MANNING CLARK'S HENRY LAWSON*

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The squall which swept over Manning Clark's *In Search of Henry Lawson* was as savage as it was short, but when the clouds cleared and the lightning receded, very little of the book's basic argument had been illuminated. This essay will attempt to focus on the kind of social theory and underlying philosophy of history shaping both the book's structure of ideas and its attitude towards sources and 'facts'. In these terms, what appear to be wilful inaccuracies by Clark, as in his having Lawson die 'near the earth from which he came',1 turn out to be necessities of Clark's conceptual scheme. The broader intellectual context of Clark's argument also needs examining, its relationship to end-of-ideology theory stemming from the Cold War 1950s and early 1960s, and to related developments in Australian literary history.

Clark's view of Henry Lawson and Lawson's relationship to Australian society rests on a wider view of the whole course of Western civilisation: the conflicts and divisions which make Lawson so interesting and central to our view of Australia are seen as the conflicts which are embedded in Western history itself. The universality of Lawson's problems and dilemmas can be seen in the history of his family, and particularly of his paternal grandfather, the Norwegian Peder Larsen. According to Clark, Peder Larsen, living on the island of Tromoy, was, like other members of the puritan wing of Christ's church in Norway, a 'deeply divided man'. Larsen was still attracted to the 'frenzy and the passion encouraged by those pagan cults which had been followed in the country for thousands of years before the teaching of the Galilean fisherman and the morality of Moses and Paul of Tarsus were superimposed on the old heathen rites and values'. The old pre-Christian, pagan 'trolls' lived on in Lawson's grandfather just as they lived on in that other Norwegian, Henrik Ibsen, so that Peder Larsen was caught between 'two strong currents—the Dionysian and the Christian, the flesh and the spirit, human uproar and respectability, life in the bright light of the sun, or death in the darkness of a Norwegian winter'. Like his grandson, Larsen took heavily to drink, torn between the Dionysian urge and the black, puritanic aspect of Norway, 'the followers of the avenging and the punishing Galilean' (pp. 2-4).

The portrait of the grandfather sets the terms of the book, and reveals Clark's basically dualistic vision. There is a drama of conflict created in *In Search of Henry Lawson* between the people who quest for life, vitality, and metaphysical understanding, and the repressive conformists who attempt to destroy these questers. The cast of conformists is extensive. It includes all puritan Christians, like Lawson's mother Louisa and his wife Bertha, daughter of the socialist and feminist Bertha McNamara. Women such as these oppose men's love of drinking.

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* This is a greatly expanded version of a review of Clark's book which appeared in the *National Times*, 2 June 1978.
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gambling, and horse-racing, because they blindly follow, in an oft-repeated, talismanic phrase, the moral precepts set by 'the Law of Moses and the teachings of Paul of Tarsus' (p. 25), rather than the life-giving and questioning side of Christianity, as in the Book of Job and Ecclesiastes.

It includes Henry's father Niels Hertzberg Larsen, who, unlike his father and his son, was not troubled by 'metaphysical anxiety' (p. 4). Niels Larsen was unpoetic, practical, orderly minded, a 'clock-husband' to Louisa: 'the husband with the mathematical head, the man who had geometry and measurements but not poetry in his soul' (pp. 9-10). It includes all the people in Australian society who are like Henry's father in their basic cast of character: the teachers at his schools who know only the dry rules of grammar; the destructive critics like A. G. Stephens—'that punctuation and spelling bully' (p. 59)—who stand for the merely analytical and critical in people, rather than the creative, imaginative, and sensitive.

The cast of conformists includes, curiously, academics like those of Sydney University, 'the pundits of Parramatta Road' (p. 56). It includes also most of the socialists and radicals of the time like William Lane: 'For Lane was one of those puritans, those frowners, those heart dimmers and head shrinkers who wanted to superimpose on his utopian socialist society the moral code of Moses and St. Paul. He was a moraliser, a spiritual bully posing as a social reformer and an architect of human happiness. Lane was not only a stranger to but also by nature a disapprover of the Dionysian frenzy in Lawson' (p. 40). Life presents a conflict between those with a 'sensitive heart' and the philistine 'measurers' and 'heart dimmers' and 'straiteners' (pp. 12, 113).

Opposed to the straiteners in life stand the 'enlargers', an always embattled minority. Clark dislikes intensely the repressive Christians in the bush, particularly the women, 'those long-suffering, self-appointed temperance officers in Australia, the wives of the drinking classes' (p. 121). Against them he poses the excitement of life at Grandpa Albury's rum shanty, as Clark records in strangely coy language. 'Thereafter the men had taken many swigs at the big black bottle, with some women telling them they had had enough, and other women seeming to hope they would have some more, because the more they had the more inclined they seemed to be to put an arm around a lady's waist, and give a bit of a squeeze, always making sure the hand did not wander towards either of the sources of life, except for those men who were past a joke' (p. 19). The bushmen and the rare women who enjoy pub life, with its sexual vitality and roistering, have their counterpart in the 'Dionysian frenzy' (p. 71) of city Bohemians—the 'writers, the painters, the journalists, the university teachers' with whom Lawson associated in Sydney in the 'nineties (pp. 81, 87). With these anti-puritans Lawson could enjoy 'the pleasures dear to the hearts of Bohemians—drinking, bawdy talk, gossip, idleness and sexual promiscuity' (p. 48).

The men of Bohemia were an ever-threatened elite, expressing male camaraderie, drinking in pubs, enjoying the company of non-moralistic women. They were an elite whose life could be counterposed to 'the deserts of Australian suburbia' (p. 109), where repressive wives ruled and destroyed. The true bush people and the city Bohemians stand against 'a society corrupted by commercialism and the values of the money-changers' (p. 93). Clark is developing here the terms of a romantic, anti-utilitarian critique which goes back to figures like Blake, Words-
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worth, Carlyle, Ruskin, William Morris and D. H. Lawrence, and is represented in Australia by writers like Brennan, Norman Lindsay, Slessor, Hope, and Patrick White.

The over-riding value in *In Search of Henry Lawson* lies in Clark's view of a necessary and determining relationship between a specific natural environment and a specific culture. In this argument, the essence of Australian culture is found in rural areas and is associated with the peculiarities and distinctiveness of Australian nature. Nature in Australia is harsh and unremitting; it induces feelings of weird melancholy, and of frequent terror and desolation; it is a nature that mocks the puny efforts of humans to change or alter it. But such knowledge is the basis of the true bush culture in Australia, that aspect of the bushman's creed that a 'man must endure as best he could his being here, as well as his going into the silence—that ripeness was all, that the moments of pain were many, and the moments of pleasure very few' (p. 18). These feelings were of the essence of Lawson's 'own people, the bush people' (p. 93)—the knowledge of the 'simple people', the wisdom of a rural folk culture, the metaphysical truth of Australian nature.

This fundamental wisdom was denied by the conformist urban dwellers of Australia, the believers in mere material progress. Both the middle-class philistines and the radicals, socialists, and feminists—the official labour movement as well as the 'self-appointed moral improvers of mankind' who met in his mother's house or at the McNamaras' book-shop—were obsessed by a belief that 'some change in society would change the human situation' (p. 67). But human societies come and go, in transient and superficial forms: nature always remains, expressing the permanent truths of life.

Lawson, however, was destructively caught in the dilemma of at once being attracted to the urban social improvers, and wishing to be at one with the truths of 'the human heart' and the 'central human instincts' (pp. 67, 16). There is a basic conflict in Australian culture between nature and the society imposed upon it, and nature would always win. 'For in everything he wrote, even in his days of wildest enthusiasm for the causes of the people, there was an undercurrent of melancholy, the melancholy of a man who had no reason to believe from all his previous experience of life that things could or would ever be very different. Nature had so blended the elements in his clay that he both wanted to believe that there was some cure for the ills of earth', at the same time as he knew that the 'one great piece of folk wisdom he had picked up in his childhood in the Australian bush was that things were still the same as ever out on the never-never—and always would be' (pp. 32-33).

Lawson is trapped and bewildered by these dualities in the society and in himself. He both wants to believe in Revolution and the future of the working class, yet knows that the basic value of Australia lies in the metaphysical truth of people's inner life, not in the external forms of society. He wants to be Dionysian, yet fears the respectability of society. He wants harmony and sexual fulfilment with women, yet feels that the powerful women in his life denied the eternal feminine in themselves—as givers of sympathy, support, kindness, and as part of nature, their sexuality—and so became avenging moralisers. Torn apart, Lawson destroyed himself in drink, self-pity, and wild acts of revenge against people he thought were his persecutors.

Clark's view of society as a culture-nature matrix is not unique, but is a development in specific Australian terms of what the American
historian of ideas René Wellek has called ‘historism’ or historicism. In figures like Herder the core of a culture is seen as inhering in organic connections between ethnic or national identity, a specific natural environment, and an associated language and literature. The distinctiveness of a culture is stressed, and this is often located in folk elements. Historicism was important not only in Continental intellectual history—in thinkers following on from Herder like Hegel, Burckhardt, Huizinga, or Dilthey—but also in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British writers, particularly and influentially, Carlyle. Historicism was often closely associated with nationalism, and promoted concepts like the national way of life or spirit or character or being. Often historicist ideas fuelled a distrust of cities, because urban landscapes were seen as covered in a dusty blanket of similarity and undistinguishability; only by attuning itself to its own specific natural environment and its own specific folk could a culture realise its prized difference from other cultures. Consequently the distinctiveness of a society was continuously held up as a primary value and aim, an almost mystically desired cultural end.

Historicism, nevertheless, was not necessarily nationalist. It could urge and enjoy diversity as well as celebrate an exclusive and superior ethnic identity; like other fertile cultural and intellectual traditions historicism could be taken up and developed in quite different and often contradictory directions. In Australia a major historicist school has been developed by writers, critics, and cultural historians like Nettie Palmer, Vance Palmer, A. A. Phillips, Geoffrey Serle, Ian Turner, and Russel Ward, and indeed Ward’s *The Australian Legend* (1958) may be taken as paradigmatic of their radical nationalist version of historicism. Ward finds in parts of nineteenth-century Australian rural society a ‘folk’ culture, strong in values of egalitarianism, sceptical humour, hospitality, and mateship.

The first few pages of Ward’s book tell the historiographical story. Setting out to describe Australia’s characteristic self-image, Ward begins by locating his ‘national mystique’ in the ‘national character’, which in turn is identified as the typical Australian man. In his 1965 foreword to the second edition Ward is at pains to stress that he is not describing what the ‘average’ Australian is like, or what most Australians or most of Australia is like. He is not dealing with observable social traits, presumably urban, which tie in Australian men with their English or American fellows. Rather, he points out with some exasperation to his critics, he is talking about the ‘typical’ man at the root of Australia’s desired ‘self-image’. In effect, the essential Australia, the Australia of the spirit, is writ large in the figure and characteristics of the bushman, even though that bushman is largely a nineteenth-century figure and most Australians now live in the cities. Our observable social world would appear to be at odds with Australia’s underlying spirit, but that doesn’t mean that this spirit doesn’t strongly persist, nor does it mean that national myths and self-images aren’t vitally important in a society’s past, present, and future.


3. For an extended discussion of the meanings of historicism in the Australian context, see my paper ‘Australian Literature and an Australian History of Ideas: The Historiography of the Nineties’, given to the Inaugural Conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, Monash University, May 1978.
Manning Clark has long been seen and occasionally hailed as an opponent of the radical nationalists, at least since his essay 'Re-writing Australian History' appeared in 1956 and proved influential in Australian historiography—for example, in its vision of the cities as manifestations of the power and importance of the bourgeoisie in the making of Australian society. Clark’s opposition to the radical nationalist view of the nineteenth century is restated in the Lawson book. He describes as a ‘comforter, or life-lie’ the idea Lawson had once entertained that the ‘bush was the nursery of all the saving features of life in Australia—of mateship, compassion, sympathy and all the manly virtues’ (p. 49). He points to the ‘dark side to the heart of the bushman’ revealed in the hatred of the Chinese on Lambing Flat, when the miners became ‘monsters in human shape’ savaging the Chinese (p. 20), a dark side which explodes the myth of egalitarianism. But Clark too we can identify as historicist, theoretically in the latter part of ‘Re-writing Australian History’ and demonstrably in the work on Lawson.

Russel Ward’s The Australian Legend and Manning Clark’s In Search of Henry Lawson—what two books could be more different? Yet while the direction of interest and location of value in these works differ clearly, the fundamental philosophy of history is similar and entails like theoretical consequences. Like Ward, Clark has a notion of the typical bushman as the basis of Australia’s national being. ‘Australia’, Clark tells us in his preface, ‘is Lawson writ large’, and the ‘story of his life might prove to be a forewarning to all of us of “wretched days to be”.’ Both stress the central importance of qualities of consciousness in the historical process, but each inverts the qualities admired or focused on by the other. Whereas Ward’s national character appears as a confident, optimistic figure, Clark’s essential bushman—for Lawson’s roots, it is stressed throughout, are in the bush and his most profound stories are about it—is at his best a figure of metaphysical questioning about the purpose of existence, knowing that the moments of pleasure are so few and always surrounded by pain. In its unremitting harshness, the Australian bush encourages such questioning, and is in itself a metaphysical fact and force. The true folk it produces are those who can at once enjoy in a Dionysian way the pleasures of life, and at the same time experience ultimate doubts. This is Lawson’s deepest wisdom, his mature vision—far deeper than his socialist and feminist leanings, which were the direct product of his impressionable early days with his mother and the assortment of radicals who visited the McNamara’s bookshop.

It is interesting to note that Clark has not always perceived Lawson in the way he now does, nor always admired him and seen him as a crucial figure in the history of the Australian spirit. In the 1956 ‘Re-writing Australian History’ essay Clark, on the contrary, is fairly short and dismissive with Lawson. He feels that Lawson’s ideas of mateship and the brotherhood of bushmen are shallow and trivial compared to the ultimate religious and metaphysical questions being raised by poets contemporary to Clark like Douglas Stewart, James McAuley, and Kenneth Slessor—in the company of writers like these, Lawson is strictly small beer.  

5. ‘Re-writing Australian History’, p. 141.
In Clark's view these modern poets, dwelling on questions of time and death and suffering and doubt, were discovering new truths about Australia's past and present. At the same time similar things were being said by some newly prominent Australian literary critics, who began vigorously to promote the importance of writers in Australia who appeared to express certain European metaphysical dilemmas—recognised as international and indeed universal—rather than ideological and political concerns, dismissed as external, impermanent, local, and necessarily unsubtle. Writers like Hope, McAuley, Slessor, Douglas Stewart, Patrick White, Martin Boyd, Henry Handel Richardson, and Christopher Brennan were acclaimed as of primary importance for criticism, teaching, and research. But this same metaphysicalising process also began to be read back into writers previously thought foreign to it, like Furphy or Lawson. The critical knife was now used to cut away the inessential, ideological parts of Lawson's or Furphy's work, to reveal cores which looked very like the central concerns of Christopher Brennan, the contemporary often felt to be their aesthetic opposite and opponent.

In the 1960-61 summer issue of Quadrant, ever a sanctuary for the subtle, H. P. Heseltine pitted himself against what he saw as the 'received scripture' on Lawson, the view that Lawson offers a 'vision of a happy band of brothers marching forward to a political and social Utopia, united in hatred of tyranny, their love of beer, their rugged manliness and independence'. Heseltine argues that there is an unresolved conflict between the policy-making half (the mateship-inventing half) of Lawson's mind and the half which controlled his real artistic talent. The side of Lawson which is anti-capitalist, and which gives mateship social and political meanings, does not represent the genuinely creative part of his imagination. On the contrary, Heseltine feels, we should see mateship in Lawson's stories not as the confident and positive expression of a bush community, but as a last line of defence against an uninviting, even hostile frontier. The Australian outback is for Lawson frighteningly anti-human, and his most compelling response to it is one of horror. Living in the bush affects the bushmen with desperation, terror, and insanity. There are examples of mateship embodying selfless nobility, but these examples always belong to the past, for which Lawson expresses a recurring nostalgia. In the present, however, Lawson experiences a sense of emotional loss and disillusion, and the figures which preoccupy his mind are 'the solitaries, the bearers of some secret sorrow, some thought that lies too deep for tears'.

In 1957 Vincent Buckley in his well-known essay 'The Image of Man in Australian Poetry'—its title as male-centred in its assumptions as Russel Ward's bushman—decided to demote Lawson, and to install Brennan instead as central to Australian historical experience in the 1890s. But when in 1972 he came to write the foreword for Brian Matthews's book on Lawson The Receding Wave, Buckley particularly praised Heseltine's Quadrant piece for helping to establish a new view—'Heseltine agrees with other critics in judging Lawson's attitude to the bush to be one of horror'. Buckley sketches out again what had been the main lines of Heseltine's argument. Lawson's fiction is defined by 'a peculiar despair and sardonicism'; his greatest strength comes from his active empathy with 'bush melancholy', a feeling characteristic of the bushmen of his time; the bushmen were always ambivalent in their

response to the bush, and often were subject to 'an incipient madness'; mateship is not so much an enduring source of courage and hope as an occasion for nostalgia, a sign of lost possibilities. Lawson's bush characters are pervaded by 'mental gloom', by wasted energies, and by an 'extreme loneliness' and an 'isolate sensibility'.

In *In Search of Henry Lawson* Manning Clark speaks to, relies on, and biographically fills in this New Critical orthodoxy about Lawson's true imaginative concerns. Clearly in 1956 in 'Re-writing Australian History' Clark was criticising what he felt to be the radical nationalist portrait of Lawson. He now joins the company of critics like Heseltine and Buckley in slapping on to an image of Lawson dramatically darker and more sombre colours. Clark's assumption is that metaphysical concerns—the relation of art and pleasure to feelings of doubt and despair and alienation and terror and desolation—arise from the permanent dilemmas of life. These dilemmas revolve around unchanging elements of existence like the Dionysian frenzy, sensuousness and sexuality, as well as the other face of nature, time and death. These dilemmas persist while the fortunes of societies change and vary—but such outer social changes never affect or reach the profound inner metaphysical dilemmas we universally face. Consequently whatever is social and political and ideological is superficial and contingent, while whatever is metaphysical is beyond ideology, beyond humanity's temporary material concerns. This view can be characterised as 'end of ideology'.

Clark follows the literary critics in rejecting what Heseltine calls the policy making half of Lawson. Clark sees Lawson's life and creativity as divided between the superficial and the profound, between his poetry which is the product of his urban political experiences, and his prose which derives from his deepest knowledge of the bush and bush people. 'When he wrote poetry Henry Lawson preached: when he wrote prose a massive person emerged' (p. 76). His poetry is ideological, his prose metaphysical. The transition from verse ideologue to a prose-writer dealing with the eternal verities can be seen in Lawson's treatment of his characters, for example, in Mitchell's use of 'the language of resignation and acceptance—the language of a man who never expected human affairs to be very different from what they were . . . Lawson, the poet of a people's revolution, was becoming the prose writer of a people's wisdom' (p. 77).

By 1893, Clark feels, Lawson had come round to the view that life was never likely to be any different. The flaunting flag of progress would be unfurled in the west; the mighty bush with iron rails would be tethered to the world; the overseas cable would end Australian isolation; men would soon fly in machines. But no change in their material setting, no change in the ownership or the distribution of wealth, no change in political institutions would bring any signs either from heaven or from earth 'to add to what the heart doth say'. That 'primal fault', that 'aboriginal calamity' in which the whole of mankind was involved, all the heartaches, all the wounds to the vulnerable, all the blows of fate to those pitifully ill-equipped to accommodate them would go on till the end of the time. Men had to pick their way as best they could through the darkness . . . (p. 63).

Clark repeats this end-of-ideology theme over and over. Lawson's 'subject was not the external world', but 'what came up from inside a man: he was to portray the heart of the bush people' (p. 11). Lawson was not concerned with the observable details of nature in the outback, but with the 'human tragedy' (p. 55).

A particular consequence of this end-of-ideology view of Lawson's essential concerns emerges in Clark's dislike of feminist ideology. The urban feminists, like Louisa Lawson was to become, try to change the social and political aspects of women's lives. But they miss out on the true majesty of the bush women, their stoicism in the face of poverty and the harshness of nature; and they ignore the more profound, unchanging aspects of the relations between men and women. Clark sees Lawson's youthful years as in part dominated by feminist ideological preoccupations. Early in his intellectual life Lawson, 'most likely under the influence of his mother', believed women should be allowed to work at suitable trades and be paid standard union wages. 'But', Clark says, 'his heart was not in that subject' (p. 38). When he arrives in Auckland on 28 November 1893, the day votes for women were introduced in New Zealand, Lawson hails the event in what Clark dismissively refers to as a 'hortatory, news-commentary style ballad'. But again, Clark argues, Lawson's pro-feminist ideas at this time were merely ideas, and so couldn't represent his true feelings. Of the poem he comments: 'That was the son relaying the enthusiasms and convictions of the mother. There was no sign in the poem that these words were written by a man who had been hurt by women, or felt very ambivalent towards them, by a man who rushed in for sympathy, or behaved like one of those insects to whom God had given sensual lust and then retired to lick the wounds women inflicted on him.' And he adds, in a phrase that has puzzled other readers and certainly puzzles this reader,9 that there 'was no sign that it was written by a man who knew it was sheer madness for another such as he to let any woman see "his view"' (p. 65).

Clark sympathises with Lawson's 'great need' with women, his 'never-ending insatiable craving for love which no woman seemed able to satisfy, or possibly even know what it was he was looking for. Perhaps he wanted something which human beings could never have—some sense of completeness, of being at one with everything' (p. 39). In these last phrases Clark is suggesting a view of women as agents of men's union with a higher reality—a view which in Australian literature has been articulated most forcibly by writers working in a Sydney tradition of romanticism like Brennan, Norman Lindsay, A. D. Hope and Patrick White. In Hope's poem 'The Gateway', for example, women symbolise nature, so that to be in sexual union with a woman is to be at one with the natural world. Woman is a gateway to oneness with the universe, and hence the means to a womb-like goal—in Clark's terms, 'some sense of completeness, of being at one with everything'. I've argued elsewhere, in the chapter 'A Provincial Romantic Idealism' in Australian Cultural Elites, that this particular Sydney tradition manipulates women as symbolic objects. Women embody the hope of metaphysical oneness with the universe, of moments of eternity. But because the moments of sexuality are moments, and because too often the social consciousness of women—like the ideological concerns of feminists—interferes with their ideal unconsciousness as part of nature, men are always dissatisfied, falling

back into the ugly social world of ordinary time. Women, potentially to be revered as embodiments of nature, are also to be reviled for their possession of personality and their entry into culture.

Such a view of women is not of course confined to romanticism. But it serves as a striking illustration of how ideological an argument about the primacy of the ‘metaphysical’ in life can be. Throughout *In Search of Henry Lawson* Clark is androcentric, anti-feminist, and slightly weirdly misogynist. Clark will unblinkingly refer to the ‘men’ who gathered at Louisa Lawson’s home in Phillip Street—as if no feminists ever darkened her doorway; and Louisa’s ideas, we are to understand, were obtained by ‘imitating’ those of the Sydney free-thinker Tommy Walker (p. 26). Against the ‘future-of-humanity men’ who meet at the McNamaras’ bookshop, Clark installs Lawson as part of an aesthetic elite. But he doesn’t compare Lawson to women writers; rather, he has Lawson jostling amongst the ‘men of sensibility’, composed of names like Bret Harte, Thomas Hardy, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov. Lawson also teams up with ‘Sydney’s Bohemia’; in New Zealand he becomes nostalgic for his ‘literary mates’, and returning to Sydney seeks out the company of people like Victor Daley, Ernest Favenc, Roderic Quinn, and Frederick Broomfield—men who were dreamers, poets, wits and explorers, and who were ‘enlargers’, not ‘philistines’ (pp. 80-81, 87).

With artistic souls like these Lawson could express his wit and enjoy male camaraderie, in free, relaxing and anti-puritanical sexual talk and stories. The literary men would buy beer and prawns, and take the ferry to Watson’s Bay, there to swim and drink beer at the pub while reciting poetry to each other, seeing themselves as advocates of a different vision of life from the misery-mongers who still held sway in philistine Sydney. There were women, too, women not like those punishing wives in suburbia, women who wanted to join in the fun without passing judgement or indulging in a character sketch . . . Lawson was a man to guffaw, the sad face suddenly looking happy when men with a glass in their hands began to talk about ‘it’ with gusto, and make witty and endearing references to that bay in which all men loved to ride, it being taken for granted that all men were never-ending anglers in the ‘lake of darkness’ (pp. 81-82).

(How does one ride in a bay? And what of the heterosexist assumption that ‘all men’ sought sexual relations with women? And the assumption also, reminiscent of A. D. Hope’s in a poem like ‘The Double Looking Glass’, that to penetrate a woman is to enter the realm of nature, with the woman assumed to be sexually passive and active—like the still ‘lake of darkness’?)

Throughout *In Search of Henry Lawson* Clark employs a masculine/feminine typology, and Lawson is seen as possessing ‘a feminine mind in a masculine body’ (p. 75). From early in his life, when he couldn’t get on in the rough world of play of other schoolboys, it was clear Lawson was one of ‘nature’s solitaries’, with a feminine ‘sensitive heart’; and he was not good at masculine skills like mathematics. With their intuitive knowledge, the women of his family knew that ‘he really should have been a girl’ (p. 12). Lawson experienced intimations of a mysterious ‘sadness known only to women and the men born with a temperament

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which enabled them to understand woman’s life and sadness’ (p. 19). Conventional women, however, reject qualities of femininity in men—feelings of sensitivity, tenderness, and intuitive insight—and insist on rigid forms of male and female personality. Thus ‘feminine’ men like Lawson will always be ‘mortally wounded if ever they risked showing their own view to a woman’ (p. 19).

This was to be Lawson’s fate: ‘he was never to know peace, or ecstasy, or lasting happiness with any woman. He, who had such a need of love and tenderness and understanding—all those precious gifts a woman can shower on a man—rarely if ever enjoyed them. If he risked showing a woman his view, what he received was a character sketch or a rejection slip, or wounding remarks about his being peculiar or unsavoury, possibly even queer’ (p. 12). At their best, in their pre-social natural selves, women do possess the eternal feminine qualities Lawson so needed. Such a woman was Lawson’s friend Hannah Thornburn, although ‘she was not distinguished by a beauty which would match his success in the world of letters . . . being rather plain and undistinguished’. In no sense was Hannah Thornburn an intellectual equal for Lawson; she possessed a ‘limited consciousness’, but she adored Henry, and her great attraction for him was that ‘she never criticized anything he said or did’. On the other hand, Clark comments in terms that interestingly recall Norman Lindsay’s vitalism, Hannah Thornburn ‘gave off no promise of voluptuousness’ (pp. 74-75).

Clark releases a great deal of venom against the female ‘misery-mongers’ he identifies with suburbia. But the venom is also mixed with fear, particularly in the strange and obsessive use of terms like character sketches and rejection slips—on yet another occasion he refers to the time Lawson was young and full of hopes and ‘no woman had said those wounding words, or made a character sketch, or handed him a rejection slip’ (p. 28). Women punish men, ‘take charge’ of their lives as does Henry’s wife Bertha (p. 73), and stop them drinking with their literary mates in pubs, as with ‘Ted Brady, another man with a wife who policed his drinking’ (p. 117). In disliking the moralistic women in the bush, ‘those long-suffering, self-appointed temperance officers in Australia, the wives of the drinking classes’, Clark sets up a male-centred and rather improbable sociological category that cuts across social and economic class divisions. At another point Clark equates destructive literary criticism with the destructive powers of moralistic women. Of E. E. Morris’s review of In the Days When the World Was Wide, Clark comments that Morris had ‘the eye of a woman for the raw spot in a man’, and he refers to Lawson telling a friend in Sydney not to take any notice of ‘A. G. Stephens or his literary old women’ (p. 72).

The Sydney literary tradition for which Clark feels such affinity is also a highly elitist one, an elitism which reveals the complexity of the end-of-ideology impact and phenomenon in Australia. Its complexity and contradictions came out most clearly in attitudes to suburbia. The assumption of end-of-ideology theory as expressed by ideologues like Donald Horne in The Lucky Country (1964) is that because of post-war prosperity, Australian society no longer needed ideologies which urged basic social change. With the rise of the white collar employees, a new middle-class, we can see that the traditional blue collar working class is

shrinking in size and importance. Poverty and severe class divisions are receding into the dim mists of the past. We should see in the suburbs the phenomenon of class convergence, where on weekends the mass of people are to be witnessed living happy, sensuous, and fulfilled lives. People no longer need ideologies. The trouble with Australian society was that its elites were not helping the mass of Australians properly to cope with technological and international challenges as they arose: while Horne celebrated ordinary Australians, he did not oppose elites as such; and if elites are to guide, they should do so not by ideology but by being quick-footed, pragmatic, and opportunist.

In many ways Horne's book was put forward as an answer to vigorous critics of suburbia like Barry Humphries and Patrick White, who see it as death to the spirit. In particular women like Edna Everage or Mrs. Flack and Mrs. Jolly in White's 1961 Riders in the Chariot are to be blamed for strangling the life out of suburban men, crushing in them any expression of natural instincts and feelings and cutting off any reaching for the transcendental, or the unusual or eccentric. Clearly Clark's In Search of Henry Lawson follows on from the elitist side of end-of-ideology theory, in his vehemence against those 'punishing wives of suburbia'. In a recent article in Historical Studies Graeme Davison argues that the 1890s writers in Sydney like Lawson who enjoyed the boozy fellowship of the Dawn and Dusk Club were affecting a strenuous Bohemianism as a last defence against the encroachment of suburbia; and he points out that Bulletin figures like Archibald and A. G. Stephens used 'suburban' as a synonym for 'mediocre'.

That this process was occurring we don't have to doubt; but it's difficult not to conclude that in In Search of Henry Lawson Clark is giving undue prominence to the notions of suburbia and suburban, and that phrases like the 'punishing wives of suburbia'?or more strikingly, 'the deserts of Australian suburbia'?are historically anachronistic, revealing more about the power of recent social criticism equating women and suburbia than about the social landscape of Lawson's time.

The Sydney literary tradition of Brennan, Lindsay, White, and Hope proved peculiarly congenial to, and was taken up by, end-of-ideology theory in the 1950s. In relation to this tradition the values of In Search of Henry Lawson come closest, perhaps, to the particular values of Patrick White's fiction. Like White, Clark is hostile to the suburbs and to women as symbolising suburban repression; like White, Clark believes in the eternal feminine; like White, Clark defends an elite of sensibility, artists and eccentrics and people responsive to nature, against the encroaching philistines; like White, Clark sees the 'central human instincts'—metaphysical questing, the poetic, the sexual, the vital—as more important than overt social forms.

Yet looking back beyond White, Clark's work on Lawson also sounds strangely close similarities with the attitudes of a figure who might appear to be an unlikely candidate for comparison, Norman Lindsay. Both Clark and Lindsay, though originally Victorians, turn their backs on Melbourne's powerful liberal traditions, the search for social progress through an enlightened, altruistic elite. In his autobiography, My Mask, Norman Lindsay records his delight on seeing the Harbour on his first night in Sydney, the first night in a new life away from Melbourne: 'The lovely spectacle of the harbour jewelled with its foreshore lights, the bulk

of an unknown city beyond them, the ferries trailing brilliant reflections back and forth across the harbour, and most of all, a full-rigged ship discharging cargo by the light of kerosene flares immediately below me . . .'. Lindsay feels that Sydney was at its best in the 'eighties and 'nineties and early nineteen hundreds, 'a city that will never again be seen on earth—a sailortown city, a free-trade city, a pre-mechanized city', where one glimpsed over wharves and the roofs of harbour-side houses the tall spars of sailing ships. Clark can offer no such enthusiastic first-hand account of Sydney last century. But he applies with relish some dismissive terms from Slessor's 'Five Bells' to refer to Melbourne, 'the city of sodden rectitude' (p. 89); and, like Lindsay, Clark talks of the beauty of Sydney in Lawson's time, 'in those days before the smog of commercialism stained even the sky above the lovely waters of Sydney Harbour' (p. 93).

Both Lindsay and Clark have a slightly lateral relationship to literature and in particular to poetry, yet both are deeply influenced by writers and by theories of the importance of the imagination in perceiving the true nature of reality. Lindsay's association with Sydney poets like Slessor and Douglas Stewart is well-known; but Clark too in his influential 1956 essay 'Re-writing Australian History' argues the importance for the writing of history of poets like James McAuley and, again, Slessor and Douglas Stewart. Both Lindsay and Clark, as in his discussion of Lawson's Norwegian grandfather, declare a liking for paganism, and a dislike for the moralistic, sexually repressive side of Christianity, Lindsay through Nietzsche, and Clark through repeated tilts at the teachings of St. Paul. Like Lindsay, Clark admires the Sydney Bohemia of Lawson's time, with its fondness for beer and its free sexuality; like Lindsay, Clark uses a dualistic and vitalist language and framework, seeing society as divided between the enlargers in life, an elite expressing a Dionysian vitality, and the straiteners of the conforming suburbs, dull, disciplined, philistine. We can't, of course, go too far along the rocky road of this comparison: Lindsay strikes me as an enormously unpleasant figure; he was racist and anti-semitic; and his elitism is always hectoring, brutal, and ugly. Clark does not share these characteristics, save for his elitism and an insistently hectoring tone.

This essay is becoming far too long, so I'll conclude by making a brief return to an earlier theme, Clark's relation to historicism. The methods of writing history by those working within the historicist paradigm vary greatly. René Wellek writes that the method of many late eighteenth and early nineteenth century historicists is 'not causal, scientific, aiming at generalisations and even laws, but interpretative, intuitive and even divinatory'. Later in the nineteenth century, however, an influential figure like Ranke, while not a positivist and in fact steeped in the romantic aspects of historicism, insisted on history being strictly empirical, a conception which in the hands of his successors was turned into a notion of history as a science. Towards the end of the century there was a turning-away from scientific and positivistic notions of history, and a return to and developments of many of the emphases of earlier historicists. Dilthey attempted to establish new directions for historicism, by insisting on distinguishing the cultural sciences from the natural sciences, and by asserting the need for a new kind of psychology, a kind which can be related to the rise of phenomenology and her-

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meneutics. In this phenomenological approach, the methods of history have to include qualities in the historian like insight, introspection, empathy, imagination, and, in Dilthey's terminology, 'understanding'. Clark's *In Search of Henry Lawson* clearly follows on from and is a distinctive Australian development of the Herder, Carlyle, and Dilthey stream of historicism. The danger of such an approach is idealism: what is important is imaginative interpretation of the spirit of a people, not an analysis of political institutions and social structure. Throughout the book Clark uses his dualistic categories—the vital versus the disciplined, the enlargers as against the straiteners, the Dionysian as against the repressive Christian, the meta-physical versus the mathematical and analytical—as ways of interpreting and understanding Lawson's character and the inner reality of Lawson's time.

The trouble is not just that these categories are so fixed and rigid; it is also that they don't explain, they merely evoke. For example, to say that the Brotherhood of Man radical nationalist view of bushmen won't work because of the dark side (racism) of bushmen's hearts is not to explain anything. Why did this dark side take the form it did? Why was it concerned with other 'races'? Why indeed was it racist? Why this particular dark side and not another? To explain racism in Australia would require an analysis of colonialism as an historical experience, but Clark nowhere attempts that. Again, he treats the outback which horrified Lawson as a metaphysical force. Yet the landscape Lawson encountered was not 'natural' in a pristine sense; European explorers earlier in the nineteenth century, from Hume and Hovell to Mitchell, Sturt, and Stuart, were struck by the beauty and fineness of the landscapes they ventured into. But by the 1890s much of the western plains had been ruined by the introduction of alien fauna and by overstocking—what Lawson saw was a landscape devastated by ecological colonialism and rural capitalism.

In discussing women in *In Search of Henry Lawson* Clark, because he focuses on values, ignores the influence of a major phenomenon of Lawson's time, their economic dependence on men. Clark is unrelentingly hostile to turn of the century feminists and in particular to prominent figures like Louisa Lawson and Rose Scott, because they repressed the pagan and Dionysian in life. Because they fall on the other side of his dualist divide, he can never grant feminist aspirations the same degree of sympathy which he does to those contrary values of which he so stridently approves. He can't see that the contemporary feminist movement was not merely under the long shadow of St. Paul, that its attitudes were not merely moral or moralistic—that there were good economic reasons, in conditions of family breakdown, death, and unemployment, why married women might be fearful of drinking and gambling and why they themselves should possess the skills and training to earn money. He can't sympathise with Lawson's contemporary feminists who saw drunkenness as leading to unwanted pregnancy, marital rape, and domestic violence. Clark does mention that Bertha wrote to Lawson saying that unless he sent money to her she could no longer feed the children and would be forced to put them in the Benevolent Asylum; and he also mentions that Bertha was indeed afraid of Lawson when drunk, and that he had threatened her (pp. 102, 104). Yet during this discussion of Law-

son's deterioration into self-laceration, persecution mania, and alcoholism, Clark still maintains his sneering tone towards feminist ideology, referring to the 'woman's elevation movement', 'those spouters about the "sex problem"', or the 'fury and outrage of the articulate in the Women's Movement' (pp. 100-104). In evoking rather than explaining, Clark's dualistic categories reveal a weakness precisely where the strength of Clark's historical method might be held to lie—a failure of imaginative understanding.

Sydney.