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Land, Law and Literature: Dad and Dave and Australian National Identity

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On Our Selection is a series of stories by Steele Rudd, the pen name of Arthur Hoey Davis. The stories portray elements of small 'selector' farming in federation-era Australia and represent a significant body of literature originating in or 'about' the 'bush', the 'outback', the 'never-never' – unspecific appellations attached to regions of non-urban Australia. The stories detail the Rudd family's experiences after taking up a 'selection' in the Australian bush – the arduous processes of early clearing through to their relative prosperity. 'Dad Rudd' has been described as 'Australia's Everyman', and his pugnacious attitude of opposition to the 'squattocracy' and the cities resonated with audiences. The sketches, periodicals, radio plays, theatre productions and, eventually, films that continued the Rudd legacy made these stories a significant voice in the creation of Australian national identity – or at least the 'bush' identity. However, an attempt to update the representation to the 1970s in a television series was unsuccessful. This article considers the interaction between the legislative creation of 'selection' of land and the depictions of life on a selection in the creation of the Australian national identity. It then considers the media and social changes that contextualise the failure of the television series.

Introduction

During the 1890s, the Australian colonies were sending representatives to urge the case and conditions for Federation and the creation of a nation. Colonies' agricultural and settlement policies were urging families to take up land inland of the Great Dividing Range. This created competition for good agricultural land with secure access to water between large landholders who had taken up runs – squatters – and selectors encouraged by the attractive terms of legislation. The project of selection of small parcels of property had the simultaneous aims of creating an agricultural industry, growing the inland population to enable a sustainable infrastructure, and creating a self-sufficient agrarian class. It was enabled by suites of legislation in each colony (and, later, state) broadly called the 'Selection Acts'.

A fictionalised experience of one of these selectors, 'Dad' Rudd, and his family was chronicled in a series of stories by Arthur Hoey Davis ('Steele Rudd') and initially published in the *Bulletin* weekly magazine during the 1890s. The stories, collectively entitled *On Our Selection*, became popular immediately and remained popular well into the 1960s. They were adapted into a long-running radio series, plays, several movies between 1932 and 1940 (and a remake in 1996); and, significantly, a poorly-received television series in the 1970s. This article considers the significance of these stories in the creation of the Australian national identity, and what it says about our changing national identity that the stories, plays and movies were so popular, but that the television series was so poorly received. It is the contention of this article that the project of creation of a national identity is ongoing and the arts – specifically television – are a significant facilitator of that project. However, law, in this case as legislation, creates the conditions within which aspects of national identity can thrive. It was the explicit purpose of many of the Selection Acts to develop an identity – the self-sufficient bush identity – considered useful to the developing colonies and, later, states.

This article will reflect upon the physical and legal context of selection as it is depicted in Rudd's stories, and will detail the identity-building narrative instanced by both the legislation enabling settlement and the media depictions of that settlement. More recent critics, as will be discussed, have described the bush identity as a myth. The 'bush character' is frequently considered in contemporary analysis to be a misrepresentation at best and a symbol of patriarchal conservatism at worst. The television series *Snake Gully with Dad 'N' Dave* an adaptation of the Rudd stories (ATN7 Sydney,

1972) was developed after a period of redefinition of the Australian identity, so reflected the change in portrayal of the bush character. This shift is consonant with the insight that the role of the television and film media is significant to national identity in the sense that it reflects, forms and reinforces symbols of identity:

> film and history constantly work to reinforce each other: a film's specific location in time and space provides validation of already existing popular national stereotypes, and the comfortably familiar icons and symbols in a film provide validation of the form in which the historical events have been depicted (Bertrand, 1984: 181).

Settlement Policy and National Identity

Closer settlement had been an aspect of policy from very early in Australia's colonisation: Governor Macquarie (1809–1821) opposed large landholding, which he associated with absentee settlers and considered ill-aligned with the food supply needs of the new colony (Connors, 1970: 72). He also considered that, for the convict settlers, farming could have 'moral rehabilitating effects' (Connors, 1970: 73), signalling the efforts at social engineering of early law. The revenue needs of the new colony soon dictated the introduction of 'a system of land grants by purchase or auction' (Connors, 1970: 73), which disadvantaged smaller settlers. Only after the end of the gold mining era, in the 1860s, did closer settlement once again appear as government policy.

The process of opening squatter lands to closer settlement was a nation-building strategy which had a foundation in contemporary political philosophy – the 'yeoman' bringing about democracy through agrarian labour, a Jeffersonian concept borrowed from America (Hewitt, 1995: 181). Legislation in the United States of America promoted the same general aims, including the *Homestead Acts* 1862. Other political influences on legislative models of land settlement and financing included John Stuart Mill and other land reformers, who opposed large landholding as monopolistic and providing unearned benefits to landowners due to the provision of state services such as railways (Taylor, 1968: 258). Policies designed to attract labour to the colonies and to attract agricultural settlement outside urban centres were also influential in creating the terms of settlement (Taylor, 1968: 261). Connors (1970) argues that 'the situation was a little more complex than at first sight … [p]eople without farming ambitions, such as the professional classes, wanted closer settlement (for others) as a means of breaking both the political and economic power of the squatters' (Connors, 1970: 73). He also notes other social goods to come from growing communities: for instance, Henry Parkes had a political interest in stabilising politics (Connors, 1970: 74) and 'the Reverend John Dunmore Lang, a moralistic clergyman, championed closer settlement as the means of acquiring a virtuous and industrious rural population' (Connors, 1970: 74). There were, then, a set of complex motivations and goals of closer settlement, and these were not consistent over time. Later waves of legislation to promote closer settlement occurred after war and as an adjunct to the major irrigation schemes, but these are outside the scope of this article.

In Queensland, the relevant Selection Acts were the *Crown Land Act* 1860 and the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* 1868 (which facilitated the closer settlement of the Darling Downs region in which *On Our Selection* is set). The *Land Act* 1876 and the *Land Act* 1884 continued the project of agrarian settlement. A similar set of Acts in New South Wales, the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* 1861 (NSW) and the *Crown Lands Occupation Act* 1861 (NSW) (the *Robertson Acts*), along with their amendments, lasted until replaced by the *Crown Land Act* 1884 (NSW). In Victoria, legislation included the *Sale of Crown Lands Act* 1860 (Vic) (the *Nicholson Act*), the *Sale and Occupation of Crown Lands Act* 1862 (Vic) (the *Duffy Act*), the *Amending Land Act* 1865 (Vic) (the *Grant Act*), the *Land Amendment Act* 1869 (Vic), the *Land Act* 1884 (Vic) and the *Land Act* 1898 (Vic).

The legacies of this legislative superstructure are complex and have been the subject of significant study (see, for instance, Taylor, 1968 and references therein). The scope of this article is limited to the project of creation of a national identity – a bush identity – which was one of the motivations for these schemes, as it is portrayed in Rudd's series of stories then captured and rearticulated in the various adaptations, culminating in *Snake Gully with Dad 'N' Dave* (ATN7 Sydney, 1972).

The Physical Landscape of Rudd's Selections

The physical context of Rudd's stories is an area in inland Queensland now known as the Darling Downs. This area was explored around 1827 by Allan Cunningham (Lee, 2007: 12), who described it as 'sumptuous pastoral country' (Steele, 1972: 306). Squatters first claimed runs in 1841 and mainly grazed sheep. These extremely large parcels of land were broken up under the Selection Acts by a process of compulsory acquisition, subdivision and resale. The area is described as 'extremely arable' (Fensham and Fairfax, 1997); however, parts were heavily wooded and so unsuitable for cropping or more intensive agriculture. The intention of the Acts was quite explicitly to enable the intensification of agriculture, and the large changes to vegetation coverage in the region date from these Acts (Fensham and Fairfax, 1997). Aside from the settlement of people facilitated by the Acts, the legislation required settlers to undertake land clearing, fencing and construction of a dwelling (the level of work required depended on the iteration of the legislation). As the land was provided to settlers under loan conditions, governments retained significant leverage over farming operations. However, adjustments had to be made to the legislative program in every state; the financial crisis in 1893 in Victoria, followed by the Federation drought which had its greatest impact in 1901 and 1902, brought significant reverses to

farming returns and many settlers abandoned their land. Many of those remaining on their lots did so despite very poor living conditions. The experiences of those farmers were the subject of Steele Rudd's series of stories.

Rudd's Selection

'Steele Rudd' was the pseudonym of Arthur Hoey Davis, who was born in 1868 and died in 1935. *On Our Selection* was a collection of short stories creating a wry written representation of rural settlement in Australia, said to be based upon Rudd's own father's experience. The stories were originally published in the Australian periodical the *Bulletin.* In 1899, 26 stories were collected into a book entitled *On Our Selection.* A second collection, *Our New Selection* (1903), followed, and further stories appeared in *Sandy's Selection* (1904), *Back at our Selection* (1906), *The Poor Parson* (1907) and *Dad in Politics and Other Stories* (1908).

The *Bulletin*, first published in 1880, was a weekly paper created by John Haynes and J. F. Archibald, and its agenda was overtly nationalist (Thomson, 1954). Webby (2006) notes that 'it was in the pages of the Bulletin, so it has long been claimed, that the first genuinely Australian, as opposed to colonial, literature' appeared. The *Bulletin* and its editors, along with other journals and newspapers of the time, actively engaged in discussion of the form the new Federation should take. At the same time, the *Bulletin* was also a major factor in the cultural swap between the 'Bush' (with a capital B) (Davision, 1978) and coastal cities which carried qualities such as 'egalitarianism and collectivism, of mateship' and eventually 'new unionism' (Davision, 1978: 191). In that way, in spite of the fact that the coastal cities always contained the greater population, the 'Bush' maintained disproportionate cultural cachet; so much so that in the 1960s Roe noted that 'whereas the appeal of the bush has been the great myth of Australian history, the appeal of the city has been the great fact' (Roe, 1962: 364).

The sentiment of Rudd's stories is clearly apparent from their dedication:

> PIONEERS OF AUSTRALIA!
> To You "Who Gave Our Country Birth;" to the memory of You whose names, whose giant enterprise, whose deeds of fortitude and daring were never engraved on tablet or tombstone; to You who strove through the silences of the Bush-lands and made them ours; to You who delved and toiled in loneliness through the years that have faded away; to You who have no place in the history of our Country so far as it is yet written; to You who have done MOST for this Land; to You for whom few, in the march of settlement, in the turmoil of busy city life, now appear to care; and to you particularly, GOOD OLD DAD, This Book is most affectionately dedicated. (Rudd, 1992a)

In content, too, the stories aligned with the construct of labour creating a nation. Rudd's early stories depicted ruinous rural labour and poverty of the most abject type. The authorial voice was the voice of a child – it is not clear which of the many Rudd children. From the earliest story, 'Starting the Selection', the position of the settlers was clear: 'No mistake, it was a real wilderness—nothing but trees, "goannas," dead timber, and bears; and the nearest house—Dwyer's— was three miles away' (Rudd, 1992a: 5). Dad ('Murtagh Joseph Rudd') projected forced optimism, while Mother 'used to sit on a log … and cry for hours' (Rudd, 1992a: 6). Their situation is elegantly summarised in 'When the Wolf was at the Door':

> We couldn't very well go without tea, so Dad showed Mother how to make a new kind. He roasted a slice of bread on the fire till it was like a black coal, then poured the boiling water over it and let it 'draw' well. Dad said it had a capital flavour – *he* liked it. (Rudd, 1992a: 25)

He, as the child could very well see, was projecting optimism based on sheer cussedness and unwillingness to resile from his own decision to take up the selection, and to bring his family to the harsh, waterless property. That patriarchal streak can also be traced to the governmental decisions to throw the country's sons and daughters to the task of creating the nation – physically, in this case; but we can see through Rudd's stories, both in their initial publication and in the later adaptations, the resources thrown at the creation of the national character. The economic cost has often been questioned. Eggleston notes that in many regions 'colossal expenditure' on development has had no effect, since 'for every migrant successfully settled, an Australian worker leaves the country for the town' (Eggleston, 1931: 199).

Dad was often the active and reactive force, the primary decision-maker, and the usual source of the tragic story elements. His emotional investment in each of his enterprises was both the source of success and the basis for disaster. Most of the stories contain elements of tragedy. 'When Dan Came Home' sketches paternal disappointment with a lazy son in a place where work is highly valued:

> Dan didn't go near the plough any more. He stayed inside every day … Sometimes he would leave the sofa, and go to the back-door and look out, and watch Dad tearing up and down the paddock after the plough; then he'd yawn, and wonder aloud what the diggins it was the old man saw in a game like that on a hot day; and return to the sofa, tired. (Rudd, 1992a: 96)

'The Prodigal's Return' in *Our New Selection* justified the family's continued disappointment with Dan – his failure to work was a moral failure compounded by other immoralities:

> Dan never bought any farm, but he settled down. He married Mary MacSmith; … and lived comfortably and happily on his wife's people. … till one day, about three months after his marriage, Mrs. Geraghty dragged her daughter Polly, who was crying, into MacSmith's place, and, … told Dan he wasn't a man or he would have married Polly, and asked him what he meant to do. (Rudd, 1992a: 225)

Conversely, the obedient Dave was the archetype of the laconic bushman: 'if Dave was noted for one thing more than another it was for his silence' ('Dave's Snakebite' (Rudd, 1992a: 56)). The role of labour and its rewards are captured briskly in 'Dave becomes Discontented' (Rudd, 1992a: 176). After one too many of Dad's servings of ill-temper he heads off to a neighbouring farm. He returns at the request of his father, and a promise of better ways, and 'two days later Dad called him a useless dog' (Rudd, 1992a: 182).

Later stories track the family as their success enables them to sell and move to more profitable selections, and Dad's hubris can be seen to cause loss and discord. His attitude to work doesn't change with the circumstances: in 'Dave becomes Discontented' the author notes that '[z]eal was what Dad wanted on our new selection. He told us so often. He liked to see people zealous – people who took pleasure and pride in working – for him. We could never work too hard or too long for Dad' (Rudd, 1992a: 176). Still, as noted in 'Dave in Distress', '[t]hose days of toil and moil – that weary, uphill struggle … were now thought of only in moments of merriment. Queer old days – wild old ways that all of us loved to remember' (Rudd, 1992a: 160).

Christopher Lee attributes to Fotheringham (1995), Davis's biographer, the argument that Rudd's original stories were not celebrations of bush character, but rather expositions of the 'difficulties of selection life and its demeaning effect upon human character and behaviour in a way that undercut the grand democratic theories of liberal parliamentarians' (Lee, 2007: 117). The overarching narrative of the series, in which the fortunes of the Rudd family improve, could be seen as portraying the success of the 'bush battler' character. The acerbic narrative voice, however, is speaking to the very common *failing* bush battler.

Many Adaptations

The texts themselves were popular amongst the reading public: one study of the reading choices in an Australian library (Collie, WA) in 1908–1909 demonstrated that Rudd's 'Dad takes to Politics' (Rudd, 1992a: 341) was more popular than Shakespeare, Dickens and Kipling, and that the readers of Collie did not have the same taste in contemporary literature as readers of British or United States library books (Dolin, 2008).

However, editorial decisions very early in the history of the works were significant in training the published works to the demands of the audience. In the selection and curation of Rudd's stories into a 1899 book, *Bulletin* editor A. G. Stephens commissioned illustrations from a number of artists, including Lionel Lindsay, which had the effect of 'emphasising the farcical rather than the realistic elements of the stories' (Ansara, 1996). The characterisations of Dad and Dave in particular became the focus of the largely slapstick 'Hayseed Comedies' of later adaptations, and comedic elements were emphasised, to the extent that the later versions of Dave were an amalgam of the laconic original Dave and the clown, Joe (Fotheringham, 1994: 81).

A radio series followed the book and was again popular – although this popularity was apparently to the chagrin of lovers of the originals: '[s]ome of the individual programmes to which the most exception has been taken in *The Australian Quarterly* and other publications are actually the most popular' (Coleman, 1942: 78). The decisions to make these changes in emphasis clearly paid off: '[i]n metropolitan surveys [of radio audience] conducted over the last three years 'Dad and Dave' has occupied first place on many occasions and has never been less than third in popularity in any city' (Coleman, 1942: 78).

Ken G. Hall's four *Dad and Dave* movies have been accused of 'transforming Davis's realist stories into generic, slapstick, bourgeois or populist texts' (Lamond, 2007: 93) and the characters into 'vulgar clowns designed to appeal only to the jejune tastes of the metropolitan mob' (Elliott, 1947: 183). They were successful in that appeal. The movie series culminated in the 1940 movie, *Dad Rudd, MP*, which resulted in queues in Melbourne '100 yards long to the box office, a crowded theatre, and sustained applause' (Chiel, 1940: 91). However, an attempt in the 1970s to revive the series was poorly received and only one season was produced. *Snake Gully with Dad 'N' Dave* (ATN-7 1972) set the family in contemporary 1970s in 'bucolic' surroundings, and bore in set, character and storyline little connection to the original stories.

Lamond (2007: 93) notes that '*On Our Selection!* (1899) has been regarded by many literary critics, particularly those working in the 1930s through to the 1960s, as one of the foundational, authentic nationalist Australian texts'. She notes Green's insight that over time, 'Dad ceases to be Davis's creation and becomes the creation of his audience' (Green, 1980). Richard Fotheringham claims that a 'lack of control over intellectual property [of Steele Rudd] gave the stories and characters over to Australian society … to remake in whatever forms it chose' (Fotheringham, 1995: 186). 'Dad Rudd' was 'Australia's Everyman – not a Prince Hamlet, or a Mr Pickwick, or a Sam Weller, or a Huckleberry Finn, or an Evgeny Onegin, or a Faust, but a Dad Rudd … He had no metaphysical anguish: he was an Australian' (Clark, 1993: 303). Just as Rudd's characters changed over time, the Australian 'character' changed. From the 1890s to the

1940s, Australian society grew more numerous, more urban and more prosperous; the successful texts and adaptations incorporated elements which enabled the characters to retain popularity. The success of the movie series appears to exemplify the assertion by Stuart Hall that cultural identity is not fixed (Hall, 1985).

However, the television series, an unsuccessful adaptation, was both produced and set in the 1970s. The 'Dad 'N' Dave' presented in that series did not manage to capture the 'Everyman' aspect of the characters. The setting had characteristic elements from the 1970s, with colour palette, furniture, clothing and hairstyles from that era. Moreover, the stories bore little resemblance to the representations of bush clearing and labour. Instead, they emphasised the 'rural fool' characterisation, or potentially the nostalgic memory of '[q]ueer old days – wild old ways that all of us loved to remember' (Rudd, 1992a: 160).

The pilot, *Snake Gully with Dad 'N' Dave* (ATN-7 1972) aired on 25 February 1972. It introduces Dad as a reactionary unwilling to take the benefits of modern technology in a clear 'age versus youth' plot device. The technology is not farm related. The activity is centred around the house and the plot relates to the acquisition of a television and kitchen appliances. The farm – the settlement and the labour attached to it – do not contribute to the plot other than as a setting. Other plot devices in the pilot and following episodes bear little connection to the original source. Storylines include a competition for the largest marrow (*Lend Me Your Body For Seven Days*, ATN-7 1972), the local theatre production (*Bill Smith – Superstar*, ATN-7 1972), a dance competition (*It Takes Two to…*, ATN-7 1972), an escaped tiger (*Hold that Tiger*, ATN-7 1972) and a proposal for a statue in the local park (*Lest We..Er..Forget*, ATN-7 1972). The centrality of labour and farming that formed the original texts is deemphasised in this adaptation.

It could be argued that plot decisions reflected the audience targeted by the numbers-based data driving programming prior to the 1970s (Kelly, 2019). The adaptation borrows far more from Ken G. Hall's movies than the original stories, and Hall himself is quoted saying '[t]here's nothing new in filmmaking … Whatever you think of has been done before. You can't say there's anything original' (Hall, 1983, quoted in Verhoeven, 2006: 83).

However, the failure of the television series could also reflect the failure to address the audience demographic at a more granular level. Clarke notes that in the 1970s 'a change in the metrics used to calculate consumption greatly changed the picture of the television market – from one of a tremendously large, undifferentiated audience to one serving elite niches – and thereby creative decision making' (Clarke, 2013: 123). Television series produced in Australia in the 1970s occurred on the cusp of the emergence of sophisticated algorithms for determining audience and ratings, affecting the 'delicate ecosystem of television' (Kelly, 2019: 118). The series aired too early in this process to be affected by the modern fragmentation of the media environment, but it is certain that television since that period has been shaped by viewer metrics in a more complex process, and that 'the content we consume is ultimately defined in the process' (Kelly, 2019: 117). It has also been argued that the development and implementation of algorithmic processes (and the role of 'transparent intermediaries' (Braun, 2014)), 'facilitate the exercise of structural power' (Braun 2014: 124) in society.

In the publication of the original stories the support of the *Bulletin* was clearly evident, and the stories aligned with the nationalist and nation-building line of that magazine. Julieanne Lamond (2007) argues that the Rudd movies became a kind of cultural artefact that defines Australian audiences. Hall's movies used overt nationalist sentiment and national symbols. *Dad Rudd, MP* (Cinesound 1940) was produced for a war-time audience at another point in the creation of the national identity. It ends with 'a montage of Dad Rudd's disembodied head, squinting proudly at the camera while superimposed upon a gently waving Australian flag, itself superimposed upon an idyllic outback landscape' (Lamond, 2007: 96). The movie was also financed by the New South Wales government to encourage the local film industry (Lamond, 2007: 96). The symbols evoke explicit links between national identity and the bush, particularly in the final of the four Hall movies. Lamond (2007: 97) argues that the mise en scène expresses an equivalence: 'Dad Rudd = Australia = the bush'. Dad Rudd had, at that point, significant cultural cachet, and the speech that ended the film, a patriotic 'wartime call for unity and sacrifice,' (Lamond, 2007: 96) borrowed from that history:

> This pictorial montage draws attention to the speech itself as a verbal montage of symbols of settler history, agrarian populism, nationalism, nostalgia, anti-fascism and empire loyalty. The sheer representative force of the image of Dad Rudd's head is enabled by the 40 years of stories, plays, films, advertisements and public discussion that had acted to cement Dad Rudd as symbolic of a particular image of Australia's history, centred upon hard work, rural life and social mobility which itself came to stand in for Australia as a whole. (Lamond, 2007: 97)

Dad Rudd's significance in the creation and representation of national identity slipped markedly between this 1940s idea and the television version of the 1970s. What motivated this shift?

Representations, Culture and the Bush

Simmonds (2003: 58) notes that 'national identity is fluid, not fixed', and 'Australian film has defined and redefined national fictions' (Simonds, 2003). Haltof (1993: 28) notes that media play a part in 'discussions on national identity', but it is as correct to attribute the *creation* of national identities as a consequence of media in their various forms. The degree to which a discrete national identity is seen to be an aspect of or prerequisite to nationalism may explain the elaborations on 'nationalist feeling, which emerged distinctively for the first time by the end of the nineteenth century' (Haltof, 1993: 28). The extensive discussion around Federation and Australian troop participation in the Boer War under

English leadership, particularly in the *Bulletin* (Connolly, 1978: 220; Henry, 2001), led to contemplation of what is distinct about Australian identity. Nevertheless, such an identity was slow to emerge, parallelling the leisurely movement towards independence. 'It is often forgotten, given the cliché perpetuated in schools that "Australia became a nation in 1901", how slow our nation was to emerge, indeed in so clouded a fashion that no particular year can be singled out as marking our independence' (Davidson, 2012: 186).

In some representations, the point of distinction between Australia – and maybe, at the time, Australians – and the rest of the world, lay in the 'bush'. Waterhouse (2000: 201) notes that 'typical' Australian values such as 'mateship, a collectivist morality, adaptability and a sense of egalitarian independence' were associated with the bush so that 'the creed of itinerant bush workers became the catechism of a nation'. Media – particularly film – have deployed the image of the unique Australian landscape as a reassurance of the 'specialness' of being Australian – 'the source of meaning – a distinctive characteristic that has its own discursive function. It typifies the "real Australia" and establishes the differences between Australian and European culture' (Haltof, 1993: 29).

The idea of the landscape as a source of meaning must be interrogated, however. It could be argued that to the European eye the Australian landscape is conceptually a void – 'sparsely populated and meagerly historicized …[not] incorporated into the symbolic order, except as a signifier of emptiness, a cultural tabula rasa, a sublime structuring void louring over all Australian culture' (Gibson, 1983: 47). The Rudd stories could, conversely, be said to be giving meaning to the bush by subjugating it to productive use, and in the process demonstrating the determination of the bush residents against enormous odds (drought, fire, illness, isolation, market prices – even government processes and the law itself). The characters' circumstances in Rudd's early stories (from *On Our Selection*) were particularly dire, leavened only with dry humour sometimes bordering on the funereal. Nevertheless, they are relatively accurate depictions of rural small settler life during this period (Clark, 1993: 301). The key difference between this account and others (for instance, Henry Lawson's *The Drover's Wife*) lies in the resilient humour of the narrator.

Questioning the credentials of the Australian bushman became de rigueur at a certain stage in Australian cultural history, so that the bush narrative on screen became subversive. Whilst the 'city reality' came to replace the 'bush myth', the critique of bush literature such as Rudd's was applied retrospectively. Piecemeal consideration, or 'lenses' through which the works were viewed, allowed the works to be appropriated to forward critical narratives. A significant body of work analyses the impact of media, particularly television, in the creation of a national identity. Much has been said about the nostalgic appropriation of a particular bush identity, and critical analyses of the influence of the Dad and Dave stories suggest that they 'became part of the patriarchal structure of society', promoting 'reactionary values' (Zielinski, 2007: 132). Zielinski (2007: 130) argues that these contribute to the mythologisation of the bush and appeal to a narrative of the self-reliant bushman, helping to construct a 'national spirit or attitude' (Zielinski 2007: 130). The impact of the stories, in their various forms, was to create an idealisation of certain supposed national characteristics and to project them onto an urban canvas. As Carter (2008: [74.7]) notes, 'if Dad and Dave became stock characters in the 1920s, they did so as part of contemporary urban popular culture'.

These critiques understate a key component of the original Dad and Dave stories. The narrative centre of Rudd's stories was labour. The creation of the national identity, if it was represented in Rudd's stories, was the literal process of carving out habitation in the bush – in *spite of* the bush. Gibson (1983: 49) suggests that '[w]e can make a mark [on the "huge uninscribable outback"] simply by persisting in subsisting'. Labour – practical activity – enabled the labourer to impose on the external world their internal character. Hirst (1978: 316) notes this aspect of the 'pioneer legend', which 'celebrates courage, enterprise, hard work and perseverance'. However, he also describes the shifting of meaning of the word 'pioneer' in the 1890s from the original colonists to those settling and working the land, who 'as settlers on the land were a much more anonymous group than pioneers as early colonists' (Hirst, 1978: 318). Poets seeking to valorise heroes settled on land by 'hard grubbin' … an' clearin' (Lawson, 1891) needed to live in the environment – Paterson and Lawson, for instance, wrote poems which become the 'chief vehicle for spreading a democratic, collectivist, national mystique' (Hirst, 1978: 322). Clark (1993: 301) reports that on a poor selection:

> [b]ands of young Australians of 6 to 7 years of age were frequently to be seen driving horses for the chaff cutter, or doing other work of a useful character. On the dairy farms the mothers and daughters got up between two and four in the morning to milk the cows. Fathers and sons at the same time got ready to transport the milk to the nearby town. The men fought the land, the changes in the weather, that never-ending cycle of drought and flood, rust in the wheat, scab and fluke in their sheep, the money-lenders and the store-keepers. The women were enslaved to the kitchen and the backyard.

In many adaptations, but particularly in the television adaptation, labour – the work of the farm – was relegated to a minor position in favour of the hayseed or comedic aspects of the characters. More importantly, the background of legislatively defined actions directed towards physically creating the Australian landscape is not developed in the television version, obscuring the defining context of the Rudd character.

Law, Culture and National Identity

What is also not immediately apparent from piecemeal critical analyses is the quite deliberate set of government decisions and processes that backgrounded Rudd's stories, and to an extent their film adaptations. The government role

in legislating for 'settlement' was a strategy intended, in part, to create the self-reliant 'yeoman' farmer represented by Rudd's settlers. This was an aspect of contemporary political philosophy and, to a degree, aligned with the radical agenda to break up large runs into smaller selections.

Hirst (1978: 330) argues that the pioneering 'legend' as depicted in art and literature had little connection to politics – implying 'that politics were unnecessary or irrelevant to the work of pioneering … [an instance] of the Australian tendency to isolate politics from the heroic or the good'. In fact, much of the settlement literature around this period had as its background and context the legislative reforms creating small settlement blocks. The 'opening up' of the inland to small settlers such as the Dad Rudd type was enabled by legislation in various states, with a significant impact: James Collier, author of *The Pastoral Age*, the 1911 history of Australian pioneers, 'dates Australia's freedom from the opening of the pastoral lands west of the mountains' (Hirst. 1978: 331). The pressures arising from this 'freedom' created the post-settlement issues manifested in Rudd's stories.

Legislation in all colonies, and later states, created the legal environment by which land was made available to small settlers. Enactments were intended to create terms for 'purchase' of land that were not prohibitive for less affluent farmers, thus prosecuting a social justice as well as a nation-building agenda, but which would also create a return for the government to finance infrastructure. This was a break from previous policy favouring the large land-holding interests of the squatters. Some of the best land in the Darling Downs, for instance, was held by squatters under New South Wales legislation (Taylor, 1968) until pressure arose as a consequence of closer settlement policies. Political compromises resulting in the *Pastoral Leases Act* 1869 and the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* 1868 resulted in resumption of land from large squatting interests. This legislation had broadly similar parallels in other jurisdictions. In Victoria, for instance, the *Amending Land Act* 1865 (the *Grant Act*) and the *Land Act* 1898 were aimed at 'homesteading'. All states passed a succession of Acts aimed at preventing 'dummying', reclassifying land according to scale or relative fertility, or changing conditions of purchase or tenure. For instance, the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* 1876 reduced the size of newly settled blocks, making them less sustainable. The *Settled Districts Pastoral Leases Act* 1876 reduced lease terms to diminish the advantages of squatters, but it had the unanticipated consequence of reducing efforts to 'improve' the land (Taylor, 1968: 254). The intense efforts of the colonies to address the financial advantages of the squatters in favour of smaller settlers resulted directly in the creation of small landholdings that were frequently uneconomic and provided on ruinous terms. This key aspect of Rudd's chronicles could not be transposed to the farming environment of the 1970s.

Other legal architecture was evident in Rudd's stories but did not feature in the television series. The creation of the legend – the mythologising of the rural character – was bitterly reflected in *Dad in Politics*, where the sense of being 'forgotten' was the motivation for the delegation asking Dad to stand (Rudd, 1992b). The role of government in forming a national character is an acknowledged legislative power of the federal government *now* – an implied nationhood power was identified by the High Court in *Davis v The Commonwealth* (1988) 1966 CLR 79 – but nation-building bore a more urgent complexion *then*. The preoccupations of Dad's electorate evidenced the physical task of 'nation building' as an ongoing task.

> Nearly every man in the Eton electorate was in communication with Dad—especially those who had opposed him at the poll … some required the railway freight for carrying produce to the markets reduced at once; some wished him to secure a level crossing near the siding; some wanted a grain shed; some more a Government dam; one end of the electorate desired him to obtain the grant of ten acres of land for a sports ground; the other end of it had no place to bury their dead, and instructed him to find out 'how they were to go about getting a cemetery?' (*Dad in Politics*, 'Behind the Scenes', Rudd, 1992b: 40)

The intense interest in the infrastructure necessary to run a community reflected a significant contemporary concern. Taylor (1968: 255) notes that '[r]ailways were the most important type of public works', and the failure of legislation intended to finance public works such as the *Western Railway Act* 1875 and the *Railway Reserves Act* 1877 (Taylor, 1968: 255) demonstrated the validity of the petitions made to Dad Rudd. The Rudds, having worked their way into relative prosperity, could afford to look outwards to the interests of others and to participate in the niceties of nation-building. Conversely, Dad Rudd in the television series was occupied with relative trivialities and the external incidents of political recognition.

Conclusion

On Our Selection demonstrated in vivid terms the cost of the legislative programmes intended to settle inland Australia. That the stories were leavened by humour may be the primary reason they are repeated and remembered, but overemphasis on the slapstick elements of the original stories removed, in the television series, the piquancy that grounded the humour. In the written chronicles of the selectors' daily lives, the significance of the legal constraints that created the terms upon which they farmed was clear. This feature of the building of the nation became less evident with each re-interpretation, until the television series seemed to ignore the context altogether. In the television adaptations, the context – the peculiar challenges faced by those attempting to subsist in the precarious Australian environment – were overlooked almost entirely. The decision to resituate the stories to the 1970s made this inevitable. Whilst the stories and Hall's movies contained nationalist aspects, and contribute to a founding legend, the nation-building aspects of the 1970s are obscure, to say the least.

In terms of an Australian national identity, it could also be said that many of the adaptations, but particularly the television series, failed to address the core aspects of the character 'mythologised' by Rudd. It was characteristic of Rudd's stories to provide a satirical rejoinder to hubris, ambition, cruelty and vanity which converted tragedy into comedy. The humour that kept the children on the farm in the face of their father and their circumstances, and on a national scale mocked political ambition, forms the 'bush identity' described by Rudd and clumsily transposed into most adaptations. The labour that was the core of the family life was poorly addressed in adaptations and is frequently overlooked in critiques of the 'mythologisation' of the Australian 'bush character'. The national identity reflected in the adaptations was an homogenised version of the bush identity reinterpreted for urban audiences.

Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

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