
UNIT 4 HENRY LAWSON : *The Drover's Wife* : *The Union Buries Its Dead*

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to Henry Lawson and his short stories. We shall begin with a biographical approach by noting how Henry Lawson's life has influenced his art. We will then examine the critical approaches to Henry Lawson and his short stories *The Drover's Wife* and *The Union Buries Its Dead*. This will naturally lead us to a discussion on the themes in his short stories and the literary styles or devices used by him.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Henry Lawson (1867–1922) is the best known of the contributors of the journal *The Bulletin*. His poems and stories were also published in *The Worker* and other radical papers. Writing provided only a meagre source of income and in 1899 in an article titled *Pursuing Literature in Australia* for *The Bulletin* he wrote:

“My advice to any young Australian writer whose talents have been recognized, would be to go steerage, stow away, swim and seek London, Yankeeland or Timbuctoo – rather than stay in Australia till his genius turn to gall, or beer. Or, failing this – and still in the interests of human nature and literature – to study anatomy, especially as applies to the cranium, and then shoot himself...”

What does he mean? Clearly he believes that the literary capitals of the world are in Europe and America. For any writer to remain in Australia would mean obscurity. Moreover, the writer's talents would go to seed in this country. In short, it would be suicidal for any established writer to remain in Australia. Does he seriously mean this or is he writing in a higher vein? Or does this statement emanate from his own experiences as a writer?

He wrote both poetry and prose but it is his prose that is far more telling and carefully worked out. He regarded prose as his forte, not poetry as he recounted to a reporter in 1917 though in the early years his reputation rested on his poetry. At one time it was even held widely that he was the national poet of Australia but he lacked imaginative penetration as a verse writer. The best of his work was accomplished in the first fifteen years of his writing career. His story collections are *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* (published by his mother in 1894), *While the Billy Boils* (1896), *On the Track* (1900), *Over the Sliprails* (1900), *The Country I Come From* (a retrospective selection published in Edinburgh in 1901), and *Children of the Bush* (London, 1902). It is his short stories that we will analyse in this unit.

4.2 HENRY LAWSON – A BRIEF HISTORY

Henry Lawson led a poverty-stricken life and worked as a coach painter before becoming a writer and an outback *swagman*. He spent the last twenty years as an alcoholic beggar who was “in the end more an object of pathos than veneration”. Though, when he died he was honoured by a civic reception attended amongst others by the then Prime Minister Mr William M Hughes, himself (Adrian Mitchell, 1995:1).

Lawson’s father, Peter (Niels) Larsen, was a Norwegian who came to Australia in the early 50s but had little luck as a gold-digger at *Ballarat*. His mother, Louisa, was the granddaughter of early settlers. She was also a short story writer and proprietor-cum-editor of a radical women’s magazine *Dawn* (1888-1905). She was a profound influence not only on his upbringing but also on his literary life. His father, who worked on *roving* commissions for the gold diggers in the outback, was mostly away from the family. Later, in 1883 the parents separated. Despite hard times Louisa was determined to provide her children with a good education as she herself had been denied one by her father. She took the initiative to avail of the provisions of the New South Wales Public Schools Act of 1866-67 for the opening of ‘provisional schools’, where twenty-five children could attend school regularly, and got a school started at Eurunderee. Henry was enrolled in this school on October 2, 1876. Thus, though difficult, his education was fruitful. As he describes:

“And we learnt the world in scraps from some ancient dingy maps
Long discarded by the public schools in town;
And as nearly as every book dated back to Captain Cook
Our geography was somewhat upside-down...”

(S.Murray-Smith, 1975:7)

Nevertheless, such education as he had was entirely due to Louisa’s ambition for him, already conscious, as she must have been, that he was a talented lad. Yet as Bertha Lawson, his wife tells us Henry’s mother “could never have given him the sympathetic understanding or affection he most needed”. Bertha’s impression is that this helped increase his sense of loneliness and diffidence as a boy. His hearing had been impaired from the age of nine though that does not seem to have hindered his sensitivity. His inner ear could catch the “pace and phrasing of colloquial speech” as well as “the rhythms and cadences” in his prose writings while his observation came from a “good eye for detail” (Adrian Mitchell, 1995:3). All these attributes helped him in his writing career.

The *Bulletin* encouraged material that dwelt with Australian life. It emphasised realism, especially of bush experience, and a casual, colloquial tone. It also encouraged dark, melodramatic but often compelling stories of the convict system. What many of the *Bulletin* writers had in common was the dominating site of the

bush and some of the values and myths associated with it and with "true Australianess, including male *mate ship* and *egalitarianism*"; values endorsed by all writers especially Lawson and Barbara Baynton (Laurie Hearnshaw, 1986:xiv). You must note the special Australian sense in which *bush* is used to refer to the vast interiors, the outback. It displaced words such as *forest* and *wood*. With it developed a new vocabulary of the *Bush* – *bushranger*, *swag*, *stockman* – to replace the names of an intimate countryside in England. For instance, convicts escaping in the bush came to be called *bushrangers*. The appeal of the *bush* gradually came to be the great myth of Australian history. In a way, it satisfied the Australian quest for identity.

You will recall that early Australian writers were in one way or another trying to approximate to the literary models of the mother country, England. However, Australia was quite different and it was within this context that the search for an Australian identity became a challenge for Australian writers. From these biographical details we can form an idea of the forces that shaped and determined the way he viewed the world in general and his surroundings in particular in his literary works. The emergence of the *Bulletin* – its proprietors, editors, readers and writers, helped him, as it did many others, in displaying their literary skills. And, though the flowering of the short story in the 1890s coincides with the peaking of the European short story in *Chekhov*, the two are apparently not connected (Laurie Hearnshaw, 1986:xiii).

Lawson was greatly preoccupied with Australia's past. The outback, in particular (of which he gained first hand knowledge and experience through the six month tramp from Bourke to Hungerford on Queensland border, funded in 1892 at the age of 25 by the *Bulletin*) and Australian society, in general, influenced most of his literary works. As a nationalist he wanted to give his country a past to be proud of. Phillips (1971:90) in his review asserts:

Lawson's love for Australia came from deeper levels than the ventriloquial folk voice, but it hardly colours at all his picture of the Australian scene. Reading Lawson's work consecutively, one becomes more and more convinced that he was not merely objectively delineating the New South Wales plains; he was projecting on to them the landscape of his soul.

There is a similar quality in Lawson's recordings of Australian society. He celebrates Australia as a land of splendid opportunity only when he is speaking through the folk-voice humour or yarns. The tone is very different when he speaks for himself. In the stories, as we shall observe later, his chosen human subjects are the people on the roads, rejects from an unjust society, the slum's victims, the *Selectors* struggling against a hostile environment, their wives facing slow spiritual destruction through hardship and loneliness.

It has been argued that Lawson wrote his best work during a period of drought and economic depression. The year 1892, when he undertook the outback trip from Bourke to Hungerford, was a year of severe drought. However, in looking at his works, one becomes progressively convinced that it is insufficient to accept the claim that there are subjective compulsions controlling his emphases (Phillips 1971, Mathews 1971, Mitchell 1995).

A number of qualities combine to make Lawson an outstanding writer although over the years he has not been valued for the same reasons. The themes that appeal today are not the comic ones of resilient battling but those concerning "loneliness, failure.... and a compulsive insistence on the gossamer precariousness of happiness"

(Hergenhan 1986). It is through the clinical description of the bush in his short stories and sketches that Barnes (Barnes 1986) in his critical appraisal comments, "Henry Lawson is the voice of the bush and the bush is the heart of Australia." Similarly, H. M. Green in Roderick (1966:8) in his admiration of Lawson stated "to read him in a foreign country is to breathe the air of home."

The qualities of Lawson's style that critics have classified and admired are "economy and simplicity, his deft use of implication to evoke what is left unsaid, his feeling for the fragmentary random quality of life, his sympathy for the outsider and an air of truthfulness which is not simply a matter of sparse but telling documentation, but of feeling of sensitivity and voice" (Barnes 1986, Roderick 1966 and Kiernan 1987). In his commentary Barnes also observes that many have sought to imitate Lawson's simplicity but no other Australian writer has managed so well to create that effect of natural unaffected speech, which is Lawson's hallmark. The absence of pretension and of self-conscious literariness enabled Lawson to write in a genuinely simple style. Roderick while describing Lawson's influential role in Australia's literary scene points out that "Lawson's power lies in his ability to capture tersely a mood or a wisp of sentiment" in his stories. Can you think of any Indian writers whose style resembles Lawson's?

To sum up briefly then, Lawson's strength lay in giving expression to the voice of the bush and his ability to represent things, mood, scene etc. with brevity and terseness as they really are (realism). An examination of two of his stories will help us in understanding him and his writing better. Having looked at Lawson's life and the factors that influenced his writing, it would be apt for us to turn to his short stories now. In the next section we shall examine closely the short story *The Drover's Wife* to see what we can learn of life in Australia at that time, particularly of life in the bush. We will also find here a sketch of what a woman's life was like in the bush. We shall also note the stylistic devices that Lawson employs. Now read the story carefully, making notes in the margins as you go along.

What do we mean by the drover's wife? Who is a drover? A typically Australian usage, drover means a person who moves along minding cattle/ sheep across vast distances, in search for greener pastures and water for the flock. He is akin to a shepherd/ cowherd. The title tells us that we will read about a woman who is married to a drover. And yet when we read the story, we find that the drover is an absent presence. He is never there and the wife is hardly a wife at all – she is a mother, the farmer, the protector of the farm and the family.

4.3 THE DROVER'S WIFE - TEXT

Henry Lawson's story "The Drover's Wife" was originally published as a book in the collection entitled **While the Billy Boils**. It is a wonderful story that portrays the hardship of life in the Bush of Australia from a woman's perspective – quite unusual for Australian writing of the period. This is probably Lawson's best-known work, very popular in anthologies of Australian short stories.

The two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs. A big bark kitchen standing at one end is larger than the house itself, veranda included.

Bush all around – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing

above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilisation – a shanty on the main road.

The drover, an ex-squatter, is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone. Four ragged, dried-up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: "Snake! Mother, here's a snake!"

The gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

"Where is it?"

"Here! Gone in the wood-heap," yells the eldest boy – a sharp-faced urchin of eleven.

"Stop there, mother! I'll have him. Stand back! I'll have the beggar!"

"Tommy, come here, or you'll be bit. Come here at once when I tell you, you little wretch!"

The youngster comes reluctantly, carrying a stick bigger than himself. Then he yells, triumphantly:

"There it goes – under the house!" and darts away with club uplifted. At the same time the big, black, yellow-eyed dog-of-all-breeds, who has shown the wildest interest in the proceedings, breaks his chain and rushes after that snake. He is a moment late, however, and his nose reaches the crack in the slabs just as the end of its tail disappears. Almost at the same moment the boy's club comes down and skins the aforesaid nose. Alligator takes small notice of this, and proceeds to undermine the building; but he is subdued after a struggle and chained up. They cannot afford to lose him.

The drover's wife makes the children stand together near the dog-house while she watches for the snake. She gets two small dishes of milk and sets them down near the wall to tempt it to come out; but an hour goes by and it does not show itself.

It is near sunset, and a thunderstorm is coming. The children must be brought inside. She will not take them into the house, for she knows the snake is there, and may at any moment come up through a crack in the rough slab floor, so she carries several armfuls of firewood into the kitchen, and then takes the children there. The kitchen has no floor – or, rather, an earthen one – called a "ground floor" in this part of the bush. There is a large, roughly-made table in the centre of the place. She brings the children in, and makes them get on this table. They are two boys and two girls – mere babies. She gives them some supper, and then, before it gets dark, she goes into the house, and snatches up some pillows and bedclothes – expecting to see or lay or hand on the snake any minute. She makes a bed on the kitchen table for the children, and sits down beside it to watch all night.

She has an eye on the corner, and a green sapling club laid in readiness on the dresser by her side; also her sewing basket and a copy of the *Young Ladies' Journal*. She has brought the dog into the room. Tommy turns in, under protest, but says he'll lie awake all night and smash that blinded snake.

His mother asks him how many times she has told not to swear.

He has his club with him under the bedclothes, and Jacky protests:

"Mummy! Tommy's skinnin' me alive wif his club. Make him take it out." Tommy:

"Shet up you little —! D'yer want to be bit with the snake?"

Jacky shuts up.

"If yer bit," says Tommy, after a pause, "you'll swell up, an' smell, an' turn red an' green an' blue all over till yer bust. Won't he mother?"

"Now then, don't frighten the child. Go to sleep," she says.

The two younger children go to sleep, and now and then Jacky complains of being "skeezed." More room is made for him. Presently Tommy says: "Mother! Listen to them (adjective) little 'possums. I'd like to screw their blanky necks."

And Jacky protests drowsily.

"But they don't hurt us, the little blanks!"

Mother: "There, I told you you'd teach Jacky to swear." But the remark makes her smile. Jacky goes to sleep.

Presently Tommy asks: "Mother! Do you think they'll ever extricate the (adjective) kangaroo?"

"Lord! How am I to know, child? Go to sleep."

"Will you wake me if the snake comes out?"

"Yes. Go to sleep."

Near midnight. The children are all asleep and she sits there still, sewing and reading by turns. From time to time she glances round the floor and wall-plate, and, whenever she hears a noise, she reaches for the stick. The thunderstorm comes on, and the wind, rushing through the cracks in the slab wall, threatens to blow out her candle. She places it on a sheltered part of the dresser and fixes up a newspaper to protect it. At every flash of lightning, the cracks between the slabs gleam like polished silver. The thunder rolls, and the rain comes down in torrents.

Alligator lies at full length on the floor, with his eyes turned towards the partition. She knows by this that the snake is there. There are large cracks in that wall opening under the floor of the dwelling-house.

She is not a coward, but recent events have shaken her nerves. A little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died. Besides, she has not heard from her husband for six months, and is anxious about him.

He was a drover, and started squatting here when they were married.

The drought of 18—ruined him. He had to sacrifice the remnant of his flock and go droving again. He intends to move his family into the nearest town when he comes back, and, in the meantime, his brother, who keeps a shanty on the main road, comes over about once a month with provisions. The wife has still a couple of cows, one horse, and a few sheep. The brother-in-law kills one of the latter occasionally, gives her what she needs of it, and takes the rest in return for other provisions.

She is used to being left alone. She once lived like this for eighteen months. As a girl she built the usual castles in the air; but all her girlish hopes and aspirations have long been dead. She finds all the excitement and recreation she needs in the *Young Ladies' Journal*, and Heaven help her! Takes a pleasure in the fashion plates.

Her husband is an Australian, and so is she. He is careless, but a good enough husband. If he had the means he would take her to the city and keep her there like a princess. They are used to being apart, or at least she is. "No use fretting," she says. He may forget sometimes that he is married; but if he has a good cheque when he comes back he will give most of it to her. When he had money he took her to the city several times—hired a railway sleeping compartment, and put up at the best hotels. He also bought her a buggy, but they had to sacrifice that along with the rest.

The last two children were born in the bush— one while her husband was bringing a drunken doctor, by force, to attend to her. She was alone on this occasion, and very weak. She had been ill with fever. She prayed to God to send her assistance. God sent

Black Mary – the “whitest” gin in all the land. Or, at least, God sent “King Jimmy” first, and he sent Black Mary. He put his black face round the door post, took in the situation at a glance, and said cheerfully: “All right, Missis – I bring my old woman, she down alonga creek.”

One of the children died while she was here alone. She rode nineteen miles for assistance, carrying the dead child.

It must be near one or two o’clock. The fire is burning low. Alligator lies with his head resting on his paws, and watches the wall. He is not a very beautiful dog, and the light shows numerous old wounds where the hair will not grow. He is afraid of nothing on the face of the earth or under it. He will tackle a bullock as readily as he will tackle a flea. He hates all other dogs – except kangaroo-dogs – and has a marked dislike to friends or relations of the family. They seldom call, however. He sometimes makes friends with strangers. He hates snakes and has killed many, but he will be bitten some day and die; most snake-dogs end that way. Now and then the bushwoman lays down her work and watches, and listens, and thinks. She thinks of things in her own life, for there is little else to think about.

The rain will make the grass grow, and this reminds her how she fought a bush fire once while her husband was away. The grass was long, and very dry, and the fire threatened to burn her out. She put on an old pair of her husband’s trousers and beat out the flames with a green bough, till great drops of sooty perspiration stood out on her forehead and ran in streaks down her blackened arms. The sight of his mother in trousers greatly amused Tommy, who worked like a little hero by her side, but the terrified baby howled lustily for his “mummy.” The fire would have mastered her but for four excited bushmen who arrived in the nick of time. It was a mixed-up affair all round; when she went to take up the baby he screamed and struggled convulsively, thinking it was a “black man;” and Alligator, trusting more to the child’s sense than his own instinct, charged furiously, and (being old and slightly deaf) did not in his excitement at first recognise his mistress’s voice, but continued to hang on to the moleskins until choked off by Tommy with a saddle-strap. The dog’s sorrow for his blunder, and his anxiety to let it be known that it was all a mistake, was as evident as his ragged tail and a twelve-inch grin could make it. It was a glorious time for the boys: a day to look back to, and talk about, and laugh over for many years. She thinks how she fought a flood during her husband’s absence. She stood for hours in the drenching downpour, and dug an overflow gutter to save the dam across the creek. But she could not save it. There are things that a bushwoman cannot do. Next morning the dam was broken, and her heart was nearly broken too, for she thought how her husband would feel when he came home and saw the result of years of labour swept away. She cried then.

She also fought the *pleuro-pneumonia* – dosed and bled the few remaining cattle, and wept again when her two best cows died.

Again, she fought a mad bullock that besieged the house for a day. She made bullets and fired at him through cracks in the slabs with an old shot-gun. He was dead in the morning. She skinned him and got seventeen-and-sixpence for the hide.

She also fights the crows and eagles that have designs on her chickens. Her plan of campaign is very original. The children cry “Crows, mother!” and she rushes out and aims a broomstick at the birds as though it were a gun, and says “Bung!” The crows leave in a hurry; they are cunning, but a woman’s cunning is greater.

Occasionally a bushman in the horrors, or a villainous-looking sundowner, comes and nearly scares the life out of her. She generally tells the suspicious-looking

stranger that her husband and two sons are at work below the dam, or over at the yard, for he always cunningly inquires for the boss.

Only last week a gallows-faced swagman – having satisfied himself that there were no men on the place – threw his swag down on the veranda, and demanded tucker. She gave him something to eat; then he expressed the intention of staying for the night. It was sundown then. She got a batten from the sofa, loosened the dog, and confronted the stranger, holding the batten in one hand and the dog's collar with the other. "Now you go!" she said. He looked at her and at the dog, said "All right, mum," in a cringing tone and left. She was a determined-looking woman, and Alligator's yellow eyes glared unpleasantly – besides, the dog's chawing-up apparatus greatly resembled that of the reptile he was named after.

She has few pleasures to think of as she sits here alone by the fire, on guard against a snake. All days are much the same for her; but on Sunday afternoon she dresses herself, tidies the children, smartens up baby, and goes for a lonely walk along the bush-track, pushing an old perambulator in front of her. She does this every Sunday. She takes as much care to make herself and the children look smart as she would if she were going to do the block in the city. There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ship can sail – and farther.

But this bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.

She is glad when her husband returns, but she does not gush or make a fuss about it. She gets him something good to eat, and tidies up the children.

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

It must be nearing morning now; but the clock is in the dwelling-house. Her candle is nearly done; she forgot that she was out of candles. Some more wood must be got to keep the fire up, and so she shuts the dog inside and hurries around to the woodheap. The rain has cleared off. She seizes a stick, pulls it out, and – crash! The whole pile collapses. Yesterday she bargained with a stray blackfellow to bring her some wood, and while he was at work she went in search of a missing cow. She was absent an hour or so, and the native black made good use of his time. On her return she was so astonished to see a good heap of wood by the chimney, and she gave him an extra fig of tobacco, and praised him for not being lazy. He thanked her, and left with head erect and chest well out. He was the last of his tribe and a King; but he had built that wood-heap hollow.

She is hurt now, and tears spring to her eyes as she sits down again by the table. She takes up a handkerchief to wipe the tears away, but pokes her eyes with her bare fingers instead. The handkerchief is full of holes, and she finds that she has put her thumb through one, and her forefinger through another.

This makes her laugh, to the surprise of the dog. She has a keen, very keen, sense of the ridiculous; and some time or other she will amuse bushmen with the story.

She has been amused before like that. One day she sat down "to have a good cry," as she said – and the old cat rubbed against her dress and "cried too." Then she had to laugh.

It must be near daylight now. The room is very close and hot because of the fire. Alligator still watches the wall from time to time. Suddenly he becomes greatly interested; he draws himself a few inches nearer the partition, and a thrill runs through his body. The hair on the back of neck begins to bristle, and the battle-light is in his yellow eyes. She knows what this means, and lays her hand on the stick. The lower end of one of the partition slabs has a large crack on both sides. An evil pair of small, bright bead-like eyes glisten at one of these holes. The snake – a black one – comes slowly out, about a foot, and moves its head up and down. The dog lies still, and the woman sits as one fascinated. The snake comes out a foot further. She lifts her stick, and the reptile, as though suddenly aware of danger, sticks his head in through the crack on the other side of the slab, and hurries to get his tail round after him. Alligator springs, and his jaws come together with a snap. He misses, for his nose is large, and the snake's body close down on the angle formed by the slabs and the floor. He snaps again as the tail comes round. He has the snake now, and tugs it out eighteen inches. Thud, thud comes the woman's club on the ground. Alligator pulls again. Thud, thud. Alligator gives another pull and he has the snake out – a black brute, five feet long. The head rises to dart about, but the dog has the enemy close to the neck. He is a big, heavy dog, but quick as a terrier. He shakes the snake as though he felt the original curse in common with mankind. The eldest boy wakes up, seizes his stick, and tries to get out of bed, but his mother forces him back with a grip of iron. Thud, thud – the snake's back is broken in several places. Thud, thud – its head is crushed, and Alligator's nose skinned again.

She lifts the mangled reptile on the point of her stick, carries it to the fire, and throws it in; then piles on the wood and watches the snake burn. The boy and the dog watch too. She lays her hand on the dog's head, and all the fierce, angry light dies out of his yellow eyes. The younger children are quieted, and presently go to sleep. The dirty-legged boy stands for a moment in his shirt, watching the fire. Presently he looks up at her, sees the tears in her eyes, and, throwing his arms around her neck exclaims:

"Mother, I won't never go drovin' blarst me if I do!"

And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him; and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.

4.3.1 The Socio-Cultural Context

Lawson points out in the story that the drover's wife and her husband are Australians. The story first appeared in the *Bulletin* and was written when Lawson was only twenty five years old (1892), it is important to remember that the *Bulletin* was occupied at the time with the issue of nationalism. It was just a decade before the creation of the *Federation* that is it is set in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Lawson was himself a nationalist and hence this attachment of the characters to their country. Lawson portrays life lived in the bush as it was. As Roderick (1966) points out, "His pictures of life convey to us a great sense of the background of the whole people's life; their struggles and cares, their humour and outlook...."

4.3.2 Theme And Characters

We have here the story of a woman who as we can see from the title of the story is not anyone in her own right. She is identified as the wife of a drover who is away "droving" while she is left alone in the bush to fend for herself and her children. The

story revolves around her life, the problems she faces in the bush while her husband, an *ex-squatter* whose property has failed, is away and how she deals with the present danger of the snake. Hers is a life of hardship. She has had to deal with villainous-looking *sundowners*, death, and childbirth all by herself. Also grassfires, mad bullocks and threatening dams have to be encountered. Yet life has little to offer and life in the bush is monotonous with very little to do except maybe take a walk. There are no opportunities to socialise, as there are no people that she can meet here, her hopes and dreams have been lost in the Bush and her husband who is mostly away may even forget that he is married.

Lawson's objective here is not merely to document the place and the incident with the snake, nor is it merely to demonstrate the bravery of Australian pioneer settlers and the nature of the hardship they endured in the outback. Notice the way in which Lawson introduces his characters in a brief and detailed manner:

The drover, an ex-squatter is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone.... Four ragged, dried-up looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: snake! Mother, here's a snake.... The gaunt sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her lofty baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

This description introduces the reader to the characters in the story. We also get the impression from the description of their dressing and physical appearance that they are a poor family struggling against the odds to survive. This is the author's style of building up his stories. In spite of the hardships we see the drover's wife as strong, loving, brave and resilient. In fact she appears to be the quintessential mother. We get a powerful description of her in the story:

She has few pleasures to think of as she sits here alone by the fire on guard against a snake.... All days are much the same to her. This bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.... She seems contented with her lot. She loves her children but has no time to show it.

The episode of the snake defines life, the strain of waiting. Yet there is something more than stoicism or fatalism here – the full weight of responsibility falls on the woman while the reader is being told that the bush is indeed “no place for a woman”; he is at the same time also depicting the heroic deeds of the woman in the outback. From the story we get a sense, a feel of the boredom and monotony of the environment:

There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ships can sail – and further.

If a man cannot endure such a place, then surely it is not a place for woman to persevere here. Yet Lawson describes in the story how the drover's wife is able to fend for herself and her children despite these hardships. Notice how the writer subtly brings up this point rather indirectly without having to lecture to the reader. She is also portrayed as the fiercely protective mother of her children: She “snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip and reaches for a stick” to kill the

snake. The safety of her children is indeed dear to her. Also, we notice that loyalty looms large in the bush: notice the son Tommy's emphatic declaration:

Mother, I wont never go drovin': blast me if I do!

Tommy reckons that his mother should be protected; she should not be left alone. This precocious loyalty, argues Mitchell (1955:10) "is the basis of defence against defeat".

The image of the drover's wife subverts the stereotype of the woman as a helpless, clinging creature who, needs to be protected by the powerful male. And even though in the story, she is referred to as the drover's wife, she is a powerful character in her own right.

Flashbacks are used as a device to reveal the pattern of the woman's life, its rigours, hardships and fears as well as, and more importantly, to invent the central incident with their own accumulating sense of spiritual and emotional exhaustion. The relief shown by the mother by hugging her son, Tommy, when the snake is finally killed exemplifies this:

And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him, and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.

The flashbacks are significant also (Mathews, 1971:ii) in exposing the pitiable nature of the victory of killing one snake because it is not the first and most certainly not the last in a succession of crises, each of which further expends the dogged human spirit. It is not pioneering steadfastness that Lawson is portraying but slow human disintegration. It is the compassion of the story, its awareness of the human plight and not archetypal possibility, which suggest that Lawson's bush portrayals may be capable of fruitful development.

4.3.3 Use Of Language

In *The Drover's Wife* and indeed in Lawson's other stories we find uniqueness of sentences that are full of nouns but scarce on adjectives and excluding verbs. Such sentences are effective in emphasising the disjointed and discontinuous country:

Bush all round – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance.... No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye.

The verbs that do occur are in the present tense, as in "the country *is* flat". It lacks connection with the past but then it is the human resilience that is significant, the heroism of the ordinary life – the woman having dealt with all sorts of situations – the situations we have already mentioned, such as saving the dam in a downpour, facing mad bullocks, deceitful sundowners, for example, the one who made a hollow woodheap for her despite all the trust that she put in him. It is a graphic description that provides us a sketch of a woman in the bush and has a visual quality about it that makes it powerful. You feel the whole action as if enacted before you. And aspects of bush life are presented also through the confiding tone of the author. This form of narration, of telling the story, of 'yarning', is Lawson's preferred form. Though it is not a carefully constructed form, such as we find say in Mark Twain's stories, it is an equally artful form that is also quite appealing and effective. Note also the use of words that are typically Australian. Beginning with 'drover' as opposed to shepherd.

The other words that you may have encountered for the first time could be 'bush', 'tucker', 'swag', etc.

Henry Lawson

4.3.4 Landscape Portrayal

The Australian landscape was something that the early settlers had to reckon with, as it was different from the one they had grown up in and so the uniqueness of this landscape, its beauty remained to be captured. It was seen primarily as monotonous and in this story it matches with the monotony of the life of the drover's wife:

The everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees – that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as time can go, and sail as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ships can sail – and further.

But this bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.

The woman is adjusted and resigned to life in the bush. There is a connection she establishes with it. She has become a *bushwoman* – that seems to mark her identity because otherwise she is merely the drover's wife. The landscape may seem as cursed but Lawson qualifies it by saying that this is how it would seem 'unless you are a bushman'. Who could better adjust to it than those who lived in the bush? And remember Lawson refers to them as Australians, which is significant in marking their new identity. It becomes a matter of pride. Having read *The Drover's Wife* and analysed it, let us now take up the next Lawson story: *The Union Buries Its Dead* in the next section of our discussion.

4.4 THE UNION BURIES ITS DEAD – TEXT

While out boating one Sunday afternoon on a billabong across the river, we saw a young man on horseback driving some horses along the bank. He said it was a fine day, and asked if the water was deep there. The joker of our party said it was deep enough to drown him, and he laughed and rode further up. We didn't take much notice of him. Next day a funeral gathered at a corner pub and asked each other in to have a drink while waiting for the hearse. They passed away some of the time dancing jigs to a piano in the bar parlour. They passed away the rest of the time skylarking and fighting.

The defunct was a young union labourer, about twenty-five, who had been drowned the previous day while trying to swim some horses across a billabong of the Darling.

He was almost a stranger in town, and the fact of his having been a union man accounted for the funeral. The police found some union papers in his swag, and called at the General Labourers Union office for information about him. That's how we knew. The secretary had very little information to give. The departed was a "Roman", and the majority of the town were otherwise – but unionism; is stronger than creed. Liquor, however, is stronger than unionism; and, when the hearse presently arrived, more than two thirds of the funeral were unable to follow.

The procession numbered fifteen; fourteen souls following the broken shell of a soul. Perhaps not one of the fourteen possessed a soul any more than the corpse did – but that doesn't matter.

Four or five of the funeral, who were boarders at the pub, borrowed a trap which the landlord used to carry passengers to and from the railway-station. They were strangers to us who were on foot, and we to them. We were all strangers to the corpse.

A horseman, who looked like a drover just returned from a big trip, dropped into our dusty wake and followed us a few hundred yards, dragging his pack-horse behind him, but a friend made wild and demonstrative signals from an hotel veranda – hooking at the air in front with his right hand and jobbing his left thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the bar – so the drover hauled off and didn't catch up to us any more. He was a stranger to the entire show.

We walked in twos. There were three tows. It was very hot and dusty; the heat rushed in fierce dazzling rays across every iron roof and light-coloured wall that was turned to the sun. One or two pubs closed respectfully until we got past. They closed their bar doors and the patrons went in and out through some side or back entrance for a few minutes. Bushman seldom grumble at an inconvenience of this sort, when it is caused by a funeral. They have too much respect for the dead.

On the way to the cemetery we passed three shearers sitting on the shady side of a fence. One was drunk – very drunk. The other two covered their right ears with their hats, out of respect for the departed – whoever he might have been – and of the them kicked the drunk and muttered something to him.

He straightened himself up, stared, and reached helplessly for his hat, which he shoved half off and then on again. Then he made a great effort to pull himself together – and succeeded. He stood up, braced his back against the fence, knocked off his hat, and remorsefully placed his foot on it – to keep it off his head till the funeral passed.

A tall, sentimental drover, who walked by my side, cynically quoted Byronic verses suitable to the occasion – to death – and asked with pathetic humour whether we thought the dead man's ticket would be recognized "over yonder". It was a G.L.U. ticket, and the general opinion was that it would be recognized.

Presently my friend said:

"You remember when we were in the boat yesterday, we saw a man driving some horses along the bank?"

"Yes."

He nodded at the hearse and said:

"Well, that's him."

I thought a while.

"I didn't take any particular notice of him," I said. "He said something, didn't he?"

"Yes; said it was a fine day. You'd have taken more notice if you'd known that he was doomed to die in the hour, and that those were the last words he would say to any man in this world."

"To be sure," said a full voice from the rear. "If ye'd known that, ye'd have prolonged the conversation."

We plodded on across the railway-line and along the hot, dusty road which ran to the cemetery, some of us talking about the accident, and lying about the narrow escapes we had had ourselves.

Presently someone said:

"There's the Devil."

I looked up and saw a priest standing in the shade of the tree by the cemetery gate.

The hearse was drawn up and the tail-boards were opened. The funeral extinguished its right ear with its hat as four men lifted the coffin out and laid it over the grave. The priest—a pale, quiet young fellow—stood under the shade of a sapling which grew at the head of the grave. He took off his hat, dropped it carelessly on the ground, and proceeded to business. I noticed that one or two heathens winced slightly when the holy water was sprinkled on the coffin. The drops quickly evaporated, and the little round black spots they left were soon dusted over; but the spots showed, by contrast, the cheapness and shabbiness of the cloth with which the coffin was covered. It seemed black before; now it looked a dusky grey.

Just here man's ignorance and vanity made a farce of the funeral. A big, bull-necked publican, with heavy, blotchy features, and a supremely ignorant expression, picked up the priest's straw hat and held it about two inches over the head of his reverence during the whole of the service. The Father, be it remembered, was standing in the shade. A few shoved their hats on and off uneasily, struggling between their disgust for the living and their respect for the dead. The hat had a conical crown and a brim sloping down all round like a sunshade, and the publican held it with his great red claw spread over the crown. To do the priest justice, perhaps he didn't notice the incident. A stage priest or parson in the same position might have said, "Put the hat down, my friend; is not the memory of our departed brother worth more than my complexion?" A wattle-bark layman might have expressed himself in stronger language, none the less to the point. But my priest seemed unconscious of what was going on. Besides, the publican was a great and important pillar of the Church. He couldn't, as an ignorant and conceited ass, lose such a good opportunity of asserting his faithfulness and importance to his Church.

The grave looked very narrow under the coffin, and I drew a breath of relief when the box slid easily down. I saw a coffin get stuck once, at Rookwood, and it had to be yanked out with difficulty, and laid on the sods at the feet of the heart-broken relations, who howled dismally while the grave-diggers widened the hole. But they don't cut contracts so fine in the West. Our grave-digger was not altogether bowelless, and, out of respect for that human quality threw it down to deaden the fall of the clay lumps on the coffin. He also tried to steer the first few shovelfuls gently down against the end of the grave with the back of the shovel turned outwards, but the hard dry Darling River clods rebounded and knocked all the same. It didn't matter much—nothing does. The fall of lumps of clay on a stranger's coffin doesn't sound any different from the fall of the same things on an ordinary wooden box—at least I didn't notice anything awesome or unusual in the sound; but, perhaps, one of us—the most sensitive—might have been impressed by being reminded of a burial long ago, when the thump of every sod jolted his heart.

I have left out the wattle—because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzled head bowed and great drops streaming down his rugged cheeks. He was absent—he was probably "outback". For similar reasons I have omitted reference to the suspicious moisture in the eyes of a bearded bush ruffian named Bill. Bill failed to turn up, and the only moisture was that which

was induced by the heat. I have left out the "sad Australian sunset", because the sun was not going down at the time. The burial took place exactly at midday.

The dead bushman's name was Jim, apparently; but they found no portraits, nor locks of hair, nor any love-letters, nor anything of that kind in his swag – not even a reference to his mother; only some papers relating to union matters. Most of us didn't know the name till we saw it on the coffin; we knew him as "that poor chap that got drowned yesterday".

"So his name's James Tyson," said my drover acquaintance, looking at the plate.

"Why! Didn't you know that before?" I asked.

"NO; but I knew he was a union man."

It turned out, afterwards, that J. T. wasn't his real name – only "the name he went by".

Anyhow he was buried by it, and most of the "Great Australian Dailies" have mentioned in their brevity columns that a young man named James John Tyson was drowned in a billabong of the Darling last Sunday.

We did hear, later, what his real name was; but if we ever chance to read it in the "Missing Friends Column" we shall not be able to give any information to heart-broken Mother or Sister or Wife, nor to any one who could let him hear something to his advantage – for we have already forgotten the name.

As in *The Drover's Wife* we will look at the art of storytelling that Lawson adopts – of concentrating on an incident. We note the significance or lack of it in the observance of ritual. This ritual is being performed in the face of absolute desolation that is physical as well as spiritual. An individual may face emptiness but culture assigns a pattern on the lives of people. Lawson inverts the emotional impact of the incident that is central to the story, that of the Union burying its dead.

The story first appeared in the *Sydney Truth* as *A Bushman's Funeral: A Sketch from life*. It was an outcome of his trip to Bourke in the North-West. The far West, according to Kiernan (1987:10) had been romanticised by many previous writers, but Lawson was appalled by the life he found there.

4.4.1 The Social Cultural Context

This story is based on an incident that is recounted by Jim Grahame in *Rambles with Henry Lawson*:

Just before we left Bourke a man carrying an Australian Workers union ticket was drowned in the river and the local agent of that union took the responsibility of the burial. Lawson and I went to the little funeral, it was a hot day and all at the graveside were bare headed, but an over officious publican opened an umbrella and held it above the officiating priest's head, irritation and maybe contempt flashed across the reverend's face. Lawson nudged me.

Lawson has used this incident to provide an insight into the way he looked at life. The story draws attention to Unionism and celebrates the spirit of mateship.

The story begins with the image of boating on a Sunday afternoon on a billabong of the Darling. We are amidst a very different setting that draws attention to the bush and the pertinent question here is whether the water is deep or not. How are we to

look at the death of a person who drowns there? Nobody had bothered to know the drover while he was alive and drove horses along the river bank. But when he drowned and was found to be a young Union labourer, everybody was concerned and came to the funeral to pay their last respects. This foregrounds the importance attached to Unionism as it presumably helps in the protection of their rights; this is what mateship is all about. The important thing about him is that he is a Unionist and unionism as a kind of systematised mateship is stronger than creed. As Lawson puts it:

The fact of his having been a Union man accounted for the funeral.... The departed was a 'Roman' and the majority of the town were otherwise – but Unionism is stronger than creed.

The members of the funeral get together at one of the pubs and soon everyone is preoccupied in his own way, unconcerned with the tragedy, dancing jigs or even fighting. Nothing seems to matter much despite the solemnity of the occasion; in any case two-thirds of the mourners (the unionists) are too drunk to follow the funeral. The pubs close their bar doors out of respect as the procession goes past the place and temporarily it is the side door that the patrons use. It is noon time and three drunk shearers sitting on the shady side of a fence manage to get their hats off, not really out of respect but because propriety demands it. While the service is on the publican holds the priest's hat. The way the story is narrated does not reflect the seriousness that the title suggests. How is this to be interpreted and what is it that it reflects is examined in the next section. Lawson has in the title "ironically appropriated the representations from any number of pictures and illustrations of the aftermath of the American Civil War". Typically, these were large-scale representations, very sobering in their effect, of the Union troops mourning their fallen comrade. It is immediately apparent how Lawson has inverted the emotional impact, and reversed the contemporary meaning of the title.

4.4.2 Theme And Characters

The chronicler of the event describes the funeral thus:

Just here man's ignorance and vanity made a farce of the funeral. It is not the loneliness of the human condition and the deadliness of human indifference that is so overtly being described here. As Phillips points out (see Murray-Smith 1975:36-37) Lawson was unashamedly sentimental but was determined not to lapse into sentimentality; thus the skilful use of openings and endings:

While out boating one Sunday afternoon....
Anyhow he was buried by it and the most of....
We did hear later on....

The same capacity for the apt and planned alternation of mood is also shown in the story. The story is highly charged with emotion. The funeral of the unknown young man, identified by a Union ticket in his pocket, is attended by fellow Unionists in the township from a sense of solidarity and respect. Time and again we are pulled up sharply from the verge of becoming sad:

I didn't take particular notice of him, I said. He said something, didn't he? Yes, said it was a fine day. You'd have taken more notice if you'd known that he was doomed to die in the hour.

The solemn thoughts raised by this exchange are abruptly ended by the remark one of the mourners makes as he sees the priest: "There is the Devil." The narrator of the story continues: "I noticed that one or two heathens winced slightly when the holy water was sprinkled on the coffin. Having now established an iconoclastic and irreverent mood Lawson switches back again:

The fall of lumps of clay on a stranger's coffin doesn't sound any different from the fall of the same things on an ordinary wooden box... but perhaps one of us – the most sensitive might have been impressed by being reminded of a burial of long ago, when the thump of every sod jotted his heart.

Immediately following this we are told:

I have left out the wattle – because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzled head bowed and great pearly drops steaming down his rugged cheeks. He was absent – he was probably "out Back". I have left out the "sad Australian sunset" because the sun was not going down at the time....

We are then made to recall the seriousness of comments on the name of the dead bushman and the story ends:

... we shall not be able to give any information to heart-broken Mother or Sister or Wife, nor to anyone who could let him hear something to his advantage – for we have already forgotten the name.

Yet all this is not so much the alternation of mood as the setting of one – complex, human and true – by the use of plain language, juxtaposition and interplay of detail. This is a highly skilled method of craftsmanship.

In the funeral we get a glimpse of the mourners from the narrator as people coarsened and spiritually debilitated by life in the outback, as people who can only accommodate the suddenness, the impartiality, the ever-presence of death by seeking to stave off or to soften the unadorned truth (Matthews 1971:xi). Our attention is constantly and cynically drawn to a whole range of complex facades and disguises used by the mourners to wall off the truth – fake sentimentality on the part of the mourners. Notice for instance that the pubs shut their front doors but leave their side doors open; there is even a desperate suggestion that the Drover's fate could have been fended off if only they had been warned:

... if ye'd known that, ye'd have prolonged the conversation...

But all these Matthews argues, further serves only to advance the fact of death and the true plight of the mourners more insistently, while transforming an apparent preoccupation with the burial of the dead into a study of the terrified living. The mumbled groping burial service affirms death as the story's great reality. The narrator has a perception of how the occasion should be observed which perhaps just points to the fact that propriety is difficult to observe in the bush. Yet it is imperative to observe certain proprieties.

Unlike the emotion of alarm and fear posed by the dangerous snake in *The Drover's Wife*, in this story we get the emotion of sadness, of helplessness in the face of death and man's

inability to do anything about it. As with other stories, there is no real resolution, no ending, only a feeling that one episode – a vital and somehow revelatory one – has been momentarily caught, its implications apprehended with tantalizing incompleteness. And though these characters remain enclosed and shadowy, a visionary element in the writing, a flicker of revelation in image and phrase brings us into contact with the great issues and aspirations of a man under stress, man on trial, man alienated.

4.4.3 Use Of Language

The writing in the story is pithy and to the point. It is written in such a way that the story is upon you as a reader at once and bears you along swiftly. The position of the narrator deserves attention. Mitchell (1990: 30) observes that "in Lawson, his narrator merges himself with the collective; there is no separating the attitudes and values of what is recounted from those apparently endorsed by the narrative itself. The narrator is not critical of the comic riot with which the funeral begins, and he is unperturbed that so many of the mourners are soon incapable of walking to the cemetery." He speaks in the first person plural, "we", because he identifies himself with the mourners; he is part and parcel of the drovers. This brings out the sensitivity of those who can feel – the grave digger even tries 'to gentle the clatter of the lumps of clay, out of respect for that human quality described as "feelin's"'. From the story we get the ironic feeling that nothing really matters, nothing surprises. Out in the broiling and dazed plains, in the heat and the dust, life such as it is goes on. Nothing of great significance happens. That man, apart from the constant pressure and demands of living, is also living under the shadow of an uncontrollable phenomenon: Death, and he can do nothing about it. But then the narratorial "we" becomes "I" and there is a thinking and noticing what the individual can do on his own account. And through the "I" we get to the next phase of the story in which the narrator registers details that indicate true feeling beneath the layer of indifference. Thus a true to life narrative is presented to the reader.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

We have looked at two of Lawson's stories in this unit. Lawson is successful in portraying life at the time, in foregrounding the prevalent societal concerns. In writing of the exploited selector, drover or the broken-down bushwoman, he was writing of all humanity in fear and suffering. His vision apparently so confined in a geographical or sociological sense was further afield. He displays a keen awareness, observation, and sensitivity and thus is a sympathetic chronicler of bush life. As a pioneer in the short story genre, he was able to give direction and colour to the Australian short story. He wrote his stories in a brief, terse manner and in a common man's language. What is unique is his ability to describe the human condition in a realistic manner. For example in *The Drover's Wife*, as Roderick puts it, we feel pity for the sorrow-laden community, while in *The Union Buries Its Dead* we see resentment against death, the manner of its coming and the helplessness of man. The latter story depicts the human being as sad and destined to suffer.

Lawson's influence is still as pervasive as ever. His stories have retained their power and finesse. His themes are still as relevant as a century ago. People still identify with him. Roderick (1966:63) with reference to *The Union Buries Its Dead* and its relevance to the present, comments that "perhaps it is because the story brings us up

suddenly against the fact of death, death robbed of sentimentality, intractable death, bleak, rigid, cold, unsparing; that it has this timeless power to attract even as it repels, a power gained from the marriage of fear and fascination that makes the fact of death an eternal mystery. In his stories Lawson mirrors the restlessness of humanity” and the situation is the same even today.

Finally, in *The Drover's Wife* and indeed in some of his other stories and poems, we note Lawson's Republican views: "... her husband is an Australian, and so is she..." These views are now in vogue. People regard themselves more as Australians with a unique culture now more than ever. Lawson's ideas, themes and socio-political views were thus ahead of his times and people are now beginning to appreciate the power and relevance of his genius even more. His contribution to the Australian literary landscape has, therefore, truly been phenomenal. It is perhaps because Lawson's stories are so local that they assume universal significance. For not only do they portray the specific conditions of bush life and what it means to be an Australian they also illuminate aspects of what it means to be human in a world often not arranged according to our convenience. It is this wider significance that contributes to the lasting appeal of the stories.

4.6 QUESTIONS

- (1) Describe the life of women in the Australian outback as depicted in the short story *The Drover's Wife*?
- (2) With examples from *The Drover's Wife* describe the literary style and language used by the author in the story.
- (3) Discuss the themes covered in *The Drover's Wife*?
- (4) Discuss the theme of helplessness in *The Union Buries Its Dead*.
- (5) In what ways are the drovers portrayed as hypocrites in *The Union Buries Its Dead*? Show with examples from the text.
- (6) Discuss the literary style used in the story *The Union Buries Its Dead*.

4.7 GLOSSARY

Ballarat	A place in Victoria well known for its gold fields. In 1864 the administrators of the gold fields antagonised the miners, a group of them thereby rose in rebellion against the administration. This was known as the Eureka rebellion. The event though not an actual revolution was a symbol of political radicalism (and the result of provocation by the authorities).
Billabong	A portion of a river that has become dry; billa means creek and bong means dead
Bulletin	The Sydney Bulletin was established in 1880. In 1896, A g Stephens introduced the Red Page literary columns.

Bush	is used in a special Australian sense to mean the vast interiors, the outback. It displaced words like <i>woods</i> and <i>forests</i> . With it developed a vast range of vocabulary of the Bush like – bushranger, billabong, swag, stockman – to replace the names of an intimate country side in England. For instance, convicts escaping in the bush came to be called bushrangers. The appeal of the bush gradually spread until a time came when the bush with all its nuances and new vocabulary came to be the great myth of Australian history. In a way, it satisfied the Australian quest for identity.
Ex- Squatter	refers to a one time big landlord or land owner
Federation	refers to the coming together of the Australian colonies to form the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1, 1901
Pioneering	derived from the word pioneer refers to those who were the first to settle in Australia, and therefore, faced lot of hardships. Their endeavour to sustain in the land so different from their native place is seen as a positive attitude
Selectors	refer to the Australian farming community
Stockman	the term came into use in the 1830s and originated from the word stock used collectively for farm animals. From 1850 it became synonymous with cattle and a stockman is thus a cattleman
Sundowners	are typical wandering nomads who lie down to sleep wherever the sun goes down
Swag	was part of the bush vocabulary. Henry Lawson describes it as a tent “fly” or strip of calico (a cover for the swag and a shelter in bad weather...), a couple of blankets spare clothing and small personal effects often comprised the swag

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