Gender and nation formation in late nineteenth century

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NOTE

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22. Tom Roberts *Shearing the Rams* 1890  
oil on canvas (lined onto board) 121.9 x 182.6 cm
CHAPTER 7

MADNESS

Introduction
In the previous chapter, I argued that the most constricted and isolated image of bushwomen is found in the representation of motherhood. In Lawson's writing especially, images of men confined to the domestic domain of the bush hut are invested with femininity, and specifically with the maternal. At the same time, home-bound men are frequently depicted in terms of their eccentricity or madness. Consequently, a significant relationship emerges between their feminine and maternal characterisation, on the one hand, and the representation of madness, on the other. Women's madness is not represented by a corresponding gender-switch, but by an extreme and negative characterisation of femininity or by the loss of gender identity as a form of psychic disintegration.

The differences between male and female expressions of madness allow insight into the construction of gender and madness in late nineteenth century writing, and reflect wider cultural discourses of madness. However, in Lawson's writing in particular, these differences overlay a perception of the bush as partially dissolving structures of meaning based on binary oppositions between such terms as sanity and madness, life and death, male and female, culture and nature. Madness is understood as a strategy adopted by men and women for coping with grief, grinding hardship and despair—a strategy of contracting the mental space within which to live. The constricted space of imagination and refusal of memory involved in this preservation of self represents an attempted repression of the 'real' world which is the site and cause of disintegration.

Feminisation of men in domestic domain
Finding men in a location that is restricted and domestic has implications for their representation, since they are not presented in the framework within which normal masculinity is understood. Difference from the masculine norm, Graeme Turner observes, can indicate victimhood, madness or eccentricity, or "a kind of constitutional unsuitability for communal life". This 'queer' or 'mad' deviation is connoted for such men by their characterisation as 'feminine'. Neither of the 'mad' men in Lawson's stories "No Place for a Woman" and "The Bush Undertaker" travel as 'normal' bushmen do, and they do not belong to the masculine bush community formed through bonds of mateship. They are immobilised, confined, and isolated, as bushwomen are.
Like bushwomen, they provide a point of return to interior space to travellers: Ratty Howlett takes the traveller-narrator back to his hut for mutton stew; the Bush Undertaker takes a corpse home to "get fixed up".

Ratty Howlett, in "No Place For A Woman", provides the most explicit account of the feminisation of madness. He is reputed to be mad, since he "'hatted' and brooded" over his wife's death in childbirth. Howlett invites the traveller-narrator home for dinner, saying "the missus will about have it ready", and offering him hay for the horses. The two-roomed slab hut was built by "a man who had plenty of life and hope in front of him, and for someone else besides himself". But the unfinished 'skilling rooms', overgrown with burrs and nettles, and farm debris indicate the subsequent neglect of the place over many years.

Inside, however, the narrator is confronted by evidence of diligent house-keeping: a clean white tablecloth, brightly polished tin plates, pannikins and jam tins that served as sugar-bowls and salt-cellars, whitewashed walls and fireplace, swept floor and clean sheets of newspaper laid on the slab mantelshelf under the row of biscuit tins that hold the groceries. In the camp-oven, mutton and potatoes are cooking, and the "billies had been scraped, and the lids polished". The narrator concludes that there is "a clean and tidy woman about the place". But of course, there is no woman to keep house. Ratty explains her absence with a comment that she and the daughter must have grown tired of waiting and gone visiting.

Ratty Howlett has obsessively re-enacted his own part in the three days of childbirth labour which ended in the death of Mary and the baby. In his "mania for running down and bailing up travellers", and his watching the horizon, he endlessly repeats his frantic vigil, first performed when he was unable to leave his wife, waiting against hope for help to arrive. He is reputed to keep his horse saddled and bridled, and hung up to the fence, or grazing nearby and whenever he glimpses a traveller approaching in the distance, "he would jump on his horse and make after him". Howlett is always waiting, though no-one might pass by for weeks. The details of his preparation to ride, and the images of movement serve only to underscore the limitations of his mobility.

In his madness, he takes on both overt and covert signs of the feminine. The overt signs in Ratty Howlett are the traces of his diligent, skilful and knowledgeable house-keeping. Nevertheless, Lawson's use of the motif of brightly polished tins in bush huts suggests the obsessive and pathetic housekeeping of "spiritless" bush women. The description of the interior bears much in common with the paintings discussed earlier —*Home Again* and *Breaking the News*. As in those paintings, the interior is
described as a tableaux. The impression of stillness of this initial moment is heightened by Ratty's restlessness in the house. Less explicit indicators of his feminisation lie in his hospitality, his constricted movement beyond the house and the disrepair of the exterior of the hut, suggesting the absence of a man.

Ratty Howlett lives in a world constructed through the more active intervention of his mind to form what others call 'delusions'. His madness lies in his attempt to shape for himself a world that he can live in, even though this entails distancing himself from the shared agreements of the fictional bushmen about the real world, and the implicit collusion of the reader who is drawn in to perceiving Ratty's actions as aberrant. The narrator recalls that Ratty "didn't ask for news, nor seem interested in it". In order for him to sustain his contained domestic world, Ratty Howlett cannot engage with the world in which Mary and the child are so insistently dead. In the 'real' world, dead women do not come back home to live and continue to meet their domestic obligations from which death has released them. Nor do infant girls who died in childbirth return as babes-in-arms and grow into adolescence over the years. But there is no joy for Ratty Howlett in the 'real' world.

It is not only in Lawson's writing that an association of madness with domestic and feminine signifiers is observed in male characters. Indeed, a comparison between two of Steele Rudd's characters—Cranky Jack and old Casey—further illustrates the point. Both Cranky Jack and old Casey are itinerants seeking permanent refuge in the home of the Rudd family. (Rudd uses the fact that neither Cranky Jack nor Casey carry swags to suggest that they are not 'bone fide' travellers. They are wanderers who have chanced across a point of return to interior space.) Cranky Jack is mad, and is identified with Mother, and succeeds in insinuating himself into the Rudd household. Casey is a wily opportunist who attempts to fill the place of the absent Dad, and is evicted on Dad's return.

Cranky Jack's madness and his feminisation are mutually constitutive. Jack's feminisation is suggested through his unpaid semi-domestic labour, and his association with Mother. Like Mother, he works outside the system of labour-wages exchange. Both the 'hiring' and the attempted dismissal of Jack make this abundantly clear. That Dad "engaged him" is suggestive of an ambiguity between employment and anticipation of marriage. Dad is not in a position to fire Jack, and when he tells Jack to go, Jack simply refuses. Dad and the boys go away from the house to work (to pull corn, to chase cockatoos from the neighbour's corn for a shilling, to cut burr, and to mow lucerne). Jack, however, works about the house and is associated with the labour of the household—chopping wood, and sinking post-holes for a milking-yard close to
the house. The fence he builds is within the house-paddock and is associated with milking. Whilst this is not unambiguously 'women's work', bushwomen doing this work would not be represented as 'out of bounds'. Jack's repairs of his clothing similarly suggest an identification with feminine traits. His clothing bears evidence of his diligent, though incompetent, dress-making: his two hats are sewn together, his shirt has been made from a blanket, and his trousers "bore reliable evidence of his industry". In part, our recognition of Cranky Jack's madness lies in his lack of clear identification as man or woman and in his association with Mother Rudd

**Forms of madness in women**

Home-bound and isolated, men like Ratty Howlett, the Bush Undertaker and Cranky Jack are represented as feminised and 'mad'. From the standpoint of masculine sanity, the 'queerness' of women can be taken as read. In this frame of reference, 'normal' women are fundamentally unlike men, but women who deviate from female normality do not thereby approach masculine standards of normality. Madness in men and normality in women are both distanced from constructs of masculine sanity and normality. "It seems clear that we can learn as much about society at particular times by studying those we lock up as those we place on pedestals," writes S. G. Foster with unintended irony. At least in the case of women, the lock-up and the pedestal appear to be not dissimilar places.

Though constructs of gender may appear to depend on polar oppositionality, it is not the case that the poles of masculine and feminine occupy symmetrical relationships to other aspects of the cultures in which they are defined. Though a relationship between madness and feminisation may be observed in men, women's madness is not represented through their 'masculinisation'. Perhaps it would be useful to imagine a scale of cultural value, on which the poles are not masculinity and femininity, but masculinity and the negation of gender, with femininity somewhere in between. To be masculine is to be positioned higher up on this scale of value so that when men lose their footing on this metaphoric scale, they may slip towards femininity. When women slide down the scale, they become even further distanced from masculinity. They may move towards a form of 'extreme' femininity in which valued traits identified with masculinity, such as reason, maturity or autonomy, are increasingly out of reach. Beyond that, they may slip towards the place at which gender loses definition. While to be 'unmanned' frequently carries connotations of feminisation, to be 'unwomanned' suggests the 'loss' of gender. And since gender identity has been understood culturally as integral to human subjectivity, this loss implies the negation of identity, and even of 'personhood'. 
Madness, then, in women may take the form of an over-blown femininity (immobilised, dependent, childlike, emotional), or may verge on the negation of identity itself. Mrs Spicer in "Water Them Geraniums" comes closer to a study of the disintegration of the human subject, imagined in part through the loss of gendered identity. Maggie Head, the woman whose children were lost in the bush in Lawson's story "The Babies in the Bush", offers an example of madness as femininity in the extreme.

The narrator's first impression of Maggie Head is that she is like a "little old woman", but he learns later that she is only thirty seven. Her eyes "were a bit too big and bright for me, and now and again, when she got excited, the white showed all round the pupils—just a little, but a little was enough." If at first impression she seemed elderly, Maggie Head begins to seem childlike at teatime.

She had the figure and movements of a girl, and the impulsiveness and expression too—a womanly girl; but sometimes I fancied there was something very childish about her face and talk.

Jack Ellis' perception of her physical appearance shifts as he acquires greater insight into Maggie's mental state. As Ellis realises that she is mentally unbalanced, he see her physically as more childlike. The expression of her mental state is signalled through her regressive attachment to the notion of fairies in the bush. Maggie Head apparently believes that the fairies took her children to care for them. In the first year after the children were lost, she has fallen apart:

"You see," said Mrs Head, in explanation to me, "at first nothing would drive it out of my head that the children had wandered about until they perished of hunger and thirst in the Bush."

She was "raving mad for months" and her husband Walter sold up the station to take her to Europe for treatment. But finally they settled in Bathurst, with Maggie desperately believing that the fairies would bring the children home "next year". Twice Walter took her to the children's grave in Waverley Cemetery near the sea, and though she would hold it in her mind that the children were dead and buried for a day or so, she would soon turn back to the fairy-story. Maggie sustains her commitment to the fairy-story in preference to acknowledging the truth of her children's death. But the belief in fairies is also associated with childishness, and Maggie has regressed to a child-like woman, whose emotional needs must be managed by adult men, and whose physical needs must be provided by "Auntie". In addition, this regression and exacerbated dependency is associated with femininity. The fantasy which is depicted as
being collectively available for women as a kind of comfort is not available to men. Walter Head can never turn away from the knowledge that his children did indeed die of thirst, hunger, fatigue and fear and his belief that he should have, and could have, found them.

For Maggie Head to find comfort in the belief in fairies implies regression, but not necessarily insanity. The idea of bush fairies was a cultural conceit not individual delusion. McCubbin, for example, painted bush fairies, but their titles— *Childhood Fancies* (1905) (Illustration 4), *What the Little Girl Saw in the Bush* (1904) (Plate 23)—and the presence of children as observers suggest that fairies belong in the fantasy world of children. Leigh Astbury suggests that McCubbin's fairy paintings could be inspired by the lost-child motif, noting that by the turn of the century elves and fairies occupied a central place in many Australian children's fairytales. In *Childhood Fancies*, the fairies appear to invite the boy to follow them away. The fence-post and shadow in *What the Little Girl Saw in the Bush* suggest the boundary between her world and theirs. In both paintings, it is implicit that if the children follow the clearly indicated paths into the enchanted world, they may be unable to follow that same path back.

Maggie never thought she had seen fairies, but depended on the word of Andy and other bushmen for verification of their existence. (It was no more, or less, unreasonable than believing that the children went to heaven, a belief that would not have not implied insanity in late nineteenth century culture.) But the kind of commitment she showed to the fairy story is seen to be appropriate for children. In her desire to believe in fairies, Maggie Head is represented as childish. Her struggle to find a way of reconciling grief and madness is marked by her ambiguous appearance and demeanour as both elderly and girlish.

Maggie Head needs confirmation of her story from Bushmen strangers. After tea, the ritual for which Jack Ellis has been both set up and prepared begins with Maggie Head telling him how glad she is to "meet somebody from the back country". Maggie sustains her delusion that the fairies took the lost children to care for them through repetition of the story to bushmen strangers who are drawn into complicity by her husband and Andy. Maggie herself is virtually confined to the house, and her interactions with others is managed so that the intrusion of adult attitudes to fairies will not undermine her fantasy. Walter Head vets the bushman brought home carefully. Maggie asks Jack Ellis if he knows about the Bush fairies "that look after the little ones that are lost in the Bush". "Most Bushmen have that I've spoken to," she says.
Her belief that the children were being cared for by fairies and would return eventually is a fragile one. "Voices" in her head compete with the fairy-tale, telling her that she killed the children and should now kill herself. In a sense then, there is an approved fantasy, the alternative of which is not the unendurable sanity of the acceptance of their death, but a self-destructive delusion, in which "Voices" drive her further into lunacy and possibly suicide.

In order to sustain Maggie's fragile mental equilibrium, Walter Head must forego the possibility of resolving his own sense of responsibility for the children's death. The ritual recounting of the story catches him in a lie about his absence. In the end, it is Walter's pain and guilt that is the focus of the story. Unlike Maggie, who lives in a very contained, inclusive and claustrophobic mental and physical space, Walter is ever on the move. A drover, he traverses the land, and his love of sea poetry takes him imaginatively far beyond to a place and time where "skies were fairer and shores were firmer". In terms of the journey plot, Walter's returns home do not function as the closure of his journey. He is set apart from the other bushmen, and like the swagman, the completion of his journey will be his death, imaged as his immersion in the skies and the sea.

Madness—the 'female malady'?  
Elaine Showalter refers to madness as the 'female malady', and argues that the relationship between madness and femininity is deeply embedded in Western systems of language and representation. Women, she says, are typically situated within Western systems of dichotomous oppositions on the side of irrationality, silence, nature and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture and mind. The representation of madness is frequently constructed through images of woman.

In the light of theoretical considerations based on the model of binary oppositions, Kay Schaffer concludes that in Lawson's fiction, it is generally female rather than male characters who go mad in the bush. She includes amongst "all those mad women", Maggie Head, Brighten's Sister-in-Law and Mrs Spicer, and the Selector's Daughter. However men, such as the Bush Undertaker and Ratty Howlett, are central to Lawson's exploration of madness and there are many other examples of mad men who appear directly or indirectly in Lawson's writing. This, in itself, warns against an overly simplified reading of Lawson's writings on bush eccentricity. I use the term 'eccentricity' advisedly here, for many of the assumptions about the nature of madness are called into question by Lawson's stories. In some of his writing, Lawson deals
explicitly with insanity, but elsewhere it is not so clear that madness is the best interpretive approach to the reading. Whilst Maggie Head and Ratty Howlett appear to be 'living in worlds of their own', this is not necessarily the case with Brighten's Sister-in-Law, Mrs Spicer or the Bush Undertaker.

The late nineteenth century Australian context in which Lawson wrote differed from the English and American contexts in which the equation of madness with femininity seemed natural in practice as well as implicit in language. Whilst in England and elsewhere in the late nineteenth century women were statistically over-represented among the mentally ill, in Australia this was not the case. The Australian colonial inmate population was atypical in that men were disproportionately represented. A perception of madness as predominantly affecting men may emerge in Australian colonial literature, qualifying the "general tendency for female characters to succumb to madness" described by Schaffer. To some extent, however, the representation of male characters as feminised in madness resolves this disjuncture between the prevalent discourses of madness and the colonial experience of a predominantly male inmate population.

The designation "mad" renders meaningful those actions which would otherwise seem chaotic and incomprehensible. Since the forms of expression of such 'disordered' thought and emotions are themselves culturally and historically specific, the representation of madness is shaped within broader cultural contexts. Thus when Lawson writes directly about madness, he appears to draw on contemporaneous notions of madness. It is significant that late nineteenth century medical discourses of insanity assumed that gender differences play an important role both in the exegesis and the articulation of madness. In American institutions, for example, Constance McGovern has shown that women's psychiatric problems were attributed to "their reproductive functions, uncontrolled emotions, or inability to cope with family relations", whereas men's problems were attributed to "alcohol or drug abuse, overwork, heredity, or sexual excesses". At least superficially, Lawson's mad men display the characteristics associated with masculine lunacy, such as delusions. Delusions, Stephen Garton observes, were more frequently associated in Australia with masculine expressions of insanity than with feminine forms. Writers such as Lawson and Rudd may be seen as participating in the social construction of the image and meaning of madness, exploring mental aberrations that would be judged "confused and inappropriate" in relation to prevailing standards of logical thought and relevant emotions.
In his more heavy-handed and literal characterisations of madness, Lawson draws directly from the popular discourses of madness of the late nineteenth century. The publican in "The House That Was Never Built", for example, tells of a young wife ("the best and dearest girl in the Bush") who succumbs to hereditary madness just one year after her marriage to the squatter's son and dies in an asylum within the year.

"Some madness is heridited, an' some comes through worry and hard graft (that's mine), an' some comes through drink, and some through worse, and, but as far as I've heard, all madnesses is pretty much the same."17

In his grief over the loss of his young bride, the young husband in this story also loses his mind. The narrator finds him at work many years later on the stone foundations of the great two-storey house that was to have been their home. In his mind, Brassington shifts in time between the anticipation of his marriage and the present: but he also inhabits alternative presents, one where his marriage has lasted many years in the finished mansion and one shared by the narrator and the lonely Bushman.

I thought as I listened, and presently I noticed that it was a case of madness within madness, so to speak: he was mad on the idea that he could build the house himself, and then he had moods when he imagined that the house had been built and he had been married and had reared a family.18

By way of contrast, "The Selector's Daughter" tells of a girl who succumbs to madness through "worse" experiences (than the loss of a young bride or than worry, hard graft or drink) at the hands of her vile father, delinquent brothers and sweetheart.19

In his characterisation of madness as hereditary and delusive and in his assumptions about the different life experiences, perceptions and responses of men and women, Lawson is articulating prevalent and widespread discourses of madness and gender. But the contours of these discourses are at the same time being transformed by the medicalisation of the models of madness. In his sympathetic treatment of mad men and women, Lawson contributes to a shift away from moral disapprobation to concern for environmental and experiential factors.20 This has important implications for Lawson's treatment of gender differences in madness in that again he turns away from essentialist conceptions of woman's madness as rooted in the ascribed biological and physiological givens through which female madness tended to be interpreted within the medical profession. Lawson's reluctance to venture into the troubled terrain of sexuality—male or female—may have helped divert his attention from medical models
which locate the causes of female insanity in the reproductive "pathology" of normal women.

Lawson suggests that male and female madness may take different forms of expression. "No Place for a Woman" and "The Babies in the Bush" can be read as explorations of the forms of male and female madness. The different experiences of bush living, and the different perceptions of and responses to those experiences imply that men and women tread different paths to madness. Women, for example, appear to "dread disgrace" and die of shame resulting from the arrest of their favourite sons, but this experience and response is not characteristic of men. Lawson's expression "past carin'" conveys the sense of emptiness and aching in a woman, for which death is the only resolution. Since the representation of femininity is so integrally bound up with the heart, with feelings, emotions, sentiments and caring, to be "past carin'" is to be unwomanly. Lawson's mature bushwomen appear to have undergone a loss of femininity through their experience of life in the bush. The gaunt, haggard bushwomen are implicitly contrasted with the womanliness of plumper, more normal women. The comparison certainly does not favour conventional women. But it does emphasise the extent to which bushwomen are cut adrift from normal womanhood. It is through the impairment of their capacity to feel and to care that this alienation is imaginatively constructed. Lawson's bushmen, by contrast, are virtually never "past carin'". Though they may seek to protect themselves from grief, despair and disappointment, this is because they remain poignantly sensitive to such pain. Bushmen losing their minds are said to "go ratty".

'Going ratty' is the phrase used to describe the queerness of thought and deed that is the consequence of loneliness "provided you have any imagination at all". Joe Wilson's comment that the wives stand the loneliness better than their husbands, implies that they lack the imagination to construct, or the memory to revive other possible worlds. Thus Mary "kept her head pretty well through the first months of loneliness".

Joe Wilson's first comment about Mrs Spicer is that

I supposed the reason why she hadn't gone mad through hardship and loneliness was that she hadn't either the brains or the memory to go farther than she could see through the trunks of the apple trees.21
Life in the bush emerges as a painful experience to which the response for some is the breaking of the mind and for others, the breaking of the heart. But the possibility of 'going ratty' depends on the imaginative capacity of the mind in the first place. If Lawson's women appear not to lose their minds, this suggests a less imaginative response to the experience of the bush. If the mind will not break, then the only possible way out of the unbearable pain of living is to be 'past carin'.

**Madness as adaptation to the bush**

To this point I have argued that gender plays a significant role in the representation of madness. The representation of men who are understood to be 'mad' is achieved through their association with feminine traits and actions. More generally, gender-specific assumptions shape the expression and forms of 'madness' in both men and women.

Madness itself, however, is a problematic construct in bush mythology. This is precisely because it undermines the system of oppositions of which gender difference is part. To the extent that gender difference is seen as absolute, the distinction between male and female is embedded in, and dependent on a semiotic structure in which meaning is achieved through paired oppositions. The principle of binary oppositionality frequently underpins the way in which meaning is attributed to life and death, sanity and madness, culture and nature, male and female. Lawson's bush studies suggest that there is a point at which the oppositionality of these categories breaks down. These studies examine the effect of the bush on the minds and hearts of its inhabitants and their responses to the overwhelming hardship of bush life.

The breaking of the mind can serve to mute unendurable grief and pain forged in the bush. Consequently, the most poignant of Lawson's characters are those like Mrs Spicer who neither seek nor find refuge in madness. What others judge to be mad or eccentric can also be read as the attempts of men and women to reconstruct their world as a more manageable but more constricted mental space in which the experience of actual loss is balanced by imagined restitution. The bush, to which the initial loss is attributed, permits this contracting of mental space. Literally, this is because the isolation makes outside disruption unlikely and because the sheer physical labour exhausts body and mind. More significantly, the bush itself is a constricted space of stultifying sameness which dulls the mind to other possible worlds making imaginative "journeying" inconceivable.

Madness, Oliver Sacks comments, involves not only "mere loss or excess", but also the reaction on the part of the individual "to restore, to replace, to compensate for and
to preserve its identity, however strange the means may be". Sacks draws on Ivy McKenzie's concept of madness as "a chaos induced in the first instance by destruction of important integrations, and reorganised on an unstable basis in the process of rehabilitation". This way of viewing madness as active engagement in the process of reconstructing a world in which one might live is clearly pertinent to "No Place for a Woman" and "The Babies in the Bush", but also offers insight into the character of Mrs Spicer in "Water Them Geraniums". Though Mrs Spicer does not seek to create and dwell within imaginary worlds, she has cut herself adrift of the world beyond the confines of the present time and her immediate surrounds. Of the rest of the world we are told that she had "lost all her curiosity".

This loss of contact with events outside her selection is signified by the "groping voice" she adopts when she tries to put into words her perceptions, memories and links with the world beyond:

But sometimes when she got outside her everyday life on this selection she spoke in a sort of—in a sort of lost groping-in-the-dark kind of voice.

(Joe Wilson himself gropes uncertainly for the words to comprehend Mrs Spicer's expression of drifting apart from the world.) Her beloved son Jack, droving or shearing outback, is beyond Mrs Spicer's normal voice range: she speaks of him in the "groping" voice, and turns her "haggard eyes in a helpless, hopeless sort of way towards the west". She uses her "groping" voice to speak of her husband and her past. She says that she no longer feels lonely when Spicer is away:

"I useter, once. I remember, when we lived on the Cudgegong River—we lived in a brick house then—the first time Spicer had to go away from home I nearly fretted my eyes out. An' he was only goin' shearin' for a month. I must bin a fol; but then we were only jist married a little while. He's been away drovin' in Queensland as long as eighteen months at a time since then. But" (her voice seemed to grope in the dark more than ever) "I don't mind—I somehow seem to have got past carin'..."

Spicer no longer belongs to her world. Physically he is placed beyond the bounds of her selection. Temporally, the Spicer she married is part of the past, and she is cut adrift from the past. Her sense of loss of the past is articulated through the vestiges of earlier and less impoverished times. Mary observes that Mrs Spicer's handling of crockery and her table-setting "convinced her that she had been used to table-napkins at one time in her life", but now she acts "in a mechanical sort of way". Mrs Spicer's comments that the better table cloths are in the wash, or that she will buy knives and
forks next trip, or that she had "some things packed away from the children" no longer carry any conviction. Mrs Spicer's managing of grief and hardship has depended on her ability to contract the mental space within which she imagines and remembers her life, to anaesthetise her mind against enduring pain.

In this sense then, madness is represented as an adaptive strategy of repressing experience and memory of pain too great to bear. Some of Lawson's characters are able to form in the imagination other worlds and to convince themselves sufficiently of their reality to almost inhabit them. For others the more austere but arguably saner approach is the numbing of the mind against the intrusive events of the wider world in order to anaesthetise the heart against its unendurable pain. In either case, 'madness' may be seen as part of a process in which the human subject strives to preserve its identity in adverse circumstances.26

The insistence of 'reality'

If madness is to be understood as an adaptive strategy, then the success of this strategy depends on the ability of characters to inhabit secure imaginary worlds from which further hardship, pain and loss are excluded. But very few of Lawson's characters are able to achieve the kind of isolation and break with the 'real' world that this strategy entails.

Those who seek to inhabit delusive worlds, like Maggie Head and Ratty Howlett, depend on 'outsiders' to maintain the delusions. Both Maggie and Ratty are compelled to repeat their story, to form it in words now set in repetition. The narrator who hears Ratty's story as he dies comments:

He told his story mechanically, monotonously—in set words, as I believe now, as he had often told it before; if not to others, then to the loneliness of the bush.27

Both characters are bound to the 'real' world because they need to have affirmation from others of their delusions. But this dependency means that the barriers that have been erected to protect them from pain are necessarily breached by those outsiders whose complicity in sustaining delusions is sought. The presence of others threatens to draw Maggie and Ratty back into the 'real' but unbearable world, a world in which they are recognisably mad. In the end, these stories suggest the impossibility of resolving grief through madness.
Unlike Ratty and Maggie, Mrs Spicer does not take refuge in delusions. But she too attempts to curtail the extent to which the world beyond her immediate confines can intrude in her life. Her precarious mental stability is thrown off balance when she revives her connections with this world beyond her immediate struggle, through recollection of her past, or interaction with the bush community. Though she describes herself as "past carin'", her comments about their earlier marriage, the brick house, and Spicer, as he used to be before he became moody, gloomy and silent at home, are ill-afforded reminders of loss.

“Oh, I don’t know what I’m talkin’ about! You mustn’t take any notice of me Mrs Wilson—I don’t often go on like this. I do believe I’m gittin’ a bit ratty at times.”

Mary and the Wilson household, the "aristocrats of Lahey's Creek", threaten the equilibrium that Mrs Spicer has established by cutting herself adrift and restricting her own mental range. She announces without warning that "I don’t think I’ll come up next week",

"Because the visits doesn’t do me any good. I git the dismals afterwards."

Once again, she follows up this breach in her defences with "Oh I-don't-know-what-I'm-talkin'-about". Mrs Spicer asks Mary not to visit her while she is ill, because "the place is in such a muck, and it hurts me." Just as Mary and Joe have already begun down the path that ends with Mrs Spicer and Spicer himself, so too do they connect Mrs Spicer to the world in which her life is unbearable. If Ratty Howlett and Maggie Head chose the madness of delusion as a buffer against an unbearable reality, Mrs Spicer attempts to close her mind against its intrusion.

Whereas Brian Matthews sees Mrs Spicer as on the verge of madness, defined in modern existential terms as "the ultimate alienation from oneself and from the world", this attempted alienation can also be seen as a protective and adaptive strategy. For Matthews, to succumb to the surroundings is to be cut adrift from "the stream of life", and the ennobling struggle for Mrs Spicer and the Wilsons is to "belong to a vital, humane existence" in the face of an environment that "brutalizes and de-civilizes them". Matthews' own values in relation to human society allow him greater insight into Joe's situation than into that of Mrs Spicer. From his point of view she is "disintegrating". Mrs Spicer herself does not express the same "dread of dissociation from existence" or "man's desperate need to know himself involved in humanity" that Matthews identifies as the universal human values underpinning Lawson's writing.
Rather than seeing Mrs Spicer as engaged in a struggle against all odds to "remain in touch with the stream of life" (by which Matthews means human society), it is possible to see her inability to sever her links with the world the Wilsons embody as a source of much pain. The value she places on hospitality, the pleasure of the company of the Wilsons, the benefits the children derive from their acquaintance, the material help Joe provides, and her protective concern for Mary draw Mrs Spicer into the world they represent. But the comparison between her life and what it might have been is painful to her, just as the Wilsons are disconcerted by the recognition of a future for them in her life.

She tries to go "past carin'" by a refusal of the imagination. Lawson reiterates that people alone in the bush for too long go mad if they have brains and imagination enough. Mrs Spicer maintains an equilibrium by denying these mental activities: not remembering, and not imagining another life. Within the circumscribed world of the farm, she is alert, sensitive to absurdity, eloquent, and innovative in times of great hardship. It is because she is neither stupid nor lacking imagination that the defences she has erected against the despair of her life are so vulnerable.

Mrs Spicer's yarns indicate her own interest in mental instability, but not in a way that condones self-destruction. The stories of the squatter who tried to suicide and her account of her own unsuccessful actions to avert the suicide of the man with the two saddle straps imply a value on preserving life. But when her son Billy is arrested for horse-stealing, Mrs Spicer begins the enactment of her final withdrawal from the world:

"...an' now she'll only sit stock-still an' stare in front of her, and won't take no notice of any of us."

In spite of the intervention of Joe Wilson and Billy Wall, the squatter's son, to have the boy released, Mrs Spicer never recovers.

"...It's the disgrace that's killing me—I can't bear it."

She quits living. Her last instructions to Annie are to milk the cows, to feed the pigs and calves, not go for Mary Wilson, and to water the geraniums. Much has been said about the injunction to "water them geraniums", but why should Annie not go for Mary Wilson? Mrs Spicer dies because she cannot grow "past carin'" as long as she must
still respond to the events of the world over which she has no control, a world that Mary represents.

Mrs Spicer's tragedy is that she is unable to anaesthetise herself sufficiently to be "past carin", because her mind is sound. She wants to complete her breach with the "real" world, but cannot. Mrs Spicer recognises in Mary her own beginnings and would not willingly see Mary absorbed into the Bush.

"What-did-you-bring-her-here-for? She's only a girl." 33

She reiterates Mary's own foreknowledge: "I can't stand this life here; it will kill me!" Later when she sees Mrs Spicer cry like a man, Mary is disturbed by her realisation of her own future:

"Oh, Joe! you must take me away from the bush." 34

Like Ratty Howlett and Maggie Head, Mrs Spicer values and draws sustenance from her contact with people who represent the world beyond the confined spaces within which they live. In each case, the interactions with 'outsiders' take on a ritualised form. As Ivor Indyk has observed, Lawson's characters "are constantly to be observed patching together ritual forms of behaviour out of the broken pieces of culture that come to hand—fragments of belief, a snatch of prayer, a flower, a tattered tablecloth, the lingering memories of ceremonies performed elsewhere, in other worlds." 35 But Indyk's optimistic suggestion that this represents a form of cultural *bricolage* through which an Australian mythology could emerge is offset by a sense of estrangement from these rituals on the part of those who enact them. The rituals of civilised society are upsetting and unsettling to each of these characters because they breach the mental walls that have been erected against the experience and memory of the world at large.

**At one with the bush**

The stories on which this discussion of madness has been based so far have each pivoted on the point of intersection between two worlds—between the imaginary and constricted world of a character who seems 'mad', and the 'real' world inhabited by sane characters, of whom the narrator is typically one. Implicitly, the reader approaches the imaginatively constricted worlds of Maggie Head, Ratty Howlett and Mrs Spicer as an 'outsider' who belongs in the world of the narrator. But, it has been argued, the madness of these characters appears to be partly a consequence of their dependence on and interaction with such 'outsiders'. Further, their madness is
understood in relation to the definitions of sanity brought to bear by the narrator and accepted by the reader. Madness is not so clearly defined where the function of narration is not borne by a specific character, and where there are no other characters who establish a compelling standard of sanity. The question of madness remains unresolved in "The Bush Undertaker" precisely because there is no standard of normality or sanity against which the Bush Undertaker's actions and state of mind can be measured.

The opening passages of "The Bush Undertaker" are reminiscent of Baynton's "Scrammy 'And", with the nurturing of an old shepherd associated with a maternal femininity. Here, too, the old man and the dog bring the sheep into the yard early, and with a sense of impending excitement, not in this case derived from fear. There's an early dinner, but not the familiar mutton stew that Ratty cooked. This dinner is bushman's tucker: doughboy, boggabri, salt meat, and spuds. During the meal, the old man throws Five Bob a chunk of dough, which he catches and swallows. Added to this nurturing role, is the old man's almost instantaneous conclusion that the man whose corpse he has found, was his mate Brummy who was coming to him for care.

"I spect yer was a-comin' t'me t' get fixt up an' set straight agin..."^36

Indeed, the old shepherd decides he must fix him up one last time and bury him:

"...an' here y'are, an' now I expect I'll have t' fix yer up for the last time an' make yer decent, for 'twon't do t' leave yer a'lyin' out here like a dead sheep."^37

He carries the blackened corpse, mummified by three months of "the intense heat of the western summer" home sandwiched between two sheets of bark. He tears strips from the bottom of his overshirt with the declared intention of sewing them back on later. These motifs of improvisation in the face of poverty, nurturing hospitality and a concern with decency which characterise eccentric or mad men are characteristics of normal women. Images of female normality are turned on their head to signify peculiarity in men. But the focus on domestic skills—sewing, cooking—is an indication of the significance of these activities in providing for the well-being of the shepherd and those in his care just as it is for the bushwomen who provide for their families out of the meagre provisions of bush life. Like a woman with children, the shepherd is immobilised by his responsibility for the sheep, since if it were not for the sheep, he could go to the station and notify the authorities of his finding.
The representation of the old shepherd's eccentricity is developed partly through this feminisation and partly through his symbiotic relationship with the natural world of which he is a part. His finding of the corpse and bringing it home is accompanied by the disturbing presence of a "great glassy iguana". The goanna was feeding off the corpse, and its startled movement drew the shepherd's attention to the body. The goanna appears three times as the old man carries home the corpse, and the old man is disturbed by this vaguely hostile encounter. Woken during the night by its noise, the old man kills it. He realises that this goanna "has been a-havin' its Christmas dinner off of Brummy, an' a-hauntin' o' me into the bargain". Significantly, the shepherd himself voices the literal meaning of the goanna: the reader and the shepherd can agree that the goanna was disturbed eating the body, followed it back to the hut, and has continued its extended meal. Unexplained, it was an enigma and a sinister symbolic presence for shepherd and reader. Its death is, however, matter-of-fact.

The goanna is associated with the shepherd himself: for both of them, the discovery of the corpse (and the bottle of rum) means that, in the words of the old man , "[m]e luck's in for the day and no mistake!" They compete for the remains in the natural world where death is part of the cycle that nourishes life. Like the goanna, the shepherd is part of the "grand Australian bush". Both belong to the realm of the weird and eccentric, and cannot be rendered completely comprehensible through frameworks formed in other "real" worlds. The corpse also inhabits this other world. Its blackened flesh is leathery, rather than decomposing. The shepherd comments that "yer ain't as bad as yer might be" even though "yer don't smell none too sweet, Brummy".

"I suspect it was the rum as persuaded yer. It was the death of yer when yer was alive, an' now yer dead, it preserves yer like—like a mummy."38

As a corpse, it is not revolting—on the contrary, it seems remarkably life-like. When the old man leans it against the wall, upside down and out of balance, "that individual fell forward and struck him a violent blow on the shoulder with the iron toes of his Blucher boots".39 When the bark slips down to reveal the face, the shepherd "was not prepared for the awful scrutiny that gleamed on him from those empty sockets".

The Bush Undertaker's interest does not seem ghoulish or macabre: his attitude is lively, practical and intimate. He speaks to the corpse as though it was Brummy, and death has not significantly altered the nature of their relationship. In death, Brummy remains the irresponsible delinquent who comes to this caring old man to be "fixt up". The Bush Undertaker has functioned as the point of return to interior space for Brummy over the years, and this final return to enclosed space is his death, his home-
coming and his burial. (In the light of Brummy's fate, Lotman's comment that eating and burial are "synonomous in the sense of insertion into enclosed space" seems somewhat ironical.) The shepherd draws the line at taking the corpse into the hut, though he reflects that "I did it when yer was in a worse state." It is a challenge to imagine a living man in a worse state than a three-month sun-dried corpse.

The Bush Undertaker is certainly not "stark raving mad". Rather, he is represented as "weird" and "eccentric", but strangely at one with his environment.

Within the context of the bush, the shepherd is "at home", nurtured by his environment. As James Wieland notes, we are drawn to "the seeming ordinariness of his existence", living "an orderly life into which he fits routine tasks and allows time for his interests." To be sure, his interests are unlikely to coincide with those of many readers, but that is not because he is mad. Rather, the world he inhabits is a different one, a place apart where people do different things, but with a similar level of engagement and pragmatism. His intention "to root up that old blackfeller" is neither irreverent nor macabre; at least no more, or less, than an archaeologist's interest would be. He decides to bury this corpse, because "after all—it were Brummy".

The difference between life and death
The bush in which these 'mad' characters are immersed is a place where systems of difference on which meaning is based break down. Where the distinction between life and death becomes blurred, other differences also lose definition. As the Bush Undertaker buries the corpse, the meaning of death shifts between different concepts of its meaning in relation to life. As has been noted already, the corpse itself has retained an almost life-like presence. Now, as the old man buries it, the finality of death, understood as the negation of life, is intertwined with concepts of Christian resurrection and of natural regeneration.

At first, the Bush Undertaker speaks to Brummy intimately:

"It's time yer turned in, Brum," he said, lifting the body down.

But as he begins to fill the grave, his attitude changes to one of solemnity and reflection. He becomes absorbed in a "flood of memories", which take him outside the constricted imaginative space of his present life, just as Brummy's visits would have
done over the years. Brummy, the traveller, bringing with him the world beyond, and memories of their times together elicits the recollection of that other world as he gropes for some framework within which both his life and Brummy's has meaning.

"Brummy," he said at last, "it's all over now; nothin' matters now—nothin' didn't ever matter, nor—nor don't. You uther say as how it 'ud be all right termorrer"

He threw in some more earth.44

For the Bush Undertaker the ritual of burial generates a somewhat ambivalent response to memories of the past:

"Yer don't remember, Brummy, an' mebbe yer don't want to remember—I don't want to remember—but—well, but, yer see that's where yer got the pull on me."45

Brummy's "pull" on the old man draws him imaginatively beyond the bush he inhabits, just as Mary Wilson's friendship exerts a pressure on Mrs Spicer's adaptive strategies to loss and hardship. But the Bush Undertaker is not "past carin'" and momentary confusion gives way to a philosophical observation that there is no basis for knowing, no authority to whom he can turn for confirmation. His concern for appropriate dignity and ceremony is generated by his recollections of the world where men think life should matter, and where Brummy "uster say as how it 'ud be all right termorrer". His words are a parody of a Christian funeral: it is not the content but the form that has meaning for the old man.

"Hashes ter hashes, dus' ter dus', Brummy,—an'—an' in hopes of great an' gerlorious rassaraction!"46

The irony of his choice of words lies in the distinction between the Christian hope for resurrection and the natural process of regeneration, to which he has committed "Brummy".47 The Christian belief is founded on the difficulty that the "sane" world has in coming to terms with death but in the world of the Bush Undertaker, death is integral to life and the separation between life and death seems less absolute because they are cyclical and interdependent:

"termorrer's come, Brummy—come fur you—it ain't come fur me yet, but—it's a-comin'."

"The Bush Undertaker" is an exploration of adaption to a world rather than a process of disintegration into madness. It is on the basis of a comparison between the
'civilised' world and the bush beyond that the judgement of madness is made. In "The Bush Undertaker", the civilised world is far away and evoked disconcertingly but vaguely in the old man's mind. It is, however, this comparison between the world of normal people and the world inhabited by the mad, the queer and the eccentric bushmen and bushwomen that is crucial to the representation of madness and eccentricity. In "The Bush Undertaker", this comparison is muted: the real world beyond is filtered through the shepherd's mind. In Lawson's more explicit discussions of madness, the comparison is a much stronger device.

From the point of view of conventional society, characters like the Bush Undertaker and Mrs Spicer seem incomprehensible, mad, and lost. The men are woman-like, the women, ungendered; survival evinces madness; they become a part of the natural order rather than its master. The structures of distinctions on which the recognition of the world is based lack definition and coherence. It is not simply the conflation of the categories of feminine, nature and madness: it is the collapse of absoluteness of difference between male-female, civilisation-nature, sanity-madness in unstable and ambiguous relationships that is glimpsed in the bush. The aliveness of life and the finality of death here yield to natural cycles, in which death is a pre-condition of living.

In Ratty Howlett's world, the separation of life and death has been eroded in Ratty's mind. In Ratty's mind, Mary has returned with the baby years back, and Mary has aged and the daughter has grown up, just as Ratty himself has aged. It is not until Mary returns after leaving him, that she appears once again to him as his young wife.

"But a month, or a year ago, Mary left me, and took the daughter, and never came back till last night—this morning, I think it was. I thought at first it was the girl with her hair done up, and her mother's skirt on, to surprise her old dad. But it was Mary, my wife—as she was when I married her." 48

But from the narrator's point of view, in spite of Ratty's attempts to make his house breathe with Mary's presence, it is her absence that is conveyed by her clothing:

I saw no woman; but on a sofa—a light, wooden, batten one, with runged arms at the ends—lay a woman's dress on a lot of sheets of old stained and faded newspapers. 49

The sofa and the old, stained and faded newspapers suggest resting, illness, decay and time-past. The outfit is, ironically, a riding skirt and jacket, presumably those the woman would have worn had she gone "on a visit down the creek", as Ratty suggests. There is also a dress and a woman's old hat hanging on the wall near the door, "but
they looked as if they might have been hanging there for a lifetime." Whilst Ratty can live as though Mary and the daughter were with him, the clothes are empty and lifeless. The narrator feels "something queer about the whole place—something wanting".

At first, the narrator attributes the sense of "something wanting" to the generalised sense of the Bush as another place. Ratty's need for yarning is, at first, seen to have a "simple, sufficient, and perfectly natural explanation—from a bushman's point of view." At first sight, too, Ratty's hut seems queer but the visitor does not attribute this to individual peculiarity:

...but then all out-of-the-way bush homes are haunted by that something wanting, or, more likely, by the spirits of the thing that should have been there, but never had been.\(^{50}\)

In "No Place for a Woman" and "The Babies in the Bush", the absence of the long dead weighs heavily in the air. Like Ratty Howlett, Maggie Head has constructed an imaginary world in which death is followed by resurrection—she clings to the belief that the fairies caring for her dead children will bring them back, perhaps "next year". The pain of her life, like that of Ratty Howlett, is that her immersion in this other world is always incomplete. She cannot fully commit herself to the fantasy that evokes madness but alleviates the grief that sanity entails. The portraits of the Head children, taken some years before their death, are ritually shown. But they are not adequate mementoes: Wally's is "not a good portrait" and "the portrait is very dark, and you've got to look close to see the foot". The traces of the children's lives evoke, not their presence in Maggie's life now, but their absence.

In "Water Them Geraniums", Mrs Spicer's death is contrasted with that of Mary, which lies still in the future for the young Joe Wilson. When Mrs Spicer dies, Joe Wilson comments that she "looked very little different from what she did when I last saw her alive".\(^{51}\) But "Water Them Geraniums" is told by Joe Wilson years later, after Mary's death. The story of Mrs Spicer is cast in the shadow of the image of Mary in death. Mary's death seems much more final and impenetrable than that of Mrs Spicer:

But the time came, and not many years after, when I stood by the bed where Mary lay, white and still.\(^{52}\)

The more they are immersed in the bush, and the less contact they have with 'outsiders', the more these bushmen and women become part of the bush. They are
absorbed into the natural cycles of growth, decay and renewal that breaks down the opposition of life and death. Once this fundamental opposition is transmuted into a cyclical movement, then other oppositions—sanity/madness, masculine/feminine—follow suit. But in none of the stories considered here, is this immersion total. The Bush Undertaker enacts a ritual that evokes memories of another time, when death carried different meaning, neither Ratty Howlett nor Maggie Head can fully commit themselves to their imaginative worlds in which the dead return to life, and Joe Wilson's account of Mrs Spicer's death is counter-balanced by Mary's death, which is in both the past and the future of the story.

**The bush as interior space—the journey motif in stories of madness**

The journey plot in its simplest form requires the delineation of interior and exterior spaces, which are understood only in relation to each other. I have argued in this thesis that bush mythology is shaped by the journeying of bushmen: by their departures from interior space, their adventures in exterior space and their returns to interior space. This chapter, like the previous chapters, has examined the implications of this dominant plot for immobilised characters. It will be recalled that Lotman described characters who are immobilised as "functions of plot-space". Characters who are immobilised and confined in interior space, it was suggested, appear mad, queer or eccentric in relation to implied standards of normality and sanity. Examined in relation to their confinement to domestic space, such eccentricity or madness was seen to be gendered in two ways. Firstly, the men took on feminine characteristics through which their madness could be perceived. Secondly, the madness of men and women was seen to take gender-specific forms of expression.

However, in stories like "The Bush Undertaker", "No Place for a Woman" and "Water Them Geraniums", the distinction between domestic space and the bush loses definition. Because the characters who appear 'mad' are immobilised, domestic space is not constituted as the point of departure and return for them (although it may serve this function for others, such as 'Brummy' in "The Bush Undertaker", or the narrator himself). Since these characters are not embarked on a journey through the bush, the bush beyond the hut does not function as exterior space. In consequence, there is neither a clearly defined boundary between bush and hut nor is there any necessary distinction between inside and outside spaces. The difference between the interior space of the hut and the exterior space of the bush, constituted by the logic of the journey motif, is no longer central to the plot.

Just as the distinction between life and death never quite dissolves, the delineation of interior and exterior space is never fully dismantled. Recalling that the journey can be
the metaphoric equivalent of the passage of life itself and that death is represented as a return to interior space, those characters who are immobilised and confined in relation to nation-forming bush journeys are still undergoing the inescapable transition towards death. While they may themselves representing the point of return for journeying bushmen, the inevitability of their own deaths suggests their 'movement' towards another 'state'. This suggestion of movement towards death is quite insistent in "No Place for a Woman", in which Ratty's immobilisation in life is counterbalanced by the significance of the road on which he waits for travellers, for Mary, and for death.

The road is the meeting place between travellers. Ratty keeps his horse nearby when he works on the land so he can chase after travellers for a yarn. When the travellers resume their journeys, Ratty "would ride back, refreshed, to his lonely selection". The road is the site of the story.

The road is also the site of Ratty's death. On his second journey, the narrator realises that Ratty is very ill and settles him against a tree. Here, on the road, Ratty tells his story about Mary's death and her return, and finally her absence "till last night—this morning, I think it was".

"She said she couldn't stay, but she'd wait for me on the road; on—the road..." The road, in Ratty's life, was the place on which travellers passed and the point of contact with the world of normal people. But Ratty himself never travelled along it. As he recounts Mary's promise to wait by the road, Ratty assures the narrator that he too will wait by the road until help arrives.

"I won't move—I'll wait by the road," he said.

Only in death is Ratty Howlett freed to move beyond his world, into the spirit-world. It is from there that Mary once again appears "as she was when I first married her". Lawson uses the motif of the spirit-girl, at last freed from the confines of the domestic sphere, ready to accompany her loved bushman in his travels. But Ratty himself has not been free to move until this moment of his death, because in order to live out her life, he has had to embody her, and live within the constricted feminine space of the domestic world.

The idea of death as the crossing of the border to complete life's journey implies a spatial dimension to death itself. Implicit in the notion of life as a journey is a concept
of death as a 'place'. In Lawson's writing, the range of mountains on the horizon conveys the faintest suggestion of a crossing into this unknowable place. Ratty Howlett had "a way of talking to the horizon", that he looked absently away to "where a blue peak or two of a distant range showed above the bush on the horizon"; and still later, that his gaze is fixed on "the azure fin of the range, showing above the dark blue-green on the horizon". On the one hand, Ratty watches the skyline for never-arriving help, as he did the night Mary died; on the other hand, his eyes are drawn to the blue realm beyond the bush horizon, a place where Mary "lives". The perception of the horizon suggests an awareness of the idea of a place beyond the horizon, a world other than the bush. The blueness lends it a spiritual quality, suggestive of a Christian concept of death, which coexists in the text with the idea of natural cycles of death and regeneration. Ernst Bloch has described the "so often so intractable blue" of medieval painting as "the fleeting promise of that which is missing".

Similarly, it is at the moment when the Bush Undertaker is burying 'Brummy' that the range of mountains becomes more than a backdrop. "Looking away over the tops of the ragged gums on the distant range", the old man becomes absorbed in recollection and thought.

By way of contrast, the bush in "The Drover's Wife" and "Water Them Geraniums" has no horizon, "for the country is flat". The faint suggestion of death as the completion of life's journey, and of the crossing into a spiritual world intimated by blueness on the horizon, is missing in the stories of bushwomen. One wonders if only male characters find solace in dreaming of the world beyond the Range:

For I have lost, except in dreams,
The Bush beyond the Range.

If, as was argued earlier in this chapter, Lawson saw women as lacking the imaginative capacity for delusive madness, then they also appear to lack the imaginative capacity to form a mental horizon, beyond which a better world might await them. The bush with no horizon not only describes the physical world, but also the mental world that women appear to inhabit. (Maggie Head appears to be an exception, but the fantasy world in which she seeks refuge is not really the product of her imagination, but the regression to a culturally shared imaginative construct which is deemed appropriate for children, and which her husband helps her sustain.)
Conclusion

Lunatics are rarely accorded an honoured place in the national cast, and Australian bush mythology is no exception in this respect. In general, interpretations of these stories have tended to slip gears, out of the narration of nation formation and into the exploration of the 'human condition'. In modernist imagination, madness appears to be more 'universal' than an expression of national culture. Brian Matthews, for example, described Lawson's vision of human life as

existing and striving in a vast disturbance of change, uncertainty and death; fleetingly ennobled, but more often sad and desperate; and always on a long, devious journey to defeat.\(^7\)

He describes Lawson's fictional world of the outback, as "a place mostly of human destruction", but suggests that destruction itself is a dynamic process and Lawson's creative achievement lies, paradoxically, in "knowing, recording and experiencing how man is unmade".

Nevertheless, I have argued that Lawson's representation of madness can be partially interpreted in relation to late nineteenth century colonial experiences and discourses of madness. The close identity of madness and femininity in nineteenth century English and American discourse is re-negotiated in the Australian context, in which the asylum population was atypically constituted, with a predominance of male rural itinerants. In Lawson's writing, male characters play a central role in the examination of madness, but the representation of their madness is achieved through the feminisation of these characters as confined, immobile, isolated, domesticated, maternal and nurturing. However, Lawson also suggested gender differences in the expression and form of madness. For women, the heart is the motif around which the character is formed, and the breaking point for women's capacity to endure loss, shame and hardship is identified with the breaking or voiding of the heart. Madness is represented as the breaking of the mind, and Lawson suggests that madness is grounded in the imaginative capacity of the mind to construct alternative delusive realities. Implicitly, women have less capacity for imagination than men.

Whether he deals with the breaking of the heart or the mind, Lawson's writing is an exploration of adaption to grief, grinding hardship and despair. His characters attempt to live in a more constricted mental space, as a means of anaesthetising the heart against pain. The bush—with its isolation and stultifying sameness—facilitates this contraction of the mental space. The poignancy of these stories lies in the inability of the characters in fact to sever links with the social world and inhabit the asylums that have been created. The exception—"The Bush Undertaker"—is not a sad or pathetic story. Here
the congruence of the bush and the imaginative world is most readily perceived. The old man has adapted his mental space to that of the bush, and nature's cyclical pattern of life and death subsumes the linear plot of civilised life.

In these studies of madness and immobilisation, structures of meaning based on binary oppositions appear to break down. Life and death are represented not only in terms of oppositions, but also through images of resurrection and cycles of regeneration. Death is represented within the logic of the journey motif as the final return to interior space, but its unresolved presence also breaks through this logic and undermines the structure of the journey-plot itself. Domestic space and the bush beyond no longer function as the metaphoric equivalents of the interior and exterior spaces implicit in the journey theme. The bush itself functions ambiguously as interior space in relation to the bushmen who journey through the bush, and as exterior space for those who inhabit it, but whose death will be constituted as a crossing to another 'place', whether this is a grave or a spiritual world beyond the horizon.

As far as narratives of nation formation are concerned, it could be argued that these mad characters play only a marginal role in the national cast of characters. The unsettling sense of dissolubility of boundaries, differences and certainties can be seen as contained within stories that are located similarly on the margins of the national mythology. However the possibility that such immobilised characters, whether male or female, may become 'adapted' to the bush in such a manner that others perceive them to be mad, suggests an anxiety is attached to journeying that colours the apparently buoyant journeys of nation formation. This process of adaptation to the bush also is perceived as one of absorption by the bush. While the journey represents a quest to claim and domesticate the land as the national territory, the price of inhabiting the untamed land threatens to be madness and death. The mobility of bushmen is product not only of quest but also of fear.

Adaptation to the land, which is understood in terms of the capacity to bear grinding hardship, pain and loss, is achieved through a constraint—or veto, to use Luiz Costa Lima's phrase—of the imagination. For writers, for whom the imagination is a most valued tool of trade, this association of madness and imagination suggests a degree of distrust of imagination which has implications for both their writing and the imagined national community.

4Henry Lawson, "No Place for a Woman", op. cit., p. 581.
6Margaret Atwood's novel The Handmaid’s Tale uses the term "Unwoman" to describe those barren women who have lost any claim to female status within the most extreme patriarchy. Such women are exiled to Colonies where they die of radiation sickness. Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid’s Tale, Virago, London, 1987.
8ibid.
9ibid., p. 779.
18ibid., p. 12.
20Consider, by way of contrast, this comment published in New Idea, 5 August 1905, illustrated by a photograph of the yard and heavy gates of Kew Asylum: "If every man and woman could be persuaded to pay one visit to the Hospital of the Insane to see there the results of living lives of ignorance, indifference, or indulgence, it would probably be the best lesson the world could have in the cause of sanity."

21 Ibid., p. 722.


25 Ibid., p. 728.

26 Ivy McKenzie, cited in Oliver Sacks, op. cit., p. 4.

27 Henry Lawson, "No Place for a Woman, op. cit., p. 583.


32 Ibid., p. 732.

33 Ibid., p. 728.

34 Ibid., p. 731.


37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., p. 246.


1985, p. 29; see also Ivor Indyk's comment that "for all its weird mixture of elements", the ritual burial here "exhibits a suggestive balance, a symmetry hinting at the emergence of a peculiar Australian order of things". Ivor Indyk, *op. cit.*, p. 62.


44 *Ibid.*.

45 *Ibid.*.


47 Harry Heseltine comments that in Lawson's best works, he "refuses to let ambivalence, uncertainty, distress be resolved by the comforts of doctrine, any absolutes of belief or action. His primal sense ... of human existence held between living and dying stubbornly opposes the seductive symbols of death and rebirth to which it is so regularly submitted." Harry Heseltine, *The Uncertain Self—Essays in Australian Literature and Criticism*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986, p. 52.


