young man named Robert Russell.

BJ:

Cecilia, things might be bad but they could be worse. Jesus, look what happened to Charlotte Duffy because of her bad leg. The poor bitch was all alone and the neighbours found her in a filthy state. They had to soak 'er in warm water to get the filth off her, and washed off hundreds of fuckin' maggots.

(Bessie takes a 'swig' from the bottle)

(Appalled) Her Ma and Pa left her to rot in bed for five months, and when they sent 'em both for trial on neglect charges they let <u>him</u> off on appeal, and <u>she</u> got 3 fuckin' months.

CA:

Jesus, she was only fourteen. It was Ma that sent me to the Royal, you know. She said, "get down there and do what's right by your sisters and yer Ma!"

[70] Shut up! Stop talking! (late 19C+)

BJ:

Your Ma would sell her soul for a nobbler of rum but that don't mean you have to do the same.

CA:

Fuck her; if I'm goin' on the game then I'll do it for Madame Brussels. She gets a better class of clientele, Members of Parliament and the like. I'm not goin back to that fuckin' shirt factory in Faraday Street.

BJ:

My mob's the same. Our Mary Ann was charged with keeping a disorderly house in Hodgson Street, and poor Charlie with having no visible means of support. Constable fucking Cane was watchin' the house for some time before he came round early Sun'dee morning and pinched 'em both.

CA:

He sure has a down on Charlie.

I reckon the only decent chance I've got to make somethin' of meself is to get in sweet at the Royal. Jenny wants me to understudy her part Bess. She said that with a bit of work and her good graces I might get to be an actress in her company.

(Pause)

Are you speakin' for Mary today?

BJ:

It's too late for poor Charlie, he copped a 5 pound fine; but Mary, she might cop 'arf an annual.[71]

CA:

There's a crowd, I don't think they'll all fit inside. Come 'ere because of Eddie, I 'spose.

[71] Six months imprisonment.

BJ:

And you darling, they'll be expectin' you to have something to say. *(Pause)* I wanted to ask; who coughed up the 25 quid to get yer out of Mr Magee's establishment[72]...

CA: *(Interrupting)*

Let's get inside before Eddie's pals take all the seats.

End.

[72] 'Mr Magee's establishment': The Old Melbourne Gaol: Used as slang term for a gaol.

Scene 13:

Setting: **On-stage at the Theatre Royal.**

Background image:

Photo of Bourke Street, looking west, taken from the perspective of the Parliament House.

(Cecilia Anthony enters from one side of the stage and a Young Male Larrikin enters from the other.)

YML:

The moon shone bright the other night,
As I walked down Bourke Street,
And there a gal, named Sydney Sal,
I happened then to meet; Says she,

CA:

How are you, dear?
Does your mother know you're out?
I can see that you're good natured
So come along and shout!

YML:

With Sydney to the Douglas
I straightway did repair,
And other pals of our young Sal
Were standing talking there;
Says she unto the lot,

CA:

'What will you have? Speak out';

YML:

And for a score of gals or more
I had of course to shout! Says Sal,

CA:

My dear, come home with me,
To talk here isn't meet;

YML:

And so we went into a house
At the top of Stephen Street;[73]
A man there knocked me down,
My pockets he turned out,
He boldly swore to 'swing the stick'
If I dared to shout!

My watch was gone, and tin I'd none;
When I got home 'twas late;
But being robbed was all my fault,
Take warning of my fate.
Of Sydney Sal beware
When you are walking out,
Or, like me you'll have to cop
A most expensive shout!

End.

[73] Stephen Street was the original name of what is now Exhibition Street.

Scene 14 a

Setting: **Inside the Collingwood Magistrates Court.**

CC:

We now come to the main business of the day.

Mr McKean?

McK: *(He stands)*

I stand ready to refute the sensational claims made in the press about the so-called 'Collingwood Outrage'. I contend that the police had brought the trouble on themselves by their mode of interfering with the men.

I call my client, Mr Edward Peddy, to the stand.

(Edwin saunters onto the stage and slouches into the seat.)

CC:

I will now describe the events that occurred in Hoddle Street on November 22nd last.

(Reading from his notebook)

About ten or twelve lads, well known to the Collingwood Police as the 'Hoddle Street Lairies', took possession of the bar at the Royal George Hotel, in Collingwood. They then marched along Hoddle Street, proclaiming they were the second Kelly gang, until they arrived at a baker's shop, where they helped themselves. Shortly afterwards they entered the Victoria Hotel in Hoddle Street, where they also demanded drinks, threatening the landlord, Mr Jeremiah Collins and his wife, with summary vengeance if he refused.

McK:

How did you manage to be so close on hand when the disturbance took place Constable Cane?

CC:

We had only recently been undertaking official exercises on the Collingwood Flat, Mr McKean.

McK:

I see. Carry on.

CC:

Constable Shorthill approached one of the larrikins about his disorderly behaviour and when he advised him to behave like a man while in the street he received a volley of abuse. As the Constable attempted to arrest the fellow one of the gang named Thomas Donnelly picked up a stone, weighing some 6lbs, and threw it at Constable Shorthill from behind, striking him on the back of the head and rendering him insensible. Constable Charlston ran to his assistance but he was attacked in a similar manner. Constable O'Shea and me joined in and a very desperate fight ensued. Constable Shorthill remained insensible upon the road during the fight, but as soon as the prisoners, including the ring-leaders Edwin Peddy and John Brewer, were properly secured, he was conveyed to a neighbouring chemist's shop, where his injuries were found to be of a very serious and dangerous character.

McK:

Thank-you, Constable.

Scene 14 b

Mr Peddy, would you please tell the Court your recollection of the events that took place outside the Victoria Hotel in Hoddle Street on Tuesday, the 22nd day of November?

EP:

Awright, chummy, and it's Edwin, by the bye, not Edward; I prefer Edwin.

(Edwin winks at his pals in the crowded Courtroom and gives the 'thumbs-up'.)

EP:

Well; the Weighbridge Gang and a few mates were havin' a free pisening at the Victoria. Out rushes the pub-keeper, and says "these young fellers has stuck up the shanty, and soaked their whistlers in the best." "Have they?" says one of the coppers, and he swung round his rifle and tumbled a Lairy. Constable Shorthill collars me mate Griffo and we has a bit of a 'tug-of-war' over 'im, nothin' too serious, and then Massa says 'leg it' and Griffo runs round behind the chemist shop with the copper up to the chin[74] behind 'im, and before you know it my pal Massa, he ups with a pebble about ten pound and tumbles the poor bastard. Then another

[74] Totally involved, fully committed (Mid 19C).

copper he swings round and capsizes five or six Lairies, and things kind o' gets mixed up, and, as about 40 more coppers jine the ball[75], I takes to shanks pad.[76]

McK

And Mr. Peddy, did you see a knife that 'Massa'; sorry, Thomas Donnelly; a knife he is alleged to have produced and used to threaten Mr Keech, the proprietor of a nearby butcher shop that stepped in to help Constable Shorthill rearrest Thomas Griffith?

CC: *(Interrupting)*

Is it true Mr. Donnelly threatened to 'knock his head off with a stone', and swore he would 'rip his heart out' if Mr. Keech touched him? Was your Push urging Donnelly to stab the Constable Mr. Peddy?

McK:

Constable, please.

EP: *(sneeringly, to the Constable)*

Keech and his pals should 'ave stayed well out of it. The coppers just made matters worse by gettin' the crowd stirred up. I didn't see a knife, yer hear; and if I did I wouldn't tell the likes of you, get me?

McK: *(Interrupting)*

So Edwin, you made your exit from the scene of the brawl as expeditiously as possible?

EP:

That's it chummy, as expeditiously as possible! I don't want to be seen as associating with members of the lower elements of society and I did not want to endanger the good name of my dear pal, Cecilia Anthony.

McK:

That was the act of a gentleman; no further questions Mr Peddy, you are excused.

EP:

Righto, chummy; you know best.

(Edwin exits slowly and confidently in the same manner as his entrance, winking at his 'pals' in the Court)

End.

[75] Possibly: join in (possibly a sporting term?
[76] To walk (Late 19C+) so: to walk off.

Scene 15

Setting: **Inside the Collingwood Magistrates Court.**

(The lights come up on the 'dock', where Cecilia Anthony is seated. Constable Cane ***(CC)*** *is standing next to her, reading from his note-book.)*

CC:

The defendant, who is wanted on suspicion for a number of offences, along with two female friends of the lowest type, were making such a din outside the Court today that they got arrested too. They were waiting in the lock-up when a mob of a dozen larrikins crowded into the Court saying they would pay whatever fine would be inflicted by the bench.

CA: *(Aggressively)*

You are a big bully, you tell more lives than I do.

Magistrate: *(To Cecilia)*

Miss Anthony, before we attend to the main business of the day; you are firstly accused of stealing a gold watch and chain, the property of the landlord of the King's Arms Hotel. The evidence before the court is that you engaged a room at the hotel and after remaining a few days, disappeared with the watch and chain. We now find that you have victimised a number of tradesmen, your last exploit being to order a handsome coffin from an unfortunate undertaker, who upon sending it to the address was horrified to find he had been swindled.

CA: *(Cecilia smiles and curtseys to the Magistrate and the Court-room, in a most majestic style.)*

There's no harm done, and therefore I have nothing to say at all.

M:

Kindly remind your client, Mr McKean, to conduct herself in the proper manner while in the dock or she will be taken down and left to 'cool her heels' in the cells.

McK: *(attempting to restrain Cecilia's impertinence)*

Miss Anthony, you have heard...

M: *(Interrupting)*

A moment, if you please Mr McKean. Are you are the same Cecilia Anthony that has only recently been charged with having no visible means of support and of being a resident of a disorderly house?

CA:

That's Ma's doing, not me.

M:

It is my understanding that a very sizeable surety of 25 pounds was proffered on your behalf by Mrs Samuel McLennan. That is an act of great generosity, Miss Anthony, is it not? I believe that Mrs McLennan is well known to the police Constable Cane?

CC:

Oh, yes indeed yer Worship. She's a thoroughly bad sort, that one; and her 'usband ain't much better sir, he's been arrested many times for violent assault, yer Worship.

McK: *(Angrily)*

What bearing do these matters have upon the case at hand, sir?

M:

Clearly, they go directly to the veracity of her impending testimony, Mr. McKean. Mrs McLennan is currently being questioned about the death of the young McDonald woman, also from Little Napier Street. Do you happen to know any of the circumstances pertaining to this poor woman's demise, Miss Anthony?

CA: *(Defiantly)*

Can't say I do chummy, but I do recall an old gentleman slippin' out the back of Madame Brussels the other night. It was a full moon so I could make out his dial[77] real clear. Ugly old coot[78] he was, with a huge conk[79]; almost as big as yours it was, sir.

McK:

Sir, you must return to the case at hand at once!

[77] The human face (Early 19C+).
[78] A fool, a simpleton (Late 18C+).
[79] The nose (Early 19C+).

M: *(Angrily)*

Mr McKean, your reputation for obdurate behaviour has preceded you, but will do you no good today. You will address the Bench in a different tone of voice.

McK:

I can only address you in the voice that God has given me.

M:

Sit down, sir.

McK:

I will not, sir.

M:

Constable Cane, do your duty. Give him twenty-four hours.

McK:

You can't do it. You are not going to frighten me[80]. I know the Bench will stick to the police**,** **t**he prisoners have no show.

M:

If Mr. McKean does not apologise to the Bench for his remarks, I will decline to hear him.

McK:

I don't care; I will not apologise.

M:

Sit down, sir, I decline to hear you.

McK:

I will appeal to the Supreme Court.

[80] CM&WC: 22/5/1885, p. 2.

M:

Sit down, sir! Constable, conduct Mr. McKean out of Court.[81]

(Constable Cane moves towards Mr. McKean.)

M:

(Loudly) No, no, no! Let's get on, for heaven's sake!

McK:

Miss Anthony, you are a friend of Mr. Peddy from Collingwood, is that correct?

CA:

That's right; Eddie and me have been stepping-out together.

McK:

I see. Tell me Miss Anthony; were you with Mr. Peddy in Collingwood on the evening of the 22nd of November last?

CA:

We was strolling down Hoddle Street; it's like we're in Collins Street, 'doing the Block'. Eddie bought me a boiled sav' in a bun and a slice of currant cake and we had a boshter[82] time!

McK:

And on the evening in question did you see a fracas between some boys from the Hoddle Street Lairies and the Police.

CA:

My oath, I did.

McK:

Did Eddie get involved in the fight, Miss Anthony?

---

[81] *Collingwood Mercury & Weekly Courier* 14/5/1886, p. 3.
[82] Good (19C+: Aust.)

CA: *(Looking askance at Edwin Peddy)*

I'm sure he wanted to, because the coppers were weighing in with[83] their rifles and Eddie is dead-set on[84] helpin' his pals and I said, "Eddie, you promised that you'd do right by me and yer Ma and keep yer nose clean"[85].

M:

(*Smiling indulgently)* I remind you that you are under oath. Did Mr Peddy attack any of the Constables? Did he encourage any of his pals to hurt Constable Shorthill? You must answer the questions Miss Anthony.

(Pause)

Take her down. I will now hear final statements before passing sentence.

(Cecilia is lead away by Constable Cane)

End.

[83]To include something extra (Late 19C +).
[84] Obsessed with (Early 19C+)
[85] To lead a law-abiding, upright life (Mid 19C+).

Scene 16

Setting: **The stage at the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street.**

Background image: **The Theatre Royal, Bourke Street.**

(Jenny Lee enters wearing a long cape.)

JL:

Your worship, I would like to speak on the prisoner's behalf.

(Pause)

There is this to be said about the profession, your Worship; it has a kind heart and a generous hand. Professionals never deny the claim of a brother or sister who is in need, and I never fail to rally round one who is in trouble, and even to the outside world. To the poor, and to the little children, and to the sick, the profession is notoriously generous.[86]

For a young girl of such delicate sensibilities to be forced into associating with the likes of the trollop McLennan, known by everyone in Fitzroy to be a notorious peddler of abortions, is an absolute disgrace. I say that Edwin Peddy and his brother John should be incarcerated for their actions. I am prepared to come to Miss Anthony's aid today; to offer sanctuary; a guiding hand, and will take her into the theatrical troupe of my husband John and I and teach her to be a wonderful actress and performer. Your worship, I beg you, have mercy on this poor waif.

(The lighting changes to focus on JL alone. She strides to Centre Stage, flings off her cape to reveal a naval officer's uniform. She stands for a few moments, in tableaux: a 'manly' pose, feet apart and hands on hips, but with a hint of glamour.)

JL:

Sink me, ladies and gentlemen, if I haven't got the most difficult task to perform, for I am the worst person in the world to make a speech. Before I left London I had the greatest dislike to come to Australia, as I thought it such a long, long way from all my friends. But I met with such a reception here as I never got anywhere else. I shall not forget any here, you bet! I now bid you good bye, but remember, no matter what you do, let your hearts be ever true to Poll.

[86] 'Burlesque: As an actress sees it' by Miss Amy Horton, in *Table Talk*: 6/1/1888, p. 13.

JL:

I'll sing you a song, not very long,
But the story somewhat new,
Of pirate William Kidd, who, whatever he did,
To his Poll was always true.
He sailed away in a gallant ship
From the port of old Bristol,

(slower)
And the last words he uttered,
As his handkerchief he fluttered,
Were, "My heart is true to Poll."

(Chorus)
His heart was true to Poll,
His heart was true to Poll,
It's no matter what you do
If your heart be only true:
And his heart was true to Poll.

Twas a wreck. William, on shore he swam,
And looked about for an inn;
When a noble young lady, of a sort rather shady
Came up with a kind of grin:
"Oh, marry *me*, and a king you'll be,
And in a palace loll,

(slower)
Or we'll do you willy-nilly."
So he gave his *hand*, did Billy,
But his *heart* was true to Poll.

Away a twelvemonth sped, a happy life he led
As the King of a rorty crew;
His cloak was red and yellar, he used a big umbrella
And wore a pair of coconuts for shoes;
He'd corals and knives, and twenty-six wives,
Whose beauties I cannot extol,

(slower)
One day they all revolted,
So he back to Bristol bolted,
For his *heart* was true to Poll.

His heart was true to Poll,
His heart was true to Poll,
It's no matter what you do
If your heart be only true:
And his heart *was* true to Poll.

JL:

I am sure mine will be to my Poll, which is Melbourne. In all the towns I have played in I never met with such kindness and enthusiasm, such good hearts and good friends, as I now see before me. I thank you with all my heart.

(Jennie Lee exits and the stage goes to black.)

End.

Scene 17

Setting: **Inside the Collingwood Magistrates Court.**

Constable Cane:

Bring up Miss Cecilia Anthony

(CA enters, dressed in drab prison garments. She seats herself in 'the dock.)

M:

Miss Anthony, you are a wilful and rebellious young woman and deserve to be punished accordingly.

CA:

No!

M:

Your involvement with the criminal Edwin Peddy, recently convicted and sentenced to 18 months hard labour at the Pentridge Stockade, has been a constant source of shame to your mother. She has also testified to your leading role in the running of an immoral house in St. David Street in Fitzroy. She was an unwilling and innocent party living in a state of constant fear. Indeed, recent scars on her head are evidence of your violent behaviour.

CA:

She's lyin', I tell yer! Me and poor Becky had no choice but to stay in that house. We had no money because the Melbourne Ladies took away their charity cards when she sent me to the Royal to make money for her. She said we'd be on the street if we didn't do what she wanted. She's as thick as glue with Ellen McLennan, and My Ma does what she's tells her, everyone know that! Ask 'er what she and Eddie knew about...

M:

(Interrupting) Miss Anthony you have already been given ample time to state your case. Your mother, Mrs Anthony, took the sensible course of action and made every effort to cooperate with the Court.

Cecilia Anthony, you are found to be guilty on both charges. You are sentenced to 12 months confinement at the Reformatory for Young Women. I urge you to reconsider your wanton behaviour so that upon your release you will endeavour to take on work befitting a girl of your age and station in life.

End.

Scene 18:

Setting: **A dimly lit alley at night, in Fitzroy.**

(Cecilia is now in the full costume of Jo, the dying street-sweeper, but he could be any young and destitute young child. Instead of Jenny Lee she is accompanied by Happy Dinah, one pace behind Jo and looking directly at the audience as if seeking a response. The sounds of a cold and windy night can be heard: the rattling of a window pane, the sound of water dripping, and the distant and intermittent sounds of a factory or workshop.)

Jo:

It's turned very dark, sir. Is there any light a comin?

HD: *(Speaking to Jo, but addressing the audience)*

It is coming fast, Jo, my poor fellow!

(To the audience)

I have witnessed great suffering and turmoil since my arrival in the colony. During our recent sorties into Van Diemen's Land I witnessed the exploitation of women the likes of which would shock any decent-minded and good-hearted person.

Jo:

I hear you, sir, in the dark; let me catch hold of your hand

(Jo raises his hand momentarily but lets it fall back from exhaustion.)

HD: *(Speaking to Jo)*

Jo, can you hear what I say?

(To the audience)

But the poor women I encountered cannot be held solely responsible, the men of that forlorn colony are equally to blame and will be held accountable on the Great Day of Judgement that is coming us all.

Jo:

I'II say anythink as you say, sir, for I knows it's good.

HD: *(Speaking to Jo)*

Our Father...

Jo: "Our Father! Yes that very good, sir"

HD: *(Speaking to Jo)*

Which art in Heaven

(To the audience)

No less pitiable are the circumstances endured by many of our sisters, young and old, in the hovels and opium-dens of Collingwood and Fitzroy.

Jo:

Art in Heaven - is the light a comin, sir?

HD: *(Speaking to Jo)*

Hallowed be thy Name. Amen.

(To the audience)

When will Mr. Deakin and other members of the Victorian Parliament stand up for the poor women trapped in a never-ending cycle of unwanted children, drunken husbands and the crushing burden of poverty and disease.

(A single light illuminates the face of the dying boy.)

Jo:

"Hallowed be - thy - ...

HD:

(To the audience)

The Light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead. Dead, you're Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts.

And dying thus around us, every day.[87]

End.

[87] *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens: pp, 648-649.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek: Shall we set about some revels?
Sir Toby Belch: What shall we do else?

Twelfth Night [88]

Chapter 1:

1.1 The Larrikin Menace

It should not be taken for granted that accurate and detailed knowledge about larrikins is widely known or understood. This is because the meaning of the term 'larrikin', and all that has been associated with it over time, has been sufficiently bowdlerised as to be almost unrecognizable. My intention when writing and presenting 'Flash Donahs' was to contribute to this knowledge and in doing so, discover what could be described as the archetypal female larrikin.

It is difficult for the contemporary reader to understand the level of anxiety that was generated by the rise of the larrikin in Melbourne during the 1880s. Melbourne was still a young city that had seen exponential growth in the breadth of its economy and the development of housing for both the rich and working-class inhabitants. By the time the rise of female and male young people defying the Victorian-era ethos of social docility had come to the attention of the authorities and leaders of the Colony, it was too late to simply sweep them away.

As Kylie Smith has argued,

> The history of larrikinism had been predicated upon their criminal history within a (highly moralised) colonial Victorian-era society; a society that was preoccupied with manifestations of sexuality and the maintenance of a family-centric model of society (Smith 2008, pp. 35-36).

[88] *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare, Act 1, Scene 3, Lines: 132-133

The ‘Push’ (or larrikin gang), was not the sole domain of the male larrikin. Young female and male larrikins mingled freely together, or went about in single-sex groups. In the eyes of the press and the arbiters of morality in Melbourne, male and female larrikins were equally as dangerous. It was believed that through their actions they undermined their own worth and therefore the future of the Colony of Victoria. Although my research has been concerned with the activities of female larrikins, particularly young female larrikins, it is impossible to give these young women their due without firstly attempting to describe their male counterparts and their preferred escapades and peccadilloes. This will be extended to include the reporting of male larrikin behaviour in the press. As with female larrikin behaviour, press reports of the more outlandish actions of these young men were often what appeared in the major and minor newspapers of the day within Melbourne, but occasionally in the regional areas of the Colony of Victoria. In this chapter I investigate what was done to combat the threat of larrikinism. Also, the performative nature of larrikin criminal behaviour can be seen in my description of a daring and outrageous event that took place in country Victoria in 1881.

In 1881, according to the *Argus*, there were 3141 arrests involving larrikinism in the inner-suburbs of the City of Melbourne. In 1882 there were rising concerns (certainly in the newspapers), about the future of the Colony of Victoria, based on the perceived and widely publicized threat of a lost generation of young women and men to a life of crime and moral dissolution. Assaults on the police were commonplace, including ‘stabs, cuts, scalp wounds, bruises, or contusions’. Two Constables were so badly injured that they were ‘superannuated’ out of the force (‘Larrikinism No. 3’, *Argus* 20/1/1882, p. 9). One of the two policemen, Sergeant Shorthill, features in Scene Fourteen (B)[89] of ‘Flash Donahs’. After being brutally struck on the head by a piece of heavy ‘road metal’, Shorthill never returned to

[89] The trial of Edwin Peddy.

duty and left the police constabulary on a pension of 'half-pay' ('Larrikinism No. 2', *Argus* 20/1/1882, p. 7).

But, it was not enough for the larrikin to make the lives of the policemen 'on his beat' a misery. Our uniquely Australian hoodlums would often attend the courts in large numbers, filling the small area available to members of the public to view the action. Throughout the trial of their friends or family members they would display,

> the liveliest interest in the fate of male or female friends who may be on trial. A youth, or a girl of a certain class being brought in, you will see that their first movement is to peep round the corner of the dock and exchange a wink with their sympathizing pals (James 1877, Vol 3: p. 56).

There was a rising state of alarm in Melbourne at the start of 1882. The cause of this alarm was the ever-present fear of anti-social behaviour by larrikin gangs. The indications were that the larrikin menace was approaching its apogee. The public responded fearfully to this behaviour by calling for highly punitive action to be taken against them. In the *Argus* newspaper the question was put, 'What will these young savages become in a few years if some effectual deterrent is not applied to larrikinism?' ('Larrikinism No. 4', *Argus* 31/1/1882, p. 4). The *Argus* did not lay the blame for larrikinism solely at the feet of the authorities. Using language that remains very familiar to us in the current day, the parents of the ruffians were also blamed for falling to carry out their obligations to their children,

> Instead of keeping a tight rein on their children they let them have their own way in everything - give them liberty to go as they please, and as has already been shown ultimately allow them to get beyond their control ('Larrikinism No. 3', *Argus* 20/1/1882, p. 9).

In *Lights and Shadows of Melbourne Life* (1888), John Freeman vividly describes some of the activities enjoyed by 'youthful larrikins' in the larger theatrical venues such as the Princess Theatre and the Theatre Royal,

> The gallery is the region belonging exclusively to the larrikin class. Certainly some few working-men go there, but not many. ... Bright specimens of our colonial youth, male and female, may be seen in that part of the house. ... The full-blown larrikin, hang-dog in look and careless in attire, comes there with no other apparent object than to air his filthy language, and create as much uproar as possible. ... Then it was filled nightly with some of the choicest specimens of the juvenile ruffianism hailing from the back slums, and disturbances were so frequent that the management, to keep as many of these interesting creatures out as possible, raised the price to a shilling (Freeman 1888, p. 77).

A slang term used by locals to describe the 'gallery' area was, 'The Saddling Paddocks' (a risqué reference to the mounting yards at a racecourse). It was given over to excessive drinking, raucous larrikin behaviour and private liaisons with female sex-workers. This enclave was described in the *Argus newspaper* as, 'a disgraceful, flagrant, heinous scandal, flaunting boldly and shamelessly in the face of decent society! - an outrageous insult to our wives and daughters!' ('The Theatre Vestibules', *Argus* 1/7/1876, page 4).

In less salubrious venues, such as Mace's 'boxing saloon' located in the VKC Hotel (in the lane next to the Theatre Royal), 'a number of youths give boxing and dancing performances in turn upon a moveable stage'. Because of their love of dancing[90], members of a 'Push would 'muster' in large numbers,

> 'at galas and fetes where they and their girls invade the dancing-greens and booths, create what disturbances occur on these occasions, and generally stay behind to seize any opportunity that may present itself to rob a drunken man' ('Larrikinism No. 4', *Argus* 31/1/1882, p. 4; Bellanta 2009, p. 684).

They often provided the music themselves courtesy of a 'squeeze box' (or concertina), played by one of their comrades (*Standard* 9/1/1886, p. 4).

The term 'Push' was a widely-used name for a larrikin gang, although the actual gangs christened themselves with colourful, provincial and menacing 'monikers' (a slang term for

[90] Bellanta has also provided us with a rollicking and colourful description of the larrikins' love of dancing and their exuberant dancing styles; to the point of 'soiling their tweed suits with sweat and drunken excess' (Bellanta 2009, p .684)

the name of a person or group). In 1882, larrikin gangs were seemingly more focussed upon invading licensed premises for free drinks and harassing defenceless members of the public, than upon each other (which became a feature of their actions in later decades). This is not to say that gangs such as the Hoddle Street Lairies did not participate in 'irregular forays' into neighbouring suburbs to battle it out with rivals such as another localized gang, the 'Fitzroy Forties' (McConville 1985, p. 76).

> Evenings idled away on street corners, rowdy displays and deliberate insult of 'respectable passers-by' defined the larrikin. But the larrikin readily moved on to more dangerous pursuits. Larrikins in Fitzroy and Collingwood who had created 'a perfect pandemonium ... swearing, spitting, and fighting', went further, to 'jostle people on the road [and] knock down those who object to their treatment' (*Fitzroy City Press* 1/4/1882; McConville 1985, p. 72).

This level of misbehaviour may seem to be relatively harmless but the larrikin male was capable of dangerous and seriously violent actions. One such event occurred on December 31, 1881 in the modest and usually calm and peaceful rural hamlet of Jung-Jung[91]. In a scenario worthy of the film, *A Clockwork orange* (1971)[92], a group of a dozen or more young men (between twenty and twenty-two), hailing from the rural city of Ballarat and the Melbourne suburb of Collingwood, arrived in the unsuspecting farming community intending to make the most of the New Year's Eve revels. Notably, all the members of the gang had put on 'blackface' make-up prior to the start of their efforts with the intention of terrorizing the local inhabitants.

In what would today be described as acts of aggravated burglary, the invading gang members stormed into unsuspecting households and harassed and terrorized the residents. When the Police Constable from the nearby small country town of Murtoa arrived in Jung-Jung to confront them (along with a handful of local men), the larrikins purloined the gun of the local

[91] Jung-Jung is located 316 kilometres north-west of Melbourne and 16 kilometres north-east of the town of Horsham (the regional capital of the Wimmera district).
[92] Directed by Stanley Kubrick.

saddler[93] and barricaded themselves inside a house, threatening to 'shoot it out with anyone who might attempt to interfere with them'. Five members of the gang were arrested, with the others making their escape ('News of the day', *Age* 4/1/1882, p. 4). It is very likely that the youths described in the *Age* as the 'Collingwood Flat' members of the larrikin gang were also part of the notorious 'Hoddle Street Lairies'. The description of an earlier and equally violent encounter between local police and the 'Lairies' on November 22nd, 1880 (later described as the 'Collingwood Outrage'), features prominently in 'Flash Donahs', as the basis of the trial of the Collingwood larrikin, Edwin Peddy.[94] In that instance, before the struggle with the police began, the gang paraded down Hoddle Street in Collingwood claiming they were the next 'Kelly Gang'.[95]

What was behind the use of 'blackface' by the marauding larrikins? The cockiness and sure-handed vulgarity of male comedians wearing 'blackface' during their performances may have been an inspiration for their choice of 'masque'[96] (Waterhouse 1990, pp. 85-87, Bellanta 2012, pp. 22-27,). Male larrikin 'style' was ostentatious and bold (Bellanta 2009, p. 686). It enabled the male larrikin to easily differentiate themselves,

> There they were, with their "Tommy Dodd"[97] or sac coats of black cloth, cut in their characteristic style, and profusely decorated with buttons and braidings, vests to match, tweed trousers of striking patterns, fitting tightly from the thigh to the knee, but springing out in bell shape at the bottom, and nearly covering their mock lacing, steel capped, high-heeled boots. A black or grey soft felt hat, with a prodigiously broad velvet band, covering a close cropped head of hair oiled to a state of sleekness, and a gaudy coloured necktie, surmounted by a clean-shaved face, completed the picture of the ordinary larrikin ('Larrikinism No. 4', *Argus* 31/1/1882, p. 4).

[93] Maker of saddles and other equine products.
[94] Scenes Twelve to Sixteen.
[95] The matter of the 'Kelly Gang' was still very topical because the execution of the infamous bushranger and leader of the gang, Ned Kelly, had taken place just eleven days earlier on the 11th of November, 1880.
[96] An 'operatic' form of entertainment in which performers imitated mythological or allegorical characters.
[97] 'A short tight-fitting coat' ('Larrikinism No. 2', *Argus* 20/1/1882, p. 7), the name apparently deriving from the name of a British 'swell' stage character (Sleight 2013, p. 156).

A ‘blackface dandy’ would parade about the stage in ‘sharply extravagant dress, skiting about their accomplishments with a deliberately burlesque panache’ (Bellanta 2009, p. 678). To the larrikin, wearing blackface like their popular stage idols was a representation of ‘outlaw masculinity’. Outlaw masculinity also went hand in hand with an emphasis on luxurious display, in keeping with the style of the most popular stage ‘criminal-dandy figures’ As Bellanta says, ‘Larrikins agreed with the dominant view that blackness meant social revolt, sexual licence, impulsiveness, and braggart criminality’ (pp. 689-690).

Larrikin males did not have it all their own way when it came to outrageous and confronting fashion choices. The author, Mary Fortune, was aghast at the ostentatious clothing and accessories worn by the young women she encountered in Bourke Street on any Saturday night,

> Oh, bless us! Do you see these chignons - those *frizzes*[98] - those trains? Heaven help us with brains! Do you observe the eardrops, and the ribbons, and the glittering jet ornaments hanging in and on every conceivable, or at least perceivable, article of attire? (Fortune 1869, qtd. in Sussex, 1989, p.196).

Where were the families of these young women, Fortune asked, ‘what then, ask we again, are the mothers of Melbourne about?’ (Fortune 1869, p. 204).[99]

[98] The author’s emphasis

[99] Mary Fortune remained largely forgotten until the late 1980s when a collection of her work was published by Lucy Sussex in 1989.

1.2 Female larrikins

In this section I will compare and evaluate the writing of contemporary academics about the everyday lives of the Australian female larrikins. Melissa Bellanta's study of larrikin culture in Australia entitled, *Larrikins: A History*, was published in 2012. The period of history covered in her book is a wide one, spanning approximately fifty years, between 1870 and 1930. Bellanta speaks about the manner in which that culture changed over the decades and of the influence of 'larrikinism' (both good and bad), upon the commonly accepted view of the true character of the 'Aussie bloke'. It also devotes a chapter entitled 'Larrikin style', to the history of larrikin fashion for both women and men. This is also discussed in relation to the caricatured depictions of larrikin fashion in the press. Bellanta's central argument is that the larrikin, and the larrikin girl, were modalities of self-performance and were strongly derivative of contemporary stage personae; and as detailed accounts of female larrikin culture are not plentiful, we rely on these performative representations to help uncover aspects of their lives.[100] Stage fashion for female performers (across all performance styles), was of crucial importance to the female audience member, regardless of class or their use of the cheapest seats in the house[101]. In *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage* (1834 - 1899), Richard Fotheringham says that 'actresses ... became the acknowledged exemplars in matters of fashion (Fotheringham 2006, p. xliii)[102].

Simon Sleight is in agreement with Bellanta about the performative nature of larrikinism. He adds to the discussion by proposing that the various physical environs of

[100] See also, Bellanta (2009) 'Leary Kin: Australian Larrikins and the Blackface Minstrel Dandy'
[101] For a closer look at the origins of theatre seating arrangements in the United Kingdom, based on 'class' (from the latter part of the 18th Century and, no doubt, transported to Australia); see *Convict Theatres of Early Australia* : 1788 - 1840 (Jordan, R 2002).
[102] For detailed and wide-ranging examples of stage fashion for women during this period see, *Pets of the public: a book of beauty, containing twenty-five portraits of favourite actresses of the Australian stage, with critical and descriptive notes* (Ellis, E. 1888)

Melbourne were a strong contributing factor in the shaping of larrikin culture. He proposes that the character of Melbourne's built upon and undeveloped land became intermeshed with 'the attributes' of its larrikin inhabitants, and when examined in this way, 'the urban form and group disposition are mutually reinforcing'. The streets of 'late Victorian'[103] Melbourne acted 'as a stage' and were directly related to all 'larrikin activities' (including, 'dress, speech and public behaviour'), [in the] 'transitional urban locations in which they occurred' (Sleight 2009, p. 232). The unique nature of larrikin style (both female and male),

> Allowed its wearer to stand out from the crowd and in addition - as is the wont of the teenager - to clearly demarcate the younger generation from their elders. It is also probable that the larrikin hoped his appearance would attract attention from rivals and impress the opposite sex (p. 243).

Larrikinism was 'closely identified with public spaces', and the vacant lot or street corner became like an exclusive private club, a place where young urban youth could 'meet, talk and be entertained' (p. 237). In Sleight's opinion 'interstitial; or 'in- between' spaces allow for a process of development for a 'subject', in this case, the larrikin. They provide the necessary 'terrain for elaborate strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - [and to] initiate new signs of identity' (p. 250).

Larrikins of both sexes gathered at a wide variety of popular venues, both professionally operated (for examples, public houses, dance halls, and theatre), or improvised and impromptu public venues such as 'pubs', street corners, vacant suburban blocks of land, beach piers and promenades. The text and performance styles employed in 'Flash Donahs', and certain aspects of the dramaturgy were often informed by Bellanta's knowledge of the 'brazen girl' and how tough and defiant she could be. This particularly

[103] Sleight is referring to the period 1870 to 1901 (1901 was the year of Queen Victoria's death, and the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia).

applied to the concept of the larrikiness as ‘pugilist’ (someone willing to prove a point by the use of her fists). This self-referencing performance culture enabled the young members of the lower-working class to exhibit an awareness of their disadvantage in general and to demonstrate their defiance to it. This was coupled with a lack of education and limited work opportunities (Bellanta 2012).[104]

Bellanta’s view is that amongst female larrikins there was a performative communality of like-minded individuals. The inhabitants of this loose-knit community were 'fellow combatants, rivals, neighbours and relatives, mates and partners in adversity' (p. 56). The use of the descriptive term ‘mates’ is not applied here in the accepted use of the Australian vernacular. It refers to what Bellanta describes as a supportive network usually for the benefit of sex-workers 'living and socialising together', in which young women referred to themselves as such (p.46). In Bellanta’s opinion, this ‘sub-culture’ flourished without the imprimatur of male larrikins or the conformity of the ‘Push’,

> Young larrikin women worked up their own sense of same-sex solidarity: their own friendships and animosities and rivalries. For many, the allure of these girl-on-girl friendships was a key impetus for their involvement in larrikin circles. It helped to compensate for the easy brutality of the boys and the contempt of colonial society at large (p. 46).

The most secure relationships enjoyed by members of the female criminal ‘subculture’ that existed in Melbourne, were with other like-minded women. These self-supporting networks strongly encouraged young women to stubbornly defy the ‘reformatory efforts’ of the legal system, and as they existed precariously on the fringes of civil society, they easily earned their place in this subculture. They were often exposed to the judicial system because of their involvement in violent and disorderly behaviour,

[104] For a more detailed account of Bellanta’s analysis of performative influences on young female larrikins see: (2010) ‘The Larrikin Girl’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 34, Issue 4, pp. 499-512

shunning lawful employment in favour of criminal behaviour such as theft and sex-work, or as result of their high rate of recidivism. Piper refers to them as members of the 'criminal classes'[105], as this is how they were described by the press and the police (Piper 2013, pp. 8-10). But there was another important factor to this involvement, As Piper says,

> disorderly women's encounters with the legal system stemmed not only from their own exploits, but from their associations with other criminally-involved women. Over a quarter of all women who appeared before Brisbane[106] and Melbourne's higher courts ... were charged alongside other women (pp. 9-10).

The rebellious behaviour of young female larrikins was influenced by the bold and occasionally daring theatricality of female burlesque performers. Bellanta describes burlesque as 'a play or skit that sent up something serious through overstatement and absurdity" (p. 49). This definition of burlesque concurs with that of Margaret Williams. In her book, *Australia on the Popular Stage: 1829-1929* (1983), Williams says that the freedom enjoyed by members of the 'Australian stage' to lampoon its politicians would have been in stark contrast to their British counterparts (Williams 1983, p. 83). When referring to the style and content of this form of theatre, Bellanta draws a clear distinction between the modern version of 'striptease-cabaret' and the structured and less bold manner of performance of the 1880s.

It would be reasonable to say that what we may consider to be innocent today was seen as daring to Melbourne audiences of the 1880s (Bellanta 2012, pp. 49-53). In the courtroom, the influence of the theatre-scene might be found in overt displays of disdain (in contrast to the

[105] 'a term used here to describe social worlds connected not just by inter-relationships but shared protocols, places and style' (Piper 2014, p. 8)

[106] This reference is from Alana Piper's 2014 PhD thesis entitled, 'In Bad Company: Female Criminal Subcultures in Brisbane and Melbourne, 1860-1920'. Piper examines the lives of female criminals and, broadly speaking, the nature of their inter-personal relationships. Piper provides an in-depth analysis of how maintaining these relationships supported and protected each other when they were drawn into the criminal justice system and reveals 'the effects of the male dominated nature of gender relations on women's criminal activity and punishment (Piper 2014, p. 12)

swagger of the male larrikin), in which female defiance was expressed by '... saucy gestures: tossing their bonnet, [and] walking with bouncy sass' (p. 49).

Bellanta emphasises the socio-economic backgrounds of those poorer women working in the less respectable modes of live performance, but does not go so far as to suggest that these young women were financially or sexually exploited. Her contention is that lower-class entertainments were mostly the domain of poor and ill-educated young women and that the selling of sexual favours by some young female performers was closely linked to their involvement in the world of the theatre, and particularly associated with the burlesque performance style. In *Selling Sex: A History of Prostitution* (2007) Raelene Frances provides a lengthy list of examples of women undertaking sex-work as an adjunct to their 'normal' work because of the poor wages paid to female manual labourers, particularly those in domestic service. This information was gleaned from an 1891 Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into Chinese gambling in the Colony of New South Wales. There is only one example given of a female stage artist working as a prostitute 'on the side': a performer of 'statues' (presumably, 'living statues', in today's parlance), working at Chiarini's Circus (Frances 2007, pp. 122-123).

Chris McConville's chapter in *Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History* (1983) is an 'eye-opener' into the world of the Melbourne larrikin during the 1880s. McConville takes a broad look at the contribution of the 'larrikin class' to the shaping of Melbourne's social culture, but his view of the female larrikin is in stark contrast to that of Bellanta,

> One of the most recurrent problems with non-fictional sources on female larrikins is the number of times they describe *any* girl in the company of a larrikin-like youth as a 'prostitute' (Bellanta 2012, p. 39).

This is undoubtedly referring to the section in Chapter Two entitled, 'Prostitutes'. His opening statement is an affirmation of the role of the 'donah' or 'larrikiness' as being little

more than a companion or accompaniment to the male members of the Push (McConville 1983, p. 76). He then moves on quickly to the details of a number of specific cases of arrest for being a sex-worker and also the attitude of the police towards female offenders. He does, however, suggest that the poor economic fortunes of many women did compel them to become sex-workers (McConville 1983, pp. 76-82).

The chapter is an 'eye-opener' because the picture that McConville paints of the violent interactions between male larrikins and the police is akin to that of an urban war-zone. He describes the typical male larrikin as being completely '...reckless as to consequences' (p.72), which has a resonance in the modern era with the current reporting of youth gang-culture in Melbourne. However, he also points out that,

> These renegades, the larrikin, the prostitute, the thief and the Sunday liquor trader, were all real men and women. But they were also generalised labels applied in Melbourne to minorities perceived as dangerous by the rest of society (p. 71).

James Murray's book, *Larrikins: 19th Century Outrage* (1973) is not an academic work; it is a popular entertainment that focuses entirely on the lives of Sydney larrikins. Murray prefaced his commentary on larrikin culture with a potted history of perilous sea-voyages to Australia, seemingly as a means of establishing a causal link between the violence endured by women during those early voyages and the violence he expounds upon later. Bellanta is very forthright in her contesting of Murray's claim that some larrikin women were placid and accepting recipients of male larrikin violence (Bellanta 2012, p. 38). Murray makes some very sexist remarks in the chapter, 'The Larrikin Drab'. For example, when referring to male violence against larrikinesses he states that,

> there are women who have little respect for a man who will not command and demand, we also know, indeed, some women are resentful of husbands who do not give them a beating occasionally, and are strangely jealous of other women given such masculine attentions (Murray 1973, p. 114).

The fact that Murray's book was written over forty years ago is not an excuse for sexist content of this kind. During my search for archival material to use in 'Flash Donahs' I did not shy away from the reports of violence against women that I regularly encountered. The character, Edwin Peddy, is a figure of male violence and it was necessary for 'Flash Donahs' to have such a character. His presence acts as a counterpoint to the efforts of the female characters to remain independent and resilient under pressure. None of the material from Murray's book found its way into the speech of any of the female characters. Nor were any of the unflattering and stereotypical caricatures of female larrikins contained within it used to 'flesh out' the actions or behaviour of the female characters (Bellanta 2012, p. 38).

1.3 The outcasts of Melbourne

In his description of those members of society that fell outside the realm of the 'respectable' majority ('The Outcasts of Melbourne', *Argus* 20/5/1876, p. 4*),* James speaks of what differentiated the European version of the 'rough' from the Australian larrikin. The principal factor in separating the two was 'his extreme boldness and contempt of authorities' (James 1877, Vol. 3, p. 56). The threat of rampant larrikinism was seen as 'a stern reality and a widespread evil - a cancer in our community ... [destroying] the vitality in the rising generation of both young women and men, that might otherwise become of incalculable value to the country ('Larrikinism No. 3', *Argus* 20/1/1882, p. 9). Larrikins are described as being 'mostly youths and boys, and those who are not thieves and sharpers[107] are flats and pigeons[108], being inducted into the mysteries of the Larrikin's Progress'. James is (perhaps mockingly), referring here to an imaginary alternate version of the Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan (1678), 'the stages of which may be divided into drink, gambling, rowdyism, assault, police-court, gaol, thief (James 1877, Vol 3, p. 62).

[107] A confidence trickster (Green 1998: p. 1055).
[108] 'Flats' or 'pigeons' refer to dupes or victims (Green 2011, p. 34).

During the month of January, in 1882, the *Argus* newspaper published a series of lengthy articles on the problem of 'larrikinism' in the Colony of Victoria. They all shared the prosaic title of 'Larrikinism' and were numbered from 1 to 4. There are no 'by-lines' attached to these particular articles but I suggest that they were, in all likelihood, penned by James. Very similar metaphors were used in the four Argus articles, and in Volumes One and Three of his collected works in *The Vagabond Papers*[109]. In the Argus articles, larrikins are referred to as 'a poisonous weed in our social garden that ought to have been rooted out long ago' ('Larrikinism No. 1', *Argus* 15/1/1882, p. 6); and as 'a cancer in our community ... [weakening] the vitality in the rising generation that might otherwise become of incalculable value to the country' ('Larrikinism No. 3', *Argus*: 20/1/1882, p. 9). In the vignette, *Outcasts of Melbourn*e (1877), James refers to the excesses of larrikin behaviour as 'a deep-seated ulcer, which, unless healed, may eat deep into and destroy the body of the State' (James 1877, Vol 3, p. 56). The perpetrators of this anti-social behaviour are compared to parasites preying on a 'noble tree ... [devouring] the sap and vigour of the monarch of the forest' (p. 55). The behaviour of male larrikins was seen as a threat to the development of the 'Young Australian' and 'the future of the Colony' ('The Salvation Army', *North Melbourne Advertiser* 2/02/1883, p.3).

Larrikin girls did not always act 'nicely', as was expected of women in mid-Victorian Australia. In fact, their behaviour in public was often as outrageous as that of male larrikin gang members (Bellanta 2012, pp. 30-56). A good example of this is the response of the press to the aggressive behaviour of female protestors on the streets of Collingwood in 1884. Was their behaviour a form of gender subversion? A clue to this question can be found in an editorial from five years earlier in the *Bendigo Advertiser,* bluntly condemning young larrikin women for associating with, and 'acting alongside' their anti-social male counterparts,

[109] Five volumes of his essays had been published by 1877.

> Are these to be the mothers of a new generation of Victorians! Heaven help the colony if that is to be the case. We are sorry indeed to find the sex disgracing and degrading in itself in this way. Why should they so misconduct themselves? Let them look up to those young women who, whether rich or poor, know what is due to themselves and to society, and would shrink with horror from making such an exhibition of themselves ('Larrikinism', *Bendigo Advertiser* 15/2/1881, p. 2).

After the publication of the *Argus* articles the strident calls for the immediate introduction of severe punishments for recidivistic larrikinism were heard throughout the community ('Ruffianism' by 'Briton', *Argus* 4/1/1882, p. 6). Senior political figures, Magistrates and Justices of the Peace demanded twenty strokes of the 'birch-rod' for boys from ten to fifteen years of age and twenty-fives lashes of the 'cat-o-nine tails' for those males over the age of fifteen. For the first category of offender the punishment was to be administered 'at the rising of the court'; and for the second, no more than a week after the judgement was made. Councillor Delbridge[110], Justice of the Peace, said that 'the community must either be ruled by larrikinism, or it must be put down with a strong hand. ... [and] hoped that the Government would take no notice of any of the mamby-pamby style of talk' currently being heard in the Parliament' ('The Suppression of Larrikinism', *Weekly Times* 11/2/1882, p. 20). It was feared that 'flogging would not reform the full-blown ruffians ... but if they are not lashed they will continue in their career of ruffianism'.

James had no doubt what would happen if the wrong course of action was taken, 'by allowing them virtually to escape are we to have citizens continually outraged, society insulted, the colony disgraced, and thousands of the rising and future generations ruined? ('Larrikinism No. 3', *Argus* 20/1/1882, p. 9). In his opinion, governments and the legal system had failed these young women and men,

[110] After whom Delbridge Street in Fitzroy is named.

> The law, as it now stands, was enacted for a state of society in which offences might be committed by individuals, and not by organised gangs banded together for a purpose (p. 9).

1.4 The living conditions of the 'larrikin class'

In 1877, the journalist and *litterateur*, John Stanley James (best known by the *nom de plume*, 'The Vagabond')[111] posed the question, 'where do the criminal classes of Melbourne live?' Well, the answer then was 'in the 'lanes, "terraces," "squares," and rights-of-way'[112] located between the two city thoroughfares. ... [where] the habitations are mostly of a kind - one - storied hovels, low, dilapidated, and dirty. The surroundings are filth and garbage' (James 1877, Vol 3, p. 63).

The lack of a proper sewage system[113] meant that life in these areas was accompanied by the overpowering stench of stale urine and other waste materials. Those areas close to the theatre in Bourke Street were particularly obnoxious with patrons of the performance venues, regardless of the threat of arrest, making full use of the 'back lanes' to relieve themselves. This behaviour was 'clearly the practice of all classes of men' and added to the 'fearful urban pathology' of the area (Brown-May 1998, pp. 96-100).

On Tuesday the 6th of February, 1883, a deputation from the Corporation of Melbourne (led by the Lord Mayor, Councillor James Dogshun and calling itself 'The Back Slums Committee'), entered into the area between 'the two thoroughfares' (Bourke Street and Lonsdale Street), to examine the housing of many of its residents, who endured a life of entrenched poverty and squalid, unhealthy living conditions. The 'huts' and 'hovels' the Committee inspected were described as being 'filthy and abominable inside', often with water pooling under the floors of the 'fallen-down looking tenements'. It was an area well-known

[111] John Stanley James changed his name to Julian Thomas in 1872.
[112] The use of parentheses at this point is taken from the original source.
[113] 'The first public urinals were placed directly over the street channels'. The establishment of the Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) sewage system commenced in 1891 (Brown-May 1998, p. 97).

for having a volatile larrikin presence and was also notorious for its high crime-rate. Many of the dwellings were interconnected and were easily accessed, often making it difficult for the police to apprehend criminals attempting to make their escape ('The Back Slums Committee', *Leader* 10/2/1883, p. 21).

1.5 Summary

In this chapter I have shown the extent to which the public authorities would go to quash the threat of larrikinism in the Colony of Victoria. In a time when social conformity was expected of the young people of the Colony, the extent of larrikin behaviour was sufficiently troublesome to see them described as 'outcasts'. In the press the message was just as alarming, 'So rampant is larrikinism at present, that it takes rank as a question of most serious import to the whole colony' ('Larrikinism No. 1', *Argus* 15/1/1882, p. 6). What can also be seen from within this chapter is that female larrikins were active participants in larrikin culture.

In Chapter Two I will look at the 'larrikin menace' from a female standpoint, with a focus on gender issues affecting women in the 1880s. This will include an examination of a social struggle between men and women for possession of the national identity. Included in this analysis are examples of the way in which 'The Men's Press' demonized young women for public displays of defiance, and how the lives of rebellious working-class women were represented in contemporary publications, particularly incidents of public violence involving female larrikins (Lake 1986).

To highlight this I look closely at the activities of some of the residents of Little Napier Street[114]. The press coverage of two significant events is also looked at. They are the formation of the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne in 1882, and the Early Closing

[114] See Scene Four of 'Flash Donahs

Movement street riots that brought inner-suburban Melbourne to a halt in April, 1886. Included in the discussion of the street riots is an analysis of the arrest of a female ‘demonstrationist' named Annie Silk.

Chapter 2: Gender issues (on-stage and off)

2.1 Introduction

Nothing speaks more directly to my approach to practice-based research than the creation of the 'composite' character, Bessie Johnston. As I discussed in Chapter One, the research process for a historically-based theatre work is often indirect and fragmentary. By this, I mean that appropriate information may present itself, but only as a scrap of data. It may become necessary to follow a 'lead' in the research and hope that sufficient information will be available. When it is not, then it is up to the writer to flesh out the character by expanding upon the suppositions about time and place that the research has hinted at. As has been suggested by Brien, speculation about a composite character may be appropriate if the authorial content is based on solid and verifiable data similar in content to that already used. The truth about one character may be acceptable for use with another (Brien 2017, pp. 15-22).

This chapter will look at the social and economic conditions affecting the lives of women, particularly young women, who were disparagingly described as being of the 'larrikin and factory classes'. Representations in the press of young women often extended into the theatrical domain (as is still the case today), usually within a framework of 'the virtuous heroine' and/or, the 'brazen girl' (Bellanta 2012, pp. 30-53). The stage practice of female to male cross-dressing will be discussed in detail in this chapter, with an examination of the work of three famous female actors that were renowned for playing male characters. A contrapuntal relationship was evident in the way that female members of the Salvation Army were often described as acting in a manner unbecoming to women. In the early years of their religious struggles in Australia, the presence of Salvation Army women on the streets of

Melbourne was confronting to the religious establishment and the broader, more respectable social structure associated with the world of charitable organizations.[115]

2.2 'The Men's Press'

In her important article entitled, *'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context' (*1986), Marilyn Lake argues convincingly for the existence of, in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, a struggle for ownership of the national 'identity'. The struggle was between women concerned with emancipation and suffrage, and a masculinist stratum within society extolling the virtues of the archetypal male figure known variously as, 'the Coming Australian', 'the Lone Hand' or 'The Bushman'. Henry Lawson was a strong advocate for this supposed manifestation of the ideal male. Lake also argues that the press attacked women activists for their efforts in gaining freedom from the debilitating burden of constant childbirth. Members of the 'bohemian' cultural elite (consisting entirely of male writers) were outspoken in their championing the uninhibited exercise of male freedoms as being at the heart of the Australian spirit. Lake speaks of how the Bulletin (first published in 1890), freely stereotyped women as nagging shrews,

> To the militants of the emergent men's press, 'home influence' was emasculating. ... The *Bulletin* was the most influential exponent of the separatist model of masculinity which lay at the heart of the eulogies to the Bushman. (Lake 1986, p. 118)... Women were portrayed in the Bulletin as vain, snobbish, conservative, parson-worshipping killjoys, and, as often as not, unprepossessing spinsters (p. 119).

Therefore, the best lifestyle for any unattached young man (true to the intrinsic nature of the 'free' man), was to avoid marriage and children at all costs (pp. 116-131).

[115] See Scene Nine, which consists of a monologue from Miss Stobbs, a 'relief' worker from the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society), composed of various notes about female welfare recipients.

A casual workplace environment had unwelcome implications for 'family formation and family life'. Only what Fisher describes as, 'marginal domestic work', was available to women 'wishing to remain part of a family structure (Fisher 1985: p. 156). Even in working environments where women were welcomed, particularly when working in licensed hotels and bars, economic opportunities for working-class women could be restricted unfairly. For example, the final report of the *Victorian Royal Commission on Employés in Shops* (1883), emphatically declared that women working in licensed hotels risked both their physical and moral health (Kirkby 2007, pp. 71-77).

The strike in 1882 by members of the Melbourne Tailoresses Association (seeking more regular and better paid 'piece work') can be viewed as an example of this and, as a result, the future role of women in the Colony had undergone a subtle shift towards greater control over many aspects of their lives (Frances 1993, p. 35). The discovery of this event, and the subsequent decision to use the reportage of female involvement, concurs solidly with Canning's reference to the search for a 'usable past' in which the feminist theatre-maker can 'transform knowledge about gender and the past' (Canning 2004, p. 228). I have not specified Bessie Johnston's actual type of paid work in 'Flash Donahs'. It is very unlikely that she would have been a salaried employee of the Union, or of the male-dominated Victorian Trades Hall (which backed the formation of the Tailoresses Association). They might have 'passed the hat around' for her but it is likely that Bessie would have continued working along with the duties associated with her Union activities. Her need to support a young child as a single mother would have made the issue of reliable and well-paid work a constant bother for her. As Fisher says,

> Nineteenth-century capitalism may well have needed and encouraged the bourgeois family model, but only for some. Just as important was the economic requirements for vast numbers of casually employed. Among casual workers this family model may have been irrelevant or unattainable (Fisher 1985, p. 161).

Young women of the 'larrikin and factory classes' ('Quivis', *Argus*: 10/4/14, p. 4), were often negatively portrayed in newspapers (and other popular or satirical publications of the 1880s), often through the use of unflattering and exaggerated visual images. Within their pages we often see the negative social and economic problems that some young larrikin women experienced. Importantly, the reports of these matters would have almost certainly been written by men, and the often cruel and insulting descriptions of the women involved would have been strongly influenced by the dominant masculinist hegemony (Lake 1986).

During my research I encountered many lurid reports of outrageous behaviour by women in certain pockets of the inner-suburbs of Melbourne. Some of that material has found its way into the text of 'Flash Donahs', often influencing a broadly applied and mutative method of character development. Having said that, my challenge has also been to look beyond the obvious representations in the press of poor behaviour, without losing the vitality and defiant resistance to conformity amongst the larrikin women I encountered. Examples can be found in reports of female behaviour in Little Napier Street, in the inner-suburb of Fitzroy. The area had a notorious reputation and was known for the large number of sex-workers residing there. Houses in Little Napier Street were occasionally declared unfit for human habitation and subsequently demolished. Much to the chagrin of the local community, Little Napier Street backed directly onto the rear of Napier Street Primary School.[116] Newspaper writers of the day were eager to 'pigeon-hole' and contemporize a misogynistic view of the street behaviour of young larrikin women. After arresting three women in Little Napier Street at four-thirty p.m. on a Saturday afternoon, Sergeant Rennie of the Fitzroy Police was reported as saying that,

> In the watchhouse they behaved like infuriated beasts. In all my experience I never saw three females in such a state ('Police Intelligence – Fitzroy', *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier* 25/11/1882, p. 3).

[116] See Figure 2.1

That the arrest took place in Little Napier Street only added to the criminal mystique of this,

> "... hotbed of moral filth" (*Fitzroy City Press*: 10/3/1883, p.2). The three female defendants were charged with breaking windows in a house belonging to Mrs. Ellen McLennan who was very well-known to the court. ('Police Intelligence – Fitzroy', *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier* 25/11/1882, p. 2).

After reading about her outrageous behaviour, a women by the name of Mrs McLennan (alias 'Mrs Mac'), became a character in 'Flash Donahs': (although we do not meet her in person), as the owner of the opium den in Scene Four where a drugged Cecilia Anthony was taken by Edwin Peddy. She is also mentioned in Scene Ten by the character, Kate Anthony.

Figure 2.1
Little Napier Street (circa 1910), facing north, with the clock tower of the Fitzroy Town Hall visible in the centre. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

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Male newspaper writers and journalists who wrote accounts of violent encounters, or other anti-social or criminal behaviour involving female larrikins, chose to embellish their writing with as much lurid detail as propriety allowed. For example, a year earlier a reporter (using the *nom de plume,* 'Cosmopolite'), issued a dire warning about an incident in Little Napier Street that included "...the spectacle of half-a-dozen semi-nude females in a partial state of intoxication indulging in a free fight" ('Notes and Comments' by 'Cosmopolite', *Collingwood Mercury & Weekly Courier* 25/11/1882, pp. 2-3). Letters to the editor occasionally attested to the veracity of these reports of scandalous female behaviour. A correspondent with the *nom de plume* 'Veritas' wrote,

> I have myself seen females in that street stark-naked, as naked as the *Venus de Medici*. I have seen children stupidly drunk. I have seen men and women - if they could be called men and women - beastly drunk, fighting like hyenas, and I have heard language that made the hair on my head stand on end. All this was in broad daylight, and the school children - dozens of them - were looking on ('Correspondence', *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier,* 2/2/1884, p.2).

Young female larrikins were as willing as their male counterparts to settle a dispute violently, and if need be, in the public arena, often for the benefit and amusement of their pals. There was a strong sense of disgust and outrage generated in the community when these types of incidents happened in the public eye. Young female street-fighters, when caught, would not only be accused of foregoing their femininity in their eagerness to beat their opponent senseless, but also of contributing to the degradation of the moral standards of the male sex. For such an outrage to occur,

> Within a hundred yards of an institution[117] devoted to the reforming of those very creatures that have disgraced the name of woman and destroyed every vestige of respect for the sex. We cannot believe ... that orgies like these, and worse than these, occur in our midst in the presence of a much-boasted well organised police system ('City Echoes', *Melbourne Punch*, 27/1/1887, p. 2).

[117] The Abbotsford Convent.

2.2.1 'Reckless, unsexed women and girls'

'Unsexed' is used in the opening of Scene Five: 'The Street Riot Burlesque' when the burlesque character, 'Mr Deakin', complains about those '... reckless, unsexed women and girls' taking part in the Early Closing Movement street demonstrations. The term was sourced from a newspaper article (*Table Talk*, 8/4/1886, p. 9), and apparently was a very derisive comment about female sexuality that was in use well before the 1880s. For example, an article from the *Age* in 1855 entitled, 'Unfeminine Females' refers to obscene language being put to use by women all over the colony. The author complains strongly that it almost seems,

> that there is some baneful element in the Australian atmosphere which quite unsexes the humbler class of women[118], and converts them, if not into a race of Amazons, at least into a community of viragos ('Domestic Intelligence', *Age* 31/1/1855, p. 5).

2.3 Theatrical cross-dressing on the 1880s Melbourne stage

The search for popular female actors to possibly act as a template for the female and male characters performing in Flash Donahs, and to subsequently underpin the development of these characters, was a long one. Cross-dressing on the stage (usually male to female, but frequently female to male) was a popular activity with theatre audiences during the 1880s. This high level of acceptance (for what today may be seen as speaking to a niche market), was commonly featured in all types of stage production, including pantomime, burlesque and (to a lesser extent), melodrama. The popularity of cross-dressing also extended to pastimes away from the stage, including charitable events such as 'fancy dress' Australian Rules Football matches in which the participants dressed as their character of choice.(Chesser 2008, p. 91). In pantomime it was a traditional practice to have 'the principal boy' played by a boyish young woman (Viola Tait 2001, pp. 49-51; Bellanta 2012, pp. 49-50). In 'burlesque' companies (where there was certainly no shortage of female performers to choose from), it

[118] Suggesting that women of less 'humble' socio-economic circumstances were less likely to give in to emotional excesses.

was commonplace for male comedians to dress as women in the hope of eliciting quick and easy laughs from the audience. This was particularly true of the 'Minstrel Show' where some of the male performers would not only dress themselves as women but would put on 'black-face' make-up as well. (Chesser 2008, p. 81)

Katherine Kelly has emphasized the importance of the usability 'offered by the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as a period of possibilities' (Kelly, K 2010, pp. 652-653). I have chosen three female actors from the 1880s to discuss, all of whom were well-known (and well-loved) for their ability to convincingly portray (usually) young male characters. They are Marie Braybrook Henderson (also regularly referred to as Mrs. George Rignold), Jennie Lee and Carrie Swain. All three had very successful careers on the Australian stage and internationally. I will examine some of their better known characters with a particular focus on Jennie Lee and her portrayal of the young street vagabond 'Jo'. .

2.3.1 'The most dashing and *debonnaire* of little soldiers'

Marie Braybrook Henderson's presentation of the young male stage character, 'Willie Spratley', in the melodrama, 'Youth', stood the test of time. Fifty years after her performance in 1888 her portrayal of the boy hero was fondly remembered as a 'young debonair soldier, dashing, frank and manly ... Mrs. George Rignold would have won your hearty esteem and profound admiration' ('Footlight favourites No. 2: Links with a Glamorous Past', by 'R. H.', *Age* 15/1/1938, p. 3). When watching melodrama (particularly those productions that cast female performers as young male characters), audiences of the period were very willing to suspend their disbelief at seeing a woman playing a young man, allowing them to enjoy the overt signalling of Victorian-era moral values. Henderson's stage performances elicited a culturally gendered and morally resonant response from the audience, particularly from the parents of young men. In *Parting with my Sex: cross-dressing, inversion and sexuality in*

Australian cultural life (2008), Lucy Chesser proposes that one of the principal attractions of female to male cross-dressing on the stage in a burlesque, pantomime or melodrama setting (at least for the heterosexually-inclined male), was observing women in costumes that accentuated the female form (Chesser 2008: p. 78). However, there was something other than the use of daring, perhaps scandalous, stage costumes at play here: cross-dressing on stage unobtrusively filled the desire for the reinforcement of mid Victorian-era social and moral values, particularly in regards to what was considered to be acceptably demonstrable behaviour by young women and men. A theatre reviewer (using the *nom de plume, '*Adagio'*),* was fulsome in his praise of Marie Braybrook Henderson, the partner of Shakespearian actor and theatre manager, George Rignall (*Australian Dictionary of Biography* 1976, vol. 6)[119]. In the role of the young Lieutenant Willie Spratley, Henderson presented the character as

> a little chit of a fellow, chaffed by the men he knows on account of his youth, and slight proportions ; equally chaffed, but much more petted, by the women of his "set," and returning the chaff and the caresses with interest. A charming face, gracefully outlined form, and a sweet but not over powerful voice, Miss Henderson possesses all the requisite physical qualifications ('The Theatre, Etc.', *Weekly Times* 1/4/1882, p. 9).

According to Edward Ellis, in his published homage to the top female actors of 1888, Henderson's performance of Willie showed him to be,

> the most dashing and *debonnaire* of little soldiers, the frankest and manliest, and brightest of boys. ... a splendid specimen of those high-souled high-bred British lads who carry our colours into the jaws of death ... Every father in the theatre felt 'I should like my boy, if he had to go on a forlorn hope, to say good-bye to his dearest friend like that' (Ellis 1888, pp. 77-78).

Pets of the Public: *a book of beauty, containing twenty-five portraits of favourite actresses of the Australian stage* (1888), was written and published in Sydney by Edward Ellis. Each of the twenty-five female actors is shown in costume (sometimes in male garb), and is

[119] Van Der Poortan, H. M., *Australian Dictionary of Biography:* George Richard Rignall (1839-1912), also known by his stage name, 'George Richard Rignold'.

accompanied by an article praising their respective performance skills and describing some of their more popular productions. Interestingly, the individual traits of the female actors are described in such a way as to suggest that Ellis believed they were roles models for a behaviourally appropriate social context for women within Australian society. For example:

> Only one thing is necessary to the permanent maintenance of the excellent understanding that exists between Mrs. Rignold and her Australian admirers, which is, that they should see her as often as possible in the class of characters[120] in which she first won their favour (Ellis 1888, p. 78).

In a review of Jennie Lee's theatrical debut in Australia at the Princess Theatre the writer postulates that her performance inspired thoughts of 'the possibilities of winning back to the better life some of those forlorn things which hide in the shadows of the streets of a great city' (*Australasian* 6/5/1882, pp. 18-19). There were brothels and opium-dens amongst the small dwellings, often within close proximity to the ostentation of Bourke Street where the lights were 'battling with night's darkness in a hundred different forms' (*Down Bourke Street*, Fortune: 1869 in, *The Fortunes of Mary Fortune*: Sussex, 1989: p. 191), but these humble dwellings also provided shelter for many families and other more legitimate and socially acceptable forms of business activity (Mayne, 2006: p. 324). The term 'forlorn things' is a likely reference to female sex-work and other related crime. Furthermore, the melodramatic phrase, 'the shadow of the streets' is a clear allusion to the back-alleys and lanes known where the members of the underworld would gather. In Scene Four of 'Flash Donahs' the principal character, Cecilia Anthony, is taken to an opium-den in Little Napier Street where she is kept captive until her eventual rescue by her mother, Kate Anthony. In actual fact, the real Cecilia Anthony was seen smoking opium in a Chinese house in Little Bourke Street and removed by a police constable at the behest of her older sister Rebecca; a sensational event

[120] The term 'class of characters' refers to the quality and variety of the roles played by Braybrook Henderson-stage, not the Victorian-era system of class differentiation.

that was widely reported in the press (*The Ballarat Star* 8/9/1884, p. 2; 'Police news' *Age* 9/9/1884, p. 6; *Weekly Times* 13/9/1884, p. 7).

2.3.2 Carrie Swain, 'A good-natured larrikiness'

In the case of the American female actor, Carrie Swain (star of the highly successful American play, *The Tomboy*), Ellis describes the aspects of her personality on display during the performance as,

> just those which nature dictates, and consequently just those which the hearts of the people instinctively recognise. ... not because heroines always do win, but because Miss Swain herself goes about all she undertakes in a perfectly irresistible manner (Ellis 1888, p. 61).

In *Pets of the Public* Carrie Swain is pictured in front of an outdoor backdrop of rolling hills and a classical style of urn in the forefront, with palm fronds behind it. In the photograph Swain is dressed in the costume of a 'smart electric telephone runner'(presumably a telegram delivery-boy), in a matching suit of jacket and trousers, curly hair poking out from under his/her cap and posing in a relaxed masculine stance, left leg raised on what appears to be a large rock (Ellis 1888, p. 60). This was an acceptable vision of the noble and true Australian girl. The play was received with near universal praise by an audience eager to experience the thrill of Swain's on-stage bravado. At the highpoint of the action on-stage the American female actor provides an affirmation of the inherent goodness of young Australian women everywhere by 'taking a genuine header'[121] into a thirty feet long and ten feet wide tank of water to rescue a drowning six year old child.[122]

The choice of Swain's costume, and how it was reported, is (sadly) worthy of note. Her appearance each night (after her daring headlong dive into a water tank), at the 'Proscenium door' - without her jacket, and dripping wet ('Theatre Royal – The Tomboy', *The Age*,

[121] A head-first dive into a body of water.
[122] The supposed 'child' was actually a doll.

4/6/1888, p. 6), accompanied by six-year old Nellie Ogden, the 'rescued' child became a controversial issue. In an example of 1880s sexism in the press, the 'Male of Melbourne' was warmly encouraged to get along to the Theatre Royal to witness Swain's appearance after her dive, while there was still time ('The Playgoer', *Melbourne Punch* 14/6/1888, p. 10). As Mulvey proposed in her important article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', the role of women in a patriarchal society (either today, or in the 1880s) was relegated to that of a 'bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning' (Mulvey, 1975: p. 7). The 'determining male gaze' was obviously as widespread then as it remains today. As Mulvey puts it, 'in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact' (p. 11). It should be noted that Mulvey was originally writing about the cinema, not the theatre. Audiences enthusiastically acknowledged the cross-gender acting skills of popular female performers such as the English female actor, Jenny Lee (Chesser 2008, p. 78, Viola Tait 2001, p. 43).

So much so, that on the night of the final performance of 'Jo' the management of the venue offered all of the women in the audience a 'cabinet card' [123] of Jennie Lee in her 'Jo' costume ('Princess Theatre', *Age* 27/5/1882, p. 3, in Chesser 2008, p. 78). Sections of Jenny Lee's farewell speech at the Princess Theatre (*Age* 26/8/1882, p. 10) have been included in her monologue in the Collingwood Courthouse on behalf of her theatrical protégé, Cecilia Anthony (see Scene Sixteen). The original setting for the speech was as part of a 'farewell benefit' performance of 'The Grasshopper' another play in which Lee performed 'female to male'; this time as a sailor (hiding her gender, and elevated social standing as a young aristocrat), after escaping from the band of gypsies that kidnapped her at an early age (Chesser 2008, p. 60). The words of another popular burlesque performer and producer of the

[123] A photograph printed on a card approximately 16 x11 cm in size.

time, Amy Horton, have been combined with Lee's courtroom speech, in support of Cecilia Anthony.

Her performance of 'Jo' was, at the same time, acceptable and a challenge to the 1880s theatre audiences. Laurence Senelick makes the point that 'watching a woman impersonating a man confirms male superiority, his unconscious hope that the female performer is displaying her desire to be him, her envy of his status' (Senelick 2000, p. 327). The female actor of the Victorian-era stage could reproduce 'the young rake's swagger and dash without being condemned for behaving brazenly in real life' (p. 332).

Documentary theatre has long been 'designed to promote direct social action' (Favorini 1994, p. 34). One response to this assertion can be found in James Smith's comment about a key component of the melodramatic genre. Smith states, 'by attacking villains we can all become heroes' (Smith 1973, p. 10). Smith says that 'melodrama is the dramatic form which expresses the reality of the human condition as we all experience it most of the time' (p. 11). He goes on to say that, 'Patterns of social protest fit so snugly into melodrama that few nineteenth-century examples can resist a random fling at some *bête noire* (p. 73). The trope of the 'sensible, dutiful, painfully virtuous heroine' (Irvin 1981, p. 3), was firmly ensconced in the lexicon of the Australian melodrama. This was partly due to the lingering social and gendered messages (and an over-abundance of 'sentimentality'), associated with the 'cult' of the seamstress (Edelstein 1980, p. 210). In my opinion the satirical delivery of the song in Scene Five, complete with the use of 'tableaux' and an ebullient and sentimentalized choral accompaniment, is in keeping with the traditions of 1880s burlesque. Gentle mockery of the important events and people of the day was an important feature of this style of theatre, albeit with an expected amount of sauciness from the female performers.

In an opinion piece in *Table Talk*, another successful English burlesque performer and manager, Amy Horton, refers to how central good dress was to a show's success, "... but, I might add how important a little undress is also"('Burlesque as an actress sees it', *Table Talk* 6/1/1888, p. 13).

2.3.3 Jennie Lee and 'Jo'

Jennie Lee, one of the principal characters in my play, was widely-renowned in Australia for her melodramatic portrayal of 'Jo', the poor London 'crossing-sweeper', was a character in a very popular stage melodrama of the same name, based on the novel *Bleak House* by the writer and social activist, Charles Dickens. The term 'crossing-sweeper' is an exact description of what 'Jo' did to earn a living. I found the term in a newspaper article describing Jenny Lee's return to Australia in 1889. Oddly, 'Crossing-Sweeper' (1870) was the title of another play that Jennie Lee performed in as a young woman (*Lorgnette* 24/8/1889, p. 5). For a pittance, crossing-sweepers worked to clear a path across the filthy streets to enable their customers to avoid soiling their clothing or footwear as they crossed. The play was written and adapted by Lee's husband, John Burnett. The play was co-produced by Burnett and Lee, with the support of the three pre-eminent theatrical impresarios of the 1880s (known to the Melbourne theatre scene as 'The Triumvirate'): the American actor and producer James Cassius Williamson[124] and his partners, Arthur Garner and George Musgrove (Tait 2001, pp. 109-113). 'Jo' played to packed audiences at the Princess Theatre in Melbourne.

[124] Van Der Porten, 1976: *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 6.

Figure 2.2: Annie Silk
Central Women's Prison Register, p. 497: inmate no. 5924.
Image courtesy of the Public Records Office Victoria.

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In 'Flash Donahs', the death of 'Jo' the young street sweeper becomes a melodramatic representation of child labour and exploitation (both contemporary issues in the 1880s). A modern audience may view such stylized and constructed content as 'unsophisticated' (French 2017, p. 46-7), drawing as it does from a model of theatrical performance that predated this period by over sixty years. A British review from 1876 said of Lee's performance,

> A more striking revelation of talent it is difficult to conceive, and has certainly rarely been made. In get-up and action the character is thoroughly realised; and the hoarse voice, the slouching, dejected gait, and the movement as of some hunted animal, is admirably exhibited (*Athenaeum* London, 1876).

Another review, this time from the first Australian season of the Lee/Burnett production of 'Jo', also provides an insight into Lee's characterization of the young boy,

> An especial feature of Miss Lee's acting of this character, is seen in the occasional suddenness with which she darts out of the torpor of degradation which is the prevailing tone of the picture she delineates (*The Australasian* 6/5/1882, pp. 18-19).

Both of these evocative and detailed descriptions of Lee's performance stylization could be readily used as aids for a modern actor or director in their search for the character of Jennie Lee, and 'Jo'

2.4 Watershed historical events

In a 2003 interview with Caridad Svich, Moises Kaufman (renowned Documentary Theatre-maker), argues for the recognition of specific historical events (what he describes as 'watershed historical moments'), that can define, however briefly, our core social values and precepts, as well as shed light (as they unfold), on the contentious and problematic issues of a certain period of history (Svich 2003, p. 70). I believe that the Tailoresses Strike of 1882/3 and the 'Early Closing Movement' street riots of 1886 were two such pivotal events in Melbourne's history. In the context of 1880s Melbourne they are broadly representative of a groundswell of support amongst the female population for significant change. In keeping with the methodology employed throughout the play, this scene is a composite of these two significant events, both of which were directly relevant to the fate of young working-class women.

The first event I will be discussing was a series of street demonstrations in late March/early April 1886, by supporters of the Early Closing Movement (mostly shop assistants, both female and male). The demonstrations were dramatic acts of public dissent against those inner-suburban shops that defiantly remained open after seven o'clock at night. ('Rioting in Melbourne', *Brisbane Courier*,[125] 10/4/1886, p. 3). Newspaper estimates of the number of 'demonstrationists' (*Argus* 5/4/1886, pp. 4-5) on the streets varied between five thousand or as many as fifteen thousand strong (*Table Talk* 8/4/1886, p.9). Representatives of the Victorian Shop Assistants Union were out in force also, urging their comrades to maintain

[125] Originally in the *Age*: 6/4/1886.

their outrage at the decision of local councils to offer certain retail businesses exemptions to the recently legislated 'Early Closing' provisions of The Factories and Shops Act that was instigated as a result of extensive community consultation (Quinlan and Goodwin 2005, pp. 346-348). The rioting took place over a short period of time and the press crammed many news items and opinion pieces onto their collective pages. Women were present of course, but they were not reported as being there or were lumped together under the heading, 'larrikin and factory classes' ('Quivis', *Argus* 10/4/14, p. 4). In their coverage of the riots the press did focus their attention on one woman in particular, Annie Silk. Annie was arrested for allegedly throwing a stone through a shop window and was later given the mocking nick-name, the 'New Joan of Arc' (*Melbourne Punch* 8/4/1886, p. 2).

2.4.1 Annie Silk: 'A New Joan of Arc'

The female larrikin inhabited a working-class world. I did not encounter any evidence of women from other socio-economic classes becoming involved in larrikin gangs, or for that matter, working until ten o'clock at night, Monday to Friday, and up to eight o'clock at night on Saturdays (M. Quinlan, M. Gardner and Akers 2005, p. 165). Scene Five ('The Street Riot Burlesque') was written to be performed in the manner of an 1880s comic spoof of current and topical events in the Colony of Victoria. It is a burlesque with a melodramatic 'twist'. The setting is 'on-stage' at the Theatre Royal in Melbourne. Not all features of the traditional burlesque have been employed however; for example, the dialogue is not spoken 'in rhyming couplets and littered with puns' (Bellanta 2012, p. 49). The scene is loosely based on newspapers reports of a series of street demonstrations that took place in late March/early April in 1884, by supporters of the Early Closing Movement. Many of the protestors would have been shop assistants and factory workers, both female and male. The demonstrations or 'riots' as they were referred to at the time, were dramatic acts of public dissent against those

inner-suburban shops that defiantly remained open after seven o'clock at night. Newspaper estimates of the number of 'demonstrationists' (*Argus* 5/4/1886, pp. 4-5) on the streets varied between five thousand or as many as fifteen thousand strong (*Table Talk* 8/4/1886, p.9). Representatives of the Victorian Shop Assistants Union were out in force also, urging their comrades to maintain their outrage at the decision of local councils to offer certain retail businesses exemptions to the recently implemented 'Early Closing' provisions of The Factories and Shops Act. The legislation was instigated as a result of extensive community consultation (Quinlan and Goodwin 2005, pp. 346-348). The rioting took place over a short period of time and the press crammed many news items and opinion pieces onto their collective pages.

Under the banner headline of 'The Compulsory Closing Agitation: The Latest Developments' the *Argus* described the rioting that had taken place the previous evening (in fact, the fifth consecutive night of street protests), in Smith Street Collingwood, (*Argus* 6/4/1886, p. 6) as 'the scene of one of the most extraordinary tumults that have ever been witnessed in any part of the metropolis.' (*Argus* 6/4/1886, p. 6) At 8 o'clock in the evening on Monday, the fifth of April, 1886; right at the peak of the riotous mob activity, the shutters of Mr Lancashire's shop were put up, but not without mishap. While the task was proceeding, a woman named Annie Silk was seen to take up a stone and deliberately throw it through one of the large plate glass windows. Silk was arrested at once. In the report of her arrest she was described as a 'young girl' ('Renewed disturbances in Collingwood – Seven persons arrested', *Argus* 6/4/1886, p. 6). It was reported that,

> Owing to the interference of the mob, the police had great difficulty in getting her into a cab. When there she screamed she that was being hurt, evidently to secure the sympathy and assistance of the crowd, who rushed to surround the vehicle, but were prevented from doing so by the troopers, who charged them, and the cab proceeded to the Collingwood lockup ('Renewed rioting in Collingwood', *Weekly Times* 10/4/1886, p. 8).

Annie Silk was named variously as, 'attempting to break another window (*Argus*: 7/4/1886, p.8), and as 'a married woman ... with her husband' (*Argus* 14/4/1886, p. 6). A newspaper report claimed that, on the previous Monday (5/4/1886), that a 'new Joan of Arc' had arisen',

> Mrs. Annie Silk is alleged to have fired a bombshell, in the shape of a brick, through the Lancashire window. The Regular Blues[126] are charging her. Silk has been sat on - in other words, she has been made a prisoner of war 'The Smith-street Disturbances' (M*elbourne Punch* 8/4/1886, p. 2).

In her prison record, Annie is described as being a dressmaker; in all likelihood a 'piece-worker' working in a cramped unhealthy factory, or in her own dwelling alongside other family members. She is also described as being unable to read or write.[127] Is it possible that the clothing she herself made was sold in Mr. Lancashire's shop in Smith Street, or that she was employed there? In due course, the penalty for her crime was three pounds. If it is the same person (see Figure. 2.2), then Annie was twenty years old when she was arrested.

Annie Silk's actions (and the dramatic accounts of her arrest) contributed to my decision to use the motif of the downtrodden, 'Poor Tailoress'. The melodramatic words of the poem, *The Song of the Shirt* (1843) by Thomas Hood, were rewritten substantially and given an Australian quality with the inclusion of the phrase 'low wages on the never'. Certainly, there were other women present during the unrest on the streets as the *Argus* rather disdainfully noted that,

> Women and children ran amongst the mob, women with children in perambulators, and others with children in arms, walking to and fro under the very nostrils of troopers' horses (*Argus* 6/4/1886, p. 6).

Interestingly, a person with a much higher public profile, the Secretary of the Victorian Shop Employés Union, John Gordon ('The Shop Employés Union', *Argus* 24/3/1886, p. 7), barely received a mention during the disturbances, and then only as the signatory on a pamphlet

[126] Members of the local mounted constabulary.
[127] *Central Women's Prison Register*, p. 497: inmate no. 5924

being handed out to the rioters by trade unionists ('The Factories and Shops Act: Operation of the Act in Collingwood', *Collingwood Mercury & Weekly Courier* 2/4/1886, p. 3). Significantly, John Gordon gave evidence to the 1883 Royal Commission on Employés[128] in Factories and Shops which preceded the introduction of the Shop Employés Act on the First of March that year (Quinlan & Goodwin 2005, p. 349). He also features as a 'burlesqued' character in Scene Five. As mentioned above, *Melbourne Punch* was proudly responsible for giving Annie Silk the title of, 'A New Joan of Arc'. Figure 3.2 contains a series of five images called, 'The Battle for Smith Street' (in the inner-suburb of Collingwood). The first image in the top left-hand corner is titled, 'Running in Mrs Silk'.

2.4.2 Postscript.

After her arrest, two women came forward to give evidence at Annie Silk's trial, both claiming that she was innocent of the charge. They were Ellen White and Alice Evans. Subsequently, it came to light that Ellen White was an 'old associate' of Silk and that Alice Evans was, in fact, her sister. They both claimed to be alongside Silk at the time the missile was flung 'from another direction'. Regardless of their evidence, Silk was convicted of the charge. A month later White and Evans appeared in Court charged with perjury over their recollections of the incident (*Argus* 8/5/1886, p. 7). The charges were dismissed and the judge stated that he could see no reason why the two women would fabricate their testimony. Annie, who liked to use the alias 'Annie Stewart', was later charged in 1891 with 'Robbery in company' and sentenced to five years hard labour.

[128] This spelling was preferred in Government publications and the newspapers.

Figure 2.3
'The Battle of Smith Street':
1. Running in Mrs. Silk (top left hand corner)
2. "Put up your shutters" **3.** Clearing the street **4.** Trying his temper **5.** Just in time
Melbourne Punch 8/4/1886, p. 2

≈

The second important event to be discussed is the formation of the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne in December 1882. The establishment of the first female only union in Australia was successful because of the efforts of female garment workers and their campaign of industrial action for better pay and conditions in the months that followed. The Association was formed on the 15th of December 1882, at a meeting in the Trades Hall building in Lygon Street, Carlton. When sweeping industrial action was taken by the newly-formed Tailoresses Association in December, 1882, there were mixed responses to the strike in the press. Not all publications were supportive. Some were openly mocking and condemnatory in their criticism of the Union's efforts (Thornton 2009, pp. 19-38; Brooks 1983, pp. 31-36). For example, the *Age* was very critical of female unionists using 'violent language and threats' (*The Age* 17/2/1883, p. 17) when condemning other workers for their lack of solidarity.

In a letter to the editor of *The* Age, John Stanley James ('The Vagabond'), advised vulnerable young women to avoid the temptations of the moral and social example set by their 'erring sisters'. His published letter was accompanied by a cheque for one guinea to be used for the benefit of the striking women (*Age* 14/12/1882, p. 6). According to Raelene Frances, the emergence of the Tailoresses Union may have contributed to how 'femininity' in Australia was perceived in last two decades of the nineteenth-century. In her opinion 'the tailoring factories seem to have attracted and fostered a more outspoken and independent type of woman (Frances 1993, p. 35). Danielle Thornton also makes the assertion that 'the events of the summer of 1882-83 mark a major turning point in the history of women's industrial activism' (Thornton, 2009: p. 19). This may be because female activists in Australia were dealing with entrenched male values and needed to adapt their strategies accordingly (Lake 1986: p. 127). These changes began to offer opportunities for young working-class women to avoid a future that limited them to a life of drudgery as a wife or domestic servant (Thornton 2009, pp. 21-24). Taking Lake's argument of a masculinist bias in the press a step further, it

can be argued that the treatment meted out to the newly-formed Union was part of a concerted effort to quash female dissent.

2.4.3 Newspaper coverage of the Tailoresses Union strike

From my research into the daily barriers faced by working mothers and daughters of poverty-stricken households, another side of the character of the 'brazen girl' play), has revealed itself (Bellanta 2012: pp. 30-56).The Tailoresses strike that started in December 1882 and ended in March 1883, was an example of direct social action by women, as part of a movement for change. Although the female textiles workers faced public approbation from some sections of the print media and the enduring hostility of many sections of clothing industry owners and operators, this was a pivotal moment in the history of female unionism in Australia. In her opinion, 'the tailoring factories seem to have attracted and fostered a more outspoken and independent type of woman' (Frances 1993, p. 35).

Danielle Thornton also makes the significant assertion that 'the events of the summer of 1882/83 mark a major turning point in the history of women's industrial activism' (Thornton 2009, p. 19). These changes began to offer opportunities for young working-class women to avoid a future that limited them to a life of drudgery as a wife or domestic servant (pp. 21-24). When the Union took sweeping industrial action in December 1882 there were mixed responses to the strike in the press. Not all publications were supportive. Some were openly mocking and condemnatory in their criticism of the Union's efforts (Thornton 2009, pp. 19-38, Brooks 1983, pp. 31-36). For example, the *Age* was very critical of female unionists using 'violent language and threats' (*Age* 17/2/1883, p. 17).

Melbourne Punch published a satirical drawing entitled, 'The Trouser Famine' *(Melbourne Punch* 1/3/1883 p. 4), showing men in top hats and frock-coats wearing women's undergarments in place of their trousers, accompanied by a warning of what to expect if the

Tailoresses strike dragged on indefinitely. Later, to the applause of the many women in attendance at a strike meeting at the Fitzroy Town Hall , the offending correspondent was condemned for 'turning so serious a movement into ridicule' (*Melbourne Punch* 15/3/1883, p. 6). By the middle of January 1883 the membership of the Tailoresses Union had swelled to over one thousand (*Weekly Times* 13/1/1883, p. 7).

2.5 Summary

When writing a play it becomes evident at some point that there are only a limited number of structural choices available to a playwright. My intention was to include material from my research that would demonstrate to the audience that larrikin women were active participants in the events of the day. Annie Silk is not included in the 'Flash Donahs' script, but she came very close to being there. At one point I re-wrote Scene Five so that the caricatured 'Alfred Deakin' would be singing Annie's praises almost as if she were 'The New Joan of Arc'. The decision to not alter the action in the scene was made when I received feedback that there was too much information for the audience to absorb. There could also have been material included from Deakin's own fictional writing,[129] but again, I considered the text from his play, *Quentin Massys: A Drama in Five Acts* (1874), to be too difficult to insert into the character's monologue. Deakin's highly melodramatic style would have been largely incomprehensible to a modern audience.

The unifying feature of this chapter is the influence of the Melbourne press on local women's lives during the 1880s. As can be seen from a report of the stage-craft of the American female actor Carrie Swain, the Australian theatre-going public was hungry for staged representations of what a real 'larrikin girl' should be. Referring to *The Tomboy*, a review in the *Age* praised Swain's appearance in,

[129] Deakin was a playwright and a novelist.

> a variety of aspects - as a good natured larrikiness, who kicks her enemies, caresses her friends, indulges in many antics in male and female attire, sings joyously and dances in sprightly fashion in the midst of her grief, and finally becomes a lady of fortune, if not of fashion, in a plush jacket and short skirt ('Theatre Royal - The Tomboy', *Age* 4/6/1888, p. 6).

This type of good-natured banter with the public about the ideal larrikin girl was not applied to reports of female behaviour in Little Napier Street. The sense of outrage in the press about the excesses of some of the residents was palpable. Unfortunately, there were no allowances made for those women forced to endure poverty or family violence, and the often primitive living conditions in this narrow street.

The efforts of the Melbourne press to publicly chastise Annie Silk can be viewed as a blatant attempt to affect the outcome of the struggle against the commonly applied business practice of employing workers under unfair wages and conditions. Because of her criminal behaviour at a street riot in Smith Street in Collingwood, Silk was arrested by the police and convicted of throwing a brick through a shop-keeper's window. For a brief period of time Silk became the focus of a campaign that mocked her involvement in the demonstrations. *Melbourne Punch* was scathing in their criticism and named her 'The New Joan of Arc'. The inference being, that women like Silk could expect to be ridiculed for their actions. Little is known about Silk, except for the details on her prison record and I cannot say if she was involved in protesting about other sensitive issues.

In Chapter Three the focus of the Exegesis moves on to an analysis of Documentary Theatre itself. The history of the origins of this art-form is examined thoroughly. This is followed by an evaluation of how theatre-makers in this field view their craft. I look at two very different examples of Documentary Theatre that employ high levels of theatricality in the construction of their work and, where applicable, compare and contrast their methodologies with my own.

'The management have taken every precaution to depict the thrilling events with realistic fidelity'[130]

Chapter 3: Documentary Theatre

3.1 Introduction

In the modern era, the use of 'creative theatricality' has become an essential component in the process of making Documentary Theatre. Audiences have also embraced the creative approach to using archival source material. Examining the origins of Documentary Theatre shows us that using non-naturalistic performance methods is not a new idea, and it is interesting to make comparisons to theatre-work that was staged approximately ninety years ago, particularly the creative output of Erwin Piscator.

In the introduction to *Coranderrk: We will show the Country* (2013), Giordano Nanni and Andrea James allude to these tensions when they tell us that their writing was "guided by the goal of balancing the needs of both historians and theatre audiences" (Nanni & James 2013: p. 3). Maintaining the audience's faith in the historical representations shown on stage was dependent upon applying a "high degree of fidelity for the written record" (p.192), during the creative process.

Amanda Fisher believes that for many playwrights working in the Documentary Theatre genre, (David Hare, in particular), the urge for 'fidelity' may equate to 'a yearning for greater honesty, truthfulness and, importantly, a greater correspondence to reality' (Fisher 2011, p. 112).

[130] 'Theatrical Items', *Fitzroy City Press* 6/8/1881, p.3. This newspaper item contained promotional material for a new six-act play about the infamous Ned Kelly Gang, by F. C. Martin Esq. entitled *Ostracized,* at the very grand Princess Theatre in Spring Street, Melbourne.

Because, as Hare puts it,

> Why can't we just admit that theatre using real people has become a fabulously rich and varied strand which, for many years has been pumping red cells into the dramatic blood stream? (David Hare quote: Soans 2005, p. 113, in Fisher: 2011, p. 112).

In this chapter I will discuss particular aspects of two very different theatre productions that have influenced my thinking on Documentary Theatre. One was written and performed in Australia and the other is a Canadian work. Each is an example of how political and social issues that may be found in archival material can be highlighted by utilizing a wide variety of theatrical practices. I will also briefly examine the origins of documentary theatre as it developed in Europe, from its commonly accepted points of origin in the third decade of the twentieth century. Documentary Theatre has remained a resilient theatrical art-form. A Documentary Theatre play offers a uniquely personal opportunity for the audience, as a 'co-producer', to assimilate a shared sensory embodiment of the truth (Reinelt 2009, pp 9-11). As a corollary to the enjoyment of this genre, the words, 'based on actual events', have become a commonplace phrase in the cinematic lexicon. The popularity of the 'docudrama', which Speer describes as a "blending of primary sources with fiction" has steadily increased, despite being roundly criticised by some proponents of Documentary Theatre as often lacking in factual legitimacy (Speer 2013, pp. 1-5).

3.2 The origins of Documentary Theatre:

Gregory Mason suggests that the origin of modern Documentary Theatre can be traced back to a play written by Erwin Piscator (Mason 1977, p. 263). Timothy Youker also credits Piscator as the originator of Documentary Theatre (Youker: 2012, p. 80). Mason and Youker

are both referring to a 1925 theatre production entitled *Trotz Alledem*[131] as the seminal work of this theatrical genre. Incidentally, Mason credits the filmmaker John Grierson with coining the term 'documentary' in 1926. In *Grierson on Documentary*: *the film writings of John Grierson*, the term is defined as being 'the creative treatment of actuality' (Hardy, F (Ed.) 1946, qtd. in Mason 1977, p. 266).

Grierson first used this phrase in 1933 in an edition of Cinema Quarterly. At the time he did not include a description of the term because his primary concern was the involvement of industry 'producers' in what he describes as a 'new art' (Grierson 1933, p. 8). Later, Grierson describes the use of 'natural material' in Documentary film-making as being subject to 'arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it' (Grierson 1946, p. 80, in Kerrigan & McIntyre 2010, p. 114), which readily describes the fragmentary and indirect processes of Documentary Theatre mentioned in the Introduction to this exegesis.

Trotz Alledem! dramatized aspects of World War 1 and the period in Germany's history between 1914 and 1919 (Mason 1977, p. 263). Allison Maderia, drawing on Piscator's 1929 manifesto, *Das Politische Theatre*, believes the play was 'a documentary drama in which the entire production was based on political documents' (Piscator 1929, in Maderia 2005, pp. 9-10).

The effect of the First World War on the development and integration of new and challenging theatrical forms was strongly influenced by the dramatic social change that occurred during, and immediately after, the cessation of the First World War. The formation of the Weimar Republic in Germany and the Treaty of Versailles (both of which took place in 1919), are two monumentally cathartic examples of that change. Piscator served in the German Army during World War One and fervently believed that *Trotz Alledem!* would confront his audience with,

[131] Translation: *In Spite of Everything!*

> the absolute truth as we ourselves had experienced it. It contained just as many dramatic highlights and moments of suspense as fictional theatre, and it moved us every bit as much (Piscator 1929, p. 65 in Mason, pp.263-264).

'Agit-Prop' theatre (derived from the blending of the words, agitation and propaganda), was explicitly left-wing in its output. After the 1917 revolution in Russia the newly-formed Marxist government recognized the urgent need to speak directly to its peoples and instructed the propagandists within the new administration to send political activists of all kind (including theatre workers) out into the far-flung regions within the USSR to enunciate the political tenets of the new (but still unstable) communist regime. Agit-Prop theatre began to appear around 1920 as a response to this need. It was a style of theatre that relied heavily on the presentation of information, which is similar to the style and aims of Erwin Piscator (also a committed Marxist).

As with Piscator's work during this period, the awakening of the *Dada* or 'anti-art' movement can also be directly attributed to the horrors of the First World War. Although Dada was championed in the cabarets of Berlin and New York it was not strongly represented in mainstream theatre. Piscator and his circle of dramaturgical collaborators, which included prominent figures from amongst the Dada movement, created *Trotz Alledem!* with the intention of ensuring historical accuracy and legitimacy. In order to achieve this Piscator made use of a 'montage of authentic speeches, articles, newspaper clippings, slogans, leaflets, photographs and films'. Piscator wanted this eclectic mix of archival material (much of it still very recent), to be indicative of a 'broadly representative revue style of theatre (Piscator 1929, p. 65 in Mason 1977, p.263). The commonly accepted dramatic ingredients of the narrative-based play were replaced by "a rapid and incisive presentation of factual material" (Mason 1977, p. 264).

3. 3 *Nanay: a testimonial play:*

The first Documentary Theatre production to be discussed is entitled *Nanay: a testimonial play*, created by Alex Ferguson (and others). It is a 'verbatim' play about 'Filipino domestic workers ... and the Canadian families that employ them' (Ferguson 2010, p. 37). Documentary Theatre is a paradoxical art-form. When analysing this theatrical genre, it is important to consider what Ferguson describes as the 'productive tensions' (Ferguson 2000, p. 9), which can occur throughout the creative process, and during the overlapping interface between 'spectator and presenter', or what Alex Ferguson describes as the 'event-state' (Ferguson: 2000, p.9). In Ferguson's opinion, the performance space is 'cohabited' by the audience and performers alike (Ferguson 2009, p. 8). The moment by moment interface between the audience and the performers,

> is as important in documentary theatre, as it is in fictional theatre. Without it, the document remains just that – a document. **...** In the event-state, documentary theatre goes from referencing the document to embodying it' (p. 13).

British modernist playwright, Harold Pinter, believed that a character has an inner-life of their own and that their intentions will manifest themselves if the playwright will only get out of their way (Pinter 2009: p. 33). Some of the theatrical outcomes associated with the improvisatory and exploratory work undertaken during the rehearsal periods were incorporated into the final structure of the play (including the often forgotten process of transcription and editing of verbatim interview data). This was achieved by utilizing a variety of interpretive interventions (Ferguson 2009, p. 20). In one example, Ferguson speaks of the necessity to transfer the setting of a character monologue from its original outdoor setting as a walk in the woods, to the physical reality of an indoor venue. This resulted in the actor and the director making changes to the dramatic persona and mannerisms of the interview subject (an introspective university academic). The actor adopted the laconic style of a 'film noir'

detective; a problematic decision, but one that enhanced the purpose and focus of their endeavours. A researcher on the project objected to the representation of the university lecturer. Decisions taken about the costume worn by the actor, changing the setting of the scene from a forest to an indoor location, and the actions that became part of the character were not in keeping with her knowledge of the person on whom the character was based.

> The scene had come to life. It was no longer a well-considered review of a transcript. It was a living embodied document that had become a persuasive challenge. It's not that Rae[132] was trying to play a detective - that would have been out of place. She had simply borrowed some of the detective's matter-of-fact delivery to keep Nadine[133] on the offensive (Ferguson 2010, p 39).

3.3.1 *CMI: A Certain Maritime Incident*

In keeping with Kaufmann's views on 'Watershed Events', Carol Martin believes that Documentary Theatre can contribute to how men and women think about the events that shape their lives (Martin, 2006: p. 9). The treatment of refugees attempting to enter Australia by boat continues to be one of the most socially divisive issues in Australia. The second theatre production I will be discussing is entitled *CMI: A Certain Maritime Incident (CMI).* It was produced by *version 1.0* (a Sydney ensemble of theatre-makers), and was first staged in Australia on the 26th of May, 2004.

The role played by documentary theatre in the elucidation of political issues is well established. Having a 'core mission' (Williams 2006, p. 125), as David Williams has described the motivation factor for his company, *version 1.0*, is an invaluable tool for any creative project.

[132] The actor performing the monologue.
[133] The interview subject, and later the character in the scene.

Garde proposes that,

> innovative documentary theatre achieves a greater degree of insight than an attempt to recreate a sense of authenticity and of closeness to reality and facts because it can lead to shifts in audience perception' (Garde 2013, p. 18).

Interestingly, the combination of 'realism and non-realism' was a feature of another collectivist effort: the Theatre Workshop production of *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963). Derek Paget has used the term 'Documentary Art', to describe how, in this important work of Documentary Theatre, Joan Littlewood superbly combined the use of documents (in this case by using 'slide and newspanel technology') with the level of theatricality that enabled the audience to perceive the anti-war message of the play (Paget 2008, p. 133).

Another effective creative tool employed by *version 1.0* was their willingness to use 'destabilizing' techniques that challenged notions of fact and fiction (Martin 2006, p. 6). From the opening moments, this play boldly created 'an awareness of the constructed nature of facts, truths, memory-making and of any preconceived ideas of the unfamiliar' (Garde 2013, p. 18). This is particularly true of the fictive suppositions employed to bind the various strands of archival research into a cohesive whole. This approach has underpinned my choice of remaining detached from the conventional 'referential' methodology in favour of a more playful and creative discourse (p. 8). In her essay, 'Bodies of Evidence', Martin argues that,

> Documentary theatre's seemingly stable telling and retelling in the context of the ephemeral medium of theatre points to how quickly the past can be broken and reassembled. (Martin 2006, p. 14)

Laureen Nussbaum reminds us that theatrical vitality in this genre is also dependant on theatrical creativity. Drawing on the 1960s manifesto of German Documentary Theatre playwright Peter Weiss, she states 'Documentary theatre is partial. It wants to effect change. In order to be effective it has to transform its raw material into art' (Nussbaum 1981: p. 239). What does this mean? When members of the *CMI* audience first entered the auditorium, they

are required to step over and around naked bodies (representing those asylum-seekers who drowned at sea). A young child (accompanied by an adult guardian) stands in front of a microphone. The microphone is linked to a 'lie-detector' machine. An Australian flag hangs upside down behind the child (a symbol of 'distress at sea').The words the child reads to the audience are those of the then Defence Minister in the Howard government, Peter Reith, and were taken verbatim from a radio interview (Australian Broadcasting Corporation).

CMI utilised 'verbatim' archival material, including key information from the more than 2000 pages of the Senate Select Committee Hansard and premièred at The Performance Space in Sydney, on the 26th of February, 2004. David Williams states that the play is not primarily a play about the plight of refugees struggling to get into Australia. In his opinion it is actually about Australians themselves and their motives and beliefs (Williams 2006, p. 125). He also believes that the play is a 'provocation', a demand put to the Australian people (through the auspices of the Senate Select Committee): how could Australians believe that any loving parent would be capable of throwing their children into the ocean for their own benefit? (Ghassan Hage 2003, p. 30, in Williams 2006, p. 124).

The event that inspired *CMI* was the so-called 'Children Overboard Affair' in October, 2001. However, there were other equally dramatic and controversial 'at sea' refugee events that preceded it. The disappearance at sea of the SEIV-X[134], with the loss of 353 lives (men, women and children) was prominently covered in the media. The sinking of the SIEV-X have been described as, 'an act of sabotage in which the possibility of direct involvement or indirect encouragement by Australian federal Police agents cannot be ruled out' (Dwyer 2006, p. 134). In August 2001, the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, used the Australian military to block a group of 438 asylum-seekers on-board the 'Tampa' (a Norwegian container vessel) from disembarking on the Australian mainland. The Howard

[134] 'Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel'

government used the fear of unknown asylum-seekers flooding into the country from Asia to their political advantage (p. 131); Williams 2006, p. 117). When claims were made that asylum-seekers on board another supposedly illegal vessel, SIEV-4, had thrown their children overboard to ensure they would be rescued by the Australian Navy (thereby ensuring their passage to Australia), the overwhelming sentiment in Australia was for blocking the entry of asylum-seekers. Within days, the claims of premeditated endangerment of children were quickly refuted by the Navy but this did not stop the Government from pursuing their campaign against asylum-seekers (Williams 2006, p. 123).

After being returned to power in 2001, the Howard Government was compelled by the Australian parliamentary upper-house (the Senate), to defend its actions at the 2002 'Senate Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident' (p. 117). David Williams (one of the founders of the *version 1.0* ensemble of researchers and performers), says in his article *'Political Theatrics in the Fog of War'* (2006), that the creative process took approximately one and half years to complete, commencing with the 'dramaturgical research' that later underpinned the structure of the play and then moving on to the 'key narrative features of the inquiry' (pp. 125-126). Another key point for the devisers of the work to consider was the question of how the information contained in the Senate Committee Hansard was to be represented on stage. Initially, a 'declaration' was made that CMI would not be a work of Verbatim Theatre, but instead, a 'textual deconstruction' of the content of the Senate Select Committee Hansard,

> The reality that these were the actual words spoken by our representatives, speaking on our behalf, needed to be foregrounded in the performance act. These words were not fiction, but the true words with which power spoke, in all their banal disgusting glory (p. 125).

David Williams speaks of the responsibility of the company to acknowledge the 'problematic' nature of representing the 'truth' on stage and that there are 'strong limitations

to the representational power of theatre' (p. 124). Williams may have had doubts about the 'representational limits' within the practice of Documentary Theatre but this did not stop *version 1.0* careening away from the style of disseminating information usually associated with Verbatim Theatre. In Act 3 the action begins with the sound of many ringing telephones. What follows is a sequence of seemingly random telephone calls. A member of the company begins to 'tell the story' of the SIEV-4 and the 'Children Overboard Affair' in Bahasa Indonesian. One call is from someone urging a friend or relative to rush down to a certain store and grab some children's clothing bargains. Another telephone call is to a florist, complete with two deliberately cobbled together quotes from Shakespeare's Hamlet,

> Hello, I'd like a dozen red roses please. And a card. And it needs to be a reasonably big card. And the inscription should read 'Rough hew them as you will[135], though this is madness, there be method in it.'[136] Yes, method. 'I must be cruel to be kind'. Signed 'With sympathy, the Department' (CMI Playscript, *Australasian Drama Studies* 2006, p. 166).

As the number of telephone calls slows, an aerobics class with the Senators that are gathered around the conference table begins. The 'dadaesque' absurdity of this scene (in the best tradition of Piscator), is matched by another cast member placing a transparency on the overhead projector used throughout the play, with the statement, 'The actors did not unanimously agree with the staging of this scene. They use a democratic model to create theatre and compromise is a working solution' (p. 167).

3.3.2 Projected visual images

'Flash Donahs' has been written with a sparse set design and simple staging in mind, and the use of projected background images is regularly employed throughout the play, as being indicative of what is to be revealed during the coming scene. The practice of using different projected images is a long-established tool in Documentary Theatre (Paget 2004, pp 397-

[135] Spoken by Hamlet: Act 5, Scene 2
[136] Spoken by Polonius: Act 2, Scene 2.

411). In Scene Seven (C), the reference by Mr Gordon about 'advertisements in all the pantomimes, but with no good results' ('Royal Commission on Employés in Shops': 13/7/1882, p. 22[137]), presumably refers to advertisements being placed prominently in the pantomime programmes. This reference was the inspiration for Bessie Johnston's loud and intrusive sloganeering in Scene Seven (C). According to Bessie, her friend Mr. Gordon has arranged for a 'message' to be shown on-stage at the Theatre Royal during the course of the evening.

Interestingly, a combination of 'realism and non-realism' was a feature of another collectivist effort: the Theatre Workshop production of *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963). Derek Paget has used the term 'Documentary Art', to describe how, in this important work of Documentary Theatre, Joan Littlewood superbly combined the use of documents (in this case by using 'slide and newspanel technology') with the level of theatricality that enabled the audience to perceive the anti-war message of the play (Paget 2008, p. 133). A projected image does not necessarily have to be solely a visual image. It can contain a combination of images and written words; or, as is the case in 'Flash Donahs', it can be written words only.

For example, Scene Ten begins with the displayed image of a phrase from a statement of evidence, reportedly given in court and attributed to Sergeant Rennie of the Fitzroy police: 'In the watchhouse they behaved like infuriated beasts.' [138] One image could not be used in the production because of technical difficulties. It was a daytime photograph of the suburb of Collingwood (and far beyond, the tower of a 'shot' factory in the top right-hand corner that remains in place today), in which the Victoria Hotel on Hoddle Street can be seen very clearly (see Figure 3.1). I had hoped to show the site of the hotel and surrounding area where the viscous brawl between the larrikin gang, the 'Hoddle Street Lairies', and the local police

[137] Part of a statement from Frederick A. Smith: 'draper's assistant'.
[138] For the full quote see p. 111.

(which came to be known as 'The Collingwood Outrage'), and how innocuous a site it was for the supposed rise (according to the 'Hoddle Street Lairies), of the 'Second Kelly Gang' (McConville 1985: p. 74).

It has been argued that part of the allure of Documentary Theatre is the covert opportunity it provides to witness the personal struggles and foibles of the subject/s, under the gaze of the spectator and the presenter (Kalb 2001, p. 22; in Nagel 2007, p. 156). Nagel also speaks of the value of 'multivocality', or the balancing of differing identities and stories within a Documentary Theatre play (Nagel 159).The complex interactions between class and gender experienced by young working-class women such as Cecilia Anthony and Bessie Johnston would not have been static. A journey of discovery for the audience commences with Cecilia Anthony's entrance in Scene One, as the street urchin 'Jo'. The actress takes her opening position of the stage under a classical image of the downtrodden street sweeper (in this case an image of the actress Jenny Lee, in character as 'Jo'). In narrative terms, Cecilia's fate is clearly marked-out from the opening scene of the play by the use of this image. The reality of her life is encapsulated in the melodramatic representation of a vulnerable 'male' character. During the scene s/he does not speak, but can only gesture. As Cecilia moves silently into 'tableaux' towards the end of the scene, the image remains the focus of the audience.

As is the case in the style of 'classic narrative', this scene is linked to two others, Scene Six and Scene Nineteen. Each of these three scenes acts as a narrative anchor for the play, with the death scene of 'Jo' (from the novel, *Bleak House*), being indicative of the unlikely possibility of a young impoverished girl such as Cecilia making a better life for herself. The concept of 'classic narrative' is usually associated with the American cinema industry and relies on the principle that an action or concept introduced at the beginning of a film will be attended to and resolved by its end.

Figure 3.1

Victoria Hotel: photographer unknown. Courtesy of City of Yarra Libraries.

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3.3.3 Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to explain the reason behind my decision to make a Documentary Theatre play the creative component of my PhD. I agree with Amanda Fisher that the search for 'truthfulness' (and the unexpected discoveries that are made along the way), is certainly demanding. During the research process, the transcription of data can become an obsessive practice. Every quirky use of punctuation and every distinctly Victorian spelling of certain words[139] became an important feature of my research. The accumulation of each word or turn of phrase (particularly when devising a monologue), added to the subtlety

[139] The word 'Employés' (or employees in today's parlance) is a good example.

of the text and to **e**ach composite character. The aim is to present the text as a whole. If successful, it will hopefully be absorbed by the audience, and they will enjoy the integrity of the end result.

Documentary Theatre can connect the past and the present 'through the creativity of the theatre, constantly 'quoting' from the past, but erasing the exact traces in order to gain full meaning in the present' (Rokem 2000: p. xiii). Both of the plays discussed in this chapter have raised important aspects about contemporary Documentary Theatre practice. In *Nanay: a testimonial play,* Alex Ferguson has shown us that within the performance process a symbiotic partnership may exist between presenter and spectator. Ferguson believes that without this shared role of 'co-producer', a 'document' remains just that, rather than becoming an embodied representation of the source material being investigated.

version 1.0 and David Williams have taken Ferguson's argument for an abstracted and shared understanding of the embodiment of archival material a step further. This is because, in the case of *CMI,* the content of the play involved some of the most contentious issues in Australia's history which, by its very nature, demanded that it be explored publicly and dramatically. v*ersion 1.0* were unabashed about revealing the flexibility of their methodology. Williams believes that we, as an audience, may gain a better understanding of these and other significant issues, when looked at through the prism of a Documentary Theatre play. In Chapter Four, the concepts of liminality and embodiment in physical presence, are viewed through an analysis of the composition and construction of the characters in 'Flash Donahs'. The methodology used to augment the character of Bessie Johnston is described in detail. In the previous chapter, in the section titled, 'Watershed Historical Events' I discussed the inclusion of important social events or gatherings as being one way of creatively dealing with issues from the distant past. This may also be applicable, in the context of historically-based source material, to the creation of feminist theatre.

Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task (Harold Pinter 2009, p. 285).

Chapter 4: Embodying the past

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with a number of vital concerns for the Documentary Theatre playwright/ researcher, the first of which is the initial search for useful archival material. A playwright may undertake the writing of their play with all the information they need to hand, requiring no research at all or, as was the case with 'Flash Donahs', they may only have an outline of what they hope to find. They may know where to look and they may not. The construction and composition of characters is another important area to consider when starting out on a project of this nature. The method I employed is discussed in some detail with a direct emphasis on the 'making' of one character in particular, Bessie Johnston.

Although the focus of my play, and my research, has been upon the issue of female larrikins, by its very nature, 'Flash Donahs' can be categorized as a work of Feminist Theatre. Rachel Fensham has provided an excellent description of what effective feminist theatre should consist of. In her opinion, the inclusion of complex female characters and greater diversity of roles are two of the basic requirements. Realizing that there is more than one way to stage feminist theatre is another (Fensham 2003, pp. 7-9). Fensham also has concerns that mainstream theatre may, in fact, be limiting the growth of 'women's theatre', despite the inclusion of work by certain female playwrights and directors into their performance seasons (Fensham 2001, pp. 90-93) In Fensham's opinion,

> The danger for women's mainstream theatre is that it will reproduce the limitations of cultural and liberal feminism by signifying the feminine only within terms set by the bourgeois heterosexual matrix (Fensham 2001, p.92).

As a consequence, this chapter also contains an analysis of the practice and theory associated with this theatre genre and how it is relevant to an era in which women were considered by their own society to be unequal to men. A discussion concerning the important matter of female violence in the 1880s, and how it may be represented on the stage in the modern era, has also been included. This is briefly considered in the context of recent dramatic works involving violence against and amongst young women today. The manner in which the Melbourne press of the 1880s responded to accounts of female violence, particularly female larrikin violence has been examined in Chapter Two. My contribution to this discussion can be found in my play, in the form of an exaggerated and cartoon-like 'stoush' (or fight) between two larrikin girls. The background to this scene and how the characters of the two larrikin girls were constructed are also outlined in this chapter.

4.2 The search for archival material

Documentary Theatre makes use of factual and archival material, either in part or in full, as the basis of a theatrical performance (Favorini 1994, p. 32). An important task in the early stages of the research for this project was the selection of actual people from 1878-1888, to be used as the principal characters in Flash Donahs. I quickly became aware of a lack of directly attributable personal information about larrikin women. The 'first-person' narrative I was hoping to find was not out there on some dusty library shelf. Regrettably, there was no 'I was a female larrikin' personal diary. Nor was there a memoir by a famous magistrate or barrister with a detailed account of the sensational trial of a notorious female larrikin. There was, however, a vast store of reports of larrikin behaviour (both female and male) to be found in the many newspapers published in Melbourne. We have become so accustomed to the availability of trial transcripts that it is easy to forget that in the early 1880s the details of court cases were largely the domain of the local press. Some prison records were available

but they only provided brief notes on the persons in question, and the outcome of the trial. Court reports must have been a popular source of entertainment to the reading public and were often treated accordingly by the male reporters. The more salacious the material the better, as it allowed the journalist to insert comedic material, often to the detriment of the person on trial.

My first encounter with the 'Amazon of the Swamp', Kate Anthony, was an arresting moment and a genuine 'signpost' in my search for characters. Kate was revealed to me as I browsed through an edition of the *Collingwood Mercury & Weekly Courier* under the heading "Amazonians of the Swamp". The article was not, in fact, about Kate Anthony. The court was concerned with the criminal behaviour of two of her daughters (Maryann and Rebecca), referred to in this article as 'Amazonians in trouble'. Maryann and Rebecca were charged with theft from an old lady, but the charges were dismissed ('Amazonians in trouble', *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier 1/7/1882, p.2*.). Cecilia Anthony was not mentioned. Finding the term 'Amazon of the Swamp' set off a search for any further references to Kate, of which there were many. Individual searches for more information about Rebecca, Maryann and Cecilia also resulted in some startling information being uncovered. My first encounter with Cecilia was in another Court report. She was, however, identified incorrectly as 'Selena Anthony' ('Police Intelligence', *Fitzroy City Press* 4/3/1882, p. 3). Clearly, newspaper journalists were free to use their own subjective and gendered commentary in order to maintain the readership of their publications. It is very likely that any male newspaper journalists giving an account of violent, anti-social or criminal behaviour involving female larrikins chose to embellish their writing with as much lurid detail as propriety allowed. For example, a year earlier a reporter (using the *nom de plume,* 'Cosmopolite'), issued a dire warning about an incident in Little Napier Street that included '... the spectacle of half-a-dozen semi-nude females in a partial state of intoxication indulging

in a free fight' ('Notes and Comments' by 'Cosmopolite', *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier,* 25/11/1882, pp 2-3). In that time the customary assertion would have been that these women were simply 'prostitutes' or 'paraders'.

At Public Records Office Victoria, I found the prison records of Cecilia Anthony, Rebecca Anthony, Edwin Peddy and Annie Silk, but not Kate Anthony. I was successful in finding the prison 'mug-shots' of Annie Silk and Edwin Peddy, but not those of Kate Anthony or her daughters. From Edwin's prison record I was able to make use of just one salient fact: his first-name was actually Edward. A small discovery that resulted in the following single line being inserted into the Courtroom scene.[140] Edwin insolently addresses his barrister Mr. McKean[141] and says, 'Awright chummy; and it's Edwin, by the by, not Edward'. I prefer Edwin'[142]

On the surface this may not seem important but when included in the script as a devised characteristic, the audience would gain an insight into Edwin's personality: that he may have been insecure about his public image. When it became apparent that I would be relying on source material that was mostly from secondary sources; that is, at least once removed from the characters I created, the content of newspaper articles became vitally important to my script-writing. Once the principal characters became known, the task ahead of me was to 'splice' together the pieces of information into a cohesive structure. When combined in the script they present a gritty and down-to-earth view of life in Melbourne during the 1880s. The audience can witness the plight of Cecilia Anthony, in the context of the social factors affecting the lives of young working-class women.

[140] Scene Fourteen (B).
[141] McKean St. in the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy North is named after him.
[142] *Central Register of Male Prisoners, Vol. 25,* p. 193: No. 14446, Peddy, Edward.

4.3 Character composition and construction

I considered myself very fortunate to have discovered such rich and detailed characters. My early efforts at devising dialogue between these characters required an on-going regimen of editing and revision. This often involved a 'cut and paste' method of compilation involving the use of many individual sentences and phrases from a number of different written sources. A word or two or a short sentence linking different thematic content was often the solution. The veracity of varying reports in different newspapers became critical to establishing the actual circumstances of a specific event. This was particularly true of Cecilia Anthony's discovery and removal from a Chinese opium-den (which forms the basis of Scene Four). In one newspaper the building was described as a brothel and that her sister had removed her from the building (*Age* 9/9/1884. p. 6). In another publication she was 'apprehended by a police-constable' and the building was a tenement in Little Lonsdale Street (*Weekly Times* 13/9/1884, p. 7).

The rhetorical observations of 'The Vagabond' also proved to be a useful source of character dialogue. Generally speaking, Thomas wrote about people living on the fringes of respectable society, and in one article he interviewed two female sex-workers. The women in question were prepared to talk freely about their lives, particularly their relationships with men. Elements of that dialogue were transposed into the mouths of the Cecilia Anthony and Bessie Johnson in Scene Seven (B), during their confrontation with a composite character, a Temperance Movement Street Orator, outside the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street. On a small number of occasions my research strayed outside the parameters of the period 1878 to 1888 to include information directly linked to this timeframe and was of direct relevance to the characters could easily have taken place during this period. An example of this is Mary Fortune's observational story entitled, *Down Bourke Street* (Fortune 1869, in Sussex 1989, pp. 153-162). It was, in fact, the only first-person account of Melbourne's night-time culture

written by a woman that I was able to locate. It provided an accurate portrait of some of the more lively aspects of life to be witnessed along Melbourne's premier streetscape and added another layer of dialogue to the interaction with the Street Orator mentioned above. Her description of the 'flighty' behaviour and 'flash' dress sense of young women in Bourke Street on a Saturday night provided some excellent dialogue for the Orator. The work of both writers was pared back substantially because of the need to soften the expository nature of their work and achieve a free-flowing and more naturalistic style of character dialogue.

Renowned Documentary Theatre practitioner, Moises Kaufman, is not only a believer in the incorporation of life-changing events into a work of Documentary Theatre he is also a strong advocate for the creation of the composite 'identity'. This is because, as Kaufman puts it, 'what is the stage but a construct of a certain reality? And what is a playwright director but a construction worker?' (Svich 2003, p. 70). The intermingling of various materials, or assemblage, was popular in the earliest European works of Documentary Theatre, often in a non-linear format. For the purposes of 'Flash Donahs', the process of combining pieces of information from a variety of sources (newspapers, novels, letters, songs, poetry, committee reports etc. including reported snippets of speech), has been used to create characters that are easily understandable to contemporary audiences, more used to a 'naturalistic' performance style. The only minor characters not based on actual people are found in Scene 4: 'The Opium Den'. They are two of the inhabitants of tan imaginary household in Little Napier Street, 'Harriett' and 'Jane', who are both 'composite' characters (along with much of their dialogue).

Ascribing the beliefs of a union activist to a composite character was based on the mention in an article from The *Age* of a unionist named Miss Johnstone, representing 'coat machinists' ('The Workwomen's Strike', *Age* 16/12/1882, p. 6). A key argument in advancing Bessie's cause as an activist, in a time when political activism amongst women was frowned upon and

restricted (Lake 1986, pp. 127-128), is the point made by Kay Daniels that it is not enough to merely add feminist ideals to the established and accepted narrative associated with the development of the Australian nation (Daniels 1985, p. 27).

My first encounter with Elizabeth Johnson was contained in a brief crime report in the *Collingwood Mercury & Weekly Courier* (see below), which spoke of a young woman acting in a belligerent and physically aggressive manner on the street. What was intriguing about this type of behaviour was that it was typically associated with the male larrikin. Coincidentally, the date in April 1882 does broadly place it around the time of the early stage of the formation of the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne. The subsequent mention of a child custody hearing in another news article (and other serious problems encountered by young larrikin women) led me to think that Cecilia, as the principal character, needed a 'pal' and close confidante (to better enable a representation of the complexity of her life); someone more mature and with worldly experience. Bessie's in the play's narrative reaches a peak when Cecilia and Bessie discuss the imminent circumstances affecting their lives in Scene Twelve (A), outside the Collingwood Magistrates Court.

For Bessie Johnston, the content of the three incidents described below provided a very useful starting point for developing a theatrical character, particularly someone capable of 'rorty'[143] behaviour in the street. The order that they were found in *The Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier* (*CM&WC*) is listed alphabetically, (a-c). They are shown here in reverse alphabetical order, but in correct chronological order (from earliest to last).

(c) On Saturday the 6th of June 1878, a young woman named Elizabeth Johnston was arrested for being 'drunk and disorderly' in Fitzroy and imprisoned until her appearance at the Fitzroy Court on the following Monday (*CM&WC* 8/6/1878, p. 3).

[143] Boisterous, rowdy, coarse, earthy (Green 1998, p. 1010, Late 19C+).

(b) Nearly four years later, on the 17th of April 1882, a case was presented in the Fitzroy Magistrates Court asking Mr Edward Berry to provide financial support for an illegitimate child.

Unfortunately for the plaintiff, Miss Elizabeth Johnston, the Court rejected the claim because the child had already been adopted by a third party (*CM&WC* 22/4/1882, p. 2). It is easy to imagine how bitter and unhappy Elizabeth Johnston may have been at the loss of the custody of her child, and receiving no financial support for her trouble from the child's father.

(a) Nine days later, on the 26th of April 1882, Bessie Johnston (in the company of Johanna McMahon) was arrested for 'jostling' respectable citizens off the footpath and 'into the gutter'. Poor Bessie was known to the local Constabulary and copped a hefty fine of ten pounds, or 'three months board and lodging at the public's expense'. The charge against Johanna McMahon was dismissed with a stern warning (*CM&WC* 29/4/1882, p. 2). Another example of the larrikin 'species' on the streets of Fitzroy (*Argus* 4/1/1882, p. 6).

A search of local newspapers and the major newspapers (the *Age* and the *Argus*), did not disclose any further details about this particular Elizabeth Johnston (there were others), but did uncover a network of men and women by the last name of Johnson, Johnston and Johnstone, all of whom lived in and around the suburbs of Collingwood and Fitzroy. These surnames were often interchangeable when included in newspaper reports of criminal activity, depending on the accuracy of the typesetter or the court reporter.

Bessie's radical speech to the working-class members of the audience during Scene Seven (C) is partly sourced from a newspaper article in the *Argus* at the time of the riots, and features the content of a political pamphlet being distributed at a large street demonstration. The pamphlet contained a call for the 'veterans' of the Eight-Hour Movement from 1856 to indicate their support for the gains made in the newly gazetted Factories Act. The original

quote from the pamphlet (attributed to a Mr Gordon from the Shop Employees Union) spoke of 'Eight-Hours Men' ('Compulsory Closing: Serious Disturbances in Collingwood', *Argus* 3/4/1886, p. 10). Although it was generally not spoken of in the press coverage of the day; without doubt, women would have played an active role in this vital fight for fairer working conditions.

During the rehearsal period I spoke many times with the actors about the historical information underpinning their characters and the play as a whole. Issues such as the struggle for the 'eight-hour' working day (and the introduction of the principle of eight-hours 'Work, Rest and Recreation' in 1856), were unknown to the cast. In 1903, the Eight Hours Pioneers Association unveiled a 25 foot high monument to the Eight-Hour movement. It was originally situated on Spring Street, opposite the Grand Hotel (now known as the Windsor Hotel), and in close proximity to the Parliament House (and the large statue of General Gordon: hero of the battle for Khartoum and a revered symbol of British Imperialism).

As the statue was being unveiled, the President of the Committee responsible for the project asked the assembled crowd why the workers of the Colony should settle for eight hours of work. Indeed; it was his considered opinion: 'that the world would be better and happier if they could have a shorter working day - say, six hours' (*Leader* 25/4/1903, p. 23).

The relevance of the large numeral '8' worn by Bessie in Scene 7(C) was made clearer when I sent the actor playing her the link to a webpage containing information about the monument (which was relocated in 1924 to a spot opposite the Trades Hall building in Lygon Street). To the best of my knowledge there were no known serving female Eight-Hour Movement Committee members.

4.4 Feminist theatre practice and Documentary Theatre

Griffin and Aston argue there is an urgent need to show the lives of ordinary women when creating history-based feminist theatre (Griffin & Aston, 1997, p.1), and 'as history is played and re-visited through the agency of feminist performance, questions of gender, class, and power come under scrutiny' (Griffin and Aston 1997, p. 2). This is also the broad aim of 'Flash Donahs'. In her article, 'Making the Bones Sing: The Feminist History Play, 1976-2010', Katherine Kelly claims that 'the feminist history play uncovers what has been hidden, straightens what has been twisted, and /or recalls what has been forgotten about the past of women's communities' (Kelly K 2010, p. 660).

Hélène Keyssar argues that: 'feminist plays attempt to pay attention to the lives of women – as individuals, in relation to each other, and in relation to men' (Keyssar, 1996 pp. 2-3, in K. Smith 2013: p. 132). All of the male characters in 'Flash Donahs' exercise power (to varying degrees) over women, particularly over the lives of working-class women known generally as 'larrikinesses'. The women in my play have all experienced repression and social exclusion because of their gender and their socio-economic status. Can a staged representation of that discrimination add to the debate about feminism in the modern era? Broadly speaking, I believe it can. In the opinion of Swedish feminist performer and theatre-maker ,Tiina Rosenberg, 'performance is one exciting and multifaceted way in which feminist artists and activists ... are demanding a more equal future. ... (and) performance has been, and remains, a means of politicising and portraying the anger and frustration felt by many feminists' (p. 84) This often achieved by combining differing performance styles and genres and, 'utilising the more text-based traditions of theatre as and when required' (p. 76). Rosenberg also believes that 'the tactic of combating repression with pranks and wry humour has a strong feminist tradition' (p. 76-77).

Reinelt reinforces the view that,

> One of the early concerns of feminist representation was to get women in central roles represented as legitimate protagonists of dramas – not just in order to create more roles for women, but to treat their lives, as serious subjects (Reinelt 2006, p. 22).

Elaine Aston speaks of the encouragement given to the members of the 'Women's Writing for Performance Project'(2007), 'through process and practice, to identify the practicalities and political possibilities of resistant 'making' (Aston 2007, p. 88). The treatment of the Temperance Movement Street Orator in Scene Seven (B) is a case in point. The two young friends, Bessie and Cecilia, are not cowed or ashamed by the Orator's attacks on their behaviour or appearance. In full view of their rowdy 'pals' outside the Theatre Royal, they defiantly refute the moral values he espouses so vociferously. 'Flash Donahs' displays similar cultural aspects to what Aston describes as the 'Bad Girl' drama (Aston 2006: p. 73). However, I am hesitant to include it in this category because it was not written in response to what Aston describes as the 'girl power' movement of the 1990s, which I consider to be a cultural impost that did not deliver on, as Aston describes it: 'the promise of empowerment whilst concealing the realities and disadvantages of social and cultural systems that militate against the fulfilment of this promise' (pp. 73-74). Who can forget the rise of 'raunch culture'?

In a 'Bad Girl' play, violence is a constant feature in the lives of the young women being portrayed, as both instigators and victims. As examples of what the term 'Bad Girl' play means, Aston refers to 3 plays: *Duck*, by Stella Feehily; *Airsick*, by Emma Frost; and *The Sugar Syndrome*, by Lucy Prebble – all three of which were performed at major theatre venues in London around the end of 2003. In the play *Duck*,

> Femininity in their working-class culture is not rejected (as it was by a feminist generation), but is messed up or roughed up through aggressive masculine behaviour: swearing, fighting and street crime (p. 74).

According to Aston there is a strong sense of 'sisterhood' between the women in this play, (pp. 75-76) , and this may be because, as Aston puts it, in 'second-wave feminist theatre, women's friendship was foundational to building 'alternative' female communities, potentially resistant to dominant and oppressive heteropatriarchal systems' (p. 75). Elaine Aston could have written this statement with 'Flash Donahs' in mind.

The female characters are represented as angry and defiant (particularly those with working-class origins) and admittedly, this may be seen as focussing on the more negative and sensationalised reports of the lives of young larrikin women. In my defence, the vast majority of published material in the major and minor newspapers I encountered constantly reinforced the role of young larrikin women as being this way. The central character of the play, Cecilia Anthony, is shown to be at risk of physical violence from a violent young man (Edwin Peddy) and because of being forced by her mother to live in a brothel. The two sex-workers living in the opium-den in Scene Four, Harriett and Jane are also caught up in the activities of a criminal and exploitative 'underworld'. Bessie Johnston is literally left 'holding the baby' by the father of her child. Cecilia fights to stay away from the life her mother has imposed upon her. Rejecting a life dependant on the economic largesse of the father of her child, Bessie Johnston becomes a strong-willed and determined union activist. A young Salvation Army 'Hallelujah Lass' Happy Dinah, establishes herself as a fearless and forthright evangelist despite rising religious approbation at the perceived threat to social order as a result of women becoming more active in church life (Swain 2002: p. 66), particularly their presence at outdoor rallies.

In Scene Seven (B) Bessie and Cecilia speak casually about a viscous attack on a mutual friend. Their friend was forced to defend herself ferociously against the violent actions of her father and then escapes to Gippsland after his subsequent death, caused by hitting him on the

head with a large piece of stone ('A Fatal Quarrel', *Illustrated Australian News* 25/1/1882, p.7). We know from the case of neglect and eventual death of the teenager, Charlotte Duffy, discussed in some detail by Cecilia Anthony and Bessie Johnston in Scene Twelve, outside the Collingwood Courthouse, (as they await the commencement of proceedings), that 'duty of care' could be an optional extra for parents, especially fathers. In 1880, a fourteen year-old girl named Charlotte Duffy died after suffering appalling neglect in her home. Her sickness was described as 'hip disease' but, in reality, it was nothing more than a scandalous lack of care by her father and mother. The information was sourced from an academic article (Hogan, 1999: pp. 305-316) and later (as I explored the circumstances as they occurred), in a series of four newspaper articles ('Shocking neglect of a child', *Argus* 5/10/1880, p. 6; 'Revolting Cruelty', *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly* Courier 9/10/1880, p. 3; 'Central Criminal Court', in *The Australasian* 16/10/1880, p. 20; & 'Central Criminal Court, *Argus* 19/10/1880, p. 9). We have no evidence to suggest that Cecilia's mother, Kate Anthony, was anything other than what she appears to be in the many newspaper reports of her criminal activity.

It may be simplistic to blame all of the troubles the family endured on the actions of Kate Anthony, as being poor or homeless in Melbourne in the 1880s were undoubtedly complex and difficult matters to deal with. Being a sole parent, without the support of a male figure in the household, might result in being ostracized by the charitable organizations sent to help, or by the community they were part of.[144] A 'transient' male in the family unit could lead to a

[144] In *Deserted and Destitute: Motherhood, Wife Desertion and Colonial Welfare (2002)* Christina Twomey speaks of the difficulties experienced by women (from the mid- nineteenth century onwards), when using the courts to claim maintenance payments from male partners. The claims were usually based on instances of family violence, drunkenness resulting in household funds being exhausted, paternity issues, and of desertion of the family home. Challenging the role of the male within the family unit would often result in women accused of being 'unrespectable'. Unrespectable women were often those who refused to abide by 'prescribed notions' of what it meant to be a wife and mother. The emphasis in the courts was upon the reestablishment of the marriage or relationship over and above the safety of women and children. Domestic violence was not an automatic trigger for the issuing of a maintenance order (Twomey 2002, pp. 20-26).

woman becoming involved in illegal activities, often in the company of a supporting female network (Piper 2013, pp. 94-96).[145]

We have evidence of Cecilia's active resistance to her home being used as a brothel, and of her being forced into being a worker in it. At the time of her removal from a Chinese opium den in September 1884 (forming the basis of Scene Four) Cecilia is noted as being sixteen ('The Chinese and their Victims', *The Weekly Times* 13/9/1884, p. 7); but Cecilia was, in fact, fifteen years old.[146] In another lurid newspaper report of the family's arrest (worthy of a stage melodrama in itself), Cecilia Anthony supposedly declaimed, "Mother, you have brought us to this", as both she and her sister Rebecca Anthony (aged twenty), were being arrested by the police. Their house is named as an 'immoral house' that was 'unfit for human habitation' and that the premises were managed by her mother, Kate. Cecilia's two brothers, one of whom was also named John, are also mentioned in this report. Apparently, they both worked 'for the Corporation' (The City of Melbourne). Sadly, Cecilia is labelled with the dreadful descriptor 'innately bad' by the newspaper reporter covering this scandalous event ('Hotbed of Vice' *Weekly Times* 11/10/1884, p. 11). Her father is not mentioned although he was listed as being a resident of the house.[147]

A disorderly incident of this type often led to being classified as not having a legitimate means of support. When this occurred, vagrancy laws were often invoked by the police and the courts. The result could be being made an 'outcast' and being moved on from a location which the subject considered to be their home. Another penalty could be a period of

[145] For a similar case of an actual family living in poverty and their subsequent involvement in the legal system see, Pawsey M 1995, *Annie Wilkins: Life on the Margins in Nineteenth-Century Collingwood.* Pawsey describes, in meticulous detail, how easily and at an early stage in life, living in poverty could become the catalyst for a life spent in and out of incarceration. In the case of Annie Wilkins, being confined in June 1881 at the Abbotsford Reformatory (run by the 'Sisters of the Good Shephard'), at the age of eleven, was the start of a lifetime struggle for survival.
[146] *Reformatory Children's Register: Oakleigh Book: p. 185, No. 14921*
[147] Ibid.

imprisonment or a fine. Julie Kimber has proposed that these laws were often used as a means of punishment for acting outside the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. They enabled police 'to criminalise aspects of working-class culture and, in the process, marginalise those deemed to be transgressing middle-class morality (Kimber 2010, pp. 275-293).

We know that Kate was married to a John Anthony and it appears that they arrived in Melbourne, via the city of Adelaide in South Australia and before that, the United Kingdom. Cecilia's brother, also named John, was charged with "having a drop too much" less than two weeks after the raid on their house in Bainbridge Place, off Bouverie Street in Carlton ('Police Intelligence', *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly* Courier 1/10/1882, p. 3). We also know that a John Anthony (aged fifty-one), of Fitzroy was charged (on warrant) for deserting his wife two months before his family were arrested ('News in brief'', *Collingwood Mercury & Weekly Courier* 4/11/1882, p. 2). It is worth noting that, twelve months later; it was Kate Anthony who met her daughter when she was released from the Oakleigh Reformatory for Catholic Girls.[148]

4.5 Music as a dramaturgical device:

The choice of the songs and poems used in 'Flash Donahs' is another important aspect of the play's approach to Documentary Theatre. For example, the song used in Scene Fourteen, which I christened 'Sydney Sal' (after a line in the third stanza), originally came from a poem written by Charles Thatcher (probably c. 1860), and entitled 'Going to Shout' (Wannan 1974: pp. 80-81). All of the songs used in 'Flash Donahs' were edited or revised in one way or another. The inclusion of 'The Poor Tailoress' (based loosely on the poem, 'The Song of the Shirt'), helps in the coalescence of the two main streams in this scene (the Street Riots over working hours and conditions, and the formation of the Tailoresses Association).

[148]Ibid.

The image of a lone woman sewing garments in a garret (illuminated only by the doleful glow of a single candle), was a familiar motif used in the mid-nineteenth century struggles for social reform (Edelstein 1980: p. 210), and reflected 'an artistic tradition, strongly established in the late eighteenth century, of evoking sentiment and beauty by portraying an unhappy, lonely woman' (p. 195). The visual motifs used in this tradition would also have been well-known forty years later. Indeed, a sculpture by the same name won a gold medal for sculpture at the 1880 -1881 Melbourne International Exhibition and was later purchased by the National Art Gallery of New South Wales (*Argus* 28/7/1882, p. 6).

To the theatre audiences of the 1880s, the melodramatic over-familiarity with the image of the 'poor seamstress' would have made it perfect source material for the bombastic wit of the Burlesque. The rhythmic stanzas of the poem would also have lent themselves easily to musical accompaniment. In order to include the poem, *The Song of the Shirt*[149], it was necessary to make substantial changes to it. To avoid the audience becoming restless as they watch an openly didactic and melodramatic performance style it was substantially reduced in length to four stanzas, with the chorus repeated only twice. It was performed in the 'recitative'[150] performance style which is used elsewhere in the play. This type of singing style allows for plenty of interaction with the audience and encourages a broad and risqué performance style. The order of the stanzas differs from the original. I also inserted the line 'Low wages on the never' into the chorus to provide a more 'colonial' and localized bias.

[149] *The Song of the Shirt* was written in 1843 by Thomas Hood.
[150] A style of singing that resembles the manner of the spoken voice.

4.6 Theatrical representations of female violence:

The principal focus of Scene Ten is physical violence on the streets of Melbourne, and particularly violence involving young women of the 'larrikin class'. In order to present this in a non-naturalistic style, 'Flash Donahs' draws freely upon the traditions of the late nineteenth-century burlesque, which was performed either on its own, or as part of a series of entertainments under the one banner (such as the imaginary production, 'The Push', ascribed to this scene by the character, Jennie Lee). The actions of the character, Kate Anthony, are integral to the overall dramatic structure in Scene Ten, by acting as a conduit, in the Brechtian manner of 'alienation' or 'distancing' (Garde 2013, p. 11) for the many snippets of information about public displays of female violence I encountered in my research.

The section in Jean Benedetti's book, *The Actor at Work* (2001) dealing with the unfolding structure and 'shape' of text-based drama (largely based on the work of Constantin Stanislavsky), has been widely utilized since 1970. He argues that there are certain inevitable steps that must be taken for a play to reach the pivotal moment on which the 'resolution' of the whole play is dependant. In other words, a conventional play (which can be as variable as there are plays in the Western theatre tradition), follows a familiar path of discovery for the actor (in the first instance), and for the audience during the performance (Benedetti 2001, pp. 109-111).

The challenge as a playwright (or compiler of archival material, in the first instance), was to create as malleable a dramatic structure as possible, to enable the disparate reports of female street behaviour to be effectively combined together. The creative paradigm on display in Scene Ten is that of a burlesque, on-stage at the Theatre Royal. The scene consists mostly of a monologue from the character of Kate Anthony, supported by the presence of two female pugilists using 'tableaux' and slow motion physical actions to mirror Kate's description of the

fight. The 1880s audience would be well-aware[151] that the person they are watching on-stage was the English actress Jennie Lee, in costume, and would have been quite accepting of the oddities contained in the Jennie Lee/Kate Anthony 'special' (or featured performance).

4.6.1 Two larrikin girls

No attempt has been in Scene Ten made to present a realistically violent encounter between the protagonists otherwise referred to as 'Curly' and 'Croppy'. These 'nick-names' came from a newspaper report in 1887 ('Female Pugilists. Two larrikinesses settle a dispute with their fists.', *Melbourne Punch* 27/1/1887, p. 10), and do not refer to the fight between Elizabeth Fry and Ettie Dickens, a report of which can be found in the *Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier*[152] (Bellanta 2012, pp. 30-32). On the contrary, the choreographed cartoon-like violence is in keeping with a broad, physical style of humour that would have been at home in the theatres and licensed premises of the 1880s. Anti-social behaviour was a common occurrence in the daily affairs of the City of Melbourne and young female larrikins were as willing as their male counterparts to settle a dispute violently, and if need be, in the public arena, often for the benefit and amusement of their pals (Bellanta 2012, pp. 70-73). There was a strong sense of disgust and outrage generated in the community when these types of incidents happened in the public eye ('City Echoes', M*elbourne Punch* 27/1/1887, p. 2).

At the conclusion of Scene Eleven, which is set inside the Salvation Army barracks in Wellington Street, Collingwood, Bessie Johnston startles all those present by taking the stage, brandishing a revolver that she has taken from out of her bag and pointing it to her temple; all the while singing a typically rousing Salvation Army hymn urging sinners and saints alike to

[151] See Scene Eight
[152] CM&WC, 20/3/1890, p.2

'Stand your ground and fire away' at the 'Old Man', a Salvation Army term used to describe the 'Devil'.[153]At the end of Scene Eleven ('The Skeletons v. the Salvos'),[154] Bessie Johnston takes a large revolver from her bag and threatens to shoot herself. Even in today's society, which has become inured to constant reports of violence in the community, the idea that in 1886 a woman would produce a revolver during a Salvation Army meeting and threaten to shoot herself (to make a point about men not providing financial support for their children) is almost unthinkable.

In response, I would like to offer a newspaper report entitled 'A Sensational Incident' A young man named Charles Chapman, standing in the doorway of a music store in Swanston Street in Melbourne's Central Business District (where he was employed as a 'junior music-seller'), was shot at with a revolver by Eliza Bourke for not giving her financial support when she was pregnant and 'on the point of being confined'. The case was later thrown out of court ('A Sensational Event', *Illustrated Australian News* 25/1/1882, pp. 2, 3, & 6). The comic sketch in Scene Ten is set on a section of flat land next to the Merri Creek in Abbotsford, large enough to accommodate a crowd of several hundred on-lookers and supporters. The two fighters have been given the names, Ettie Dickens and Elizabeth Fry (aged sixteen and eighteen respectively) and the action and dialogue in the scene are a compilation of events that occurred over a number of years.

[153] *The Australasian* 20/9/1884, pp. 42-43
[154] 'Skeleton Gangs' vs The Salvation Army.

Figure 4.1
Scene 10: 'The Stoush at Merri Creek'
Anna Ellis performing as 'Jennie Lee' (in character as 'Kate Anthony, the 'Amazon of the Swamp')

≈

Although there were two young women known by these names, they are both composite characters. They were both residents of the inner-suburb of Fitzroy and when it came time for them to settle a dispute over '... a certain young man' (*Melbourne Punch* 27/1/1887, p. 2), they were only too willing to find a vacant block of land to settle the score with their fists.

The remaining character traits of the '... two young women of the larrikiness type' ('Police Intelligence', *Argus* 18/3/1890, p.4)[155], were drawn from those above and other reports of public violence between young larrikin women.[156] The actual number of larrikins and interested bystanders attending similar outdoor pugilistic events often varied greatly. Another newspaper report of the original fight between Ettie and Lizzie claimed that over two-hundred and fifty people ('Police news - Pugilistic encounter between females', *Age* 19/3/1890) gathered on a vacant lot in George Street, Fitzroy, known to local residents as 'Jerusalem Square' (Bellanta 2012, pp. 30-31).[157].

Over on the other side of Melbourne, the suburb of Williamstown also had a hard earned reputation for local larrikinesses 'stoushing' on the street, also on vacant lots or open ground. Regrettably, Ettie Dickens didn't travel over from Williamstown to 'take on' Lizzie Fry and it is highly unlikely that a Fitzroy girl would have ventured out from her local area to go to a dance at the Oddfellows Hall in 'Willy'.[158] There would have been some healthy rivalry between the two suburbs of course, as the Britannia Football Club[159] occasionally met the Williamstown Juniors in an Australian Rules football match (*Collingwood Mercury and Weekly Courier* 15/5/1885, p.3).

4.7 Summary

In this chapter, the focus is on the method used to create the characters in 'Flash Donahs', the availability of appropriate archival sources, and on the interpretation of that material. As I have suggested earlier, I have relied more on secondary rather than what I describe as 'primary' sources. It can be argued that a newspaper article from a major newspaper of the

[155] A short example of using material from outside the determined research period that proved to be very relevant to the construction of Scene Ten.
[156] For example, 'Disgraceful Scene at Williamstown', *Argus*: 19/9/1888, p. 5.
[157] Bellanta's description of the circumstances surrounding the fight between the two young girls was an important reference point for the subsequent research into overt displays of violence by female larrikins.
[158] A local name for the suburb of Williamstown.
[159] The precursor to the famous Collingwood Football Club.

period can be considered a verbatim source but that would depend on an important factor. What was the intention of the author and how much emphasis is there on the truth rather than the need to entertain the reader?

Because of its importance in the overall structure of my play, Scene Ten features prominently in this chapter. The reason for this emphasis on what is essentially a boisterous 'entertainment' (based on some of the known ingredients of a 1880s burlesque), is that the scene brings together many different types of information about female larrikins. A question that arises from this is does the 'style' of Scene Ten add to or detract from my broad aim of showing female larrikins 'stepping out of the shadows'. The answer to that question is yes, because the characters retain a postion of control over the events taking place within the scene. On the other hand, it can argued that the repeated focus on behaviour that fell outside the law and the accepted view of women in the community, limits discussion on the role of women during this period.

As the title suggests, in the next and final chapter, 'Reflections', I examine a number of different aspect to the La Mama Theatre production of 'Flash Donahs'. I approach the play from a number of directions (non-sequentially at times), including from the viewpoint of male impersonation on-stage which features very prominently in this play. The theory of *gestus* is discussed briefly as part of the discussion on female to male stage impersonation because of Brecht's knowledge of class (and perhaps gender) representations on-stage. Lastly, after looking at different aspects of what may or may not have been successfully achieved during the La Mama season I turn to what could may happen if I, or another director, has the opportunity to stage 'Flash Donahs' again.

Chapter 5: Reflections

5.1 Introduction

British modernist playwright, Harold Pinter, believed that a stage character has an inner-life of their own and that their intentions will manifest themselves if the playwright will only get out of their way (Pinter, 2009: p. 33).

In this chapter I will discuss some examples of how 'Flash Donahs' was staged and directed. Through a brief examination of the scenes in the play that I think encapsulate my approach to writing the play, I hope to provide some insights into my own style of direction. As the matter of female to male cross-dressing features prominently I will also look at what may be involved when playing a member of the opposite sex. I have done so partly in the context of how Berthold Brecht approached the question of physical representation of the personal status and class of a character, known as *gestus*, and partly from a feminist standpoint. I consider 'Flash Donahs' to be class-based because it focuses on working-class values from over one hundred and thirty years ago (as we can best represent them in the modern era.).

I have not arranged my reflections on the play in sequential order. Rather, I have attempted to gather together my ideas around specific issues. The scope of this exegesis does not permit me to analyse my approach to direction for the stage in great detail, but I will attempt to do so at specific points in this chapter. I will also discuss aspects of how the play-script was developed and adapted for the stage, including an explanation behind the changes to the performance text, as the season progressed. I will evaluate some of the creative decisions taken in order to present the world of the principal character in 'Flash Donahs', Cecilia Anthony, to a modern audience. Having examined those scenes that may have approached their full theatrical potential, and those scenes that were less successful in doing so, I will comment on any subsequent ideas I have since considered for its re-staging. Hopefully my

commentary on staging and directing my play will be of use to another director undertaking the task of working with my script.

5.2 Staging 'Flash Donahs'

Flash Donahs' is an amalgam of two different theatre styles. It employs aspects of the burlesque 'revue' performance style (with strong melodramatic overtones), which was very popular in Australia during the 1880s. A 'revue' style performance is a 'sequence of sketches' constructed of self-contained and distinct scenes that may be arranged in any order (Brecht 1964, p. 46). Other descriptive terms that may describe a 'revue' style are 'music-hall', 'cabaret' and 'vaudevillian'.. Documentary Theatre is generally reliant on verbatim material which is often associated with an expository style of performance. However, as long as the intention of the work is enhanced and expounded upon, then any form of theatre style is acceptable in a Documentary Theatre play. As a contrast to the heavy emphasis on 'entertainment' in the 'revue' style (and as a means of providing a workable structure for the play), a narrative through-line (enhanced by use of a naturalistic acting style), was also included.

5.2.1 Male impersonation in 'Flash Donahs'

In the 'Preface to the Playscript', I refer to the abstracted and nonrepresentational theatrical device of having the male roles in 'Flash Donahs' played by a female cast. Which leads to the question: how should the female actor approach the task of playing a male on-stage when performing in a historically-based Documentary Theatre play? Jessica Walker dealt with this conundrum in her play about female to male impersonation on the Victorian-era stage in Great Britain entitled, 'The Girl I Left Behind Me'. Walker claims that despite the use of 'staccato, and less fluid' male speech patterns and typically masculine 'pieces' such as false facial hair, that 'androgyny, in the end, is what the male impersonator achieves, vocally and

visually' (Walker 2012: p. 110). A stylized representation of criminality was used in the creation of the character, Edwin Peddy. With the assistance of a choreographer, his deliberate speech and movement patterns created a sense of menace and imminent violence. In keeping with his public persona, Eddie enters the courtroom calmly and slowly; and when he sits, he claims the witness box as his own. As a contrast to this, in Scene Fourteen (B) Eddie momentarily forgets himself (and where he is), when he excitedly describes the fight between he and his pals and the Collingwood police.

In her 2013 article on the background to the staging of the play, *Muffet Inna Alla Wi*, by the Jamaican women's theatre collective, 'Sistren', Karina Smith questions the use of the term 'male impersonation' when male characters (particularly the use of male 'stock' characters), are performed by an all-female cast. In Smith's opinion, the word 'impersonation' does not accurately reflect what occurred on-stage. Her argument is that the term 'implies that the performer is pretending to be male, masquerading as the opposite sex' (Smith 2013, pp. 129). Smith's preferred choice of descriptor is the word 'drag', because it 'suggests that the performance is a parody, and shows very clearly that gender is socially constructed and performed' (p.130). This question of gender construction is also integral to 'Flash Donahs'. Smith's insight is very pertinent to my play. Presenting gendered representations of different male characters without first deciding on where those representations will eventually sit on the, 'parody versus impersonation' continuum, which extends 'from the obvious markers of gender difference at one end to complete disguise at the other' (p.130), is a practice fraught with difficulty and risk. This may also be true for the audience. They could be left wondering how to process what is being offered to them on-stage and how, because of the historicization of the archival material, to critically assess the play's approach to gender construction and inequality in the modern era.

In Scene Two, when Cecilia parodies the religious message in the popular Salvation Army hymn: *Oh! Bless His Name He sets me Free*[160] (sung to the tune of the mildly salacious mid-Victorian music-hall classic, *Champagne Charlie*[161]*)*, it became a satirical monologue with a melodic rhythm. The Salvation Army liked to use popular melodies to accompany their hymns but larrikins also adapted popular religious tunes to in order to mock the Salvation Army 'soldiers'(Ussher 1985, pp. 133-134; Walker P 2006, Chapter 6). The song *Champagne Charlie* contains lyrics such as 'Good for any game at night boys' and 'Oh, what a Champagne swell' and has always been performed (with variations according to the actor's style), as an inebriated, brazen and mildly lecherous older male 'toff', or member of the upper-classes. To use an old Australian colloquialism, he is a 'good sport'. My intention was to show that the use of a Salvation Army song, being performed in a music-hall setting' as something that would have been shocking and even indecent to a theatre audience of the 1880s.

In this scene Cecilia Anthony performs the role of the 'swell', in this case, the 'Champagne Swell' first popularised by English music-hall performer, George Leybourne, in the mid-to-late 1860s. Earlier versions of the 'swell' stage character had been in play for decades but it was Leybourne who successfully imbued his performances with the insouciant narcissism and gentile depravity of an indulgent member of the upper-classes. His character became a template for his many imitators, even those that would parody his style. 'Swell' songs were 'delivered robustly, even aggressively' and Bailey describes them as engaging with their admirers through a wealth of social, material and stylistic connotations (Bailey 1998, pp. 101-127). In Australia, there were a variety of 'swell' characters that became equally as popular. In particular, the 'blackface dandy' was adopted by the larrikin community as an inspiration

[160] *Oh, Bless His Name He Sets Me Free'* (1882) by Salvation Army Captain, William Baugh.
[161] *'Champagne Charlie'* by George Leybourne (1866)

for them to dress extravagantly and imitate their favourite characters in public. They had a large part to play in the evolving nature of the larrikin sub-culture. As Bellanta puts it,

> these characters were *also* a source of inspiration for larrikins themselves. [Stage] Variety traditions played a crucial role in the development of the larrikin persona. They provided street-youths with the means to style identities for themselves (Bellanta 2008, pp. 131-143).[162]

5.2.2 Brecht's theory of 'Gestus'

Carl Weber believes that in Brecht's earliest work, in the 1920s, the term g*estus* was used to 'signify body gesture as opposed to the spoken word.' Later, when referring to the processes of the actor at work in rehearsal, Brecht's use of the term became inclusive of a complete package of gesture, movement and voice 'when showing us a "character" on stage by way of his/her social interactions'. When referring to human interactions, Weber makes the point that *gestus* was capable of demonstrating the 'socially conditioned' functionality of the character and the world they inhabited (Weber 2000: p. 43).

In Brecht's words,

> The realm of attitudes adopted by the characters towards one another is what we call the realm of the gest. Physical attitude, tone of voice and facial expression are all determined by a social gest (Brecht 1964: p. 198).

Perhaps, even more importantly, physical and vocal manifestations of social status and function have the practical capability of being overtly representational. In other words, just as a word or sentence or paragraph can be extracted from a body of text (as being highly indicative of the remaining body of the text), 'a particular gestural detail of an actor's performance should be 'quotable', [by which Weber means] demonstrating the social *gestus* of his performance, of the scene, or even the play' (Weber 2000: p. 44). What this means is that although 'the actor's biological sex always reinscribes the performer with the cultural

[162] Bellanta also discusses larrikin development in *Larrikins: A History* (2012), pp. 123-125.

codes associated with his/her gender', the use of clearly delineated *gestic* signifiers may serve to allay any audience unease when the political and social aims of the play are reiterated by this practice (Geis 1996, p. 169). The character of the larrikin, Edwin Peddy, is again a case in point. In rehearsal, the questions I applied to the development of this character were: how will 'Eddie' be shown to the audience? What features of his persona will the female actor accentuate? Would a single physical characteristic suffice, or perhaps a complex set of actions were required?

Elin Diamond has looked closely at the relationship between Feminist Theatre and the role of *gestus.* Although Diamond states that 'feminist theory and Brechtian theory need to be read intertextually' (Diamond 1988, p. 82), she is quite scathing in her criticism of the 'typical Marxian blindness towards gender relations' (p. 83). In Diamond's opinion, this intertextuality is at its most relevant and productive when sharing a conceptualization of the 'unfetishized female performer' (p. 89). A 'gestic feminist criticism', as Diamond puts it, will 'highlight sex-gender configurations as they conceal or disrupt a coercive or patriarchal ideology' (p. 91). In 'Flash Donahs', the patriarchal ideology of the 1880s is embodied in the actions of the male characters, and in the limited means of responses available to young female larrikins. The eventual imprisonment of Cecilia Anthony at the Oakleigh Reformatory in October 1884 for 'living an immoral life' *Reformatory Children's Register: Oakleigh Book: p. 185, No. 14921*), in a brothel run by her mother, was a bitterly tragic manifestation of that ideology.

During the rehearsal period and the performance season, it was interesting to observe that not only were there the interpersonal dynamics of a male directing a female cast and crew to consider[163] there was also the matter of the 'masculine persona' being presented back to me.

[163] There were a total of 13 women involved, though not all at the same time, as we had three costume interns who attended on various nights

As the rehearsal period went by, one of my tasks became encouraging some of the worst traits of masculine behaviour. For example, I wanted Edwin to be portrayed as a 'cocky' male thug, full of the 'toxic masculinity' that is observed within Australian society today. In conversation with the actor playing Eddie, I suggested that one of the most popular and renowned American film actors of the first half of the twentieth century, James Cagney,[164]may be a source of inspiration for the character 'type' I had in mind, but this idea was not well-received. It was made clear to the cast and crew that we were not looking to impersonate men but were seeking to demonstrate different aspects of masculinity that would hopefully be easily recognized by all members of the audience. This did require a distillation of easily identifiable masculine traits. Edwin Peddy came to my attention after reading about his brother John in Chapter Three of *The Outcasts of Melbourne* (1984)[165], who was, in all likelihood, a member of the 'Hoddle Street Lairies'. His monologue in Scene Fourteen (B) is based on a newspaper article containing a letter from anther larrikin named 'Pan Snatcher' to one of his pals in prison. Like his younger brother, John Peddy was an habitual criminal (McConville 1985, p. 73).

5.3 As Director

During the early stages of rehearsal it became apparent that a number of changes to the script were required. These changes reflected the aims of the play, one of which was to demonstrate the strength and individuality of the female characters. The insertion of some comic 'business' based around the stealing of the Street Orator's hat added to the theatricality of Scene Seven (B). It also became apparent that the narrative structure would be better served by a re-allocation of lines to the character of Cecilia Anthony, with the intention of

[164] Cagney was renowned for his portrayal of tough and pugnacious characters in American gangster films. He was 161.1 cms tall and compensated for his short stature by adopting a menacing physicality. He was an excellent singer and dancer (see *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), directed by Michael Curtiz).
[165] Written by the renowned historian, Professor Chris McConville.

strengthening the depth of Cecilia's character (both for the actor performing in the role and the audience's perception of the overall theme of the play). I had written a scene in which an actual young larrikin woman by the name of Ellen O'Della appeared before the Magistrates because of a number of different offenses. Her list of crimes included arranging for a coffin to be sent to a male acquaintance, as a mischievous prank ('Hotham Court', *North Melbourne Advertiser* 17/10/1882).

I wrote the scene to demonstrate the typically defiant courtroom behaviour displayed by young larrikin women (Bellanta 2012, pp. 40-46). Ellen O'Della's account of her exploits and her responses to courtroom officials were absorbed into the text of Cecilia Anthony, thereby strengthening the role, and at the same time, presenting a more focussed example of female larrikin behaviour. The details of a number of other miscellaneous crimes committed by young larrikin women were also used in this way. For example, the defiant behaviour of a young woman by the name of Margaret Howard is an excellent case in point. Margaret was accused of conducting herself 'with great levity' in the court-room and refusing to say if she was married. For her trouble, the Court sent her for 'medical treatment' ('Flemington Court - Unfortunate Beings', *North Melbourne Advertiser* 19/1/1883, p. 3).

Another important decision was the addition of extra archival text into Edwin Peddy's courtroom testimony in Scene 14 (B). As the event aroused great public interest at the time there were a number of reports in different newspapers that provided some pivotal pieces of information, such as the use of a knife by one of the assailants, Thomas Donnelly (*Collingwood Mercury & Weekly Courier* 18/12/1880, p. 2). The scene needed something extra to expose the chilling level of brutality of the larrikin gang attack on the Police. The gravity of the testimony, and Edwin's interaction with his barrister, Mr. McKean, was substantially strengthened by the inclusion of this extra archival material from newspapers referred to above.

The creative process can often be stimulated by the smallest and simplest of decisions. A good example of this was the request from the cast (made close to the first public performance) to change the method of presentation of the song, *His Heart Was True To Poll.* It was decided not have the three other cast members 'on-stage' singing as a chorus behind the character of Jennie Lee. They had previously been working with some choreographed movement with a 'nautical' flavour to match the theme of her song about the famous late 17th Century pirate, 'William Kidd'. It was decided that the vocal chorus of three remaining performers (other than Jennie Lee) would use the back-stage area to sing, instead of than being positioned on-stage. Our backstage area during the performance season was, in fact, not a traditional dressing-room, but a narrow and rather small space behind the larger of the two projection screens. Audience sightlines did not allow the cast to postion themselves behind the small projection screen which was approximately a metre forward of the larger screen. Unexpectedly, this gave the cast plenty of latitude in how they performed the song and resulted in a very boisterous and uninhibited version of the chorus.

It is interesting to speculate on the use of the theatrical chorus in the 1880s. Would Jennie Lee have sung this song by herself? I think it is fair to say that large theatrical ensembles were very commonplace during this period so it is very likely that she would have been joined in the rendition of this very popular song by other members of the troupe. In our adaptation I chose an acapella version because it lent itself so easily to the 'larger than life' recitative performance style I was looking for.

Many of the staging decisions for 'Flash Donahs' had already been made during the writing process. The positioning of the characters 'Jo' and 'Happy Dinah', on-stage during the final scene is an example of this.

Figure 5.1
Scene Four: ‘Inside the Opium-Den'

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Interestingly, the actor playing Lieutenant Dinah Bray did not agree with the concept that two characters could be on-stage with each other without directly interacting in a naturalistic manner. In cinematic terms, I wrote the scene with a ‘split-screen’ in mind. The different realities of the characters could take place side-by-side, as if in different worlds. Much of the dialogue in Scene Four spoken by the two female residents in the opium-den was taken and adapted from the memoir of a largely forgotten Melbourne social activist of the period, Doctor John Singleton. We cannot be certain they are verbatim accounts because they appear to be edited transcripts.

Figure 5.2
The Street Riot Burlesque'

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These composites stories of 'friendless and fallen women' (Singleton 1891, p. 247), are presented in the plaintive style of a stage melodrama. The words of a number of contrite and forlorn young women were put into the mouths of the two hard-bitten inhabitants of the Little Napier Street opium-den, and subsequently couched in a 'mock' performative style (which would have been well-known to the purveyor of 1880s melodrama). In its original form, the pious simplicity of the text in Singleton's memoir sent a warning to young women: that their futures were inextricably intertwined with the responsibilities of the domestic environment, and not that of the factory or the shop. In 'Flash Donahs', they become, for the characters of Harriet and Jane, both a means of deception, and a comic device to amuse Edwin Peddy and themselves. Dr. Singleton arrived in Melbourne in 1851. Recognizing the many problems afflicting the poor in the suburb of Collingwood, he opened the 'Free Mission Medical Dispensary' in Wellington Street, Collingwood. During his long career he worked closely

with the Salvation Army, particularly the 'Prison Gate Brigade' which meet women and men as they were being set free from prison. Singleton Street in Collingwood is named in his honour.

As part of the process of introducing a light-hearted sense of fun and frivolity into the staging of Scene Five, I freely drew upon the Victorian-era tradition of the melodramatic 'narrative painting'. In 'Flash Donahs' this would help to incorporate three separate modalities of the character 'Jo', in three distinctly different scenes; the intention being to present a range of interlocking images, or theatrical triptych, representing the beginning, middle and end of a classical narrative story. The three parts of the triptych are based on the actions of the character, Jo. Firstly in the opening scene; then again in Scene Eight when the role of 'Jo' is 'reprised' (during a rehearsal under the tutelage of Jennie Lee); and finally, in the last scene when the death of 'Jo' occurs. The widely known Victorian-era image, the 'Weary Seamstress', was my choice of theme for the second part of this scene.[166] The melodramatic trope of the 'narrative' painting would have been well-known to Australian playwrights and producers during the 1880s. An example of this style of painting is, *Homeless (*1890), by Thomas Benjamin Kennington. The painting features a young mother comforting her unconscious son as he lies on a wet footpath in the depths of winter.[167]

The 1904 oil painting on canvas entitled, *The Pioneer*, by Frederick McCubbin is set in three distinct periods of time in the lives of an Australian pioneer family. In the third panel we see that they have been all but forgotten. All that remains of their lives is a wooden cross used as a grave site marker. Although the painting was conceived after the period I have researched, it is emblematic of the national struggle for progress in Australia. The themes of 'death' and

[166] See Figure 5.2
[167] *Homeless* now hangs in a Victorian regional gallery, The Bendigo Art Gallery.

'loss' and 'struggle' are also emblematic of the 'melodrama' as it was portrayed on the stage in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Figure 5.3
'The New Boat'
Melbourne Punch: 18/2/1886, p. 64.
Courtesy of the Rare Books Collection,
Monash University

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The intended light-heartedness of Scene Five, based on a mixture of sentimentality and an exaggerated style of 'high farce', is not easy to achieve on-stage. The action in this scene may have been better served by the use of more overt signals to the audience as to the comic intention of the action on-stage, and the supposed location of the scene. I discuss this further in the final section of this chapter. During the performance season the mood of Scene Five continued to become more and more earnest despite my best efforts. I encouraged the three cast members in the scene to remember that it was actually meant to be a topical and humorous 'spoof' (or lampoon). The sketch was intended to highlight, by the liberal use of

melodrama and burlesque, the serious political ramifications that could arise because of the introduction of shorter working hours, and the push for fairer conditions for factory and garment-workers (many of whom were female). Instead, the action within the scene was played with a melodramatic tone but without the comic emphasis I was hoping to achieve. Small changes to the scene were made where possible, as a means of assisting the actors with being at ease with the melodramatic style. In Scene Six, Cecilia Anthony is shown rehearsing the death scene from the play, 'Jo', and her character's histrionics and bad acting were immediately accessible to the audience. This response from the audience was not unexpected. It did, in fact, become one of the more popular and humorous scenes in the production.

The projected image used for the beginning of Scene Five is entitled 'The New Boat'[168] (*Melbourne Punch* 18/2/1886, p. 64), with the sub-title: 'Youth at the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm' (Sleight 2005, p. 05.7). The demonstrable cynicism in this comic illustration about Alfred Deakin's leadership capabilities exposed 'a dichotomy between those who regarded youth as a realm of possibility and those for whom youth represented weakness or failing' (p. 05.1). The man destined to become the second Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia is portrayed standing proudly and boldly in the prow of the boat. Deakin was just twenty-nine years of age. To emphasize his supposed youth and inexperience, the cartoonist Tom Carrington portrayed him as the 'Little Boy from Manly' (p. 05.8). This figure was a recurring nationalist and comically sartorial motif first shown in the *Bulletin* in 1885 (as a representation of the brazen and defiant nature of the young colonies). The figurative image would have been very well-known to an audience 'in the know'[169] (Kelly, V 2000, p. 254-268)[170], about the political wrangling being played out in the daily press under headlines such

[168] See Figure 5.3
[169] Privy to secret, privileged information (Green 1998, p. 640); in a theatrical context: 'knowingness' based on a familiarity with the performer and/or a style of presentation (Bailey 1998).
[170] Veronica Kelly is of the opinion that melodrama was 'the dominant and characteristic nineteenth-century theatrical form. Although Australian producers often made use of English plays by adapting their scenarios and

as ‘The Battle for Smith Street’[171] (*Melbourne Punch* 8/4/1886, p. 2). The satirical effect of the cartoon is amplified when the character of Cecilia Anthony appears as on-stage as the heavily-bearded Deakin, similar to the one he has in the cartoon.

One of the practical changes to the scene referred to above occurred approximately half-way through the performance season. Cecilia Anthony had previously appeared on-stage as Alfred Deakin dressed in a men’s suit and hat and sporting an obviously fake bushy black beard. Unfortunately, the ‘little Lord Fauntleroy’ style of breeches, being worn by Mr. Deakin in the ‘New Boat’, were not available. Deakin’s costume was pared back to wearing a suit jacket over Cecilia’s dress. Later, I suggested ‘Cecilia’ take off the beard as she exited to emphasise that it was a woman delivering the line, ‘If you want a seat, why not women members of Parliament?’ The statement ascribed to the character, Mr Gordon in Scene Five, referring to ‘advertisements in all the pantomimes, but with no good results’[172] (*Royal Commission on Employés in Shops: Minutes of Proceedings*, 13/7/1882, p. 22), was based on the evidence to the Commission of a different person. This was inserted into the commencement of the scene as an indication to the modern audience that the politics of the day were part of the everyday consciousness of the populace, through the idiom of live popular theatre.

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locations to fit the requirements of the local market, melodrama had an important part to play in the development of ‘Australian colonial identities’, particularly that of the notorious bushranger, Ned Kelly and his gang (Kelly, V 1993, pp. 51-61)

[171] Smith Street was the main shopping thoroughfare in the inner-suburb of Collingwood in Melbourne and the epicentre of the Early Closing Movement riots.

[172] Part of a statement from Frederick A., Smith: ‘Draper’s assistant’.

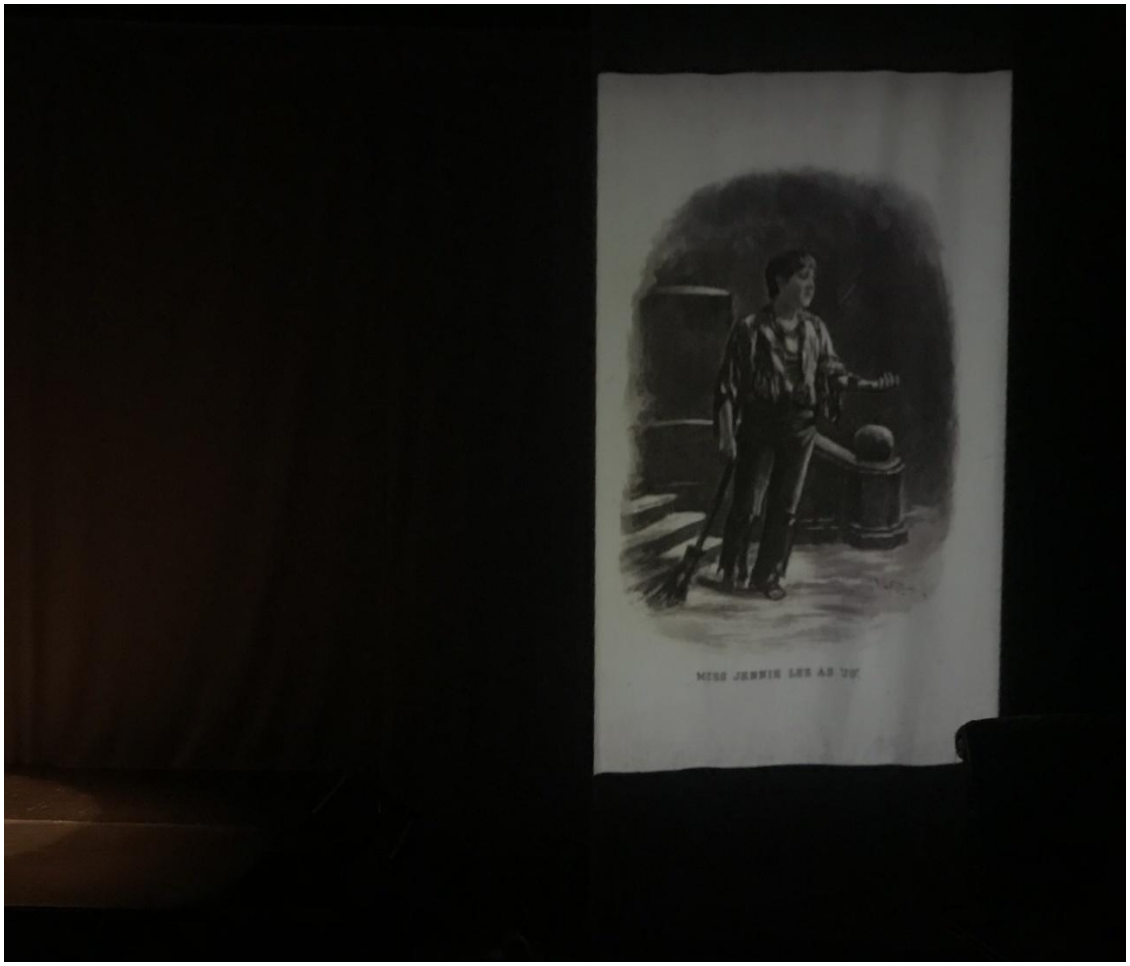

Figure 5.4
Scene 1: Opening projected image

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The opening scene of 'Flash Donahs' begins in 'tableaux' and then progresses into a re-enactment of 'Jo' clearing the roadway for his client. There is no added sound during the scene and all that is heard is the soft rasping of a broom on the stage floor. It is a brief scene of perhaps two to three minutes duration. The intention is to immediately situate the play as being notionally representative of an environment hostile to the weak and vulnerable; but perhaps more importantly, as a signifier to the audience of the 'on-stage' world being established. At this early stage, the actor entering the scene is not meant to represent the Jennie Lee characterization of 'Jo', but that of an anonymous street-sweeper.

The opening of 'Flash Donahs' can be viewed as being very grim, even 'dystopian' in its vision; however, I did not structure the opening of the play to be didactic in the manner of its

storytelling. I wanted to introduce the character of 'Jo' gently, almost surreptitiously, to allow the audience to acclimatize themselves to the vulnerability of the character. My original concept of a single projection screen was expanded to two (one large and one small). As an image of Jennie Lee in costume (see Figure 5.4) is projected onto the smaller screen, the character of 'Jo' is moments away from entering. When the young street-sweeper comes on-stage he positions himself a few paces directly in front of the projection screen, under a street lamp. This effect was achieved by suspending a large period style lamp. A muted lighting 'spot' on the rostra (to the left of the projection screen), is 'up' throughout the scene and increases in intensity in anticipation of the first entrance of 'Happy Dinah'. This form of lighting crossover is utilized a number of times throughout 'Flash Donahs' to create an atmosphere of transition and expectancy. Another image of Jennie Lee is used during the final scene when the character of Cecilia Anthony reprises the death of 'Jo'.

At the end of the play, in order to resolve the narrative tension engendered by the staging of a non-naturalistic opening, the final scene is imbued with a 'grotesque' aesthetic (French 2017, pp. 46-47). Cecilia recites her part (now fully in character, in contrast to the rehearsal scene with Jenny Lee), with an unabashed sense of melodramatic urgency as she quotes 'verbatim' a block of text imported from *Bleak House* (1853). The Salvation Army 'Hallelujah Lass', Happy Dinah, stands with Jo until the boy's final breath. It is important to note that Happy Dinah has been written into the scene for two reasons, one of which is to act as an enabling counterpoint for the delivery of his lines and the conclusion of the narrative. In other words, a stage character was needed to perform Mr. Woodcot's spoken text during the death scene as he helps to ease the eventual passing of 'Jo' (Dickens 1853, *Bleak House* (1970), p. 649). The other reason is a little more prosaic. Happy Dinah' is given a final opportunity to speak of some of the serious issues affecting the daily lives of young larrikin women.

Lt. Dinah Bray was given the epithet 'Happy Dinah' by the Salvation Army because of her beautiful singing voice and reputed ability to garner affectionate support from the rowdy and disruptive mobs of female and male larrikins gathered at their meetings. The Salvation Army regularly used religious nomenclature such as 'Happy Dinah', 'Yorkshire Relish'[173] and 'Zulu Jim', presumably as a means of endearing themselves to a restive audience ready to 'soak- up' the often blaring and confrontational entertainments encouraged at 'Hosanna' meetings.

Throughout the play one of my principal concerns was how to effectively utilize the projected images I had carefully chosen during my research. For example, the two images that were sourced from the Victorian Public Records Office became very important to me. The first was a prison photograph of the larrikin, Edwin Peddy, and the second was the top part of a page in the *Female Register of Prisoners* containing the details of Cecilia Anthony's court details, including her sentencing outcome. In the semi-darkness, as 'Jo' expired onstage the image assumed an ethereal and poignant quality as the screen was the almost unnoticeable (and unintentional) movement of the screens as a result of the gentle air movement inside the venue.

[173] Salvation Army Staff-Sergeant, Thomas Gibbs.

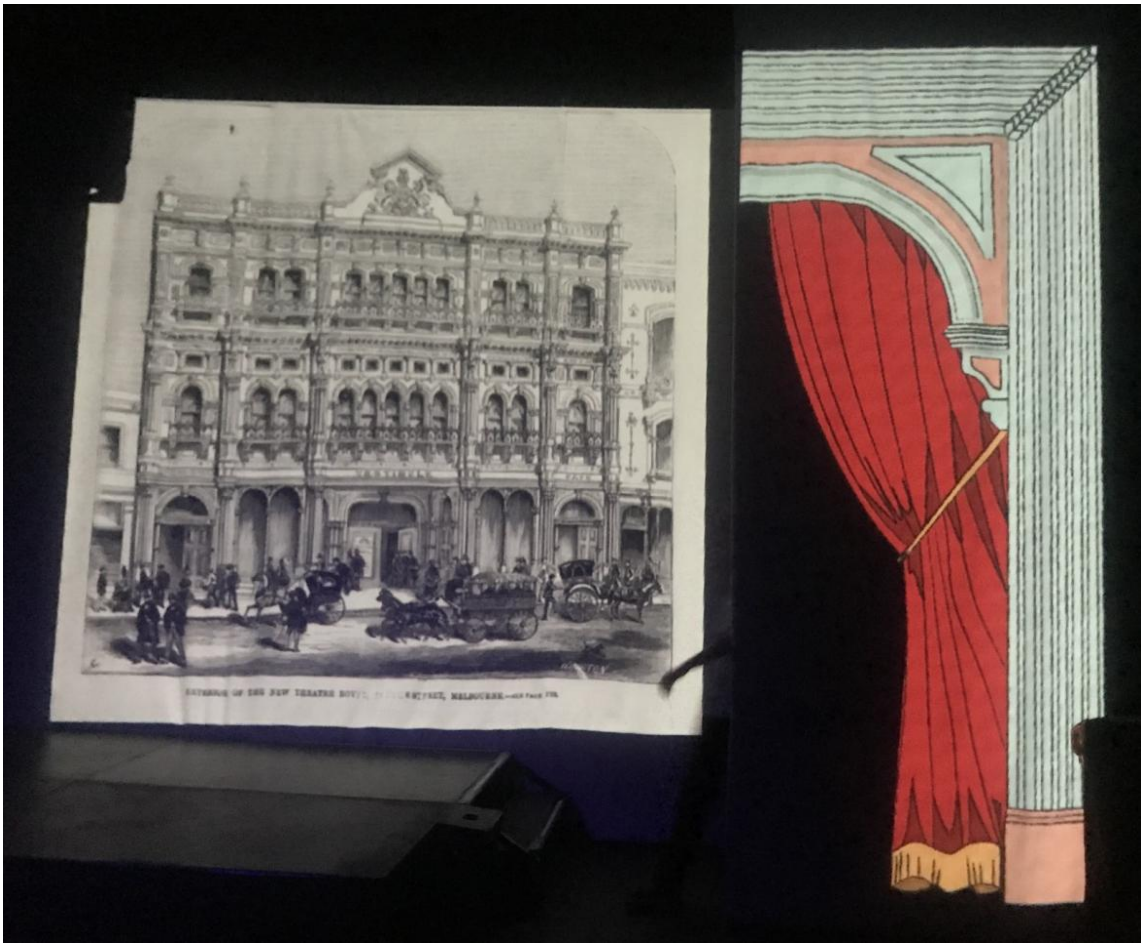

Figure 5.5
'Inside' the Theatre Royal

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Throughout the play I made use of projected images to 'locate' some scenes. For example, I used two different exterior images of the Theatre Royal as a means of signifying, when necessary, the theatrical environs in which Jenny Lee and Cecilia rehearsed and performed their work. Additionally, this was aided by the use of different projected images of the exterior of the Theatre Royal, and of a red velvet curtain drawn to the side of the stage.[174]

The effectiveness of a lighting 'black-out' is very pertinent because as I was writing 'Flash Donahs' I envisaged that the action on-stage would be fast-paced, and that scene changes would be rapidly signified by the use of a 'black-out'. Generally speaking, I consider a lighting black-out to be a powerful theatrical tool. I was reminded of a 1979 production of,

[174] See Figure 5.5

Sexual Perversity in Chicago, by David Mamet., staged in the smaller of the two venues at the first home of the Playbox Theatre Company (originally known as 'Hoopla Theatre Foundation' and then later as The Malthouse Theatre in Southbank), in Exhibition Street in Melbourne's CBD.

Figure 5.6
Scene Seven (C)
Genevieve Neve as Bessie Johnston

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The set was designed by the renowned Peter Corrigan and featured jagged-edged 'doors' (like a set of razor-sharp teeth), that swiftly opened and closed across the width of the small stage,

to emphatically signify the conclusion of a scene. Not quite the same as a black-out, but used with the same intention: to clearly differentiate between different actions and locations.

Figure 5.7
Scene Twelve (A):
Outside Collingwood Courthouse

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In Scene Seven (C) Bessie Johnston, as a combined representation of women from the Tailoresses Association of Melbourne, the Early Closing Movement of 1886, and the earlier struggle for the Eight-Hour working day (1882/3), exhorts those present in the Theatre Royal to take direct action against those who seek to exploit them. A projected image showing the view of the audience in the Theatre Royal (from an on-stage perspective), was displayed at this point. In the changeover between Scenes Seven and Eight, Cecilia Anthony exits the stage along with Bessie Johnston. This is preceded by a brief interaction between Lt. Dinah Bray and Cecilia. Cecilia is off-stage for a short time and then re-enters for her monologue

(Scene Eight). It is a good scene and one that I am quite proud of and provides an insight into Cecilia's defiant nature. However, in hindsight, I would certainly consider allowing the actor playing Cecilia to remain on stage and wait for a lighting cue to begin, rather than have her exit along with the 'Happy Dinah' character (signifying a different time and location). I would also consider having her begin speaking after 'Happy' Dinah has picked up her 'soapbox' and exited. This would have required timing the commencement of the monologue to the second to avoid confusing the audience about the location of the scene. The 'soapbox' was a small wooden crate used by public speakers to raise them above the height of a crowd, to enable the speaker to be seen. The practice of gathering on the banks of the Yarra (particularly the South Bank, east of Princes Bridge, to listen to public speakers was a popular pastime in Melbourne from the latter part of the 1880s onwards. The 'Yarra Bankers', as they were known, were often trade unionists ('Yarra Bank and Yarra Bankers' (*The Encyclopaedia of Melbourne*, 2005, pp. 785-786).

As the season progressed, the tendency of both actors in Scene Twelve (A) was to 'drift' towards an intimate acting style, at the expense of the required pace and energy of the scene. So much so that it was necessary to redirect the action by asking them to change their seating positions on stage so they were directly facing the audience. The intention was to make them less aware of each other and more aware of the demands upon them of the 'given circumstances' of their characters. I am referring to where they are seated (supposedly on the edge of the bluestone street gutter) and what is happening around them (people entering and leaving the Magistrates Court, or passing by on their everyday business). They are 'swigging' alcohol out of a bottle and doing so in broad daylight. What is this act of bravado saying to those people streaming around them, many of whom they would have known? This is similar to Scenes Seven (A) & Seven (B) when the same two actors were also alone on-stage. As an aid to the development of Scene Twelve (A), I decided to take Harriett Robertson and

Genevieve Neve outside, onto the footpath outside the bluestone brick, 'Gothic-style' Carlton Courthouse Theatre (opened in 1887). The two actors were able to place themselves in a very similar setting to that of the play; that is, sitting in the gutter outside the Collingwood Courthouse. I also wanted them to be clearly heard by the audience. Both actors were asked to 'endow' the scene with the sense that Cecilia and Bessie were expecting to see people that they knew and were anxious about meeting on the street and what was about to happen to them.

As a general note, the cast were reminded that they needed to keep their vocal levels high and to avoid any unnecessary pausing. This pausing was occasionally due to a momentary lapse of memory with the lines, but more often than not it was because of the inclination of each of the actors to 'internalize' the action of the scene rather than adapt to the overt needs of the play. When this occurs it has a notably cumulative effect on the action of a scene. All it takes is for a 'beat', or 'unit of action' to be extended unnecessarily and the energy of the scene will drop, and gaps in a dialogue will begin to expand (Benedetti, 2001: pp. 101-102). In a production that already carried a little 'baggage' because of some extended breaks between scenes it was necessary to 'shave off' a few seconds wherever possible. This was achieved in a number of ways, as the season progressed. Some of the changes were very modest such as introducing a 'soundscape' a little earlier as well as displaying an image, or bringing up a specific lighting spot.

Another example of this process of making on-going adjustments throughout the performance season was the changeover between Scenes Fifteen and Sixteen (the last two scenes in the play). Scene Fifteen contains the announcement of a guilty verdict for Cecilia Anthony. Cecilia is dressed in 'prison garb'. The final scene also features the actor playing Cecilia and a change of costume is needed into that of 'Jo' the dying young street-sweeper. In order to

keep the audience engaged while Harriet changed costumes I asked the actor performing with her in the scene as 'Happy Dinah'(Isabelle Jenkins), to enter as quickly as possible after the first lighting 'pre-set' before the final scene commenced (including the associated projected images) and take her position.

The time needed for the actor playing Cecilia Johnston to change her costume had been shortened a little by an earlier adjustment to her costume for 'Jo' but still needed approximately thirty seconds to be done properly. I asked Isabelle if she would quietly sing the hymn, 'Alas! And Did My Saviour Bleed?' This is the hymn sung by the character Jane, a resident of the opium den in Scene 4 (also played by Isabelle). Although a little nervous at having the audience focussing upon her singing voice, Isabelle agreed to do the song. I was concerned about asking her to alter her performance; but, in hindsight, it was a part of the normal interchange between actor and director. It was comforting to note afterwards that Berthold Brecht was no stranger to making adjustments during the run of the play,

> After the opening, work on the production didn't stop. The director- or one of his assistants-watched every performance and whenever changes or a reworking were felt necessary, rehearsals were scheduled (Weber 1967: p. 105).

5.4 Once more with feeling.

During the writing of this chapter I have considered many different aspects of our production at La Mama Theatre. Now that the first staging of 'Flash Donahs' has taken place, and as an on-going part of that consideration, I would like to propose an alternate vision of how I might direct my play (or how another director might like to try). I do so because I believe that the script could easily accommodate another creative strategy. To that end, I would firstly remove the 'back-stage' area that was used in the La Mama Theatre production and make all costume

changes and set changes visible to the audience.[175] This might extend to the practice of all members of the cast being on-stage at all times. To make that work, it would be necessary to involve the entire cast in the action of the play, at all times. This would not necessarily mean that they were all 'busy' doing something while the action of the play proceeds. The ability to be 'in the moment' and be conscious of what is about to happen and what their part in that action will be, is an invaluable tool for an actor. It is a sense of expectancy, but also a practice of 'endowment' to your fellow actor. By this I that each actor is generously providing their each of their fellow actors with what they need to allow the business of each role in the play to unfold. The actors would be watching and listening so that they can readily join in the action, either vocally or by using their bodies, through the use of posture and tableau, as a means of underpinning the actions of the Cecilia Anthony character.

When it came time to for the action of the scene to change (the audience would hopefully recognize when these moments arrived), any banter would immediately come to an end. A dimming of the lights may be used to signify a change of time or location. I am intrigued by the idea of having all aspects of these changes communicated to the audience by direct methods. By this I mean having the actors speak directly to the audience about what may be coming in the next scene. There is nothing particularly new about this practice, For example, when Moises Kaufman staged his dramatic work of Documentary Theatre, *The Laramie Project*, and the research methods of the Tectonic Theatre ensemble were openly disclosed to the audience. The comments therefore become part of the play's narrative (Bottoms 2006, p. 65).

This vocal signification could be associated with a 'sign' either projected onto a screen, or in the form of a sign-board placed to the front of the stage. The signage might say something like: 'Scene Five: 'The Street Riot Burlesque'. Cecilia could enter and say (while attaching

[175] This was suggested by the CEO of La Mama Inc., Ms Liz Jones.

Deakin's beard), "In 1884 thousands of young women and men took to the streets of inner-suburban Melbourne to demand that their hours be reduced to a fair day's work! We now present for you, 'The Street Riot Burlesque". An image of Alfred Deakin could then appear on the screen. Cecilia Anthony would say something along the lines of, "In this scene I will be playing the Chief Secretary of the Colony of Victoria, Mr. Alfred Deakin!", so that the audience is left in no doubt as to what the approaching scene will be about. I would draw the line at a lengthy verbal explanation but would incorporate a projected image, perhaps in two parts, so that the audience can read the text easily saying something like, "In the 1880s, street demonstrations in Melbourne (change projected image), demanded shorter working hours". Or, "In 1884, female and male demonstrationists took to the streets of Melbourne to demand better workplace pay and conditions". Some of the emphasis could be the type of 'agit-prop' theatre that pre-dated the rise of documentary theatre in Europe in the 1920s.

5.5 Summary

Chapter Five demonstrates the complexity of staging a Documentary Theatre play. It also confirms again that applying a theatrical overlay to a play using archival material, such as 'Flash Donahs', can be an important factor in bringing the play to life. Indeed, it could be said that theatricality has become an integral part of the process of making a non-verbatim based, Documentary Theatre play. I have spoken about the use of projected images as a means of conveying information to an audience. As was the case in some of the earliest works in this theatrical genre, the importance of visual images cannot be understated. What image should be used? In this instance, with so to choose from, the choice is to use an image that maximises curiosity and receptivity in the audience. The visual impact of photography in a Documentary Theatre play has been far-reaching since the early twentieth century. Tony Birch, in his work on the so-called Fitzroy 'slums' has shown how photographic imagery can

create public opinion, especially when dealing with imagery associated with working-class people (Birch 2004, pp, 1-15). In Scene Eighteen, I used the stark image of a back lane in the suburb of Richmond called Stoke Place. This image was used in the very last moments of 'Flash Donahs' accompanied by a non-naturalistic 'soundscape' meant to represent the night-time sounds of an industrialized working-class environment.

I have highlighted some of the problems that may arise between director and actor when creative decisions are made and the logic of those decisions many not be immediately apparent. This was the case, as I have outlined, in the rehearsal and staging the final scene. However, as with all theatre-work, the aim is to overcome impasses when they occur. In the closing section of the chapter, I have attempted to show that a play such as this has the potential for much experimentation. Rearranging the order in which the play is performed is one such possibility. Adding further archival material to the text could be another.

Conclusion

Documentary Theatre is a versatile, flexible and occasionally veristic theatrical art-form that can be both entertaining and confronting. The premise of my Exegesis and Creative Component is that a play of this type can be effectively employed as a conduit for historical re-presentation. My research has examined female larrikin culture in Melbourne between 1878 and 1888 and the methods used to apply my 'practice-based research' are discussed in depth. The key phrase in the title of my thesis is 'Stepping out of the Shadows'. It alludes to the fact that the history of female larrikins in Melbourne is not widely known and that there is a need to increase awareness of that history. In this case, the method for doing so has been the creation of a Documentary Theatre play.

In the Introduction, the reader's attention is directed to the role of popular culture in the formation of the larrikin 'push' and the development of the female larrikin cohort within it.[176] The contemporary portrayal of male characters by female performers was as equally popular (if not more so), as the practice of men dressing as women. Both traditions were firmly entrenched in the stock practices of melodrama, burlesque and pantomime. As part of a political and social debate, the colonial female was often presented to the public as a welcoming symbolic representation or, in other instances, a vengeful 'virago'. A female only cast has been chosen because it accentuates the focus on the female characters. When masculinity is represented on-stage by female performers what the audience actually sees is an examination of femininity.

The use of Documentary Theatre as a mode of historical exploration and re-enactment of archival artefacts has provided new insights into the lives of young larrikin women. The

[176] See: **Creative Component: Research Question and Scope of the Thesis** (p. 14)

practice of combining information from a variety of sources into a play-script has also proven to be an effective method of character construction. One of my original aims was to provide a source of useful information to anyone approaching the problematic task of developing characters in a Documentary Theatre format. In 'Flash Donahs' there are fleeting moments of non-verbal action (the opening scene is an example of this). This may be another example of where Documentary Theatre may expand and develop and may be worthy of future research and application.

It is also asserted in the Introduction that the history of the larrikin remains an almost entirely masculine domain.[177] I also claim that the shared consciousness within our memory of the lives of female and male larrikins has, until recent years' been filtered through a mono-gendered interpretation of Australia's history. This supposition, and the need to correct the historical imbalance underpinning it, became the basis of my research and the subsequent writing and presentation of the Creative Component. Having performed 'Flash Donahs' to live audiences (who were mostly unfamiliar with the history of Melbourne), the aim of showing a re-presentation of female larrikins was successfully manifested on-stage. The expansion of Documentary Theatre styles in recent years has led to a better understanding of the impact that historical theatricality can have. This exegesis has extended and expanded upon the broad application of this theatrical model.

The reaction to larrikin behaviour during the 1880s is perplexing to us today. Nevertheless, I argue that the fear generated by the 1880s version of gang culture was intense because it was seen as being an epidemic of social incivility. The outrage and helplessness endured by the respectable members of Melbourne's society was very high. As the outcomes of the research

[177] See **The history of larrikins in Australia (** p. 17)

were revealed I was drawn to the theatricality of the local female performers (particularly women involved in female to male performative cross-dressing). During her time in Australia the American actor, Carrie Swain, was promoted as the type of female larrikin that everyone would want to meet. A possible area of further research could be the influx of female actors visiting Australia from other countries at this time. Did this influx inhibit the opportunities for locally-born female actors to achieve theatrical success? Although the population of Australia consisted mostly of people from an Anglo-Saxon background during the 1880s, there were also significant numbers of people from other nations. An examination of female stage performers from these other nations would certainly be worthy of investigation. At the end of my research it was apparent that further exploration of this history was needed. More needs to be done to bring the lives of young larrikin women into the forefront of our national consciousness, particularly when analysing the development of Australia as a nation.

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