

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

This new collection of 1890s writing represents the ways in which Australian literature responded to a set of social, cultural and political problems that were typical of the empire and yet richly inflected by local experience. In the last twenty years our view of this period has been transformed by a new generation of criticism. The fraught relations between the literature associated with the *Bulletin*, the burgeoning Labour movement, the first wave of feminism and a set of liberal ideas which led to the formation of an imperially loyal and yet reformist bourgeois State have been reinvestigated and new questions asked.¹

In the 1990s the "nervous nineties" have seemed less national, less radical, and less transformative than some of its earlier eulogists might have wished. On the eve of a new millennium, however, a new conservatism in federal politics is dismantling many of the liberal reforms that grew out of the struggles of the last century. The political culture of the 1990s has replaced trade protection with an open market, wage arbitration with enterprise bargaining, and white Australia with multiculturalism and indigenous reconciliation. Successive federal governments have sought to cede the responsibilities of the state to the global market and applied funding pressure to the key state institutions associated with health, welfare and education. The associated rise of the One Nation Party has again confused race with a desire to ameliorate the workings of capitalism, so indigenous reconciliation and multiculturalism become the scapegoats of an increasingly disenfranchised regional constituency. Developments such as these have made the liberal reforms prompted by the 1890s seem less modest and another look at the period seems especially important as we enter the twenty-first century.²

The response of Australian writers to the key preoccupations of the 1890s are presented here: *Histories and Futures*; *Home and Away*; *Love and Other Catastrophes*; *Work and Play*; *Civilisation and its Discontents*; and *Art and Society*.³ Public memory was used in the 1890s as a

dynamic resource for interventions in contemporary social and political struggles and speculations as to their future implications. The predominantly British Settler culture was inevitably preoccupied with domesticating the exotic spaces of the ancient continent and writers were imaginative about rethinking their new home and its relation to the Old World. The status and character of relations between the sexes remains an important barometer of any society and the sex question was deeply implicated in the imagining of an Australian social contract. Work in the 1890s was also organised by prevailing ideas about gender, race and class and these significantly inflected hopes for "the working man's paradise". Dreams of a happy wholesome society were troubled by the proximity of monstrous others in the form of primitive natives, Asian hordes, revolutionary masses and the new woman. The triumphant rise of a new civilisation in an ancient continent was haunted by its discontents. Literature has always been a vital component of cultural history and in the lead up to the federation of the Australian colonies opinion was divided as to whether it ought to guide moral development or social reform. Everyone seemed to agree that art was an indication of the level of a civilisation.

The Legend of the Nineties

The emergence of a self-consciously Australian sentiment in the decade preceding Federation soon became the stuff of legend in popular accounts of this country's cultural history. The claim, as Vance Palmer ambivalently described it in 1954, was that in the 1890s "a scattered people, with origins in all corners of the British Islands and in Europe, had a sudden vision of themselves as a nation, with a character of their own and a historic role to play, and this vision set fruitful creative forces in motion". According to A. W. Jose's 1933 account, it was not a *fin de siècle* but the beginnings of a new age in which European decadents were to be revitalised by the vigorous enthusiasms of optimistic Australian youth. The emerging Sydney-based movement was transformed into a national culture that sought to rediscover the poetry in everyday things and Jose set it against Melbourne's implicitly more conservative preoccupation with a European past. "Every one sang," he wrote, "everything Australian was worth writing about, in verse if possible. The diggings and the sea-ports, the slums and the Outback, the selections, and the stock-routes, and the wheatfields, and the artesian

boreas, all found their poet, and usually found him in high spirits." Jose's rose coloured view helped to establish the nineties legend but it was to be substantially modified by succeeding generations of Australian cultural historians.⁴

The gold rushes of the 1850s and 60s boosted the immigrant population and created the capital for an expansion of the cultural infrastructure in the form of theatres, libraries, mechanics' institutes, galleries and museums. One product of the spread of these cultural institutions and the colonial Education Acts was a growing popular audience and a number of periodicals emerged to cater for it. Australia, as Richard Twopenny wrote, was the "land of newspapers". The burgeoning press provided new outlets for writing on local subjects and some displayed an interest in local idioms. The numerous regional newspapers were important, as were the metropolitan dailies and the weeklies they established to tap the dispersed colonial audience. These papers included substantial literary sections with serialised fiction, short stories, verse and critical reviews. Angus and Robertson, The Bulletin Publishing Company and George Robertson later published some of this work in book form in Australia. Throughout the 1880s and 90s the ratio of overseas to local publication of Australian books actually increased, however, as the new professional authors sought the greater opportunities and more lucrative rewards of the British market.⁵

Chief amongst the new weeklies for historians of the Legend was J.F. Archibald's radical nationalist *Bulletin*, and under its aegis a new generation of Australian writers came to prominence. Sylvia Lawson's influential account of this national icon describes the ways in which its variety of discourses might fit the vigorous, youthful, optimistic images that we find in Jose's nostalgic recollections. The "great print circus" was a vital, expressive often-contradictory ensemble of different subjects, forms, styles, and voices. The literature published within its pages needs to be seen as just one of many acts in an excessive discursive carnival: "the relation of any one story was, most often, simply that of the one act sketch to the vaudeville sequence in which it took its turn ... the reader, having skipped or marched through the pages of argument and comment, taken in high satire, gossip, news and cartooning, visited fields of theatre and sport, was then offered escape routes into various mythic geographies ..."⁶

Critics have pointed out the large circulation and hence influence of

the dailies and their respective weeklies, but what made the *Bulletin* especially significant for a new generation of increasingly professional writers was that it paid upon receipt of the manuscript and it paid well. According to H.M. Green this gave the weekly "first call on almost every Australian writer," and although there is evidence of a particular editorial policy, work of an eclectic character found its way into the magazine. Henry Lawson's sparse sketches, realist short stories and sentimental verse could sit beside "the Banjo's" simple bush romanticism and his sporting jingles. Edward Dyson's stark bush stories, lurid mining tales and melodramatic indictments of the Chinese might share the page with the romantic writing of Victor Daley, Roderic Quinn or Louise Maek; bush ballads by Will Ogilvie, Breaker Morant — even Scotty the Wrinkler — could rub elbows with the cosmopolitan criticism and verse of Christopher Brennan.⁷

When the *Bulletin* "opened the literary floodgates" in the mid 1880s by accepting popular ballads and short fiction on local subjects it pioneered what came to be seen as a new nationalistic school of Australian writing. The discursive complexities of the *Bulletin* enabled it to address a broad, popular and heterogeneous audience, and it was proactive in imagining that audience as a national community. Archibald's weekly was interested in international trends, and it canvassed a range of issues which it thought pertinent to the social contracts required of the coming nation. These included a republican Australia, one person one vote, free secular education, criminal and penal reform, a united protected white Australia, and the abolition of titles of nobility and the private ownership of land. In a famous editorial in the late 1880s the *Bulletin* spelt out its ideal of the national character:

By the term Australian we mean not those who have been merely born in Australia. All white men who come to these shores — with a clean record — and who leave behind them the memory of the class-distinctions and the religious differences of the old world; all men who place the happiness, the prosperity, the advancement of their adopted country before the interests of Imperialism are Australian. In this regard all men who leave the tyrant-ridden lands of Europe for freedom of speech and right of personal liberty are Australians before they set foot on the ship which brings them hither. Those who fly from an odious military conscription, those who leave their fatherland because they cannot swallow the worm-eaten lie of the divine right of kings to murder peasants, are Australian by instinct — Australian and Republican are synonymous. No nigger, no Chinaman, no lascar, no kanaka, no purveyor of cheap coloured labour, is an Australian.

Archibald's famous weekly was racist, misogynist, socialist and republican in the late 1880s and the early 1890s. In art and letters it displayed its editor's preference for forms of Realism compatible with the new journalism and the pseudo-scientific pretensions of an emerging professional sociology. Prior to A.G. Stephens' development of the red page in 1896, Archibald was the force behind the *Bulletin*'s literary credo. Under his tutelage the weekly rejected the literary fashions of the 1880s as unhealthy, un-Australian and unscientific, and it intimately connected them to clerical wowers and a dissipated and corrupt aristocracy. Literature was not merely an index of the social and moral character of a civilisation; it was a potential tool for democratic social development. The magazine was therefore "committed to realism not only as an antidote to aestheticism, classicism, and unscientific romanticism but also as the literary vehicle of egalitarian and ... nationalist values". The controversial French realist, Emile Zola, was a significant role model and the *Bulletin* praised him for sociological insights that enabled literature to function as a prompt and guide for reformist social legislation.⁸

The Labour Movement

The *Bulletin*'s radicalism, nationalism, and racism complemented the campaigns of the labour movement and the periodicals that emerged to service them. The *Boomerang* (Bne 1887-92), *The Worker* (Bne 1890-1974; Syd 1891-) and, later in the decade, *Tocsin* (Melb 1897-1907) published verse, short fiction, serials and literary reviews. Henry Lawson, Bruntton Stephens, John Farrell, Francis Adams, A.G. Stephens, Mary Gilmore and Bernard O'Dowd were involved in different capacities. It is the English born journalist, editor, writer and activist, William Lane, however, who represents the most significant associate of the labour press. Lane used these newspapers to promote socialism and the New Unionism within the labour movement in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The political journalist's "mystical, religious communism" was inspired by international influences which included the radical religious movements of the early nineteenth century and the later economic, sociological and utopian theories of Adam Smith, Henry George, Edward Bellamy, and Karl Marx.⁹

As editor of *The Worker*, Lane was instrumental in promoting solidarity across unions in the interest of mobilising a more politically

effective working class and he was a major player in the great confrontations between labour and capital that occurred during the maritime strike of 1890 and the shearer's strike of 1891 — the industrial experiences that led to the formation of the Australian Labor Party in the same year. Lane's journalism closely associates the concepts of masculinity, class, race and nation which were a feature of the emerging labour movement's ideological campaigns. Such connections helped to win popular support, but they restricted the socialist project and opened the way for the appropriation of radical programs by the liberal reform movements. *The Workingman's Paradise* (1892), the novel he hastily wrote in the wake of the industrial defeats to raise funds for the imprisoned union leaders, is insistent in its utopian socialism. The overt racism that Lane shared with the *Bulletin* and most sections of the labour movement, however, inevitably helped shift the emphasis from class conflict to a white Australia.¹⁰

While they agreed on race, Lane and the *Bulletin* seemed poles apart on the position of women. In the *Bulletin*, women were often imagined as the domestic representatives of an Establishment that the radical magazine had planted firmly in its sights. The "fairer sex" earned the magazine's sympathy only when they could be presented as victims of the System. For Lane, it was Capitalism that deprived men and women of a natural, healthy and prosperous family life. In *The Workingman's Paradise* the impoverishment and subsequent prostitution of Nellie Lawton's sister inspires her determination to stay chaste and single: "nothing we can do, no care we can take, can secure a child against misery while the world is what it is". Under capitalism working class women are deprived of the resources required to respectably nurture themselves, their husbands and their offspring; men are emasculated by the servile dependency of the wage slave. Lane seized upon the ethical, vigorous and muscular heroes normally associated with romantic masculine adventures such as H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887), so as to craft a persuasive and essentially limited campaign for the redemption of the working class.¹¹

Feminism

Feminist cultural historiography from the 1980s has contested the masculine bias of earlier critics and argued for the significance of gender to the debates of the period. The position on gender that we find

in Lane's work shares some common ground with the women's movements. Nellie's critique of George Stratton's patriarchal ideal reveals tensions between feminism, socialism and nationalism. George's view of woman under socialism has her "full-hipped and broad-hearted, fit to love and be loved! Full-breasted and broad-hipped fit to have children! Full-brained and broad-browed, fit to teach them!" According to George, "women should be the embodiment of the nation, and none of them should work except for those they loved and of their own free will". Nellie's insightful critique parts company with this common labour position as well as with some of the more liberal and conservative forms of expedient feminism by insisting that a woman's significance stands separate from the maternal role:

Can't you see that it is because we have been degraded into machines that Society is what it is? ... you can't raise free men from slave women. We want to be free ... to be let alone a little, to be treated as human beings with souls, just as men do. We have hands to work with, brains to think with, and hearts to feel with. Why not join hands with us in theory as you do in fact? ... Will you refuse us the fruit of victory when the fight is won?

There was some confusion amongst the socialist and labour movements over the ideal relationships between the sexes in general and the place of women in particular. There were also disagreements between socialist feminists who rejected parliamentary processes of reform and more liberal minded feminists such as Rose Scott who sought suffrage as a progressive step. Suffrage was a significant goal of the feminist movement in this period, however, and Suffrage Leagues often sought to appropriate conservative definitions of maternity and femininity in arguing for reform. Poetry, fiction and journalistic commentary in the women's pages of the Labour press and new feminist periodicals such as Louisa Lawson's *The Dawn* (1888–1905) were vehicles for the campaign.¹²

In the early 1880s the Women's Christian Temperance Union established a colonial presence and took up campaigns for the respectable reform of domestic and public culture. Louisa Lawson established The Dawn Club as a forum for the discussion of women's issues and reforms in 1889, and it was soon absorbed into a new organisation when a group of "influential Sydney women" formed the Women's Suffrage League. The WSL suffered defections for being perceived as both too extreme and too conservative. The WCTU withdrew their association in the early nineties after Lizzie Ashton criticised the institution of

marriage and in 1901 a rebel group of women with Labor Party sympathies broke away to form an alternative group, the Women's Progressive Association. Lawson was involved with the WSL and the WPA and vigorously promoted the campaign for suffrage and women's emancipation in *The Dawn*. Strategic recourse to the moral domestic ideologies of the earlier evangelical campaigns allowed these movements to argue for women's entry to the public sphere in ways which did not necessarily threaten patriarchal definitions of woman's nature — but this was by no means the only strategy adopted. There were tensions between the less threatening positions taken by the WSL, the more working class orientations of the WPA and the "maverick" Lawson.¹³

The Dawn is an interesting site for an investigation of the strategies of the women's movement in the 1890s. A typical issue opens with an editorial invariably devoted to the public impact of women's causes. Titles such as "The Coming Woman", "The Education of Women", "Woman's Part in Evolution", "The Present Position of Women", "Give Women Their Due" reveal Lawson's interests. The tone and content of these editorials have a consistent character. Content includes education, suffrage, evolution, the national type, marriage, divorce reform, and occupational emancipation. The tone is consistently rational, moral, confident, and assertive. The representation of woman, both as writer and reader, as an intelligent, rational, capable, dependable and moral type is a significant strategy of *The Dawn* and enabled the magazine to extend its concern with social issues to the active development of its female readers.¹⁴

The Dawn imagined a resourceful, proactive and independent female citizen who was intended to transform society and this new woman carried significant implications for the types of narrative occasion and the forms of authorship that were available to women. Late nineteenth-century women poets were often confined by social expectation to conventionalised forms and devotional or domestic subjects. Woman's undeveloped mind, moral sensibility, and reproductive function ill fitted her for the public occasions and metaphysical experiences that provided men with the substance for serious poetry. Louisa Lawson's verse, collected in the *Lonely Crossing and Other Verses* in 1905, developed the critique of patriarchal society that we find in *The Dawn*, and represented another public performance of the revolution-

ary female reader imagined through her magazine. The generally supportive reception of Ada Cambridge's *Unspoken Thoughts* (1887), particularly in Australia, suggests that with contacts in the press and the publishing industry and an established reputation for fiction, a woman might also aspire to a serious poetic reputation. The response to Catherine Martin's novel, *An Australian Girl* (1890), certainly shows that local critics could allow women some latitude if they thought they were promoting the much maligned cultural accomplishments of the "Australian girl".¹⁵

Orthodox religion's responsibility for public morality often restricted critiques of the social predicament of men and women. Even the assertive Louisa Lawson sometimes skirted social ills by reverting to a conventional faith in spiritual redemption, and it is a common device in the poetry that contributors published in her magazine. Yet Michael Ackland argues that "the weight of particularised analysis and of dramatic revelations throughout [*The Lonely Crossing*] testifies to the contrary, thereby suggesting the inadequacy of former explanations and old standards".¹⁶ The possibility of a similar interpretation in the period, however, would have varied significantly across the different constituencies of the WCTU, the WSL, and the WPA.

Spirituality

Ada Cambridge's challenging collection, *Unspoken Thoughts*, seems to be the exception that demonstrates the rule. Australian reviewers perceptively placed this volume in the context of contemporary expressions of "religious doubt and social protest". Cambridge's "confidential expression ... [of] the moral and spiritual differences and cravings of the time" was generally welcomed, although criticism of the pessimistic tone of the volume foreshadowed later complaints about the work of Henry Lawson. Cambridge's handling of metaphysical issues differs from George Essex Evans's treatment of contemporary philosophical anxieties in its refusal to adopt the closures provided by orthodox Christianity. In so far as her "crisis of faith would expand into a general questioning of patriarchally ordained structures", Cambridge's poetry, like her fiction, needs to be read in the context of the women's movement at the end of the century. The poet rejects religious dogma and social convention as inimical to the realisation of the individual's divine spirit. Her subsequent quest via

representations of nature and an associated ethical exploration of the self, however, particularly in so far as that process is directed towards an ultimate union with an idealised soul-mate, offers comparison with the more egoistic wanderings of the troubled scholar, poet and critic Christopher Brennan.¹⁷

Brennan pursued poetry upon his return from Europe in 1894 as compensation for his forced separation from his German fiancée and the spiritual gap left by his lapsed Catholicism. His *Poems [1913]* is organised according to the principles of the Symbolist *livre composé* and chronicles the poet's romantic search for Eden. The academic poet initially used heroic love as a means to paradise, but he abandoned this theme soon after his marriage, superseding it with the heroic individual's introspective search for the transcendent self. This phase of Brennan's verse is notoriously difficult and reflects his view that the artist writes for himself alone and not the public. The final section of the collection, "The Wanderer", retains an interest in the heroic self but it relinquishes the struggle to find in language and image an absolute symbol; a struggle soon to be taken up by the young John Shaw Neilson. The abandonment of the quest for Eden is met by a corresponding sense of resignation to what seems inevitable defeat. It is here that Brennan's poetry comes closest to establishing thematic connections with the precarious sense of questing spirituality found in Cambridge and the frustrated stoic heroes of his male contemporaries. Brennan's sense of isolation and alienation is in many ways typical of both the colonial intellectual and the English decadents of the end of the century.¹⁸

The search for a divine and yet individualised self has been traced to Brennan's interest in the theosophical ideas of the Christian esoteric, Edward Maitland, who visited Australia in the 1850s. Theosophy explored the divinity of the human soul as part of a program that attempted to reaffirm spirituality in an increasingly materialistic society and it significantly influenced the thinking of a wide range of colonial writers, intellectuals, and politicians. Brennan's poetry shares with Maitland's work the sense that life's spiritual quest was a search through experience and higher knowledge to the realisation of an individualised, divine and yet dynamic self.¹⁹

The use of theosophical ideas allowed Rosa Praed to develop the exploration of the "sex problem", which was a feature of the work of

contemporaries such as Lane, Cambridge, Tasma, Louisa and Henry Lawson, Barbara Baynton, Catherine Martin, Joseph Furphy and Miles Franklin. The Queensland-born novelist put her own experiences of remote bush living and a troubled marriage to good use in a string of racy colonial novels published after she moved to England in 1876. An interest in theosophy taught her that "the renegotiation of [sexual] relations required a rethinking of the claims of sensual and psychic love". The development of this line of thinking in the popular thrillers of Guy Boothby and the erotic poetry of W.L. Marshall Hall, the controversial Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne, justifies feminist fears that theosophy might have more potential for libertine pleasures than feminist emancipation. In occult novels such as *The Brother of the Shadow* (1886) and *The Soul of Countess Adrian* (1891) and colonial adventures such as *Oulaw and Lawmaker* (1893) and *Fugitive Arne* (1903), however, Praed was able to question a patriarchal society held together by confinement within monogamous marriage, the objectifying relations of heterosexual desire, and the economic and intellectual dependence of women.²⁰

Imperial Frontiers and the Indigene

Praed's freedom to confront controversial social issues was partly due to the latitude that an English audience allowed tales from the exotic frontiers of its empire. The Anglo-Australian fiction writer's achievement, like Baynton's, Lawson's and others, represents a subversion of these popular ideological forms. The use of the Australian frontier as a site of adventure in the popular fiction of the late nineteenth century often served the masculinist interests of the new imperialism. *Fin-de-Siècle* doubts over cultural decadence, racial degeneration and the future of civilisation in Europe, and an increasingly pessimistic sense of the failure of utopian hopes for the new nation in the Australian context, were anxiously exercised in the works of Rolfe Boldrewood, Ernest Favenc, George Firth Scott, Alexander McDonald, Guy Boothby and Louis Becke. The novel of imperial adventure functioned to resolve "contradictions in the lived experience of imperialism" by involving Anglo-Saxon men in the narrative triumphs of vigorous, virtuous and sexually successful adventurers. The ripping yarn expressed a modern "ideology of

identity that found redemption in the other, in difference and alienation".²¹

The original inhabitants of the continent were represented throughout the nineteenth century by a set of recurring tropes that justified exploration, invasion and then settlement. The invaders transformed the indigene through a grotesque aesthetic which configured them as demons who had to be exorcised by the representatives of a coming civilisation. Settlers safely following along behind the violent frontier were free to appreciate their picturesque beauty as an enlightened civilisation supplanted exotic natives who were sadly disappearing into history. The Aborigines might have been in the same space but they were in a different time. The colonists' brief was to usher in a new age through cultivation and dispossession. Memories of the land's first inhabitants nevertheless "lingered as if ghosts forever haunting the psyche of the nation ... The once dreary featureless bush now teemed with spirits and history, making this *new* country the most *ancient* land, and giving its new owners a new indigenous identity". Henry Lawson's bush undertaker is haunted by the bush, as the "nurse and tutor of eccentric minds", for desecrating an Aboriginal grave; the subliminal eroticism of an Aboriginal corroboree serves as a foil for the frustrated courtship of the romantic heroes in Praed's *Outlaw and Lawmaker*, while "Pompey", Ernest Favenc's tale of Aboriginal dispersion, ends with the mutual destruction of a white man and his Aboriginal son. As the Victorian era approached an end the consolations of imperial masculinism became increasingly questionable. The Melanesian, Asian and Pacific stories of Becke, Favenc and Sutherland disavow the utopian hopes of a young nation in waiting by powerfully exposing the moral failure of colonial sub-imperialism.²²

A Liberal Nation

The utopian hopes and dreams for a New World in the great southern land seemed to dry up as the decade progressed towards Federation. Pessimism seemed the predominant mood as labour failed in the great strikes of 1890 and 1891; capitalism struggled for credibility in the depression and the subsequent collapse of the Banks in 1892 and 1893; and drought and a general rural downturn crushed the many small land-holders who had taken advantage of the selection acts to secure their own piece of the country. William Lane, Mary Gilmore and others

left for a "New Australia" in South America in a vain effort to show that socialist idealism had a future, but by 1894 this Paraguayan experiment was a failure. Metropolitan writers with substantial rural experience such as Henry Lawson, Barbara Baynton, Steele Rudd, and Miles Franklin showed the devastating effects of a rural crisis on the hopes and aspirations of working men and women. Lawson, Edward Dyson, and Crewee Roe (Victor Daley) went on to suggest that life in the cities was little better for the working class. As the century waned the *Bulletin* ditched republican socialism for economic security and drifted towards more conservative policies. A.G. Stephens took over as literary editor in the middle of the decade and his complex aesthetic tastes seemed more appropriate to the magazine's less radical character in the run up to Federation. The Toowoomba born critic, who received his training from the regional press and was a vigorous supporter of the concept of a national school of literature, played a significant role in the careers of most of the important writers of his generation. Local value was only a preliminary step for Stephens, however, and he insisted upon a familiarity with international literary traditions and a putatively universal standard. In the early part of the new century the vote and parliamentary representation seemed to do little for women or the labour movement and the *Bulletin's* disagreements with the bourgeois imperatives of the new Federal Government seem hardly worth mentioning.²³

In such a context Tom Collins, the magnificently unreliable narrator created by Joseph Furphy, provided a rather appropriate perspective for the new Australian nation. The theoretical eclecticism of the auto-didact prevents him from accurately reading a world that is characterised by personal suffering, sexual exploitation and class oppression. Collins's irritating, abstract and quasi-scientific philosophising establishes "an organising scheme of explanation that evades realities." The vital presentation of a socialist future which might have explained the "alienation and confusion" of Collins's social order was edited out of the vernacular sprawl that became *Such is Life* (1903). Catherine Martin's exploration of German socialism suffered a similar fate a decade earlier. Richard Bentley, Martin's English publisher, had the offending chapter of *An Australian Girl* removed from the second edition along with the "metaphysical observations" of its romantic heroine, because his reader and the reviewers felt they violated the form

of the novel. The condensation of Martin's novel emphasised its romance; the abbreviation of Furphy's great tome confined the nationalist classic to the expression of a humorous, but nevertheless frustrated scepticism.²⁴

Colonial literary criticism registered the anxieties of the end of the century through its continuing interest in the possibilities of a national literature. If literature was the measure of social development then colonial cultures required one as a means of self-justification. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century as colonial governments exercised greater degrees of independence it became something of a favoured pastime to argue over the existence, character and future of the local literary product. The role of criticism in providing an environment conducive to the development of quality was a persistent emphasis and critics played with the tensions between local interest and universal values.²⁵

While those critics who were interested in cultivating quality were expressing concern at nationalist enthusiasms for the colonial product, the English market was demanding local character. The "Introductory Note" to Rosa Praed's *Policy and Passion* (1881) claims an ethnographic interest in colonial life for the benefit of her English audience. Such claims were intimately bound up with the evolutionary ideas of the time and represented a common marketing strategy for Australian writing both in England and the colonies. In the words of Hippolyte A. Taine, "when the literary work is rich, and one knows how to interpret it, we find there the psychology of a soul, frequently of an age, now and then of a race". Douglas B. Sladen accordingly identified the chief interest in his 1888 anthology of Australian verse as racial in character. "Australia is the country of the future," he wrote. "Separated by oceans from every considerable land except impenetrable and equatorial New Guinea, blessed with an unmalarious climate more brilliant and equable than that of Italy, and peopled from the most adventurous stock, this round world in the far South-eastern seas gives race development its amplest scope." The literature of colonial Australia provided a bird's eye view of a dynamic experiment into the redevelopment of the British race in an exotic geography. Poetry, drama, short fiction, and the novel regardless of its form or ideology might be read as an expression of the experiment.²⁶

The Cultural Heritage

If the Legend of the Nineties has its roots in these nineteenth century

ideas it has tended to shift its character with the changing politics and perspective of different critical generations. For a century now the Labor movement has been intent upon promoting the period as a moment when the working people awoke to their exploitation and sought to develop a new Australian state free from the social inequalities of a European past. More conservative political interests registered the force of this argument between the wars when they worked to reshape the writers of the period as picturesque chroniclers of a pioneering past. From this past they derived the values of the Australian nation. Some of the writers in the nineties were already aware that modernity was rapidly consigning their subjects to the romantic adventures of a bygone age. G.A. Taylor's *Those Were the Days* (1918), John Le Gay Breton's *Knocking Around* (1930), the collection of Lawson reminiscences *Henry Lawson By His Mates* (1931) and A.W. Jose's *Romantic Nineties* (1933) helped to consolidate a nostalgic view of a golden period.²⁷

In the 1940s, 50s and 60s the Communist Party of Australia tried to justify its national significance by attaching itself to its own version of the nineties. Vance Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954), A.A. Phillips's *The Australian Tradition* (1958) and Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958) were influential monographs which confirmed the contribution to the national ethos of the bush writing from the period. Literary critics who complained that nationalist interest prevented a discriminating assessment of the nineties' literary achievement immediately challenged these sociological accounts. Academic historians later pointed out the influence of international ideas, the significance of the city, and the lack of attention given to the nation building achievements of the middle classes.²⁸

In the 1970s and 80s, feminist critics explored the erasure of many important women writers from the end of the century. The masculinist politics of the Legend had discredited women's writing and so Tasmania, Ada Cambridge, Rosa Praed and Catherine Martin were recovered, and Barbara Baynton and Miles Franklin reinterpreted. The 1980s and 90s brought fashionable critical trends from overseas. Psychoanalysis, new historicism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism allowed Australian critics to explore the politics of subjectivity, representation and history. The social policies of the Federal Labor Government seemed to reflect this critical interest in the politics of identity and the Hawke

and Keating governments combined their rationalist economic policies with a public advocacy of multiculturalism and indigenous reconciliation. This putatively "elitist" and "intellectual" interest in exotic minorities has in turn been interpreted as the neglect of blue-collar and regional constituencies and media commentators and members of the Howard Government have blamed it for the rapid rise of a new populist, racist and anti-intellectual political force. As Paul Kelly puts it, Pauline Hanson shakes the cage into which Australia has consigned its history. She is an echo of our Anglo-Celtic origins; the claims of the once mighty bush to define the Australian legend; a descendant of the romanticism and racism of Henry Lawson whose hold on national identity was once so comprehensive... the latest manifestations of our reflex to distrust authority, abuse our elites and damn our leaders... As 1990s Australia looks anxiously towards the centenary of Federation it seems that the 1890s still has a few things to teach us.²⁹

Notes

- Footnotes will be grouped at the end of paragraphs and full bibliographic details can be found in the select bibliography. An earlier anthology of 1890s writing appeared in the Australian Authors Series: Leon Cantrell, ed. *The 1890s: Stories, Verse and Essays*, St. Lucia: UQP, 1977.
- For an account of the ameliorative politics of middle class reformism see R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, and Alastair Davidson. The term "nervous nineties" is from John Docker's monograph of the same name, Paul Kelly, p. 96.
- Each section has its own thematic introduction.
- Vance Palmer, p. 9. See also Tom Inglis Moore and Geoffrey Serle. Arthur W. Jose, pp. 27-33, p. 43, p. 28.
- Ken Stewart, "Journalism and the World of the Writer", p. 175. R.E.N. Twopeny, p. 221. Elizabeth Morrison, "Serial Fiction in Australian Colonial Newspapers", and "Introduction", pp. xv-xviii. H.M. Green, p. 378. Ken Stewart, "Introduction", *The 1890s*.
- Sylvia Lawson, p. 180.
- Morrison, "Serial Fiction". Stewart, "Journalism and the World of the Writer", pp. 183-84. See Henry Lawson, "Pursuing Literature", pp. 109-15, for a discussion of the economics of publishing in the period H.M. Green, p. 785.
- Anderson. See also David Carter and Gillian Whitlock. *The Bulletin 17 June 1893* cited in Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, pp. 224-25. "Australia for the Australians", *The Bulletin* 2 July 1887, cited in Sylvia Lawson, p. 130. Doug Jarvis, "Lawson, the *Bulletin* and the Short Story" and "The Development of an Egelian Poetics in the *Bulletin*", p. 30.
- See Lloyd Ross; Robin Gollan; Gavin Souter; Verity Burgmann; and Marilyn Lake, "Socialism and Manhood". Michael Wilding, "Introduction", p. [10].
- Burgmann, p. 21. Wilding argues that Lane's circumspection on class conflict was prompted by contemporary sensitivities over the conspiracy convictions of the union leaders in the Shearers' dispute. See Wilding, "Introduction".
- Sylvia Lawson, pp. 194-204. Lake, "Socialism and Manhood". William Lane, *The Working Man's Paradise*, p. 176. Lake's source is Richard White, pp. 78-84, but see also Robert Dixon, pp. 1-14.
- See the work of Susan Sheridan (1995), Kay Schaffer (1988), Marilyn Lake "The Politics of Respectability", Docker *The Nervous Nineties* (1991) and the essays in *Debutante Nation* (1993). Lane, *The Working Man's Paradise*, p. 72, p. 73. Judith Allen, "The Feminisms of the Early Women's Movements". Patricia Grimshaw, pp. 100-13. Sheridan, pp. 86-102.
- Lake, "The Politics of Respectability". Judith A. Allen, *Rose Scott*, pp. 95ff. Audrey Oldfield, "Louisa Lawson", pp. 261-66. See also Sheridan, pp. 89-100.
- Christopher Lee, "Feminism, Nationalism", pp. 267-68.
- Brian Matthews, *Louisa*, p. 178. Sheridan, pp. 77-78. Michael Ackland, "A View From the Other Side", pp. 205-14. Patricia Barton, pp. 154-59. Christopher Lee, "Romance, Gender, Nation".
- Ackland, p. 213.
- Barton, "Background", p. 155. *Daily Telegraph*, 6 August 1887, qtd in Barton, p. 157. Christopher Lee, "The Emasculation of Henry Lawson". Michael Ackland, *That Shining Band*, p. 159, pp. 171-74.
- Axel Clark.
- Dorothy Green, p. 28, p. 35. Jill Roe.
- Kay Ferrer, "Rewriting Desire", p. 241, pp. 238-55. On feminist fears of male sexuality see Judith Allen, "Our Deeply Degraded Sex" and "The Animal in Man". Dixon, pp. 100-17.
- Dale Spender Docker, *The Nervous Nineties*, pp. 167-232; Dixon, p. 1. Ian McLean, p. 47.
- McLean, p. 50. Dixon, p. 179.
- Sylvia Lawson, p. 152. S.F. Lee, "A.G. Stephens: The Critical Creed" and "A.G. Stephens as Literary Editor"; John Barnes, "A.G. Stephens and the Critic's Tasks"; Gillian Whitlock.
- Michael Wilding, p. 131, p. 132. It was later serialised in the *Barrier Truth* in 1905 but had to wait until 1946 before it was published in full in a single volume as *Rigby's Romance*. Contrary to Wilding, Patrick Morgan suggests that the despair which superseded the utopian hopes of nationalism was a sign of its spiritual emptiness. Patrick Morgan, pp. 53-72. Lee, "Romance, Gender, Nation", p. 72.
- Brian Kiernan, *Criticism*, p. 4 and *Studies in Australian Literary History*, pp. 11-17.

26. R.M. Praed, "Introductory Note", p. v. H.A. Taine, p. 20. Douglas B. Sladen, "Introduction", p. [xiif].
27. Lloyd Ross, *Fifty Years: Wilding, Studies in Classic Australian Fiction*; and Lee, "Pomp and Ceremony", and "Bronzed Aussie".
28. David Carter. There were many academic interpretations that can be seen in this context: G.A. Wilkes' work on Brennan, John Barnes' work on Joseph Furphy, and Brian Matthews' work on Henry Lawson are all good examples: see the Select Bibliography for more examples. Leigh Astbury; Graeme Davison; and Michael Roe. Note also Russel Ward, "The Australian Legend Revisited".
29. Susan Sheridan; Joy Hooton. The significant monographs have been those by Richard White (1981), John Docker (1984) and (1991); Graeme Turner (1986); Sylvia Lawson (1987); Kay Schaffer (1988); Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra (1990); Susan Sheridan (1995); Robert Dixon (1995) and Ian Mclean (1998). P.P. McGuiness; Paul Kelly, pp. 92-93.

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