



MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY PRESS

PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

PAR.SH

Mr R. Boyd,
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Dear Robin,

I'm returning your MS. of the dreamtime with this letter, with some comments, if they are worth anything.

It's a very strange book, because although partly fiction it's nothing like a novel. And although it contains explicit comment it isn't a work of social criticism in the ordinary way. All right - so it's an unconventional book; does it come off?

In my opinion the book as a whole doesn't succeed as well as the virtue of its separate parts would encourage one to hope.

Some parts are brilliant, and I really mean brilliant. Caption Webb's tree is superb (I have supposed that the Evans diary extracts are authentic?). The floating house is hilarious (perhaps a little bit private, to architects?) I liked the bloweys even better second time round. And so on. Many of the individual pieces would be distinguished creations on their own - belle lettres in the best sense. The horror of the last piece is good, though I think you might refine it just a little if you read it over again after letting it lie a month or two untouched.

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But all put together they somehow mystify without satisfying. The friendly book hostess is ingeniously cunning, but she creaks a bit. The mixing of real and fictitious names I thought good and successful, though it will probably madden some people.

Some criticisms of a minor or detailed sort: Almost every piece could do with a little cutting - merely a few words or sentences in most cases. But the Illiteracy Power section has too many words built on for what the foundation will stand. It's a good idea, but goes on too long.

Also in that piece, I feel uncomfortable about the 'but'. ('He's a lovely bloke, but'). I know the idiot you mean, but I don't think you've got it exactly right, and anyhow it's overdone.

There are many typing slips, some of which I've marked with a light pencil cross on the blank facing page.

As to whether you ought to publish it, and if so under your own name, I can only say how I would feel if I had written it (which I'd be proud to have done). I think I'd be too nervous of being thought a nut, and the fact that it might enjoy a great success would not overcome my fears. But I should like to try it out anonymously, and (with the utmost of modest reluctance, of course) allow myself to be identified eventually, say when the swift second edition is printed. Cowardly? Maybe, but ...

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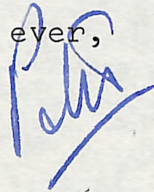
For this purpose, a literary agent could be useful, and Peter Grose of Curtis Brown is trustworthy and (as such people go) efficient. I could introduce you, if you like.

If you are going straight to a publisher, the one who comes most readily to mind is Sam Ure Smith. I think he'd love it.

I suppose my position in relation to the MS. is, in a sense, that of victim. Quite untravelled, anti-airconditioning, fairly content with the public bar and the locals, not desperately worried by the odd blowey, owner of an Aussie accent, and ~~ex~~cetera. So I can finish quite properly with one other comment of purely personal criticism (but not, N.B., an argument against publishing): The targets you select have been pretty extensively shot at, and as some of them (e.g. the Aussie accent) are both unique and absolutely harmless, they are a bit like the koala, and maybe they deserve a little sympathy. I'd like to see your powers deployed more against our lazy, comfortable intellectuals.

Please let me know what you decide to do - I'll be most excited to hear.

Yours ever,



P.S. Glad you found P.R. Stephensen worth a look.