

FITZGERALD, THOMAS MICHAEL (1918-1993), milkman, 'lion of journalism',¹ servant of the public, and public intellectual *avant la lettre*, was born on 28 August 1918 at Marrickville, New South Wales, eldest of five children of Thomas, milk vendor, and his Irish-born wife Lizzie, nee Trant.

Fitzgerald began his working life on his family's horse-drawn milk-cart around Marrickville, returning to the run after his father's death in September 1940 to be selected by local suppliers to chair their milk-zoning committee.²

He attended Erskinville convent before Lewisham Christian Brothers (an 'absolute disgrace'³), Marist Darlinghurst and Marist Kogarah for his Intermediate,⁴ earning an exhibition. He joined the Commonwealth Treasury but was seconded to Victoria Barracks.⁵ His evening studies in economics at the University of Sydney were disrupted first by the deaths of his parents and then by war service.

He enlisted with RAAF on 5 November 1942, training here and in North America, to be assigned to Northern Command as a navigator with RAF Squadron 547 and discharged in Sydney as a Flight Lieutenant on 13 December 1945.⁶

He had become engaged by post to Margaret Pahlow, whom he had met at Victoria Barracks; they married at Ashfield in November 1945 to honeymoon at Armidale.⁷

Impressed by intellectual vibrancy in the USA, he applied without success for an immigrant visa until mid-1950s, encouraged, as in all his adventures, by Margaret.⁸

He re-entered civilian life on the *Bulletin*, editing its *Wild Cat Monthly* from 1948.⁹ He transferred to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1950 as commercial editor on £1,000 a year, then financial editor from September 1952 and economics leader writer during 1956.¹⁰ Throughout those years, he never bought a share. Four people serving sentences for offences he had exposed sought stop-writs. He was wont to refer to their prospectuses euphemistically as 'unlovely issues'¹¹ and to include a line of numbers to add 'artistic verisimilitude' to his daily columns.

Although management dangled the *Herald* editorship, he kept his distance, in the spirit of George Orwell, whose death he felt like 'a second father or an elder brother'.¹²

By 1956, censorship at the *Herald* convinced him to quit and set up his own publication.¹³ Fitzgerald appreciated how hard it was 'for people to realise that, to a journalist, who was in the kitchen of a daily newspaper, having the freedom to produce your own paper, however small, is infinitely more rewarding than to be the nominal editor of any bloody

¹ Valerie Lawson, *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 27 January 1993, p. 3.

² National Library of Australia (NLA), Oral TRC 2247, Tape 3: 1/11, hereafter NLA TRC tape: side/page; see also W.E. Murphy, *The Milk Board of New South Wales*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1949, p. 91; Milk Board, *Report 1941-2, New South Wales, Parliamentary Papers*, 1941-2, Appendix 'B', p. 1221.

³ NLA TRC 5: 2/7.

⁴ NLA TRC 3: 1/7-8.

⁵ NLA TRC 3: 1/8-9.

⁶ Australian War Memorial (AWM), service records on line; NLA TRC 3: 1/12-13 and 3: 2/1-8; AWM Interview Tim Bowden, 10 March 1989, ID Number S00536.

⁷ NSW Registrar, Reg. No. 19657/1945; Fitzgerald family papers, John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, Electronic Research Archive, Photographs.

⁸ NLA TRC 1: 1/1 and 2/ 1-11.

⁹ NLA TRC 3: 2/8-9; K.S. Inglis (ed), *Nation: the life of an independent journal of opinion*, MUP, Carlton, 1989, pp. 3-4; Patricia Rolfe, *Journalistic javelin, an illustrated history of the Bulletin*, Wildcat Press, Sydney, 1979, pp. 240 and 253.

¹⁰ Inglis (ed.), *Nation*, p. 5; Gavin Souter, *Company of Heralds*, MUP, Carlton, 1981, p. 292; NLA TRC 3: 2/9.

¹¹ Souter, *Company of Heralds*, p. 387.

¹² NLA TRC 1: 2/14 and 2: 1/7.

¹³ Souter, *Company of Heralds*, pp. 386-9; NLA TRC 1: 1/3.

metropolitan paper.¹⁴ A plan to freelance for Frank Packer (qv) at his Australian Consolidated Press went awry¹⁵ when the Fairfaxes agreed to his conducting *Nation, an independent journal of opinion*, issued fortnightly from 26 September 1958,¹⁶ on Commonwealth Bank mortgages of £6,500 against the family home in Abbotsford.¹⁷ Able to set losses against taxable income, he paid contributors as much as £10 a page.¹⁸ The 1961 credit crunch boosted sales to 12,000.¹⁹

At the late-night eatery of Lorrenzini's,²⁰ Barry Humphries introduced George Munster (qv) who joined *Nation* as business manager to form a personal and intellectual intimacy, shattered by Munster's death in 1984. *Nation* attracted a galaxy with art critic Robert Hughes,²¹ theatre critic Harry Kippax ('Brek'), film critic Sylvia Lawson, Clive James,²² K. S. Inglis, Cyril Pearl (qv), Brian Johns and Peter Ryan. The *Nation* crowd later met at Vadim's coffee house in King's Cross until it closed in 1969 after which Tom subbed nearby in the all-night Hastie-Tastie and on buses.²³ He left Fairfax in 1970, cashing in his superannuation to keep *Nation* afloat but those funds were not enough and he sold it to Gordon Barton (qv) to emerge as *Nation Review* from 29 July 1972.²⁴

Fitzgerald joined Murdoch as editorial director of News Ltd in August 1970²⁵ until December 1972,²⁶ recalling those years as 'ignominious', especially after the dismissal in July 1971 of Adrian Deamer (qv) as editor of the *Australian*, which Murdoch disparaged as a 'daily *Nation*'.²⁷

In the wake of the mining-share boom and bust of 1968-70, Fitzgerald co-wrote the report of the Senate Committee on Securities and Exchange.²⁸ That experience led in June 1973²⁹ to research for the Labor Minister for Resources and Energy, Rex Connor (qv), who raised a question which Fitzgerald recalled no expert having posed: what had been the contribution of the resources boom to Australian welfare?³⁰ He calculated a \$55m. deficit during the six years to 1972-73 on subsidies over taxes; the Industries Assistance Commission came up with only \$5m.³¹ Fitzgerald resisted Connor's push for higher returns at once.³²

¹⁴ NLA TRC 1: 2/14.

¹⁵ David McNicoll, *Luck's A Fortune*, Sydney, Wildcat Press, 1979, p. 141; denied by Fitzgerald, NLA TRC 1: 1/4.

¹⁶ Inglis (ed.), *Nation*, p. 12; H. McQueen, 'Nation', *SMH*, 17 July 1982, p. 30, reprinted *Gallipoli to Petrov*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1984, pp. 98-101; NLA MS 7995/1/1; Jan Brazier, 'Tom Fitzgerald's *Nation*: An Australian Independent Journal of Opinion', *Australian & New Zealand journal of serials librarianship*, 2 (1), 1991, pp. 35-43.

¹⁷ NLA TRC 1: 1/5; Souter, *Company of Herald's*, p. 389; Inglis (ed.) *Nation*, p. 11.

¹⁸ NLA TRC 1: 2/6; NLA MS 7995/10/8.

¹⁹ NLA TRC 1: 1/6 and 2/7.

²⁰ NLA TRC 1: 1/7-12.

²¹ Robert Hughes, *Things I didn't know: a memoir*, Random House, Milson's Point, 2012, pp. 171-3.

²² Clive James, *Unreliable Memoirs*, Cape, London, 1980, p. 158.

²³ NLA TRC 2: 2/4; Geoffrey Dutton, *The Innovators, the Sydney alternatives in the rise of modern art, literature and ideas*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 151-6, 200, 203-5 and 227.

²⁴ NLA TRC 1: 2/13; NLA MS 7995/1/5 and 2/5; farewell 'Editorial', *Nation*, 22 July 1972, p. 3; Inglis (ed.), *Nation*, pp. 251-2.

²⁵ *Australian*, 8 August 1970, p. 1.

²⁶ *Australian Financial Review (AFR)*, 12 December 1972, p. 17.

²⁷ NLA TRC 7: 2/1; 4: 1/13 and 4: 2/1.

²⁸ *AFR*, 12 December 1972, p. 17; *Australian Parliamentary Papers (APP)*, 1974, vols. 9-12.

²⁹ *Canberra Times*, 28 June 1973, p. 9.

³⁰ NLA TRC 4: 2/4-9; R.F.X. Connor papers, University of Wollongong Archives, D 61, RAAM No. 917.

³¹ *APP*, 1974, volume 8, number 3; H. McQueen, *Gone Tomorrow*, A&R, Sydney, 1982, chapters, 3 to 5 and 7; Sarah Burnside, 'Mineral booms, taxation and the national interest. The impact of the 1974 Fitzgerald Report on *The Contribution of the Mineral Industry to Australian Welfare*', *History Australia*, 10 (3), December 2013, pp. 171-92; I.A.C. Report, *APP*, 1976, vol. 9, no 12.

³² NLA TRC 5: 1/3-4.

From 1975, he worked on the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration chaired by his friend, Dr H.C. Coombs, to chart a path through the fiscal crisis of the welfare state.³³ He became an economic advisor to N.S.W. premier Neville Wran in 1976 until 1983.

In retirement, he improved his classical Greek for which he had enrolled at his *alma mater* from 1969, after units in philosophy, the history of science and private tutoring in mathematics.³⁴

He also researched the intellectual formation before 1935 of Labor leader John Curtin as a self-taught economic thinker. Fitzgerald's method was to soak himself in his sources and then to pour out his findings into his manual portable typewriter, which meant he bequeathed no publishable drafts. His interest in Curtin had been sparked by his sense that the Whitlam administration had undone itself by not following Curtin's precept: if you get the economy wrong, you cannot get anything right.³⁵ Fitzgerald rescued another autodidact, the pioneer of hire purchase, Ian Jacoby (*qv*).³⁶

When ABC chairman, David Hill, a workmate from Wran's office, invited Fitzgerald to deliver the 1990 Boyer Lectures, he wove a lifetime of reflections on current problems around *Life and Economics*, declaring his preference for the former by opening with Charles Darwin and poetry.³⁷

Tom's mother had responded to what he called his 'ecstatic' temperament, by buying him the collected Shakespeare before he went to secondary school. J.M. Keynes³⁸ appealed first as a literary figure though the major influence in the late 1930s was T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land, Essays, and Murder in the Cathedral*, quoting passages fifty years later:

'King rules or barons rule: /The strong man strongly, the weak man by caprice .../ And the steadfast can manipulate the greed and lust of others,/ The feeble is devoured by his own.'³⁹

He reviewed the fifth edition of the *Concise OED* in 1964 as obsolete and a poor guide.⁴⁰

Always courtly and growing portly,⁴¹ with a 'round, rosy face of a very shrewd-looking cherub',⁴² he could be scathing about fools in high places, notably those in the besieged manufacturing sector.⁴³

He declined offers of Orders of Australia on the grounds that it could do him no honour to be associated with people about whom he knew enough to jail. His unmet ambition was a seat on the Board of the Reserve Bank to unearth how it arrived at its decisions.⁴⁴

³³ Tim Rowse, *Nugget Coombs, a reforming life*, MUP, Carlton, 2005, pp. 331-7; Coombs interviewed by Fitzgerald, *SMH*, 18 May 1984, p. 9.

³⁴ NLA TRC 2: 2/9-12.

³⁵ NLA TRC 5: 1/711; T.M. Fitzgerald, 'An Education for Labor Leadership: the case of Curtin', Curtin Memorial Lecture, *Australian National University*, August 1977; JCPML, PID 86320.

³⁶ T.M. Fitzgerald, 'Ian Jacoby', R.T. Appleyard and C.B. Schedvin (eds), *Australian Financiers, Biographical Essays*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1988, pp. 364-87.

³⁷ T.M. Fitzgerald, *Between Life and Economics*, ABC, Sydney, 1990; H. McQueen, 'On Economics, Life, Love and Barnacles', *24 Hours*, November 1990, pp. 16-17; Tony Stephens, 'Time to end deregulation taboo', *SMH*, 10 November 1990, p. 4.

³⁸ Review of Robert Skidelsky's second volume of biography of Keynes, *SMH*, 28 November 1992, p. 47.

³⁹ NLA Tape 5: 2/7; T.S. Eliot, *Collected plays*, Faber and Faber, London, 1962, p. 13.

⁴⁰ *Nation*, 25 July 1964, p. 21.

⁴¹ H. McQueen, 'A humane face of economics', *24 Hours*, April 1993, pp. 84-88, reprinted *Temper Democratic*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town (SA), 1998, pp. 64-74.

⁴² Souter, *Company of Herald's*, p. 386; cf. *Meanjin* editor Clem Christesen: 'a sweet guy', quoted Dutton, *The Innovators*, p. 204.

⁴³ 'The Manufacturing Ghetto', *Nation*, 12 November 1971, pp. 11-14, reprinted Inglis (ed.) *Nation*, pp. 231-7; *SMH*, 29 August 1992, p. 43.

A heart attack in 1975 led to surgery and to fearing any loss of mental powers more than death, which came in St Vincent's, Darlinghurst, on 25 January 1993.⁴⁵ An atheist since late teenage, he was cremated after a private ceremony. He was survived by his wife, Margaret, and their four children, Tom, Julia, Claire, and Dennis, and four grandchildren.

⁴⁴ Tom Fitzgerald, 'The Haves and Have-Nots in Home Ownership', *Bowyang*, 6, 1981, pp. 4-7.

⁴⁵ *SMH*, 27 January 1993, pp. 3 and 13; *Australian*, 27 January 1993, p. 3 and Editorial, 'Genial Intellect', p. 10.