Gender and nation formation in late nineteenth century

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NOTE

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CHAPTER 6

THE REPRESENTATION OF MOTHERHOOD

Introduction
In his reduction of plot to its most "elementary sequence of events", Lotman describes a chain made up of entry into closed space and emergence from it. All acts of entry into closed space—"a cave', 'the grave', 'a house', 'woman'"—are "thought of as mutually identical", he says.\(^1\) The problem addressed in this chapter is that of describing this closed space from within. Since 'woman' is at once the embodiment of closed space and its occupant, her experience of this spatial closure cannot be inferred from the journey in which she both represents and dwells within the point of departure and return.\(^2\)

The idea that the home should be a 'haven' was an important element in the ideological formation of the public and domestic domains in the late nineteenth century. The idea of a home as "a world of strife shut out, a world of love shut in" was an insistent theme of popular exhortation and advice. As Kerreen Reiger observes, "the emphasis on the home as a place of rest and expressive relationships was of course more appropriate for men than for women."\(^3\) For women, the responsibility of creating such a milieu entailed, at the very least, a considerable commitment to labour, and a preparedness to place the needs of other family members ahead of their own. And, as this chapter aims to demonstrate, it was a growing concern about the falling birth rate at the close of the nineteenth century that gave rise to criticisms of women who did not bear large numbers of children for being "selfish".

The belief that a "healthy and numerous population" was a "national resource" was not peculiar to Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Population debates, as Anna Davin has argued in her influential essay "Imperialism and Motherhood", were characteristically framed in terms of national or imperial interests.\(^4\) But in Australia, these shifts in ideologies and practices related to motherhood and child-rearing were perceived as having major significance for the emerging nation. Jill Matthews has adopted the term 'population ideology' to describe the "obsession" with the "size, composition and health" of the nation's population from the 1890s into the early decades of the twentieth century.\(^5\) Population ideology, she says, "was concerned with the supervision and regulation of procreation, migration, mortality, the
level of health, and life expectancy. Implicit in the system of values and programs formed within this ideology was the elevation of motherhood, the education of mothers and the surveillance of their mothering. The woman's responsibility for the well-being of home and family was on one level seen as the *quid pro quo* of the husband's responsibilities in the public arena. Increasingly from the 1890s into the twentieth century, the mutuality of this division of responsibilities and labour was eroded as the model of breadwinner husband-dependent wife took root. On another level, the homemaker became increasingly accountable to the state for the proper exercise of her duties. State and public institutional intervention in the affairs of the domestic domain were to be a feature of the newly emerging nation. As the conditions of motherhood changed, women responded actively in ways that sought to contribute to the ideal of motherhood and the practices of mothering. Motherhood and child-rearing lay at the centre of concerns and platforms of late nineteenth century feminism.

The opacity of the home to outside observers was a problem not only of representation, but also of surveillance, as the activities within were increasingly seen to be 'of public concern'. This, however, presented a difficulty for the inclusion of women in narratives of nation. On the one hand, they were more 'visible' outside the home, but this visibility implied their dislocation and therefore social disorder. On the other hand, their occupancy of the domestic domain suggested social stability and order, but at the cost of the inaccessibility to scrutiny of their activities. Though women themselves appeared to be seeking greater access to the public domain, the resolution of the dilemma by state and public institutions generally favoured their retention in a domestic environment rendered transparent to the institutional gaze and porous to public intervention.

**Motherhood**

In bush mythology, the representation of women as mothers, particularly as young mothers, articulates the division of labour between men and women which was regarded as both natural and proper. The resolution of the tensions implicit in the representation of women's labour outside the domestic sphere (discussed in Chapter 4) is achieved through the mythic transformation of physical labour into child-bearing. Through this transformation, women's labour could be celebrated as their contribution to the nation. Thus, it is with motherhood that the insistence on the separation of domestic and public domains is most unambiguously expressed: as mothers, women are almost invariably represented within the home. The containment of domestic space is integral to the depiction of motherhood, but, this chapter argues, the idea of motherhood remains ambivalent and unresolved.
Historically, the crystallisation of the representation of woman as mother coincided with the greater ability of men to support families, the attempts to restrict women's participation in the paid workforce, and the reorganisation of the domestic sphere. Female employment opportunities, which had expanded in the 1880s, were under notice by the 1890s. Whilst many of the institutional measures to consolidate the norm of the family consisting of a male breadwinner and an unemployed housekeeping wife and mother occurred in the early years of the twentieth century, the mythical images through which this family was imaginatively formed were shaped in preceding decades and coexisted with other competing and complementary images of women. Women's relationship to the nation shifted over this period from an extension of their relationship to their husbands to their role as mothers of the nation's future sons and, ambiguously, daughters. Increasingly, it became difficult to represent women within narratives of nation except as mothers.

Motherhood domesticates women, binding them to their proper sphere. In Baynton's story "The Chosen Vessel" and in McCubbin's painting *Home Again*, discussed in the previous chapter, the presence of young babies is a significant element in the depiction of young wives. In both cases the immobilisation of the woman in the 'besieged' home can be read as a consequence of her maternity, and the presence of the baby appears to enhance rather than diminish her sense of aloneness and vulnerability.

In "The Chosen Vessel", the bonding of the cow to her tethered calf serves as a metaphor for the constriction of the young mother's mobility:

She laid the stick and her baby on the grass while she untied the rope that tethered the calf. The length of rope separated them. The cow was near the calf, and both were lying down. Feed along the creek was plentiful, and every day she found a fresh place to tether it, since tether it she must, for if she did not, it would stray with the cow out onto the plain.

The cow would stray and the woman could pursue her out onto the plain, if it were not for the calf and for her own baby. Baynton's story explores the consequences of the binding of the woman in motherhood to the baby, and her inability to save herself from the intruder swagman who rapes and murders her is integrally tied to her motherhood. A. A. Phillips' confident assertion that the theme of "fierce power of the maternal instinct" "saves Barbara Baynton's work from the final effect of pessimism, despite the grimness of her tone" misses the point of Baynton's handling of the maternal theme.

In McCubbin's *Home Again* (Plate 17), the young woman, presuming her husband to be dead, supports herself and her infant by taking in laundry. If it were not for the
child, perhaps she might have found employment outside the home. But since she is a mother, she is bound to the home and consequently must accept the poorer pay and more vulnerable conditions attached to domestic outwork. The visual image constructs the circumstances under which women would be bound to the home. Whilst the incursions of women into the public sphere, and particularly into paid employment could seem problematic, the notion of a young mother, recently widowed and certainly respectable, taking in appropriate work, could be seen to be quite heroic. Although the baby's presence indicates the seriousness of her plight and the great restrictions on her options for employment, there is no visual sign of a bond between them that might alleviate the young wife's aloneness. The depiction of women's plight in terms of widowhood detracts attention from the issues of destitution resulting from desertion and the economic dependency of women. Widowhood was a common enough experience for both men and women, but the poverty that a widow with young children faced was the consequence of social not natural circumstances. Thus, although impoverished by her husband's absence, the painting suggests that the social order is intact.

The representation of gendered interior space

In the bush mythology, domestic space was constituted as a "known unknown location", to use Lennard Davis' term. Domestic space was known, in the sense that it was taken for granted, and assumed to be constant, a still point in a dynamic world. It was unknown in the sense that it was defined as women's place and the ways in which women constructed their lives in that space were opaque to the masculine observer.

The visual representation of domestic space in the narrative paintings in which a central figure is that of the young mother, positions the viewer outside the frame which encloses the space of the painting. Like McCubbin's Home Again (1884), John Longstaff's Breaking the News (1887) (Plate 18) and Aby Alston's Flood Sufferings (1890) (Plate 19) employ a number of devices for rendering the domestic space. Shallow depth, coupled with a wide view of the room, gives it the appearance of a stage, and renders it strangely one-dimensional. The walls, with their panels of dark and light suggest a backdrop rather than adding depth to the space of the painting. There are signs of feminine occupancy. In Breaking the News, the table is set and the plates are warming on the stove. The Australasian Sketcher, 12 July 1887, infers the story of domestic well-being:
The table is laid for the evening meal. The young wife takes pride in the neatness of her modest home, as shown by the little surroundings. We imagine her, with her infant in her arms, sitting by the fire as she prepares the husband's dinner.\(^{19}\)

The woman's actions described here are familiar and yet give the impression of being slightly out of focus. The suggestion that she was simultaneously preparing her husband's dinner, holding her infant, and sitting by the fire, table laid, waiting for her husband's return, has a tranquil quality that throws the emphasis on the waiting, rather than the labour. It implies a masculine observer who is not familiar with the complicated and active process of juggling saucepans and babies, but who perceives the home as a stage tableau waiting for the central character to bring it all to life with his arrival. Further, the implication that the miner will come in and straight away sit down to the evening meal suggests a lack of familiarity with the lives of mining families. The use of realism in the treatment of the narrative connotes a universality of what is in fact a bourgeois expectation of female domestic labour. The work of women in mining communities was certainly more arduous, but also more central to the support of the income-earner than is implicit in this painting. Winifred Mitchell tells us that the miner arrived home "expecting to find the stove well alight, and before it the great tub of hot water in which, with his wife's help, he would remove the coal dust grimed into his skin; it was impossible to clean the back without aid."\(^{20}\) Miners came home to a bath and women spent a good part of the day getting the water hot.

The setting for each of these works is not, in fact, the space in which women construct their lives, but space in which men are at home. The table set for dinner, the fireplace, the space just inside the door: these are the spaces of leisure and comfort. (McCubbin's \textit{Winter Evening, Hawthorn} (1886) (Plate 20) depicts the home-coming of a working man, and suggests the anticipation of the evening meal, homely comfort and well-earned leisure.) The spaces of cooking, cleaning, washing are off-stage, except in the case of \textit{Home Again}. Here the ironing in front of the fire displaces the husband, confirming his absence. The viewer's realisation that the sheet will be scorched if she does not lift the iron, coupled with the frozen quality of the tableaux, and in conjunction with the woman's introspective, protective and vulnerable pose, makes this an ambiguous and ambivalent image. The orderliness of the arrangements of objects suggests housework as her only activity. The husband's dramatic entrance suggests that his presence will bring the home alive. The reversal of this is suggested in the cluttered cupboard top in \textit{Breaking the News}. Wine bottles, cup, newspaper, book - these signs of masculine leisure make the place look "lived in". Norman Bryson refers to the "iconography of disorderly tables", suggesting that masculine "litter" signals "the male's inability or refusal to harmonise with the domestic space".\(^{21}\) With his death,
20. Frederick McCubbin *Winter Evening, Hawthorn* 1886
   oil on canvas 51 x 76 cm
this slight sense of disorder will be erased and with it, the sense of activity that it imparts. In each of the three paintings, the space is represented as familiarly feminine and yet, there is little sense of the way in which these immobilised women move through that space.

**Interfaces between outside and inside**

If the domestic space is shallow and somber in tone, depth and light are the features of the glimpse through the open door. The open door ruptures the otherwise enclosed interior, giving it a womb-like quality. The view from the inside of the world beyond the home is a framed and partial one; the door, a reminder of the sense of confinement and separation from the world at large that is implicit in these representations of domestic space. The narrative focusses on the implications for the young mother of events that occur outside her domain. In each of these works the defences of the home have been breached: by flood, by death as a result of a mining accident represented as a "natural disaster", and, in the case of *Home Again*, by firstly the assumed death and then by the ambiguously depicted return of the intruder-husband. The differences in scale, depth and lighting of the scene outside, glimpsed through the doorway focus attention on what is happening outside. The outside world is glimpsed partially through the doorway, as though we too see the world from the inside looking out. The relationship between interior and exterior space constructed in these paintings focusses attention on the interface which the doorway creates.

A very different treatment of space is found in other late nineteenth century works. For example, some paintings of shearing sheds depict interior views of masculine space, and make an interesting comparison with the domestic interiors. In Tom Roberts' *Shearing the Rams* (1890) (Plate 22), and *The Golden Fleece* (1894) and R. Godfrey Rivers' *A Woolshed* (1890), the viewer is positioned within the picture space, which is characterised by depth. The outside, still framed by windows and doors, is more expansive, and throws light into the shed. The landscape is not the scene of action. It is the men's labour in the shed that is the focus of narrative attention.

The interest of the impressionist painters was shifting from the depiction of interior space to *plein air* landscape painting, and the sense of vision correspondingly expanded. Bush huts became a sign of the fruits of "strong masculine labour", of the domestication of the land. The hut could then be represented from outside, and was frequently placed in the background. A smudge of smoke was sufficient indication of the life within the home and the comfort awaiting the home-comer. The interface between the domestic interior and the world beyond was no longer a central device in these works. The lives of men could be represented as autonomous of women but the
lives of women were seen from the point of view of men, and as dependent on the events of the world beyond the home.

Although in literary works, the devices for the representation of space are different from those used in painting, the relationship between the inside and the outside remains central to the construction of gendered space in the bush stories. In the literature of the bush mythology the reader is generally positioned with the implicitly or explicitly masculine narrator. The reader follows the narrator as he observes the house from outside and crosses the threshold to come inside. Writers' like Lawson situate bushwomen in much greater poverty, isolation and hardship than the painters envisage. The huts in the bush literature are frequently rough-built. The cracks between the timber slabs of the walls convey a powerful impression of restricted vision, inadequate protection and entrapment. In "The Drover's Wife", the snake which goes under the house, "may at any moment come up through the cracks in the rough slab floor". Through the night, the woman waits for the snake, watching for it, and listening for its movements.

From time to time she glances round the floor and wall-plate, and whenever she hears a noise she reaches for the stick. The thunderstorm comes on, and the wind, rushing through the cracks in the slab wall, threatens to blow out her candle... At every flash of lightning, the cracks between the slabs gleam like polished silver.

The snake, when it is caught, is literally half in and half out. Having emerged two feet into the kitchen, it realises the danger and "sticks his head in through the crack on the other side of the slab, and hurries to get his tail round after him".

The huts in Baynton's stories, "Scrammy 'And", "The Chosen Vessel" and "Squeaker's Mate", all enclose a feminine or feminised character who looks out, through cracks in the wall and through the door at her assailant. This activity of looking and listening for the threatening intruder outside, who is, in turn, looking and listening for movement inside, is the basis of the suspense that builds up in Baynton's stories. As in the paintings, the ability to make sense of what is happening on the other side of the wall is frustrated by obscured vision and a straining to hear the faintest of sounds.

In "Scrammy 'And", the dog and the old man listen for the telltale sounds of the thief outside. But it is not only those confined within who must piece together the outside world from incomplete fragments of vision and hearing. The man outside strains to see and hear what is happening behind the walls.
Warder growling savagely went along the back wall of the hut, and despite the semi-darkness his eyes scintillating with menace through the cracks, drove from them a crouching figure who turned hastily to grip the axe near the myall logs.27

Those outside must rely on obscured vision and impaired hearing to make sense of domestic activities. Only some of the sounds and sights of the interior can be rendered meaningful. Meaning must be constructed within discursive frameworks which allow only partial and fragmented access to the interior. Yet, this process of constructing meaning represses the recognition of its partiality and incompleteness. In the paintings described earlier, the living space of the hut functions as a metonym for the domestic space. But this obscures the limited extent to which women's labour within the home can be inferred from the representation.

It is significant that some historical accounts suggest that women may have seen the threshold that marks the interface between public and domestic space as part of their domain, and as providing access to and a view of the world outside. Ellen Ross tells of working-class women in London before World War 1 marking out in white circles, squares or oblong shapes outside their front doors "to extend their turf just a bit beyond their own four walls". "Clean steps, sidewalks, windowsill, hearths and so on, the work of wives or children, were physical outlines of women's space in households and streets."28 Fiona Giles suggests that in late nineteenth century Australian women's writing, the verandah served a similar function. The verandah, she says, is a "special place in relation to the garden, the house, and the world beyond, of the bush, farm or city.... The verandah extends the domestic into social life; it is marginal to both, but through the fiction becomes central, mediating between private and public worlds, and breaking down the division between them."29

Representations of mothering
This construction of gender through spatiality is crucial to an understanding of the representation of mothers in the bush mythology. The positioning of the reader or viewer is implicitly a masculine one, and consequently the representation of the mother is shaped in response to a male, bourgeois point of view. In "The Drover's Wife", Lawson tells us:

She loves her children, but has no time to show it. She seems harsh to them. Her surroundings are not favourable to the development of the "womanly" or sentimental side of nature.30

At another level, the whole story can be read as a demonstration of her construction of her own motherhood. Lawson is commenting ironically on the absence of expected
articulations of motherhood in time-consuming displays of the sentiments of love. But the concept of motherhood in Lawson's story is not a coherent and resolved ideal against which the Drover's Wife's practices are measured. On the one hand, the Drover's Wife is an image of an heroic mother whose mothering is shaped by the immense hardship that the protection and survival of her children entails. On the other hand, the poignant sense of the woman's "spiritual exhaustion" is implicit in the dissolution of her "womanly" mothering. The text shifts between an expression of a middle class ideology of motherhood and an alternative and resistant construction of what it means to be a mother. (Frank Mahony's illustration of the final moment of the story, by contrast, suggests a very sentimental view of the mother-son relationship (Illustration 3).

In the late nineteenth century, bourgeois observers sought to comprehend the apparently disordered lives of working class families by forming an imaginative grid through which working class practices were interpreted and judged. Categories such as respectability, domesticity, hygiene, dependency and sexual morality were fixed points in the evaluation of mothering practices. In her Sunday ritual bush walks and her unsuccessful prohibition of swearing, the Drover's Wife also adheres to the ideal of the "good mother". But the quality of mechanical repetition to these behaviours suggests her alienation from the social context in which these actions would have been meaningful. It is Lawson's acknowledgement of this imaginative grid that allows his characterisation of the woman as undergoing a loss of those sentiments by which femininity was defined. But, at the same time, the fierce protective mothering that ensures the survival of the family against great odds resists the imposition of the bourgeois grid through which working class mothering practices were evaluated. This resistant alternative feels like bedrock partly because it is the articulation of a more archaic practice. It is subversive because it continues to undermine the efforts of reformers to modernise the relations between child, mother and the institutions of the public order.

In her study of London working-class mothers, Ellen Ross comments that the "relational and sentimental features" of mothering have come to dominate the 'service aspects' of traditional services. She argues that the assumption of a greater emotional investment in modern mothering has emerged because of the failure to understand the meanings "service" carried for working class and poor women in the past. The mothers' domestic work of sewing, cleaning, nursing and especially supplying and preparing food, frequently provided not only their families' only sources of comfort but also their sheer physical survival. As a result, these caring services carried much greater emotional resonance with both mothers and families than is assumed. She suggests that "the deep
Illustration 3: Frank Mahony, The Drover’s Wife (1892)
appreciation of food in a hungry people" helps explain the detailed accounts of domestic activities, such as shopping and cooking, and the "larger-than-life stature of mothers" given in autobiographical accounts of impoverished lives. Similarly, it is the scarcity of food that informs the detailed accounts of the getting of meat, and the preparation and eating of food in Steele Rudd's early selection stories.

In Lawson's story, then, this emotional resonance which defines the meaning of the mother's service-oriented actions can be read as a subversion of the dominant discourse of motherhood also inscribed in the text. However, the story differs from the autobiographical accounts that inform Ellen Ross' study in that it is not the routine domestic activities to which this emotional investment is attached. There is no elaboration of detail to the information that she gives the children some supper, and that she has her sewing basket by her side. But the focus of the night's vigil and of her memories is on her actions to protect the family against dangers that threaten their lives and livelihood. To think of these, she puts down her sewing:

Now and then the bushwoman lays down her work and watches, and listens, and thinks.35

The dangers against which she struggles are associated with the world beyond the hut. Like the paintings, Breaking the News and Flood Sufferings, the disasters are not seen to be consequences of the social order: bushfire, flood, pleuro-pneumonia, crows. The hut is besieged by intruders: swagman, mad bull, and the snake itself. The differentiation of gendered space is integral to the heroism of the woman. She does not extend her domain into the bush beyond the yard, and neither is she successful in her struggle against fire, flood or pleuro-pneumonia. But she repels intruders, protects her family and maintains the integrity of her own sphere. Once again, the domestic space is constructed as a "known unknown location" and her actions within it are eclipsed. As Delys Bird has commented, the narrative celebration of maternal power and influence functions to deny the ambiguities of the woman's life experiences which are the subject of her night's reverie.36 The focus is on the interface between her world and the world at large. Though "she thinks of things in her own life, for there is little else to think of", her reminiscences give little sense of ways in which she might ascribe meaning to the domestic activities on which the family's comfort and sheer physical survival depend.

The unresolved tension in "The Drover's Wife" between incompatible constructions of the meaning of mothering registers a critical moment of uncertainty, and of transition in the relationship between the public and domestic spheres and between the men, women and children within them. This may be taken as the reason for the recurring motifs of
thresholds, doors and cracks in the walls through which men gain access to the interior, unaware of the limitations which render this access partial and obstructed by the imaginative grids they use to make sense of domestic space and activity.

**Experiencing childbirth from outside**

In images of childbirth, however, the threshold becomes the only part of domestic space that is comprehensible and accessible to men. The site of dramatic action is not within where a baby is born, but at the threshold, the boundary between inside and outside. At the moment when women are in labour and give birth, men's access to the domestic sphere is closed off. What has been assumed to be "known" is held in abeyance as all routine domestic labour is assumed to have ceased. Domestic space becomes an "unknown location" which cannot be represented from within. The house becomes a black box, alluring and threatening, but inaccessible and illegible. Men neither observe nor participate in the childbearing, and nor do those inside respond to their home-comings. The babies are born inside, and the exclusion of men from domestic space seems virtually absolute during childbirth.

Readers of the stories are positioned outside, waiting with the presumptively masculine narrator. At the doorstep, the new father crosses, but is then lost to view, or the new baby is brought out by the mid-wife and presented to the father. Consequently, although men appear acutely aware of their exclusion from childbearing, the stories create an inversion, in which it is the mothers who are excluded from representation.

This uneasy sense of male exclusion from childbirth, and its inversion in the exclusion of the mother from the narration of the event, is found in Rudd's "The Night We Watched For Wallabies". The enormous fire that Dad has built inside contrasts with the bitter cold of the night outside, but the boys protests are in vain when Dad insists that they go out to keep the wallabies off the barren paddocks.

Slowly and reluctantly we left that roaring fireside to accompany Dad that bitter night. It was a night!—dark as pitch, silent, forlorn and forbidding, and colder than the busiest morgue.\(^37\)

It is not until the end of the night when the baby is born that the boys realise the meaning of their expulsion from the hut. It is only at this point that the story itself acknowledges the birth which constitutes the absence at the centre of the story. The experience for the boys is one of pain, resentment, futility and anxiety. The land is barren, the night dark, and their useless vigil "was a lonely, wretched occupation".
In Steele Rudd's "Two Cases For A Doctor", the reader is positioned with Uncle, who is left alone outside the hut when Sandy responds to Kate's message—"a flag in the shape of a white skirt flying at the humpy"—by dropping the plough, harnessing the horse, and recklessly driving away to collect the mid-wife.

Uncle stared after Sandy till he became restless, then walked about, now and again pausing to glance at the deserted humpy, where the white shirt was still flying.

Inside the deserted hut, Kate gives birth to a child.

Rudd is unable to account for the childbirth directly but in "Two Cases for the Doctor", he creates an analogy to the childbirth. The story tells of two apparently different episodes when a doctor is needed on Sandy's Selection. In the first case, the male doctor cuts a "cancer" from Uncle's lip. Before the operation, Sandy shaves Uncle's top lip with a razor used for shaving greenhide. The doctor arrives and at Uncle's request, he operates without chloroform, snipping a V-shaped piece from his lip. Though Uncle "submitted himself bravely" to the painful operation, when the doctor tells him that Sandy must shave the area for a second time, tears come to his eyes and he demands chloroform for the shave. Lionel Lindsay's illustration of the operation shows it being performed outside the hut.

This episode is loosely analogous to the one which follows: childbirth is an operation equated with the removal of a painful, though not necessarily malignant, cancer. Since Sandy's solicitous participation in the first episode has exacerbated the pain associated with the operation, it is implied that he would also intensify Kate's pain if he were present at the birth.

Rudd's handling of the analogy suggests his uncertainty and ambivalence about childbirth. On one hand the analogy suggests that giving birth is a comparatively minor operation like the incision in Uncle's lip. On the other hand, the story suggests that men, like Uncle, make a great deal of fuss about very little pain but women undergo a moment of great pain and danger, almost in silence. The crudely comic treatment of Uncle's operation contrasts with the aura of secrecy and mystery which attaches to the image of the deserted hut. The Uncle's operation can be cast in the form of a men's yarn, or tall story, but implicitly, childbirth cannot find expression in this form.
Death and danger in childbirth

If Steele Rudd eclipses the drama of childbirth by focusing on the actions of men, nevertheless the babies are born alive, well and apparently after trouble-free labour. It is Henry Lawson who paints the nightmare picture of a husband who cannot act to save his wife and baby, both of whom die in childbirth. Desperately ill, Ratty Howlett tells of his wife's death many years ago in "No Place For A Woman". He had made arrangements for a doctor and a woman in town to attend Mary's labour, but she "was wrong in her time".

"She was took bad suddenly one night, but it passed off. False alarm. I was going to ride somewhere, but she said to wait until daylight. Someone was sure to pass. She was a brave and sensible girl, but she had a terror of being left alone. It was no place for a woman!"

Howlett's descriptions of his actions reveal his panic, indecision and fear. Unable to actually leave the vicinity of the hut, Howlett watches the road for someone coming. At dusk, when the light fails, he "went down in the hollow and stopped down to get the gap agen the sky". This image of confinement heightens the sense of his inability to act decisively, and through the use of motifs generally associated with female confinement to the domestic sphere, the panic-stricken Howlett is emasculated.

"I'd get on the horse and gallop along towards the town for five miles, but something would drive me back, and then I'd race for fear she'd die before I got to the hut..."

Howlett sends a "black boy" into town for help. For a night and a day and another night he watches desperately for someone to come, paralysed by anxiety, running this way and that, but never inside to Mary.

"It come on about daylight next morning. I ran back'ards and for'ards between the hut and the road like a madman. And no one came. I was running amongst the logs and stumps, and fallin' over them, when I saw a cloud of dust agen sunrise."

Mary's mother and sister arrive at the same time as the doctor and the woman who was to stay.

"They said she was dead. And the child was dead, too. "They blamed me, but I didn't want her to come; it was no place for a woman."

In Lawson's story the isolation is overwhelming; unable to get help, Howlett is beside himself with grief and despair. Nevertheless the motifs are those identified in Rudd's
more optimistic stories: exclusion of the male from the domestic space, the positioning of the narrator and reader outside the house, and the consequent absence of the mother from the story. This baby, however, is never to be carried across the doorstep by midwife or doctor. Ratty Howlett spends the rest of his years compulsively "running down and bailing up travellers". But they can never bring the help that Mary needed in childbirth. It is Howlett himself who, at least in fantasy, brings Mary and the baby daughter back, by maintaining the simulacrum of the domestic life he might have led had Mary lived.

This sense of danger and the possibility of death which men cannot act to forestall underlies these representations of childbirth. Clearly articulated in Lawson's story, the muted sense of danger and dread is implicit in Rudd's stories. The enormous fire in the hut the night they "watched for wallabies" suggests an inferno: Dad "staggered inside with an immense log for the fire", and the family sits "as near to it as we could without burning ourselves". In drawing the parallel between childbirth and the operation on Uncle's lip, Rudd could suggest that both might be "rather painful". This parallel is as close as either author could come to recognising the pain and fear that the women left alone inside the "deserted humpies" might experience in labour.

**Midwifery and female support**

The pain and the insistent fear of death which attends childbirth undermines representation of woman as "the bearer of new life". The muted recognition that her life might be forfeit in childbirth is grounded in the actual experience of maternal mortality in the late nineteenth century. In her study of American women's responses to "death and debility fears" in nineteenth century childbirth, Judith Walzer Leavitt comments that most women seemed to know or know of other women who had died in childbirth, and that one in seventeen men claimed that they had a mother or a sister who had died as a result of childbirth. In Australia, about one in thirty women might be expected to die in childbirth in the 1890s.

Acknowledging that this is a moment of danger, the need for female help in childbirth is emphasised. In spite of the title of the Rudd story, "Two Cases for the Doctor", it is the mid-wife who attends births in the Rudd families. The mid-wives are somewhat incomprehensible to the boys: they "couldn't make out" why Mrs Brown should stay with them. In the *Sandy's Section* stories, the midwives who attend Kate's labour, Mrs McNevin and Mrs Holstein, both speak with heavy accents, which emphasise their foreignness. Their difference underpins the inaccessibility of their knowledge and skill. In "No Place for a Woman", Ratty Howlett says he "thought Mary was wrong in her time".
"We should have had a mother-woman to talk to us." 46

He hopes against hope that Mary's mother, sister or the woman from town, or the doctor, will arrive in time. But it is the "black boy" and the drunken doctor whom he blames for the delay. In Lawson's stories the exclusive magic of women's knowledge about childbirth is further emphasised by the motif of the "black gin". In "The Drover's Wife", the woman was alone, "very weak", and "ill with fever", praying for help.

God sent Black Mary—the "whitest gin" in all the land.47

In "No Place For A Woman", "the old black gin was dead the week before, or Mary would a' bin alright".48 The fiction is not far removed from the experience of at least some Australian women in the nineteenth century. Kaye Saunders and Katie Spearitt comment on the high premium placed on black women's midwifery skills in rural colonial Queensland.49 They cite one woman's account of a friend's labour on an isolated station in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The husband, who had brought in an Aboriginal woman of great experience in delivery, was worriedly "reading up in the medical book what he should do":

But what was happening was quite different from what he was reading; and while I was trying to understand it all, old Fanny just ignored us both and went about with whatever blacks normally did. Arthur kept calling out 'Don't take any notice of that old black fool, this is what the book says'... I was watching Fanny and I thought 'She's brought more picanninies into the world than Arthur White has ever seen.' So I let her go ahead without interfering and everything was all right.50

Childbirth remains the deepest secret of the woman's domain. E. Ann Kaplan comments that "motherhood has been repressed on all levels except that of hypostatization, romanticization, and idealization. Yet women have been struggling with lives as mothers—silently, quietly, often in agony, often in bliss, but always on the periphery of a society that tries to make us all (men and women) forget our mothers." For this reason, she argues, motherhood remains, in part, "unviolated, unable to be penetrated by patriarchy".51

In bush mythology this inaccessibility of childbirth is simultaneously acknowledged and repressed. Babies are born inside the house and men must wait outside. Other women attend the births and present the babies to the men. The mid-wife is the mediator, going between the dark, unknowable recess inside and the doorstep: it is she,
not the mother, who brings the infant to the world inhabited by men. The babies are a sign of the future but the representation of childbirth is unsettled by the recognition of the danger and closeness to death which is the shadow in which the image of new life is formed. Men's response to childbirth is to get help and then to wait with a sense of anxiety and exclusion. At the moment when they become mothers, women are rendered invisible and absent from the narrative. Only through indirect means can their experience of pain, fear and isolation be acknowledged.

"Scrammy 'And"

In "Scrammy 'And", Barbara Baynton's account of the siege of the old shepherd's hut can be read as a substitution for childbirth. The incident is framed by the birth of a child. Where the stories of Rudd and Lawson are told from the point of view of the man who waits anxiously outside, Baynton's story constructs a complex interplay between the terrified figure within, and the terrified adversary without. The old shepherd is left alone with his dog when the man and woman leave the bush for the distant township to have a baby. In the early evening the man and dog, Waterloo, become aware of the threatening presence of the one-handed tramp called "Scrammy 'And", lurking outside. The old man tries to allay his fears by carrying on with habitual repartee and routine evening activities, but his fear pervades the story. Without firm knowledge of Scrammy 'And's whereabouts, the old man treats himself and the dog to the counting of the gold coins which he keeps concealed in his belt. As they become more convinced of their danger, the old man lies down on his bunk and dies. From the terror inside the hut, the narrative now moves outside to the intruder, desperately clinging to an axe, trying to get into the hut to steal the coins, but terrified of the dog. He bashes down the door, which falls across the bunk, concealing the old man's body, which the dog guards. Scrammy 'And climbs onto the bark roof, pulls away a sheet of rotten bark, and swings a pole at the dog through the rafters. He manages to injure the dog, but his support snaps and he hangs by one arm above the bunk on which the door-concealed body lies. The dog pulls him down, the door falls aside, and he confronts the "open eyes set in that bald head", just as the dawn brings light into the hut. The intruder flees. The broken-ribbed dog continues to guard the old man without comprehending his death until the following day. When the man and the woman return with the baby late in the afternoon, the husband goes to check the shepherd's hut. Inside he finds the wild-eyed dog still keeping the blowflies away from his master, a sight he "was not willing she should share".

The woman, the old shepherd and the dog are associated with each other and with the maternal. We learn that "there was a suggestion of the dog in his movements", and, in the dog, "more than a suggestion of his master". The man talks to the dog as though
he were talking with himself, and their intimacy is expressed in word and action. Together they care for the sheep, and protect the lambs. Yet each is both mother and child to the other. The old man feeds the dog meat that he has carefully boned. The dog watches with protective concern as his master succumbs to his death. The absent woman is third point of this maternal triangle, and "the tenderness of her womanhood brought the old man closer to her". He feels that the woman has supplanted him in the man’s affection, and he complains about the "despised woman-worked button" that she has stitched for the hat he has made for the man. "What does 'e care about me an' you, now 'e's got 'er?" he asks the dog and accuses the dog too of switching allegiance. "An' wot's more yer don't bark at 'er like yer used ter!"

"An' wot's more," he continued, "I believe ye'U fool roun' 'er wusser nor ever w'en she comes back with ther baby."

In a sense the woman is a younger version of himself. In spite of his dire forecast that she'll have a girl, he has penned the calf so that there will be milk when they return with the baby. He hand-feeds the lamb of the ewe with barren udders, and his fingers are "lamb-bitten" and sore. The images of the milch cow, the ewe with "blanky blind udder" and his hand-feeding of the lamb all suggest a concern that the woman may not be able to feed the new baby, and that he will be the one who provides milk.

The description of the old man opening the stitching of his belt to spill out his gold coins is suggestive of childbirth:

Then together they closed the door, spread a kangaroo skin on the floor, and put a slush lamp where the light fell on it. The man sat down, so did War, took off his belt, turned it carefully, tenderly, and opened his knife to cut the stitching. This was a tedious process, for it was wax thread, and had been crossed and recrossed. Then came the chink of the coins falling.

Hearing the noise of the intruder outside, he thrusts the coins back into the belt.

But round his waist the belt did not go that night. Only its bulk in his life of solitariness could have conceived its hiding place.

Presumably, he wore his belt hidden under his trousers round his loins. The notion of "bulk" and of conception imparts a sexual ambiguity to the shepherd and a suggestion that the belt laden with coins is equated with pregnancy. The faltering obscurity and unusual wording of these two sentences suggests that Baynton is using a metaphor about which there is uncertainty and discomfort. The gold coins can be read also as a
The threat that Scrammy 'And poses is a multiple one. He has killed a lamb, and has stolen the milk from the cow. He wants to steal the coins, and in order to do so, intends to kill the shepherd, and to distract the dog by unpenning the sheep, so that "dingoes would come up from the creek to worry the lambs." His stumbling over the lamb's feeding-pan reminds us that the lamb will be at risk if the shepherd does not feed it. Metaphorically, his plan to steal the coins can be read as his intention to steal the child, and this theft is cast as an act of sexual violation. We are told that the night "seemed pregnant with eyes", he began to feel "impotently frenzied" in the fear of daylight breaking, his "body stiffened with determination", and "unconsciously he felt this stiffened beard". His handling of the axe, and the breach of the defences of the hut by breaking its door and roof again constitutes an image of rape and of his intrusion into domestic space.

Baynton's treatment of the maternal not only affirms its fierce power, but also demonstrates constraints on the actions of the mother (even when needed to save her life) that are the consequence of maternity. The dog cannot leave the master and is vulnerable to attack because he seeks to protect the old man. The old man is trapped inside the hut and dies of fear on his bunk. The 'natural' mothers, in "The Chosen Vessel" and in "Scrammy 'And", here represented by the old man and the dog, are rendered passive, vulnerable and trapped within the domestic sphere as a consequence of their motherhood. It is the 'unnatural' mother, the ewe with the blind udder, who finally teaches her lamb to drink water from the creek, and "they crossed to tender grass in the billabong, then joined the flock for the first time." With this image of the "unashamed, silent mother", Baynton contests the conventional notions of motherhood, for though the "undemonstrative" ewe is unable to feed the lamb herself, she has ensured its survival by breaking the confines of domesticity.

Like the other bush writers, Baynton does not deal directly with childbirth from the point of view of the mother. But it is possible to read "Scrammy 'And", in the context of the other bush stories, particularly those of Lawson and Rudd, as a vivid metaphoric treatment of childbirth, which explores the experience of both the woman giving birth in the hut, and the man excluded from the event.
Women's 'selfishness' and the decline in the birth rate

Concurrently with this transition of the representation of women as mothers, around the turn of the century a shift in the idea of the child was occurring. In fact, as Marianne Hirsch has argued, the focus of the ideology of the maternal was not the mother but the child. In nationalist and imperialist discourse, the child was seen as a "national resource". As "an asset of the State, related to the State, a child of the State, a member of the community", the child was no longer the offspring and responsibility only of parents. Public alarm was expressed at the consequences for the nation of the decline in the white birth rate and the high infant mortality. Women began to bear the brunt of the blame for their unwillingness to raise large families and for mothering practices which were seen to jeopardise the lives of their infants. Consequently, the representation of motherhood is inscribed with anxiety about the welfare of the infant and the undermining of the "national strength" inferred from the drop in the birth rate.

The actions of women to control their experience of reproduction and maternity were profoundly disturbing and controversial in the public sphere. That the decline in the white birth rate was a matter of considerable public debate is evident from a number of public enquiries, and most notably the NSW Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth-Rate (1903). The Royal Commission reported four reasons for limiting family size:

i. An unwillingness to submit to the strain and worry of children;
ii. A dislike of the interference with pleasure and comfort involved in child-bearing and child-rearing;
iii. A desire to avoid the actual physical discomfort of gestation, parturition, and lactation; and
iv. A love of luxury and of social pleasures, which is increasing.

In short, the Commission concluded, the reasons given for family limitation amounted to "selfishness", and specifically the selfishness of women. In the name of the nation and the race, they demanded that "people of today should consider what these facts mean for the future". This intersection of the discourses of pro-natalism and nationalism has significant implications for the representation of motherhood in nationalist mythology.

In his poetry, Lawson explicitly intervened in the debates about the birthrate. He supported the pro-natalist position, and his demands for high white fertility are articulated in terms of national and race survival. He too attributed the decline in the birthrate to selfishness, particularly on the part of women.
We must suffer, husband and father, we must suffer, daughter and son,
For the wrong we have taken part in and the wrong that we have seen done.
Let the bride of frivolous fashion, and of ease, be ashamed and dumb,
For I tell you the nations shall rule us who have let their children come!\(^{67}\)

But Lawson also coupled the short-sightedness of birth control with his critique of government policy with respect to immigration, irrigation and employment. In "And the Bairns Will Come", birth control is associated with the selfishness of the "rich and well-to-do".\(^{68}\) But, he suggests, young men, out of work, and their employed sweethearts are in no position to marry and bear children. Poverty has created an inversion of the social order, with men out of work and women working in factories and shops. It is in the interests of the nation that Lawson advances a pro-natalist position. In his articulation of national needs, Lawson combines a critique of the political, economic and social order with pro-natalism. The representation of Australia as the mother of her children eclipses the participation of women as mothers. Women are castigated for their reluctance to bear Australia's children:

Don't you hear Australia calling for her children unconceived?
Don't you hear them calling to her while her heart is very grieved?\(^{69}\)

Those who did not support the pro-natalist position were, in Lawson's view, disqualified from expressing concern about the welfare of children generally. Yet, in his early writing, Lawson could support the suffrage campaign in terms of the protection of children, arguing for the need for women to extend their domestic and nurturing role into the public sphere through the exercise of political power. In 1891 Henry Lawson published "The Helpless Mothers" in the Dawn. Lawson decried the powerlessness of mothers to protect sons from "Halls of Vice", and prevent "the sacrifice of the daughter's soul to lust". He talked of the destitution of families dependant on drunkard husbands and advocated, as at least a part solution, the women's vote:

We'll know the worth of a purer youth
When women rule with men,
For love of virtue and peace and truth
Shall save the world again.\(^{70}\)
Over the decade Lawson changed his treatment of women’s political activism to express a view that results not only from his personal career and relationships with women, but also from a broader cultural hardening towards women’s role within the nation. Lawson characterises feminists through a number of recurring motifs. Amongst these motifs are the accusations that the women were childless, and that this was incompatible with their professed concern for the well-being of children and girls. Because the poems appear to express very extreme sentiments, it is worth noting that they were published, and that these views were not too far removed from the conclusions of the Mackellar Commission on the Decline of the Birth-Rate in NSW.

There are some who never have had a child or a girl about the place,  
Who'd rush into print, with a letter wild, for a lane-brat's dirty face.  
Neglected children! and Brutal Men! and Young Unprotected Girls!  
Are the cries of the Awful Neglected Hen—and that is the way it whirls.71

Lawson is contributing to the shaping of a nationalist discourse in which feminists have "never a thought for their country's sake".72 Up till the late 1880s and early 1890s, child-bearing and rearing were seen to be "women's work", and Lawson supported the argument for granting women the resources and power they needed to discharge their responsibility for the care of children. Over the decade of the 1890s, women's practices of birth control and family limitation became public knowledge, and men began to formulate a role for themselves in controlling reproduction. Responsibility for pregnancy and birth was assumed by the state, and by the men who dominated the police force, the judiciary and the medical profession.73 This masculinist intervention in reproduction was legitimated in terms of the national interest and the shift in Lawson's position reflects this intersection of pro-natalism and nationalism. Thus, Lawson calls on "the men who made Australia"—the bushmen—to "see that your daughters have children, and see that Australia is home."74

Infant mortality
Public alarm was not focussed only on the decline in the white birth rate. Concern with infant mortality escalated as it became clear that the trend towards smaller families was irreversible. Infant death was a common experience, with 14% of babies born in the 1890s dying before the age of one.75 A slight rise in infant mortality from the 1880s to the 1890s was viewed with considerable public concern. In nationalist discourse, the image of the child and of childbirth as signifying the continuity of life and the young nation is unsettled by the muted acknowledgement of the insistent possibility of child mortality.
The fear of infant mortality finds expression in the bush stories. In Steele Rudd's "Kate's Babies", Dad's response to the birth of triplets is "I s'pose it's better than losin' one." In a later story, Lily mentions the death of a baby in her letter to her mother:

The day before it took sick there was nothing whatever the matter with it, but it took convulsions, and before Mr Pills could get enough hot water to put it in the poor little thing was dead. It was Mrs Pill's first baby too, and everyone about is so sorry over it.

In "The Drover's Wife" the woman recalls that "one of her children died while she was here alone" and that "she rode nineteen miles for assistance, carrying the dead child". These accounts are one step removed, remembered or retold, but the experience of the death of infants was both common and painful enough to cast its shadow across the bush mythology.

Whilst the death of some infants had in the past been seen as inevitable, now there was a growing concern to prevent these deaths. The population debate shifted ground, away from concern about the declining birth rate to focus on the means of preserving infant life. Infant life and child health became matters of public concern. Once again, mothers were frequently held accountable for infant death and the failure of infants to "thrive". Wide-ranging public interventions, legislation and reforms were introduced to promote infant welfare, and to transform women's traditional childcare practices. Whether the result of neglect or ignorance, deficiencies in mothering cried out for redress.

The child in the public domain
The representation of motherhood, then, was deeply problematic. On one hand, women were insistently represented as mothers in the bush mythology. On the other hand, this representation was inscribed with a certain lack of confidence in their mothering practices. In the society itself, medical and welfare networks combined support with surveillance, instruction and control to effectively supervise mothering, "rescuing" children whose mothers were lacking the moral qualifications for rearing Australia's children. However, in the world of imagination, the notion of "separate spheres" worked against the construction of an image of "supervised motherhood".

Finding visual and literary images for representation of the child as the responsibility of men was difficult to achieve. They were liable to undermine the representation of motherhood, the spatial differentiation central to the construction of gender difference,
and the articulation of the journey motif, in narratives of nation. That men might share the domestic interior with women and children appears to have been difficult to imagine, partly for the reasons already discussed in this thesis. If the child was to be imagined in the care of fathers, then the child would have to be placed outside the home.

One alternative was to bring both mother and child out into the world of men. This could be represented in the context of natural disaster and hardship, against which men battle to protect their families. In paintings like McCubbin's *The North Wind* (1891) (Plate 21) and Longstaff's *Gippsland Sunday Night, February 20 1898* (1898), the image of women clasping babies to their breasts in the face of searing heat, drought, bushfire and flood underscores the heroic struggle of men to protect their families and their property.

Aby Alston's *Flood Sufferings* (1890) associates protection and safety of mother and child with their evacuation from the home. As flood waters swirl through the humble room, a young mother cradling her tiny infant is carried on a makeshift stretcher by two stalwart men, out of the house, into the rain towards the waiting vehicle. The baby is tiny enough, and the woman invalid enough to warrant the conclusion that the mother has given birth to the child in the midst of the flood. Outside the door, waiting anxiously is another woman, perhaps the mid-wife. One of the stretcher-bearers, perhaps the father, looks solicitously down. Behind the carriage, the misty grey sky has cleared to pale gold. The mid-wife stands on the other side of the threshold, ushering the infant into the world. The domestic sphere is no longer seen to be a safe haven. The men seek to secure and protect the child and the mother. Metaphorically, this shift is represented in the image of bringing the child out into the public sphere.

The images of women and children protected by men rob the women of their capacity to act. The women and their infants are carried in vehicles and on stretchers, with arms entangled in baby clothes. Though they are not confined within domestic space, their capacity for action is even more circumscribed. They are represented as more dependent and more passive than bushwomen isolated in huts. Their vulnerability is heightened by the sense of homelessness. In McCubbin's painting *The North Wind*, for example, the cart piled high with the family's possessions represents the contraction of domestic space. But the family's movement across the drought-stricken land suggests a destination. When, and if, the family arrives, the gendered spatial segregation of home and the bush beyond the slip-rails will be re-established.
21. Frederick McCubbin *The North Wind* 1891
oil on canvas 91 x 152.7 cm
Homelessness is an image which connotes disorder and disaster. Whilst men cannot imagine themselves within the home, neither can they associate well-being with the obliteration of the home. Their own sphere, exterior space in the journey motif, is defined by its dichotomous opposition to the interior space which is the 'proper place' of women. The completion of the journey rests on the return to the domestic interior. Consequently the restoration of order rests on the re-establishment of the home. Thus, the representation of men protecting women and children out of doors is compatible with the representation of women as mothers, but the absence of spatial differentiation suggests a transient moment of social disorder.

**The father's loss**

An alternative representation of the child as the responsibility of men, one which leaves the domestic world of women intact, is formed by the separation of mother and child. Mothers remain in the home but "motherless" children are brought into the public sphere under the guardianship of fathers.\(^2\)

But the guardianship is by no means depicted as secure. Images of the child in the bush are fraught with anxiety. The recurring motif of the lost child in both visual and literary works furnish poignant examples of the fragility and vulnerability of children in the bush. This motif enjoyed widespread popular and artistic appeal throughout the nineteenth century, and as Leigh Astbury shows, its topical interest lay in the actual disappearances and miraculous rescues of children lost in the bush.\(^3\) But, it is also in the 1890s that the metaphoric potency of the image can be tied to the anxiety about the proliferation of healthy white Australian children.

Although much of the account of the lost children in Lawson's story "The Babies in the Bush" is about the distress of the mother over their disappearance, the final twist of the story focusses on the father's sense of guilt. Walter Head responds to Jack's sympathy by telling of his absence from the search for the children. When the children were lost, he was "beastly drunk in a shanty in the Bush" and the shanty-keeper refused to tell of his whereabouts.

"I could have found those children, Jack. They were mostly new chums and fools about the run, and not one of the three policemen was a Bushman. I knew those scrubs better than any man in the county."\(^4\)

As Andy says later, Walter Head's belief that he was responsible for the children's death ten years earlier, is "the thing that's been killing him ever since."\(^5\) For the father, no comfort can be found in the reconstruction of the event in fantasy: he must
face the knowledge that his wife represses. At the time of the children's death, he was himself in danger of being 'lost', for the 'beastly drunk' can easily lose their way on the journey home.

At the literal and narrative level, the lost child theme finds its topical source in the actual disappearances and rescues of lost children. Another area of topical concern, the newly realised value of the child, the fears for its safety and well-being, the controversies, and public interventions to ensure the reproduction of the race finds metaphoric expression in these works. This concern is most clearly articulated in Furphy's account of the death (described in Chapter 3 of this thesis) of Mary O'Halloran in Such Is Life.

Mary O'Halloran, five years old, is described by Tom Collins as her father's companion: "Rory was her guide, philosopher, and crony". The child is inseparable from her father and their mutual love is to the exclusion of the mother. Mrs O'Halloran is described as an embittered woman who "spends her time in a sort of a steady fury". As Collins approaches the neat two-roomed hut, she and the child emerge to meet him. After a brief introduction she goes inside, leaving Collins with the child. He asks her name and as she replies "Mary", her unseen mother also responds:

"She's got no name," remarked the grim voice from the interior.

The child goes inside only when her father does, except once when she goes in to be dressed for bed by her mother; she falls asleep each night cradled in Rory's arms. She is not seen to inhabit domestic space with her mother. The care and rearing of the child is seen as exclusively Rory's responsibility: he dresses her and teaches her to write. She is showing Collins her writing skill when the entrance of her mother "cut short this nonsense". Rory has forbidden his wife to beat her. When the woman comments that not beating children "when they want it" was unheard of, Rory responds with, "You bate hur, an' A'll bate you!" It is the father who determines the manner of child-rearing, though his nurturing and teaching style in other contexts would be seen to be maternal, and her harsh withdrawn relationship, paternal.

Mary dies when she goes in search of her father who has been away for three days mustering sheep. Though she began to show signs of disorientation after the second day of her father's absence, in retelling the story Thompson comments, "Still, the curious thing was that she never took her mother into her confidence, and never seemed to fret."
On the third day, Mary goes missing. Her mother walks twelve miles to raise the alarm and is unable to stand when she arrives at the station. The men searching for the child pick up the sound of Mary's exhausted voice after she had been missing for seventy-two hours. But by the time they reach her, she is dead.

Her heart-broken father prepares to take her for burial in Hay.

"The child's mother wanted to go with them, but Dan refused to allow it, and did so with a harshness that surprised me."^90

It is men who must take responsibility for this child's death.91 Rory, because he loved her and bound her to him with that love which fulfilled the need of his "love-hungered soul", and because he did not prepare her for his absence, left her fearing for his safety. Tom Collins, too, is responsible for the child's death. He had decided not to disturb a swagman whom he believed to be sleeping, and consequently was unwittingly responsible for the death of the exhausted man, blinded by sandy blight and in desperate need of the care and protection from the light that the hut and the woman within could have given him. It was the discovery of this man's body that caused the child to be fearful for her father's safety.

The mother's exclusion is virtually complete. She is outside the charmed circle in which her daughter lived with the father, absent in the search and recovery of the child's body, and forbidden to articulate her grief through ritual in the journey to bury the dead child. Yet Furphy allows enough clues to indicate that it is her point of view that must be repressed if the story is to be given the coherence required by "the correctness of style" which structures the masculine yarn. Thus we perceive her story through cracks, partially obscured, incoherent and framed by another point of view. Whilst the reader's sympathy for the child and the father is actively engaged in the narration, we learn that this nameless woman loved the child, that she cooked and cleaned and sewed, that she was powerless to construct the relationship with her daughter that she sought, that she was unable to stand when she arrived at the station after her twelve mile trek through the bush to raise the search, and that she wanted to accompany the child to its burial. If her alienation from the child is signified by her inability to speak her name, there is a suggestion that this alienation was not of her choosing, but the corollary of the intimacy between father and daughter who fulfilled each others' emotional needs to the exclusion of all others.
Conclusion
In the bush mythology, settling the land is achieved by men traversing and clearing it and women bearing children to inherit it. The division of labour between men and women is articulated in terms of the spatial metaphor that is also imbedded in the journey myth. The notion of men and women occupying their "separate spheres" is an expression of the complementary relationship between them. However, the insistence on spatial segregation and differentiation in the construction of gender sets the terms within which the representation of motherhood is shaped. Whilst mothers are placed under virtual "house-arrest" , the positioning of the implicitly masculine observer renders the domestic interior only partially legible. In consequence the point of view of the mother is excluded and the meanings she might ascribe to her domestic and mothering practices are negated.

Although in the paintings and literature of the 1890s and early 1900s, women's significant contribution to the nation lies in their child-bearing, public concern about birth control and deficient mothering practices undermines the celebration of motherhood. The representation of motherhood is inscribed with a distrust of women as mothers and a desire by men to control child-bearing and rearing. This masculinist intervention in an area previously seen to be women's responsibility is represented in terms of a separation of mother and child. The child is imaginatively shifted into the public sphere, under the protection of the father. With the evacuation of the child, the occupancy of the "deserted" home is suppressed.

2A preliminary version of this argument has been published as Sue Rowley, "Inside the Deserted Hut: The Representation of Motherhood in Bush Mythology", Westerly, no. 4, December 1989, pp. 76-96.
6For discussion of late nineteenth century feminist platforms on motherhood and child-rearing in the USA, see Linda Gordon, "Family Violence, Feminism and Social Control", Feminist Studies, vol. 12, no. 3, Fall 1986, p. 466.

Susan Magarey, *ibid.*, pp. 15-26; Kerreen Reiger, *op. cit.*...


Barbara Baynton, "The Chosen Vessel", in Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson (eds), *Barbara Baynton*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1980, p. 80.


Leigh Astbury discusses the influence of George Folingsby on his students who included Longstaff, McCubbin and Alston; Leigh Astbury, *City Bushmen, The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 36.


23 See for example, Frederick McCubbin, *The Pioneer*, (1904); Tom Roberts, *Evening, when the quiet east flushes faintly at the sun's last look* (1887-8).


26 *ibid.*, p. 243.


31 See, for example, Manning Clark's reference to the heroism of "this bush mum" in Manning Clark, *In Search of Henry Lawson*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1978, p. 52.


33 Ellen Ross, "Labour and Love: Rediscovering London's Working-Class Mothers 1870-1918", in Jane Lewis (ed.), *Labour and Love, Women's Experience of Home*

34Ellen Ross, ibid., p.74.
37Steele Rudd, "The Night We Watched for Wallabies", On Our Selection, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1987, p. 28.
38Steele Rudd, "Two Cases for the Doctor", ibid., p. 259.
39ibid., p. 257.
41ibid.
42ibid.
43ibid.

44Maternal mortality in the 1880s - 1890s was around seven deaths in every 1000 confinements; P. McDonald and P. Quiggin, "LifeCourse Transitions in Victoria in the 1880s", in Patricia Grimshaw, et al (eds), op. cit., p. 67. Although women had begun to restrict the size of their families from the 1880s, women of reproductive age during the 1880s bore between five and seven children; ibid., p. 76. If one mother died for each 143 confinements, and if women bore, on average, five infants, then one in thirty women might be expected to die in childbirth. The rate of maternal mortality based on confinements clearly underestimates deaths connected with pregnancy, abortion, childbirth and post-partum illness.
48Henry Lawson, "No Place for a Woman", ibid., p. 584.
50ibid.
52Barbara Baynton, "Scrammy 'And", op. cit., p. 45.

Barbara Baynton, "Scrammy 'And", op. cit., p. 32-3.

ibid., p. 33.

ibid., p. 37.

Barbara Baynton, "The Chosen Vessel", Barbara Baynton, op. cit., p. 82.

Barbara Baynton, "Scrammy 'And", op. cit., p. 38.

ibid., p. 44.


From the debate on Maternity Allowance Bill, 25 September 1912, cited in Kerreen Reiger, op. cit., p. 110.

Whilst middle class women may have been adopting contraceptive practices, working class women were unlikely to have had access to contraception. Other social practices to avoid childbearing and rearing included infanticide, babyfarming and abortion. Judith Allen, "Octavius Beale Reconsidered: Infanticide, Babyfarming and Abortion in NSW 1880-1939", in Sydney Labour History Group (ed.), What Rough Beast?, op. cit., 1982, pp. 111-129; Lynn Finch and Jon Stratton, "The Australian Working Class and the Practice of Abortion 1880-1939, Journal of Australian Studies, no. 23, November 1988, pp. 45-63.


ibid., p. 220.

ibid.


Lynn Finch and Jon Stratton, op. cit., p. 51.

Henry Lawson, "Australia's Peril", A Fantasy of Man, op. cit., p. 245.
76 Steele Rudd, "Kate's Babies", *op. cit.*, p. 371.
77 Steele Rudd, "Lily's Mother Arrives" *op. cit.*, p. 473.
80 Kerreen Reiger, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
82 See, for example, Henry Lawson, "His Father's Mate", *A Camp-Fire Yarn, op. cit.*, pp. 56-65; and "Brighten's Sister-In-Law", *ibid.*, pp. 708-718.
83 Leigh Astbury, *City Bushmen, op. cit.*, pp. 158-175.
85 *ibid.*
87 *ibid.*, p. 89.
88 *ibid.*, p. 93.
89 *ibid.*, p. 234.
90 *ibid.*, p. 241.
91 Frances Devlin Glass observes that in the case of Mary's and other lost children's deaths, "human agency [is] implicated more systematically than the land itself." (Frances Devlin Glass, "Furphy and the land: the feminine as a metaphor for Landscape", *Westerly*, no. 4, December 1991, p. 41.) Significantly Glass attempts to defend Furphy against the charge of "misogyny" from a feminist perspective. She argues (following Kay Schaffer) that the land is constructed as feminine. She reads in Furphy a "return to pre-phallocentric and matrifocal thinking of his Celtic forebears". (p. 43) However, "the land as feminine" is not the only way in which gender is called into play, and the search for "the feminine" may overlook the nuanced construction of female characters and the ways in which gender is called into play through narration.