

RUSSELL THE RAINMAKER: TOURING IN EARLY COLD WAR AUSTRALIA

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During his 1950 lecture tour of Australia, Bertrand Russell was given the nickname “Russell the Rainmaker” due to unseasonably wet weather in the eastern states that appeared to accompany his travels. This humorous name represents a central idea that shaped his tour. Russell was convinced that the technical ability to make rain could transform Australia’s largely dry landscape and boost the nation’s farming potential, which could, in turn, support a new age of happiness and prosperity. Russell used this vision of the future to imagine a safe refuge for Western civilization in case Europe was destroyed in a possible nuclear Third World War. This paper will discuss how his Australian tour was an important moment of both hope and anxiety in his life. Russell’s idea of a pastoral utopia in Australia that relied on optimism about the capability of science to transform the landscape can be understood as a key way in which he responded intellectually to the events of the early Cold War.

When Russell arrived in Australia in June 1950 on a two-month lecture tour, he had expected the country to live up to its image of the driest in the world.¹ Instead, the conditions he found were remarkably different. While typically much wetter than the centre, the east coast was in the middle of an unseasonably and extremely wet winter, experiencing several damaging and fatal floods. Russell’s travels around the eastern states of New South Wales and Queensland throughout July were accompanied by such an atypical amount of rain that he was given, by an unknown person, the nickname “Russell the Rainmaker”.² This title can be understood as more

¹ Russell to Rupert and Elizabeth Crawshay-Williams, 2 July 1950, Russell Archives, McMaster University, Rec. Acq. 501E, Russell Archives (*SLBR* 2: 448–9).

² “Sun Greet ‘Russell the Rainmaker’”, *The Mail*, Adelaide, 5 Aug. 1950, p. 54; “Will

than just a joke about a tourist who brought the weather with him. Interpreted metaphorically, “Russell the Rainmaker” represents a central idea that defined his tour. During an interview in London for *The Australian Women’s Weekly* a month before he arrived, Russell was reported as having said about Australia that “here is a country which, perhaps more than any other in the world, could be transformed by adequate rainfall. I am deeply interested in the possibilities of man-made rain and other things that can be done to increase fertility.”³ His eight weeks in the country strengthened this conviction that the technical ability to make rain could transform the largely dry landscape and boost Australia’s farming potential. In turn, this could support a new national age of happiness and prosperity.

Through a highly utopian vision of the future that centred on an idea of pastoral Australia, Russell had tapped into an optimism in the positive capabilities of science in the Atomic Age. At the same time, this new technological knowledge was also seen by many intellectuals, including Russell, to have been misused with the creation of nuclear weapons, also leading to an unprecedented capability for destruction.⁴ During the early years of the Cold War, it appeared that humankind had reached a critical turning point, poised between a coming era of unparalleled peace and global catastrophe. On 25 June 1950, just three days after he had arrived in Australia, North Korean troops entered South Korea with the support of the People’s Republic of China, and it was widely assumed that Soviet Russia would quickly become involved. Newspapers around Australia reported alarming speculations on the likelihood of the conflict turning into a third World War, and Russell himself shared these anxieties. Mid-century, he stated on numerous occasions that although the human species would survive a global nuclear war, civilization was likely to be reduced to small centres in unexpected and non-European places, including the mid-west of the USA, South America, South Africa, some Pacific Islands, and Alice Springs in central Australia.⁵ Of all these possibilities, Australia

He Live Up to His Nickname?”, *Centralian Advocate*, Alice Springs, 11 Aug. 1950, p. 12.

³ STRUTTON, “Philosopher Bertrand Russell Here Next Month” (1950).

⁴ SHERRATT, “Frontiers of the Future: Science and Progress in 20th-Century Australia” (2005); WEART, *Nuclear Fear: a History of Images* (1988); WITTNER, *One World or None: a History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement through 1953* (1993).

⁵ See JOHNSTON, “Noted Philosopher Warns Aust. about Asia: 10-year War against Russia Forecast” (1950); “Lord Russell Says Australians Optimistic”, *Centralian Advocate*, 11 Aug. 1950, p. 12; RUSSELL, “Hopes for Australia in a Hundred Years” (1951). WILLIS’s recent article in this journal also quotes Russell from later in 1950.

had the unique position of being the most utopian for Russell. He imagined the continent as the last remaining nearly empty liveable space on the planet and, quite possibly, the most happy.⁶ Alice Springs represented the country as a whole when, after a weekend's

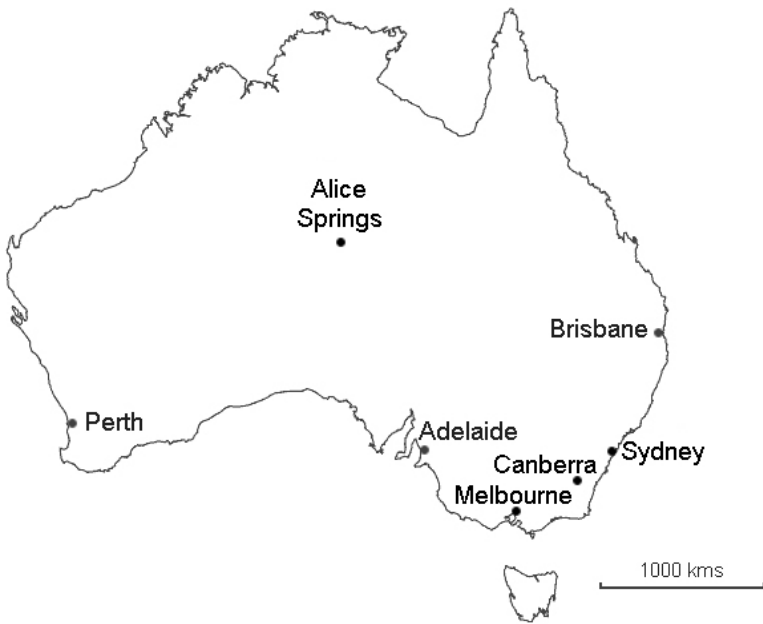


Figure 1. The significant places where Russell travelled in Australia, as discussed below.

visit there, Russell returned to the larger cities with stories of “such promise” for future development.⁷ Yet this small town of only 3,000 people was surrounded by desert for hundreds of kilometres in all directions. Settlement in Australia occurs largely on the consistently wetter and more fertile coastal plains of the east and south-east, and to a lesser extent the south-west. After seeing some of rural Australia first hand, there still remained what Russell described as “a vast

When he received his Nobel Prize in December, Russell again suggested that a nuclear war with the USSR would destroy Europe, but leave America and Australia relatively intact. This demonstrates how important Russell’s anxieties over the survival of Western civilization continued to be at around this time (WILLIS, “Russell and the Nobel Prize” [2014], p. 112).

⁶ RUSSELL, “Hopes for Australia in a Hundred Years”.

⁷ “Bertrand Russell Back: Great Future for ‘Alice’”, *The News*, Adelaide, 7 Aug. 1950, p. 8.

country to be conquered".⁸ Developing this harsh landscape would be a sizeable challenge, but one that was necessary to overcome in order to realize Australia's future as a site for the preservation and flourishing of Western civilization.

This paper aims to explore how Russell's optimism for the development of rural Australia forms the foundations of his utopian impressions of the country, and how this was offset by an anxiety about the possible devastating uses of nuclear weapons during the early years of the cold war. It will discuss, firstly, how Russell's tour has been approached in previous scholarship, emphasizing the utopian character of his writing at the time, especially within the context of Britain's settler colonial relationship with Australia. This will be followed with an outline of some significant moments from Russell's travels that focus on his identification of the lack of water as the central problem facing agricultural development. Through an examination of Russell's attitudes towards the Australian landscape, this paper will demonstrate how utopian thinking is a key way in which he responded intellectually to events of the early years of the cold war, namely post-war reconstruction in Britain, and the considerable risk to world peace provided by the Korean War and global geopolitical tensions between the democratic West and the USSR.

Russell was invited to make a lecture tour by the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) with the purpose of raising the public profile of the Institute across the nation. Founded in 1924 and affiliated with the Royal Institute of International Affairs in Britain, the AIIA was driven by the democratic ideal that the circulation of accurate and publicly accessible knowledge about international affairs was a crucial means of preventing violent conflict.⁹ After the Second World War, prominent members were concerned that local expertise could not adequately comprehend and guide Australia's shifting relationship with the wider world.¹⁰ The country's British orientation was beginning to diminish, and a new and distinct national identity was being consolidated through the creation of Australian citizenship in 1948 as well as through greater diplomatic relations and cultural exchange with the USA. Substantial numbers of non-British migrants also began to arrive in Australia for the first time, many of them war refugees

⁸ RUSSELL, "My Impressions of Australia" (1950).

⁹ COTTON, "Celebrating 75 Years: The Australian Institute of International Affairs and International Relations" (2008), p. 541.

¹⁰ LEGGE, *Australian Outlook: a History of the Australian Institute of International Affairs* (1999), Chs. 4–6.

from Eastern Europe.¹¹ But while the composition of the population remained principally white, Australians remained acutely aware of their proximity to Asia. The cold war rekindled continuing fears of invasion by newly communist countries in the region, such as China, as well as amplified anxieties of domestic communist subversion, leading to the establishment of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization in 1949 and the Government's failed attempts in the early 1950s to outlaw the Communist Party of Australia.¹²

The Dyason Lectures were established by the AIIA to help promote public understanding of how global events impacted upon Australian society.¹³ After a similar visit by American philosopher F. S. C. Northrop the previous year, Russell was the second lecturer in this series of tours by foreign public intellectuals that ran annually from 1949 to 1981. Named after Melbourne pacifist, stockbroker and AIIA member Edward Dyason, whose estate contributed the majority of funding for the first ten speakers, other Dyason Lecturers during the 1950s included anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, biologist Julian Huxley, economist Gunnar Myrdal, and historian Arnold Toynbee. During Russell's tour the public had wide access to his varied ideas on international affairs through broad newspaper coverage of his interviews and travels, five talks for the national radio broadcaster, several articles commissioned by some of the larger newspapers, and one cinema newsreel. However, the main purpose of his tour was to deliver a total of fifteen public and AIIA-member-only lectures in various combinations in the national and state capitals, with the exception of Hobart in Tasmania. Russell's six different lecture subjects covered topical political issues of communism, nuclear weapons and race relations. Apart from his support of birth control in Asia, most of his ideas were mainstream and respectable to his audiences, including that of agricultural development and national growth.¹⁴ Russell also took the opportunity to reiterate his long-standing cosmopolitan view that a supranational world government would be the most effective means of preventing further wars.

¹¹ RICHARDS, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901* (2008), Chs. 7–8.

¹² CURTHOYS AND MERRITT, eds., *Australia's First Cold War: 1945–1953*, Vol. 1 (1984).

¹³ LEGGE, pp. 107–12.

¹⁴ The most notable disapproval of Russell's ideas came from the Catholic community, especially from Melbourne's Archbishop Daniel Mannix (who was also a fervent campaigner against conscription during the First World War). His and Russell's terse exchange via telegram was heavily reported in the newspapers, but the controversy was short lived. See RUSSELL, *Auto*. 3: 27.

Despite the centrality of hope to Russell's tour, a specifically utopian analysis has not been made by previous scholars who have examined these two months of his life. The most comprehensive secondary accounts are also the oldest, namely a short chapter in the biography by Australian author Alan Wood (1957), and an article in this journal by Nicholas Griffin (1974).¹⁵ Several subsequent biographers have given little heed to this two-month period.¹⁶ Russell's short time in Australia is typically seen as an isolated incident, rather than having lasting importance for either his biography or his thought. Arguably, this reflects Russell's own treatment of the country as a location. He did not reference Australia with any great regularity either before or after his visit, and the page and a half that Russell devoted to the experience in his *Autobiography* is not even without one notable inaccuracy. He wrote that Labor was the political party in government at the time, but 1949 in fact saw the beginning of a long period of conservative Liberal–Country government under Prime Minister Robert Menzies.¹⁷ This confusion may have arisen from two of Russell's encounters in Canberra, where he met with former Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley, and also with Governor-General William McKell, who had been the Labor Premier of New South Wales for much of the 1940s.

While most previous accounts of Russell's tour make cursory reference to his public optimism at the time, none provide a comprehensive analysis of his utopian ideas, nor significant contextualization within relevant currents of Australian history, such as rural development. Ray Monk's two-volume biography does discuss Russell's tour against the background of the cold war, leading him to the assumption that Russell's anxieties were "quite at odds with the optimism that, in public, he claimed to be bringing to and taking from Australia."¹⁸ Relying largely on Russell's private correspondence, Monk has demonstrated that his "utterly gloomy" thoughts were inspired by a deep concern for his son John's family living in London, which was one of

¹⁵ GRIFFIN, "Russell in Australia" (1974); WOOD, *Bertrand Russell: the Passionate Sceptic* (1957), pp. 210–17.

¹⁶ Clark and Moorehead each devote about a page to the tour, covering only basic details that can be found in earlier literature (CLARK, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* [1975], pp. 510–11; MOOREHEAD, *Bertrand Russell: a Life* [1992], pp. 461–2). RUJA's article in this journal ("Bertrand Russell's Life in Pictures" [1995], pp. 114–16) listed known photographs of Russell from the tour, but since then approximately a dozen new images have been located in the records of the Australian News and Information Bureau held at the National Archives of Australia. A selection appears in this paper.

¹⁷ *Auto.* 3: 26–7 and facing p. 48.

¹⁸ MONK, *Bertrand Russell 1921–1970: the Ghost of Madness* (2000), p. 329.

Russell's major sites of imagined Soviet annihilation.¹⁹ Yet, as I show in this paper, his doubts about global politics were certainly not only a private matter, and he openly and frequently told interviewers that he expected a nuclear Third World War to happen in the near future. Monk's analysis of Russell's emotional response to the Korean War is a useful starting point, but it is incomplete. Russell did certainly imagine a future where Europe had been destroyed by nuclear weapons, yet at the same time he also spoke of an equally possible future that is best described as utopian. Although his hopes for the future may not have reflected his private opinions, it is important to recognize the value of these optimistic statements to gain a richer understanding of Russell's experience of the early cold war.

Even beyond his visit to Australia, Russell is only sometimes recognized as a utopian thinker, and less often as a dystopian thinker, despite frequent allusions in his writing to futures full of hope, joy and compassion, or superstition, fear and hatred.²⁰ Russell himself had a consistent disdain for utopias, generally understanding them to be over-planned societies that strive for the perfect realization of a certain political ideal. His reading of Plato's *The Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) argued that their social arrangements tend towards cultural homogeneity with little diversity of thought or creativity, and which therefore lack great cultural and intellectual achievements and, most importantly, progress. This led him to call utopias "intolerably dull" places where the boredom of living would drive a person "to suicide or rebellion".²¹ But using Russell's own definition to analyse his works is limiting in several ways. First and foremost, it discounts his optimism and desire for social change. He employed a late-Victorian liberal notion of "infinite perfectibility" as his ideal of progress,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 328–30. The original correspondence is held in the Russell Archives (Russell to Rupert and Elizabeth Crawshay-Williams, 2 July 1950 [SLBR 2: 449–50]; Russell to Rupert Crawshay-Williams, 26 July 1950).

²⁰ The 1990s saw a number of utopian interpretations of Russell, although they were not always favourable. Ryan in particular criticized Russell's utopianism as a serious fault in his thought (RYAN, "Russell: the Last Great Radical?" [1996], pp. 260–2). See also GREENSPAN, "Bertrand Russell and the End of Nationalism" (1996), p. 359; MORAN, "'The World as it Can be Made': Bertrand Russell's Protest against WWI" [1985]. IRONSIDE is a notable exception who discusses Russell's thinking on dystopia alongside his utopianism (*The Social and Political Thought of Bertrand Russell* [1998], especially Chs. 8–9). DENTON does not utilize an overtly utopian or dystopian analysis, yet he writes extensively on the themes of Russell's hopes and anxieties for industrial civilization (*The ABC of Armageddon: Bertrand Russell on Science, Religion, and the Next War, 1919–1938* [2001]).

²¹ *HWP*₄, p. 480; RUSSELL, *ISS*, pp. 63–5.

while at the same time never assuming that progress was indeed inevitable. Rather than planning the details of a possible future, Russell more often imagined a world that would be loosely shaped by his own ideals of infinite progress, liberal democracy, scientific technique and reason, and preferably with a world government to mediate the interests of nations. In this vision there was also a central place for emotions such as hope, happiness and love.

Whereas some authors insist upon the content of utopias and dystopias being their defining feature, another strand of scholarship, which includes war historian Jay Winter, examines them in terms of their function and methodological utility.²² Created through critical, radical acts of the imagination, utopias and dystopias provide historians with a window into how their authors understood and responded to their historical circumstances through their hopes and desires, as well as their anxieties and dissatisfactions. The large amount of primary material from Russell's visit to Australia allows for such an examination. Ending his study of Russell's thought at the beginning of the Second World War, Ironside argues that the 1920s and 1930s constitute Russell's utopian phase, overlooking the ways in which 1950 was also a distinctly utopian moment, despite the uncertain historical context.²³ A curiously hopeful image of Australia emerges from Russell's writing at this time, given extra urgency by the threat of a third World War.

Agricultural development is one of the most important themes that defined Russell's tour, and it is strongly linked to hope in that he believed the country's utopian potential lay locked in the landscape. Russell studies have yet to engage with the recent "environmental turn" in the broader humanities, and very little attention has so far been given to his thought on the environment and its relationship to society and culture. His time in Australia provides the ideal context to raise this discussion. His imaginings of a pastoral utopia reveal important links between the concepts of civilization and land, as well as his attitudes to the social value of environmental resources. Russell's vision of a prosperous Australia was founded on the idea of human mastery over nature, made increasingly efficient through scientific endeavour. Throughout his life he wrote and spoke passionately on the

²² GORDIN, TILLEY AND PRAKASH, eds., *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (2010); WINTER, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Movements in the Twentieth Century* (2006).

²³ IRONSIDE, *The Social and Political Thought of Bertrand Russell*.

social and political value of the West's "scientific technique", including delivering lectures in Britain and the USA in 1950 that were included in *The Impact of Science on Society* (1952). In 1957 he won UNESCO's Kalinga Prize for his efforts towards the popularization of science, an honour which put him in the company of his friend and the Dyason Lecturer for 1953, Julian Huxley. During the early years of the cold war, Russell was not alone, in Australia or abroad, in his confidence that scientific research could offer solutions to human problems, including society's relationship with the environment. Despite long-standing criticisms of political abuses of science—seen, for example, in his attitude towards nuclear weapons and an ambivalence towards eugenics—his Australian material provides an exploration of the unequivocal benefits of scientific knowledge, if used in the service of civilization.²⁴

Russell's safe, prosperous and fertile Australia drew heavily on a long tradition of thinking on Britain's antipodes. His is a continuation of the idea of a bountiful, paradisiacal *Terra Australis* that circulated in literature well before European explorers had actually located it in the seventeenth century. After white settlement, subsequent and often unsuccessful journeys into the harsh interior did little to shift the widespread view that the land could readily support a new society.²⁵ An optimistic assumption that nature could be changed, or "conquered", underwrote narratives of transformation that were evoked in white settler colonies across the world.²⁶ This assumption effectively overrode the lengthy relationship of indigenous people with the land, justified by the argument that they had failed to utilize it through agriculture. The masculine figure of the pioneer who worked to tame wild frontiers through hard, physical labour featured as a vital participant in this project of founding a new society in a distant, apparently empty space.²⁷ During the second half of the nineteenth century, ideas of transforming the landscape became intertwined with that of the moral

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. 9; DENTON, *The ABC of Armageddon*; HEATHORN, "Explaining Russell's Eugenic Discourse in the 1920s" (2005).

²⁵ GIBSON, *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia* (1984).

²⁶ There is a vast literature on how the settler colonial project has impacted upon the environment, including in Australia. Some particularly useful texts are DUNLAP, *Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and History in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand* (1999); GRIFFITHS AND ROBIN, eds., *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies* (1997); ROSE AND DAVIS, eds., *Dislocating the Frontier: Essaying the Mystique of the Outback* (2005).

²⁷ REYNOLDS, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (1987); RICHARDS, *The Unending Frontier: an Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (2003); ROSE AND DAVIS, eds., *Dislocating the Frontier*.

regeneration of society. While the Australian colonies stopped receiving British convicts in 1868, they were still often conceived of as a place where the poor might make a better life. The challenges of an industrializing society in Britain, such as urban slums, poverty, degrading labour conditions and the destruction of the countryside, contrasted starkly with Australia's open spaces and the wholesome outdoor labour required of a pioneering existence.²⁸ By the time of Russell's visit in 1950, discourses of racial decline in Europe had also been in circulation for several decades, coinciding with anxieties about rapidly increasing non-white populations around the globe. Alongside ideas of eugenics, migration to the settler colonies was put forward as a means of securing social and racial regeneration in a healthy and revitalizing space.²⁹

The settler-colonial narratives of transformation and regeneration echo clearly through Russell's writing from the tour, often used when he discussed Australia's potential prosperous future. In an article written for *The West Australian*, he neatly linked the project of developing the country's largest state to the beginnings of British imperialism by way of a popular trope:

In the Elizabethan days, splendid adventure beckoned Englishmen to all parts of the world. They stood for freedom against the dark tyranny of Spain. They were expansive, energetic, hopeful, and their hopes were abundantly justified. A similar attitude is still possible in a country like Western Australia, a country of boundless possibilities waiting only for science and enterprise to develop them.³⁰

The significance of this quotation becomes clearer when read alongside Russell's earlier writing, especially when he referred to the Elizabethan Age in the service of his peace advocacy during the First World War. In *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916), and again a year later

²⁸ R. GRANT, "'The Fit and the Unfit': Suitable Settlers for Britain's Mid-Nineteenth-Century Colonial Possessions" (2005); JONES, *Outcast London: a Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (1971).

²⁹ BASHFORD, "Nation, Empire, Globe: the Spaces of Population Debate in the Inter-war Years" (2007); HEATHORN, "Explaining Russell's Eugenic Discourse in the 1920s"; HOWKINS, "The Discovery of Rural England" (2014); TOSH, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (2005), Chs. 8–9.

³⁰ RUSSELL, "Bertrand Russell's Impressions: Why West Australians Should be Happy" (1950).

in *Political Ideals* (1917), he extolled the vitality of an era that “stimulated adventure, poetry, music, fine architecture, and set going the whole movement out of which England’s greatness has sprung”.³¹ Ironside notes that the sixteenth century, “minus a few of its more exuberant barbarities”, serves as an ideal utopian society for Russell, but without exploring how this particular Golden Age functioned within his thought as a critique of war.³² These passages served both an aspirational and a critical purpose, in that they highlighted the stark difference between great cultural achievements of an earlier period and the apparent degradation of contemporary civilization that was occurring in the First World War.

The Elizabethan Age has featured prominently in popular constructions of an English national past and identity since the second half of the nineteenth century. England under the reign of Elizabeth I was celebrated by historians such as J. A. Froude and John Seeley who sought to create a sense of national continuity with an imagined past of exploration, imperial expansion, and great artistic achievements.³³ The trope of a *new* or Second Elizabethan Age came into wide circulation at around the time of Russell’s Australian tour, upon the accession of Elizabeth II to the throne in February 1952, although the first appearance of this idea can be traced back a decade earlier to 1942.³⁴ Talk of a new Elizabethan Age was not only rhetoric of popular nostalgia, but often a specific call to national renewal against the memory of recent hardship, particularly the Second World War and lingering austerity.³⁵ While it was almost always used in reference to Britain alone, Russell was one of the few figures who alluded to creating a new Elizabethan Age on the other side of the world. Yet in the quotation above, unlike during the First World War, Russell writes not of Shakespeare and culture, but of the defeat of the Spanish Armada and England’s early days of imperial expansion.

³¹ RUSSELL, *PSR*, p. 135; cf. *Political Ideals* (1917), p. 20.

³² IRONSIDE, p. 5. A useful study on how Golden Age tropes are frequently deployed in narratives of national renewal is SMITH, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal” (1997).

³³ COLLS, “Englishness and the Political Culture” (2014), pp. 68–9; HOWKINS, “The Discovery of Rural England”, pp. 93–4. See FROUDE, *History of England, from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth* (1969 [1854–1870]); SEELEY, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (1883).

³⁴ HEWISON, “‘Happy Were He’: Benjamin Britten and the *Gloriana* Story” (1993), p. 9.

³⁵ WIEBE, “‘Now and England’: Britten’s *Gloriana* and the ‘New Elizabethans’” (2005), pp. 145–50. See also MARKHAM, “The New Elizabethan Age” (1953); ROWSE, *An Elizabethan Garland* (1953), p. 161.

Both well before and after 1950, Russell maintained that colonization was historically important to the global spread of civilization, and he imagined that Australia would fulfil this role in the midst of the precarious geopolitical circumstances of the early cold war.³⁶ With the suggestion that hope was no longer possible in Europe because both its recent past and its near future appeared to be overshadowed by conflict, Russell's anti-war sentiments gave a critical edge to his utopian vision of Australia. He was clearly troubled by the sense that Western Europe, and Britain in particular, were no longer able to offer cultural, political and moral leadership in a troubled world of national, racial and ideological tensions. In Australia he spoke and wrote repeatedly on how industrial overdevelopment, but especially the two world wars, had led Europe to a cultural stand-still, with little prospect of improvement due to the stultifying fear of another, even more devastating war. Russell gave a broad critique of this now "destitute" and "infected" civilization that had become "overburdened" by a "deadening" reminder of its past greatness.³⁷

Australia, in contrast, is a space of hope for Russell, in that it offered a site for the survival and flourishing of English culture, and Western civilization more generally. The federated Commonwealth of Australia was only 49 years old when Russell arrived, and his impressions were imbued with a strong sense of dynamism, youth, and new historical opportunities. Replete with land-related and organic metaphors, in an article for Adelaide's *The Advertiser*, Russell penned: "I should hope that the best culture of the old world could be *transplanted* and *blossom* anew on more *fruitful soil*."³⁸ Imagining Australia as "a country of boundless possibilities" points towards not only its potential for farming, but also, in keeping with the settler-colonial narrative of regeneration, its chance to experiment socially, culturally and emotionally.³⁹ Compared to European societies in the middle of post-war reconstruction in 1950, Russell toured Australia during a period of unprecedented economic growth and affluence that was substantially based upon the booming primary industries.⁴⁰ The country's average standard of living was so high that he reported back to British readership that the population (aside from recent migrants and Aborigines)

³⁶ See especially RUSSELL, *Justice in War Time* (1917), p. 27, and "The Story of Colonization" (1956; *Papers* 29: 49).

³⁷ See, for example, RUSSELL, "Bertrand Russell's Impressions", and "Famous Philosopher Muses ... I'd Like to be Born an Australian" (1950).

³⁸ RUSSELL, "Famous Philosopher Muses"; my emphases.

³⁹ RUSSELL, "Hopes for Australia in a Hundred Years".

⁴⁰ BOLTON, *The Oxford History of Australia: 1942-1988, the Middle Way* (1990), p. 90.

were, on the whole, happy and comfortable in a spacious country, and given further development, there was no reason why the level of prosperity and affluence could not continue to increase (see *Fig. 2*).⁴¹



Figure 2. The actually “fruitful” life in Australia. Russell and his private secretary on the tour, Richard Greenish, looking at the window of Jonas’ Fruit Shop in Melbourne, a store locally famous for its wide variety of unusual tropical fruits. (National Archives of Australia, A8139, volume 8, CUI255/4 [1950])

However, much of the Australian soil was not, in fact, more fruitful than that of Europe, and large swathes of dry, infertile land stood in the way of realizing Russell’s pastoral utopia. But instead of “sit[ting] down under the barrenness of the desert”, he saw this task as a great and admirable challenge.⁴²

Like many of the other Dyason Lecturers, Russell had never been to Australia before, and would never return. Aiming to make the most of the long journey, he travelled not only as a public intellectual but also as a tourist. To assist with managing his busy schedule of work and leisure, the AIIA designated the honorary secretary of the Canberra branch, Richard Greenish, to act as his private secretary, who was able to accompany Russell for the duration of his tour at the

⁴¹ RUSSELL, “Happy Australia” (1950).

⁴² RUSSELL, “Science Can Help Australia Support More People” (1950).

expense of the Dyason Estate. A full and comprehensive itinerary was organized, starting in the eastern states before going to the drier west (see *Fig. 1*). Given his preference for country sightseeing, he was taken on drives by AIIA members between official engagements to nearby places of interest.⁴³ Russell found parts of the rural landscape to be impressive, such as the “delicious” dramatic vistas of unsettled and densely forested eucalypt valleys in the Blue Mountains, a plateau not far west of Sydney.⁴⁴ Travelling further afield to central Australia by plane, Russell declared that the scenic beauty of the ancient MacDonnell Ranges surrounding Alice Springs, with its dry river beds and sparsely vegetated red-hued mountains, was unlike anywhere else in the world.⁴⁵

Russell’s visit to Alice Springs in the Northern Territory is a particularly notable moment in his tour, notable enough for him to single the town out as one location that might survive a global nuclear war. He declined an invitation from the South Australian AIIA Branch to visit sheep stations and small towns along the Murray River, wishing instead to experience a little of inland Australia.⁴⁶ To this end, Russell and Greenish spent a weekend in Alice Springs in the middle of lecturing commitments in Adelaide, from Saturday to Monday, 5–7 August. Russell’s *Autobiography* paints a mythical version of the town, writing that the “leading citizens” of Alice Springs were regularly imprisoned because “expectedly and regularly, whenever possible, they stole each other’s sheep” (*Auto.* 3: 27). Australia has a long history of cattle “duffing” (stealing) since British settlement, and while some farms in the Alice Springs region did run both sheep and cattle, there is no evidence that suggests significant members of the community had ever been engaged in stealing either. It is unknown if some locals told this to Russell in jest, or if he remembered incorrectly, but the story certainly echoes Australian national narratives that glorify working-class lawbreakers, such as those of bushrangers (violent rural thieves) and larrikins (unruly urban youth).

Wood’s biography and several articles in the local newspaper, the *Centralian Advocate*, provide a fuller, and less apocryphal account of

⁴³ CAIGER, Memorandum “Bertrand Russell’s Visit”, 23 March 1950, Records of the AIIA, 1933–1997, National Library of Australia, MS2821/1/4.

⁴⁴ Russell to Rupert and Elizabeth Crawshay-Williams, 2 July 1950.

⁴⁵ “Bertrand Russell Back: Great Future for ‘Alice’”, *The News*, 7 Aug. 1950, p. 8.

⁴⁶ “Lord Russell to Visit Alice Springs”, *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 3 Aug. 1950, p. 2; *Auto.* 3: 27. See Records of the AIIA, National Library of Australia, MS2821/1/5: Alec Ramsey to George Caiger, 7 July 1950; Caiger to Lance Milne, 25 July 1950; Milne to Caiger, 27 July 1950; Caiger to Greenish, 28 July 1950.

Russell's inland experience. Together these sources describe how Alice Springs surprised Russell as the most "typically" Australian town he saw on his tour. Spending three days at a particularly "fine" and "modern" hotel, he met a number of local residents, and was shown around the "greatly interesting" and "admirable" Flying Doctors' service base where he received a demonstration of the radio communications between doctors and their isolated patients in the vast, sparsely settled countryside.⁴⁷ Russell was also taken on a drive to the Lutheran Aboriginal Mission at Hermannsburg in the heart of Aranda country, where he apparently purchased several watercolour paintings by the Namatjira family, although none by the most famous member, Albert.⁴⁸ Back in town, some of the local farmers expressed their hope that Russell would live up to his new nickname, "the Rainmaker", undoubtedly to relieve the typical conditions of a semi-desert landscape that receives, on average, less than 300 mm. of rain annually. His short time in central Australia was, however, sunny.⁴⁹

While often labelled as the driest settled continent on the planet, high *variability* of rainfall more accurately describes Australia's climate, due in large part to the influence of the phenomena El Niño and La Niña.⁵⁰ Depending on the strength of easterly trade winds across the Pacific Ocean, the north and east of Australia can receive either greater rainfall during La Niña events, or notably less rainfall during El Niño events. Russell came to Australia during one of the strongest La Niña events since reliable recording began at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵¹ In the eastern states, 1950 remains the wettest recorded year on average, despite Alice Springs and the west being dry and sunny. Russell's first significant stop on the tour was Sydney, which saw between five and six times the average monthly rainfall in both June and July while he was present.⁵² He related to friends Rupert and Elizabeth Crawshay-Williams in Britain that there were "floods everywhere and people in boats rowing along railway

⁴⁷ "Bertrand Russell Back: Great Future for 'Alice'", *The News*, 7 Aug. 1950, p. 8; WOOD, *Bertrand Russell*, p. 212.

⁴⁸ "Not Albert's Pictures", *Centralian Advocate*, 11 Aug. 1950, p. 20; WOOD, p. 212.

⁴⁹ "Will He Live up to His Nickname?", *Centralian Advocate*, 11 Aug. 1950, p. 12.

⁵⁰ SHELDRIK, "Goyder's Line: the Unreliable History of the Line of Reliable Rainfall" (2004), p. 56.

⁵¹ Commonwealth of Australia, Bureau of Meteorology, "La Niña—Detailed Australian Analysis" (<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/lnlist/>; consulted 4 March 2016).

⁵² Commonwealth of Australia, Bureau of Meteorology, "Climate Statistics for Australian Locations" (available at: http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/averages/tables/cw_066062_All.shtml; consulted 4 March 2016).

lines.”⁵³ Unlike the story of sheep stealing in Alice Springs, this report has more historical authenticity, since photographs published in newspapers from July show rowboats being used in flooded roads in suburban Sydney.⁵⁴ From the window of his many plane flights between cities, Russell would have also seen a landscape transformed by the rain, with greener vegetation and lakes holding far more water than usual.

Both the prosperity of the time and the overly wet weather undoubtedly helped to shape Russell’s impressions of rural existence, and his optimism in human mastery of nature. His enthusiasm for development was shared by many of his hosts and audiences, and Australia’s policies for economic and population growth had long been defined by a strong confidence in the success of rural development. The Government’s official target for population growth aimed at an increase from 8 million in 1950 to 20 million by the year 2000. Russell went much further, declaring that in the same period of time up to 100 million people could be supported by the transformed soil, if Australia could only be made “rainy”. Given the talents of the “modern man of science”, he saw no reason why the ability to make rain should not be discovered.⁵⁵

The idea of the pioneer gained new currency in the early years of the cold war with breakthroughs in nuclear science that promised ever more effective methods of managing the landscape. At this time, scientists and scientifically-minded farmers became the modern Australian pioneers in a new Atomic Age.⁵⁶ Both these professions, held in high esteem by Russell as energetic and vigorous, were his vanguard of a happy, prosperous future. Near the end of his tour he wrote for the main newspaper of Perth: “If I lived in Western Australia, I should feel the desert a perpetual challenge, and should devote my energies to conquering it, either as a man of science or as a pioneer according to the talents I happened to possess.”⁵⁷ In particular, he directed many of his newspaper articles and radio broadcasts towards the youth of

⁵³ Russell to Rupert and Elizabeth Crawshay-Williams, 2 July 1950.

⁵⁴ “Boats in Flooded Suburban Streets”, *Daily Telegraph and Daily News*, Sydney, 24 July 1950, p. 3.

⁵⁵ RUSSELL, “Famous Philosopher Muses”, and “Science Can Help Australia”. Official targets came close to the historical reality of 19.15 million in 2000, but this figure included a far greater multi-ethnic composition than was imagined in 1950, due to the liberalizing of immigration policies in the intervening years.

⁵⁶ HOME, “Rainmaking in CSIRO: the Science and Politics of Climate Modification” (2005); SHERRATT, “Frontiers of the Future”.

⁵⁷ RUSSELL, “Bertrand Russell’s Impressions”.

this similarly young nation. Russell imagined that the future of the country, and perhaps even Western civilization, rested upon their shoulders.

Russell placed the greatest emphasis on scientists' abilities to make more of the landscape farmable. In his Australian texts, "rainmaking" features as an important symbol of science as a form of pioneering. Studies into rainmaking had a long history by the time of Russell's visit, dating back to the late nineteenth century in the United States.⁵⁸ In Australia, the state-funded Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the nation's peak body for scientific research, was chiefly devoted to furthering the applied sciences for the benefit of the country's primary industries. Both research and experiments into rainmaking consumed a large part of their Division of Radio Physics from 1947 until the project was discontinued in the early 1980s.⁵⁹ Despite Russell being aware of some of CSIRO's work, he offered his own speculations on ways that rain might be made, such as the more productive use of atomic explosions in man-made lakes to send water into the atmosphere, or the creation of barriers (presumably in the sky) to direct wind to higher altitudes where the cooling air would increase condensation. While realizing that these suggestions were "quite wild" compared with the avenues being officially pursued at the time, he continued to remain optimistic about human creativity. Not quite a month into his tour, he wrote: "I am firmly convinced that if first-class men of science, with adequate instruments, devoted themselves to the problem they would before long discover means of increasing total rainfalls."⁶⁰

Aside from rainmaking, Russell was exposed to other Australian proposals for transforming the landscape, including the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectricity Scheme. Located in Australia's highest mountain range 450 kilometres south-west of Sydney, the Scheme has the dual purpose of diverting snow melt to irrigate the drier farming regions west of the mountains, as well as to generate electricity for south-eastern cities. A post-war federal government initiative that was completed in 1974, it includes sixteen dams, seven power stations (two underground), eighty kilometres of pipes, and 140 kilometres of tunnels in an area larger than the Australian Capital Territory, at over 3,000 square kilometres. Regarded as one of Australia's greatest nation-building projects, the Scheme remains the country's and one

⁵⁸ SPENCE, *The Rainmakers: American "Pluviculture" to World War II* (1980).

⁵⁹ HOME, "Rainmaking in CSIRO".

⁶⁰ RUSSELL, "Science Can Help Australia".

of the world's largest civil-engineering ventures.

Despite the sparse coverage of the tour in his *Autobiography*, Russell nevertheless devoted an entire paragraph to a description of the Snowy Mountains Scheme, demonstrating how greatly the project impressed him.⁶¹ Again, Wood's biography sheds some further light on the matter, recounting Russell's meeting with the Australian Governor-General, William McKell, in Canberra on 18 July 1950 (see *Fig. 3*). Wood writes that the two discussed the Scheme at length, with



Figure 3. McKell (left), Russell and Greenish (right) at Government House, Canberra. (National Archives of Australia, A8139, volume 8, CU1249/5 [1950])

McKell even showing Russell a relief map of its works.⁶² This brief report explains little, and underplays the significance of the encounter, when read alongside the large amount of primary source material that has become accessible since Wood's biography was published. McKell, a former premier of New South Wales, had long been interested in matters of Australian agriculture and resource conservation. He presided over the foundation of Kosciuszko State Park in 1944 (now Kosciuszko National Park), the alpine region that encompasses

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; *Auto.* 3: 27.

⁶² WOOD, p. 212.

the Scheme, and after becoming Governor-General in 1947, he officially supported the then Labor Government to undertake the Scheme. McKell blew the first charge at the ceremony to mark the start of work in October 1949, at which he received a model marked with construction plans. This was undoubtedly the relief map that he displayed to Russell less than a year later, and it is now held by the National Library of Australia in Canberra.⁶³ It is more than likely during that meeting that McKell and Russell would have had much to discuss about the country's agricultural development and its relationship to national security. Construction had only recently begun at the time of Russell's visit, but he was clearly referring to the Scheme when he wrote in a newspaper article about the "spectacular" proposals for diverting rivers through tunnels for inland irrigation. With the nation's future in mind, he urged greater government expenditure on similar development projects and agricultural research throughout his tour.⁶⁴

The geopolitical motivations behind large infrastructure projects such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme made transforming the environment an important aspect of the cold war. The spate of dam-building across the world in the 1950s and 1960s has been identified by environmental historians to be inspired by competition between the USA and USSR for the allegiance of newly independent countries in Asia. In return for political alliances and investment opportunities, countries were offered technical and management assistance of infrastructure projects that would provide electricity and irrigation, both of which were seen to be central to the process of economic modernization.⁶⁵ Significantly, the longest-lasting engagement of the Bureau of Reclamation, the American government organization responsible for dam-building projects domestically and for consulting abroad, was not in a decolonizing Asian country but in Australia, consulting on the Snowy Mountains Scheme for over twenty years.⁶⁶ The extent of this

⁶³ Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority, *Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Development*, National Library of Australia.

⁶⁴ RUSSELL, "Science Can Help Australia".

⁶⁵ SNEDDON, *Concrete Revolution: Large Dams, Cold War Geopolitics, and the US Bureau of Reclamation* (2015); TUCKER, "Containing Communism by Impounding Rivers: American Strategic Interests and the Global Spread of High Dams in the Early Cold War" (2010). The "Green Revolution" of the early decades of the cold war also follows this pattern, whereby the West offered similar technical assistance to decolonizing countries with agricultural initiatives. See CULLATHER, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (2010).

⁶⁶ SNEDDON, *Concrete Revolution*, p. 234 n.1.

involvement demonstrates how Australia was regarded as an important location in the cold war, not only by Russell, but also more broadly by Western governments. Agricultural development could provide the economic and social foundations of a stable bulwark against a turbulent Asia, which, in the midst of decolonization, was widely believed might easily turn to communism.

But while technical approaches to transforming the environment formed one aspect of cold war geopolitical strategizing across the world, ultimately Russell recognized that creating a pastoral utopia in Australia would require the highly physical labour of working the land. In the age of atomic science and technologies, he still emphasized the gratification of a more rigorous physical lifestyle alongside the intellectual work of research. Russell recalled several months later in December 1950 during his Nobel Prize Lecture in Stockholm that hunting rabbits (an introduced pest) “in the primitive manner” on Australian farms was a peaceful means to satisfy humankind’s essential impulse to adventure, made possible only because Australia was a relatively non-industrialized and pioneering society.⁶⁷ This anecdote, delivered to an elite European audience, is based upon several visits he made to the rural regions surrounding Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne. A number of photographs of Russell at a farm near Canberra show a pastoral Australian scene (see *Fig. 4*) complete with the common icons of corrugated-iron buildings, a working dog and, especially, sheep. But the farmer in the photo is clearly not young as in Russell’s ideal, and he would have been aware of the challenge that rural communities encountered, and continue to encounter, of retaining their younger members in face of the wider services and opportunities available in the larger urban centres, especially the state capitals.⁶⁸ Russell’s proposed solution to this problem was to build up social and leisure facilities in regional towns, such as dance halls, swimming pools, cinemas and libraries. He also advocated migration programmes to encourage youthful, and preferably skilled workers from an overcrowded Europe to settle in the Australian countryside in order to fill the employment gap that the existing population of only 8 million, concentrated in the large cities on the coast, simply could not provide.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ RUSSELL, “What Desires Are Politically Important?” (1950).

⁶⁸ HUGO, “The State of Rural Populations” (2004).

⁶⁹ “Need for Greater Population in Australia Stressed: Views of Lord Bertrand Russell”, *Cairns Post*, 15 July 1950, p. 5; “Rural Migration Needed Here”, *Chronicle*, Adelaide, 10 Aug. 1950, p. 7; RUSSELL, “Famous Philosopher Muses”, “Science Can Help Australia”, and “Hopes for Australia in a Hundred Years”.



Figure 4. Greenish (left), Russell and an unknown farmer (right) at a sheep station in the Canberra region. (National Archives of Australia, A8139, volume 8, CU1249/6 [1950])

Russell's public engagement with Australia did not end immediately after he left on 23 August 1950. Several months after he had returned to Britain, the Australian Broadcasting Commission arranged⁷⁰ for him to record another talk in London, this time about his "blue-

⁷⁰ B. H. Molesworth to Russell, 25 July 1950, Records of the AIIA, National Library of Australia, MS2821/1/5.

print for utopia". The result was the revealingly titled "Hopes for Australia in a Hundred Years". So for twenty minutes on the evening of Monday, 2 April 1951, Russell was once again heard over Australian national radio. This broadcast stands out in stark contrast to its turbulent historical context, as well as to Russell's ongoing anxieties about world peace that grew apace as the decade progressed (*Auto.* 3, Ch. 1). It was also a neat epilogue to his tour of the previous year, revisiting many of the same themes on which he had already comprehensively written and spoken. In 1951, Russell provided his listeners with some highly imaginative speculations, both utopian and apocalyptic at the same time. He painted a vibrant and unusually detailed picture of the future that turned upon life in Britain's antipodes, while the rest of the world suffered from the destructive legacy of Europe's division into communist and democratic blocs:

I imagine the children of Australia being taught that their ancestors came from a place called Europe, now mostly desert, but in former times fertile and even, in a sense, more or less civilized. This queer place, they will learn, was cut in two by an imaginary line down the middle, and the people on each side of the line were carefully taught to hate and fear the people on the other side. One fine day they started killing each other with the most exquisite scientific skill and dropping poison on the ground from the clouds so that crops would no longer grow. The consequence is that this part of the world is now only interesting to archaeologists, who have to go in special clothes and boots made to screen them from radio-activity. ("Hopes for Australia in a Hundred Years")

In this dark world of the mid-twenty-first century, Europe's landscape, and the civilization that depended upon it, had been ruined, turned into a barren desert from the effects of atomic warfare. In the southern hemisphere, however, Australia of 2050 had become a fertile paradise, where no one would work very hard, leaving plenty of time for leisure. Large cities would be magnificent centres of culture, and rural isolation would be overcome with the wide use of helicopters by farmers to access dynamic regional towns. Most importantly, Australians also had the precious opportunity to bypass hatred and fear in their hopeful space of freedom and prosperity. Returning at the end of his broadcast from this imagined future to the year 1951, Russell concluded: "in my visions of the next hundred years, I find that Australia contributes a very large part to the total of my hopes" (*ibid.*). After his two-month tour, Russell gave the country and its population

pride of place in leading the world through the precarious political terrain of the Atomic Age.

Although Russell's public impressions of Australia in 1950 can best be described as utopian, ultimately his private imaginings of the country were ambivalent. Not only did his anxiety about a possible nuclear war offset his optimism, but so did aspects of the country and its population. Russell's letters to family and friends complicate the positive tone of his public statements, which can be seen in his direct comparison of Australia to his own, critical definition of utopia. Writing to his daughter, Katharine Tait, after the tour, Russell described the country to be "more like More's Utopia than one would think a real place could be, and almost equally dull..."⁷¹ Even the landscape that Russell praised in interviews and broadcasts as holding such promise received the cool description of "flat" and "monotonous" in private.⁷² Near the end of the tour, he suggested in several newspaper articles that such favourable socio-economic conditions, while a necessary prerequisite of happiness, had also led to cultural uniformity and a sense of comfortable, "modest competence". Instead, he urged the Australian public to tolerate "exceptional" and "eccentric" men of art, and hoped that adventurous and enterprising individuals would take the risk of becoming farming pioneers.⁷³ Russell's promotion of agricultural and pastoral development can be interpreted as an attempt to motivate the settler population for economic growth, but also to develop a great culture that they might, in time, become the keepers of Western civilization.

Despite his praises, Russell made few allusions to Australia in his writing outside his tour, and the nickname "the Rainmaker" appears to have been forgotten by both him and the local public. Yet his hopes of 1950 were consolidated when, in the following year, his Australian lectures provided the foundation of a book to which he gave the working title of "A Baedeker Guide to the Twentieth Century", referring to the series of travel guides that were popular during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷⁴ Both his lectures and the book

⁷¹ Russell to Katharine Tait, 29 Aug. 1950 (*SLBR* 2: 450). See also, Russell to Rupert Crawshay-Williams, 14 Aug. 1950. Russell's assessment of dullness echoes throughout more recent strands of Australian historiography that characterize the 1950s as an overwhelmingly domestic, conservative and culturally homogenous decade. See MURPHY AND SMART, eds., *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s* (1997).

⁷² Russell to Alys Russell, 2 Aug. 1950; Russell to Katharine Tait, 29 Aug. 1950.

⁷³ RUSSELL, "Bertrand Russell's Impressions", and "Famous Philosopher Muses".

⁷⁴ Russell to M. Lincoln Schuster, 31 March 1951.

mapped the intellectual tour that Russell offered the Australian public while he in turn toured the local countryside. Although the book became *New Hopes for a Changing World*, it nevertheless remained an exploration of the many obstacles to world peace in the early cold war era, and especially the conflicts of ideology and race. It also suggested in equal measure possible ways to overcome humankind's violent divisions. As the title suggests, Russell identified hope as a vital means for transforming global politics, as much as it could transform the Australian countryside. At this momentous and unprecedented turning point of history, he challenged humankind to choose glorious peace over annihilation.⁷⁵

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