

Brian Matthews: 'The Drover's Wife' Writ Large: One Measure of Lawson's Achievement

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'*THE DROVER'S WIFE*' is almost certainly one of Henry Lawson's best known stories. Relentlessly anthologized, it deserves its eminence, even if the attention of most readers and many editors has been too much focused upon the pioneering aspects of the story or its skilfully controlled suspense. It is no doubt true that 'The Drover's Wife' pictures 'the self-sacrificing lonely life of the bushwoman, who in those days helped to lay the foundation of our prosperity',¹ but I feel that the story's real significance and merit are better appreciated if it is seen as a crucial stage in Lawson's artistic development. With stories like 'The Union Buries Its Dead' and 'The Bush Undertaker' it impresses as one of the successive refinements of Lawson's elusively apocalyptic vision of the bush. But 'The Drover's Wife' is perhaps especially intriguing because, with 'Water Them Geraniums'—a second, more ambitious attempt at a similar theme—it provides some measure of Lawson's achievement up to and including *Joe Wilson*, his greatest work.

'The Drover's Wife' opens with a series of flat, documentary observations. The tone is dispassionate, if a little pessimistic and there is a general impression of unyielding realism.

*The two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs ... Bush all round—bush with no horizon, for the country is flat ... 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 civilization...*²

Yet despite this apparently neutral monotone and the clipped, naturalistic piecing together of staccato descriptions, there is nevertheless a subtly implied sense of involvement, of belonging: one feels the bush as the common enemy. The toneless documentation is not as taut and mechanical as might at first appear: there is a perceptible stress on the prospect of the encircling bush and on the remoteness of even the most pathetic form of human life—'a shanty on the main road'. This emphasis unobtrusively invites us not only to *envisage* the drab scene, but even more to realize and savour the potential horror of the situation.

This quiet flexibility of style continually undercuts the stern, seemingly dispassionate observations: without losing the documentary flavour Lawson can, for example, accommodate a sort of tight-lipped humour. 'He is a moment late ... the boy's club comes down and skins the aforesaid nose.' Again, as the story progresses, the narrator becomes at times identified with the emotions and reactions of the woman:

She finds all the excitement and recreation she needs in the Young Ladies' Journal, and Heaven help her! takes pleasure in the fashion plates.

or

She does this every Sunday.... There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet.... 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....

The resumption, at various points throughout the woman's reminiscences, of the purely documentary narrative tone helps to give the present situation a hard immediacy in contrast to the controlled gentleness, even softness of tone, that characterizes much of her memories. This documentary quality also helps, by virtue of its toughness and self-imposed limitations, to avoid undue sentimentality in a story that at least runs the risk of that sort of failure. Lawson does permit himself a gesture in the last sentence:

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.

But in the context of the story this admittedly well-worn tableau seems to me to succeed remarkably. It reinforces that sense of implacable continuity, of a life being lived, that is so strong throughout the story, and uses the natural scene to suggest emotional and spiritual exhaustion.³

Lawson's view of life here is characteristically sombre. The odds are heavily stacked against the drover's wife: the elements, loneliness, hardships, fear, littleness in face of the vast, indifferent, natural world—all these attack and defeat her. Her survival through the present situation is quite immaterial. We can gauge her desperation by simply reflecting how utterly small is her present victory—the killing of one snake—in comparison with the fear and strain she has gone through to achieve it. Lawson's flashback method has not merely served to reveal her whole life in the space of one brief incident, it has endowed that incident with an intensity of emotion, fear and spiritual exhaustion which accumulates as it were from her vivid memories of past hardships. Nor is this crisis the last, but merely one in a succession: her reminiscences are equally a drab blueprint for her future. The only bright spot is that Tommy, in a flash of sympathetic insight, promises he 'won't never go drovin' '—a significantly negative assurance. Her husband's return is never a real factor in the story: 'if he has a good cheque when he comes back he will give most of it to her', but 'she has not heard from her husband for six months, and is anxious about him'. His nebulous existence is underlined by the fact that she actually has to 'invent' him on certain occasions:

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 all its terse delineations and the oppressive, threatening atmosphere so felicitously evoked by the blend of past and present, it is the deep human sympathy of the story which adds a new dimension to Lawson's talent for portraying the bush and its captives. The woman emerges as a loving, fearful, determined human being: though, as a character, she remains a shadowy figure, the revealed pattern of her life endows her, if not with a personal individuality, at least with a profound and poignant humanity. The plight of the drover's wife is hopeless, but susceptible of deep compassion and understanding. The story implies that human attributes may well be the ennobling and enduring consolation in a ruthless and spiritually debilitating environment. In 'The Drover's Wife' the 'Lawson country' is taking shape: life there is insidiously cruel and potentially tragic, but—in this story at least—human worth perhaps prevents it from being a bad joke.

'The Drover's Wife', for all its virtues, is nevertheless a study of a human situation rather than an impression from within it. The documentary style and the stance of the narrator—as a severely sympathetic onlooker—enhance this effect. In 'The Drover's Wife' the very organization, with its flashbacks commenting on and intensifying a central situation in the present, has the neatness and unity of careful, controlled observation. This is in no way a contradiction of the various merits previously claimed for the story: the picture of her plight is vivid and compassionate, the pathos enhanced, not dissipated, by the documentation. But while we are strongly aware of the stresses and fears she constantly endures and the abrasive effect on her character and personality, the actual processes by which she seeks to adjust mentally and emotionally to her situation, and the effects on her of this adjustment, remain obscure. This is partly because the observant, fairly detached onlooker can obviously explore such depths to a limited extent only, and partly because Lawson, it seems, had simply not developed his craft to that point (though the whole concept of 'The Drover's Wife' shows it is coming within his scope). Her courage and steadfastness against mainly physical hardships are no doubt part of the reason why the story is so often accepted as a fine tribute to the pioneers.

IT IS INTERESTING then to find Lawson returning to the same theme later on and treating it in an entirely different way. 'Water Them Geraniums'⁴ is not simply a study or a document. It is sprawling, untidy, full of the inconsequential asides and indirections of life; it conforms only to the broadest logic—that of time and change drawing events and characters irresistibly onwards, and its climax, as it happens, is life's own inevitable climax. Mrs Spicer, and indeed Joe and Mary, are all fighting physical hardships, but Lawson is now less interested in the actual battle; he is exploring the effect on the personalities of the people themselves, and on their efforts to communicate with one another. One could not speak of the nature of the communication in 'The Drover's Wife' because there was none. In this story Lawson was on the verge of

discoveries about the effect of the bush on people's minds and hearts, but he was unable to carry this interest very far. The bush was fires, drownings, drought, loneliness—an opponent to be physically confronted. It is in the Joe Wilson stories that the emphasis shifts in various intriguing ways. One of the most impressive achievements of 'Water Then Geraniums' is the sense of alienation that runs so strongly through the story: the environment again becomes a divisive force, but in a way that transcends the mere physical separations of earlier stories.⁵

Joe and Mary set off for Lahey's Creek against a backdrop of the same unpromising, monochromatic bush that provided such a tight, vivid opening description for 'The Drover's Wife':

Mary drove with me the rest of the way to the creek, along the lonely branch track, across native apple-tree flats. It was a dreary, hopeless track. There was no horizon, nothing but the rough ashen trunks of the gnarled and stunted trees in all directions, little or no undergrowth, and the ground ... as bare as the road, for it was a dry season ... I wondered what I should do with the cattle if there wasn't more grass on the creek.

...

Mary and I didn't talk much along this track.... And I suppose we both began to feel pretty dismal as the shadows lengthened. I'd noticed lately that Mary and I had got out of the habit of talking to each other. ... But then I thought, 'It won't last long—I'll make life brighter for her by and by.'

It is not only the personal, looser, less cryptic and less consciously tight-lipped style that is different here: the bush is being seen not just as a symbol of the physical hardships and troubles, but as an active force working invisibly towards the alienation of one human being from another. Communication between Joe and Mary has broken down so that even the smallest efforts towards genuine relationship either seem impossibly complicated, or are better put off to another time 'when things brighten up a bit'. The thrall of the bush, it seems, is the constant hope of better times—'something better and brighter' when 'everything will be alright' and Joe will be able to 'win her back again'. But human contact apparently cannot stand such a search in such unrelenting surroundings. Here then, Lawson moves into a new dimension of existence within the familiar context, one which so transcends the earlier 'physical' view of the bush, that that view itself becomes a symbol of the higher significance, and no longer an end in itself; as, for example, when Lawson interrupts Joe's moody reflection on the puzzling intricacies of his marriage:

In this sort of country a stranger might travel for miles without seeming to have moved, for all the difference there is in the scenery. The new tracks were 'blazed'—that is, slices of bark cut off from both sides of trees, within sight of each other, in a line, to mark the track until the horses and wheel marks made it plain ... a bushman a little used to the country soon picks out the differences amongst the trees, half unconsciously as it were, and so finds his way about.

The physical surroundings mirror Joe's state of mind: a faceless country where it is difficult to tell if your directions are right, or if you have moved at all. Joe badly needs the track ahead to be blazed (the word stands out artlessly in inverted commas!) to find something familiar he can cling to, or some sign he can follow that shows others have gone the same way.

Whether intuitive or deliberated, this seems to me one of those master strokes which so frequently lie beneath the deceptive surfaces of Lawson's best work; so completely integrated into the mood and spirit of the writing that the effect is wrought almost on the subconscious. (Here it will be noted that the description under discussion not only *deals* with directions and the lack of them, but is in itself involved and repetitious: the technical explanation of 'blazing', the repeating of the word 'track' produce an over-all impression of intricacy rather than clarity.) Even more important, though, it shows Lawson working at a new level, the familiar environment being explored not only as a physical obstacle to man, but as a pervasive, often divisive influence on human relationships and man's efforts to comprehend his fellows and himself in a pitiless land.

Again, their shack in the bush is at first glance a replica of that in 'The Drover's Wife', and of many another in Lawson's stories. But where the emphasis previously had been on the material deficiencies and primitiveness of the place (the rough slabs, the 'ground' floor, the chinks and draughts), the house at Lahey's

Creek is framed in a context of alienation: Mary's first glimpse of it follows suddenly upon Joe's depressed musings on the strange, half-understood failure of their relationship.

It's an awful thing to me, now I look back to it, to think how far apart we had grown, what strangers we were to each other. It seems, now, as though we had been sweethearts long years before, and had parted, and had never really met since.

The sun was going down when Mary called out:

'There's our place, Joe!'

Instead of breaking his gloomy train of thought with the possibility of something a little more hopeful, the house for that brief instant becomes in Joe's sombre eyes a symbol of the very failure he has been brooding on:

She hadn't seen it before, and somehow it came new and with a shock to me, who had been out here several times.

One infers that it is a shock because the miserable shack stands as a part of the whole environment whose unreasonable demands and strange influence have, in some way that Joe cannot quite grasp, brought them to their own personal crisis. The lengthy naturalistic description of the property that follows shows the house to be indeed miserable and depressing: but Lawson no longer relies on such details to evoke atmosphere; the real impact of the house had already been established before even a slab of it was described; its oppressive connotations are enhanced by the final, inconsequential remark that 'the man who took up this selection left it because his wife died there.'

In this uneasy atmosphere, enclosed yet divided by the bush, Joe and Mary grope their way through the imponderable silences and the strained snatches of conversation that increase their remoteness from each other, until the crisis is temporarily relieved, though not resolved, by a quarrel. 'We quarrelled badly then—that first hour in our new home. ...' The causes of this quarrel, of course, run deeper than the mere sight of the house or the dismal prospect of Lahey's Creek, but it is on the other hand the stolid, unpromising surroundings that provoke the train of thought: their situation appears so grim that conflicts and doubts arise as to whether Joe has amounted to anything. The homecoming thus finally disintegrates and the failure, which Joe in retrospect attributes to the callous influence of the surroundings, hangs like a cloud over them, even after the worst wounds are seemingly patched up. 'Somehow I didn't feel satisfied with the way things had gone.'

One of the reasons that leads Joe to blame the place for their troubles is his shocked glimpse of the Spicer family. In fact, the 'Lonely Track' that Joe and Mary have just traversed through the bush, and the 'Lonely Track' on which they find themselves, spiritually directionless and apart, both lead ineluctably to Mrs Spicer, the gloomy colossus of the story and one of Lawson's finest achievements.

Mrs Spicer is the drover's wife writ large; where the latter was steadfast and had about her (though not to the story's detriment) a suggestion of 'the woman-of-the-west', Mrs Spicer is flawed and a little confused.

I supposed the reason why she hadn't gone mad through hardship and loneliness was that she hadn't either the brains or the memory to go farther than she could see through the trunks of the 'apple-trees'.

She stands as a horrible example of what Mary might become; this is implicit in the counterbalance of the two parts of the story—'The Lonely Track' and 'Past Carin'—and explicit at particular points, for example:

I didn't feel like going to the woman's house that night; I felt ... that this was what Mary would come to if I left her here.

and

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

Against the competence of the drover's wife in so many situations, Mrs Spicer's life seems a flurry of pathetic, often unsuccessful efforts to make headway against a sea of shortcomings and threats. It is true that she deals with similar, sometimes identical situations (e.g. the fire) but where the drover's wife's courageous efforts evoke admiration and some compassion, Mrs. Spicer is—for all her undeniable courage and tenacity—often pathetic and pitiable.

The reason why this second version of 'The Drover's Wife' is so different (despite the fact that it contains much reworked material)⁶ is that Lawson is exploring another and more ambitious dimension, and again one is struck by the sense of alienation. Mrs Spicer is a personality in process of disintegration. She faces the hardships of each day, not with the intense determination that almost seemed like composure in the drover's wife, but with a doggedness that has lost sight of the purpose and is animated only by habit. She has gone beyond the stages of physical separation and alienation from her husband, though once they were painful enough:

'I remember when we lived on the Cudgegong River ... the first time Spicer had to go away from home I nearly fretted my eyes out. ... He's been away drovin' in Queenslan' as long as eighteen months at a time since then. ... But ... I don't mind—I somehow seem to have got past carin'. Besides—besides, Spicer was a very different man then to what he is now. He's got so moody and gloomy at home, he hardly ever speaks.'

Her plight is far worse than this: she is a personality at war, alienated from her innermost self and switching unsurely from one 'self' to the other, no longer certain which is meaningful.

Her voice sounded, more than anything else, like a voice coming out of a phonograph ... and not like a voice coming out of her. But sometimes, when she got outside her everyday life on this selection she spoke in a sort of—in a sort of lost groping-in-the-dark kind of voice.

Doggedness, and a rather heavy cheerfulness are common characteristics of the 'selection' side of Mrs Spicer; on 'smothering' hot mornings, or 'bitter, black rainy mornings' she is already toiling at sunrise, and accepts help with a matter-of-factness that belies her inadequacy to cope:

'Think yer, Mr Wilson. Do yer think we're ever goin' to have any rain?'

or

'Think yer, Mr Wilson. This drop of rain's a blessin'! Come in and have a dry at the fire and I'll make yer a cup of tea.'

Her descriptions of the 'ploorer' and the mad squatter are similarly down-to-earth just this side of being humorous, and always with the not quite convincing implication that these events were simply routine and unremarkable.

But it is her 'groping' voice that reveals Mrs Spicer to herself, shows the extent to which she has been brutalized and hurt, turned away from a gentleness and gentility to which she has the last shreds of a genuine response. Such outbursts are so alien to what she has become and to her surroundings, that they are invariably followed by an embarrassed and pathetic disclaimer, a shocked, too-hurried return to the safety of the other self, that only needs to talk about rain and drought and 'ploorer' and milkers to sound safely normal.

'Oh, I don't know what I'm talkin' about! You mustn't take any notice of me, Mrs Wilson—I don't often go on like this. I do believe I'm gittin' a bit ratty at times. It must be the heat and the dullness.'

This sort of uneasy explanation, with its rather ghastly flippancy, occurs again and again to cover up the softer, almost ethereal musings that take control of her conversation at various times. Her whole nature seems to be in fragments, with the pieces re-arranging themselves into this pattern or that, according to what the situation, seen through her pained, half-nostalgic, half-comprehending eyes, evokes. There is, in fact, more than a little truth in Mrs Spicer's disturbed protestations. She seems on the verge of madness—the ultimate

alienation, from oneself and from the world. It would be a gentle vague madness, but madness nevertheless. And Lawson is, of course, well aware of this final complexity to which his quiet, deceptive probings in this new dimension have led him. For madness, or the fear of it, pervades the story utterly.

Because they so constantly and consciously walk this knife-edge of madness, Joe and Mary and Mrs Spicer have about them implicitly a pathetically intense desire to remain linked with some broader, ill-defined stream of life, from which they doggedly refuse to see themselves as disqualified simply because of their surroundings; disqualification will come only if they *succumb* to their surroundings. It is this consciousness of and determination to belong to a vital, humane existence that so sharpens the compassion in this story in comparison with 'The Drover's Wife'. In the latter, the woman herself, and the shadowy figures who moved on the periphery of her small world, were bush people, their life was bush life and their trials were those that the implacable bush presented. This vision produced a dramatic and moving story—a compassionate picture of a determined woman fighting to preserve her own spirit, her family and some sort of reasonable existence against the degradations of hardship and dangers of various kinds. All this is equally true of 'Water Them Geraniums'—but the story goes much further than this. The alienation already discussed applies not only to the individual characters and their relationships with each other, it applies to them as a group: they confront not only hardships and dangers, not only failure of personal communications; they are fighting to remain in the human race, to be members of a stream of existence which, for all its faults, ennobles them, while failure to remain members brutalizes and decivilizes them. No such implication was apparent in the powerful but simpler 'Drover's Wife', and it is this I think which at once makes 'Water Them Geraniums' a more deeply compassionate story, and suggests that Lawson's art has assumed a breadth and a power in relation to which the bush milieu of his stories no longer stands as a limiting factor.

The references to madness collectively make up one important way by which this 'broader stream of life' is suggested, and membership of it made to seem valuable. For about all these references there is a sort of duality: the emphasis is not so much on the madness itself as on its effect—the terrible separation or dissociation from life that it brings with it. In comparison with this fate, it seems, almost anything is acceptable. Better to be something of a fool than be sufficiently sensitive and imaginative for the insidious surroundings to produce this gradual alienation from life itself:

I often think how, at sunset, the past must come home to a new-chum black sheep, sent out to Australia and drifted into the bush. I used to think that they couldn't have much brains, or the loneliness would drive them mad.

Even the more or less inevitable 'strangeness' that is the lot of any habitual bush dweller, expresses itself in a partial spiritual separation from the rest of the world:

You'll sometimes sit of an evening and watch the lonely track, by the hour, for a horseman or a cart or someone that's never likely to come that way—someone, or a stranger, that you can't and don't really expect to see. I think that most men who have been alone in the bush for any length of time—and married couples too—are more or less mad ... it is generally the husband who is painfully shy and awkward when strangers come.

There is an intimacy, a longing and a deliberative weight even about the rhythm of this musing revelation that deeply impress the seriousness of the problem. One feels above all a desire to belong, a dread of letting things slip too far. With a scarcely noticeable but characteristic complexity, Lawson is suggesting that this very desire is so strong that it becomes a form of madness itself (quite distinct from the 'strangeness' of solitude) if thwarted too long.

... watch the lonely track, by the hour, for a horseman or a cart, or someone that's never likely to come that way—someone, or a stranger, that you can't and don't really expect to see.

This dread of dissociation from existence is further implied in the very seriousness of the references to madness. There is a horrible fascination about it—this insidious yielding to the inscrutable invitations of the bush and contracting out of the human race—but it is never funny. The bushman in the horrors is a bizarre figure—perhaps the nearest approach in the story to a humorous madman—but he *does* go and hang himself, and his grotesque corpse *does* exercise a hideous attraction to which not only the children yield. And

it is impossible in retrospect to remember Mrs Spicer's off-hand reference—'He had two saddle-straps in his hand'—without the slow realization that the whole incident, however curious, may have had a chill and insane determination running through it.

The possibility that Mrs Spicer's life and death may prefigure the fate of others, reinforces the compassion one must feel for people struggling so desperately to remain involved in humanity. Her death is not simply the result of hardships and heartbreaks (as, for example, we might imagine the death of the drover's wife *would* be); it is the climax, and paradoxically the greatest triumph in a long struggle to remain a 'member': in death she affirms a humanity and a sense of purpose which her confused and disintegrating personality was losing in life. Mrs Spicer stands as a ghastly glimpse into the future for Mary, but not only for Mary. In her pathetic clinging to niceties, innocent pretensions and etiquettes that she can neither sustain nor properly remember, Mrs Spicer stakes her dwindling claim to belonging; at the same time she not only emphasizes, unwittingly, the grotesque irrelevance of such observances in that environment, but sounds a grim warning that the bush may be the death of womanhood, and not merely of some of the refinements affected by woman. Her unsuccessful attempts to maintain appearances (which persist right up to her last breath) are an important part of the ever more confused flurry of her life:

'Mother told Annie not to say we was hungry if yer asked; but if yer give us anythink to eat, we was to take it an' say thenk yer, Mrs Wilson.'

'I wish you wouldn't come down any more till I'm on my feet, Mrs Wilson. The children can do for me.'

'... the place is in such a muck and it hurts me.'

... we'd see her bustle round, and two or three fowls fly out the front door, and she'd lay hold of a broom ... and flick out the floor, with a flick or two round in front of the door perhaps.

All of these, and the many other examples, have that strangely ambivalent character that Lawson so artlessly achieves. The actions themselves are essentially feminine, as is the mind that sees the necessity for them; yet the situation is so pathetic, the efforts, however well-intended, so pitiable, that her womanhood seems somehow undermined, its character changed by the stress of unreasonable demands. This feeling is enhanced by fleeting impressions that circumstances have made her rather masculine in some ways:

... She was gaunt and flat-chested and her face was 'burnt to a brick' ... She had brown eyes, nearly red, and a little wild-looking at times, and a sharp face—ground sharp by hardship—the cheeks drawn in.

I've ... seen her trudging about the yard ... ankle-deep in black, liquid filth—with an old pair of blucher boots on, and an old coat of her husband's ...

In the context of her spiritual disintegration her little attempts at frippery and appearance emerge, not so much as pride (though this is partly the case) but rather as her personal effort to cling to the stream of life. There is much more than hurt pride in the anguished recognition:

'Oh, I don't think I'll come up next week, Mrs Wilson.'

'... the visits doesn't do me any good. I get the dismals afterwards.'

Rather the recognition seems to come from an impression, however vague, that her dissociation from herself and from life is worsening, in comparison with someone whose trial has only just begun. Mrs Spicer's 'dismals' are more than injured pride at a patched tablecloth or a deficient cutlery set.

She is a warning, not just to Mary but to all women, that their very personalities may be distorted, their characteristic femininity denatured, as deprivation, inadequacy, makeshift and longing take their physical, mental and spiritual toll; and that they may pass into a limbo where existence is not that of woman or man, but one of confused, dissociated sensations—pain, nostalgia, bitterness, despair.*

In 'Water Them Geraniums' there is, then, a depth and quality of compassion not found in 'The Drover's Wife'. Its poignancy and impact derive from Lawson's delicate understanding of man's desperate need to

know himself involved in humanity (perhaps this is the real Lawson mateship?) and his fear and horror when, for whatever reason, he begins to lose himself and his human landmarks in the labyrinths of alienation and endless physical stress; and Lawson sees this fate as perhaps being highly likely in the Australian bush environment. Perhaps, even more important, Lawson's style has developed to such a point in this story that he can realize these elusive ideas with such subtlety that the writing actually *embodies* the intricacies, doubts and confusions, rather than being a description of them.

1 Colin Roderick, *Introduction to Henry Lawson, Fifteen Stories*, Angus & Robertson, 1965, p. xi.

2 Cecil Mann, *The Stories of Henry Lawson, Three Series*, Angus & Robertson, 1964. First Series, p. 175. (All references to Lawson's stories in this essay are based on the above-named edition.)

3 One is reminded of the ending of 'The Bush Undertaker' which has the same air of deep sympathy, the same summarizing force and which runs similar risks, i.e. of becoming rather romantic, or a cliché.

4 *Stories*, ii, p. 40.

5 Some of the points made in this discussion of 'Water Them Geraniums' have been developed to varying degrees by C. Wallace-Crabbe in an essay on the Joe Wilson series in *Australian Literary Studies*, June 1964, and by A. A. Phillips, 'Lawson Revisited', *Meanjin Quarterly*, 1/1965. I have attempted, by narrowing the focus almost exclusively to 'Water Them Geraniums', to take some of these ideas a little further.

6 There are many parallels. Apart from drought, rain, fire, and physical hardships generally, there is the torn handkerchief incident and the link between the drover's wife's Sunday walks in the scrub and Joe's remark that Mrs Spicer 'hadn't either the brains or the memory to go further than she could see through the trunks of the "apple-trees".' Quite apart from the fact, of course, that the whole concept of 'Water Them Geraniums' is an elaboration of 'The Drover's Wife'. A. A. Phillips has pointed out that the two women were in fact drawn from two *different* models; however, I do not think this affects the point being made here about the development of Lawson's art.

* Spicer is the warning for Joe: he exists only as a gloomy, moody, bitter shadow of what he apparently once was.

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