This quotation comes from Ward's *Australian Legend*. First published in 1958, many times reprinted and still in print fifty years later in 2008, it was based on a PhD done earlier in the 1950s and completed in 1956. Ward's case is about the second half of the nineteenth century, as he traces the actuality of the bushman experience, especially via its multiple recording in folk song and then its conscious promulgation in the *Bulletin* from the mid-1880s. Only with burgeoning literacy and the new railway systems 'did the powerful current come to the surface of events, to dominate formal literature and to provide a native tradition for the new industrial trade union movement'. While these changes helped bring about the demise of the actual bushman ethos by nearly eliminating the distance between the city and the bush, the changes helped make city colonists 'much more conscious of the ethos'. The result was that 'the values and the attitudes of the nomad tribe were embalmed in a national myth, thence to react powerfully, as they still do, upon thought and events'.[28]

The feminist revaluation of Ward's case

Ward's model of a building wave, consolidating into myth in the 1890s, necessarily cast the coming decades as after-effects. Later commentators, especially but not only feminist ones, have accepted the historical case while reversing Ward's valuation of it. They have typically seen a continuity from the 1890s Bushman myth to the celebration at home of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzac) disaster at Gallipoli in 1915 – when the really effective Australian Imperial Force (AIF) actions occurred late in the war on the Western Front. The mythologising minimised the role and importance of women in the national ideological formation, a case radically deepened later in the 1980s by the application of the thinking of Julia Kristeva and other poststructuralist thinkers. The land, especially the outback, was now portrayed as having become, by the 1890s, the feminised object of male

---

[28]   Ward, *Australian Legend*, pp. 194, 196.

desire and domination. The naturalising of this myth, it was argued, left an ideological and gender legacy with disempowering consequences for women in the post-World War II period. The rediscovery and re-publication in the 1980s of Australian women novelists and poets from the 1880s and 1890s was, accordingly, welcomed as a counteraction.[29]

A book-historical study of the life of *While the Billy Boils* disputes this series of linked positions, at least in relation to the 1890s. The problem lay in the feminist incorporation into their critique of the increasingly extrapolated nationalist myth. This is not to argue that their battle was not worth the fight. Indeed, the general recognition, now naturalised in political and social debate, that the social, family and legal arrangements of the postwar period needed to be changed if anything like gender fairness and equal opportunity were to be achieved is an enduring legacy of the feminist intellectual movement. But the urgency of the task, I will show, led to some illegitimate intellectual shortcuts that have distorted our view of the 1890s and its aftermath.[30]

Marilyn Lake and Graeme Davison

What would prove to be a very influential essay by Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', appeared in *Historical Studies* in 1986.[31] It built in part on Graeme Davison's earlier essay of 1978 in which he argued, on strong evidence,

[29]   The developing feminist case may be traced in: Richard White, *Inventing Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981); Susan Sheridan, 'Ada Cambridge and the Female Literary Tradition', in *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends: Essays in Australian Cultural History*, ed. Susan Dermody, John Docker and Drusilla Modjeska (Malmsbury, Vic.: Kibble Books, 1982); Sheridan, '"Temper Romantic; Bias Offensively Australian": Australian Women Writers and Literary Nationalism', *Kunapipi* 7.2–7.3 (1985), 49–58; and for Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, see below.
[30]   E.g., the accompanying account of why female authors of the 1880s and 1890s were so soon forgotten after their own period – an account of gender ideology – can at best be only partially true. Elsewhere I have explained the situation as being one of price and availability of books as well as of changing taste – and the first two considerations, at least, are only very distantly an ideological reflection: Eggert, 'Australian Classics and the Price of Books: The Puzzle of the 1890s', *Journal of the Association of Australian Literature* (special issue *The Colonial Present*, ed. Gillian Whitlock), 8 (2008), 130–57.
[31]   Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', *Historical Studies*, 22 (1986), 116–31.

that the bush values were mainly 'the projection onto the outback of values revered by an alienated urban intelligentsia' rather than an autochthonous set of beliefs engendered in the bush, recorded in folk tale as a result, and later taken up by the *Bulletin* writers before spreading across the country as a national myth.[32] In Davison's account, the alienating effects of the 1890s depression on the large group of journalists and writers that the growth of newspapers and magazines had brought together in central Sydney are crucial. The dismal, sometimes apocalyptic view of city life, according to Davison, drew upon a longstanding British tradition of 'rhetorical, quasi-religious verse which descended from the late eighteenth century through Blake and Shelley . . . [to] the radical movements of the 1870s and 1880s' and came into Australia via James Thomson and then Francis Adams's *Songs of the Army of the Night* (Sydney, 1888).[33] As far as Lawson – a city dweller, mainly, from the age of 15 – is concerned, a little digging shows that the dates fit, and helps to explain the derivative nature of his early verse. Adams's 'little volume of poems' was 'received' by the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 6 February 1888. Lawson's 'Army of the Rear' was published in the *Bulletin* on 12 May (as 'Song of the Outcasts'), and his rousing 'Faces in the Street' on 28 July. He recalled of the former: 'I can't remember writing it or where I got the idea from'.[34]

Armed with the emerging feminist perspectives of the 1980s, Marilyn Lake pushed the case about the Bushman myth harder, and in a different direction. Starting with the claim that 'The *Bulletin* was the most influential exponent of the separatist model of masculinity which lay at the heart of the eulogies to the Bushman',[35] Lake portrays the nationalist myth about the Bushman as homogeneous and dominant, and she then traces the gradual amelioration of its deleterious effects for women through the Harvester Judgement of 1907 and other legal

---

[32]   Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian Legend', *Historical Studies*, 18 (1978), 191–209 [p. 208].
[33]   *Ibid*., p. 202.
[34]   HL, 'A Fragment of Autobiography' (1903–08), in *Autobiographical* 212.
[35]   Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability', p. 118.

measures that would provide incentives for men to become honest, sober and industrious supporters of home and hearth rather than to go on thinking of themselves as still somehow part of Ward's 'nomad tribe', wandering from station to station in search of work in the outback.

To what extent this had been a masculine preference for an irresponsible family-free existence as opposed to an economic necessity caused by the depression of the 1890s remains a complicating factor. The easy attraction of versifying the former because of its airy outdoor freedoms, as opposed to the gloominess of the latter, was always going to skew the literary evidence. But in fact Lawson covered both sides of the case, and in his prose the personal and social costs as well as the consolations in mateship – on the track and elsewhere – are registered, whether in a spirit of compassion or of fun.

In characterising the *Bulletin* Lake's strongest evidence, rhetorically-speaking, comes from the least responsible sources: *Bulletin* cartoons and editorial quips, nearly all of 1886–88, and from simple pounding verse more likely to recirculate clichés, sentimentalities and pieties. The potentially subtler workings of fiction of the period, especially but not only Lawson's, go unconsidered. Lake's broad brush inevitably ignores the finer-grained evidence. For example, 'Henry Lawson, unhappily married, returned again and again in his verse to the pleasures of the "careless roaming life" and the nobility of the love between men encountered on the track'.[36] Lake illustrates this with a quotation from 'The Vagabond', published in the *Bulletin* on 31 August 1895 when Lawson was still a bachelor. The poem, which Lake cites from *Winnowed Verses* in a 1944 reprint (and which therefore speaks to its 1940s moment of production as much as to 1895), is actually about the pleasures of going to sea.

Lake also narrows the *Bulletin* letterpress into a single voice ('The Sydney *Bulletin* liked to believe . . .', 'the *Bulletin* portrayed . . .', 'the masculinist press', 'In the *Bulletin*'s view . . .') when Sylvia Lawson had already demonstrated the multi-voiced cacophony – the 'print circus' –

36   *Ibid*., p. 121.

of the weekly.[37] Lake's typifying remark that 'the "nationalist" school of writers represented the pastoral workers as cultural heroes' is given an erotic intensification when she claims that 'The lone bushman was these writers' love object'.[38] The first claim might be true if either the writers' beliefs could be shown to be identical to one another's and to the *Bulletin*'s, *or* if there were no competition at the time for this gender-ideological push. The late-colonial literary and journalistic marketplace, revealed in cross-section by the early reception of *While the Billy Boils* (explored in Chapters 8 and 11), rules out both alternatives. As for the second claim, in his stories and sketches of the 1890s, it is true that Lawson portrayed, for the men outback, the emotional push and pull of family or girlfriend left behind. But far from being a love object, the 'lone bushman' was usually an eccentric figure of fun or a sad, psychiatric case.

Lawson problematised mateship or placed it in an irretrievable past; he was not its single-minded celebrant. He often reacted against, as he simultaneously explored, an existing set of assumptions about contemporary male behaviours. Tonally subtle and emotionally complex as they often are, his stories and sketches usually resist historical or ideological categorising. Their testimony is more complex.[39]

Kay Schaffer

Kay Schaffer's *Women and the Bush*, published in 1988 and based on a PhD of 1984, was another, more philosophically radical milestone in the feminist argument about the 1890s and its aftermath.[40] Starting

---

[37] *Ibid*., pp. 118, 119, 127, 128. Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox*, 1983 (see Chapter 2 above, pp. 50–2).

[38] Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability', pp. 120, 121.

[39] Cf. Christopher Lee, 'Looking for Mr Backbone: The Politics of Gender in the Work of Henry Lawson', in *The 1890s*, ed. Stewart, pp. 95–108. Lee grants Lake her case too readily, to my mind. But he shows that Lake's case does not apply to HL's subtly balanced, quietly despairing explorations of married life on selection farms in the Joe Wilson stories. If anything, 'Lawson's work endorses the logic of the women, the logic of the *Dawn*, the ideology of the family' (p. 108).

[40] Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); 'The Place of Woman in the Australian Tradition: An Analysis of the Discourse', PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1984 (facsimile from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Mich.).

from the presupposition that we are all 'constituted through a linguistic system of meanings', she offers the book as a study of 'the Australian tradition as a discourse' of national identity that marginalises women by 'reading' them, along with the land, as alien, as the 'other' that frustrates male endeavour to conquer or enclose it. Such 'subject/object operations of Western discourse' undergird 'the masculinity of the cultural order', which ought therefore to be found expressed in the 'definitive texts', as she calls them in her PhD dissertation, of the Australian tradition: by Nettie Palmer, W. H. Hancock, Vance Palmer and Russel Ward.

Accordingly, Lawson is a special focus of her study: not 'the man himself' but rather 'the cultural object, handed down to Australians through commentary and cultural practice'.[41] While it must be clear to any reader of the present book that study of the reception of Lawson's writings can be peculiarly revealing as forming part of the 'life' of the works, the temptation to disconnect them from 'the man himself' is no longer necessary – liberating though it must have been for Schaffer and other feminists to frame their arguments solely as discursive critique.

The traditional understandings of 'author' and 'works', confining as they were, needed, I agree, to be burst open: there is more on this topic in Chapter 13. But the move immediately created, for Schaffer, a new other-ing of its own in the explanatory regime she was proposing – discourse on the one hand versus the 'man himself' on the other – even though binary oppositions are consciously identified by her as expressions of the central problem of the Western tradition needing to be exposed and superseded.[42]

Unfortunately, with the new binary went a de-agenting of the individual, a de-privileging of the writing event and the publication event, and a floating temporality for the newly revealed 'discourse'. This condition has, since Schaffer's book appeared, frequently proved to be the case with discursive critique. We employ it because it lends

---

[41]   Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, pp. 10, 15, 111, 112; 'The Place of Woman', pp. 13, 39.
[42]   See the list of binary oppositions under the headings 'Typical Australian' and 'Other': Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, pp. 19–20.

argumentation a generalising sweep and rhetorical power. But insofar as it abandons the field of the empirically verifiable, of which chronology and agency are key vectors, discourse analysis encourages evidential shortcuts and sometimes only gestural argument.

For Schaffer to take this route was to grant as historically accurate whatever claims were made in Lawson's name about 'the man himself', since his status was now reduced to that of 'cultural object', at each and every critic's pleasure. The historical slide in phrases such as 'the bushman-cum-digger'[43] shows Schaffer's basic acceptance of Ward's historical case, even as she reached for a more fundamental ground on which to revaluate its meanings and implications. This retreat into a historical naivety is remarkable now, in hindsight: even though it seemed to many at the time like a fearless breakthrough.

The problem is now, rather, how are the two domains, the discursive and the empirical, to be brought into productive relationship? Chapter 13 addresses this question more directly as one of literary methodology. What may, perhaps, already be claimed is that book-historical and bibliographic methodologies that do not lose touch with agented events and material forms but try to answer the questions that they raise have the capacity to reveal the cultural indexing that long-lived literary works always perform.

What indexing may be drawn from the preceding discussion? First, there are bibliographic-sociological implications. If, as I suggested at the beginning of Chapter 10, there is a heterochronic moment of writing for the individual author so can there be one for a social myth. The 1950s – the period in which Ward came into his own as a historian – saw a concerted effort to collect the ballads of colonial Australia, many of which, as Ward's bibliography shows, provided his primary source material (and that of his friend Vance Palmer too). Ward overlooked the moment of their collection. He had eyes only for their content. There had been an effort of collection and publication of colonial ballads and songs

43   *Ibid.*, p. 115.

in the 1860s (four collections, including the *Queenslanders' New Colonial Camp Fire Song Book* and those by George Chanson and by Alexander Forbes); an increased number in the 1880s probably attributable to the Centenary celebrations in 1888 (six, including *Tibb's Popular Australian Songs and Poems*; the *'Native Companion' Songster* and two of Douglas Sladen's collections published in London). There was a falling-off of publishing interest in the 1890s (just as there had been in the 1870s), until Banjo Paterson notably contributed his reworked *Old Bush Songs* (1905), one of four collections in the 1900s decade. Thereafter there was another lull until the 1950s when at least nineteen were published (e.g. the collections by Hugh Anderson, Vance Palmer and Margaret Sutherland, Douglas Stewart and Nancy Keesing, Bill Wannan, John Manifold, John Meredith, and Marjorie Pizer).[44] This trend continued, decade by decade, peaking in the 1980s, probably again associated with national celebrations, this time the Bicentenary.

The postwar development was paralleled by a similar pattern, beginning slightly earlier, in the collection and publication of bushranging tales and also of a new mythologising of Ned Kelly in print and paint.[45] Regathering the colonial heritage, in its intertwined

[44]   These (provisional) figures – which exclude single-author collections of poetry, some of which included verse in ballad form – derive from a search of the NLA catalogue using Library of Congress subject headings relating to ballads, and checked against the AUSTLIT database ('anthologies of poetry': it does not distinguish poetic forms) and bibliographies in published collections of ballads and monographs on ballads. A more thorough search might discover more. Nevertheless, the relativities by decade are striking, as is the fact that the 1890s decade does not stand out: 1860s (4 collections), 1870s (1), 1880s (6), 1890s (2), 1900s (4), 1910s (2), 1920s (2), 1930s (2), 1940s (2), 1950s (19).

[45]   My study of the publishing history of *Robbery Under Arms* and of Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter (and the various adaptations of his story) shows they followed the same pattern. See Eggert, 'The Bibliographic Life of an Australian Classic: *Robbery Under Arms*', *Script & Print*, 29 (2005), 73–92; this article supplements the account in the Introduction to the Academy Edition of *Robbery Under Arms*, ed. Paul Eggert and Elizabeth Webby (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2005). See also Eggert: 'Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*' and 'New Life for the Colonial Classic *Robbery Under Arms*' in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia,* vol. 3 *1946–2004*, ed. Craig Munro and Robin Sheahan-Bright (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), pp. 195–8 and 260–3; 'Textual Criticism and Folklore: The Ned Kelly Story and *Robbery Under Arms*', *Script & Print*, 31 (2007), 69–80; 'The Bushranger's Voice: Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) and Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter (1879)', *College Literature*, 34 (2007), 120–39 and at www.austlit.edu.au in *The AustLit Anthology of Criticism*, ed. Leigh Dale and Linda Hale (2010).

but sometimes conflicting strands, into a contemporary national identity took various forms at this time. For instance, on 17 June 1949 an Australian stamp was issued featuring a bust-portrait of Henry Lawson. The design was based on a drypoint by Lionel Lindsay and included a reproduction of Lawson's signature: 109,252,000 copies were printed and circulated throughout the country. There was no special Lawson anniversary needing to be commemorated in this way in 1949. Rather, he was the fourth of five public figures to be thus honoured. The colonial explorer Thomas Mitchell had been accorded the philatelic guerdon in 1946, the wheat researcher William Farrer and colonial botanist Ferdinand von Mueller in 1948. The explorer and first premier of Western Australia throughout the 1890s, Sir John Forrest, would be the last in 1949. The fact that all these designs were issued on stamps at the ordinary letter rate (2 1/2 d.) guaranteed them the widest distribution.

Yet a further indicator that Ward, while attributing his Australian Legend to the 1890s, was a good deal wide of the mark chronologically is provided by economic statistics. If income can be regarded as a proxy indicator of the 'egalitarian collectivism' he claimed was at the heart of the tradition then he definitely mistook the relevant decade. Income disparity between the richest and poorest Australians reduced markedly in the 1940s and 50s from what it had been earlier in the century (and very probably in the 1890s). The income disparity kept reducing, reaching its lowest point in 1980;[46] and, by then (appropriately for a re-dating of the Legend),

---

[46]   This is according to the Federal politician and former academic economist, Andrew Leigh in a speech given to the Sydney Institute on 1 May 2012, and partly based on his studies of the historical series of records of Australian and New Zealand annual taxation returns: e.g. Anthony B. Atkinson and Andrew Leigh, 'Top Incomes in New Zealand 1921–2005: Understanding the Effects of Marginal Tax Rates, Migration Threat and the Macroeconomy', *Review of Income and Wealth*, 54 (2007), 149–65.

In the 1910s and 1920s, the richest 1 percent of Australians had 12 percent of national income – 12 times their proportionate share. By the mid-1950s, this was down to 8 percent. By 1980, it was down to 5 percent.

You can see the same pattern if you look further up the distribution, at the richest 0.1 percent – the 1/1000th of Australians with the highest incomes. Back in the 1910s and 1920s, the top 0.1 percent had about 4 percent of household income – 40 times their proportionate share. By the 1950s, this had fallen to 2 percent, and by 1980, it was down to 1 percent. Under the Prime Ministership of Malcolm Fraser, the share of income held by the richest 1/1000th of Australians was only a quarter of what it had been under Billy Hughes.

Lawson's image had been on the Australian ten-dollar note for fourteen years. The disparity has been widening ever since 1980. Appropriately, if a little belatedly for the Legend, Lawson's image was removed in 1993.

These factors and statistics point towards a significant conclusion: that Ward's Australian Legend of the 1890s is more a creation of the twentieth century, and especially of the 1950s. Ward allows that 'A myth, after all, relates to past events, real or imaginary' (194); but he did not see the application to his own writing. Although elements of Ward's Legend were undoubtedly seeded in the more widely literate culture of the 1890s, they did not reach their influential peak until his own decade. And Lawson, especially in his prose, continued to be invoked as its peculiarly important witness.

The feminist historians and commentators needed Ward to be right if his conclusions were to be turned back on him. But in doing so, they strained the evidence unacceptably. One rhetorical closure was effected at the expense of 'blotting out' the other's, while both – understandably for their successive periods – glided over what can only now for the first time be properly appreciated as the book-historical evidence.

So what may we conclude about the nationalists of the 1950s? As I have observed, the slow tide of nationalism that swept through country after country in continental Europe and Scandinavia in the nineteenth century was delayed and differently expressed in settler cultures like Australia's. There were periodic upwellings (the 1890s, and especially strongly in the aftermath of World War II) but also lulls; and then another slow build-up from the 1970s can be discerned in the patterns

The collapse of the super-rich is vividly portrayed in William Rubinstein's book *The All-Time Australian 200 Rich List*. Published in 2004, the list covers the all-time richest 200 Australians, from Samuel Terry to Kerry Packer. The cut-off for inclusion in the book is that you had to have wealth of 0.17 percent of GDP, equivalent to $2.7 billion today.

Because Rubinstein's book covers 200 people and about two centuries, you'd expect an entrant every year or so. But the striking thing is that for four decades, from 1940 to 1980, there wasn't a single Australian wealthy enough to make the all-time rich list. For example, Rubinstein points out that in the 1940s and 1950s, there were probably only a handful of people worth more than £1 million, and no-one worth more than £8 million (the cutoff necessary to make the all-time rich list in 1955).

(www.andrewleigh.com/blog/?p=2521, accessed 6 May 2012)

of Australiana and literary-heritage publishing up until the Australian Bicentennial in 1988, before it was overwhelmed, once again, by the international stylistic influences of the postmodern early 1990s. (This is discussed in the next chapter.)

Reactions against the 1890s, especially from feminist critics in the 1980s, must then be read as having partially missed their target for they too ignored the book-historical framework of the myth-busting in which they were so urgently engaged. Much of what has been called the ethos of the 1890s happened later, and Lawson's fate in the marketplace indexes that cultural unfolding.

The professional postwar literary critics

Just as post-World War II critics found language in which to describe the technical innovation of the first-person vernacular narration of *Robbery Under Arms*, so too did they learn to articulate in more-or-less technical terms some of the achievement of Lawson's prose.[47] Nettie Palmer foreshadowed the change. Her private journal of 1925–39 (published as *Fourteen Years* in 1948) anticipates the postwar swing to a privileged aesthetic sphere and absorbs some of the international influences that would result in the New Criticism of the 1940s and after. She deploys a rhetoric of 'shape and significance', of successful prose fiction being 'like a poem', and of completeness: 'A short story must have its own perfection, or it is nothing. The element of completeness, of art, must enter into it so that it lives as a whole in the mind'.[48] The aesthetic

[47] The New Zealander Frank Sargeson made the interpretative breakthrough with *Robbery Under Arms* in 1950: see the Introduction to the Academy Edition, ed. Eggert and Webby, pp. lxxix–lxxx.

[48] *Fourteen Years: Extracts from a Private Journal 1925–1939* (Melbourne: Meanjin Press, 1948), pp. 22–3. The entry on HL is given as 9 February 1927, but her actual diary entries were selectively reassembled and revised for publication *c.* 1947: see Vivian Smith's Editor's Note in *Nettie Palmer: Her Private Journal 'Fourteen Years', Poems, Reviews and Literary Essays* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988), pp. 2–5. Cf. F. R. Leavis's series of postwar articles in *Scrutiny* considering various novels and novellas as 'dramatic poems' (e.g. in vol. 17 (1950–51) in relation to D. H. Lawrence's *St. Mawr* and *Women in Love*).

H. M. Green's formulations in his *History* often collapsed the distance between HL's style and subject matter (e.g., see pp. 533, 532), but the newly available idea of works as organic wholes lent a support to HL not present in his earlier *Outline*. Cleanth Brooks and Robert