

Thunderstorm at Newton Boyd

An object will remain at rest or in uniform motion in a straight line unless acted upon by an external force.
—Newton's First Law

SOMEWHERE, on the Old Glen Innes Road, I came across a great hole in the rock. A tunnel. *Convict-carved*, they say—but they'd be wrong by fifty years. Along the River Mann, men discovered gold in 1882 and came back to work it. Then came the claims and mendacious tales about a noble cause. A far-off fight. Adventures abroad, and you *had to be in it. Too right!* Right up to their bloody necks, those diggers: from veins of shining gold they sailed to trenches of mud. And blood.

*De-Boyed: the town of Newton Boyd
Neutered of Boys and robbed of men,
Now this valley is like a Void
Buoyed by riches then poor again.*

NEWTON BOYD is not alone in her wins or her losses. Down the road, Dalmorton liked to boast about her 13 pubs and her 5,000 souls in the days of her gold rush—but now she's 5,013 ghosts. They haunt her still, those diggers, those days.

Many Australian towns have a monument—a tribute to the men they sent. At Newton Boyd, the four sides name more men than you will find for forty k's! Today, where I stand at the World War One Memorial, the air is humid and the pressure is building towards a storm that threatens and rumbles ominously in the distant hills.

LOCAL VETERANS' names are on the monument—the *men* you meant?—30 left this valley of the living. One soldier who returned was killed in a rockslide not long after. Death by dirt. Falling earth. "*Of those who fell*" says the inscription. And many did fall. Felled by the rattling machine-gunfire of bullets. Or felled from their Walers. Or fell where they stood.

*De-Boyed: the town of Newton Boyd
Neutered of Boys and robbed of men,
Now this valley is like a Void
Buoyed by nothing and quiet again.*

ANTS ARE ON THE MARCH, up from their trenches. They, too, sense it—the coming rain. First drops falling on fallen names, dark spots, marble stained. It's boom and bust again. The booming of the thunder and the busting bursts of rain. The sky erupts like it was Nineteen-Fifteen as lightning strikes nearby.

ABANDONED FARMSTEAD. The craggy hands of an old tree plead and pierce the vast heavens who look back indifferently. Naked arms twisted and contorted—bent by, and in, the wind. I see a shed made of hand-cut logs shaped by swinging axe under the sweats of hardy, singledotted pioneer folk. Splintered wagon wheels fashioned by craftsmen long-departed and once drawn by shaggy-hoofed creatures also gone.

I witness the now-withered products of toil and talent, their purpose served. Derived from the living, worked by the living, but slowly returning to the soil like all things. These fallen timbers all destined to join their makers. Who made you, Newton Boyd, Mother of Boys and Men?

*De-Boyed: the town of Newton Boyd
Neutered of Boys and robbed of men,
Now this valley is like a Void
Buoyed by action then still again.*

What really becomes of us? Do only the elements remain? Is the violence of the storm Newton's inertia in action? Does everything stay in a state of motion until such time some force acts to change that motion? Where did you go, Newton Boyd? N.B. Note well: those who fell. And *Nota bene*: the shared family names, the three Fords or the five Meehan boys. And Trooper Livermore lives no more.

A CENTURY on, some sounds return to this long-silent vale. Nowadays, teenagers and twenty-somethings march to a different drummer—the relentless, pounding *doof doof* beat. The remoteness of this place lends itself to illegal rave parties being held on old farms where the young now die of another kind of Grievous Bodily Harm.

*De-Boyed: the town of Newton Boyd
Neutered of Boys and robbed of men,
Now this valley is like a Void
Buoyed by something then dead again.*