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Gender and nation formation in late nineteenth century

Susan Elizabeth Rowley

University of Wollongong

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GENDER AND NATION FORMATION
IN
LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY
AUSTRALIAN BUSH MYTHOLOGY

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from
THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by
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B.A (Hons), Dip. Ed., B.C.A.

SCHOOL OF CREATIVE ARTS
1993
I certify that this work has not been submitted for a degree to any other university or institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

Susan E Rowley
23 April 1993
GENDER AND NATION FORMATION

IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY BUSH MYTHOLOGY

ABSTRACT

In the late nineteenth century, literary narratives and visual representations of the Australian bush played a major role in the historical process through which Australia was becoming conceptualised as a nation. This thesis examines features of these representations—the role of the journey, the portrayal of women's labour, the role of the swagman and of madness, the representation of motherhood, mateship and marriage, the scope and role of the imagination, and narratives of community—in their historical context. Using this analysis the thesis shows how the process of national cultural imagination was in part shaped by the experience at the time of both modernisation in public and domestic life, and change and contestation in the gender order.

Bush mythology frequently employed the notion of the masculine journey as an image of nation formation. The journey was used to represent a quest for nationhood which was to be achieved through the domestication of the land in the name of 'Australia'. The end of the journey—frequently figured as the return to the interior space of the home—was associated with the achievement of maturity on the part of both the traveller and the nation. Whilst men might embark on such journeys, female maturity was usually represented as a move into the home. This move, which appeared to take women out of the nation-space, testifies to the difficulty at the time of bringing men and women together into an imagined Australian national community.
FOR MY FATHER

FRANK ROWLEY

1916–1991
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My affection for literature and ballads of the Australian bush was a childhood gift from my father. I hope that this lasting affection can be discerned in the critical analysis of bush mythology in this study, and I dedicate the thesis to my father. In doing so, I thank my mother for her strength of character and mind, and her unfailing support.

In writing this thesis I undertook a critical study of the cultural constitution of the domestic and public domains. The study itself paid scant heed to the distinction between domestic and professional life—mine or that of my family, friends and colleagues. Jim Falk not only lived with this work over six years, but guided me through it. Without his encouragement, tuition and help, the study may not have begun, let alone been completed. I cannot find the words to express my gratitude to him.

I would not like my readers to think that I have found this study an onerous chore: I have very much enjoyed the sustained work required by this thesis that stood in such contrast to the more short-termed projects of my academic work. Much of the pleasure of this study was derived from the discussions and debates to which the research gave rise. Paula Hamilton and I have spent many happy hours working through ideas and shared many books, and our friendship and collaboration have been invested in the development of this study. Susan Magarey, Susan Sheridan and I worked together to edit *Debutante Nation*, and our shared interest in feminism and the 1890s has contributed to the shape of the thesis. They also gave me intellectual guidance and taught me a great deal about the production of completed manuscripts. I thank them for their contribution to the evolution of this thesis, and for their hospitality, warmth and sense of fun.

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Sue Rowley 1993