

Common Pleasures: Low Culture in Sydney 1887-1914

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

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Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements ii

Abstract vi

Introduction 1

Part 1, The Pub 23

Chapter 1: The 1887 Intoxicating Drink Inquiry 24

Chapter 2: Lower-Class Drinking: Places and Practices 54

Chapter 3: Women and the Drink Question 82

Part 2, The Vaudeville Theatre 115

Chapter 4: 'Colour, Music, Light and Rhythm': Vaudeville in Sydney
116

Chapter 5: The Gallery Gods: 'Kicking up a Row in Olympus' 141

Chapter 6: "We've Got a Lodger and He's Very Fond of Ma': The
Vaudeville Repertoire 162

Part 3, The Street 196

Chapter 7: Larrikin Days 197

Chapter 8: The Haymarket Swell: Larrikin Fashion 223

Chapter 9: Everyday Resistance: Larrikin Street Life 248

Conclusion 280

Bibliography 285

Preface and Acknowledgements

In *Heterologies* De Certeau writes:

By a professional reflex, the historian refers any discourse to the socioeconomic or mental conditions that produced it. He needs to apply this kind of analysis to his own discourse in a manner that will make it pertinent to the elucidation of those forces that presently organise representations of the past.

Accordingly, in the interests of breaking open my own discourse, I will outline some of the circumstances which led me to undertake this thesis and the bodies of knowledge and personal baggage which have informed its writing.

My original undergraduate training, undertaken in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was in cultural anthropology, English literature, and European history. The first sparked an enduring interest in micro-practices and beliefs. The last two, in combination with a lifetime's reading of Victorian novels, inspired an interest in the nineteenth century. A gap of some thirty odd years ensued before I returned to non-vocational tertiary study and undertook, as what used to be called an 'irregular student', a course in Australian Cultural History taught by Penny Russell at Sydney University. The course introduced me to the ethnographic approach to history through the work of writers like Greg Dening, Robert Darnton and the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Darnton has said that the ethnographic historian 'studies the way ordinary people made sense of the world', encapsulating an approach which appealed to my anthropological training. The course also revealed to me the joys of research which led to an MA thesis on representations of Sydney in fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the course of researching for that thesis I became curious about the people, the things, the activities that seemed to have been left out of most of the documentary sources. In particular I found it perplexing that the lower class, the poor, the humble, however one chooses to term them, though numerically dominant, had only a precarious foothold in history. The details of the lived experience of this obscure majority seemed to me mysterious and exotic, more interesting and more meaningful than grand historical rubrics of nation and identity which left great swathes of life unexamined and unexplained. I came to consider it an important social task to acknowledge these people, akin perhaps to Michelet's pronouncement that it is the work of the living in writing history to quiet the dead.

When I began this PhD I planned to take an ethnographic approach to the topic, gleaning as much detail on practices and rituals as possible and searching for their meanings, their internal logic. However insights gained in a series of overcrowded but lively postgrad seminars on modernity taught by Zdenko Zlatar enabled me to see that the period I was concerned with was in fact one of radical change, not only sweeping change in technology and the arts, but also less spectacular changes in socio-cultural formations which were ultimately to transform everyday life.

Another factor which influenced the writing was awareness of a new body of theoretical work which was having a profound effect on the social sciences and the humanities. The conversations of academic friends and family members had alerted me to the work of that disparate group of theorists classed as 'post-modern' or 'post-structuralist' among other terms and to the transformations that their work was effecting in the academic world. As I began selectively to read these writers it became apparent that a whole world of theory had developed since I was an undergraduate. Some conservative historians like Keith Windschuttle were dismissive, questioning the relevance and

appropriateness of these ideas to the writing of history. This ought primarily, so they held, to be concerned with sources not theories. I found however that the work of particular writers was illuminating when applied to the texted past and could be used to unlock deeper levels of meaning.

I have been aware throughout the writing process that the culture I was describing represents a thin archaeological veneer laid over a much deeper layer of pre-existing culture, namely that of Australia's indigenous inhabitants. Although I am aware that any attempt to acknowledge its ancient and powerful presence can be no more than the merest tokenism, nonetheless I feel that it is necessary to make a gesture in this regard. This, I felt, was preferable to inattention in the face of the moral enormities which the dispossession of its owners have entailed. To pass over it in silence would seem complicit with historical attempts to nullify both the culture and the prior claims of the people who practised it. Such inattention inevitably deepens the injury to the national psyche which so urgently needs attention.

Although the writing of this thesis has been essentially a solitary task, it would be a considerably poorer product had it not been for the contributions of a number of people, to whom I would like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude: to Peter Doyle for his wide-ranging knowledge, rigorous intellectual standards and keen eye for shapely narrative and the generosity with which he placed them at my disposal; to Bidy Doyle for her lively and unique way of engaging with the written word which has been both inspiring and corrective; to Malcolm Skewis and Bruce Doar for their perceptive reading and comments on early drafts of part one; to Sharon Davidson for intense and sometimes difficult discussions which helped me to clarify a number of historiographical problems; to John Whiteoak whose unstinting kindness in reading drafts and enormous knowledge of Australian popular music allowed me to correct some omissions, misconceptions and

misinterpretations in part two; to Jeni Thornley for insights into the violence and dispossession wrought by history and the need to acknowledge that at the deepest levels; to the numerous friends and family members whose interest did not flag even at times when mine did, particularly Moira Bishop and Denise Byrne; and finally to my supervisor, Paul Ashton whose combination of a formidable knowledge of Australian history, fine editorial skills, tact, conscientiousness and bracing good humour helped to make a task which might have been gruelling into an enormous pleasure; also to the other members of Paul's PhD group for their insights and support. Heartfelt thanks to all.

Abstract

This thesis describes and analyses lower-class culture in inner-urban Sydney from 1887 to 1914 as it was enacted in three key institutions—the pub, the vaudeville theatre and the street. It proposes that resistance from below to the dominant order was commonly articulated through cultural codes and practices. Moreover these were historically specific, determined by contemporaneous facts and conditions.

The historic period under discussion spans the transition from Victorian to modern culture. It saw the spectacular growth of the cities and confirmed Australia as an urban nation. It also saw the development of a self-conscious national culture shaped by a rural ethos. Despite the prominence of rural motifs in the ideology of nationalism it was in the cities that the forging of a truly national, though unvalorised popular culture was taking place. I am interested in the intersections of popular discourses and practices with those of the city and of modernity and in how they shaped the complex evolution of an urban lower-class culture.

My approach in this thesis is interpretive and often impressionistic, though based on extensive use of sources. The term 'lower class' has been used in preference to 'working class' to reflect a focus on how the abstraction known as class was substantiated through cultural artefacts and practices rather than through relations to political or economic facts and conditions. Emphasis is on close scrutiny of the particular rather than the construction of a grand narrative, on everyday practices rather than the ideological framework which contains them. This represents a move away from, in Fiske's words 'the totalising structures and mechanisms of power to the heterogeneous practices of everyday life'.

Introduction

Culture (and its meanings and pleasures) is a constant succession of social practices; it is therefore inherently political, it is centrally involved in the distribution and possible redistribution of various forms of social power.¹

This thesis inquires into aspects of lower-class cultural life in Sydney in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its scope encompasses the 'lived texts'² of the pub, the vaudeville theatre and the street which, in the decades that spanned the turn of the nineteenth century, were key components in a lively and well-established urban lower-class popular and lived culture. The city's network of pubs and wine bars nurtured a distinctive drinking culture. It was vigorously contested by the temperance movement which succeeded in having a significant number of lower-class drinking practices outlawed under a tightening regime of liquor control. Vaudeville, the favourite theatrical entertainment of Sydney's lower class, was not so vigorously targeted, though it was stigmatised as vulgar and nonsensical. On the streets larrikins staked a claim to public space, colonising street corners, dancing saloons and harbourside picnic grounds and causing an outcry from the respectable public.

These were facets of a rich cultural plexus which decisively coloured the ambience of the city and shaped its unique character. Sydney's rapidly increasing populace constituted a 'volatile mixing of the poor, the vicious and the exotic'.³ The expansion of commercial activity which this concentration of humanity fostered resulted in more noise, more street traffic and a proliferation of advertising signs and billboards that made Sydney more chaotic, more exciting and its pace more urgent than it had been in the past. Urban life was characterised by an ambience of 'hyperstimulus'.⁴ It allowed more choices in day to day

existence and offered a wider variety of experiences, even for poor people. There were more pubs, more dancing saloons, more theatres, markets, street vendors and amusements than ever before. There were also of course more people, and not always the same ones, for Sydney's population was in a constant state of flux. Migrants, a class of people who were pivotal to modernity, arrived on a weekly basis bringing new ideas, songs, dances and fashions. Once here most settled in the city. A seasonal inflow of rural workers in winter and the crews of foreign ships docked in the harbour further increased the diversity of the population and added to the numbers of unattached men.

The cultural sphere was characterized by contestation of lower-class practices and preferences articulated according to a complex of dominant ideologies. But although as a subordinated group the lower class lacked the power of representation, they were not mere passive objects of imposed cultural hegemony. They evolved everyday practices that enabled them to contest or evade the forces of the dominant culture that objectified them. The sorts of questions asked in this work are: what was the nature of the practices which constituted this culture? Why were they adopted? What were their meanings? How were they shaped by the socio-historical context in which they developed? In attempting to answer them my aim has been to decipher the internal logic and symbolic import of such practices. This has entailed uncovering evidence of strategies of resistance embedded in them, for I am in agreement with John Fiske who maintains that 'scholarship that neglects or devalues these practices is guilty of a disrespect for the weak that is politically reprehensible'.⁵

In broad terms my inquiry is concerned with how the abstractions of the city, modernity, class and culture intersected to shape the specific historical realities described herein. To make use of a phrase coined by Raymond Williams, this hinges on a number of keywords which

cover respectively the place, the people, the practices and the time under investigation.⁶ These words warrant some explanation. My intention is not, as Williams has done in *Keywords*, to give a thoroughgoing social and historical analysis of their meanings, but to attempt to clarify their signification, to explain how they are used in the context of the inquiry that is this thesis.

It is an historical irony much remarked upon that, despite the mythologising of the bush which began in the 1890s, most Australian people were obliged or preferred to live in the cities. Their spectacular growth in the second half of the nineteenth century confirmed Australia as an urban nation. Sydney had never had the glittering reputation of 'Marvellous Melbourne', built on the enormous riches which flooded in from the Ballarat and Bendigo goldfields. But it continued to grow when Melbourne slumped in the 1890s and by the 1910s was Australia's largest city. It was made up of an assemblage of people thrown together by historical conditions.⁷ First came the convicts and their gaolers who displaced the Aboriginal inhabitants. They were followed by a trickle of economic opportunists, then a stream of immigrants which swelled to a flood in the 1850s during the goldrushes. Afterwards the former diggers and people from rural areas who gravitated to Sydney increased its numbers further. By 1891 more than a third of the population lived in the four colonial capitals, and by Federation this had risen to more than half. The increase in numbers also brought a more diversified community. Whereas in the early days of the colony the major divisions had been between convicts and free and rich and poor, social roles became more differentiated.⁸

Sydney in this period was a deeply segmented city whose social disjunctures were reflected in the conformation of the city's spatial politics. The city comprised a commercial centre surrounded by crowded residential districts which housed the casual workforce and their families who relied on being close to places of mass employment

like the wharves. It also offered other amenities such as plentiful pubs, markets and cheap places of entertainment. The middle class and aspirational working class made a mass exodus to the suburbs from the 1880s in pursuit of a different ideal, a *rus in urbe* and an improved standard of living. The appeal of suburbia lay in the space and privacy it offered but also in its distance from the noise and dirt and from the criminal, lowlife associations of the city. Life in the suburbs was predictable, muted, conformist, homogeneous. As Ashton has shown it also came to be associated with moral and even racial superiority.⁹

The period spanned by this thesis began with industrial upheaval and a major economic depression followed by a slow recovery. In terms of broad socio-political developments it saw Federation, the franchise extended to women and widened for men and the foundation of the Labor Party. It saw faith in *laissez-faire* capitalism falter as structural explanations for poverty and unemployment gained credence. And it ended with the catastrophic 'Great War'. It also spanned the early phase of the epoch of modernity.

'Modernity' is a catch-all term which often cannot be defined more precisely than 'change and people's reactions to it'.¹⁰ I do not intend here to undertake a thoroughgoing analysis encompassing various technological advances or the movements in the world of elite art labelled modernism. Rather I am concerned with a range of specific civic, socio-political and cultural processes which impinged on the everyday life of Sydney's lower class. While most people readily identify the 'modern' signification of images from the 1920s such as flappers with rouged knees and their lounge lizard partners, art deco dance emporiums, jazz bands, palatial cinemas and the packaged American glamour of early talking films, the period prior to World War One is not so vividly present in the public imagination. Few readymade images or familiar snatches of music spring to mind. And yet this was when modernity began to bite.

Though it was ultimately all pervasive modernity was not uniform in its effects. There were in fact multiple modernities which wrought changes in virtually all aspects of life. As expressed in the bourgeois public sphere it was manifested in the rationalisation of city life which was subject to intensified processes of urban renewal and increasing regulation. This impulse of modernity was founded on optimism, boosterism, and a rhetoric of progress which aimed to extend the rational order of middle-class capitalist society to the lower class. But other impulses were wreaking fundamental changes in the way people lived their daily lives. Modernity affected the quality of individual and social experience producing a 'structure of feeling' which was exemplified in a new emphasis on self-expression and gratification. Changing subjectivities were transforming notions of selfhood although as O'Shea observes these changes did not affect all groups in the same way or at the same pace.¹¹ Women's lives were expanding under the pressure in conspicuous ways. Middle-class women gained new power as consumers and emerged into the public sphere to shop or to work for reforming organisations such as charities and the proto-feminist Women's Christian Temperance Union. Jill Julius Matthews has described behavioural changes discernible after World War One when women began to drink and socialise with men outside the home.¹² In *Dance Hall and Picture Palace* she investigates changes in leisure preferences in Sydney with an emphasis on palais culture and the cinema, both key manifestations of the modern.¹³ Her focus on the 1920s and 1930s reinforces the common association of a range of popular images from that period with the notion of modernity. But as early as the 1890s or even before boundaries between the separate spheres were assailed as young lower-class women pursued pleasure on the streets and in the dancing saloons or took jobs as factory hands or barmaids. Male power faced a crisis as women challenged a burgeoning masculinist ethos¹⁴ and in a defensive counteraction the

New Woman, in both a lower-class and a middle-class version, was mercilessly lampooned in the popular press.

Modernity was also transforming the sphere of ideology as the moral and philosophical assumptions which had shaped Victorian society began to shift under the pressure of the new. The nineteenth century did not end for western civilisation until the First World War. Until then the primary values of the Victorian age dominated.¹⁵ Among them was the ethos of respectability which effectively set the standards for Australian society in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its advocates had a monopoly on public expressions of opinion and collectively occupied a position of dominance across the country at large. But cracks were beginning to appear in the edifice of the respectable consensus though it continued to have a firm hold on Australian cultural life until at least the 1950s and remains influential today. At times conflict was apparent between receding Victorian values and emerging modern ideologies. But it would be misleading to place too great an emphasis on discontinuities. It was often the case that modernity modified rather than supplanted nineteenth-century discourses. The anti-drink cause, for example, with roots in evangelical Protestantism, aligned with modernizing forces in an increasingly ordered urban society which needed a more disciplined workforce.¹⁶

Changes were occurring in the discourse of work, one of the key ideologies of the Victorian age albeit a complex and ambiguous one. On the one hand the Protestant ethic held work to be a moral duty in harmony with God's laws whose effects were ennobling, even sanctifying. It was invoked to legitimate class privilege. Balls, garden parties and musical recitals held in aid of a worthy cause allowed the genteel bourgeoisie to camouflage hedonism with a cloak of moral righteousness. A pamphlet by the Anglican Canon of Sydney entitled 'To be the King means work' constructed the monarch as a tireless worker, contrasting his arduous life with that of 'the English country

gentleman of the leasured [sic] class' who in his inclination to 'spend his time...in ease and pleasure' is implicitly grouped with the old decadent aristocracy. On the other hand the biblical formulation of work as punishment, the curse of post-lapsarian humankind, justified its deployment in a punitive way, as, for example, in the imposition of hard labour on the worst offenders in gaols.

With modernity came changes in the role played by work in defining individual identity (with different effects for men and women) and a diminution of the place it occupied in the moral economy. A corollary of the undermining of the primacy of the work ethic was a corresponding valorisation of leisure. Transformations in the production and consumption of popular culture were experienced as changes in patterns of social life and recreation. Commodity culture legitimated the gratification of desire and men and women began to define themselves according to consumption preferences. Though lower-class people could not afford to consume material goods in any large way they were being conditioned to a habit of desire by an environment of intensified advertising and the spectacle of storefront displays which encouraged window-shopping. Moreover, scope for consumption choices in the realm of leisure pursuits increased as opportunities for entertainment, enjoyment and socialising expanded and assumed increasing importance in peoples' lives. Lower-class people developed what Bailey has described as the 'habit of enjoyment'.¹⁷

The influence of religion declined and secularisation gained ground as the moral authority of the protestant churches gradually weakened. As Rowse expressed it 'the moral obligation to obey God was being replaced...with the moral obligation to obey society'.¹⁸ The emerging disciplines of the social sciences were seen as a new morality, more in touch with the world than religious notions of sin. This trend can be seen as part of an effort to re-shape the culture of industrial capitalist

societies to incorporate the lower class into the bourgeois cultural hegemony. The residuum who were not swept into the middle class were pathologised as ideologies of social control were displaced by modern therapeutic models. The Victorian passion for taxonomy was perpetuated in increasingly differentiated classifications of deviance. The monolithic gaols and lunatic asylums of the nineteenth century were fragmented into specific institutions for inebriates, youthful offenders and so on and correspondingly specialized modes of treatment were applied.

Having outlined some of the ways in which modernity functioned as a determinant of socio-cultural forces at this time let us turn our attention to one particular group of people who were caught up in its currents, a group which I refer to as the lower class. There are ambiguities evident in the taxonomies of class used by Australian historians. Use of the term 'middle class', a formulation which implies a vertical social analysis, is common. But it is undercut by the widespread use of the term 'working class' whose Marxian connotations emphasise a particular relation to the means of production. The term reflects a traditionally narrow conception of this social stratum, a phenomenon commented on by Humphrey McQueen who points out that 'working class' as it has been used in Australian historiography generally consists of 'nothing more than the trade unions and the ALP'.¹⁹ The group of people with whom I am concerned, while identifiable as a social class, are not distinguished primarily by their economic position. They were often on the margins of the labour market, employed as casual labour, or working as hawkers or other street-based occupations, categories excluded from trade unions and hence overlooked by historians of the left. It is for these reasons that I have used the term 'lower class' in preference to 'working class' except when quoting or paraphrasing an author who uses the latter term.

Dissociation of the notion of class from its defining economic position leaves us with a group which can be loosely defined as, to use de Certeau's term, a cultural aggregate. This conception opens up a broader field, for 'class identities based on economics offer little scope for negotiation. Those based on style are not only more flexible, but also offer the consumer greater control in their construction'.²⁰ The nature of the inquiry then becomes to describe the functioning of this group, to 'make its laws visible, to hear its silences, to structure a landscape'.²¹ This is not a straightforward task. It is difficult to discern from documentary sources what the reality of the daily lives of the lower class was like. Their working lives can be traced through industrial records, company archives, wage judgements and union records. They also appear as objects of state discipline in court and police records, or of private philanthropy on the books of charitable institutions and of moral reform in the documents of churches and temperance groups. But it is harder to follow them into the private sphere, to know something of their everyday existence, of their lives as producers and consumers of culture.

Because the term 'lower class' is in itself totalising it is important to remember that this was nothing if not a heterogeneous group and that the life histories, experiences and partialities of its members varied widely. One important split and determinant of cultural allegiance which ran through the 'working classes' like a fault line was the respectable/non-respectable divide. Indeed Geoffrey Best maintains that the value system of respectability constituted 'the sharpest of all lines of social division...a sharper line by far than that between rich and poor, employer and employee, or capitalist and proletarian'.²² Many people who were economically speaking of the working class, commonly the skilled labour aristocracy, shared bourgeois values. The ethos of respectability pervaded the unions and the Labor Party.²³ Conversely, culturally conservative organisations such as the protestant churches, implacable in their opposition to drinking,

gambling and extra-marital sex, often took progressive political positions in support of labour reforms.²⁴ Nor should it be assumed that class was the only cultural divider. Other conformations based on ethnicity, gender, age and so on were no doubt at certain times and under certain circumstances equally if not more important in determining cultural choices. Sectarian divisions too had important cultural correlatives, one of which has been touched upon in the section in this thesis on drink. Gender is particularly significant. All culture is gendered and the experiences of women were sharply different from those of men. Although I have considered women separately throughout, the nature of their experience, constituting an entire rich and complex world in itself, could furnish material enough for several theses. The same might be said regarding the experiences of other sub-groups—Aborigines, various ethnic enclaves, children, the indigent—which have barely been touched upon.

While recognizing socio-political divisions, Australian historiography has often obscured the cultural distinctions which are so important in the conformation of class. There are a number of factors which have contributed to this. An enthusiasm for sweeping historical concepts such as national identity has tended to obscure the detail of micro-practices. A totalizing tendency which has assumed that all Australians share a common culture has also concealed the specifics of difference and of heterogeneous practices. Reference to the effects of trends such as the embourgeoisement of the working class which began in the last decades of the nineteenth century, increasing affluence and widening access to consumer capitalism has implicitly further justified an assumption of cultural homogeneity. But the differences which have been overlooked carry more meaning than the commonalities. As Rickard maintains 'a culture should be identified not so much by any shared values, which may often be artificially induced, as by the means it develops to reconcile, or at least accommodate the dissonant forces within it'.²⁵ For these reasons the focus of my inquiry has been

away from 'the totalising structures and mechanisms of power' towards 'the heterogeneous practices of everyday life'.²⁶

The period under consideration was characterised by efforts to deny class differences. Following the class antagonism which was a legacy of the strikes of the early 1890s a new, harmonious social order was proposed free from divisive tendencies.²⁷ Federation intensified the mood. High-flown rhetoric expressed the contingent needs of the capitalist class in a language of universal historical imperative. Class divisions persisted of course as class conflict was played out in the cultural arena. Leisure was a dimension of life that was assuming greater importance at this time. Throughout the nineteenth century middle-class leisure functioned as a sign of class dominance. Although the right to leisure time was extended to the working classes in gains made in working conditions by the labour movement in the 1880s, lower-class leisure was still commonly stigmatized within the discourses of idleness or immorality. Concerted opposition was mobilized mainly by the Protestant churches who guarded the piety of the Sabbath and sought to suppress 'impurity' and gambling. But their main efforts were directed at the Anti-Drink cause. In the rhetoric of the temperance movement cultural and moral issues were elided in a way which recalls Ruskin's adage that 'taste is not only a part and an index of morality; - it is the ONLY morality'.²⁸ A realization gradually gained ground that insistence on Sabbath observance and temperance principles were class issues which impinged on free choice and equal access to relaxation and recreation. Restraints were also seen as obstructive by entrepreneurs in a commercialising world of popular entertainment where profits depended on numbers. The profit potential of pursuits once censured as vulgar or immoral worked some rapid changes in the realm of leisure. The opinions and preferences of lower-class people began to matter.

It is possible to substantiate the notion of class through cultural artefacts and practices and to identify components of a specifically lower-class *cultural* identity. Lower-class life was characterised by the existence of a distinctive cultural tradition which is different from, but not necessarily oppositional to, a middle-class cultural tradition. Historically, there has been an ongoing attempt, though this has not always been conscious or systematic, to modify this culture and to impose middle-class values and behaviour on its practitioners. Gramsci formulated the notion of cultural hegemony to describe the situation which occurs when the life-style and world outlook of one class are accepted as normative by another class, particularly in questions of morality and aesthetics.²⁹ Hegemony involves a complex process of negotiation by which those who hold power partially accommodate the aspirations of subordinate groups in ways which leave their power base relatively unaffected. Gramsci, however, did not see the lower classes as mere passive objects of ruling class cultural dominance. Historians such as Raymond Williams and EP Thompson, too, have acknowledged the significant measure of power or agency possessed by lower-class subjects, who may be limited but are by no means subdued by the constraints imposed by the dominant class. Lower-class cultural practice often constituted a critique of the dominant culture, albeit one that was oblique, non-verbal, corporeal.

Having established how the class of people with which this thesis is concerned were defined by their cultural choices, let us now turn to the concept of culture itself. In the word's narrow sense of works and practices of intellectual, especially artistic activity, vaudeville alone among the three main objects of inquiry in this thesis qualifies as a cultural phenomenon. Critiques of vaudeville, which was regarded as having no morally elevating effects nor any transcendent aesthetic claims, were commonly formulated and mobilised in terms of the highbrow/lowbrow spectrum. Positioned at the high end, the orthodoxy of elite culture stood in opposition to the disreputable heterodoxy that

vaudeville embodied. Bourdieu has drawn attention to the role of such cultural polarities in legitimating social differences. 'The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile—in a word, natural—enjoyment', he says,

which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane.³⁰

As well as being censured for its vulgarity by the defenders of elite culture vaudeville was also denigrated at the time by those who advocated truly 'Australian' forms. Up until the 1920s when the impact of American popular culture began to be felt in a substantial way Britain exercised a hegemony over Australian cultural life. It was not until the 1890s that the strings which bound the colonies to England loosened and cultural expressions that were labeled 'Australian' began to be articulated, almost invariably at this stage associated with rural life. This was the heyday of the *Bulletin* and its tradition which linked nationalist pride with male solidarity and the moral ascendancy of the bush. But other, urban, international influences with different ideological tendencies were also at work. It was these processes which were synthesizing a national culture and it was lowbrow forms such as vaudeville which gave full expression to modernity's attributes rather than 'the conscious strivings of the polemicists' who peddled the bush mythos.³¹

Vaudeville has continued to be criticized by musicologists and others on a quest for the roots of an authentic working-class or folk culture. As part of the international popular entertainment industry it has been regarded with suspicion by critics with a range of agendas. Adorno, for example, saw popular music as exploitive, infantilising and politically regressive. Hoggart, writing about England after World War Two, identified the undermining of traditional working-class culture by the

influence of the mass media. Although his reading was sympathetic, acknowledging that mass culture could be a focus of 'real' desire and was thus to be taken seriously, he also questioned the quality of the cultural life of the working class and seemed to say that the price of post-war affluence was cultural exploitation. In discussing vaudeville I am not concerned with either refuting or endorsing value judgments about commercial culture regardless of the ideology from which they emanate, but rather to attempt to identify the meanings it carried for the people who constituted its audience.

A broader conception of the word, consistent with Williams' definition that 'a culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work [but]...essentially a whole way of life'³² was required for consideration of the pub and the street. At these two loci were enacted a broad range of behaviours which encompassed in Stratton's words 'the lived practices, sometimes self-consciously elaborated, sometimes not, which express the underlying values of a class'.³³ Drinking encompassed practices which were continuous from pre-industrial times as well as others which were generated, or inflected by modernity. Changes associated with modernity were also experienced and given meaning through street life. The sight of young people with free time on their hands roaming the streets in search of a good time, with no father and no factory foreman to keep them in check, gave rise to perceptions that city life was undermining patriarchal authority. The promiscuous environment of the streets was seen to pose a threat to female virtue which was assailed on all sides. Larrikins, whose mobility and performative enactments of transgressive selfhood gave them a unique place in the spatial politics of the city, were lead players in urban street life. Their lower-class youth style generated a censorious reaction from the respectable public who demanded police action to clear them away. But in important ways larrikins were in the vanguard of modernity, although there was no awareness in turn-of-the-century Sydney that they were the harbingers of a new order. They were part

of a wholesale transformation which was challenging old certainties, blurring the boundaries between high and low, civilized and degenerate in the world of social relations as well as that of mass culture.

The methodology I have used for this work involves an approach to cultural analysis that is inevitably speculative to some degree, dealing as it does with a population that had no public voice. It is, however, based on wide reading of abundant but diffuse material from a range of sources both factual and impressionistic. This included newspapers, government reports, pamphlets and other ephemera, conference papers, documents produced by reforming bodies such as churches and charitable organizations, memoirs and works of fiction. The contemporary press was extensively sampled, particularly the tabloids which I found more useful than the respectable newspapers for the subject matter. The popular press, as both a key indicator and agent of change in the period under discussion, gives valuable insights into what was considered newsworthy and what mattered to its readership. Novels have also proven to be valuable. Though they do not purport to convey truth in a literal sense they give close attention to the sphere of manners and mores and are often rich in socio-cultural detail. Their documenting of small scale everyday practices which generally do not make their way into official literature makes them what de Certeau has termed a 'zoo of everyday practice'.³⁴

Primary source material for part one was plentiful due to the fact that drinking was the central focus of bourgeois attempts to regulate and moralise lower-class life. But although information is plentiful, official sources are coloured by the world view of their bourgeois authors and reading 'against the grain' is required to draw out sub-texts. The 1887 *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry* was the main source used for this section. The *Minutes of Evidence* canvassed a wide range of issues which

formed an intricate web connecting drinking with broader questions of public order and private morality. Despite the heavily ideological colouration of this material a striking, imagistic picture emerges from the tangle of judgement and supposition which provides insights into what pubs and liquor meant to lower-class people and the complex role they played in their lives, whether for good or ill. The records of the Women's Christian Temperance Union were also illuminating particularly regarding changes in priorities and emphases which came with the modernization of the anti-drink cause.

For part two the Mitchell Library's collection of programmes from the Tivoli and the National Amphitheatre were a blessing. They provided documentation of the enormous variety of acts and genres encompassed by vaudeville and placed the repertoire in a social and discursive context. They also revealed changes in themes and content over time. The Mitchell also holds a collection of songbooks published from 1880 to the 1920s which provided the basis for the content analysis in chapter six. Theatrical magazines such as *Theatre* and *Lorgnette*, though vaudeville was only one of a range of theatrical forms they covered, were useful, particularly reviews which strayed from the performance to comment on the composition and behaviour of the audience.

Primary sources for part three were diffuse, dispersed across a range of subject areas and formats. The press was the most important source along with commentaries on Sydney life, often written for an English audience, which constitute a genre in themselves and which commonly included a set piece on larrikins. Graphic images were plentiful, particularly after 1900, most notably in the *Bulletin*. The work of CJ Dennis reveals the mythologizing of the type which served the imperialist drive for cannon fodder for the First World War.

Regarding secondary sources, although it would be overstating the case to say that historians have ignored lower-class cultural life, historiography in this area, which overlaps with urban history and historical writing on popular culture, has not been substantial. Urban history has generally received more attention in Melbourne than in Sydney particularly since the demise of Macquarie University's Sydney History Group. Although there is now a significant body of historical work on popular culture, mostly produced in the last two decades, lower-class culture can not said to be a heavily inscribed area of historical inquiry. Indeed, in Rickard's view, popular culture has been 'the least examined aspect of [working class] social existence, even though, through such an examination, their truly defining characteristics were most likely to be revealed'.³⁵ Since the 1970s the emerging discipline of cultural studies has given the popular more serious and sustained attention although the emphasis has been heavily on theory with scant if any attention paid to documentary sources.

As was the case for primary sources historiography was most plentiful for the section on drinking. I have drawn on the work of Dingle, Dunstan, Freeland, Lewis, Powell and Kirkby among others. Beresford's unpublished doctoral thesis was also useful. Vaudeville has not received much sustained attention from historians, outside being included as a component in general histories of popular entertainment or popular music. Waterhouse is the only notable exception. His work has been drawn upon in particular for chapter four.

Historical writing on larrikinism, a phenomenon which constitutes the most important theme in part three, is diverse in both aim and import. Sympathetic humanists like Murray, who wrote the only full-length book on the subject for a general readership, see it as a reaction to poverty and inequality. Various interpretations have been made by historians. Finch argues that larrikins were a construction imposed by

middle-class commentators on working-class youth whose street presence conflicted with modernising processes in the public sphere. Morgan identifies the first colonial moral panic in representations of larrikins in the *Bulletin*. Walker examines the problematic constructions of youth which began to coalesce around larrikins connected with the Mt Rennie rape case. McConville, writing about Melbourne, traces a transformation in response to changing social conditions from sporadic troublemaking by groups of youths to sustained conflict between territorially-based gangs to organised criminal gangs. Hogg and Golder show that street-based activities were not uniformly subject to police action, perceiving a 'crisis in legitimacy' in clashes between larrikins and police. Stratton's characterisation of larrikinism as Australia's first youth subculture, drawing on the work of a range of theorists and sociologists, was particularly useful for the clarifying framework it provided.

This is a work of cultural history not cultural studies and accordingly the primary object of study has been documentary sources rather than theory, however, I felt that to ignore authoritative theoretical work which impinges on history as much as other disciplines within the humanities would be parochial. Writing which does not take account of work on, for example, subjectivity and discourse theory, risks sounding naïve and irrelevant. In fact the type of cultural analysis which I have attempted, for which symbolics are as important as empirical content, could not feasibly have been undertaken without recourse to explanatory theoretical frameworks. No single set of constructs or generalizations, however, could do justice to the range of experiences, social styles and cultural meanings embodied in the material I was dealing with. Accordingly, the work of a number of cultural theorists was referred to at specific points in the narrative when it helped to clarify a point or organise material. Lefebvre's concept of the everyday opened up a whole new dimension to the subject matter. Bourdieu's work on taste and its relation to social formations was fundamental.

Social theorist Erving Goffman and anthropologist Clifford Geertz suggested ways of seeing social ritual which offered new expanses of meaning. For part two Adorno's exploration of the ideological nature of popular music was illuminating although the variety of influences and expectations which audience reception lends to the content is wider and more varied than his political philosophy allows. Some ideas, such as Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony and Williams' formulation of structures of meaning and feeling, are in such widespread use that I have not made specific reference to their origins.

I have found Fiske's libertarian reading of the popular useful. The direction taken by this inquiry which is concerned not with meta-narratives and the well-trodden historical path of nation, myth and identity, but with the details of everyday life, was inspired in part by his work. Thus the emphasis is 'away from the "grand narrative" toward the particular, away from the text to the reading, away from the speech system toward the utterance, away from ideology and hegemony to the everyday practices of the subordinate'.³⁶ Fiske shares common ground with Certeau who concluded that the power to resist and reappropriate within the cultural arena for purposes other than those designed for the power elite is inscribed within the very nature of the popular. In his words:

Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other's game...characterise the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations.³⁷

Certeau draws our attention to the 'tactics, strategies and ruses' employed to neutralize the mechanics of power.³⁸ He chronicles individual and small-group resistance to the machinery of control expressed through the various modes of interaction that constitute lived experience. Certeau's work on the function of historiography was also useful at critical points in the writing process.

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- ¹ Fiske, John, *Reading the Popular*, Boston, Unwin Hyman, 1989, p1.
- ² The term is used in John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner eds, *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1987, x.
- ³ Davison, Graeme, 'Sydney and the Bush: an Urban Context for the Australian Legend', *Historical Studies* 18:71 (October 1978), p194.
- ⁴ For a discussion of the term and its origins see Ben Singer, 'Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism' in Leo Charney and Vanessa R Schwartz eds, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996.
- ⁵ Fiske, John, *Reading the Popular*, p35.
- ⁶ Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London, Fontana, 1987. See also the recent publication by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris eds, *New Keywords: a Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Malden, Ma, Blackwell, 2005.
- ⁷ Demographics may partly explain Sydney's more raffish image. Immigration to Melbourne during the goldrushes of the 1850s may have produced a lower class with different values. And in Sydney descendants of a large convict population may have formed a more noticeable 'rough' element. Urban layout may also have played a role, Sydney's narrow, twisting streets offering more opportunities for controversial street behaviour than Melbourne's straight boulevards. Both these issues warrant further exploration.
- ⁸ See Helen Proudfoot, 'Founding Cities in Nineteenth-Century Australia' in Stephen Hamnett and Robert Freestone eds, *The Australian Metropolis: a Planning History*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1999.
- ⁹ Ashton, Paul, "'Our Splendid Isolation": Reactions to Modernism in Sydney's Northern Suburbs', *UTS Review* 6:1 (May 2000), p42.
- ¹⁰ See the 'Localising Modernities' issue of *UTS Review*, 6:1 (May 2000).
- ¹¹ O'Shea, Alan, 'English Subjects of Modernity' in Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea eds, *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, London, Routledge, 1996, p8.
- ¹² Matthews, Jill Julius, 'Normalising Modernity', *UTS Review*, 6:1 (May 2000), 4-10.
- ¹³ Matthews, Jill Julius, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace: Sydney's Romance with Modernity*, Sydney, Currency Press, 2005.
- ¹⁴ Lake, Marilyn, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context' *Australian Historical Studies* 22 (1986) 116-131.
- ¹⁵ Hobsbawn, Eric, *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London, Michael Joseph, 1994, p6.

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- ¹⁶ See Barry M Doyle, 'Temperance and Modernity: the Impact of Local Experience on Rank and File Liberal Attitudes to Alcohol', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 16 (1996) 1-10.
- ¹⁷ Bailey, Peter, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p16.
- ¹⁸ Rowse, Tim, *Australian Liberalism and the National Character*, (Theses on the Left), Malmesbury, Vic, Kibble Books, 1978, p52.
- ¹⁹ McQueen, Humphrey [Discussion on class in Australian history] *Australian Historical Studies* 19 (1980), p446.
- ²⁰ Fiske, *Reading the Popular*, p37.
- ²¹ Godzich, Wlad, foreword to Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, translated by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985, (Theory and History of Literature volume 17), xiv.
- ²² Quoted in Bailey, p175.
- ²³ Unions refused benefits to any member whose illness was 'occasioned by drunkenness or fighting or any disease improperly contracted' (Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia: an Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1970, p203); among the 35 Labor members elected to the NSW parliament in 1891 most were temperance advocates (Graham Freudenberg, *Cause for Power: the Official History of the NSW Branch of the ALP*, Sydney, Pluto Press, 1991, p16).
- ²⁴ See JD Bollen, *Protestantism and Social Reform in NSW*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1972.
- ²⁵ Rickard, John, *Australia: a Cultural History*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1988, p192.
- ²⁶ Fiske, *Reading the Popular*, p32.
- ²⁷ Rowse, p97.
- ²⁸ Quoted in John F Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1990, p169.
- ²⁹ See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.
- ³⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1984, p7.
- ³¹ Rickard, p192.
- ³² Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1960, p325.
- ³³ Stratton, Jon, *The Young Ones: Working-Class Culture, Consumption and the Category of Youth*, Perth, Black Swan Press, 1992, p13.
- ³⁴ Certeau, Michel de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven F Rendall, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, p78.

³⁵ Evans, Raymond and Olive Moore, 'Pursuing the Popular in Australian History', *Journal of Popular Culture* 33:1 (Summer 1999), p2.

³⁶ Fiske, *Reading the Popular*, p32.

³⁷ Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, p18.

³⁸ Certeau, Michel de, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, translated by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985, (Theory and History of Literature volume 17), xiv.

Part 1

THE PUB

Chapter 1

The 1887 Intoxicating Drink Inquiry

In the number of low pot houses, and drunken men and blowsy women who haunt the streets, Sydney has the worst features of an English town... I saw more drunken men in Sydney in a week than I have in Melbourne in a month.¹

Thus declared the Vagabond in 1877. Another chronicler of vice, the anonymous 'Pupil of Professor John Woolley' was similarly struck. Drunkenness, he said, 'has certainly reached Sydney and in its most revolting and degrading form'. In the city's narrow, ancient-looking streets and back-alleys he observed intemperance 'in all its phases as an unsoftened vice'.² In society parlours too, indeed in the withdrawing rooms of parliament itself, drunkenness was rife for, as REN Twopeny commented, in Sydney 'it is not merely the lower classes but everybody that drinks'.³

The image of Sydney as a drunken city was one commonly invoked by the official classes in the 1880s. In the second half of the nineteenth century excessive drinking and the social squalor which attended it was commonly seen as emblematic of the dark side of city life.⁴ In the case of Sydney the connection was pointed. The city's public and private character was felt to be determined by liquor and its citizens' perceived propensity for strong drink was commonly linked with the city's nefarious penal past.

The notion that Sydney was a drunken city was endorsed and promulgated by the temperance movement. Its followers saw evidence of the depredations of strong drink in all aspects of public and private life. For temperance advocates drink was the font and wellspring of

human misery. It was the principal cause of poverty, led to other vices such as lust and profanity, disrupted domestic life, and undermined national efficiency. They found ample evidence that the city was awash with liquor. Pubs on every corner, drunken men and women staggering about the streets, foul-mouthed larrikins lounging under lampposts and urchins begging for coppers, bore eloquent testimony to a city in the grip of drink. The prominence of liquor trade names in the city's visual landscape lent graphic credence to the notion. Advertisements for Gilbey's Dry Gin, Silverstream Schnapps, Williams' Whisky and Tolley's brandy jostled for attention on the hoardings, billboards and shopfronts which dominated inner Sydney.⁵ Only tea, soap and tobacco were as ubiquitously promoted.

Drinking, and most particularly, drinking to excess, had been officially problematised since colonisation. Between 1825 and 1883 no less than twenty-seven Acts on liquor were passed in NSW.⁶ A spike in the level of official concern in the 1850s had prompted a full-scale inquiry into intemperance in 1854.⁷ But although numerous witnesses were called and copious evidence amassed no recommendations were made and no conclusive report was issued. Nor did the general concern voiced translate into tightening regulation of the liquor industry. The contrast between the Inquiry's censorious rhetoric and its inconclusive outcome may be read as a result of political pressure from large urban brewing and distilling interests. Although there was undoubtedly resentment on the part of drinkers this is unlikely to have had much impact on an unrepresentative parliament.⁸ A few years later, in 1862, the government introduced extended trading hours, from 4am to midnight. At the same time the number of licensed premises was increasing, due mainly to stimulation from an expanding economy.⁹ It is uncertain whether these circumstances increased the level of drinking, but they may well have made it more visible.

At the same time the temperance movement was undergoing an upsurge in activism. The movement's favoured political strategies were to flood parliament with petitions and incessantly lobby members. As well as bringing direct political pressure to bear, the temperance cause exerted a powerful influence on the public mood.¹⁰ The combination of the two resulted in the setting up of another Inquiry into Intoxicating Drink in Sydney in 1887. This was in itself a victory for temperance advocates because it affirmed their view that drinking and drunkenness were significant and worsening problems in the colony.

Though never as powerful in Australia as it was in England, mainly due to the counter-influence of the large Irish population, the movement nonetheless brought significant pressure to bear on colonial governments and exerted a strong influence on public life and social relations. From the 1880s until the First World War it was the major social reform movement in Australia¹¹ absorbing virtually all the energies of the protestant churches.¹² Accounts of the temperance movement's strategies and campaigns, its victories and setbacks, have tended to dominate historical studies of drinking, for the obvious reason that this side of the question is well documented while drinkers rarely left records. Although the emphasis of this work is on the drinking rather than the non-drinking classes, it is necessary, in order to understand the socio-historical context, to be aware of the temperance philosophy, which so decisively influenced the age. Accordingly in this chapter I have drawn on normative discourses articulated by the movement, by the Inquiry into Intoxicating Drink and by police and the judiciary to denote the socio-cultural context for lower-class drinking practices which are examined in the following two chapters.

Two factors were influential in increasing the level of activism of the movement in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The first was the evangelical revival launched by the protestant churches in the

1880s in an attempt to reanimate enthusiasm for churchgoing and moral reform. Visiting preachers from overseas railed against drink, sexual immorality, gambling and desecration of the Sabbath.¹³ And, if they failed to bring people flocking back to the churches, they at least succeeded in stiffening the resolve of those bent on reforming the lower class. The second was the formation of the NSW Temperance Alliance in 1878 which brought together what had been a collection of independent organisations such as the Band of Hope, the Blue Ribbon Army (temperance followers wore blue ribbons in their buttonholes), the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Rechabites, the Sons of Temperance and the Good Templars. Thereafter, the 1880s saw the newly unified movement change its tactics from trying to win individual drinkers over to voluntary abstinence to pressing for public reform through legislative action, from moral suasion to legislative compulsion in the terminology of the time.¹⁴ United in their opposition to the liquor trade, the Alliance was nonetheless a broad coalition encompassing a range of positions on other issues. The proto-feminist WCTU for example adopted a broader platform with the aim of improving the lot of women and children and securing female suffrage.

A changing political environment, which saw the parliament increasingly moving towards legislative control facilitated this change in direction. The ultimate ideal of temperance advocates was to completely prohibit the sale of alcohol. In fact 'temperance' was by the 1880s a misnomer because the majority position of the movement supported teetotalism, condemning the 'dangerous path of moderation' on the grounds that it ultimately led to worse degeneration. It was clear, however, that such an aim was unrealistic in the colony so they turned their efforts to pressing for restrictions on the availability of liquor. But they were pragmatic enough to accept that in the Australian colonies prohibition was not an attainable goal. Instead, they argued vigorously for the introduction of local option whereby constituents

could vote for the reduction or total abolition of licensed premises within their electorate. It was hoped that in this way prohibition might be achieved by increments. At the same time the movement continued to press in the political arena for other restrictions on the availability of liquor.¹⁵ They had a major success in New South Wales in 1882, when selling it on Sundays was banned.¹⁶

Temperance ideas were not only forceful in the political sphere, they coloured the entire cultural landscape. The colony was characterised by deep social divisions, foremost among which was the sectarian rivalry which had been an endemic part of its make up since the early days. One of the fundamental points of sectarian difference was attitudes to the drink question. The philosophical base of temperance was in protestant moralism which saw drunkenness as a manifestation of moral turpitude and the drinker as a miscreant. The Catholic Church traditionally took a somewhat more lenient view. Though in the 1830s many Catholics were influenced by the Father Mathew temperance crusades and the movement continued to be influential within the Church the opposing influence of the ethnic Irish element was stronger. The Church did sometimes demur on specific issues but seems to have become nervous about being seen to be soft on the drink question. In 1904 a Catholic Temperance Crusade was organised to 'diminish the curse of intemperance which is so deep a stain on our nationality and Christianity'.¹⁷

Non-drinkers were more vocal and more organised than drinkers and comparatively few voices were raised in defence of the lower classes' right to drink. The Licensed Victuallers Association made some attempt to oppose the political aims of temperance but they were not well organized.¹⁸ When both sectarian and class divisions deepened as a result of the economic turmoil of the 1890s and the Labor Party was developing as a political force objections began to be made by Labor and populist members of parliament on the grounds that the

burden of measures taken to curb the drinking problem fell on the shoulders of the working classes. This position, in combination with Labor's support for the liquor industry inflamed temperance forces: 'The Labour Party', railed *The Methodist* 'in so far as it has allied itself with Romanism and Drinkdom...has become a menace to pure government and the general good'.¹⁹ But despite putting up some resistance in the legislature the labour movement was in general strongly pro-temperance, on the grounds that drink kept the working man poor, a position echoed by the labour press.²⁰

The ideological battle between the principles of temperance and traditional, non-respectable lower-class cultural values was played out in the important institutions of the day and, mediated by the tabloid press, provided an ongoing spectacle for the people of Sydney. It could be said that this was a clash not only of opposing world views but of opposing worlds. Institutions of lower-class life—the pub, the music hall and the penny novelette—were mirrored in the world of temperance by the Coffee Palace, the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon (described by one observer as 'a kind of religious vaudeville'), and the Religious Tract Society novelette.²¹ The hope was that the alternative improving and morally elevating pursuits provided would be adopted in place of those judged to be irrational and indulgent.

The temperance view of lower-class Sydneysiders as a drunken lot was vigorously promoted and widely accepted but its accuracy is open to question. Some historians have suggested that the level of drinking among the 'working class' has been exaggerated based on unsubstantiated claims by colonial officials and other observers. Some of the available figures seem to support this view. In absolute terms the annual per capita consumption of liquor in New South Wales began to decline in the 1860s and the downward trend continued until before the First World War, when consumption began to rise again.²² In Dingle's words, 'the nation was founded by heavy drinkers but

progressively less was consumed as the century progressed'.²³ He suggests that changing values associated with the *embourgeoisement* of the lower classes were the predominant cause of diminishing consumption.²⁴ But historical drinking levels can be gauged in a number of ways and in relative terms a comparison between spirit consumption in NSW and in Britain does give some credence to the colony's reputation for drunkenness.²⁵ Until the end of the 1850s Australians were drinking between twice and four times the quantity of spirits of the British. It should be borne in mind, however, that the high level of spirit consumption was due at least in part to limitations on the supply of beer, of which more presently. From the 1860s the difference began to narrow and by the end of the century Australian drinkers had fallen behind their British counterparts.²⁶

In global terms Sydney, according to the report issued by the Inquiry, was 'more statistically "drunken" than most cities in the United Kingdom, but not quite so drunken as Liverpool, and not nearly so drunken as Limerick'.²⁷ This is a colourful claim although no source of corroborating statistics is given. Historical figures on the quantity of liquor consumed may not in any case be particularly enlightening. Given their uncertain quality we cannot claim to know with any confidence the extent of excessive drinking and dependency on liquor.

More important for the purposes of this thesis than establishing the empirical realities is the prevailing *perception* of drinking. The high level of anxiety which the drink question generated among the respectable middle class tells us more about the reformers than the drinkers. At the most visible level alarm was commonly triggered by the spectacle of abjection surrounding the public loss of control that accompanied advanced intoxication. The drunkard's abandonment of self-governance, expressed in terms of the loss of coherence by men and of virtue by women, conflicted with the bourgeois discourse of rational, individual self-determination. It has also been suggested by

Sturma that the real driving force behind the zeal of the temperance movement was status anxiety. Temperance advocates claimed to want to eliminate drunkenness but its existence, or more precisely, its visibility, served both to affirm their moral standards and enhance their social position. If respectability is viewed as a product of social relationships then it can be said that the public drunkard was an essential element in the moral schema of the respectable class. Such a class can exist only if there are others who can be identified as its immoral and disreputable other. As Sturma puts it:

To the extent that individuals or groups wish to create a moral image, they are in a 'competitive struggle' to morally upgrade themselves, and morally downgrade others not identified with themselves.²⁸

The need to delineate a symbolic other channelled the concern of the reforming middle class towards the spectacle of drunkenness rather than the actuality of its social ill-effects or the distress of individual drinkers, though both were substantial.

Such then, was the historical climate in which the 1887 Inquiry into Intoxicating Drink was conducted. Its terms of reference and proceedings were decisively shaped by the agenda of the temperance alliance. The report and minutes of evidence constitute a mass of opinion which reveals more about the mindsets of 'interested parties' than it does about the drinkers they were investigating. But despite these limitations, the documents can be said at the least to constitute a systematic approach to a highly charged issue. 'Experts' advance various strands of thought on the nature of inebriety, its causes and treatment. Was it a moral failing or merely a bad habit, an uncontrollable compulsion or weakness of will? In attempting to answer such imponderables a range of discourses surrounding practices of social control, the doctrine of free will and the boundaries of moral responsibility were canvassed. The evidence illustrates the

complexity and diversity of late nineteenth-century discourse on drunkenness which gave expression both to Victorian ideologies of social control and to developing notions of the regulation of private life and the deviant subject by therapeutic interventions.

The Commissioners did not question the assumption that drunkenness was 'a national evil' that was causing crime, threatening public order, draining the public purse and causing affront to respectable citizens. It is worth briefly looking at the Inquiry's charter and composition because they give some insight into how a specific moral consensus influenced its proceedings and recommendations. The brief was broad, namely 'to make a diligent and full inquiry into the causes of the excessive use of intoxicating drink by the people of this Colony and the deterioration it has produced in public morality'. The Commissioners were thus authorised to go beyond the core subject of intoxicating drink to explore the broader issue of moral decline. The Inquiry affirmed the legitimacy of this all-encompassing view when the President wrote:

I cannot state one single transaction or state of things existing in the Colony in which there is anything wrong—anything blameable, anything criminal—that takes place, but drink has something to do with it.²⁹

Such a sweeping interpretation allowed anxiety about other social ills such as crime, insanity, troublesome behaviour among youth and sexual licence to be displaced onto intemperance.

In a clear endorsement of the culture of control upheld by the temperance movement, the President declared the aim of the investigation to be not only 'to inquire into the drinking habits of the people', but also to investigate 'by what means they can be diminished'.³⁰ It was no coincidence that the strategies proposed by the temperance alliance—fewer hotels, shorter opening hours, weaker

liquor, a higher legal drinking age, a dry Sunday and the abolition of barmaids—were precisely the issues with which the Inquiry chose to concern itself.

The list of members is revealing. They included Thomas Colls, a country publican from Yass, and James Toohey, scion of the famous brewing family. But representatives from the liquor industry were outnumbered by men like John Davies, a teetotaler, non-smoker, Orangeman and leader of 'multifarious political, temperance and wouser fraternities',³¹ Ninian Melville, active in labour politics but a staunch Sabbatarian and temperance advocate,³² and Robert Fowler, representative of the Local Option League in Parliament.³³ Toohey eventually resigned in protest against the imbalance of views.³⁴

He was not the only one to perceive bias. The *Bulletin* declared:

As matters now stand, the inquiry is being conducted by teetotalers who are pledged by their creed to bring in a whole-souled curse and call it a report.³⁵

The *Bulletin* also took issue with the fact that drinkers were not represented among the witnesses. It accused the Inquiry of 'relying solely on the evidence of men who have never been drunk, or who dare not admit it if they have been'. Continuing in a facetious vein, it urged that 'the confirmed drunkards of the community should be called in evidence, and also that a drunken lawyer should be allowed to cross-examine'.

The waggish tone notwithstanding the piece hints at the fundamental inequity which underpinned the conduct of the Inquiry. 'The people' whose drinking habits its brief was to investigate were lower-class people. Drinking was a key attribute used to define the urban lower classes and drinking behaviour was the major focus of critical scrutiny by the respectable middle class in their efforts to reform them and

impose their own moral programme. The report and the minutes of evidence contain a mere handful of references to middle-class drinking which was located in a separate and entirely different drinking culture. The habits of affluent imbibers were, it seemed, their own business. Witnesses, who included various 'persons who occupy official positions', 'experts', police officers and members of the clergy, affirmed the notion of excessive drinking as a class problem. In a gesture to evenhandedness, representatives from the ranks of the brewers and publicans and from the 'labouring classes' were questioned.³⁶ The latter, in a wilful elision of sectoral interests, were deemed to speak for the drinking classes, although as we shall see presently, the two were by no means the same.

Excessive drinking was characterised by official discourses as a class problem. Such a view was shaped by the evangelicals' puritan perception of the world which saw the lower class as characteristically weak-willed and feckless, people who, left to their own devices, would drink as often and as much as they could. The debate was also sharply gendered, an issue that will be discussed more fully in chapter three. Physical differences which typified women as the weaker sex were invoked. Even though women were far less likely than men to succumb to drink, the American Association for the Study and Cure of Inebriety judged that '[w]omen suffer more keenly from inebriety than men, because they have feebler organisations, and suffer more from functional disorders and organic degenerations'.³⁷ Social drivers of drinking behaviour such as poverty, poor housing, bleak lives and indifferent prospects were scarcely considered or dismissed as immaterial. A clergyman whose work took him among gaol inmates declared: 'it is not a question of drinking away their troubles; it is simply a giving way to the craving'.³⁸ In the wider world, secular temperance advocates with socialist convictions, like William Lane, took a broader and more sympathetic view identifying despair arising from poverty

rather than character flaws as the cause of the 'drowning of sorrow in drink'.³⁹

The absence of any clear terminology or classification and the ambiguity of meaning that results makes it uncertain what severity of condition and class of drinker are being talked about. This has the effect of implicitly vilifying all lower-class drinking. Legitimate drinking is acknowledged only in a negative way by numerous examples of drinking practices specifically identified as *not* legitimate. In a blurring of boundaries which was typical of Victorian social thought, the terms drinking, drunkenness and inebriety are often used interchangeably. The label 'drunkard' is a catch-all term used on the one hand to describe a person who takes too much in a public house and on the other someone who is repeatedly gaoled for being a public nuisance. 'Alcoholism', a relatively modern term, occurs only once or twice in the documentation and then only in reference to homeless inebriates living in dereliction. For instance there is no suggestion that people who suffer from *delirium tremens*, which is conceptualised as a separate condition, are necessarily 'alcoholics'. John Read, the Governor of Darlinghurst Gaol, reported that in one year 600 cases of *delirium tremens* were treated by the gaol doctor. He goes on to make a circuitous distinction:

You may cure *delirium tremens*, but alcoholism, if it can be cured at all, will take a long time to cure. When I see a strong powerful man brought into gaol suffering from alcoholism I give him up.⁴⁰

For the most part no distinction is made between pathological drinking, harmful to both the drinker and society at large, and moderate recreational drinking. Instances of lawful drinking are condemned. For example, it is regretted that police could not act as often as they might to apprehend drunkards because they were not always able to tell when people were drunk.⁴¹

If the nature of inebriety itself was difficult to come to terms with, questions about how it should be managed gave rise to even greater diversity of opinion. The solutions canvassed before the Inquiry fall into two broad categories—punitive, which advocated deterrent and retributive measures, and ameliorative, based on therapeutic programmes.

The punitive response was institutionalised in the *status quo*: gaol was the most common treatment for drunkenness. While most witnesses agreed that the gaol system was a failure from a rehabilitative perspective there was a strong belief in the salutary nature of punishment both as an admonition to the drinker and as a warning to others. One witness who advocated gaol sentences saw the coercive effect on drinkers as twofold: ‘they should be made to work and help to keep their families...[and] they ought to be punished’.⁴² The belief that ‘inebriates as a rule, are very averse to work, especially those from the poorer classes’ was fairly widely held and gaol was seen by some as a character corrective.⁴³ The failure of imprisonment to effect reform was commonly attributed to the insufficient severity of the carceral regime. Both prison officials and police officers criticised the gaol experience as too comfortable. It was alleged for example that prisoners were overfed.⁴⁴ Governor Read claimed that gaol was ‘like a club’ for inebriates. He proposed a prison hulk specifically for the detention of drunkards, no doubt with a possible solution to the overcrowded state of the prisons in mind.⁴⁵ Dr O’Connor, the Medical Officer at Darlinghurst Gaol, claimed that drunkards preferred being in gaol, where they were fed and clothed and not required to do much, to working.⁴⁶ He ignored the fact that drunkards were frequently sentenced to hard labour, made to ‘drag barrows of stones’, or, in the case of the physically incapable, to pick oakum.⁴⁷ In a regressive vein which harked back to the vengeful regime of the penal era several witnesses advocated flogging or the treadmill. Flogging was much in the mind of the public. Only a little earlier, in September 1886, in the

wake of the Mount Rennie rape (which will be discussed more fully in chapter eight) the NSW Parliament had voted to retain flogging as an official punishment.⁴⁸ Other forms of physical chastisement were also advocated. Police Inspector Atwill drew the line at flogging but put his faith in an archaic form of public shaming:

If we could bring back the old days, and could put stocks in the street and put a man in them now and again for twelve hours, leaving him a loaf of bread to eat if he liked, that would do some good.⁴⁹

Physical punishments were also advocated for women. One suggestion advanced at the Committee on Intemperance, held in 1854, was that inebriate women should have their heads shaved, a punishment with heavy metaphoric import.⁵⁰

Such retributive responses were often accompanied by a pessimistic view of the capacity of the habitual drunkard to reform. They were coloured by a deep-seated fear of the convict taint. This was a pervasive and powerful force in the colony's social imaginary. Conservative official and public opinion feared what the residue of 'the stain' among the lower classes might lead to and historically had no hesitation in resorting to the disciplinary powers of the criminal justice system to keep it in check.⁵¹

The outlook for female inebriates was even gloomier than for males. As a number of witnesses acknowledged before the Inquiry, 'it is a greater reproach to a woman to be apprehended as a drunkard than it is to a man'. In a symbolic recognition of the finality for women of a lost reputation, there was general agreement that, although male inebriates sometimes recovered, women were virtually incurable. Some of the reasons for this were seen to arise from restricted social opportunities. Women had 'narrower lives and fewer interests' whereas a man, if he did reform, had 'a larger scope for his energies and a larger field

before him'.⁵² Men's 'larger will' was also cited though this would seem to be contradicted by the fact that more men became drunkards in the first place.

Imprisonment was by far the most common treatment for drunkenness meted out to lower-class people during the 1880s and 1890s. It is an anomaly that while actual drunkenness was quite likely declining in the 1880s the numbers of those arrested for the offence reached a new high.⁵³ In the last two decades of the century drink-related charges constituted the single largest category of arrests and convictions—around thirty to forty per cent.⁵⁴ The divergence between declining consumption and the rising arrest rate may indicate reduced tolerance for public drunkenness possibly connected with the rising fortunes of the temperance movement or the historical context of economic recession. The practice of gaoling the poor resulted in a situation described by Grabosky: 'To an extent unsurpassed before or since, prisons served as warehouses for drunkards, vagrants, the aged and infirm, and lunatics'.⁵⁵ 'Drunk and disorderly' was among a number of street crimes for which police could make summary arrests without a warrant. Others included prostitution, abusive or indecent language, indecent exposure and begging. The *Vagrancy Act* also was commonly used to remove drunks and other undesirables from the streets. For those afflicted with alcoholic insanity or behaving in a bizarre manner an alternative to gaol was committal by a magistrate under the *Lunacy Act* to the Reception House at Darlinghurst which admitted persons who were not permanently insane for fourteen days. It was estimated that two-thirds of the inmates were suffering from *delirium tremens*.⁵⁶ Discharged, and in somewhat better shape after a brief stay, most reverted to their usual habits.

The difficulty of breaking this cycle also prompted some who took an ameliorative approach to advocate extended gaol sentences as way of

keeping inebriates out of temptation's way long enough to make rehabilitation a possibility.

Stereotyped notions of the character of the lower classes, with roots in early and mid-Victorian attitudes, were still being advanced with conviction. The middle-class belief that drunkards came from the lowest segments of society was continuously affirmed by discriminatory policing practices. Sir Alfred Stephen opined: 'Among gentlemen drinking is, I think, rare'.⁵⁷ But not all those who were merely rich could claim to be gentlemen. REN Twopeny observed that 'not a few of the wealthiest and most leading citizens are well-known to be frequently drunk, though their names do not, of course, appear in the papers or police reports'.⁵⁸ Harrison summarises the situation:

A fiction of upper-class morality was preserved by a police force which publicised the intemperance of the poor, while quietly conducting upper-class drunkards to their homes without taking them to court.⁵⁹

Police on the beat were enjoined on the one hand to be 'strictly impartial in the discharge of their duties towards all classes'. On the other they were cautioned that 'Offences which are of a trivial character, and sometimes committed by law-abiding citizens in ignorance, should be dealt with discreetly'.⁶⁰ Judgements about who was and who was not a law-abiding citizen were pre-emptive to say the least and ignorance of the law was not, legally speaking, a valid defence. Such rules were designed to give police enough discretionary power to enable them to avoid having to haul in a middle-class citizen on a bender. There is an underlying notion here of the criminal as a particular type of person disconnected from the circumstances of his or her social context. This reflected bourgeois society's concern with marking out social and moral boundaries, with making a tangible distinction between good and bad subjects.

Punishment was not restricted to those who fell foul of the law. The stigma which attached to the habitual drinker could incur fateful social sanctions. Most lodgings were available only to 'sober gents' and sobriety was a commonly stipulated qualification in job advertisements. Summary eviction or dismissal as well as lesser penalties could be deployed against the intemperate.

Responses to drunkenness which might be broadly labelled ameliorative also emerged in the course of the Inquiry, usually associated with a relatively optimistic outlook on the prospects for individual reform. These reflected emerging notions that 'treatment' of the drunkard was both more enlightened and more effective than punishment. Some witnesses believed that gaol terms were too short to effect the moral reconstruction necessary for drunkards to change their ways. They advocated longer sentences and more emphasis on rehabilitation. Reformed drunkards did exist, though they were not numerous. Charlie Woodward, a one-time burglar who found religion and took up mission work among Sydney's poor, was one such 'brand plucked from the burning'.⁶¹ He worked among gaol inmates attempting to convert them to sobriety and religion with, if his own testimony is to be believed, some success. One malefactor for example repented on reading a tract called *The Conversion of a Drunken Chimney-Sweep*, signed the pledge and 'swore off liquor for life'.⁶² Although the numbers who thus achieved long-term sobriety were probably small they were significant because they supported the claim of the evangelicals that the drink problem could be overcome through religion.

As an alternative to gaol, there was considerable support for the establishment of an inebriate asylum. The asylum was conceived as a re-socialising environment offering a morally wholesome regime removed from the evil influences of the drunkard's daily life. The WCTU for example advocated prolonged, compassionate rehabilitative

treatment in inebriate asylums for habitual drunkards.⁶³ The gradual secularisation of thinking which influenced liberal social reform in the late nineteenth-century, in which the decisive influence of a person's environment on their moral development came to be recognised, is in evidence here.

One privately run inebriates' home was already in operation at Willoughby, but was accessible only to those with some means. The type of inmate can be gathered from an article in the *Illustrated Sydney News*: 'The present residents comprise commercial travellers, journalists, members of the dramatic profession, insurance agents, lawyers and ex-merchants'.⁶⁴ The manager of the home was 'a gentleman well known in literature and politics', none other in fact than the raffish Adolphus Taylor, florid drunkard, sometime member of parliament and founding editor of *Truth*.⁶⁵ Henry Lawson underwent a course of treatment there in 1899 and wrote about the experience in his story 'The Boozers' Home'.⁶⁶ It is unlikely that many lower-class inebriates would have found their way into such an establishment. They were catered for to some extent by city church missions like that of the Salvation Army which provided basic food and shelter for the derelict inebriate.⁶⁷ But there was to be no establishment for poor inebriates for some years. Two possible reasons for prevarication may have been that asylums were not supported by some sectors of the temperance movement which saw therapeutic measures as a diversion and that government was unwilling to commit the necessary funds. For women gaol was virtually the only option. The numbers of Irish women gaoled for drunkenness was said to be particularly high.⁶⁸ Eventually in 1908 the Prisons Department opened the Shaftesbury Reformatory with places for both men and women.⁶⁹

In discussion on the causes of drunkenness the influence of eugenics emerges in evidence which identifies mental defectiveness passed on as a hereditary flaw as being at the root of the problem. Charles

M'Carthy, an Australian doctor who wrote on inebriety, subscribed to such a view. In one American asylum for the insane he noted 'there are 300 idiots and the parents of 145 of them were known as habitual drunkards'. He went on to say that: 'In one case ...drunken parents had seven idiotic children'.⁷⁰

The influence of environmental factors on people's propensity to become inebriates was discussed in the context of the Inquiry and in wider circles. For example the American Association for the Study and Cure of Inebriety made the connection between a poor environment and drunkenness explicitly, if reductively, when it stated: 'All unhealthy mental, physical and social surroundings, continuous excitement, and dark, damp, low places of residence are noted for the inebriety which springs from them'.⁷¹ It was further claimed that 'cellar occupants and those of tenement houses...are inebriates as a rule'.⁷² Belief that the moral structure of the individual could be changed by changing his or her surroundings characterised both preventative eugenics (which looked to social reform and hygiene to effect 'improvement' in human beings) and euthenics (which advocated better surroundings and living conditions). Although these related belief systems represented a retreat from the temperance conviction that poverty and disease were a consequence rather than a cause of drunkenness they were essentially conservative in intent.

The influence of euthenics is also evident in discussion of the social ill effects of lower-class home life. Drinking in the home was widely condemned, typified by some witnesses as a virtually contagious condition, which was brought into homes by men and passed on to women and children. The childrearing practices of the lower class were called into question by some witnesses, compared unfavourably, as they commonly were, with the stricter standards of surveillance and chaperonage which characterized the middle class. The Reverend Rich was among those who attributed the drinking habits of youths of

the larrikin class to deficiencies in the home. He believed that 'parents are at fault in not looking after their boys and girls—in not keeping them at home instead of allowing them to go out and mix with others'.⁷³ This ignored the sheer physical impossibility, apart from the numerous social factors at work, of keeping young men and women 'at home' when home consisted of two or three cramped, rickety rooms, crowded with other family members and very often one or more boarders.

The view of habitual drunkenness as a disease first began to be constructed in the 1860s and reference to it is made by a number of witnesses to the Inquiry.⁷⁴ The concept would develop along with the modern tendency to pathologise deviance. The notion of drinking as a disease was not openly supported by a majority in the temperance movement. Defining habituated drunkards as being ill implied that other forms of drinking were normal and acceptable, a notion to which they were adamantly opposed. One witness considered drunkenness to be 'a disease akin to insanity, and not a crime' and believed that habitual drunkards should be sent not to gaol but to a hospital.⁷⁵ This view admitted the possibility that the impulse to drink was beyond the drunkard's control. As John Read saw it, 'many drunkards would take a glass of grog if they knew that it would kill them'. He saw a commonality with other compulsions, like gambling and opium-smoking when he commented: 'We condemn the Chinese for taking opium when there are a number of our own people shaking from head to foot from the effects of drink'.⁷⁶ But although the term 'disease' is used by several witnesses to describe the habit of drunkenness, the treatments they propose are environmentalist rather than medical interventionist in nature. The latter approach gained ground in the first decades of the twentieth century when a broad movement towards the medicalisation of a range of socio-psychological conditions emerged.

A variety of chemical treatments were also promoted at this time by the mainstream medical profession as well as by quacks. The use of bichloride of gold was pioneered by the Keeley Institute in the USA and later used in Australia.⁷⁷ Arsenic, strychnine and ammonia were all used to treat alcoholic dementia.⁷⁸ A host of less drastic nostrums were promoted both privately and commercially. The anonymous 'Pupil of Professor Woolley' offered 'with confidence' the following cure to be taken 'whenever the patient has a desire for drink': 'Sulphate of iron, 5 grains; peppermint water, 11 drachms; spirits of nutmeg, 1 drachm; magnesia, 10 grains'.⁷⁹ Hypnotism was also used in an attempt to eliminate the craving. Some cures were as bad as the disease and some inebriates became addicted to morphine used in preparations to treat drinking.⁸⁰

Alongside an emerging pathology model and environmentalist suppositions ran older Benthamite utilitarian notions which emerge in views of the drunkard as unproductive and a drain on society. This paradigm was used most often to critique the then current system of gaoling habitual drunkards for short periods which, it was argued, merely prolonged the life of one who might (it is implied) otherwise be dead and off the hands of the community. Governor Read described the cycle:

They are brought out of the Domain, or perhaps from lying in the gutter. In the course of the day or two they spend in gaol they are cured and cleansed; otherwise they would not live long.⁸¹

Utilitarianism underpins attempts to calculate, however approximately, the social costs of drunkenness. This is evident in prolonged discussions about the number of criminals in gaol as a consequence of drink, which reflects the temperance movement's assertion that drinking was a royal road to all other vices. Most witnesses questioned on this subject agreed with Police Inspector Camphin that drink was

'the primary cause of a great deal of crime'. The Church of England chaplain at Darlinghurst Gaol was more cautious. He thought that prisoners often used drunkenness to excuse their crimes and that their accounts should be taken '*cum grano salis*'.⁸² Police officers attested that rape, wife-beating, assault, theft and, oddly, in one instance, forgery, were attributable to drink.⁸³ Although it was generally considered that crimes which require 'all a man's astuteness' were not directly linked with liquor it could aid certain types of criminal, such as pickpockets, by steadying the hand and bracing the nerves. Even burglars were said to have 'orgies occasionally' of what would in current parlance be labelled binge drinking.⁸⁴ Not only did drunkards often perpetrate crimes they were also culpable in providing others with the opportunity to commit crime. Men in a helplessly drunken state, for example, were an inducement to robbery and assault. Robberies of men in houses of ill fame were attributed to the intoxicated state of the victims. The high rate of robbery on Newcastle steamers was said to be a result of the unrestricted drinking thereon.⁸⁵

Whereas drinking among men was widely agreed to be linked to crime, the causal connection between female criminality and drink is generally restricted to prostitution and other forms of sexual profligacy. Infanticide, the most common form of murder committed by women,⁸⁶ was considered by Darlinghurst Gaol's Governor Read to be generally committed out of shame or 'to avoid the trouble of bringing up a child' rather than brought about by drunkenness.⁸⁷

Several witnesses specifically identified urban crime as associated with drinking, claiming that such a nexus did not exist in country districts. Bushranging, for example, was considered by one police officer not to be caused by drink, bushrangers being on the whole 'very temperate men'.⁸⁸ Governor Read alleged, however, that Thunderbolt was mad with drink when he shot it out with police.⁸⁹ These views were consistent with the common formulation of drunkenness as an

urban problem. Even though country towns such as Wagga, Hay and Bourke had more hotels than general stores⁹⁰ excessive drinking was characterized as a product of city spaces and conditions, linked with social disorder and dissolute street life.

In their report, the Commissioners preferred, in the face of some overwhelmingly difficult and complex questions, to cling to the certainties peddled by religion and a conservative political ideology. The way in which they interpreted their brief, the tendentiousness of their questioning, the methods used to cue and prompt witnesses and the conclusions they arrived at all provide ample testimony to the socially and politically conservative frame of reference within which they operated. This was despite testimony which acknowledged the ineffectiveness of the current regime and questioned its benevolence. Discussion consisted largely of generalisations, judgements and unsubstantiated opinion and was couched in the euphemisms, stock phrases and stylised vocabulary of the time. In the absence of any hard evidence the assumptions of the temperance movement were, by and large, not questioned. The Commissioners took the view that 'the traffic in alcoholic liquors is of a kind which should be discouraged as far as possible, and...every method which can prudently be adopted for throwing obstacles in the way of the sale of them is a step distinctly in advance'.⁹¹

But despite the censorious rhetoric and indeed contradicting the assumptions which underlay its own terms of reference the Inquiry found that drinking was not rising but declining. Its Report concluded that 'instead of increasing with the increase of population in this colony, the consumption of every kind of liquor, except imported sparkling wines, imported bottled beer, and Colonial beer,⁹² has decreased, not always by the same ratio for any given year, but steadily, and in some cases, by very strongly marked ratios'.⁹³ Such

evidence might have been expected to take the wind out of the sails of temperance supporters but does not appear to have done so.

Despite the oppositional position on lower-class drinking which emerges throughout the Inquiry's deliberations ultimately its recommendations were pragmatic with only minor implications for the *status quo*. Political realism, which dictated that the people would not tolerate substantial further restrictions on their drinking, had won the day. The Inquiry recommended that the number of licensed public houses in the city of Sydney be reduced to one for every eighty electors on the roll, and that some of the lower-class houses should be thus swept away, but local option was rejected as an unsatisfactorily piecemeal approach.⁹⁴ On the other hand, relaxation of Sunday closing was not countenanced despite widespread flouting of the law in this regard.

In the wake of the Inquiry temperance advocates, while remaining active and keeping up their flood of petitions to parliament, made no major gains for some years. The movement's most successful phase came somewhat later in the first decade of the twentieth century. An added boost to the cause came with the introduction of the vote for women in 1901. The political field became polarised, with temperance and Protestantism formally aligning themselves in 1904 with Carruthers and the Liberal and Reform Association.⁹⁵ On the other side of the cultural and political divide stood Labor, liquor interests and Catholicism. Carruthers won the 1904 election with temperance support and passed an amendment to the *Liquor Act* in the following year which introduced Local Option voting, to be held at the same time as state elections. At the first poll, in 1907, sixty-seven electorates voted for a reduction in licences but none voted for the wholesale closing of hotels.⁹⁶ The majority of lower-class voters were not eligible to vote in local option polls.

Local Option was suspended when war broke out in 1914 and the forces of temperance transferred their energies to campaigning for six o'clock closing. Initially the rationale for early closing was that hotels should keep the same hours as 'ordinary shops'.⁹⁷ Later, in response to public alarm over a riot by soldiers from Liverpool army camp,⁹⁸ it was thought necessary 'to keep the young soldiers sober while on leave'.⁹⁹ The cause was significantly buoyed by patriotic fervour. The King himself had foresworn liquor for the sake of the war effort and Australians were urged to enter into the royal spirit of renunciation. The construction of 'disloyal' behaviour was thus extended to include drinking. A referendum held in 1916 resulted in the introduction of 6 o'clock closing, a regime which was not to be relaxed in Sydney until 1956. The grotesque changes this forced in male drinking culture have been described by Phillips and others.¹⁰⁰

But even as temperance advocates were enjoying their victory history was hard on their heels. The Depression of the early 1890s undermined assumptions that individuals were to blame for their own privation and misery. A multi-faceted, structural view of the causes of poverty gained credence and a conviction that the precedence of the drink question in the political arena was disadvantaging working people was gaining ground. A poster issued by the Licensed Victuallers Association during the local option campaign appealed to this conviction. It shows a street scene: on one side is the Red Lion, closed, with a group of gesticulating working men outside. On the other side two gentlemen alight from a cab at covered steps. The caption reads: 'The result of no license. One law for the rich—another for the worker. Vote for continuance of license and "Fight for your liberty"'.¹⁰¹ At the same time those concerned with social reform began to take a more nuanced view of lower-class life. They began to recognise, as had the English social surveyor, Charles Booth, that the culture of drinking fulfilled a complex of functions in lower-class life and that public houses played 'a larger part in the lives of the people than clubs

or friendly societies, churches or missions, or perhaps than all put together'.¹⁰² While the temperance movement continued to be active into the 1920s, its philosophy was receding further and further into the mists of irrelevance, inundated by a multiplicity of socio-cultural forces which were re-organising the processes of everyday life.

¹ [James, John Stanley], *The Vagabond Papers: Sketches of Melbourne Life, in Light and Shade etc.* Fourth series, Melbourne, Robertson, 1877, p186.

² *Vice and its Victims in Sydney, the Cause and Cure* by a Pupil of the late Professor John Woolley, Principal of Sydney University. Sydney, Edwin H. Becke, 1873, p1.

³ Twopeny, REN, *Town life in Australia (1883)*, facsimile edition, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1973, p70.

⁴ For example in English expose literature such as George Sims' newspaper articles collectively entitled *How the Poor Live* and Andrew Mearns' *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*; also in the work of 'slum novelists' such as Arthur Morrison.

⁵ See examples in Eric Russell, *Victorian and Edwardian Sydney from Old Photographs*, Sydney, Ferguson, 1975.

⁶ Dunstan, Keith, *Wowsers*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1968, p97.

⁷ For an account of the Inquiry see AW Martin, 'Drink and Deviance in Sydney 1854-5', *Historical Studies* 17:68 (April 1977) 342-60.

⁸ Prior to the 1856 Act which established a quasi-representative legislature the NSW parliament was extremely conservative and unresponsive to the popular will; see GN Hawker, *The Parliament of New South Wales: 1856-1965*, Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1971, p45.

⁹ Powell, KC, *Drinking and Alcohol in Colonial Australia 1788-1901 for the Eastern Colonies* (National Campaign Against Drug Abuse Monograph Series, no. 3), Canberra, AGPS, 1988 p40.

¹⁰ See Dunstan; also Quentin Beresford, *Drinkers and the Anti-Drink Movement in Sydney 1870-1930*, Ph.D. thesis, ANU, 1984; Milton Lewis, *A Rum State: Alcohol and State Policy in Australia*, Canberra, AGPS, 1992; JD Bollen, *Protestantism and Social Reform in NSW*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1972 for accounts of the temperance movement in New South Wales.

¹¹ Garton, Stephen, 'Once a Drunkard: Social Reform and the Problem of "Habitual Drunkenness" in Australia, 1880-1914', *Labour History* 53 (1987), p38.

¹² Bollen, p138.

¹³ O'Hara, John, *A Mug's Game: a History of Gaming and Betting in Australia*, Kensington, UNSW Press, 1988, p131.

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- ¹⁴ Harrison, Brian, *Drink and the Victorians: the Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971, p19.
- ¹⁵ The temperance movement was dominated by women; the fact that the anti-drink cause was so successful even though women did not get the vote in New South Wales until 1902 serves to emphasise the power of the movement. At a practical level, the mainly middle-class women in the temperance coalition undoubtedly influenced their men who wielded direct political power.
- ¹⁶ Beresford, p131.
- ¹⁷ Hays, Reverend FC, with an introductory note by WL Bowditch, *The Catholic Church and Temperance*, Melbourne, Australian Catholic Truth Society, 1904, p13.
- ¹⁸ Lang, JT, *I Remember*, Sydney, Invincible Press, 1956, p154; *The Licensed Victualler and NSW Sportsman* launched 21/9/89 to put the licensees' position seems only to have run to one issue, or at least that is all that the Mitchell Library holds.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Bollen, p147.
- ²⁰ For instance, most of the original thirty-five members of the newly formed Labor Party elected to parliament in 1891 were temperance sympathisers; Graham Freudenberg, *Cause for Power: the Official History of the NSW Branch of the ALP*, Sydney, Pluto Press, 1991, p16.
- ²¹ Rodd, LC, *A Gentle Shipwreck*, Melbourne, Nelson, 1975, p123.
- ²² See Lewis p8, and Anthony Dingle, "'The Truly Magnificent Thirst': an Historical Survey of Australian Drinking Habits", *Australian Historical Studies* 19 (1980), pp247-249.
- ²³ Dingle, p244.
- ²⁴ Consumption of locally brewed beer was not included in figures for NSW until 1888; see Powell p26.
- ²⁵ See Dingle p242, and Robin Walker, 'Aspects of Working-Class Life in Industrial Sydney in 1913', *Labour History* 58 (May 1990) p9.
- ²⁶ Dingle p242.
- ²⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission 1886-87, *Report*, 5 Oct 1887, Sydney, Government Printer, 1887, p78.
- ²⁸ Sturma, Michael, *Vice in a Vicious Society: Crime and Convicts in Mid-Nineteenth Century NSW*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1983, p7.
- ²⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Report*, p41.
- ³⁰ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission 1886-87, *Minutes of Evidence*, 5 Oct 1887, Sydney, Government Printer, 1887, p29.
- ³¹ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 4 1851-1890, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1969, p29.
- ³² *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 5 1851-1890, p238.

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- ³³ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 6 1851-1890, p284.
- ³⁴ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 4 1851-1890, p210.
- ³⁵ *The Bulletin*, 11/12/86, p5.
- ³⁶ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Report*, p79.
- ³⁷ American Association for the Study and Cure of Inebriety, *The Disease of Inebriety from Alcohol, Opium and other Narcotic Drugs*, New York, Treat, 1893, p61.
- ³⁸ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p155.
- ³⁹ [Lane, William], *The Workingman's Paradise: an Australian novel by 'John Miller'*, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1980, p39.
- ⁴⁰ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p150.
- ⁴¹ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p111.
- ⁴² *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p94.
- ⁴³ M'Carthy, Charles M, *Dipsomania, or Drink Craving, its History, Nature, Consequences, Treatment and Cure*, Melbourne, Robertson, 1881, p15.
- ⁴⁴ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p144.
- ⁴⁵ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p151.
- ⁴⁶ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p159.
- ⁴⁷ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p147.
- ⁴⁸ Walker, David, 'Youth on Trial: the Mt Rennie Case', *Labour History*, 50 (May 1986) p37.
- ⁴⁹ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p47.
- ⁵⁰ Sturma, p156.
- ⁵¹ See Sturma.
- ⁵² *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p169.
- ⁵³ Lewis, p15.
- ⁵⁴ Sturma notes (p144) that the statistics may be swollen by multiple arrests of the same people.
- ⁵⁵ Grabosky, Peter N, *Sydney in Ferment: Crime, Dissent and Official Reaction 1788 to 1973*, Canberra, ANU Press, 1977, p98.
- ⁵⁶ Garton, Stephen, *Medicine and Madness: a Social History of Insanity in NSW 1880-1940*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 1988, p30.
- ⁵⁷ *Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Minutes of Evidence*, p88.
- ⁵⁸ Twopeny, p70.

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- ⁵⁹ Harrison, p390.
- ⁶⁰ *Rules for the General Government and Discipline of Members of the Police Force of NSW*, Sydney, Government Printer, 1903, p2.
- ⁶¹ Woodward, Charlie, *A Burglar Captured, being the Life Story of Charlie Woodward, ex-Notorious Sydney Burglar*, Auckland, Newmarket Printing House, 1922, p13.
- ⁶² Woodward, Charlie, *Peeps into Gaols, Police Courts, Opium Dens*. Sydney, JA Packer, [1933], p37.
- ⁶³ NSW WCTU's Annual Reports of Conventions [Sydney, WCTU], 1897-1902, contain numerous calls for the establishment of inebriate asylums by the government.
- ⁶⁴ *Illustrated Sydney News* 6/5/93, p14.
- ⁶⁵ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 6 1851-1890, p246.
- ⁶⁶ Roderick, Colin, *Henry Lawson, a Life*. Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1991, p199.
- ⁶⁷ Lewis, p119.
- ⁶⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p151; I attempted to establish the accuracy of this claim through the Department of Justice, but although figures do apparently exist on the ethnicity of women prisoners at the time, they were not available to researchers outside the Department.
- ⁶⁹ Ramsland, John, *With Just but Relentless Discipline: a Social History of Corrective Services in NSW*, Sydney, Kangaroo Press, 1996, p166.
- ⁷⁰ M'Carthy, p8.
- ⁷¹ American Association for the Study and Cure of Inebriety, p63.
- ⁷² American Association for the Study and Cure of Inebriety, p64.
- ⁷³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p154.
- ⁷⁴ Harrison, p21; Garton ('Once a Drunkard' p42ff) has described how the disease concept and environmentalist views emerged during the Inquiry.
- ⁷⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p95.
- ⁷⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p150.
- ⁷⁷ Garton 'Once a Drunkard', p47.
- ⁷⁸ Garton 'Once a Drunkard', p39.
- ⁷⁹ *Vice and its Victims in Sydney*, p11.
- ⁸⁰ Lewis, p112.
- ⁸¹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p150.
- ⁸² Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p153.

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- ⁸³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p82.
- ⁸⁴ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p146.
- ⁸⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p83.
- ⁸⁶ Allen, Judith A, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes involving Australian Women since 1880*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1990, p22.
- ⁸⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p153.
- ⁸⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p83.
- ⁸⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p151.
- ⁹⁰ Lang, p154.
- ⁹¹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Report*, p81.
- ⁹² It is worth noting however that figures on consumption of colonial beer supplied to the Inquiry by the NSW Chief Inspector of Distilleries for the years 1881-86 (*Report* p25) are significantly lower than those from the Statistical Register quoted by Powell, p38.
- ⁹³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Report*, p27.
- ⁹⁴ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Report*, p65.
- ⁹⁵ Bollen, p8.
- ⁹⁶ Lang, p154.
- ⁹⁷ Phillips, Walter, "'Six o'clock swill': the Introduction of Early Closing of Hotel Bars in Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 19 (1980), p253.
- ⁹⁸ See Keating, Christopher, *On the Frontier: a Social History of Liverpool*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1996, p150 for an account of the riot.
- ⁹⁹ Lang, p157.
- ¹⁰⁰ Phillips, 'Six O'Clock Swill'.
- ¹⁰¹ Bollen, p113.
- ¹⁰² Quoted in Keating, PJ, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, p119.

Chapter 2

Lower-Class Drinking: Places and Practices

It was almost universally accepted among the governing class in the late nineteenth century that the common people drank too much. The complex reality behind this denunciation, however, was rarely examined closely. Drinking was a key cultural practice for Sydney's lower classes: the city's drinking culture was a rich and complex world of practices, rituals and collective knowledges which arose from the lives and experiences of the drinkers. It was also oppositional in the sense that it encompassed customs and conduct which contravened middle-class norms and were consequently characterised as deviant. This chapter construes some aspects of that culture, the meanings it carried and the wider social patterns and practices in which it was embedded.

Drinking as a lower-class pursuit was vigorously contested by the reforming middle class. But the public and organised pressure they brought to bear to restrict the availability of liquor did not go unchallenged. *The Licensed Victualler and NSW Sportsman* favourably contrasted the appearance and general demeanour of moderate drinkers with that of teetotallers who were labelled 'weak and puny ... the drones of commercial life'. The temperate use of drink was urged 'for the benefit of the constitution'.¹ The tabloid press was another medium which gave expression to a dissenting voice in a spirited discourse of hypocrisy: 'the toilers are far less addicted to alcoholic stimulants than the opulent slave-drivers who buy parsonic silence by liberally patronising the "plate"', accused *Truth*.² This may have been true as far as it went. But claims about whether the 'opulent slave-drivers' drank more than the 'toilers' obscured complexities which attended divergent class-based understandings of drinking.

Truth promulgated in its pages a cultural style which aligned with the values of the lower class and opposed those of the temperance movement. Along with reports of murders and divorces one of its most characteristic tropes was the unremitting ridicule and provocation of wowers who it claimed sought to deny the humbler classes their chosen pleasures. In its pages the inanities of Prating Parsons and the Women's Cold Tea Union (WCTU) were set against the unabashed villainy and gargantuan drinking habits of men such as Paddy Crick and *Truth's* proprietor, the infamous John Norton, elected to the NSW parliament in 1899 and 1898 respectively. *Truth* incensed the respectables but was appreciated by large sections of the lower-class public who admired its irreverence and enjoyed the spectacle afforded by the antics of Crick and his cronies.³

Truth also questioned the reductive view that drink was the cause of poverty. Temperance advocates were slow to abandon this claim, even in the face of the widespread economic hardship which accompanied the 1890s Depression:

Is the present poverty the result of drunkenness?
Or is it brought about by low wages and lack of work?
'Pop-Gun' Bertie Boyce [Canon Boyce, founding member of the NSW Temperance Alliance] says the poor of Sydney spend their earnings in pubs.
'Truth' says his statement is false.⁴

According to *Truth*, to attempt to deny hard working people a drink was tantamount to persecution and they had every reason to resent it.

What was the nature of the drinking patterns and behaviours which sparked such controversy? Liquor was used in a variety of ways, for a multitude of reasons and with differing effects on both the drinker and on society at large. It fulfilled many functions—dietary supplement, appetite suppressant, analgesic, social lubricant, ritual beverage, stimulant, aphrodisiac, euphoric and soporific among others. Perhaps

its principal benefit for people who lived hard lives and who felt powerless to change their circumstances was that it could make things appear not so bad. Friedrich Engels' explanation of why working men drank retained its ring of truth:

The working man comes home from his work tired, exhausted, finds his home comfortless, damp, dirty, repulsive; he has urgent need of recreation, he must have something to make his work worth his trouble, to make the prospect of the next day endurable...His enfeebled frame, weakened by bad air and bad food, violently demands some external stimulus; his social need can be gratified only in the public house, he has absolutely no other place where he can meet his friends. How can he be expected to resist temptation?⁵

The temperance movement's efforts to lure working people from strong drink with innocuous substitutes were consistently met with indifference. Coffee stalls, which sold sandwiches, sausages and saveloys as well as hot drinks, were first established in Sydney in 1880. But they missed their intended mark and seemed only to be patronised by respectable people.⁶ Nor were healthful substitutes as profitable as liquor. The Sydney Coffee Palace, for example—which opened in 1881 and dispensed tea, scones, beef tea, malt extract, fresh milk and other wholesome refreshments—lasted less than three years. In the end it was taken over by a publican who began selling liquor.⁷ Another alternative to the pub was the Working Men's Club which aimed to 'give the working man a taste of friendly club-life, entirely dissociated from the defects of the tavern'. Several were founded in Sydney but were met with a resounding lack of interest. This was read as evidence of the unredeemability of the lower class. The failure of a club in Bathurst Street was attributed to the 'spiritually coarse-fibred' nature of working men who could not be convinced that 'chess and pictures, and flowers and periodicals were as attractive as "pots of heavy wet"'.⁸

Liquor was not the only means of intoxication available though it was overwhelmingly the most widely used. In the 1890s Australia became one of the world's leading consumers of patent medicines and tonics.⁹ Chlorodyne was widely used (and abused) by a range of people including those for whom access to liquor was problematic for whatever reason. Among them were 'staunch teetotallers' and drovers who carried it with them to induce sleep and keep out the cold. Recreational use of illegal drugs was, however, rare. Opium was well-known in Sydney but was regarded as an exotic taste and used mainly by 'Orientals' and a handful of transgressive whites. One daily paper estimated that there were 'not one hundred white smokers of opium of either sex' and these were virtual pariahs, 'a poor, wretched, miserable lot of forsaken creatures'.¹⁰

The belief that the high level of drunkenness was due at least in part to *what* people drank had wide currency. The low quality and high potency of the cheap liquor sold in Sydney was commonly denounced. A long-standing source of official concern was the partiality of the people to 'ardent spirits'. Owing to a combination of factors including the historical importance of rum, transport difficulties and the lack of a brewing technique suited to a warm climate, Australians traditionally consumed more spirits than beer.¹¹ Rum was the favoured drink in the early colonial years. When Alexander Harris visited Australia in 1826 instead of the 'refreshing beer of old England' he encountered 'that frightfully pernicious habit of the colony, drinking rum neat out of wine glasses'.¹² Some, John Dunmore Lang among them, believed that the consumption of locally produced wine should be encouraged as a benign alternative, arguing that if it was more widely drunk 'many... disgusting exhibitions of "mania potu" or "delirium tremens" arising from "brain poison" will be done away with'.¹³ Rum still had 36 per cent of the market in the early 1860s.¹⁴ But from the middle of the century the government's concerted attempt to wean the populace away from spirits and towards colonial wine and ale began to show

results. Overall per capita spirit consumption declined from over four gallons in 1831 to less than one gallon in 1900. At the same time beer consumption rose from just over four gallons to ten gallons.¹⁵ In the 1880s beer finally overtook spirits as the preferred tippie of the 'labouring classes'¹⁶ although some groups such as sailors and larrikins were said still to favour rum.

By 1900 locally produced beer, which was both cheap and potent, had virtually ousted imported beer from the market. Most colonial ales were sold at 3d a pint. Indeed 3d was the price of a standard drink in the public bars of most hotels. But the notorious Tooth's 'stringy', which attracted a great deal of condemnation from the Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, could be had for a mere 2d a pint in public houses of the lower type.¹⁷ The hope that wholesale beer drinking would reduce the level of drunkenness however proved to be a vain one. A magistrate reported that 'nearly all men brought before him for drunkenness get drunk on colonial beer'.¹⁸

For drinkers who persisted in a preference for spirits the quality of the liquor they were served was execrable. Good quality brandy such as Hennessy or Martell cost a publican seventeen shillings a gallon which effectively put the unit price of a drink out of the range of poor people. A substitute was available, however, in the form of a 'rough, crude, raw spirit, coloured and flavoured' which could be obtained for three shillings a gallon.¹⁹ Such pernicious stuff was said to 'fly to the head' and cause excessive drunkenness. It could also be highly toxic and was capable of inducing acute illness.²⁰ If a landlord was unscrupulous even customers prepared to lay out the price of quality liquor could not always be sure of getting what they paid for once they had imbibed sufficient to blunt their powers of discernment. Good liquor was altogether beyond the reach of poor landlords. In any case, it was claimed, they were often no more discriminating than their customers,

drinking the same poor quality stuff they served, even 'taking it from the same bottle', presumably for the sake of conviviality.²¹

The middle-class notion that the appropriate times for drinking were ceremonial and social occasions and at dinner was foreign to the lower classes. As well as being a fundamental component of their leisure time drink was an integral part of their working lives (of which more later). Saturday was both a half-holiday and for most people pay day when a conjunction of free time and the possession of money occurred. It was consequently the high point in the week for many drinkers. But in their efforts to reduce hotel opening hours it was late night and Sunday trading that were targetted by temperance advocates. Canon Boyce, one of the founding members of the Temperance Alliance, condemned night trading thus:

It is unquestionable that the last hours of the liquor business are the worst and most perilous. Thousands are now in bars and parlours drinking who should be at home with their families.²²

Opposition to Sunday drinking was particularly strong, bringing together as it did two powerful canons of evangelical Protestantism—temperance and the sanctity of the Sabbath. Sabbatarians regarded any but pious pursuits such as churchgoing and Bible reading undertaken on Sundays as an affront to God. Looming threats of the incursion of the 'Continental' Sunday were strenuously resisted. They campaigned against the opening of art galleries and museums, the holding of political meetings and sporting fixtures and the selling of newspapers on the Lord's day. Drinking and gambling, not tolerated at any time, caused particular affront.

Prior to 1882 hotels had been open for two hours to allow people to buy beer for their Sunday dinners. The temperance movement had a victory, however, when they succeeded in having a new *Licensing Act*

passed in that year which prohibited any Sunday selling of liquor. Thus was ushered in the dry Sunday which would remain a Sydney institution for almost a century. The dreariness of the city on Sundays was conjured up by one observer:

It presses hardly upon people sometimes when they are moving about on Sunday and find that they cannot get any moderate or fair refreshment. In fact they cannot even get anything to eat.²³

There were ways to circumvent Sunday closing. It was, for example, possible to drink legally under the *bona fide* travellers' clause of the *Licensing Act* by travelling a distance of at least five miles from one's place of residence. Manly was one destination popular for this purpose with Sunday drinkers.²⁴ This ruse was, however, until public transport improved, largely the prerogative of the better-off who could afford the expense of travelling for their refreshment.

Another contrivance for evading the dry Sunday was the 'working men's clubs' which sprang up in inner-Sydney (not to be confused with the similarly-named temperance clubs). They represented an attempt to lay claim to some of the privileges of the bourgeois Gentlemen's clubs which were not restricted in their opening hours. In this, however, they met resistance, judged by the 1887 Intoxicating Drink Inquiry not to be *bona fide* and dismissed as existing 'solely for the purpose of drinking on Sundays'.

It may have been sacrosanct to the pious but Sunday was also the one full day of the week on which many lower-class people had some discretionary time. The middle class, who could afford to lay in a stock of liquor, were not so dependent on Sunday trading. The Inquiry heard that working people who wished to take beer with their dinners on Sunday now had to take home jugs on Saturday night and drink them in a flat, stale condition the next day. As one witness said:

I think it is very hard upon the class of men who are not drunkards that they should not be able, at a certain time of day, to get their beer, and perhaps take it away.²⁵

But others believed that 'the taking home on Saturdays of quantities of beer lead to intemperance and Sunday drinking', and defended Sunday opening on the grounds that it would *reduce* drunkenness.²⁶ The views of drinkers were not sought by the Inquiry. No doubt as a sop to anticipated disgruntlement, however, evidence was heard from a number of witnesses identified as 'representatives of the labouring classes', men considered to be 'in a position to speak from practical experience of the habits and desires of their fellows'.²⁷ Although we are not privy to how these witnesses were recruited they appear to have been drawn from the labour aristocracy, trade-union office holders mostly, and their evidence indicates that they had embraced the respectable value system of their social superiors. Most, it emerges, were members of temperance organizations. Nonetheless not all took a hard line on Sunday closing. The spokesman from the Government Printing Office believed that the majority of the men were in favour of opening public houses for an hour in the afternoon and another hour in the evening.²⁸ Wharf labourers were said by their representative to be in favour of opening from 12.30 to 3pm or 'even till church time'.

But most of the labour representatives declared themselves opposed to any Sunday opening. One witness maintained that, as a body, working men were in favour of Sunday closing and, then, as though to rebut a disbelieving rejoinder, that certainly their wives were.²⁹ The Secretary of the Seaman's Union reported optimistically, though unconvincingly: 'Now that the lemon-squash shops are opening in greater numbers, I see a large number of the members of our Union patronising them'³⁰. The President of the Inquiry, clearly dubious about

the drawing power claimed for the lemon-squash shops, inquired whether there was 'anything improper at the back of those places', a suggestion denied by the witness.³¹

The temperance forces may have won the day in the legislature but the drinking populace refused to passively tolerate a dry Sunday. The law in this regard was honoured more in the breach than the observance and widespread and blatant Sunday drinking persistently caused affront to respectable society. It was estimated that of more than 800 hotels in Sydney only 193 operated within the law in this regard, the rest carrying on a systematic Sunday trade behind closed doors.³² Police constables were called to clear men away from street corners 'because persons going to places of worship were annoyed at seeing people going into public houses'.³³ In a counteraction lookouts were posted to watch for police, passwords were required to gain admittance and a dozen other dodges employed to avoid detection.³⁴ But the greatest protection for publicans lay in the fact that Sunday trading was so widespread that there were simply not enough police officers to control it. Moreover, police could not count on community support in their attempts to enforce a law which was held so widely in contempt. As one opponent objected 'I do not like laws which are sure to be evaded by some of the people'.³⁵

Despite such evidence the voice of the drinking class was pronounced by the Inquiry to be resoundingly in favour of Sunday closing. The Commissioners had 'no hesitation in stating that, whatever the views of other classes may be, the evidence and opinions of the working classes, as presented to us, are in favour of completely closing public houses on Sundays'.³⁶ Regarding the inconvenience this caused to the 'poor man', though it was admitted that some hardship was involved, it was nonetheless considered that this was 'not of a serious nature'.³⁷ In response to evidence of widespread flouting of the law changes were recommended, though not of a liberalising type which might have

helped to close the gap between rule and practice. Instead it was proposed to extend culpability to include drinkers found on licensed premises out of hours as well as publicans. Under the then current law drinkers could only be charged if caught in the act of drinking or taking away drink. The Inspector-General of Police agreed that this was the only effective way to stop Sunday trading.³⁸ But the necessary legislative changes were never made and five years later, if an article in *Truth* is any indication, little had changed and an inordinate level of police manpower was still being directed towards trying to control illegal Sunday trading to little effect.³⁹

Another target of those concerned about drinking was the numerous hotels in Sydney. A major plank in the temperance platform was to reduce their numbers. This sprang from a conviction that 'drunkenness, crime and licentiousness increase in the ratio of facilities for obtaining intoxicating drinks'.⁴⁰ Concern was not confined to the temperance movement. The *Telegraph* observed that 'a man standing in the centre of King Street, at its junction with Castlereagh Street, is within a stone's throw of about a score of hotels, comprising perhaps, sixty bars at which he can run up and down the scale in regard to quality of liquor and respectability of surroundings'.⁴¹ In 1887 there were 855 public houses in the inner-metropolitan area.⁴² Pubs were also plentiful in residential localities such as the Rocks, the Haymarket, East Sydney and West Sydney, most of them humble establishments serving a mainly local trade. In the Haymarket there were twenty-eight pubs within a radius of 308 yards of the corner of Pitt and Gipps Streets (Gipps Street no longer exists but was one block south of Hay street),⁴³ and in East Sydney thirty-two within 400 yards of the corner of William and Bourke Streets.⁴⁴ The pattern was repeated further afield in neighbourhoods such as Redfern, Waterloo and Newtown.

In the quest to reduce the number of city hotels it was the poorer establishments that were targeted. They were typified, in images of the

'slum' public house which recurred in official discourses, as squalid dens of vice,⁴⁵ condemned as places where 'poor persons go ... and stay ... all night drinking'.⁴⁶ Dr O'Connor, the Medical Officer at Darlinghurst Gaol, advocated abolishing altogether public-houses in 'low and crowded districts'. Other commentators agreed that 'the lower class of houses such as those which are to be found at Woolloomooloo, and the lower end of George Street... should be stamped out'.⁴⁷ Reducing the number of hotels in poor neighbourhoods it was suggested would curb drinking during working hours because a 'very large percentage of the persons who patronise hotels ... are busily engaged all the day in work of various kinds, and could not possibly spare time to visit distant hotels in quest of stimulants'. The negative side was perceived to be that fewer pubs would mean 'a great many more bottles of whisky and gallons of beer being conveyed into the houses of those habituated to drinking'.⁴⁸

Closures struck directly and purposefully at lower-class amenities. Drinking in pubs was a distinctly lower-class pursuit. As one observer put it: 'The lower classes go to public houses and the rich people drink at home'.⁴⁹ The ubiquity of pubs in poor areas attested to their importance as lower-class recreational institutions. Indeed, one of the prime conveniences of city living was an abundance of public houses selling cheap liquor. But they were more than mere drinking shops. Local people could conveniently call in for a pre- or post-work drink, meet friends and neighbours or have a jug filled to take home. For pedestrian communities—where most working people lived within walking distance of their workplaces, and the spatial reach of housewives, children and old people was limited—a pub close at hand was an important amenity.

The landlords as well as the clientele of the poorer houses were targeted by authorities. Selling liquor for a living did not necessarily preclude social respectability and status. Some prosperous publicans

of expensive establishments took their place among Sydney's leading citizenry. But landlords of the poorest, least capitalised houses incurred systematic censure despite the fact that, as independent proprietors, they were signalling their endorsement of the bourgeois ideal of success through application. Running a pub was for some working men a way out of back-breaking labour and hireling status which offered, even if only notionally, independence and a congenial work environment. There were too many houses, it was claimed, run by such men, 'labouring men, coal lumpers and the like', who had managed to save a hundred pounds or so to set up in a small way in the hotel business. Such marginal establishments were said to be responsible for most of the illegal practices, foremost among which was Sunday trading, which they were forced to carry on in order to survive.⁵⁰ Many abuses would cease, it was claimed, if licenses were harder to get and were only granted to 'respectable persons'.

The pub, it was often said, was the poor man's club. Lower-class men did most of their drinking in pubs where a masculinist culture flourished.⁵¹ Here married men found a retreat from domestic squalor and demands in the companionship of other men. Single men living in boarding-houses found it more welcoming in the evenings than a comfortless room. Men could drink, smoke and swear freely. They could play at cards or dice⁵² and wager in a small way on the games.⁵³ Bets on the races could be placed with SP bookmakers and race results received, delivered by lightning messengers within minutes of the event.⁵⁴ Gossip could be exchanged, keeping one in touch not only with local goings-on but with stories and scuttlebutt which kept the entire city humming. Country visitors could get their bearings and 'receive proper elucidation'. Except in the poorest houses free lunches were available for the price of a drink. Indeed the claim was made that 'publicans had done more for the working man, with their counter luncheons, than the combined efforts of teetotallers and parsons...It is the only meal they often have of a day'.⁵⁵ Some publicans, like corner

shopkeepers, would allow credit to regular customers, thus ensuring continued business from them and their friends.⁵⁶ In the absence of an accommodating landlord a man without the price of a drink could hang about outside a pub until someone going in took pity on him. Joe, one of the neighbourhood drunks in Stone's *Jonah*, is such a one. The threepence he cadged from a passer-by represented 'more than the price of a beer...; it was the price of admission to the warm, comfortable bar every night, for the landlord was the friend of every man with the price of a drink in his pocket'.⁵⁷ As customers in a highly competitive industry drinkers were treated with a degree of respect, even warmth, which helped to ease the hurt of the numberless small setbacks and humiliations which were part and parcel of lower-class existence.

The convivial ambience of the pub was enhanced by the practice of shouting which facilitated social bonding through reciprocity among peers. Conversely, solitary drinking, or 'drinking with the flies', was considered an affront, and a Jimmy Woodser was generally regarded with suspicion.⁵⁸ Shouting became commonplace in the late nineteenth-century and was perceived to have reached problem proportions prior to World War One. James Toohey, one of the members of the Inquiry, believed that it was the cause of all the excessive drinking in the colony, though this would seem to be drawing rather a long bow.⁵⁹ It did have the effect of increasing consumption because each member of a shouting group was committed to participate in every round. To avoid one's shout was one of the most unacceptable of all public acts and could result in social obloquy.⁶⁰ As well as increasing a man's intake of liquor, shouting also put a strain on his pocket.

Drinking was important as a leisure pursuit but for many men it was also a key component in their working day.⁶¹ For some, it was customary to have one or two drinks to fortify them on their way to

work.⁶² Others, like coal lumpers who were out and about, called in for their glass in the course of the day.⁶³ A Sydney barmaid reported:

I have seen a man pour six pints of beer down his throat within an hour, and then steadily leave the hotel to follow his occupation as a navy.⁶⁴

The pre-industrial belief that liquor imparted physical stamina, referred to by Harrison, had not completely died out.⁶⁵ Sailors for example were said to be able to 'get through ten times the quantity of work that they would otherwise do'.⁶⁶ Drinking at the noon break was common. And calling in to the pub after work was a well-earned reward for an honest day's labour. It is notable that drinking as a restorative after hard manual work was the only form of drinking which was explicitly accepted as a legitimate practice by the Inquiry. The inconvenience of market workers who 'are unable to obtain necessary refreshment at the end of what is often a long and fatiguing journey' attracted the sympathy of the Commissioners.⁶⁷ Designated houses in the environs of the markets and the wharves open at times to accommodate such workers were recommended as a solution. This regime still operated in Sydney a hundred years later when 'early openers' could be found around Haymarket, Pyrmont, Circular Quay and Balmain. On the other hand, drinking by the unemployed or the underemployed, typified as idlers or wastrels, attracted particularly strident condemnation. But liquor could ease the shame and misery of chronic unemployment and drinking with his peers could lull a man into believing that he still had a part to play in the masculine world.

Sailors and merchant seaman were a significant occupational group in Sydney with its busy working port. They augmented the local drinking population, bringing their own distinctive drinking patterns and practices. Drunkenness was generally considered to be a major vice among seafaring men although 'impurity' was thought by some to be a worse weakness.⁶⁸ Sailors' preferred drink was rum, one of the pillars

of the British navy. The more discerning among them bypassed the houses in lower George Street and the Rocks with nautical names like 'The Sailors Return' and the 'Whalers' Arms', walking up as far as King Street to get better quality liquor.⁶⁹ Clearly, they knew the good stuff from the bad and, fresh on shore after a stint at sea, would have had the wherewithal to buy it. Pubs also offered cheap and convenient lodgings for sailors ashore.⁷⁰ They were preferred to the Sailors' Home which had been established for the purpose of 'protecting simple-hearted "Jack" from the harpies who prey on his purse and person'. The Home was a temperance establishment where, apart from 'a little lime juice' on Christmas Day, nothing but cold water was allowed and the food was notoriously bad.⁷¹ It is hardly surprising that the sailors stayed away in droves.

Once ashore the hazards for seafaring men drinking alone in lower George Street were many. They were prey to gangs who waylaid and robbed them in the shadowy, labyrinthine alleyways of the Rocks. Some of the loafers in the Argyle Cut were in league with certain publicans and dragged their victims to public houses in return for payment.⁷² The hapless sailors were plied with liquor then fleeced. Such foul play no doubt accounted for at least some of the numerous instances of sailors reported as jumping ship. Though the once infamous 'crimping houses' (where men were entrapped to serve as seaman while drunk) were said to have all but disappeared, the practice still existed 'to some degree'. Shinghaing too still occurred. One sailor was reported as saying: 'I took a glass of drink, and I never knew where I was until I found myself on board another ship'.⁷³

'Foreign' sailors, fresh from a long stretch at sea without female company, no doubt found the masculinist drinking culture of Sydney puzzling as well as alienating. The beer-dominated, homosocial pub was no place for exotic strangers. Many headed for the more congenial ambience of wine bars kept by fellow foreigners. They were

licensed to sell only colonial wine in an official attempt to promote the drinking of this relatively innocuous beverage over rum and other spirits. But their licenses were not subject to police supervision⁷⁴ and virtually all illegally sold hard liquor as well.⁷⁵ At the wine bars could be found something approaching the atmosphere of a continental bar. Palesi's wine cellar in King Street, described by Louis Stone in *Betty Wayside*, is a far cry from the typical hotel public bar. There, in a cosmopolitan atmosphere, hock and claret were served, girls drank with sailors at marble tables and snatches of conversations in French and German could be heard.⁷⁶

Wine bars were widely regarded as shady, the haunts of pickpockets and thieves.⁷⁷ Those managed by women, 'creatures of paint and ghastly smiles', were identified as covers for prostitution. It is likely that some were. Others offered the blandishments of friendly female staff who were not quite prostitutes. The 'Dago wine-shop back of Paddy's' frequented by Benno, Dyson's larrikin hero, for example, had 'a room at the back where the barmaids'll sit on yer knee when you've stood 'em three drinks outter the stained water bottle'.⁷⁸ Prostitutes and 'charity girls'⁷⁹ also frequented the wine bars and must have constituted an important attraction for the lonely sailors and other men who patronized them.

Drinking among young people was sharply on the increase, or at least that was the opinion expressed by police officers and others who came into contact with lower-class youth. One officer claimed that drunken young people were common in Sydney whereas thirty years before this had been entirely unknown.⁸⁰ In the 1880s a problematic conception of youth began to coalesce around the larrikins. Indeed the larrikin has been constructed as the colony's first youth 'folk devil', a middle-class projection of all the evils of working-class life.⁸¹ Whether drinking among youth was actually on the increase and whether those identified as larrikins drank more than other groups is uncertain. They were

conspicuous, and whatever they did was liable to be noticed. What can be said is that drinking played a central role in the incipient male youth culture of the late nineteenth century. As one of their number characterised it, the larrikin passions were 'drinkin', darncin' and kickin' the tripes out of coppers'. A notable fictional larrikin, CJ Dennis' Ginger Mick, spent his working hours as a hawker of rabbits and his leisure time 'gittin' on the shick'.⁸² Another youthful larrikin, Benno, from Spats' factory, did not care for beer, but felt obliged nonetheless, for the sake of solidarity, to maintain the pretence of 'an undying devotion to "pints" and "pots"' which was 'one of the most cherished affectations of his class'.⁸³

Drinking promoted camaraderie and fuelled high spirits which often led to boisterous and offensive if not criminal conduct. It triggered fighting and loutish street behaviour. It incited larrikins 'to assault Chinamen and other harmless people'.⁸⁴ As one police officer put it: 'These young people do not usually get helplessly drunk—they get fighting, noisy drunk, though not in a state to be arrested'.⁸⁵

As young, single men, on the lookout for sex, larrikins would not always have found the homosocial atmosphere of the pub as inviting as their fathers did. The fact that dancing, the larrikin's passion, was not permitted in pubs without a special license, was another of their drawbacks.⁸⁶ As a consequence it seems that the locus of larrikin drinking may have been displaced to other spaces such as the zones surrounding dancing saloons and excursion grounds, key sites in lower-class youth culture. The Sunday excursion to Clontarf, Chowder Bay or another of the harbourside picnic spots, on which they converged with their donahs *en masse*, was something of a larrikin institution. To ensure that the outings were 'well lubricated by drink' barrels of beer were carried down to Circular Quay and loaded on to the excursion ferries.⁸⁷ Larrikin culture will be discussed more fully in chapters eight and nine.

As well as being typified themselves as intemperate, larrikins were seen as the degenerate product of familial drinking. The worst of them, it was claimed, were 'recruited from among the children of drunken parents'.⁸⁸ The corrupting effects on children of drinking in the home was an issue canvassed by a number of witnesses before the Inquiry. Early familiarity with public houses as fetchers and carriers was specifically censored. Bottled beer was considered 'a luxury for aristocrats', the deposit required on the bottles making it too expensive for everyday consumption. A cheaper option was to fetch home draught beer from a nearby public house, a task often entrusted to children. As one witness to the Inquiry attested, 'it is a common thing to see children of tender years trotting in all directions with jugs'.⁸⁹ The job may not always have been a welcome one. The pub was a masculine domain, likely to be intimidating for children. Entering the beery, smoke-filled atmosphere crowded with men, noisy and often drunk, and being subjected to their chaffs or curses, was undoubtedly an ordeal for some of them. And the consequences at home if a jug was spilt were no doubt unpleasant. Bill, the Sentimental Bloke, recalled the socially challenging nature of fetching:

I never been so shy,
Not since I was a tiny little cub,
An' run the rabbit to the corner pub-
Wot time the Summer days wus dry an' 'ot-
Fer me ole pot.⁹⁰

Such experiences initiated children into the world of pubs which they would ever after find familiar, if not in all cases agreeable. One young woman who was accustomed to fetch for her parents, both of whom spent 'a very considerable portion of any money earned at the corner pub', later came to earn her living as a barmaid. Her early experiences no doubt inured her to a work environment which she might otherwise have found alarming and alienating.⁹¹

Some children were introduced directly to liquor at an early age. A rag soaked in brandy was commonly used as a pacifier for babies and many patent soothers had a high alcohol content. In some households children, even at a very young age, were given a glass of beer or sometimes something stronger on festive occasions. Other drugs were also liberally administered in patent nostrums such as Mrs Winslow's Soothing Syrup, a morphine-based preparation which produced infantile addiction. Until the 1890s Sydney sweet shops sold children chlorodyne lozenges laced with morphine.⁹²

The age at which liquor could be consumed legally was sixteen. This created social anomalies when many boys assumed the responsibilities of manhood much earlier. By the 1880s a significant youth labour market existed and increasing numbers of children, mostly boys, worked at casual jobs such as selling newspapers from as young as seven or eight. Some went into full-time factory work from the age of twelve.⁹³ As wage earners, such boys may well have felt justified in laying claim to the independence and privileges of working men which included drinking, smoking and gambling. Liquor was relatively easy to come by for desirous underage youths. Disreputable landlords, it was claimed, were quite willing to flout the law in this regard. Enforcing it was difficult when a young person's appearance was all a publican had to go on. And there was little incentive to be scrupulous when it meant turning away paying customers. Though the Inquiry generated some discussion on whether the drinking age should be raised to eighteen the issue did not arouse the level of concern triggered by, for example, Sunday drinking.

Court and prison records, as well as case histories from mental hospitals, provide ample evidence of the significant proportion of lower-class drinkers who became habituated to liquor. The large number of 'inebriates' in Sydney, which was estimated to be not less

than 5,000, caused widespread consternation.⁹⁴ By 'inebriates' was meant 'persons who, having three or more convictions for drunkenness during any one year recorded against them, commit the offence of drunkenness; also persons who are in private habitual "soakers" or "tipplers" to a degree which makes them the helpless victims of drink'. Some habituated drinkers became totally de-socialised and ended up living in dereliction. They included people with mental conditions, which went largely untreated, who no doubt often drank to repress frightening or dismaying symptoms. Shadowy figures, they haunted the parks and back alleys and other obscure interstices of the city. Their lifestyle was described by one observer thus: 'They lie down in the park all day and they prowl about at night. How they get their food and lodging I do not know'.⁹⁵ The daily lives of such people are shrouded even more deeply in darkness for the historian than those of the broader lower classes. Luc Sante characterizes them as inhabiting the outermost edges of society:

[I]nvisibility was a way of life... [They] were ignored when they needed to be seen and noticeable only to their own cost, only when they were needed for blame, for reform, for institutionalisation. Thus, they developed maps ... of the city that shed recognizable features and wrapped around hiding places and clandestine access to the necessities.⁹⁶

One group on which the Inquiry is silent is Aborigines. They were excluded from the official statistics of the colony and indeed had virtually disappeared from the city itself. They had long since been dispossessed of their ancestral lands and by the 1880s public pressure had prompted the removal of small groups who had camped at the government boatshed at Circular Quay and in other parts of the city. Most were transported to the settlement of La Perouse on the fringe of the city.⁹⁷ Liquor, along with western diseases and general neglect had taken such a devastating toll among them that they were widely held to be 'a dying race'.

Since 1838 selling or supplying liquor to Aborigines had been prohibited, a ban which remained in force until 1963.⁹⁸ However the law in this regard was too easily circumvented according to the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Only 'full-blood' Aborigines were covered and they could enlist the help of their 'half-bred' friends and family to buy liquor on their behalf.⁹⁹ Moreover, the La Perouse settlement, though it was off limits to whites, was regularly visited by larrikins and other disreputable men who took liquor with them. (See chapter nine for more on this). The WCTU mounted a counter offensive by making their own visits and distributing temperance literature.¹⁰⁰

There was, all agreed, no easy way for those habituated to break the drinking habit. Some men and women simply made a decision and swore off liquor, often influenced by bad experiences with a drunken family member, usually a father.¹⁰¹ Others found religion.¹⁰² Although the tactics of the temperance movement were changing from trying to win individual drinkers over to voluntary abstinence to pressing for public reform through the legislature moral suasion had not entirely had its day. Temperance and church meetings were still winning converts from among habitual drinkers.¹⁰³ This was the evangelical doctrine of salvation through individual redemption put into practice. The outward sign of reform was the signing of the pledge, a written undertaking, on an appropriately decorated testimonial 'to abstain from all Intoxicating liquors as beverages, and to encourage others to do the same'.

City mission work among sailors, a group perceived to be particularly susceptible to the lure of drink, provided another outlet for evangelical zeal. In a two-pronged attack almost mediaeval in its allegorical portent they were targetted on the one hand by prostitutes and hotel touts, who lay in wait for them at the Man o' War steps, and on the other by religious and temperance advocates. The Reverend Bradley from the

Bethel Seamen's Mission was in the habit of boarding merchant ships berthed at the wharves to waylay sailors in a pre-emptive strike before they disembarked. He staged a regular Wednesday night concert at the Mission which provided an evening's diversion for lonely sailors, though perhaps not of the liveliest type. To round off the proceedings members of the audience were called upon to step forward and take abstinence pledges, and many apparently did so. The Reverend Bradley conjectured sadly, however, 'I think that many break them'.¹⁰⁴ Such lapses were viewed as symptomatic of the inconstancy and weakness of will of the lower class but manipulative intent was more likely. One man reported taking the pledge ten times and declared he would do so again in order to 'get a bob or two out of any old society'.¹⁰⁵ But the gesture may not always have been totally cynical. The sailors possibly regarded it as a contribution to the theatrical proceedings or even merely as a well-mannered expression of gratitude for the entertainment provided. In any event they had nothing tangible to lose in making a gesture that would clearly oblige their hosts.

Sydney's drinking culture was determined in its broad lineaments by the licensing laws which changed according to the political pressure of various ideological hues brought to bear on the legislature. Although the setting up of the Intoxicating Drink Inquiry was in itself a victory for temperance advocates it did not result in sweeping legislative reforms. Changes to the *Liquor Act* were made in 1898 requiring all hotels to provide accommodation, fixing trading hours from 6am to 11pm six days a week, and prohibiting music and dancing. More significant changes were effected by the 1905 *Liquor Amendment Act*. The most important of these was the introduction of local option which, within three years, reduced the number of public houses in inner-Sydney from 745 to 694.¹⁰⁶ The Act also made it easier for police to prosecute Sunday trading. The sly grog trade was already well established in 1905: 'How many "sly grog shops" are now being run within a radius of

a quarter of a mile from the GPO?' asked the *Dead Bird* in 1903.¹⁰⁷ But thereafter the trade burgeoned, becoming a Sydney institution, and fundamentally changing the character of inner-city drinking. Sly grog shops depended largely on local patronage and were operated and patronized mainly by lower-class people who did not balk at flouting the law if necessary to pursue their chosen diversions. The trade spawned a criminal sub-culture in Sydney which became well-established in the 1920s and reached the peak of its power in the 1930s.¹⁰⁸ Beresford also suggests that at this time the habit of metho-drinking may have been adopted by chronic inebriates as a result of the crack down on Sunday trading.¹⁰⁹ But factors of greater consequence are more likely to have been its cheapness and potency (it was 65 per cent proof and sold at chemist shops for only 6d a pint).

In the cultural sphere, new forms of subjectivity associated with modernity and played out in the city began to be felt after the First World War. The centrality of the individual, expressed through a new emphasis on self-expression, enjoyment, consumption and glamour, set the mood of the post-war age. As one writer saw it, 'Moral righteousness went out of style. A standard of no restraints... came into vogue'.¹¹⁰ These changes were not uniformly influential across the social spectrum. In retrospect, however, it can be seen that they did have the effect of blurring differences in drinking patterns between the social classes. This was part of a process which saw drinking as a cultural practice totally re-cast. That is not to say that the temperance movement retreated to the wings. It continued to nip at the heels of the drinking populace until 1928 when it suffered a massive defeat in the referendum on prohibition from which it never recovered.

¹ *The Licensed Victualler and NSW Sportsman*, 21/9/89, p3.

² *Truth* 24/5/03 p5.

³ See Cyril Pearl's *Wild Men of Sydney*, London, Universal, 1970, for an insight into hard drinking among the disreputable powerful.

⁴ *Truth* 24/5/03, p.5.

⁵ Quoted in Dunstan, Keith, *Wowsers*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1968, p37.

⁶ Beresford, Quentin, *Drinkers and the Anti-Drink Movement in Sydney 1870-1930*, Ph.D. thesis, ANU, 1984, p163.

⁷ Dunstan, p62.

⁸ *Illustrated Sydney News* 15/6/87, p2.

⁹ McCoy, Alfred W, *Drug Traffic: Narcotics and Organised Crime in Australia*, Sydney, Harper and Row, 1980, p43.

¹⁰ *Australian Star* 12/7/05, p1.

¹¹ Walker, Robin, *Under Fire: a History of Tobacco Smoking in Australia*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1984, p9.

¹² Quoted in Symons, Michael, *One Continuous Picnic: a History of Eating in Australia*, Adelaide, Duck Press, 1982, p32.

¹³ *Illustrated Sydney News* 2/5/74, p4.

¹⁴ Dingle, Anthony, "'The Truly Magnificent Thirst': an Historical Survey of Australian Drinking Habits", *Australian Historical Studies*, 19:75 (1980), p230.

¹⁵ Dingle, p231.

¹⁶ Lewis, Milton, *A Rum State: Alcohol and State Policy in Australia*, Canberra, AGPS, 1992, p10.

¹⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission 1886-87, *Minutes of Evidence*, 5 Oct 1887, Sydney, Government Printer, 1887, p81.

¹⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p110.

¹⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p78.

²⁰ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p51.

²¹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p82.

²² Phillips, Walter, "'Six o'clock swill": the Introduction of Early Closing of Hotel Bars in Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 19:75 (1980), p254.

²³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p146.

²⁴ Beresford, p100.

²⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p146.

²⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p104.

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- ²⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission 1886-87, *Report*, 5 Oct 1887, Sydney, Government Printer, 1887, p80.
- ²⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p102.
- ²⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p101.
- ³⁰ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p448.
- ³¹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p452.
- ³² NSW Police Department, *Report*, [Sydney, Government Printer, 1885], p2.
- ³³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p68.
- ³⁴ Dunstan, p99.
- ³⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p146.
- ³⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Report*, p80.
- ³⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Report*, p79.
- ³⁸ NSW Police Department, *Report*, 1894, p2.
- ³⁹ *Truth* 24/1/92, p3.
- ⁴⁰ *Australasian Text Book of Temperance*, Melbourne, Firth and M'Cutcheon, [nd], p5.
- ⁴¹ *Daily Telegraph* 15/7/90, p5.
- ⁴² NSW Police Department, *Report* 1888, p2.
- ⁴³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Report*, Map No.1.
- ⁴⁴ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Report*, Map No.3.
- ⁴⁵ See for example, Second Australasian Conference on Charity, *Proceedings*, 1891, Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne, Melbourne, Government Printer, [1892], p122.
- ⁴⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p159.
- ⁴⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p453.
- ⁴⁸ *Daily Telegraph* 7/10/01, p4.
- ⁴⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p441.
- ⁵⁰ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p152.
- ⁵¹ See Lake, Marilyn, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', *Australian Historical Studies* 22 (1986) 116-131.
- ⁵² See Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p28.

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- ⁵³ From 1882 betting was illegal in public houses, though gaming was not; it was however difficult to prove that money changed hands.
- ⁵⁴ See Frank Clune, *Saga of Sydney: the Birth, Growth and Maturity of the Mother City of Australia*, Sydney Angus & Robertson, 1961, p208; and LC Rodd, *A Gentle Shipwreck*, Melbourne, Nelson, 1975, p106.
- ⁵⁵ *Truth* 8/1/93, p7.
- ⁵⁶ Powell, KC, *Drinking and Alcohol in Colonial Australia 1788-1901 for the Eastern Colonies*, (National Campaign Against Drug Abuse Monograph series No. 3), Canberra, AGPS, 1988, p36.
- ⁵⁷ Stone, Louis, *Jonah*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1991, p167.
- ⁵⁸ Baker, Sidney J, *The Australian Language*, Melbourne, Sun Books, 1966, p230.
- ⁵⁹ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 6 1851-1890, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1969, p284.
- ⁶⁰ Baker, p230.
- ⁶¹ For example, Kathy Peiss (*Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986, p193) records that a New York survey carried out in the early twentieth century found that 51 per cent of working men drank liquor at noon and 14.6 per cent drank before work.
- ⁶² Powell, p30.
- ⁶³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p407.
- ⁶⁴ *The Life, Adventures and Confessions of a Sydney Barmaid*, [Anonymous], Sydney, Panza and Co, 1891, p12.
- ⁶⁵ Harrison, Brian, *Drink and the Victorians: the Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971, p39.
- ⁶⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p453.
- ⁶⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Report*, p83.
- ⁶⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p431.
- ⁶⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p454.
- ⁷⁰ Joseph Conrad stayed at the 'Ship and Mermaid' when he visited Sydney as a young sailor in 1878.
- ⁷¹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p450.
- ⁷² Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p449.
- ⁷³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p51.
- ⁷⁴ Lewis, p47.
- ⁷⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p50.

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- ⁷⁶ Stone, Louis, *Betty Wayside*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, [n.d.], p175.
- ⁷⁷ The low reputation of wine bars continued until after the Second World War. They sometimes admitted the patronage of Aborigines and elderly derelicts who were not welcome elsewhere.
- ⁷⁸ Dyson, Edward, *Benno and Some of the Push*, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Company, 1911, p82.
- ⁷⁹ Peiss's term.
- ⁸⁰ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p22.
- ⁸¹ A concept developed by sociologist Stanley Cohen and applied in an Australian context by Jon Stratton in *The Young Ones: Working-Class Culture, Consumption and the Category of Youth*, Perth, Black Swan Press, 1992.
- ⁸² Dennis, CJ, *The Moods of Ginger Mick*, Sydney Angus & Robertson, 1976, p15.
- ⁸³ Dyson, p127.
- ⁸⁴ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p83.
- ⁸⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p69.
- ⁸⁶ Powell, p36.
- ⁸⁷ Murray, James, *Larrikins: Nineteenth Century Outrage*, Melbourne, Lansdowne Press, 1973, p42.
- ⁸⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p44.
- ⁸⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p448.
- ⁹⁰ Dennis, CJ, *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1957, p22.
- ⁹¹ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p9.
- ⁹² McCoy, p63.
- ⁹³ O'Brien, Anne, *Poverty's Prison: the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1988, p181.
- ⁹⁴ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Report*, p77.
- ⁹⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p146.
- ⁹⁶ Sante, Luc, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York*, London, Granta, 1998, p303.
- ⁹⁷ Garton, Stephen, *Out of Luck: Poor Australians and Social Welfare 1788-1988*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1990, p37.
- ⁹⁸ Lewis, p160.

⁹⁹ Women's Christian Temperance Union of NSW, *Annual Report of the 21st Convention 1903*, Sydney, [no pub details], 1903, p56.

¹⁰⁰ WCTU *Annual Report 1903*, p63.

¹⁰¹ The case of William Lane springs to mind here.

¹⁰² See for example, Rodd, p66.

¹⁰³ Arthur Stace, 'Mr Eternity', was a notable later example.

¹⁰⁴ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p430.

¹⁰⁵ Yarrington, Reverend SD, *Darkest Sydney*, Sydney, [no pub details], 1914, p36.

¹⁰⁶ Beresford, p230.

¹⁰⁷ *The Dead Bird* 30/9/93.

¹⁰⁸ See Chris McConville ('From Criminal Class to Underworld' in G Davison, D Dunstan and C McConville eds, *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1985) for an account of changes in the social landscape of Australian cities between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which included the increasing organization of the underworld.

¹⁰⁹ Beresford, p219.

¹¹⁰ Burnham, John C, *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehaviour and Swearing in American History*, New York, New York University Press, 1993, p4.

Chapter 3

Women and the Drink Question

The drink question in late nineteenth-century Australia was formulated primarily around male drinking. In the terms of the dominant culture, women were simply presumed not to drink. This was of course, not so, although it was true that not nearly as many women drank as men and that they consumed only half the quantity of liquor.¹ The gendered nature of the discourse surrounding drink allowed female drunkenness to be typified as especially aberrant. The image of a drunken woman carried powerful taboos:

The drunken man upon the stage of a theatre usually excites merriment, but even the feigned drunkenness of a woman, in the same place, would be so revolting to an ordinary audience that playwrights rarely, or never, create such characters, and theatrical managers as seldom require them.²

Whereas anxiety about male drinking was generated by the spectacle of the abandonment of rationality and self-governance female drinking was associated with sexual profligacy. Drunken women were commonly assumed to be prostitutes. One clergyman, for example, claimed that all women gaoled for drunkenness were either prostitutes or sexually dissolute.³ The connection was made explicit: 'Excessive drinking encourages the social evil, and *vice versa*, and the two things are intimately associated with each other'.⁴

In the climate of alarm over the drink question in which the 1887 Inquiry into Intoxicating Drink was conducted it was claimed that female drinking was on the increase.⁵ Although it is difficult to gauge whether there was any empirical basis for this assertion evidence indicates that the representation of women among the inebriate class

in Sydney was significant. A magistrate reported committing one woman for drunkenness between 200 and 300 times.⁶ And certainly sensational press reports of drunken public displays by women were common. A *Truth* eyewitness account described a group of inebriated women drinking from a bottle in Darlinghurst's Green Park, one with a precarious hold on a baby and another unconscious on the ground.⁷

Women's access to pubs, the primary locus of male drinking, was marginal and problematic. Evidence given to the Inquiry indicates that women who wished to preserve their respectability did not patronize pubs. This is supported by Caddie, a barmaid writing about a period four decades later than the Inquiry, who claimed 'no woman who valued her reputation would have dared put her nose even into a ladies' parlour'.⁸ While such testimony may be overstated it is true that the pub was fraught with risk. It could be a dangerous environment for women who were 'fair game' unless protected by an escort. A few especially bold ones might venture into the public bar to fetch out a husband who had stayed too long but many more would have been unwilling to flout convention or too timid to brave the taunts and ridicule of the assembled drinkers. Even passing a pub could be hazardous. The area around them was potentially a dangerous space where women could be subjected to harassment by drunks and loafers.

It was, however, not uniformly the case that women did not frequent public houses.⁹ The middle class might label any woman who entered a pub as non-respectable but the attitude of lower-class communities was more flexible. Certainly the public bar was off limits for them. The so-called 'private bars', staffed by women, were also male domains, calculated to appeal exclusively to men. But the pub by this time was a spatially differentiated environment where women were specifically catered for. Separate bars, designated as parlours, existed where women could go to have a drink.

In one hotel where Caddie worked in the 1920s there were two such rooms, a ladies' parlour and a back parlour, 'specially fitted out with tables and chairs for those females who liked their drop'.¹⁰ The ladies' parlour was frequented by younger women who drank mostly beer and gin. The back parlour which had no windows, possibly designed to protect drinkers from the prying eyes of passers-by, was 'the special reserve of the older women who drank mainly wine and spirits, having reached the stage apparently, where nothing weaker could give them the necessary kick'. That older women of the lower class drank wine (that is, fortified wine) in pubs is borne out in Kylie Tennant's novel *Foveaux*, a portrayal of a Surry Hills community in the years before and after the First World War.¹¹ Rendered androgynous by virtue of their age such women were past the stage in life when protecting a reputation for sexual propriety was relevant or important. No longer responsible for children, they also avoided censure on the grounds of neglecting family duties. They were still open to being labeled rough, a charge which was sometimes justified. In the pub where Caddie worked occasional violence erupted among the women drinkers usually of the hair-pulling and scratching variety. But when a scrap broke out among the older women in the back parlour they 'favoured the broken glass or bottle as their weapon'.¹² There were gradations in roughness among inner-city pubs and others would not have been so volatile.

If women could be compromised by pubs it seemed that pubs could also be compromised by women. Prostitutes frequented the parlours for the access they afforded to a steady stream of men coming and going from the public bar. It was claimed, however, that 'publicans who study their own interests will not allow females to go to their bars, because it gives the house a bad name'.¹³ One such professional was *Foveaux's* Jessie Kerr who sat in the parlour 'under a straw hat overburdened with roses...warmly extending hospitality to a newly acquired and rather befuddled gentleman friend'.¹⁴ Ladies' parlours

were avoided by men unaccompanied by women. Whereas a lone woman was likely to be presumed a prostitute a lone man was assumed to be looking for a prostitute. The mythos of the Australian male, which incorporated a range of androcentric and masculinist cultural practices, was becoming established at this time and segregated drinking was one of its hallmarks. To enter the ladies' parlour was to be lured in to the world of women either ensnared by a prostitute, like Jessie's befuddled friend, or caught in a milieu of potentially emasculating ersatz domesticity, sitting around a table with women, just like in the kitchen at home.

Wine bars, some of which were run by 'foreigners', allowed mixed drinking and were frequented by a more cosmopolitan clientele than the pubs. Less heavily regulated than pubs, their custom expanded in the wake of the 1905 *Liquor Amendment Act* which tightened restrictions on hotels.¹⁵ But for women the stigma attached was comparable to that of pubs. When the fictional Neicie from *Foveaux* is invited by her friend from the factory to take 'a dose of paint at Jordie's' she refuses for fear of her husband's reaction—'Tommy'd lay me out cold if he even thought I went in there'.¹⁶ As we saw in chapter two, wine bars were popular with sailors on leave. They were also patronized by the bohemian fringe as well as a rakish crew of 'low heels, quandongs [and] ripperty men'.¹⁷ Such a mixed clientele caused respectable opinion to regard them as the haunts of thieves and other undesirables. An especially dim view was taken of those which 'instead of being run on decent lines, under male management', were operated by 'a questionable class of women' who were 'giving such places a bad name'.¹⁸ It was true that the wine bars attracted prostitutes. When the failed composer Walter Chippendale from Louis Stone's novel *Betty Wayside* goes to Palesi's to drown his sorrows he encounters a 'pretty, ladylike girl' whom he invites to drink with him.¹⁹ She, it transpires, is a prostitute and in a sequence which was expunged from the novel by a nervous publisher she and Walter live

together for a time. Fast girls like Neicie's factory friend, not quite prostitutes, but with modern views, careless of reputation and friendly towards men who might pay for drinks, also patronized them.

The loss of respectability consequent upon becoming habituated to liquor was total and irrevocable for a woman. The resulting stigma which attached to female drinking meant that it was often characterized by secrecy. It was widely acknowledged that the number of women who drank was underestimated due to the fact that 'a large number of female inebriates are concealed by their friends'.²⁰ The phenomenon of 'drawing room drunkenness' had been identified among middle-class women. The victims were genteel women who drank in private from bottles hidden in secret recesses in parlours and boudoirs masking the smell with peppermint or cloves. Where ordinary liquor could not be obtained they resorted to drinking substitutes like 'eau de cologne, lavender water, sal volatile [and] compound spirits of lavender'.²¹

The threat to respectability lay not so much in drinking per se, which could be managed skillfully and discreetly, but in being seen to drink. This was of prime importance to women who strove to preserve their reputations. The history of Ada, Jonah's wife in Stone's novel, highlights the furtive nature of women's drinking. Unable to cope with the pressures of upward social mobility she takes to liquor under the tutelage of her neighbour, Mrs Herring, an adept cupboard drinker. Ada begins with nips of brandy in the parlour of 'The Angel'. When Jonah smells liquor on her she 'stammered out a tale of a tea-room where she had been taken ill, and brandy had been brought in from the adjoining hotel'.²² From 'The Angel' she graduates to Paddy Boland's, 'a notorious drinking den for women in the Haymarket, where spirits were served to customers, disguised as light refreshments'. Eventually she comes to a bad end when she falls down the stairs, drunk, and kills herself.

Secret tipping was not confined to the suburbs although generally speaking the conditions of lower-class life made concealment somewhat harder. While children bearing home brimming jugs were highly visible a bottle of sherry could be carried away discreetly in a covered basket from the grocer. Licensed grocers who sold wine by the bottle were blamed by temperance advocates for allowing housewives to obtain liquor easily and without fear of exposure.²³ While inner-city neighbourhoods may have been relatively tolerant in regard to drinking they accommodated a heterogeneous collection of people which included a sprinkling of those who had 'come down in the world' and struggled to retain the shreds of their former gentility. Mrs Price from Surry Hills, recalled in his memoir by Lewis Rodd, was a once wealthy woman reduced to working as a laundress at Government House.²⁴ Such people clung to middle-class habits and exhibited distinct drinking practices, which set them a cut above their careless neighbours: 'Drunk they may be, but it is gin, and in the privacy of their own rooms'.²⁵

The problematising of drinking obscured the fact that in the lives of many women liquor played a useful role. Cecilia, in Lindsay's *The Cousin from Fiji* must have spoken for many when she said: 'why not admit it when you're fagged out a drink does you all the good in the world'.²⁶ But the notion of acceptable drinking was not one with which temperance reformers were comfortable and it was consequently largely absent from official discussion.

The temperance movement's hard-line teetotalism and the resulting social stigma which could attach to even moderate drinking produced a need for a rationale to justify the use of liquor. For women, as well as others for whom maintaining an appearance of respectability was important but who were reluctant to forswear drink, medical necessity could be invoked. Brewing and distilling companies were willing

conspirators in upholding a construction of liquor as medicine. Advertising copy commonly emphasised its therapeutic qualities: 'Doctors recommend Gilbey's Gin', and 'Atkin's Quinine Wine—Pure and Good' were favoured over 'Gilbey's Gin makes you drunk', or 'Atkin's Quinine Wine packs a punch' although the subtext was clear. Some advertising warned against the unknown dangers of patent medicines an alternative to liquor which avoided social stigma:

An Apothecary shop is made for the stomach by those who swallow with avidity, every prescription commended to their lips. The result is the system is not only irretrievably ruined but really efficacious remedies lose their virtue. If people would only exercise more judgement than credulity, and have less faith than circumspection about them, they would confide only in those measures that assert their own supremacy. They would take nothing into the system but what, like WOLFE'S SCHNAPPS, vindicates its value by its effects.²⁷

The manufacturers of patent medicines specifically targeted women in their advertising.²⁸ Many of their products were alcohol-based. The American nostrum *Pe-ru-na*, for example, obtainable over the counter from any pharmacy, had an alcohol content of 24 per cent, which was higher than that of fortified wines.²⁹ Advertising for these medicines signalled their product's alcohol content for the benefit of the secret tippler. Other preparations contained significant doses of narcotics and abuse was widespread. The most extreme instances involved Dr Collis Browne's Chlorodyne, which contained six grams of morphine, one drachm of chloroform, and six grams of cannabis extract. Cases of women who consumed a large bottle a day were not uncommon. Buried in the garden of one habituated woman were found 940 empty bottles.³⁰ Claims were made in the press that drinking chlorodyne mixed with gin was a growing vice among Sydney women.³¹ Nor can these be dismissed as yellow journalism. The Women's Christian Temperance Union also acknowledged the use of chlorodyne as a growing problem at their 1896 convention.³² Before 1914 when such

preparations came under legislative control their contents were not revealed to the public. Those who took them generally had no idea what it was they were taking.

Prescribed drugs such as morphine were also available as a discreet form of intoxication for those wealthy enough to avail themselves of regular consultations with doctors. In 1913 the NSW Pharmaceutical Society admitted that 'the use of hypodermic syringes and tablets...had grown to shocking proportions'.³³ A *Truth* expose entitled 'Morphia Slaves of Sydney' claimed that

[C]ertain doctors are in the habit of presenting their wealthy lady patrons with dainty syringes, enclosed in small morocco leather cases, accompanied with a prescription for the morphia pellets, [with]...practical instructions as to how the injection is to be performed.³⁴

A well-known pharmacist operating in Sydney in the 1920s claimed to have a number of customers who were addicted to morphine including 'an attractive young lady whose arms were pitted with hypodermic punctures' who 'ended up prostituting herself to earn sufficient money to buy the drug she craved'.³⁵

Lower-class women did not encounter the same sanctions against drinking from their own communities with which middle-class women contended. But they were a major focus of official concern. Representations in the press and official sources depicted lower-class women as particularly susceptible to liquor. The dangers were clear. It was perilous to the morals of the young and single and potentially disruptive to the home if married women got hold of it. Police reported receiving 'complaints from men of having found their wives drunk when they came home'.³⁶ When lower-class women drank it was often from a jug sitting around the kitchen table with friends. A clergyman who gave evidence to the Inquiry confirmed that 'many of the artisan class

drink with their neighbours at home'.³⁷ Home-based drinking was frowned upon by the reforming middle class who were fearful that inebriate housewives would result. Indeed, an argument advanced in favour of Sunday opening was that it would prevent quantities of liquor being taken into homes on Saturday which 'leads to intemperance and Sunday drinking, and also demoralises the wife and family'.³⁸

The drinking practices of lower-class married women were shaped by the patterns of everyday life. They had little free time and fewer opportunities for leisure than their husbands, their work continuing long after men's had ceased for the day. As well as the endless tasks associated with keeping house and caring for their own families many women took in one or more boarders to help make ends meet which added to their workload.³⁹ Their leisure was not sharply differentiated from their work. What little they had in the way of purposeful recreation tended to take place in the home rather than in the public realm and was intertwined with housework and day-to-day contacts with family members and neighbours. Married women generally had no spending money of their own although there was often some discretion regarding disposal of the housekeeping whether condoned by the breadwinner or not.⁴⁰ Nonetheless a jug of beer was cheap and taken in company would have been a welcome respite to the relentless round of domestic chores. Women who drank at home had to be careful. Lower-class people were accustomed to police, charity workers and clergymen 'investigating' them.⁴¹ If a family was thrown into poverty by reason of unemployment or the death, sickness or desertion of a breadwinner, they were likely to attract the attention of charitable institutions. Demands by such agencies that recipients of assistance be 'deserving' meant that liquor or evidence of drinking had to be hidden if charity workers or other members of officialdom came to the house.

The drinking practices of young, single women were different from those of their mothers and married sisters. The late 1880s was a time when more of them were taking jobs outside the home in shops, restaurants and, most commonly, factories. Factory employment, which brought numbers of young people of both sexes together, was regarded with suspicion by authorities because of fear that it would lead to a loosening of moral standards. Young people 'engaged in tobacco factories and places of that kind' were identified as the culprits in incidents of rowdy drinking behaviour.⁴² As wage-earners the patterns of time and labour of young working women were closer to men's than married women's. They had more time for leisure and were not constantly tied to the home. Many sought fun and company on the streets. This was a time when Victorian culture was being assailed by the complex forces of modernity which included, as part of a redefinition of gender relations, a shift from homosocial to heterosocial culture.⁴³ These changes were discernible in an increasing desire on the part of young women to engage in leisure activities in the company of men which revolved around heterosocial cultural sites.⁴⁴

Street-life was important (of which more in chapter nine). Young women were engaging in the sort of unruly street behaviour, including drinking, which was traditionally the preserve of boys. A police officer reported seeing 'within the last eight years... young women 17 or 18 years of age rolling about in Sydney the worse for liquor'.⁴⁵ Other important loci for heterosocial leisure were dancing saloons and harbourside picnic grounds. Dancing saloons, of which there were twenty-six in the Sydney Metropolitan district,⁴⁶ were branded as hotbeds of immorality and 'snares to the young'.⁴⁷ Mixed sex sociability was regarded with such suspicion that, in a deductive leap, they were labelled as a *cause* of sexual immorality. Police officers were generally united in considering them 'a source of great evil',⁴⁸ as 'nothing more nor less than preparatory schools of vice'.⁴⁹ The Inspector-General of Police declared that complaints 'are constantly made to me of the

disorderly, immoral and obscene behaviour of people frequenting such saloons'.⁵⁰ The saloons were actually important cultural sites for young people where they could indulge their love of dancing, demonstrate their skills and preen before their peers, tricked out in the latest finery.

Harbour picnics too were condemned as 'promiscuous gatherings' due to the drinking that occurred.⁵¹ Even temperance picnics, though presumably alcohol-free, came under fire. The variegated topography of Sydney offered erotic possibilities which engendered considerable uneasiness in moral watchdogs. As one commentator saw it:

Sydney and its surroundings contain many Arcadias, and the mingling of the sexes, and the opportunities afforded for seclusion thereat, tend to bring many girls to the downward path.⁵²

The combination of sex, liquor and a sequestered glade was a potent one and the use by predatory men of the disinhibiting effects of alcohol to obtain sexual advantage common knowledge. Girls as young as eleven and twelve, it was claimed, became drunk on liquor supplied by their male companions.⁵³ Once a girl had 'lost what she could never replace' the imagined consequences were the stuff of melodrama:

That night the girl knows that her Hymen is no longer intact...in a rage or in despair—perhaps both—she either commits suicide, or 'goes on the town'.⁵⁴

The impact of such emotional Victorian narratives diminished as modern values began to permeate the everyday lives of women and drink became associated with sophistication and fun rather than degradation and ruin.⁵⁵

Women and children as the objects of men's drinking generated a different set of narratives. Images of wretched and starving women and children, the innocent victims of drink, constituted a powerful stereotype pervasive throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. It

provided one of the key narratives of the temperance movement and was also exploited by popular cultural forms such as vaudeville and melodrama.

Bathos notwithstanding such narratives were grounded in truth. Many families were devastated by liquor. Domestic violence and material hardship were rife. Women who had suffered as a result of drink or had seen their mothers suffer often carried a lifelong abhorrence for it. Caddie's mother who had married a drunkard 'hated everything connected with the drink trade'.⁵⁶ Another woman who had borne the ill effects of male drunkenness over a lifetime flatly summed up: 'that's drink for you, drink's been the whole problem through our family'.⁵⁷

The extent of the misery and hardship caused by drink, both to the drinkers themselves and to those dependent on them, can be guessed at from the numerous small advertisements in the popular press for remedies which claimed to cure dipsomania. The following is typical:

GOLDEN SPECIFIC

The drink habit when acquired is positively a DISEASE pure and simple, and no longer a habit, loathsome, disgusting and ruinous. In these colonies thousands gratefully acknowledge the efficacy and success of this great Remedy. Can be used with or WITHOUT THE SUBJECT'S KNOWLEDGE. It is absolutely harmless, safe, sure and speedy. The 'Golden Specific' supplies the place of the accustomed liquor, and promptly causes its disuse. Hundreds without their knowledge are now made temperate men, and fancy they have quit drinking of their own free will....⁵⁸

None of these treatments were effective. Some were drastic. A man who took a dose of 'Dr Tyson's Vegetable Cure for Drunkenness', in which strychnine was an ingredient, died almost immediately.⁵⁹ Compulsive drinkers no doubt were moved frequently in remorseful moments of sobriety to dose themselves. But more often it was their wives or other family members who clutching at a last desperate hope

sent away for such nostrums, secretly (what pathos is in those words 'without the subject's knowledge') administered them in cups of tea and then watched anxiously for results. One critic of these patent cures illustrated how they could claim to work. The label instructed the drinker under no circumstances to take any intoxicating drink while taking the remedy. As long as he complied with this why of course he would be sober.

For some men, drinking was a compulsion with which the claims of home and family could not compete. For the women and children dependent on them life was hard. Men had discretion over their earnings and some felt entitled to spend them as they pleased. But money spent at the pub was often badly needed at home. Workers who repaired to their local on ceasing work at noon on Saturday sometimes did not emerge till Monday morning the worse for drink and considerably poorer.⁶⁰ Wives would plead with police to bring their husbands out of the pub but legally they did not have the power to do so.⁶¹ In families where the wife controlled the finances the level of security and wellbeing tended to be relatively high. A working man who came within the rubric of a 'good provider' would hand his pay packet over to his wife who would give him tobacco and beer money for the week and use the rest to run the household. These tended to be skilled workers who were also more likely to accept middle-class notions of domesticity and spend their leisure time with their families. These were among the hallmarks of respectability for lower-class households which served to set them apart from the feckless roughs.⁶²

Even moderate drinking could mean hardship for the wives and children of lower-class men in households where every penny counted and at a time when jobs were rarely secure. Despite the mythic construction of Australia as a 'workingman's paradise' for families living on the wages of an unskilled worker strict budgeting was necessary merely in order to achieve precarious survival let alone make ends

meet. A heavy-drinking breadwinner had a disastrous effect on domestic life. Rents in inner-Sydney close to the wharves and other places of employment were high and consumed a large slice of the wages of the poor.⁶³ Lower-class shopping practices were often not economical. In the absence of refrigeration food had to be purchased daily in small quantities.⁶⁴ Dependence on corner shops which would extend credit, but where prices were higher, was prevalent. Compounding the situation was the reluctance of some charitable organizations to assist the needy families of drunkards in the belief that this would encourage vice.⁶⁵

Despite the hardship drinking caused the belief that men, particularly working men, were entitled to their pint was widespread. It was one of the privileges of the breadwinner along with the lion's share of the meat at tea-time and immunity from domestic chores. When times were hard, such as during the economic depression of the early 1890s, the statistics that are available indicate that people drank less.⁶⁶ Some oral history informants confirm this.⁶⁷ Others, however, recall that men managed to drink no matter how hard times were: 'The men drank very heavy. I don't know where they got the money from in the Depression. But they used to drink, pubs everywhere in Port [Melbourne]!'. One woman recalled:

With the men drinking, they were bloody drunkards: if they didn't get it for nothing they bought it and the family went without. That's how it was. My father was always drunk.⁶⁸

Another strand of the debate surrounding women and liquor focussed on barmaids. Barmaids were unique to Britain and its white settler colonies New Zealand and Australia.⁶⁹ They were prohibited by law in virtually all of the United States and there was strong feeling from the temperance movement that Australia should follow suit. The discourse was polysemic and intricate though tightly circumscribed. It ignored, for

example, the powerful socio-economic drivers motivating women who undertook the work in favour of a narrowly moralistic debate focused on the inflammatory conjunction of sex and drink. In 1883 8000 women in NSW signed a petition to parliament seeking to ban the employment of women in licensed premises.⁷⁰ This was never achieved but the issue came in for a great deal of attention from the legislature over the next two decades.

The historical context in which the Inquiry considered the barmaid question was characterized by a desperate shortage of jobs for women who wanted to work. The main source of employment for single women was domestic service which the middle class regarded as the most suitable and respectable work for lower-class women. Not only did the existence of a large pool of servants align with their own class interests, the work also inculcated housewifely skills and kept potentially unmanageable girls under the constant surveillance of their employers in the private sphere of the home. But Australian girls displayed a decided distaste for the work. This was often noted by disapproving commentators. Twopeny, for example, remarked:

[U]nless some means can be found to reconcile colonial girls to service, I fear an evil is growing in our midst which is likely to be even more baneful in its effects upon the community than the corresponding tendency to 'larrikinism' amongst colonial youths.⁷¹

Evidence of the preoccupation of the middle class with 'the servant problem' was plentiful in letters columns and provided a rich fund of cartoons and satirical pieces in the press. Various solutions were proposed including the 'Darkest England' scheme advanced by the Salvation Army's General Booth which proposed bringing 5000 poor girls from England to work as servants in New South Wales.⁷²

Women showed a marked preference for work outside the home. Factory work in the 1880s was beginning to employ significant

numbers in Sydney. Other job opportunities, though not numerous, existed in restaurants and shops. The employment of growing numbers of young, single women outside the domestic sphere where they came into contact with men under conditions of relatively low surveillance caused rising anxiety among the middle class. The advantages of work in the public sphere from a lower-class women's point of view were perplexing to some like the observer who commented: 'It seems strange that girls should have a preference for hotels and factories instead of for domestic service'.⁷³ That the pay was better, the free time of employees their own and the work environment, which brought them into contact with other people of their own age and class, more convivial, were ignored.

In a climate where lower-class women were struggling not only to find suitable jobs, but to establish their right to paid work outside the home at all, hotel work presented a golden opportunity. Traditional female skills acquired and developed in the course of running a household were ideally suited to managing a hotel. But unless she was the widow of a publican a woman was not permitted to hold a liquor license. There were numerous ways and means however of outwitting the licensing laws. Some pubs, for example, carried the name of a dead publican over the front door long after his widow had re-married.⁷⁴ Despite restrictions women played a key role in the Australian hotel industry. In 1906 55 per cent of Melbourne's 644 pubs had female licensees.⁷⁵ There is no reason to believe that the situation in Sydney was markedly different. Frank Clune who was employed as a ten year-old 'lightning' messenger delivering race results to city hotels recalled women publicans such as 'Ma Watson' who ran 'The Paragon' near Circular Quay and Mrs Kelly who had a hotel on the corner of Bridge Street.⁷⁶ Women were more likely, at least in Clune's memory, to dispense soft drinks to working children.

Hotels were also a source of domestic jobs for housemaids, waitresses and the like, particularly the larger establishments which provided substantial accommodation. But positions behind the bar were more sought after despite the widely held view that the job was not respectable. When Caddie landed her first job in the 1920s she was uneasy about what her mother would have thought had she known that her daughter 'had come down to serving in a public bar'.⁷⁷ No doubt the social opprobrium was sufficient to deter some women but others were hard-headed enough to defy the preposterous demands made in the name of respectability. The great attraction of the job was the relatively high wages. In Melbourne in 1895 barmaids earned up to sixty-three pounds per year compared to fifty pounds for waitresses and thirty-five pounds for housemaids.⁷⁸

Another advantage of the job was the opportunities it offered for meeting eligible men. In the prosperous city hotels where most barmaids were employed the clientele was generally well-heeled.⁷⁹ The prospects in this regard, however, tended to be overstated. Marriage proposals were rare. And the type of husband most sought after, 'a rich old landowner, or a gold-miner with a payable claim', seldom came along. The real situation as described by one Sydney barmaid was not promising: 'the men we want won't marry us, and the men that would marry us we would not have'.⁸⁰ The glittering matches of fantasy did not eventuate, the best she knew of being 'one or two instances in which a girl hooked a junior bank clerk or so, but the position of neither party was much benefited thereby'. Most men were looking for a less permanent arrangement than marriage which was highly compromising to the woman involved. The Sydney barmaid quoted here did succeed in capturing a wealthy old gentleman but soon discovered that she had been trapped into a bigamous marriage.⁸¹

The smiling, wasp-waisted barmaid was one of the standard female types purveyed by popular culture. Cartoons emphasised her as the site of male desire. Music-hall songs extolled the qualities which made her attractive to men and aroused the suspicion of other women:

The Barmaid, the Barmaid, the idol of the Rose and Crown;
Since she's been there what chat and cheek, she's raised the trade a
hundred a week.
The saucy swells, the horsey swells, were never known to drink so;
For she's so gay, the men all say, awfully jolly girl, don't you think so?

The customers of the fair sex cry –
Forward bit of goods don't you think so?
See her golden hair my dear, I'll bet it's dye,
Painted little minx, don't you think so?⁸²

But there was a hierarchy within the profession,⁸³ and not all its members were young and attractive.⁸⁴ Anyone aspiring to the job needed to be physically robust to withstand the long hours on her feet. Only those who possessed in addition a pleasing appearance, a spritely manner and a quick intelligence, qualities which placed them above the average domestic servant, were in demand for up-market hotels. In order not to spoil men's fantasies of closer contact it was necessary to be single, or to pass oneself off as single, for as Caddie observed 'men, as a rule, have an objection to their "nectar" being served up to them by mothers of families'.⁸⁵

The work itself was demanding. Hours were long and it could be back-breakingly hard. There were physical hazards to contend with such as exploding bottles. In one alleged incident in a city hotel:

[A] vulgar young wench tried to pull a tight-fitting cork out of a soda-water bottle with her teeth, and ... the obstinate stopper having by this means been slightly moved, suddenly shot down her throat, killing her almost immediately!⁸⁶

The work was also insecure. The women were liable to be dismissed at short notice if the landlord decided he wanted a 'fresh face'⁸⁷ or if business took a downturn. The necessity of dressing well also made inroads into wages.⁸⁸

The conditions attendant on the intrinsic objectification of the barmaid as spectacle and commodity caused additional stress. As a Sydney barmaid recalled:

I...had to attend to every guzzler who could raise a threepenny piece, and at the same time assume a pleasant look which often belied my own inward feelings.⁸⁹

Peter Bailey identifies the Victorian barmaid as the embodiment of a phenomenon he labels parasexuality, sexuality that is 'deployed but contained, carefully channelled rather than fully discharged'.⁹⁰ It was manifested in the visual code of glamour which provided an 'inoculation' of a little sexuality to counter its dangerously subversive nature. Such commercial deployment of glamour was a product of the increasing commodification of women's sexuality in an incipient consumer culture. The barmaid's good looks and friendly manners, her approachability with its hints of perhaps closer contact, were the premium purchased by the customer along with his drink. As an object of the male gaze she had to endure the implicit disrespect this entailed. There were constant claims on her attention by voyeuristic and predatory or simply drunk and stupid men. The atmosphere was, more often than not, rough. According to Caddie:

[M]y father's idea that a man didn't swear in front of a woman didn't hold in public bars. Nor apparently did it matter what kind of jokes were told in front of a barmaid.⁹¹

She recalled that on occasions the customers 'repelled me, with their alcohol-laden breath, their meaningless profanity, their carelessness of their appearance'.⁹² But a certain level of professional detachment paid dividends:

I was learning how to be popular with the customers while keeping them at a distance. I was learning to smile when they lifted their glasses to each other with the familiar toast: 'Here's to our wives and sweethearts! May they never meet!' A smile was worth a tip.⁹³

In addition to the exigencies of the work barmaids had to contend with attacks on their livelihood from the temperance movement. Although the Women's Christian Temperance Union and other women's groups condemned the economic exploitation of barmaids their regressive solution was to abolish their jobs entirely, thus cutting off an important avenue of employment, rather than to press for improved conditions.⁹⁴ Women behind the bar were a bugbear for temperance advocates for three main reasons. Firstly in common with other inducements such as skittle alleys and board games they made drinking places more enticing and kept men away from their homes. This contradicted the temperance objective of 'rendering vice repulsive'. Secondly, the sexualisation of the barmaid conflicted with dominant notions about female virtue. The association of barmaids with sexual allure invested with additional danger by the presence of liquor emerges clearly in the temperance literature. Thirdly, they were themselves considered to be in danger of acquiring a taste for the drink they sold. Once habituated, it was said, their downward slide was 'swift and humiliating'.⁹⁵ Some, it was reported, ended up in Darlinghurst Gaol suffering from *delirium tremens*.⁹⁶

As a woman on display in a public place frequented by men the barmaid inhabited territory on the borderland of prostitution. Parallels, both overt and covert, were drawn between the two professions. A clergyman who worked with the Sailors' Mission claimed that barmaids

visited ships at anchor in the Quay or loitered around the Macquarie steps when the leave boats were expected touting for business for their establishments.⁹⁷ Barmaids who worked in the so-called private bars were typified as predatory gold-diggers. A temperance advocate who testified before the 1887 Inquiry, although he hastened to assure the Commissioners that he had no personal knowledge of such places, believed that respectable citizens were decoyed into private bars presided over by women and that

there were women there with whom arrangements might have been made; that the dresses were unbecoming; and that some of the girls sat on the men's knees, and threw their arms around their necks.⁹⁸

A police inspector recounted:

Only the other day a worthy citizen told me that a nephew of his and other young men had been ruined by their being robbed at these places, and by their expenditure on presents to these barmaids.⁹⁹

On the one hand moralists considered barmaids to be a dangerous enticement luring men to drink and perhaps worse. On the other they were themselves seen to be surrounded by sexual danger, a familiar nineteenth-century narrative applied to women outside the domestic sphere. One critic typified the dichotomy thus:

[T]he one place above all others in which [women] are most apt to injure their own best selves and often do a fatal amount of harm to others, is a public-house bar.¹⁰⁰

Anxiety about compromised female purity emerges clearly in the examination of witnesses by the Inquiry in questions such as 'Is it not a very dangerous business for a girl to be engaged in?',¹⁰¹ and 'You must know what a bad tendency it must have on a poor unfortunate girl who has to stand behind a bar and listen to the obscene language of a

drivelling drunkard?'.¹⁰² The work was 'degrading the womanhood of our colony' claimed a clergyman who argued against any women, even family members of the publican, being permitted to work in bars.¹⁰³ Appeals were made to the protective instincts of the (male) witnesses lending a tone of *faux* chivalry to the proceedings. One of the typically loaded stock questions was whether they would like their daughters to work as barmaids. Between representations of the barmaid as the endangered feminine and as a predatory seducer of unwary men an unspoken Hogarthian harlot's progress narrative intervenes. The fresh looks and pleasant manners a girl brings to the job degenerate in time in the corrupting atmosphere of the pub into gaudy dresses and forward behaviour.

Questions of morals and character are central to this discourse. Bar work, it was claimed, caused women 'to lose their womanly qualities and to degenerate'.¹⁰⁴ Some witnesses, however, resisting the tendentious questioning, defended the profession and persisted in the opinion that bar work need not be a dubious occupation. The allegation that in Victoria 'a large proportion of girls that went wrong were from public houses' was refuted by Police Inspector Lenthall. He knew most of the girls who worked King Street he told the Inquiry and very few were former barmaids.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore:

Very large numbers of highly respectable young women, who I know have led most blameless lives, are employed in this way, and they seem not only to keep themselves respectable but they win the respect of the people too. I have known several of them to marry very well indeed, and I do not think the calling of itself would lower any respectable young woman in the estimation of her friends.¹⁰⁶

Another witness believed, perhaps somewhat too hopefully, that respectable barmaids might have an edifying effect on the atmosphere of public houses by acting as a check on the coarse behaviour of

men.¹⁰⁷ Inspector Lenthall condemned the employment of very young barmaids, but went on to say that:

In places like the Royal Hotel, Metropolitan Hotel and Oxford Hotel, where several barmaids of tolerably mature age—from 24 up to 28—are kept, I do not think there is any cause to complain.¹⁰⁸

Inspector Lenthall was unusual in that he recognized the barmaid as a working woman with a difficult job: 'The girls get tolerably good wages, and they certainly have long hours and it is not all play'. But even the staunchest defenders of the profession acknowledged its attraction for women of loose morals. The problem of how to distinguish between respectable and non-respectable incumbents was a recurring issue. One suggestion involved increased surveillance through requiring barmaids to hold a certificate of good character issued by a police Inspector or another authority.¹⁰⁹

Despite the currency of powerful negative stereotypes the late nineteenth-century barmaid emerges as a relatively emancipated figure. Earning higher than average wages, negotiating the demanding environment of the bar and withstanding the adverse opinion of the respectable public it seems likely that the Sydney barmaid in common with her London counterpart described by Peter Bailey 'was not... an alienated whore, but an assertive and competent modernist'.¹¹⁰

The operation of so-called private bars, which were largely staffed and run by women, was another focus for a range of concerns about women in licensed premises. The purpose of private bars was 'to enable anyone who did not care to mingle with the common throng to obtain a drink with more privacy and under somewhat better conditions than the public bar afforded'.¹¹¹ There were ninety-four such bars in Sydney. They offered a potent mix—women and alcohol in a secluded setting—which represented the eroticisation of the drinking space and

incited widespread alarm. Exposes in the tabloid press condemned them as fronts for prostitution. The Inquiry considered that at least three-quarters of them 'ought to be suppressed as providing illicit incentives to drunkenness or because they are disreputably conducted'.

Typically a private bar was set up in a small room in a hotel run by a woman who paid rent to the landlord. The woman was passed off to authorities as a servant, an arrangement considered to be 'a fraudulent extension...of the publican's license'.¹¹² Often located upstairs the bars were out of the way of direct surveillance from the policeman on his beat. The rents were high—as much as five pounds per week.¹¹³ Liquor was obtained by the bottle from the landlord as required and sold at sixpence a glass. (These places were also known as 'sixpenny bars'.) This was double what was charged in an ordinary bar an indication that they 'are not frequented for the purposes of legitimate refreshment'. With good management and a little luck such a bar could be a profitable enterprise for a woman. But the risks and hazards were numerous. Robbery was a constant worry in an establishment with no male staff. One female proprietor, for example, was rendered unconscious with chloroform and robbed of her takings by two well-dressed customers.¹¹⁴

Another source of concern to moralists was their class of clientele. It was not the run-of-the-mill lower-class drinking man who patronized these special bars. That twice as much was charged for a drink as was normal put them out of the reach of most working men or at least did not represent good drinking value for money. Working men also ran the risk of being snubbed by the barmaids.¹¹⁵ Neither did the impoverished bohemian characters in Norman Lindsay's autobiographical novel patronize sixpenny bars 'unless someone else is paying for the drinks'.¹¹⁶ Who then frequented these 'dens of Bacchus and Venus'? As a witness explained to the Inquiry 'the

constituents of the upper bars are what we call our respectable young men'¹¹⁷ such as, perhaps, the 'young fellow, lah-di-dahing over the counter' observed by one police officer.¹¹⁸ The young coxcomb thus described was doubtless showing off, vying with his fellows for the barmaid's attention. Such evidence suggests that the private bars may have served as training grounds for young middle-class men who had few opportunities for testing their skills on girls of their own class or were too awkward to take advantage of them when they had.¹¹⁹ Such young men no doubt could be nuisances and were not always remunerative customers. The lady proprietor of one bar professed 'a profound contempt for that small salaried class known by the generic term of 'barbers' clerks'¹²⁰ preferring to encourage 'men to whom a five-pound note would be of little moment'.¹²¹

The private bars were morally dubious spaces widely believed to be a front for brothels or at least to function as houses of assignation. The *Telegraph* conducted an expose on these places in a series of articles in August 1892 claiming that their chief function was prostitution. Even the stridently anti-puritan *Truth* denounced them as dens of vice.¹²² They were more intimate and inviting than the public bars and ordinary parlours with sofas, tables and chairs and sometimes a piano.¹²³ Some were apparently decorated like brothels with luxurious fittings such as in one case 'mirrors, vases, flowers, pictures, statues of semi- and wholly nude females...an ottoman, and a magnificent spring couch, capacious enough to comfortably accommodate two'.¹²⁴

The chief attraction for the clientele was the women who worked there, generally 'of gay appearance and doubtful character',¹²⁵ who 'dressed for the purpose of enticing young fellows to drink'. A police officer recounted:

Last Saturday fortnight I saw, at a place where there is a sort of balcony over the street, a man and a woman come out of a bar and behave in a most disgraceful manner.¹²⁶

Other officers gave similar descriptions. But despite dark references to dubious goings-on and to the 'gay appearance' and 'doubtful character' of the barmaids, none of the officers questioned at the Inquiry were aware that they were known as prostitutes. A description recorded by another observer, however, albeit writing with a sensational bent, leaves a different impression. A woman at work in the bar he visited seemed to have been employed less as a barmaid than a 'hostess':

She has not even the protection of the bar to insure her against the demonstrative attentions of... customers. Her role is truly a difficult one to successfully play. She must have a pleasant word and smile for all, and yet be careful her favours fall not too plentifully upon any individual customer.¹²⁷

Despite seeming to take a dim view of barmaids the Inquiry stopped short of recommending that they be banned. Spurred on by this setback to further efforts the temperance movement presented another anti-barmaid petition to Parliament in 1888.¹²⁸ Subsequently a bill was introduced in 1890 which sought to prohibit private bars on upper floors and to 'preserve the purity of our female population' by abolishing all female labour in hotels except the licensee's wife, sister or daughter. But the bill lapsed and the political will to revive it seems to have been absent. Another attempt in 1902 to amend the licensing legislation failed. Finally in 1905 the *Liquor Amendment Act*, though it fell short of the temperance movement's desires, made it an offence for a licensee to allow any female under twenty-one years 'other than his wife and daughter' to serve liquor.¹²⁹ The Act also virtually abolished the private bar trade forcing prostitution out to the wine bars.¹³⁰ The suppression of private bars closed one door for women but the burgeoning sly grog trade opened another. Women were active

in the trade, often operating from unobtrusive neighbourhood premises and catering primarily for local demand.¹³¹ Kate Leigh, a famous figure from the Sydney criminal underworld, dominated the trade in the inner-city during the 1920s and 1930s.

The historical circumstances I have described were affected by the First World War and by changing perceptions and expectations regarding the role of women. The period under discussion represents a sort of interregnum when Victorian values and ideologies, though still a powerful force in the regulation of social relations, were being challenged by new notions and different priorities. By the end of the nineteenth century drinking practices were being affected by broader changes in the patterns of social life which saw the spread and entrenchment of heterosociality in the sphere of leisure and the consequent development of new gendered subjectivities. After the War these changes accelerated and by the 1920s were being felt by most women in at least some aspects of their lives, though not uniformly across the social spectrum.

Although drinking was not of course in itself a modern activity, Jill Julius Matthews has shown that certain practices were associated with its modernization as women re-defined themselves and sought experiences outside traditional gender roles. Thus for women public drinking in the company of men came to be seen as a sophisticated pastime which signaled freedom and self-actualisation rather than, as formerly, loss of status and a ruined reputation.¹³² It would be wrong, however, to over-emphasise the emancipatory aspects of women's changing drinking practices. One of the realities behind their emergence into the world of public drinking was increased opportunities for sexual coercion on the part of men. Continuities are evident from the 1960s in the popularity of such sweet alcoholic beverages as Porphyry Pearl as 'leg openers' to the current practice of spiking young women's drinks with soporifics.

The debate surrounding women's work in licensed premises was affected by shifts in the demographics of employment. The war had seen significant numbers of women move into the workforce to replace the men who joined up and this ultimately brought about permanent changes in work patterns. However residual Victorian notions of the public and private spheres and women's traditional role persisted alongside modern developments and barmaids continued to be a live political issue well into the twentieth century. They were, for instance, banned in South Australia until 1967.¹³³

¹ Powell, KC, *Drinking and Alcohol in Colonial Australia 1788-1901 for the Eastern Colonies*, (National Campaign Against Drug Abuse Monograph Series no. 3), Canberra AGPS, 1988, p26.

² *Illustrated Sydney News* 6/5/93, p4.

³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission 1886-87, *Minutes of Evidence*, 5 Oct 1887, Sydney, Government Printer, 1887, p154.

⁴ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p238.

⁵ See for example Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p154, and K Mitchell, *Effects of Alcohol upon Women*, London, National Temperance Publication Depot, 1884, p3.

⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p48.

⁷ *Truth* 16/11/90, p7.

⁸ *Caddie: a Sydney Barmaid, An Autobiography Written by Herself*, Melbourne, Sun Books, 1953, p1.

⁹ See for example Robin Walker, 'Aspects of Working-Class Life in Industrial Sydney in 1913', *Labour History*, 58 (May 1990), p45; and Kylie Tennant, *Foveaux*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1939, p220.

¹⁰ *Caddie*, p4.

¹¹ Tennant, p220.

¹² *Caddie*, p5.

¹³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p69.

¹⁴ Tennant, p43.

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- ¹⁵ Beresford, Quentin, *Drinkers and the Anti-Drink Movement in Sydney 1870-1930*, PhD thesis, ANU, 1984, p227.
- ¹⁶ Tennant, p293.
- ¹⁷ Tennant, p296.
- ¹⁸ *Australian Star* 23/3/08, p1.
- ¹⁹ Stone, Louis, *Betty Wayside*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, [n.d], p229.
- ²⁰ American Association for the Study and Cure of Inebriety, *The Disease of Inebriety from Alcohol, Opium and other Narcotic Drugs*, NY, Treat, 1893, p61.
- ²¹ *Vice and its Victims in Sydney, the Cause and Cure* by a Pupil of the late Professor John Woolley, Principal of Sydney University. Sydney, Edwin H. Becke, 1873, p15.
- ²² Stone, Louis, *Jonah*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1991, p165.
- ²³ Mitchell, p3.
- ²⁴ Rodd, LC, *A Gentle Shipwreck*, Melbourne, Nelson, 1975, p258.
- ²⁵ Rodd, p259.
- ²⁶ Lindsay, Norman, *The Cousin from Fiji*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1945, p57.
- ²⁷ *The Lorgnette* 5/10/1889.
- ²⁸ McCoy, Alfred W, *Drug Traffic: Narcotics and Organised Crime in Australia*, Sydney, Harper and Row, 1980, p43.
- ²⁹ McCoy, p46.
- ³⁰ McCoy, p65.
- ³¹ *Australian Star* 18/7/05, p1.
- ³² Women's Christian Temperance Union, *Annual Report of the 14th Convention*, Bathurst, 'National Advocate', 1896, p38.
- ³³ McCoy, p66.
- ³⁴ *Truth* 28/2/92, p2.
- ³⁵ Samuels, Eddie, *If the Cap Fits, an Autobiography*, Sydney, Modern Literature Co, 1972, p31.
- ³⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p68.
- ³⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p155.
- ³⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p104.
- ³⁹ See for example Rodd, Tennant and Stone's *Jonah*.

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- ⁴⁰ For example, Mrs Partridge in Stone's *Jonah* finagles the housekeeping to buy herself finery and cookshop tidbits, p24.
- ⁴¹ Tennant, p363.
- ⁴² Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p22.
- ⁴³ See Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986, for an account of the American experience.
- ⁴⁴ Jill Julius Matthews describes changes in subjectivity associated with modernity discernible after World War One which saw more women drinking outside the home in the company of men; 'Normalising Modernity', *UTS Review*, 6:1 (May 2000), p4-10.
- ⁴⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p18.
- ⁴⁶ NSW Police Department, *Report*, 1885, [Sydney, NSW Government Printer], p2.
- ⁴⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p29.
- ⁴⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p18.
- ⁴⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p81.
- ⁵⁰ NSW Police *Report* 1885, p2.
- ⁵¹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p18.
- ⁵² [Grey, Harold] *The Moocher, Scenes in Sydney by Day and Night*, no 1, Parramatta, 1887, p4.
- ⁵³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p81.
- ⁵⁴ Grey, p4.
- ⁵⁵ See Matthews.
- ⁵⁶ *Caddie*, p3.
- ⁵⁷ Wilson, Rhonda ed, *Good Talk: the Extraordinary Lives of Ten Extraordinary Australian Women*, Melbourne, McPhee/Penguin, 1984, p78.
- ⁵⁸ *Truth* 24/7/92, p4.
- ⁵⁹ McCoy, p66.
- ⁶⁰ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p44.
- ⁶¹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p45.
- ⁶² See for example Walker, p37.
- ⁶³ Walker, p40.
- ⁶⁴ Walker, p42.

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- ⁶⁵ Second Australasian Conference on Charity, *Proceedings*, Melbourne, 17th to 21st November 1891, Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne, Melbourne, Government Printer, [1892], p139.
- ⁶⁶ Sturma, Michael, *Vice in a Vicious Society: Crime and Convicts in Mid-Nineteenth Century NSW*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1983, p147; Milton Lewis, *A Rum State: Alcohol and State Policy in Australia*, Canberra, AGPS, 1992, p9.
- ⁶⁷ *Caddie* p164; Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour: an Oral Record of the 1930s Depression in Australia*, Melbourne, Scribe, 1978, p420.
- ⁶⁸ Wilson, p78.
- ⁶⁹ Bailey, Peter, 'The Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype', in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p155.
- ⁷⁰ Kirkby, Diane, *Barmaids: a History of Women's Work in Pubs*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p99.
- ⁷¹ Twopeny, REN, *Town Life in Australia* (Facsimile edition 1883), Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1973, p57.
- ⁷² Second Australasian Conference on Charity *Proceedings*, p68.
- ⁷³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence*, p153.
- ⁷⁴ Freeland, JM, *The Australian Pub*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1966, p143.
- ⁷⁵ Wright, Clare, 'Of Public Houses and Private Lives: Female Hotelkeepers as Domestic Entrepreneurs', *Australian Historical Studies*, 116, April 2001, p60.
- ⁷⁶ Clune, Frank, *Saga of Sydney: the Birth, Growth and Maturity of the Mother City of Australia*, Sydney Angus & Robertson, 1961, p208.
- ⁷⁷ *Caddie*, p3.
- ⁷⁸ Kirkby, p51.
- ⁷⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p69.
- ⁸⁰ *The Life, Adventures and Confessions of a Sydney Barmaid*, Sydney, Panza, 1891, p16.
- ⁸¹ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p32.
- ⁸² Slater, Joe, *Imperial Songster*, Sydney, Joe Slater, [n.d], p35.
- ⁸³ *Caddie*, p102.
- ⁸⁴ See Kirkby.
- ⁸⁵ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p48.
- ⁸⁶ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p55.
- ⁸⁷ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p19.

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- ⁸⁸ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p44.
- ⁸⁹ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p14.
- ⁹⁰ Bailey, p151.
- ⁹¹ *Caddie*, p2.
- ⁹² *Caddie*, p5.
- ⁹³ *Caddie*, p80.
- ⁹⁴ See Kirkby for an account of the industrial conditions of barmaids.
- ⁹⁵ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p45.
- ⁹⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p152.
- ⁹⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p119.
- ⁹⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p113.
- ⁹⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p22.
- ¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Kirkby, p7.
- ¹⁰¹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p79.
- ¹⁰² Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p110.
- ¹⁰³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p118.
- ¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Kirkby, p7.
- ¹⁰⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p81.
- ¹⁰⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p79.
- ¹⁰⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p118.
- ¹⁰⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p80.
- ¹⁰⁹ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p82.
- ¹¹⁰ Bailey, p171.
- ¹¹¹ *Daily Telegraph* 25/8/92.
- ¹¹² Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p84.
- ¹¹³ *Daily Telegraph* 25/8/92.
- ¹¹⁴ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p26.
- ¹¹⁵ *Caddie*, p108.

¹¹⁶ Lindsay, Norman, *Rooms and Houses, an Autobiographical Novel*, Sydney, Ure Smith, 1968, p36.

¹¹⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p39.

¹¹⁸ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p19.

¹²⁰ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p13.

¹²¹ In support of the notion that barmaids loomed large in the sexual fantasies of young men Keith Dunstan records (*Wowsers*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1968, p83) that in the late 1890s Herbert Hoover, future US President, while working as a mining engineer in Kalgoorlie, wrote a passionate ode to a barmaid.

¹²² *Truth* 9/6/01.

¹²³ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p85.

¹²⁴ *Life of a Sydney Barmaid*, p13.

¹²⁵ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p85.

¹²⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry *Minutes of Evidence* p19.

¹²⁷ [Grey, Harold] *The Pilgrim, a Sensational Weekly Pamphlet*, No. 3, Sydney, Gorman and Riordan, 1877, p29.

¹²⁸ Kirkby, p99.

¹²⁹ Kirkby, p126.

¹³⁰ Beresford, p227.

¹³¹ Beresford, p232.

¹³² Matthews, p6.

¹³³ Dunstan, p86.

Part 2

**THE VAUDEVILLE
THEATRE**

Chapter 4

'Colour, Music, Light and Rhythm': Vaudeville in Sydney

In Sydney, as in all cities of the western world, what was loosely described as 'vaudeville'¹ emerged as the most popular form of theatrical entertainment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² Though its appeal was enormous in its heyday its attractions were specific to its time. By the second half of the twentieth century the style had so far fallen from public favour that dedicated vaudeville venues had virtually ceased to exist.³ It is difficult from a historical distance of a century to grasp the once potent appeal of this now defunct public entertainment form. And yet to ignore it is to miss unique cross-currents which were shaping the cultural profile of the nation. In an age which had few widely accessible commercial entertainments vaudeville houses played an important role in the lives of lower-class people. Vaudeville theatre as a shifting complex of stagecraft is rich in clues as to what mattered to its lower-class patrons, what drew them out of their homes and induced them to part with their hard-earned sixpences and what they judged to be amusing, pleasurable, stirring, or astonishing. This section analyses the experiential and symbolic attractions of vaudeville and the structures of meaning and feeling which its discourses and practices reveal. This chapter situates vaudeville in the currents of scholarly literature and explores its historical status as a popular form and the place it held in the wider landscape of Australian social and cultural life.

Vaudeville has attracted comparatively little attention from historians and only somewhat more from scholars in other disciplines. Up until the 1980s this was attributable to the fact that lowbrow cultural forms were generally not treated as serious objects of study. When the scholarly gaze was finally turned towards the popular vaudeville still

did not receive the level of attention that its enormous contemporary appeal might have been expected to warrant. A number of its inherent attributes have been responsible for this. Firstly, its international character and the apparent absence of 'Australian' content meant that it lacked appeal for those scholars whose work was concerned with exploring national identity. As Richard Waterhouse, the only Australian historian to give serious and sustained attention to the form, has observed, historians have assumed that its predominantly imported content was popular with Australian audiences for the same reasons that it was popular with British or American audiences and hence would offer no insights.⁴

Secondly, as an urban, commercial form vaudeville fell outside the ambit of musicologists and others who sought an authentic Australian folk culture in rural forms such as the bush ballad. This was despite the dubious nature of the notion of authenticity on which such research was based.⁵ One Australian music historian for example claims that 'folk movements are the work of middle-class intellectuals who have clear ideas about what they are looking for in popular, 'lower-class' culture'.⁶ Another scholar reminds us that bush ballads were more likely to have been written by professional songwriters than passed down through generations.⁷ Despite the continuing efforts of researchers to locate and define an oral musical tradition originating in the bush it was in popular mass entertainment in the cities that an Australian lower-class culture was actually taking shape. Waters's research in the 1950s revealed that many bush songs were in fact derived from stage songs rather than the other way round. He established that vaudeville songs were widely sung even in remote rural areas. An old itinerant worker told him that in 1905 he was very popular as a singer in bush camps because he knew the latest songs from the Sydney vaudeville theatres.⁸ This is scarcely surprising. The large, mobile population of bushmen who worked seasonally in various rural industries and spent a proportion of each year in Sydney

considered the theatres one of the city's main attractions.⁹ Furthermore, vaudeville¹⁰ was consumed across Australia on varying scales of presentation, widely disseminated by travelling troupes which toured country circuits. Some large rural towns had permanent fixtures. Broken Hill for example had a rough music hall known as 'Sod's Opera'.¹¹ If there was in fact, as one might gather from the pages of the *Bulletin*, antagonism among bush workers towards the British governing classes there was clearly no reluctance to embrace the products of the British (or indeed American) popular entertainment industry.

Thirdly, the integrally related forms of popular theatre known as vaudeville, music hall and variety have alienated scholars of the left who have characterised it as commercially exploitive and politically anodyne. In the 1970s British historians used the Gramscian concept of hegemony to critique music hall as a medium for the imposition of a bourgeois political and aesthetic world view.¹² Earlier, in the field of cultural theory, Adorno and the influential Frankfurt School had found that the escapist distractions of popular music engendered false consciousness and conditioned people to acquiesce to authority. They also considered it to be wanting in authenticity though they defined the concept somewhat differently to the musicologists. For Adorno authenticity was exemplified by avant-garde music which alone remained uncontaminated in his view because it refused to affirm the status quo. In contrast the popular music industry purveyed for profit easily accessible and instantly gratifying fare. A diet of such music conditioned audiences to reject anything that was not familiar and predictable resulting in a standardised and repetitive format that was anathema to true art. There is ample evidence in the programme to support Adorno's charges of standardisation. Vaudeville was a form almost ritualized in its protocols. The lyrical content depended on clichés and hackneyed rhymes. The melodies and harmonic sequences of the musical content were formulaic, their predictability

further emphasised by oft-repeated choruses. Standard tunes, familiar to everyone, were used over and over again for a multitude of songs.¹³ The promotional emphasis on novelty, the latest song with the newest gimmick, was dismissed by Adorno as 'pseudo-individualisation' which served to persuade people that what they were hearing was new, thus reinforcing the ideology of uniqueness and creativity necessary for cultural products.¹⁴

Adorno has been influential in twentieth-century cultural theory but his dismissive attitude to popular music was one of his blind spots, leading him to overlook complexities which might have qualified his position. Firstly, when he heard clichéd phrasing and formulaic melodies and saw audiences lulled into passivity he was missing the point. The familiarity of vaudeville's rich stock of tropes and conventions was comfortable and reassuring and not the least among its attractions. Well-known tunes and predictable rhymes facilitated chorus-singing for example.

Secondly, if vaudeville was not politically subversive the programme, in many important respects, manifested cultural resistance. Specifically, it managed to evade the repressive mechanics of bourgeois discourse which enjoined diligence, sobriety and thrift and which were part of the dominant ideology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Waterhouse has drawn attention to this culture of resistance characterizing it as 'hegemony imposed from below'.¹⁵ Such a formulation draws attention to a key quality of the repertoire but if taken at face value is apt to obscure the heterogeneity which is at the heart of vaudeville. Its products may have been standardised according to the precepts of elite aesthetics but vaudeville was nevertheless, both stylistically and textually, a heterogeneous and enormously varied cultural form. The French show business historian Legrand-Chabrier defined it as 'a collation of every kind of spectacle that is not theatre'.¹⁶ Scholars such as Peter Bailey have convincingly

shown the great diversity of themes and styles apparent in the vaudeville *oeuvre*. The repertoire was complex and often contradictory both challenging and affirming the dominant culture and engaging its audience in a more diverse and complex set of meanings than have been acknowledged by some scholarly agendas.

Thirdly, Adorno's analysis is predominately confined to the realm of production and does not take account of how content is enriched and personalised by the infinite variety of ways it is received. On this point he has been challenged by theorists who argue that audiences have not been credited with sufficient agency. They are not merely passive recipients of cultural products but actively confer meaning and significance derived from the conditions of their individual lives. As one writer observed:

It is one thing to argue that people have little choice in what the media presents [sic] to them, and another to deny that they make choices in reception and confer meaning on what they receive.¹⁷

The various currents of scholarship establish a theoretical context. But what was the significance of the large Sydney vaudeville houses in their heydays as a historical phenomenon? The sheer size of the audiences testified to their significance as a popular entertainment form. Sydneysiders flocked to vaudeville shows. The packed theatres, the wild applause and the raucous chorus-singing signalled how deeply they resonated in the popular consciousness of the time. As a cultural form vaudeville was extraordinarily pervasive. The influence of its tropes and language can be discerned in a broad range of other popular genres from the tabloid press to advertising billboards. It infused the lives of ordinary people as few other forms have done. As one performer recalled:

The permeating magic of those songs, those catchy, silly, haunting songs filtered through the meshes of conventional nets and found their way into

nurseries, the school rooms, and insidiously infiltrated via the servants' entrance into the sacred home itself, to be sung by young and old around the piano.¹⁸

Even marginal groups such as inmates of mental hospitals were within the range of its force field. In a programme for patients staged at the Parramatta Hospital for the Insane in 1891 the Mascotte Minstrels performed such popular music hall and minstrel numbers as 'Father's Growing Old' and 'I Wish I was Back in Alabama'.¹⁹

In Sydney what came to be known here as vaudeville was dominated from the 1890s by Harry Rickards dubbed the 'Napoleon of Australian vaudeville'.²⁰ Rickards was an English entrepreneur who had been a successful *lion comique* and singer of topical songs on the London halls. He took over the Garrick Theatre in Castlereagh Street in 1892, renamed it the Tivoli, and there established Sydney's first permanent vaudeville venue. The format of the Tivoli shows featured a first half in the minstrel-style a well-established genre which had been popular in Australia since the 1840s.²¹ For the second half he introduced a new variety format in which musical entertainment dominated but which also included dancers, comics, contortionists, animal acts, jugglers and a mind-boggling range of miscellaneous novelty turns. Rickards himself, as well as his wife Kattie and daughters Noni and Madge, often performed. He was not only a shrewd businessman but also an accomplished showman with a keen sense of what would catch the fancy of audiences. The Tivoli was an immediate success. It had no serious competition in Sydney until 1906 when James Brennan opened the National Amphitheatre (known locally as 'The Nash') also in Castlereagh Street.²² The Nash was taken over by Ben Fuller in 1912. The Tivoli, however, retained its position as Sydney's pre-eminent vaudeville venue. The Nash, where tickets were cheaper, the shows 'earthier' and the audience presumably a little more raffish, was never quite in the same class.²³

Vaudeville's cultural status was decidedly lowbrow in relation to elite forms such as opera and legitimate theatre. Its antecedents included the variously named 'free and easies', 'concert halls' or 'harmonic halls' attached to hotels offering participatory musical entertainment which had operated in Sydney from the 1840s and became numerous during the goldrush years.²⁴ These had a reputation for ribaldry and roughness and attracted a mainly male clientele. Charges of indecency were levelled at their risqué content which was thought to have a corrupting effect on the morals of the people. In 1873 a critic claimed that:

Nine-tenths of [young men] find one of their chief pleasures in the villainous song books and sheets of songs which are monthly launched here—the taste for which had been introduced by some of the *genus homo* who rejoice in the very questionable title of *star comique*—and in frequenting low places of amusement.²⁵

Later in the century the entertainment offered by the free and easies was cleaned up and extended in range and moved into theatres with fixed seating.²⁶ Tighter licensing laws requiring theatres to be 'dry' had a further refining effect.²⁷

By the 1890s when Rickards introduced vaudeville at the Tivoli²⁸ it was a mixed form with genteel acts alternating with less constrained performances though the latter generally dominated. As an English observer commented on the mix:

Despite certain acceptable, even excellent numbers and songs the music-hall programme was regrettably overshadowed by boisterous vulgarity and outstanding absurdity, unrelieved by humour....²⁹

Despite its reputation for vulgarity the repertoire, especially its British music hall song content, provides ample evidence that vaudeville was

also a medium for the expression of uncontentious forms and values appropriated from bourgeois culture. The sentimental ballad for example had close links with the Victorian parlour ballad, a musical genre with considerable cross-class appeal, which demonstrated that popular did not always mean low. Another genre with wide appeal was the motto song which purveyed any one of a multitude of the platitudes of folk wisdom. Songs such as 'Don't Put Your Umbrella up Before it Starts to Rain' were touted as 'The song with a moral. Every line teaches a lesson'.³⁰ Annual Christmas pantomimes, too, performed by vaudeville artistes with the material stripped of any suggestive content in deference to the tender sensibilities of the juvenile sector, enjoyed mass popularity across the social spectrum.

But although the repertoire had undergone a sanitising evolution since the days of the free and easies it remained fundamentally a low form disapproved by the genteel middle-class on a number of counts. It was condemned for irreverence based on a tradition of ridiculing authority figures such as parsons, policemen and others held in official esteem. Some content was also condemned for fatuity. One critic of American vaudeville considered that 'its most striking characteristic is simply stupidity... No person of moderate intelligence can attend a dozen vaudeville performances without being disgusted at their vapidty'.³¹

Advocates of rational recreation objected to the fact that its primary purpose was not to improve its audience but merely to entertain it. They argued for more elevating amusements calculated to appeal to the faculties of reason rather than the emotions. In an effort to provide wholesome alternative attractions in the 1890s the Sydney Methodists initiated the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon described as 'a sort of religious Tivoli'.³² There were parallels here with the British Coffee Music Hall movement founded in 1880 which aimed to offer entertainment free from 'the unworthy style of song and other attraction offered in too many of the existing halls'.³³ But such bland fare had

limited drawing power and the rational recreationists were often disappointed with the turn out.

Purity advocates condemned performances which relied for impact on display of the female body. These were common in vaudeville. Performers such as Vulcana, an Amazonian strongwoman, appeared in a double turn with her brother Atlas in 'barbarian' costumes designed to display the magnificence of her form.³⁴ Dancers in the 'ballet' wore short skirts or kicked up their legs in the can-can to reveal frilly knickers. *Tableaux vivants* or *poses plastiques* were a genre in themselves. They consisted of groups of usually female figures in 'fleshings' standing in picturesque formation, often, in an attempt to appropriate a veneer of respectability from 'classical' sculpture, representing a mythological scene.³⁵ The *poses plastiques* were in a direct line from an earlier, bolder tradition of the English free and easies where frankly naked women posed against a black curtain.³⁶ Despite the seeming licence there were limits. A Sydney performance by 'Dolly the Danseuse' for example was terminated because her hula-hula and hootchie-cootchie were too risqué.³⁷

The use of the *double entendre*, the stock in trade of the comic song repertoire, particularly infuriated the guardians of public morality. Dolly's hootch clearly crossed the decency divide. But the attention of the purity watchdogs could be evaded by lyrics which were, on the face of it, innocuous, but into which another, saucier signification could be read. Performers publicly disavowed ulterior meanings. Roy Rene consistently denied his material was blue, claiming 'It's all in their dirty, filthy minds'.³⁸ Respectable people were, nominally at least, excluded from the joys of the *double entendre*. An Australian etiquette manual declared that 'a well-bred person always refuses to understand a phrase of doubtful meaning' and only downright indecency 'grows hilarious over it'.³⁹ The full impact of innuendo was dependent on delivery which was all important to ensure the looked-for audience

response. The words might appear straightforward but the performer, with knowing winks and waggish looks, 'signalled complicity with an audience... investing language, tone and gesture with oblique but knowing conspiracies of meaning'.⁴⁰ Robert Graves's description of the technique of a comic singer gives some idea of how important performance was in putting over a song:

[He] sang 'The Derby Ram' in a very arch manner, persuading the audience to expect obscene words because of the rhymes that led up to them, yet shutting his mouth fast like a freshwater mussel when he came to the point, and treating us to a most prodigious wink, as who would say: 'If you know the missing words laugh by all means, gentlemen, but do not blame me for indecency—for I did not teach you them myself'.⁴¹

Vaudeville's earthiness was a potent part of its attraction in a repressive socio-cultural milieu providing an outlet for openness and high spirits. As Marie Lloyd put it to critics who rebuked her for impropriety: 'You take the pit on a Saturday night or a Bank Holiday. You don't suppose they want Sunday School stuff do you?'. What critics labelled indecent or irreverent was experienced by audiences as liberating and cathartic. As a performer described it:

The wondrous magic of music hall is that it spontaneously erupted into the face of a massive and agreed hypocrisy, and gave the mass of people not only the relief and refreshment of colour, music, light and rhythm, but lifted their spirits crippled as much by hypocrisy as by the hardness of their lives, by fashioning a form which slipped past the guards into a freedom which was permitted neither in the home nor in any public place, except these palaces of pleasure.⁴²

Although vaudeville was disapproved of by, among others, the protestant churches, in Australia opposition was never as organised or vocal as in Britain.⁴³ The Australian White Cross League a social purity coalition which campaigned against prostitution and other forms of extra-marital sex was active in Sydney and other capital cities. It

targeted swearing and 'immodest' language. Members were enjoined by their charter to 'endeavour to put down all indecent language and coarse jests'. If they had not the courage to call a halt when vulgar jokes were bandied they were counselled at least to refrain from laughing.⁴⁴ But the League did not directly target vaudeville. The purity plank in the platform of the Women's Christian Temperance Union also might potentially have brought the movement into conflict with vaudeville but their attention was focused on curbing men's sexual freedom and no concerted campaign seems to have been mounted. Though religious papers frequently denounced it and the Salvation Army on occasions stationed themselves outside theatres to sing 'war songs' overall opposition seems to have been neither sustained nor well organised.⁴⁵ With limited resources it seemed that the champions of respectability preferred to concentrate their efforts on the anti-drink cause.

Despite the absence of strong and concerted local opposition the sanitising of the British halls had a flow-on effect in Australia which depended for its content on British material. From the end of the century proprietors and theatre managers in mainstream vaudeville took greater pains to emphasise the edifying content of their programmes. Fuller's circuit for example advertised itself in 1914 as 'The Home of Clean Vaudeville' though the claim may have been more perfunctory than genuine.⁴⁶ Standards were enforced from within though they were not necessarily the same as those of the rational recreationists. Fuller made a practice of vetting the material of comedians working on his circuit⁴⁷ and theatre managers could terminate an artiste's contract if their material got 'too blue'.⁴⁸ But how sustained such censorship was and the level of control to which material was subject is uncertain. Any sanitising changes which might have been made to content locally are difficult to identify in a repertoire which consisted almost entirely of imported material. Moreover, material could be subversively altered in performance.

As acts were cleaned up they were also refined in other ways. In the search for bigger ticket sales more novel, more spectacular and more professional acts were engaged. Rickards believed 'the style's the thing' and for him style was embodied by the talent and glamour of big name international acts.⁴⁹ Among his attractions were Houdini, Marie Lloyd, a young WC Fields (billed as an 'eccentric juggler' at that stage of his career), Cinquevalli and Little Tich. He tapped in to a stable of highly mobile international performers who played in vaudeville houses across the globe. Distinguished visitors always topped the bill. Although some Australian performers such as Florrie Forde, Albert Whelan and Billy Williams did achieve star status⁵⁰ it is clear from the printed programmes that the imported name acts overshadowed the various 'clever young Australians' whose talents were confined to the less prestigious first half of the programme. Fuller took a different approach at the Nash advertising 'Australian Artists and Prices for Australian People'. He could not match Rickards' big-spending and was no doubt making a virtue of economic necessity.

The preeminence of international performers and the high proportion of material imported from England and the USA emphasised the fact that vaudeville was first and foremost an international form. From the dawn of the culture industry in the 1890s it became increasingly globalised, a process facilitated by the development of new methods of mass production, publicity and distribution. The enthusiastic response of Australian audiences to a predominantly international repertoire signalled their eagerness to participate in a shared, cosmopolitan culture. International hits were extolled by puff like 'Top of the Bill at the Halls' or 'The World's Sensational Rag Winner' and songs like 'Alexander's Ragtime Band' and 'Waiting at the Church' were sung from Dublin to Johannesburg.

In the 1890s, at a historical moment when nationalism was a dominant discourse in the cultural sphere, vaudeville's status as a global form meant that it was sidelined in cultural debate. Its dependence for content on imported material was regarded as antagonistic to truly 'Australian' forms. A correspondent to the *Bulletin* complained that songs and characterisations derived from the English stage dominated Australian vaudeville.⁵¹ As a *Bulletin* reader, he may have been overly sensitive to the absence of local product but the point he makes is valid. The strong links that existed between English and Australian vaudeville meant that the use of English songs, sketch material and comical patter was common. To those who saw a need to develop Australian themes and content this seemed to be yet another manifestation of British cultural dominance. But the concerns about synthesising a national identity that so exercised polemicists were irrelevant to vaudeville. There was no sense within the industry which depended for its profitability on giving people what they wanted and maintaining wide appeal that English or indeed American cultural product was not appropriate or satisfactory for local audiences.

Despite the dependence on overseas content a significant volume of material was written locally though it constituted a small proportion of the programme. Two conditions of the entertainment industry worked to encourage local production. Firstly, the craze for novelty produced a need for a continual influx of new material. Though some old chestnuts were guaranteed always to get an enthusiastic response it was the novel, the striking, that audiences paid their money to hear. The life expectancy of a song was a mere six weeks and in the manner of the later hit parade when everyone had heard and become familiar with it it passed quickly from hit status into obscurity, possibly to be revived or adapted at some future time. The language of advertising—'The latest hit', 'The current rag sensation'—highlighted the fleeting nature of musical fashion.

Secondly, the establishment of an international copyright regime made well-known songs expensive to acquire. By the 1890s the marketing of cultural products was becoming increasingly regulated. Songs written by or specifically for a particular performer were claimed as proprietary material and prefaced in published form by such warnings as 'Must not be sung by professionals without permission'. Joe Slater's *Songsters*, which reproduced the words to current vaudeville tunes carried the following caution:

Joe Slater begs to point out that he has paid large sums for the exclusive right of printing and publishing, for a certain term, words of Songs, Recitations, Gags and parodies published by several well-known English and American firms...and he will at once institute legal proceedings where his rights are infringed.

As the twentieth century progressed the copyright regime became better established which reinforced incentives to look for cheaper locally-penned material.⁵²

It is fairly clear that in an industry so dependent for success on giving audiences what they wanted there was no attempt to stage Australian material because there was little demand for it. Waters has observed that neither urban nor bush audiences showed any partiality for Australian themes in their vaudeville.⁵³ Indeed there may have been a prejudice against it. Many locally written songs had no recognizably Australian content at all. It is difficult now to identify these in the songbooks unless the attributed composer happens to be known by name. One songwriter who claimed to have written over 300 songs for the music hall complained in a letter to the *Bulletin* in 1907:

I am practically unknown to the Australian public, simply because I am an Australian. Publishers inform me that they cannot attach my name to songs, as the public will not buy songs unless they are written and composed by some well-known American or English author. Scores of my songs have been published as written and composed by well-known foreigners...⁵⁴

The audience, claimed the writer, who 'would hardly recognize a London coster if it saw one, is expected to have the taste of an epicure for all things Cockney'. But it is after all not surprising that audiences were not put off by specifically English references. Until the 1890s there was little discernible indigenous culture as such and consumers of cultural products across the lowbrow/highbrow spectrum were accustomed to relying on importations from Britain. English place names and other references posed no problem of identification. Audiences were as familiar in a notional sense with the Old Kent Road as they were with Martin Place and the cockney coster was as popular a figure on the Sydney as on the London stage.

But the mostly international nature of the repertoire should not obscure the fact that it also developed unique local variations. Australian audiences had their own preferences and antipathies, important differences in cultural values and social structure producing unique local inflections in taste.⁵⁵ Filtering of imported material must inevitably have occurred in an industry so sensitive to audience preferences although the processes involved in programming decisions are not known. The songbooks yield some insights. They suggest, for example, that although transportation and the convict system were favourite themes in the British vaudeville repertoire⁵⁶ the genre was apparently absent from Australian vaudeville. The subject is likely to have been sensitive and perhaps was considered best avoided by theatre managers and performers. There is evidence that public references to the population's convict antecedents were not taken kindly. Lord Beauchamp earned instant unpopularity, for example, when at the beginning of his term as Governor he tactlessly declaimed in a speech 'Your birth stains you have turned to good'.⁵⁷ For some audience members the connection with convictism would have been as close as grandparents or even parents and such allusions may well have caused resentment.

Some though not all locally produced songs were recognizably Australian in content. Others which depended on obvious Australian motifs for their appeal were merely adapted from English or American originals rather than produced from scratch. A perfunctory local stamp could be placed on lyrics, simply by substituting 'King Street' for 'The Strand' or 'Manly' for 'Brighton' which lent a sufficiently domestic tone if this was wanted. There is, however, no evidence in the vaudeville programmes and songbooks I was able to examine from the 1890s or even up until World War One of any concerted attempts to create truly 'Australian' forms.⁵⁸ Around 1890 there was a brief vogue for larrikin songs, a variation on the traditional coster song.⁵⁹ In 1892 EJ Lonnen had a hit in Sydney with a song entitled 'I've Chucked-up my Push for my Donah'.⁶⁰ Will Whitburn was a comedian who made his name with larrikin songs appearing in character with his hair slicked down over his forehead, a waistcoat, an emerald green bootlace tie and bell-bottomed trousers.⁶¹ But the craze was short-lived and once the novelty had worn off audiences were seemingly happy to revert to the international programme.

It was not until the second decade of the twentieth century that vaudeville became a medium for the expression of Australian imagery though this was still a minor thematic strand. Following Federation *The Theatre*, an illustrated stage periodical, considered that with 'a bound our continent took her place among the other great portions of the globe, and the old parochial boundaries began to melt into the background'.⁶² But this perceived new found cultural maturity did not equate with an upsurge in local content for it was still the case that 'the great bulk of our amusements is [sic] imported'.⁶³ Novelty songs which played on the peculiarity of local place names such as 'Woolloomooloo' and 'Kosciusko' appeared and inevitably nationalistic invocations of native flora and fauna were conspicuous. 'My Waratah' was advertised in 1908 in the Tivoli programme as a 'real Australian

song by Australian writers'.⁶⁴ But it was World War One which really kicked nationalism along. Once it was underway and increasingly after it ended songs such as 'Home Again to Dear Old Aussie'⁶⁵ appeared which expressed nostalgia for a specifically Australian *rural* idyll, one that was usually far away and unattainable. Such patriotic songs gave expression to the homesickness of troops serving overseas and drew on an upsurge in national pride which followed the failed but valiant efforts of Australian troops at Gallipoli.

Most of these 'Australian' songs were novelties which enhanced the variety of the programme. But attempts to capture any but the superficial qualities of Australian life were rare. Another *Bulletin* correspondent recognised this and expressed a wish that performers would depict Australian everyday life, would, for example, 'tell us something of our own 'Push', or of the Chow or the Dago'. He quaintly attributed the failure to do so to the decadence of theatrical types who 'know nothing about life [and] spend their days and nights in a vitiated atmosphere of false romance'.⁶⁶ What he was envisioning was Australianness of a less arbitrary and emblematic nature to that which was commonly expressed. Indeed it was true that though audiences soon tired of novelty songs they seemed to be responsive to local references which drew more deeply on the specifics of the everyday. A particular local detail observed from the quotidian round could elicit a roar of recognition from an audience. Bobby Watson, a 'refined character comedian', recalled how he used to affix two green spots, which designated Newtown on the destination displays of Sydney trams, to his back with 'Newtown' written underneath. He had only to stand up and turn his back to the audience to elicit screams of laughter.⁶⁷

A recognisable Australian vernacular style would develop in the 1920s. Australian comedians such as Roy Rene, Jim Gerald, Syd Beck and George Wallace who came to prominence on the Fuller and Clay

circuits recognised the argot and mannerisms of the Australian urban lower class and incorporated them into their acts. Roy Rene—who started out as a boy soprano and was later billed as a ‘Hebrew comedian’⁶⁸—in particular was a master of the apt, eccentric or suggestive colloquialism. His language and material were derived from a rich local vernacular based on observed Australian urban life rather than stereotypes.

Paradoxically, at the same time as vaudeville began to recognise and address its audience as Australians it was also opening up to modern, global popular culture. A song praising the local boxing idol Les Darcy appeared at the same time as songs about American celebrities such as Hollywood film star Mary Pickford and cartoon character Felix the Cat. But the movements that were occurring in the tectonic plate of world culture from 1910 began to make vaudeville itself, or at least old style vaudeville, obsolete. Public tastes were changing. People were turning away from the boisterous vulgarity and broad comedy which had once had such appeal in search of more modern, sophisticated entertainment. Miss Ada Reeve, one of vaudeville’s stars, believed that this was for the better. Now, she noted approvingly,

[I]ight and subtle humour was appreciated. The clowns with their obvious jokes, who used to adorn the music-hall stage of the past generation, had now no place on an up-to-date vaudeville programme.⁶⁹

From 1899 early ragtime sub-genres such as cakewalk music appeared in the vaudeville repertoire. A second phase of ragtime was introduced to Australia in 1910 by which time it had lost its association with Afro-American motifs and was seen as ultra-modern ‘American’ music.

When the ragtime craze hit Tin Pan Alley imports flooded in, shifting vaudeville’s cultural focus from England to the USA. The world of high

culture put up strong resistance to the incursions of American popular culture in all its guises. Artists and intellectuals with such widely differing world views as Norman Lindsay and Vance and Nettie Palmer shared a deep antipathy towards the encroaching American cultural hegemony, the most visible front of looming modernity. To Australian vaudeville audiences, however, modern popular culture represented not barbarism at the gate but a liberating opportunity. They quickly became familiar with American idioms and readily absorbed them into their own cultural vocabularies. It may have been partly due to the absence of a strong commitment to recognizably Australian content in vaudeville that allowed its audiences to embrace modern American cultural forms such as ragtime with such enthusiasm.

When the boost to vaudeville which the craze for ragtime provided in the 1910s subsided new attractions were sought. The boxing entrepreneur Hugh D McIntosh took over the Tivoli when Harry Rickards died in 1911 and made some changes. He did away with the minstrel first half and introduced straight variety programmes.⁷⁰ In an attempt to expand his audience base he began to target women who were assuming increasing importance as consumers. The Tivoli introduced mid-week matinees and Tango Teas (which actually featured mainly ragtime music)⁷¹ at which light refreshments were served.⁷² The Tango Teas presaged the craze for social dancing on an enormous scale and the palais culture which it fostered between the wars. By 1919 Australians from across the social spectrum had gone dancing mad, at the expense of other live entertainments. Ben Fuller too was turning to integrated forms such as revue.⁷³ But such strategies were mere tinkering when new forms of mass media were threatening to replace vaudeville altogether. Before too many years had elapsed the wireless was able to broadcast a single performance to thousands of listeners in their own lounge rooms.

But cinema, the medium which ‘became the fullest expression and combination of modernity’s attributes’⁷⁴ had the greatest impact. Rickards introduced moving pictures lasting for about a minute, mostly of sporting events to close his Tivoli shows in 1896.⁷⁵ Their impact in this context was, however, slight as the experience of one of JB Priestley’s characters indicates:

I went out during the final turn...caring nothing, like most people then, about the inevitable flickering bioscope that would end the program. (We never imagined that soon it would help to put an end to Variety itself).⁷⁶

Also in 1896 the first purpose-built picture theatre in Australia, the Salon Lumiere in Pitt Street, opened its doors. From the outset cinema was cheap and accessible, even cheaper than vaudeville. Seats were as little as threepence in 1914 which put them within reach of the humblest folk including housewives with children.⁷⁷ By 1911 there were more than 100 permanent and temporary picture shows in Sydney and local film production was expanding. Between 1910 and 1912 at least 101 Australian three- or four-reel features were released.

But loyalty to vaudeville persisted and cinema was resisted in some circles with varying degrees of vehemence. TS Eliot was among those who were alarmed at the prospect that music hall, which he saw as the epitome of ‘Englishness’ might give way to cinema.⁷⁸ A rather less high-minded opinion was expressed by Doris, one of Priestley’s fictional vaudeville artistes, who dismissed it as a ‘lot of silly rubbish and always looks as if it’s raining’.⁷⁹ The point at which film reached its full power was when it was combined with narrative which fixed and channeled the attention of audiences. With narrative film, as Hobsbawn puts it: ‘[F]or the first time in history story, drama or spectacle were freed from the constraints imposed by time, space and the physical nature of the observer’.⁸⁰

By 1921 more Australians went to the cinema than to all forms of live theatre combined and by 1928 Australia was second only to the United States in the ratio of cinema seats to population.⁸¹ Vaudeville's final passing came when the venerable Fuller's circuit which outlasted the Tivoli collapsed in the 1930s. Its audiences had either been kept away by Depression-induced hardship, or gone to the pictures.⁸²

The cinema can be said to have sounded vaudeville's death knell as Eliot and others had feared it would. But an alternative conclusion might be that it was fragmented and dispersed across other entertainment forms. Many of its songs survived to become perennials. And many of its artistes continued to ply their trade long after the vaudeville theatres had disappeared. Queenie Paul, for example, a famously long-lived performer was still doing shows practically up until her death in 1982. Others crossed over to work in film. Arthur Tauchert who starred in the silent film version of 'The Sentimental Bloke' was one such. And the variety format itself survived into the early days of television when content was at a premium virtually unchanged in a world of bewildering technological transformations.

¹ Among music historians and musicologists 'vaudeville' is a contested term which can refer to a variety of modes of content and presentation. It was, for example, partly interchangeable with variety, music-hall and revue. To attempt to define it precisely as a theatrical form would be to digress from the main line of inquiry. For the sake of clarity it can be assumed that the argument is based on the type of entertainment, called vaudeville by proprietors, which was staged in major Sydney theatres from the 1890s.

² The only genre which rivalled vaudeville in popularity was melodrama, which, in Australia, enjoyed a uniquely long-lived popularity, continuing to draw audiences until the 1920s, long after it had run its course in England and the USA. The composition of the respective audiences differed somewhat however in that melodrama had, proportionally, a larger middle-class following than vaudeville due to the supposedly 'moral' nature of its content (Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: a History of Australian Popular Culture Since 1788*, Melbourne, Longman, 1995, p68).

⁴ Waterhouse, Richard, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: The Australian Popular Stage 1788-1914*, Sydney, University of NSW Press, 1990, xii.

⁵ Raymond Williams highlights some of the difficulties inherent in the use of the word 'folk' in the sense of 'made by the people for themselves' and contrasted with modern popular forms (*Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London, Fontana, 1976, p136).

⁶ Smith, Graeme, *Singing Australian: a History of Folk and Country Music*, Sydney, Pluto Press, 2005, p7.

⁷ Whiteoak, John, 'Bush ballads' in *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, eds John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell, Sydney, Currency Press, 2003, p99.

⁸ Waters, Edgar P, *Some Aspects of the Popular Arts in Australia 1880-1915*, PhD thesis, ANU, 1962, p171.

⁹ Waters, p161.

¹⁰ Or 'variety'; see reference to definitional problems in Note 1.

¹¹ Bard, Katrina, *The History of Vaudeville in Australia from 1900 to 1930*, BLitt thesis, University of New England, 1983, p79.

¹² Kift, Dagmar, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict*, Translated by Roy Kift, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p4.

¹³ For example, over 100 songs were written to the tune of Londonderry Air (or Danny Boy), www.standingstones.com.

¹⁴ Middleton, Richard, *Studying Popular Music*, Milton Keynes, Philadelphia, Open University Press, 1990, p50.

¹⁵ Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*, xiv.

¹⁶ Sudworth, Gwynned, *The Great Little Tilley: Vesta Tilley and her Times*, Luton, Courtney Publications, 1984, p1.

¹⁷ Mortimer, L, 'The Construction of Mass Men: the Frankfurt School', *Arena* 65 (1983), p138.

¹⁸ Norman, Charles, *When Vaudeville was King*, Melbourne, Spectrum, 1984, p29.

¹⁹ Garton, Stephen, *Medicine and Madness: a Social History of Insanity in NSW 1880-1940*, Sydney, University of NSW Press, 1988, p167.

²⁰ Anderson, Gae Mary, *Harry Rickards: a Performance-Centred Portrait from Music-Hall to Vaudeville*, PhD thesis, Sydney University, 1998, p4.

²¹ I will only be dealing here with the variety and music hall components of vaudeville, not minstrelsy; see Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville* for an account of minstrelsy in Australia.

²² Smaller circuits were also established in the suburbs, like Harry Clay's, with theatres in Petersham, Balmain, Newtown, Parramatta and North Sydney, but these lacked the cache and drawing power of the city theatres (Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*, p120).

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- ²³ Brisbane, Katherine ed, *Entertaining Australia, an Illustrated History*, Sydney, Currency Press, 1991, p148.
- ²⁴ Waters, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*, p144; John Whiteoak, entry for 'Music hall' in *Currency Companion to Music and Dance*, p451.
- ²⁵ *Vice and its Victims in Sydney, the Cause and Cure*, by a pupil of the late Professor John Woolley, Sydney, Published for the Proprietor at Edwin H. Becke's... 1873, p118.
- ²⁶ As Whiteoak notes (entry for 'Music hall', *Currency Companion to Music and Dance*, p451), the population was too small to support the numerous lavish purpose-built theatres which accommodated British music hall.
- ²⁷ Anderson, p263.
- ²⁸ Although the component forms of minstrelsy and speciality company entertainment were current in Australia decades before.
- ²⁹ Kift, p119.
- ³⁰ *Babes in the Wood Pantomime Songster*, [Sydney], Slater, [1914?], p3.
- ³¹ Barth, Gunther, *City People: the Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980, p206.
- ³² Bollen, JD, *Protestantism and Social Reform in NSW*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1972, p33.
- ³³ Kift, p133.
- ³⁴ *Tivoli Programme*, [no pub details], February 15, 1908.
- ³⁵ One of the most famous exponents of the *pose plastique* was Patsy Montague, an Australian who, as La Milo, achieved stardom on the British halls (Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *British Music Hall: a Story in Pictures*, London, Studio Vista, 1965, [n.p]).
- ³⁶ Burke, Thomas, *English Nightlife: from Norman Curfew to Present Black-Out*, London, Batsford, 1941, p108.
- ³⁷ *Australian Star*, 11/7/05, p5.
- ³⁸ McDermott, Celestine, *Australian Music Hall Theatre*, BA thesis, Monash University, 1980, p4.
- ³⁹ *Australian Etiquette or the Rules and Usages of the Best Society in the Australasian Colonies, together with their Sports, Pastimes, Games and Amusements*, Sydney, McConnell, 1885, p102.
- ⁴⁰ Peter Bailey, quoted in Kift, p52.
- ⁴¹ Graves, Robert, *They Hanged my Sainly Billy*, London, Cassell, 1957, p62.
- ⁴² Norman, p27.

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- ⁴³ In Britain a concerted campaign was mounted against the music halls which became a prime target of the reforming bourgeoisie. Throughout the 1880s the social purity movement exerted pressure on local councils to close or place restrictions on theatres; see Kift, p 52.
- ⁴⁴ Australian White Cross league pamphlet, [No pub.details], p4.
- ⁴⁵ Ussher, Blair, 'The Salvation War' in Graeme Davison, David Dunstan and Chris McConville eds, *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1985, p134.
- ⁴⁶ Bard, p37.
- ⁴⁷ Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*, p124.
- ⁴⁸ Napier, Valantyne, *Act as Known: Australian Speciality Acts on the World Vaudeville Variety Circuits from 1900 to 1960*, Melbourne, Globe, 1986, p120.
- ⁴⁹ Anderson, p201.
- ⁵⁰ Whiteoak, 'Music hall', p451.
- ⁵¹ Waters, p220.
- ⁵² It remained however, difficult to enforce. Visiting English performers were often taken aback to hear their own material performed by local artistes.
- ⁵³ Waters, p250.
- ⁵⁴ Quoted in Waters, p220.
- ⁵⁵ Artistes who were stars in England or the USA were not always popular in Australia. Little Tich for example, one of the greatest names in British vaudeville was 'given the bird' by audiences in some of his Australian appearances (Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*, p127).
- ⁵⁶ Kift, p36.
- ⁵⁷ Lang, JT, *I Remember*, Sydney, Invincible Press, 1956, p195.
- ⁵⁸ Patriotic songs invoking Australia's role in defense of Empire appeared during the Boer War and are discussed in chapter six, though these were mostly adapted from British originals.
- ⁵⁹ Waters, p208.
- ⁶⁰ Chisholm, AH ed, *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, Volume 5, Sydney, Grolier, 1965, p244.
- ⁶¹ Norman, p58.
- ⁶² *The Theatre, an Illustrated Stage Annual for 1903-4* [no pub details], p3.
- ⁶³ *The Theatre*, p5.
- ⁶⁴ Tivoli Programme, February 15, 1908.
- ⁶⁵ *Joe Slater's Peace Songster*, [Sydney, Slater, 1918], p12.

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- ⁶⁶ Quoted in Waters, p220.
- ⁶⁷ Campbell, Norman, 'Fifty Years of Vaudeville', *Punch*, [Sydney], April 9, 1925, p64.
- ⁶⁸ Bard, p69.
- ⁶⁹ Tivoli Programme, June 8, 1914.
- ⁷⁰ McDermott, p137.
- ⁷¹ John Whiteoak provided this information.
- ⁷² Tivoli Programme, August 18, 1914.
- ⁷³ Whiteoak, 'Music hall', p448.
- ⁷⁴ Charney, Leo and Vanessa R Schwartz eds, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p1.
- ⁷⁵ Brisbane, p125.
- ⁷⁶ Priestley, JB, *Lost Empires: Being Richard Herncastle's Account of his Life on the Variety Stage from November 1913 to August 1914 together with a Prologue and Epilogue*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1965, p34.
- ⁷⁷ Bard, p7.
- ⁷⁸ See Barry J. Faulk 'Modernism and the Popular: Eliot's Music Halls', *Modernism/Modernity* 8:4 (2001) 603-621 for a discussion of Eliot and music hall.
- ⁷⁹ Priestley, p291.
- ⁸⁰ Hobsbawn, EJ, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, London, Guild, 1987, p238.
- ⁸¹ Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*, p133.
- ⁸² The integrated form of cinema-vaudeville which existed into the 1940s had the effect of *prolonging* the currency of vaudeville.

Chapter 5

The Gallery Gods: 'Kicking up a Row in Olympus'

What precisely were the attractions the type of entertainment loosely styled as vaudeville offered its audiences? The most obvious answer lies in the spectacle of performance. Another was in the pleasures of engaging with the repertoire as text which will be investigated in the following chapter. In this chapter I will survey the experiential attractions of the vaudeville theatre as a popular medium and attempt to identify other enjoyments audiences may have derived which, far from being peripheral to the performance, were a fundamental part of the experience. Important components in this economy of pleasure included the empowering spatial politics of the vaudeville theatre, the opportunities it presented for sociability and participatory self-expression and the rich store of cultural capital offered both by the programme and the personae of the artistes.

Vaudeville in its Australian manifestations was regarded by contemporary cultural observers as a low aesthetic form. It was vulgar, banal, humorous and irreverent. As one artiste described it: 'There was no pretence that what was being performed was culture or art with a capital "A"'.¹ Its status too was low. No social cache attached to attending a vaudeville show, no personal superiority of taste or cultivation was claimed by its enthusiasts. Whereas the mission of high aesthetic forms was to uplift, to edify, to teach, to improve, vaudeville's primary purpose was to entertain. It represented collective, participative enjoyment in an informal setting which was neither exclusive nor intimidating. Tickets were cheap enough to make it accessible to virtually everyone above the level of the destitute poor. In the 1870s even street urchins like Duffy—that 'vendor of *Echos* and

matches' observed by the Vagabond—who outlaid the better portion of his takings at the theatre could afford to attend.² Up until World War One seats in the gallery could be had for as little as sixpence. Among the range of organized cultural venues available to the lower classes vaudeville theatres were pre-eminent. The reforming middle class might promote the virtues of rational recreational pursuits such as visits to art galleries and museums but such places were not always welcoming. Lower-class clothes and manners which would pass unnoticed in the gallery at the vaudeville theatre were out of place in such temples of high culture. Frank Clune recollected that in the early years of the twentieth century the presence of himself and his fellow working boys was not encouraged at the Art Gallery:

We were a bad-looking lot, hatless, with open shirts, and looking very sunburned. We really only went there to stand in front of the pictures of naked ladies and pass remarks that the keeper could hear. Then when we had him listening, the whole gang would tour the Gallery, talking in loud voices and generally making ourselves objectionable.³

But although the pull of vaudeville was strongest among the lower classes it was not confined to them. To a significant degree its attractions extended across class divisions.⁴ The vaudeville programme was mixed, offering material from uncontentious genres alongside vulgar, popular fare. But it is important to stress that no simplistic equation existed between class position and cultural preferences. Neither the middle nor the lower classes were culturally homogeneous groups. Doubtless many middle-class vaudeville enthusiasts preferred pathetic ballads and the more respectable component of the programme. But others are likely to have been more eclectic in taste sharing to some extent the values and cultural preferences associated with the lower class or at least tolerating their expression. Furthermore, the entrenchment and growth of modern mass culture, proceeding apace at this time, was inclined to blur cultural divisions based on class. Transforming forces at work in the

sphere of popular culture from the second decade of the twentieth century introduced confusions about high and low, civilised and debased. While legitimate theatre and other elite forms continued to demand social restraint and gentility on the part of audiences, experiences traditionally associated with vaudeville—informality, the encouragement of gratification and expressiveness—were hallmarks of the new commercialised culture industry and exerted a powerful attraction for the middle classes.

Vaudeville was a form which some have seen as particularly suited to urban life. Barth argues that in America it met the needs of a new historical situation in the 1890s and 1910s, bringing a sense of common humanity to diverse people and imparting social skills and cultural values that helped them cope with the demands of city life.⁵ Others have described the type of entertainment, offering a high level of sensation and 'vivid, disjointed, fleeting spectacle' that urbanites on the crest of the wave of the classic period of modernity demanded. Walter Benjamin, for example, observed a 'new and urgent need for stimuli' to match the nervous energies of a sensorium calibrated to modern life.⁶ Michael Davis, writing about New York in 1910, coined the term 'urban hyperstimulus' to describe the level of excitement demanded by city people which mirrored the 'kaleidoscopic stimuli', the fast-paced, ever-changing quality of modern urban life.⁷

Australian cities too were growing rapidly although their populations were not so diverse nor conditions so hectic as in the USA. Here too vaudeville presented sensation and exhilaration to people keen to avail themselves of what the city offered. Its random series of turns—songs, knockabout acts, tumblers, jugglers, dancers, trained dogs, male impersonators, strongmen and the like—constituted an onslaught on the senses, an aesthetic criticised as overwrought. The pace of the shows was fast and the acts were short varying from a single song lasting a few minutes to thirty minutes or more for star performers.

Rapid turnover ensured the audience's attention did not flag. The emphasis was on novelty, variety and thrills; what Singer, writing about the cinema which soon overtook vaudeville as the key cultural form of modernity, called 'the aesthetics of astonishment'.

London had 500 music halls in the 1880s,⁸ ranging from smart establishments in the West End frequented by royalty to squalid little premises or 'penny gaffs' in the poorer districts which attracted audiences at correspondingly different ends of the social scale. From the 1890s when vaudeville-style entertainment was introduced at the Tivoli by Rickards Sydney's comparatively small population could support no more than two permanent variety theatres, not enough to enable class segregation between theatres. The resultant heterogeneous nature of the audiences meant that access control which protected the social boundaries of class had therefore to be managed within the theatres. This was accomplished mainly through differentials in ticket pricing. High prices were sometimes set quite consciously by theatre managers, not to maximize profit but to 'keep out the rowdies'.⁹ Earlier in the century a Melbourne theatre, dismayingly frequented by 'the choicest specimens of juvenile ruffianism hailing from the back slums' raised the price of gallery seats from sixpence to a shilling in an effort 'to keep as many of these interesting creatures out as possible'. The house was 'much quieter in consequence'.¹⁰ As the ethos of mass culture became established, however, shrewder entrepreneurs realised that exclusivity was not a money-making proposition. A hundred sixpences, even if they came from the pockets of riff-raff, represented better profits than a handful of florins from the well-to-do.

It is not difficult to imagine that part of the attraction of vaudeville for Australia's urban poor, whose living conditions were often spartan, was the opulence of the theatres. Their ornate decoration must have seemed palatial to them. The acknowledged preserve of the lower

classes were the cheap seats in the gallery or 'gods' high up at the back of the theatre. Jonah, Louis Stone's larrikin protagonist, patronises the gallery at the 'Tiv' when he is 'flush' where he, his friends and his girlfriend Ada sit 'packed like sardines' on the bench seating.¹¹ A ragged appearance did not stand out in the gallery. From a larrikin perspective the gallery had an added advantage in being impossible for ushers to control from the end of an aisle. Gallery occupants were described by one observer:

Bright specimens of our colonial youth, male and female, may be seen in that part of the house. The neglected child, after running about the streets all day, finds his way there at night, the money with which he pays for admittance being probably the proceeds of some petty theft. The full-blown larrikin, hang-dog in look and careless in attire, comes there with no other apparent object than to air his filthy language, and create as much uproar as possible. Young girls, children almost, but who have, nevertheless, been on the streets for years, prefer it to the pit, because they can indulge in greater freedom of speech, and be less guarded in their actions.¹²

The more expensive seats in the stalls, directly below the stage, the dress circle at the front of the upper level and the boxes, raised on either side of the theatre, were occupied by people from higher up the social scale. Social barriers were sufficiently firmly drawn that making onslaughts on them by straying from the sections traditionally allocated to one's class could be swiftly and humiliatingly checked. When 'The Don' one of Dyson's fictional factory hands and a regular gallery goer, lashed out on two and sixpenny stalls tickets in an attempt to impress a young woman his attempt to carry off this piece of social audacity failed when the stalls occupants objected to his unsuitable presence.¹³ The Don's friends watching from the gallery, amused by the antics below, became rowdy and the man employed to keep order had to be summoned to quell the racket.

Clearly, expectations of decorum differed in the various parts of the house. The stage paper *The Lorgnette* was inclined to be lenient towards the unruly 'denizens of the upper regions':

To some extent the gods... may be excused for kicking up a row in Olympus, partly because of their youth and exuberance ... partly because very many of them know and have been taught no better...

But when middle-class audience members in the dress circle stepped outside sanctioned class roles by imitating such behaviour they were shown less tolerance. They were labeled 'the wealthy lower orders' and accused of behaving 'like cads and ill-bred louts'.¹⁴

In a spatial sense the sharp-eyed gallery god was king of the theatre. Denoting an emblematic figure who sees all, 'The Gallery Boy' was adopted as the title of a regular column in *The Lorgnette* in which theatrical events of the week were reviewed. It was headed by an illustration of a cheekily grinning youth, hat awry, arms folded on the railing. He damns or praises performances with homespun opinions. On Ibsen the Gallery Boy opined in 1890: 'It won't cotton on, that 'Doll's House' won't'.

In terms of spatial dominance, the lower-class gallery occupants had symbolic mastery of the theatre through sight. Although theirs were the cheapest seats they enjoyed panoptic privilege from their elevated vantage point with a commanding view, not only of the stage, but of the other spectators. They could easily see into the dress circle and stalls whereas the occupants there had to turn in their seats and crane their necks to stare back at the gallery. The dress circle, directly in front of the gallery, was particularly conspicuous. 'Ladies of a nervous temperament' who were averse to being 'stared at' at close range were said to prefer the stalls.¹⁵ Vaudeville theatre thus offered a carnivalesque opportunity for the common people in the gallery to

participate in a reversed hierarchical social order which decreed that they were normally the ones at the bottom of the urban chain of being who were watched and assessed. In a reversal of normal panoptic practice, the middle class were transformed into objects that could be scrutinized and appraised, and thus, in a symbolic sense, controlled, by the lower-class gaze. In Certeau's words, the division of space in the vaudeville theatre made possible

a panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and 'include' them within its scope of vision.¹⁶

Such spatial arrangements challenged bourgeois public aloofness—that 'mantle of reserve'—which maintained something of the private in the public sphere and warded off unwelcome attention. It also demonstrated 'correct' behaviour to the rowdies behind. Middle-class audience members in the dress circle and stalls were subsumed into the totality of the spectacle, subject to the scrutiny of the 'sharp, envious eyes' of their social inferiors from the gallery. At an experiential level, for many lower-class people in a city which was deeply segregated in socio-spatial terms this was a rare opportunity to unabashedly stare at their betters at close quarters. Mrs Yabsley, a stay-at-home resident of the fictional Cardigan Street, relies on reports from her theatre-going neighbours on the appearance and comportment of the 'aristocracy', never having herself seen a specimen of this class 'in the flesh'.¹⁷

Vaudeville was a participatory as well as a spectacular cultural form and privileged an extroverted public mode whose traditions stretched back to Elizabethan times and beyond. Dryden, for example, criticized unruly theatre audiences in 1670:

Some come with lusty Burgundy half-drunk,
T'eat China Oranges, make love to Punk;

And briskly mount a bench when th'Act is done,
And comb their much-lov'd periwigs to the tune.¹⁸

Its collective nature was one of its fundamental pleasures.

'Participation', according to Fiske, 'brings with it the pleasures of revelry and festivity, of self-expression and the expression and experience of solidarity with others'.¹⁹ The vaudeville audience had an important role to play which went far beyond that prescribed for audiences at legitimate theatre and other high art forms. The notion of theatrical performance as an edifying experience to be sat through for the benefits it might bestow, was alien to vaudeville. What it offered its audience was an informal, recreational environment where they could conduct themselves as they pleased and where a wide range of what Goffmann termed 'subordinate involvements' were sanctioned. These included the eating of apples, oranges, peppermints and peanuts, conversing with one's neighbours, kissing and cuddling, shouting, gesticulating, waving and walking around. Toleration of such subordinate involvements signified for Goffmann 'a downgrading in the dignity of the occasion and an upgrading of the status of the audience relative to the theatrical proceedings'.²⁰ By contrast a crypto-religious mode prevailed in legitimate theatre. The audience, subordinate to the performance, was relegated to watching and listening in reverential stillness and silence, whether or not they liked, or even understood what they were watching. Such passive, self-governing behaviour became the hallmark of elite theatrical forms and accompanied the separation of high and low culture in the second half of the nineteenth century.²¹ In a Foucauldian view such self-discipline is enforced when everyone becomes an object of the official gaze, regardless of high/low or other axes of power or dominance.

It was accepted that members of the vaudeville audience were not there merely as passive onlookers. Their demonstrative behaviour was part of the performance. Not only were lower-class manners tolerated:

the vaudeville experience was predicated on energised exchanges between audience and performer. The impact of many a performance would have been lost without the anticipated audience response which enhanced both the impact of the narrative and the intensity of the mood. Who can imagine a risqué comic song without the essential component of audience reactions to give point to its pauses, heavy with innuendo, its knowing winks and gestures?

Chorus singing, one of the hallmarks of vaudeville, was clearly relished by audiences and also encouraged by theatre managers. Choruses transformed the individualism of a solo performance into a collective event by uniting audience and performer in song. A catchy number, denoted in the songbooks by subtitles such as 'A rattling good chorus song' could rocket a tune to immediate success. Performers often had the band play an extra chorus to drive it home.²² The aim was to fix the melodies in the consciousness of the audience, to make songs so popular that 'you could hear their choruses being rolled out, toward closing time, in hundreds of pubs.'²³ Gallery habitués were noted for their enthusiastic vocalising:

If she's in a Musical Hall
Ev'ry chorus she will bawl
As she hangs across the rail up in the 'Gords'.²⁴

The collective energy of audience response, whatever its import, could be overpowering. A popular act might be greeted with stamping, cheering, whistling and thunderous demands for an encore. On the other hand the hapless players who proved to be instant failures were left in no doubt as to the feelings of the audience. Boos, cat-calls, insults and missiles rained onto the stage, usually followed by the stage manager's signal from the wings to walk off. 'It was', said one performer, 'all uproar, whether they liked you or not'.²⁵ Audience members were well aware of the degree of control they had over a

performance. Having paid their money they clearly felt entitled to see what they chose. The dialogue enacted between audience and performer was commonly spirited and uninhibited, as the following song suggests:

Now the song is stale, perhaps;
Then you'll hear her call out 'Rats'
As she lets fly at the artiste on the boards.²⁶

At the notorious 'trial nights' whose aim was to discover new talent, which were held at theatres such as the Newtown Majestic, admittance was free. Audience responses were so boisterous that performers often fled, terrified, from the stage.²⁷ Dull turns, however, had their place. In New York, where vaudeville shows ran continuously, managers cleared the theatre to make room for waiting patrons by programming 'chasers' at the end of each show, boring and lacklustre acts intended to drive out loiterers.²⁸ Self-reflexive songs about the audience affirmed the reputation of the gallery gods for rowdy conduct and merciless treatment of unpopular acts. The tone in the following song is admiring rather than censorious, suggesting that audiences took pride in their active role:

Order please! Silence in the Gallery!
Order please! Or it's out you go!
The first turn went very well thank you!
The doctor's in the dressing room, trying to pull him through.
Order, please! And when the lady vocalist
Begins to take top C's;
If you want to throw some flowers, will you take them from the flower pots—
And keep a little order please!²⁹

It is not difficult to imagine that the formidable power represented by the gallery gods in full voice may have carried an undercurrent of threat triggering anxiety in middle-class observers.

It was such expressive audience behaviour as much as its low content that gave rise to vaudeville's reputation for roughness. The demonstrated disregard of lower-class audiences for the rules of conduct which guided genteel, socialized individuals in public situations brought them directly up against the bulwark of middle-class public culture. The vaudeville theatre itself thus emerges as a stage on which the audience played out its own drama, one which was collaborative with the spectacle being enacted on the stage. Within its spatial confines tensions and conflicts were simultaneously expressed and repressed, enacted and contained, the boundaries of class and of individual self-containment established and challenged in a fluid and elaborate dynamic.

The audience went to learn as well as to be entertained for 'vaudeville circuits carried the lessons of modern city culture from ocean to ocean'.³⁰ Changing values associated with modernity were re-arranging the lives of lower-class people, particularly young people. New attitudes to gratification and personal fulfillment were taking hold. Part of this evolutionary process was a heightened awareness of self which was expressed through a sense of individuality and personal style. Vaudeville fostered the development of such a style by offering a means of acquiring competencies of speech, mannerism and comportment which expanded the stylistic vocabulary of lower-class youth. Such cultural competencies have, as Bourdieu has noted, a social 'market price', possessing value in terms of advantages gained. Vaudeville provided a rich bank of cultural capital for audiences looking for an edge in competitive city living. The repertoire was an abundant resource which could be mined repeatedly and used to enhance the capabilities of the audience as modern city dwellers. Bailey observes, for example, how the repeated punch line in a comic song might be sung along with by an audience, then make its way into everyday speech as a catchphrase, operating like a cue to those in the know.³¹

It is not difficult to imagine that such topical and ready made *bon mots* were an important enhancement to the conversational prowess of lower-class people, broadening their range of social skills and enhancing their attractiveness to the opposite sex. On the street they could pass for smart repartee, thus marking the user as a rum and 'knowing' cove. Indeed Bailey has convincingly argued that it was this quality of knowingness which so imbued vaudeville that characterised it as a culture of competence rather than, as Stedman-Jones has formulated, a culture of consolation.³² Through an *oeuvre* that flattered spectators' knowledge and skills 'performers could continue to reassure an audience that they were nobody's fool—or more pertinently in this era—no teacher's dunce, no head-clerk's cipher, no foreman's stooge'.³³ Such reassurance may have had an ameliorating effect, compensating for that sense of insignificance that was the badge of lower-class people, by reflecting back images of themselves as worldly and streetwise.

Information about appearance and behaviour, encoded in the behavioural models offered by star performers, provided valuable guidance to audience members in developing a convincing social *persona*. Appearing in character was almost universal for vaudeville performers as a racial type—Irish, Negro, Jew and so on—or in other roles—sailor, chorus girl or barrowman. As Max Beerbohm described it: 'There is a swift succession of strongly, variously defined personalities...all imitating this or that phase of modern life within the limits of their new art'.³⁴ The characters thus created were potent carriers of signification. Performers often appeared in trickster roles for example, inviting the audience to identify with them rather than seeing themselves as poor and downtrodden. Character roles were also potentially rich sources of knowledge. The swell, a standard vaudeville character who affected the swaggering demeanour of a West End toff complete with cane, monocle and top hat, was especially influential. Bailey has described how Champagne Charlie, famously portrayed by

the great *lion comique* George Leybourne provided a model in matters of dress and style to 'bachelor clerks and counter-jumpers' a social group with little cultural capital of their own.³⁵ The language of the swell was a parodic echo of the formal language of officialdom and the social elite which mocked the upper class through mimicry. But important information was also conveyed about how a gentleman, or at least an imaginary construction of one, dressed, spoke and conducted himself. The swell demonstrated, through his manners and appearance, the self-assurance that was the foundation of successful interaction with the opposite sex. He lived the high life and enjoyed being seen with and by attractive and fashionable women but was totally immune to their sexual powers. The swell's demeanour was characterised by 'the sexuality of display, perhaps of provocation, but not obviously of engagement'. Bailey typifies the drama enacted by the swell as 'a form of collective narcissism—that of men showing off to other men'.³⁶

The masher, another character type who bore some similarity to the swell conveyed a more modern, more overt sexual message. Like the swell the masher displayed a high level of male competency and had an easy way with women. But unlike the swell he engaged directly with them often in a predatory way:

I look in their eyes, fill them with lies,
And I leave them flat, just like that –
When they're wise'.³⁷

A confirmed bachelor, he was unwilling to give up the joys and amenities of the single life and went to great lengths to avoid being trapped into marriage. But the masher's role could be a hazardous one. Women could all too easily spoil the fun by becoming demanding or jealous, falling pregnant or bringing a breach of promise suit. These were all signals for the masher to make himself scarce.

There were useful messages here for those who cared to look and learn. The cultural resources offered by vaudeville—its clothes, music and language— could be appropriated, especially by young people, and put into service for performative exploration of selfhood. Dyson tells us that The Don, for example, whose normal conversation is very much ‘in the vernacular’, falls into ‘a fairly accurate imitation of the barbarous accent of the English dude in the burlesques’ when attempting to impress a young lady.³⁸ Another of the factory hands, a flash larrikin type [draw out larrikin connection] known as The Bantam, distinguishes himself by his habit of singing snatches from music hall choruses complete with ‘original effects’.³⁹ The Colonel in Louis Stone’s *Betty Wayside* is another fictional character who assumes a persona derived from vaudeville. An urban idler *par excellence* he affects ‘the rakish air of the ‘Lion Comiques’ of his youth’. He saunters forth to the city each day dressed immaculately in the cast-off wardrobe of a distinguished judge, acquired from a Bathurst Street old clothes dealer beaming graciously upon everyone he meets.⁴⁰ The Don, The Bantam and the Colonel all embody the notion of modern subjectivity as performative. They draw on the important stock of resources provided by vaudeville when making choices regarding the presentation of self and the development and honing of social skills and personal style.

After 1910 women, too, were looking for guidance in how to enter the modern world in roles which they had not taken on before. After 1910 the female roles in vaudeville changed and glamour began to overtake character in importance. The costumes, makeup and hairstyles of vaudeville's female singers were important markers of glamour for women in the audience setting standards for them to aspire to. The ubiquitous soubrette a stock vaudeville type, who sang and danced a bit and sometimes did comic patter provided an obvious role model for

young women. She was pretty and exquisitely dressed and her persona was saucy and flirtatious.

But other less conventional roles were also represented in the *oeuvre*. The female figures in vaudeville songs, for example, drink, swear, gossip, fight, run around with men, neglect their homes and families and are unfaithful to their husbands. They affirmed that there were roles for women other than passive love objects, domestic goddesses or sainted mothers, and may well have been read as validating by those women in the audience (and surely there were many) who lived in unconventional ways. The *persona* of female serio-comic artistes such as Marie Lloyd one of the most famous of British music hall stars, notorious for her risqué songs, was that of a seasoned, knowing woman. Lloyd appeared in extravagant 'great lady' outfits, trailing dresses, enormous feathered hats and her trademark parasol. Florrie Forde, known as the Australian Marie Lloyd, who reached the peak of her fame during World War One, also assumed the costume, airs and language of a lady of quality and affected a jewelled cane. But despite their aristocratic appearance the enormous success of the serio-comic stars was due in no small part to their levelling humour and unerring ability to convey their affinity with the audience. They clearly telegraphed their humble origins and lower-class life experiences. Songs such as Lloyd's 'I'm one of the Ruins that Cromwell Knocked About a Bit', for example, implicitly assured women that sexual experience could be treated with rueful humour instead of the pathos prescribed by the loss of innocence.

Celebrity worship was a key aspect of modern consumer culture which had its origins in vaudeville. Both its male and female stars inspired florid adulation which did not, however, reach the stupendous proportions it did later with early film stars such as Rudolph Valentino. A more muted form of celebrity worship provided an outlet for the individual expression of female desire which was part of a loosening

modern attitude towards emotional self-expression. It allowed for a retreat into fantasy through partial displacement of emotional life on to the object of admiration. It also offered vicarious romance. Being a fan and worshipping stars from afar was a safe alternative to real contact, removed from the pitfalls and difficulties of direct, unmediated relationships. Further, it was a defensive retreat from the possibility of being labelled 'fast' which was carried by such relationships. Prototypes of the fan magazines which grew alongside the motion picture industry can be discerned in song books and theatrical papers which carried glamourised photos and snippets of gossip about artistes. The Sydney magazine *Theatre*, for example, featured elaborately posed full-page photographs of various vaudeville stars 'signed' in the lower right hand corner. *Theatre* also ran a regular column of responses to readers' letters most of which were requests for the address of a particular star or queries as to his or her marital status. These were only glimmerings, however, in comparison to the mass capitulation to saturation-level glamour which would come with cinema culture. Even the usherettes who showed guests to their seats in the lavish picture 'palaces' wore evening gowns, reflecting the allure of lifestyles portrayed on the screen.⁴¹

It was not only the mannerisms and fashions of the stars that were studied and imitated. They were also important career role models for those young audience members who aspired to a place in the footlights. The lure of glamour attracted many lower-class youths of both sexes and with varying degrees of talent to the life of a performer. Far fewer became writers, composers or managers.⁴² There were more opportunities for women, numbers of whom were required for ballets and chorus lines, than for men. The training and apprenticeship of a vaudeville player was not as rigorous as that required for a performer in legitimate theatre. In a form which consisted of multiple short turns it was possible for an aspiring performer to develop a modest, highly specific talent to a commercial level in a relatively short

time.⁴³ Only those, however, who possessed the elusive ability to charm audiences could aspire to stardom. Even then such an ephemeral quality could not always be turned on at will, or may not have been effective with every audience.

A stage career represented, at least to those unacquainted with its harsh realities, an escape from the monotony and harshness of lower-class life into a world of glamour and adulation. One was applauded rather than rebuked for making a spectacle of oneself; one's charms could be cultivated and shown off to an admiring audience instead of being ruined by menial labour:

When I was in the ballet, why I soon became the rage.
The boys up in the gallery at me would loudly shout:
'Good old Sally, can't she throw herself about'.

A taste of drudgery in the working world and the ever present example of the grinding lives of parents provided added incentives:

My mother takes in washing but her little game don't pay,
My sister turns the mangle, working all the blessed day.
I had a situation once – it soon gave me the hump,
The master and the missus they were clean off their chump.⁴⁴

The financial rewards were meager, however, for all but an elite few and the work was not steady. This was borne out by the crowd of out-of-work performers who customarily assembled at 'Poverty Point' on the corner of Park and Pitt Streets. Managers of theatres and travelling shows such as Sorlies, Coles Bohemian Players, Barton's Follies, The Lynch Family Bell Ringers and Coleman's Pantomine Company often stopped there to pick up actors.⁴⁵ But despite its drawbacks life on the stage continued to exert a powerful attraction. Most vaudeville players, not excluding the elite group of stars, whether local or imported, were drawn from the lower class.⁴⁶ 'I'll tell you what Variety's full of' opines

one of JB Priestley's characters, 'riffraff, just downright common riffraff, earning ten times as much money as they're worth'.⁴⁷ The number of English artistes who died prematurely is striking. Few lived to see sixty.⁴⁸ This was probably due to a combination of factors including a rough early life, the demands of the vaudeville industry—in London some artistes rushed from one hall to another, performing their special turn six or even more times in an evening—and too free a partaking of the high life.

An important part of vaudeville's traditional appeal was the extent to which its audience could identify with its narratives. This will be analysed in the next chapter. As a medium which demonstrated key attributes of modern forms—spectacle, sensation, variety, rapid shifts in genre, tenor and tempo—it also offered newer, more stimulating forms of entertainment. But the pleasures of a vaudeville show were multiform extending to other types of engagement with the experience than could be found in the diversions of the performance. They encompassed the popular spatial politics of the theatre, the ways in which performances contributed to discourses of the city and modernity of concern to its audiences and the fantasies of romance and glamour it made available, especially to women. Such pleasures were eagerly taken up by the lower classes but were also increasingly desired by the middle classes from the 1890s. The voices of vaudeville's traditional opponents, the purity campaigners and rational recreationists, grew fainter as the grip of conventional Victorian moralism loosened. Following the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the subsequent accession of the rakish Edward VII vaudeville had something of a resurgence. As the Prince of Wales, Edward had affronted the respectable middle class and contributed to the growing confusion between high and low cultural boundaries by commanding many of the famous names of music hall to private performances at Sandringham. When he publicly attended the London Empire in 1909 vaudeville received the royal seal of approval.⁴⁹ It is arguable,

however, that Edward was a symptom rather than a cause of the broadening appeal of vaudeville, carried along by new values and subjectivities borne on the encroaching tide of modernity as surely as were his subjects.

¹ Napier, Valantyne, *Act as Known: Australian Speciality Acts on the World Vaudeville Variety Circuits from 1900 to 1960*, Melbourne, Globe, 1986, p119.

² [James, John Stanley], Michael Cannon ed, *The Vagabond Papers*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1969, p49.

³ Clune, Frank, *Try Anything Once*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1940, p10.

⁴ A survey undertaken in New York in 1910 found that although sixty per cent of the vaudeville audience was 'working class', a substantial thirty-six per cent came from the 'clerical' class (Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986, p143). Australian vaudeville audiences were also mixed (see Richard Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: The Australian Popular Stage 1788-1914*, Sydney, University of NSW Press, 1990, p18) though we can only guess at whether a similar distribution held here. It is not known for example to what extent audience composition differed according to the location of the theatre, whether the artistes were local or international and so on.

⁵ Barth, Gunther, *City People: the Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980, p25.

⁶ Singer, Ben, 'Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism' in Leo Charney and Vanessa R Schwartz eds, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p93.

⁷ Quoted in Singer, p92.

⁸ Stedman-Jones, Gareth, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-class Politics in London, 1870-1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class', *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974), p477.

⁹ Brisbane, Katherine ed, *Entertaining Australia, an Illustrated History*, Sydney, Currency Press, 1991, p104.

¹⁰ Freeman, John, *Lights and Shadows of Melbourne Life*, London, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888, p77.

¹¹ Stone, Louis, *Jonah*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1991, p11.

¹² Freeman, p77.

¹³ Dyson, Edward, *Benno and Some of the Push*, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Company, 1911, p22.

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- ¹⁴ *The Lorgnette* 23/8/90, p2.
- ¹⁵ Freeman, p74.
- ¹⁶ Certeau, Michel de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, p36.
- ¹⁷ Stone, p146.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London, Methuen, 1986, p91.
- ¹⁹ Fiske, John, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Boston, Unwin Hyman, 1989, p141.
- ²⁰ Goffmann, Erving, *Behavior in Public Places*, New York, Free Press, 1963, p48.
- ²¹ See, for example, Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, Cambridge Ma, Harvard University Press, 1988.
- ²² Vicinus, Martha, *The Industrial Muse: a Study of Nineteenth Century British Working Class Literature*, London, Croom Helm, 1974, p251.
- ²³ Priestley, JB, *Lost Empires: Being Richard Herncastle's account of his Life on the Variety Stage from November 1913 to August 1914 together with a Prologue and Epilogue*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1965, p243.
- ²⁴ 'London "Ria"', *Slater's Tivoli Songster* Number 8, [Sydney, no pub details], p30.
- ²⁵ Bailey, Peter, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p141.
- ²⁶ *Slater's Tivoli Songster* Number 8, p30.
- ²⁷ Bard, Katrina J, *The History of Vaudeville in Australia from 1900 to 1930*, BLitt thesis, University of New England, 1983, p4.
- ²⁸ Barth, p205.
- ²⁹ 'Silence in the Gallery', *Her Majesty's Songster*, [Sydney], Slater, 1917, p10.
- ³⁰ Barth, p26.
- ³¹ Bailey, p134.
- ³² Bailey, p149.
- ³³ Bailey, p143.
- ³⁴ Beckson, Carl, *London in the 1890s, a Cultural History*, New York, Norton, 1992, p113.
- ³⁵ Bailey, p147.
- ³⁶ Bailey, p118.
- ³⁷ *Imperial Songster* Number 134, [Sydney], Slater, [1920?], [np].
- ³⁸ Dyson, p6.

³⁹ Dyson, Edward, *Fact'ry 'Ands*, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Company, 1912, p106.

⁴⁰ Stone, Louis, *Betty Wayside*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, [n.d], p101.

⁴¹ Collins, Diane, *Hollywood Down Under. Australians at the Movies: 1896 to the Present Day*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1987, p36.

⁴² Vicinus, p254.

⁴³ An 88-year-old informant told me, for example, about a man who played the Sydney vaudeville theatres in the 1930s who had only one song, 'Oh to Hear a Sausage Sizzling in the Pan' which he performed for as long as people would put up with hearing it.

⁴⁴ 'Sally the Slavey', *Imperial Songster Number 26*, [Sydney, Slater, 1899], p71.

⁴⁵ Bard, p56.

⁴⁶ It is striking how many of the British stars came from very humble origins (Stedman-Jones, p478). A classic example was Dan Leno, the most famous comedian of his generation, who began his career at the age of four, dancing in public houses for coppers.

⁴⁷ Priestley, p297.

⁴⁸ Dan Leno died, mentally unhinged, at forty-three. See the potted biographies at the end of Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson's *British Music Hall: a Story in Pictures*, London, Studio Vista, 1965, for other examples.

⁴⁹ Mander and Mitchenson, p30.

Chapter 6

‘We’ve Got a Lodger and He’s Very Fond of Ma’: The Vaudeville Repertoire

For most members of the vaudeville audience the primary ‘text’ of a song was the performance, specifically the arrangement for live staging with which they were familiar. A song's impact, its structures of meaning and feeling were particularized, personalized and conveyed via the performance. Indeed success in vaudeville depended primarily not on the material but on a performer's ability to use his or her personality to project it. This entailed establishing a rapport with an audience. The performer was thus vastly more important in determining how a song was received than its writer or composer. A multitude of accounts exist which attest to the transformative power of performance. Lyrics which on paper were banal, clichéd and repetitive when set to music and mediated by a skilled performer became intense and vital. Performance had the power to ‘defamiliarise the familiar’, to invest the ostensibly banal with that affective force which was at the heart of the vaudeville experience.¹

The magical quality which could transfigure a song in performance can not of course be grasped through the numerous words-only songbooks published in Sydney. Nonetheless there were specific pleasures to be gleaned from the words read in isolation. Although the musical genre was probably the most potent carrier of meaning in a song people did listen to the words. The popularity of verse recitation in various professional and amateur entertainments bears this out. The lyrical content of the songs is concrete and specific, commonly with a strong narrative thread which held and directed the attention of the listener. The songbooks were aimed at a different audience to that for sheet music, certainly less musically literate and probably less affluent. They

were cheap—sixpence for most—and topical—'every song up-to-date'—containing the words to songs that were being sung currently in Sydney theatres and that would within six weeks or so be passé and perhaps forgotten. They were a way of extending and remembering performance and appealed mainly to people who had seen the songs performed. No music was required if one remembered the tune and vaudeville tunes were easy to remember.

The reception end of vaudeville, how people in the audience understood and responded to the material they saw, is to a great degree unknowable and the specific nature of the pleasures it offered must remain obscure. Considering the songs as texts, however, can yield insights into the structures of meaning which were a significant part of the attraction of the repertoire. This chapter examines the lyrical content of songs within the context of three major genres: the ballad, the patriotic song and the comic song. These were all derived from British music hall traditions of earlier in the nineteenth century. But as we shall see the vaudeville repertoire and the musical and discursive content of song genres underwent some fundamental changes after 1910 when the ragtime era of vaudeville transformed these genres. At that time, before moving pictures came to dominate popular culture, new style vaudeville songs departed from the music hall tradition to become an important medium for the expression of a range of discourses associated with modernity, reflecting in microcosm shifts which were occurring in society at large.

Although I have concentrated on the lyrics, I have attempted to avoid assuming a too simplistic relationship between the words of a song and the 'reality' of its socio-historical context. A text is the product of a multiplicity of determinants and the relationships between genre and social context are complex. A number of specific complicating factors need to be borne in mind. Firstly, in a standardized form like vaudeville the musical genre was often a more potent carrier of meaning than the

words. Within each genre strong conventions were at work, both narrative and musical, which predominately determined the mood a song created and often transcended or modified the overt meaning of the words.

Secondly, consistency in the effects of lyrics cannot be assumed. Cultural forms can have no unmediated effects and each song contained a galaxy of potential meanings and effects, none of which can be said to predominate. A sentimental ballad or a broadly comic piece can be interpreted in as many different ways as there are members of an audience. To assign a finite meaning to a text would be to ignore the active nature of reception in which ideological choices are made and preferred meanings selected from a range of possibilities.

Thirdly, the ostensible meaning, or denotation, is not the only dimension of signification to the lyrics. Secondary meaning is carried at several connotative levels. In addition to textual connotations, performance was nuanced by style connotations associated with the character assumed by the performer—swell, soubrette, tramp etc—as well as by the rhetorical posture of the song.

Within the three broad styles were a host of sub-genres—nostalgic songs, convivial songs, topical songs, character songs, cockney and coster songs, Irish ballads, Southern ballads, pathetic ballads, coon songs, nonsense songs, 'girl' songs, motto songs and so on. The sentimental or pathetic ballad did not have the 'low' connotations of the comic song and was consequently adduced by the industry as evidence of the wholesome nature of vaudeville. Performed by 'refined vocalists' and flagged in the song-books by descriptors such as 'A Beautiful Song for the Parlour' sentimental ballads could be enjoyed even by the prudish. They had middle-brow cultural status, their manipulative emotionalism characterized as uplifting. One London theatre manager claimed:

It has often been my lot to witness persons, certainly not of the richest cultivation of mind, drawn from the use of low and vulgar language, and indeed riotous conduct, into some submission after hearing a good sentimental song.²

The ancient origins of the ballad lie in the folk tradition. Originally it was a recitative form which later was set to music. Typically it told a simple narrative in a rhythmic metre with alternating four and three stress lines. In performance delivery was smooth with an emphasis on the sustained emotional effect of the narrative rather than on catchy phrases or surprise punch lines. Its emotional range was downbeat encompassing sorrow, pity, regret, tenderness, nostalgia, sympathy and so on. Themes were romantic, tragic or fond—a virtuous girl led astray, a mother’s wisdom remembered, a good man ruined by drink, the harsh fate of orphans, the heartbreak caused by ungrateful children. The highly formulaic structure of the narratives did not detract from the undoubted emotional impact of sentimental ballads which frequently reduced audience members to tears.

The philosophical stance of the sentimental ballad was above all fatalistic. It portrayed a morally polarised world driven by a Manichean struggle between good and evil and devoid of rational causality. The acquisitive individualism encouraged by the bourgeois ethos of success was critiqued, material success depicted as a threat to more important lower-class values. Resignation to low status was urged. Lyrics reassured audience members of their own worth by stressing the virtues of the ordinary man or woman. The notion of respectability as a yardstick for measuring human worth was deprecated. ‘The Ragged Jacket’ asserts a secular notion of morality defined not by religion but by the everyday interaction of human beings. It affirms that all are equal before God and rebuts those who would judge the poor and humble as worthless based on their appearance:

All men were equally born at first,

Through this and every nation;
The rich among the poor would be
But for wealth and education.
And when we're laid beneath the sod,
With a hundred years to back it,
There's none can tell which were the bones
That wore the ragged jacket.³

Such sentiments may not truly have reflected what people believed and how they conducted themselves. Their significance was that they gave expression to an ideal.

Social problems such as poverty and deprivation were formulated as an immutable part of the human condition rather than a consequence of unjust structures, diffused into an impressionistic backdrop for the real issue which is the triumph or failure of human sympathy. 'Life is harsh but must be endured' is a frequent message. If a solution is proposed it is most often simply compassion. If people would be nicer to one another social problems would disappear. Class inequalities are accepted as a fact of life. 'The Brave Sons of Toil' addresses the division between capital and labour and recognizes the injustice of the unequal distribution of wealth:

Throughout this world of ours today what contrasts do we see,
Some toil and sweat while others live a life of luxury.
The rich folk lead a life of ease and ride about all day,
But for their pleasure who's the one that's always got to pay?⁴

A direct attack on 'rich folk' is avoided, however, and an appeal to sentiment is made rather than a plea for social change.

In like manner 'Don't Put the Poor Working Man Down' condemns 'iron-heeled capital' but veers away from a political analysis of poverty instead making an appeal for everyone to be nicer to poor people:

Let capital shake hands with labour, let the poor have the bread that they
earn;
For surely they need every penny is a lesson quite easy to learn.
Remember the poor love their children, so give them a smile, not a frown;
Live and let live be your motto—oh! Don't put the poor working man down.⁵

The large sub-genre of nostalgic songs which invoked a variety of homelands enjoyed great public esteem. Irish songs were common, not surprising given that people of Irish extraction comprised around a third of the population of New South Wales and probably an even greater proportion of the vaudeville audience. Home Rule for Ireland recurs as a theme and was given sentimental treatment in songs whose lyrics were inoffensively metaphoric, channelling potentially subversive political energy into a sea of sentiment.⁶ Overtly factional messages are avoided although the content is implicitly political:

The dear little shamrock, the sweet little shamrock,
How they've scorned you, and crushed you in vain
Oh! God, let us pray, to speed on the great day,
When Ireland belongs to the Irish again.⁷

Another central motif of the sentimental ballad was the ruined woman. This gave utterance to melodramatic Victorian discourses surrounding the loss of female virtue in narratives of seduction and betrayal. An ever-present danger for women, the sexually predatory man, is represented as a despoiler of female honour:

I was a good little girl till I met you
When I was young and innocent
You stole into my heart;
You taught me things I now repent ...
I wonder what my ma would say
If she could see me now?⁸

The romantic ballad, commonly sung by a man, was another vaudeville perennial. In the 1930s its importance as a popular music

form burgeoned with the popularity of crooners⁹ whose smooth delivery and over-groomed good looks appealed to the same female audience as the matinee idols of the cinema. The romantic ballad was a paean of praise to the bliss of pre-marital love. The virtues of the beloved, and especially her physical attributes—rosebud lips, golden hair and so on—are lovingly catalogued. In a variation on the theme the mood is rueful. Faithless girls who break chaps' hearts and mercenary girls out for his money are lamented, attention drawn bitterly to the contrast between their sweet looks and their cruel hearts.

Ballads dealing with the ruinous effects of drink, the obverse of the convivial drinking song, sounded a cautionary note. They dated from the early days of the English music hall tradition though were still popular here until World War One, to judge from their representation in songbooks. One might have thought that audience members would have heard the message more times than they cared to from the temperance brigade without paying to hear it again at the theatre. If the lower classes were ignorant, as was often claimed, they had no excuse for claiming ignorance about the evils of liquor. The mode of discourse and the inflections of the anti-drink message mediated by vaudeville, however, were at odds in some important ways with the temperance message. As Vicinus points out, with so much emphasis on self-improvement in society at large vaudeville 'provided an antidote in praising man as he is and not as he should or could be'.¹⁰

'The Tragedian', for example, tells the story of a once-great actor brought low by drink and now reduced to parading in the street wearing advertising boards. The old fellow gives an impromptu performance in the Mummer's Retreat one night in his cups and is hauled off to gaol for his pains. His history is traced and the audience is given, via the intermediary singer, an intimate and confidential account of his decline. The narrative arc of the story follows that of classic tragedy rather than a temperance tale, the drunkard himself

playing the tragic hero. The descent into madness and death told by the actor's role as Lear is echoed in the circumstances of his own decline. That his misfortune is, like Lear's, of his own making, merely deepens the tragedy. This is character drawn in a humanistic rather than a didactic way, fatally flawed, but large nonetheless, the progression to disgrace a matter of tragic inevitability. Such representations countered the personification of the unregenerate drunkard in Victorian temperance homilies, reduced in human terms to a beater and starver of wives and children.

Patriotic songs, another key genre, had been popular since the early days of music hall. They were commonly written in march time, either slow or sprightly, to a strictly regular tempo. The mood was stirring and the sentiments jingoistic.¹¹ The genre has alienated some left-liberal historians who have had difficulty coming to terms with the working class's enthusiasm for imperialist flag-waving. Manning Clark, among others, looked askance: 'The working class in Australia...sang lustily all the tunes of the imperial exploiters', he wrote.¹² The songs may have been chauvinistic in sentiment but their narratives followed a different contour to the rhetoric of official patriotism. In songs such as 'He Was Only a Private, That's All' it is the bravery of the common soldier that is celebrated, rather than abstract notions of honour and Imperial supremacy.¹³ Writing about Boer War songs Stedman-Jones says:

There is every reason to believe that they were an expression of admiration for the bravery of husbands, brothers and sons at the front, rather than a general endorsement of the war, and that this identification with the common soldier was the primary way in which London workers related to the South African campaign.¹⁴

Furthermore, closer examination reveals alternative views which contest received notions about fighting for king and country:

In the trenches brave men suffer, what a scene of grave despair,
Wounded and dying, mid cannons' dull roar,
Oh, what a curse to the world is the war!¹⁵

Most of the patriotic songs sung in Australian theatres were imported from England and expressed British motifs of loyalty. In world political terms Australia identified with British foreign interests and generic imperial motifs were readily received by audiences.¹⁶ With the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899 the number of patriotic songs in the repertoire increased and allusions became more topical. This was not the first war in which Australians had fought for British interests. Volunteers had gone to the Maori Wars in 1863 and a small contingent had been sent to the Sudan in 1885. But this was the first time Australian troops had been involved in significant numbers.¹⁷ The dominant mood was self-congratulatory. There were some identifiably Australian songs, or at least with a recognizable local flavour: 'God Speed our Soldiers—May They Return Again' which was 'sung with prolonged cheering' in vaudeville theatres included mentions of Western Australia and Queensland tacked on after verses in praise of the Lancers, the Gordon Highlanders, and the Dublin Fusiliers. The mood was militaristic and in a foreshadowing of the brutal cant that was to become all too familiar after 1914 troops were exhorted to sacrifice themselves in the name of a higher cause:

See them when the General gives the order 'Charge!'
Rush for the entrenchments like fury set at large.
Brave heroes get their mortal wounds, when victory is nigh,
But sets a grand example, boys, that will never die.¹⁸

When World War One broke out another wave of patriotism swept the vaudeville theatres and an injection of new patriotic songs entered the programme. The national anthems of Britain's allies were sung the most popular being 'The Marseillaise'.

The Great War was the first large-scale international engagement in which Australian troops had participated. Songs such as 'Old England Must be Master, on the Land and on the Sea'¹⁹ and 'The Boys of Australia's Little Navy'²⁰ took for granted that it was Australia's duty to fight in defence of British interests.

And when old England wants a hand
We're here to help dear Mother land.

The commitment of Australians to the war was unequivocal notwithstanding the widespread and deeply felt resistance to conscription. Even when the Labor party split over the issue late in 1916 the majority of anti-conscriptionists remained pro-war.²¹ From a total population of about five million some 417,000 enlisted. The numbers of troops fighting were such that few people in the vaudeville audiences would not have had a family member, friend or neighbour involved. The lives of many were directly and often disastrously affected which must have given added potency to the patriotic ambience in the theatres. More than 59,000 troops were killed and about 174,000 wounded. This represented a very high casualty rate of 68.5 per cent compared to Britain's 52.5 per cent.²²

Consciousness that the front was a proving ground for Australia as a nation emerged clearly in lyrics. In the days before Gallipoli Australia had yet to forge an identity as an effective fighting nation. Lines such as 'There's something in our Australian fleet / They've proved they're not mere toys' asserted the effectiveness of the Australian forces in what may have been an answer to a lurking unease that theirs was merely a token presence. When the engagement of Australian troops began in earnest and news of their exploits began to appear in the press the focus shifted from imperialist sentiments to a more nationalistic stance. After Gallipoli this mood intensified and the myth-building commenced:

Boys of the Dardanelles,
They faced the shot and shells,
Down in hist'ry their fame will go,
Our children's children their daring deeds will know.
Australian lads in khaki and in blue
Have shown the world what they can do.²³

And while on one hand the bravery of the troops was celebrated on the other the braggart returned man was satirized with a dig at the overblown notion of valour:

Who on the enemy wanted to burst,
Who for their blood had a terrible thirst,
Who stood behind while the others went first,
Me! Me! Me!²⁴

The feminine counterpart of the heroic soldier was the Red Cross nurse. She was introduced as an idealized figure, saintly in her self-denial and devotion. This represented a notable departure from the vaudeville tradition of lampooning women with jobs unless they were barmaids or chorus girls:

It's not among society and fashion,
You'll find this heroine sublime,
'Midst the scenes of war, where the cannons roar,
Like an angel she reigns divine.²⁵

'All Heroes Don't Go to War'²⁶ celebrates bravery in civilian life reaffirming the importance of those who worked on the home front. It can be read as an implicit critique of the pressure, both official and personal, on civilian men to enlist as expressed by the provocative practice of handing white feathers to young men of military age who were not in uniform.

At the end of the war when the troops came home there was an outburst of sentimental nationalism:

I've seen France and Leicester Square
I've been nearly everywhere,
But Aussie, good old Aussie,
That is the only place for me (coo-ee).²⁷

The genre at the heart and soul of vaudeville was the comic song. It offered the combined pleasures of laughter and music as well as the collective, participatory enjoyment of chorus-singing. The thematic content of comic songs was enormously wide ranging. It seemed that almost any topic could be given comic treatment on the vaudeville stage. The humour was not gentle:

[T]here was something fierce and vindictive about it, not coming from a happy people but from those whose bewilderment deepening to despair was not a mask; and I noticed that...the poorer and darker the streets surrounding us, the closer we were to misery, the louder and harder the laughter was.²⁸

It often relied on holding others up to ridicule—various ethnic groups, parsons, policemen, cuckolded husbands, drunkards and people who sang flat at musical evenings. An admonitory or warning note was sounded in songs about nagging wives, ageing but amorous widows, greedy people and so on. Some songs, if not risqué, were, to a genteel sensibility at least, in questionable taste. Things were paraded that the etiquette books forbade mention of in polite society, like peoples' physical peculiarities—stoutness, thinness, baldness—and prostheses—wigs, corsets, false teeth, artificial limbs and other augmentations. Comic patter too, often relied on indelicacy, if not outright indecency, for its impact.

The comic song was the medium for that most typical of vaudeville tropes, the *double entendre*. Songs which relied on its impact were

commonly constructed as a series of short jokes with a reiterated, often suggestive, punch line. 'When the Gentle Breezes Blow', for example, a song with a typically innocuous-sounding title, follows the path of the said gentle breezes up a lady's dress, under a gentleman's nightshirt, through a tear in another gentleman's trousers and finally up a Scottish lad's kilt giving his female companion a shock.²⁹

Illicit or extra-marital sex was a favourite comic theme which provided ample scope for the use of the *double entendre*. In 'Hulloa! hulloa! hulloa!', made famous by Marie Lloyd, the joke hinges on a couple at a seaside resort posing as 'Mr and Mrs Brown' who give themselves away:

They make a point of squabbling, in public, it appears,
To give one the impression that they'd been spliced for years;
At breakfast though, next morning, I heard her ask him, Joe,
Do you take milk and sugar? Hulloa, Hulloa, Hulloa.³⁰

The small disappointments of life—losing at the races, friends failing to repay loans, lack of sufficient funds to go to the pub—are the stuff of comic songs. But the real vicissitudes of lower-class life are also characteristically treated with humour rather than pathos. Economic insecurity and the significant life problems associated with it shaped the lives of many of those in the audience. The everyday struggle to make ends meet is given realistic but hilarious treatment. Unemployment, a terrifying and very real prospect for many lower-class people, loomed large. 'When Father Gets the Sack' paints a bleak scenario in a stoically jaunty tone:

The baker wants his 'dough' and so he'll soon be on our track,
The butcherman will be sure to want his leg of mutton back...
I feel so awful sad 'cause mother's nearly off her chump,
She says if things go on like this, we'll all be in the lump...
The landlord's coming round to get his rent tomorrow morn,
So I suppose this frock of mine will have to go to pawn.³¹

Housing problems, universal for the propertyless poor were dramatized as high farce. Substandard housing and high rents were the norm in inner-Sydney: 'Dolly Gray' depicts the endlessly recurring problem of finding the rent in a way which would have chimed with many people in the audience:

One day my darling wife she came to me,
She said I am dead broke it's plain to see,
And the rent is due today, I said can't we move away,
We have got no dough to pay Dolly Gray.³²

The song proposes as a solution a widely practised stratagem in the ongoing battle between the haves and the have-nots—a moonlight flit. The flit would quite likely have been regarded by the majority of the audience not as an act of dishonesty but merely a practical ploy to cope with Sydney's high housing costs.

Comic songs documented social relations which were often dangerous, problematic and demanding. They expressed tensions connected with class, gender and community and their sublimations in motifs of fantasy and desire. Comic representation acted as a distancing mechanism and provided an emotional outlet in laughter which was prompted as often by the pleasure of recognition as by the innately amusing nature of the content. Negative aspects of male and female roles were expressed through humour which may have provided a release for some of the ambient tensions associated with marital and familial relations. In songs sung by men male anxieties associated with various life phases were expressed. They presented men in various roles as son, lover, man-about-town, hen-pecked or deceived husband, father and pal. Friendship between males was celebrated in drinking songs which suggest the important role played by liquor in the social and emotional life of lower-class males. Homosocial male friendship is emphasized; the absence of women is

necessary for it to flourish. Indeed it seemed that to spend leisure time in the company of his wife or children exposed a man to charges of unmanliness from his friends. In the following song the singer imagines the taunts that will greet him if he concedes to his wife's wish to accompany him to the pub:

Must you have the Missus with you,
Can't you come out on your own,
Must you always have a keeper,
Ain't you old enough to be alone.³³

The curtailment of male drinking and socializing which occurs after marriage is experienced as a significant loss:

My days are over, no more in clover,
I never hear the welcome words from old pals:
'Ain't yer goin' to have one?'³⁴

Dominant women as threat is a theme not confined to the representation of wives. Separation struggles are dramatized in songs about mothers who will not allow their sons to grow up. The mother's boy is presented as a figure of fun and the necessity for young men to break free of their mother's apron strings in order to attain credible status in the world of men emphasized. Mothers are typified as controllers. The sexuality of sons cannot find direct expression within the family for which the mother is resented:

You can see by my dark flashing eye
I can be a gay dog if I try,
But tho' I've turned twenty and want to be free
My mother still thinks I'm a youngster of three.³⁵

Anxiety produced by the intimidating effect of eligible women is apparent. Shy young men who lacked the self-possession necessary

to carry off successful interaction with the opposite sex were lampooned, their gaucherie furnishing many a comic moment.

Songs sung by husband figures were unusual in that they represented the presence of lower-class men in the home. They commonly expressed disillusionment with the married state and bespoke the difficulty of adjusting to the restrictions and responsibilities of married life. Conditions in middle-class homes made it possible to maintain the Victorian ideal of separate spheres, insulating the paterfamilias from household worries and frictions. In crowded and servantless lower-class households, however, men did not have the option of disengaging themselves from a female-dominated domain and may well have felt beleaguered. The result was a problematic relationship of lower-class men with the domestic environment. The wedded bliss they had eagerly anticipated in the love songs has not eventuated. Children scream at inconvenient hours, wives are not as affectionate as they once were and one's time and money are not one's own. Self-pity is rife:

If ever a poor fellow led a miserable life,
It's me, I wish that I was in my grave.

The prevailing tone is one of disappointment. Hints are given of having made a bad bargain. Women are not what they seemed. A girl who was pretty in the courting phase soon lets herself go. Her complexion goes to ruin, she becomes stout and her teeth are no longer her own. A woman who seemed sweet and docile turns termagant, a spoiler of a man's enjoyment and a disrupter of his tranquility:

For I'm married to a woman who is hotter than Cayenne,
Who treats me absolutely as a slave.³⁶

The expectation that it was the responsibility of women to provide a viable domestic base, to cook, clean and wash for men is not

questioned and calls for male assistance with domestic chores are resented. Furthermore a wife may not keep her side of the marriage bargain. Instead of being dutiful and industrious she proves to be lazy and pleasure-loving, lying in bed all day then going out at night to the music hall.³⁷ Some wives clear out altogether. One song tells of a wife who leaves one morning to go in search of a house to let and never comes back.³⁸

Children are typified as nuisances and invoked in terms which to a modern child-centred sensibility border on the callous. Notwithstanding the sentimental ballads of the 'Daddy's little girl/boy' type, couched in the flowery phraseology of the parlour ballad, songs which deal in more specific terms with domestic life and child-rearing are generally not so tender hearted in tone:

We have got a baby, and
It's only three days old.
...It's such a stupid child,
It screams all day and makes me riled.

Another source of child resentment is the diminishing of sexual activity which accompanies their arrival:

And ever since it landed,
Well, I'm left out in the cold.

Domestic disruptions, particularly disturbed sleep, are bothersome:

When it starts crying in the night,
The wife says, 'Get up John!'
And out of bed I have to jump,
And put the kettle on.³⁹

Expectations that a man should relinquish his weekly pay packet to his wife are a major source of disgruntlement. The management of

household finances was a task which was generally conceded to the wife in families which aspired to even minimal respectability.⁴⁰ A man who was a 'good provider' would hand his wages over to his wife and receive back a small sum in beer and tobacco money. The curtailment of economic autonomy that this arrangement imposed was represented as unjust. A man's wages, which he has worked so hard to earn, are no longer his own to use as he pleases for drinking, betting or other leisure pursuits:

I'm always broke, I can never see a joke,
I'm what you call a proper married man.⁴¹

It was easy for a dissatisfied man to conceptualise his wife as a grasping abuser of her fiscal power as in the following mimetic sequence sung by a man portraying his wife:

How dare you come to me and ask for ha'pennys,
I never heard such impudence and cheek;
You're earning thirty shillings now and all that you give me,
Is twenty-nine and tenpence every week.
Are you keeping up two homes or going racing,
For the money must go somewhere you'll allow;
When you had three ha'pence Saturday and it's only Friday night,
How dare you come and ask for money now?⁴²

Another aspect of marriage experienced as hard is the strict standards of sexual fidelity expected. Even so much as a glance at a well-turned ankle can earn a man censure. Wives themselves, however, are typified as faithless given the least opportunity. Lodgers are a particular danger:

We've got a lodger and he's very fond of Ma,
I wonder why, I wonder why.
Pa doesn't like him, and he doesn't like Papa,
I wonder why, I wonder why.

The family as represented in the vaudeville repertoire was a matriarchal institution. Father is represented as a hapless, ineffectual figure, much put upon by other members of the household, a far cry from the stern patriarch of the middle-class home. Instead of being its respected head he feels relegated to the least of its members. He comes off second-best to the lodger in the competition for his wife's affection and he must also give up the choice portions of food and other household amenities:

The lodger gets the very best of everything, you bet,
Poor old pa has whatever he can get.⁴³

From a woman's perspective, the married state is no less disappointing. The propensity of husbands to ogle nice-looking women, the difficulty of getting them out of the pub and their tendency to stint on the housekeeping are just some of the drawbacks. Emotionally it proves to be a letdown. The attentiveness of the husband quickly wanes and unfaithfulness and absenteeism set in:

They're alright in the honeymoon stage,
But once they get the bird in the cage,
The rooster goes a pickin' with another chicken,
Leaves the hen to brood and sigh.
You can't keep them out of the house when first you begin,
When you're married you will find you can't keep them in.⁴⁴

Even greater disappointments are in store. Once married a woman's lot in life was largely determined by the character and predisposition of her husband. The blessing of being married to a good provider is apparently celebrated in 'He Was a Good, Kind Husband':

He used to earn good money, but
Let me be understood –
'Twas only 18 bob a week,
But every bob was good.
He'd bring it home on Saturday,

And place it on the shelf,
And never dreamed of keeping more
Than tuppence for himself.⁴⁵

But the voice here is decidedly tongue-in-cheek. The pleasure of this song for the female sector of the audience no doubt lay in decoding the irony.

The drunken husband, one of the worst of life's problems for women, was, along with other trials of lower-class life usually treated in comic mode. The following song parodies the tropes of the pathetic ballad in a stark presentation of brutality:

He was more like a friend than a husband
His kindness was touching – he touched everyone.
Of course, we had squabbles at times.
He once raised his hand to me – *once*, mind I say;
I might add he hadn't his boots on that day.
He then threw a flat iron – we'd had a few words;
It caught me on top of the head,
Now that shows his kindness; he might just as well
Have thrown the piano instead.
His heart was as soft – well! As soft as his head,
I can't say the same of his fist.⁴⁶

In sentimental mode mothers are portrayed as wise, selfless and true, particularly if they are mortally ill or, even more affecting, dead. In comic mode, however, they are peppery matriarchs, for whom idle, greedy or unruly husbands and children are forever nervously on the watch. Women as the passive victims of drunkenness, a stereotype favoured by temperance rhetoric, is not in evidence. Rather, women are represented as wryly stoical or actively laying down the law. The following song depicts an indignant mother, rampant in her righteous wrath, with relish:

Now when I was a little boy,

Ma sent me out for grub,
I came home and I broke the news
That dad was in the pub;
So mother and me and the family
All started there and then –
Mother rushed in with her ears back,
And laid out twenty men.⁴⁷

Emphasis was placed on women's sexual presence rather than their status as wage workers. Factory work does not figure although many female audience members are likely to have been either factory workers or domestic servants. In roles other than those of sweetheart, wife or mother, roles in other words not defined by a relation to men, women were commonly ridiculed. 'The Lady Doctor', for example, denigrates professional women by symbolically classing them with prostitutes:

It's a nice little house with a little red lamp,
And a little brass plate outside.
If you don't feel well, just push the bell,
And then you step inside;
When you get into the surgery, feeling full of grief and pain,
When she's felt your pulse and made you well,
You'll want to be ill again.⁴⁸

Such negative portrayals were no doubt to some extent a defensive response to the women's suffrage movement and the increasing visibility of women in the workforce from the 1880s.⁴⁹ But misogynistic slurs were also a traditional weapon in the ongoing battle of the sexes as men attempted to come to terms with the perceived threats posed by women in changing male/female relations.⁵⁰

Domestic service as a work option had always been unpopular with lower-class Australian girls.⁵¹ This was articulated in the bourgeois press as the servant problem. Middle-class women complained of the

impossibility of finding competent, reliable servants. In the following song the situation is depicted from the other side of the fence. As in the songs in praise of idleness which will be examined presently, a stereotype, in this case the uppity, lazy and coquettish servant, is appropriated and brandished under the noses of a censorious bourgeoisie:

I'm looking for a situation,
I want one, you see,
Where there isn't any noisy kids about,
And the washing and the work is all put out.
I'm not particular
If they call me when day is dawning,
As long as the guv'nor brings me up a cup of tea
Before I get up in the morning...
Why, everywhere I go, there's always a row you know,
Over the master see.
But if the guv'nor's nice to me,
I must be nice to him, you see.⁵²

The women portrayed in comic songs were often active in contrast to most roles in melodrama and 'legitimate' theatre which were more traditional and narrower in range. In the vaudeville repertoire conventional expectations of the female role are sometimes totally shattered. The following song, for example, is a celebration of the drinking and swearing prowess of a decidedly non-respectable wife by her husband:

My old woman
Like a great big navy,
She drinks and smokes and chews,
She'd wrestle Mr Hackensmith,⁵³
When she's mopping up the booze...
It doesn't matter what it is,
From paraffin to glue;
And she hasn't tasted water now

Since 1892;
And when she's taking drink,
The fearful things she says,
The air turns blue, birds fly away,
And the town's in dark for days.⁵⁴

One of the major themes of comic songs was drinking, a reflection of the importance of the role played by liquor in the lives of the audience. Drinking with cronies was predominant among the joys of lower-class leisure followed by a day at the races and lying late in bed. Whereas sentimental ballads dealt with drink in a cautionary or remorseful vein comic songs are generally celebratory, characterized by rollicking choruses. 'Come Where There's Booze for All' was sung for seven weeks at the Tivoli and described as 'without a doubt the very best Chorus Song of the day':

Come where there's plenty of booze for all –
The fat, the lean, the short ones and the tall;
Let's give the dear old pub a call,
And we'll all get blind-o in the morning.⁵⁵

It opens with a general invitation to a prelapsarian land of plenty where another 'drink problem', that is, its unavailability in sufficient quantities, disappears. The inclusiveness which is fundamental to true conviviality is emphasized and the pub is invoked in terms of affection. The final line is a jab at the work ethic. Not only will all get blind-o, but they will do so in the morning when sober and compliant citizens are hard at work.

The temperance advocate who contested lower-class drinking practices was resented:

No more he'll close the pubs up, with our pleasures interfere
So I murdered that old wowser, for he wasn't wanted here.⁵⁶

Next to drinking, gambling is the leisure pursuit which most often appeared in comic songs. Betting on horse races is particularly well documented. Losing one's money is a common theme. Songs which appear to be about winning invariably turn out to be merely loser's tales with a twist because the winner never actually collects. The bookmaker is normally cast as the villain in the piece either disappearing before the punter can collect his winnings or refusing point blank to pay up.⁵⁷ The lower-class punter had little recourse in these situations which must have occurred frequently.

The basic joys of food, less fraught with danger than those of drink, were celebrated in fantasies of plenty sustained by lives of privation. The cuisine of vaudeville songs is not grand cuisine. Street food such as the pie and the saveloy—'full of meat, nice and sweet'—are celebrated.⁵⁸ The plain fare of a humble table was the standard of perfection and greed was not censured but relished:

Corned beef and carrots, corned beef and carrots...
Don't live like vegetarians, on food they give to parrots,
From morn till night blow out your 'Kite' on corned beef and carrots.⁵⁹

Or:

It's tripe, tripe, beautiful tripe!...
I wish I'd a pound, it would soon be gone,
And the same to you, with vinegar on!
Dream, dream of lovely 'thick seam',
It's always in season and ripe,
I'm all of a quiver, when I see a shivering
Lovely great plateful of tripe.⁶⁰

Comic songs about work are few. More common are songs that reject the notion of work altogether such as Harry Lauder's 'It's Nice to get up in the Mornin' (But it's Nicer to Lie in Bed)':

When [the factory bells] commence to ring, I rise, but if it looks like rain,

I fill my pipe, then light it, and go back to bed again.⁶¹

Such anti-work songs in fact underlined the abnormality of idleness for working people. They also undercut the idealization of work, the cardinal virtue of the Victorian age, 'the Protestant vice'. It was advocated especially for the lower class who were urged to greater efforts as a panacea for virtually all social and personal problems. The obverse of this reverence for work was the construction of idleness as an evil. Vaudeville contests the adage that hard work guarantees prosperity—lower-class people would have been well aware that this was cant. Vaudeville makes no moral distinction between undeserving idlers and the deserving working poor, one of the most deep-seated and abiding dichotomies in the bourgeois discourse of poverty. The songs reflect an opposing view that fate is the most important determining force at work in human lives, a fate which is all too apt to disdain human endeavour.

To reject the notion of honest work was to attack the very foundations of Victorian bourgeois moralism. The ethos of defiant idleness was alive and well in vaudeville in comic patter such as: 'Who was it invented work? Our ancestors. And what is the result? They are all dead'; and 'I want eight hours for play, eight hours for sleep and eight hours—to look for work'.⁶² Songs such as those of Scottish comedian Harry Lauder, enormously popular in Australia, which represented the lazy with amused indulgence, were firmly in the *epater le bourgeois* tradition:

O! there's lots o' folks that never work, they hate the very name;
And others would be idle if it wasn't for the shame.
They say we should rise wi' the lark – well I believe that when
The lark that we should rise wi' doesn't get up till ten.⁶³

The following song refutes the expectation of the governing class that an unemployed man should devote himself to looking for work:

A man said to me, 'Are you out of employment?'
I said, 'If you must know, I am.'
Said he, 'What a pity, there's work here in plenty'.
I merely replied, 'So I've heard'.
Said he, 'Then why don't you go round and look for it?'
Being idle you know is absurd'...
But if I did look, look'd left and right,
Then I might find work – I say I might;
But if I found it would I commence?
It isn't likely, so where's the sense?⁶⁴

Major changes in musical and discursive content followed on the introduction of ragtime, an intensely mediated form derived from the traditions of black music. The craze for new Irving Berlin-style ragtime song and dance music dates globally from 1911 and the publication of Berlin's famous 'Alexander's Ragtime Band' which embodied the new modernised form of ragtime. Thereafter Tin Pan Alley songs by Berlin, Gershwin and others of their ilk were commonly performed on the vaudeville stage, plugged by artistes for the music publishing houses. The new style was vivid and dynamic—snappy, modern American music which answered the quickening pace of twentieth century life. It confirmed Ben Singer's observation that: 'as the urban environment grew more intense so did the sensations of commercial amusement'.⁶⁵ Unlike the more traditional vaudeville repertoire jazz and ragtime owed nothing to bourgeois culture which they were about to transform from below.⁶⁶

Ragtime introduced an entirely new set of musical tropes to the vaudeville stage. It was a significant departure from traditional vaudeville music whose roots were in Victorian music halls. But the triumph of the new form seemed inexorable. Old style vaudeville songs began to sound bland and outdated. Performance was paramount. Although there were continuities with minstrel entertainment this

looked old hat in comparison with a new wave of black musicians performing more expressive and authentic ragtime numbers and soon virtually disappeared.⁶⁷ Not everyone welcomed the changes. To traditionalists among vaudeville patrons ragtime was formless and discordant. Its complex syncopations sounded like 'distortions' of the natural rhythm of a song and they responded with perplexity and sometimes hostility. Such criticisms were common enough to be satirised in the repertoire:

When composing ragtime, if you want to make hits,
Take a sheet of music, cut it up into bits;
Paste it all together, never mind if it fits.⁶⁸

Despite initial alarm the impact of ragtime and its successor, jazz, was immense and ultimately changed the face of popular music and of public tastes. As older forms passed away new ones more in keeping with the modern sound emerged. Ragtime rhythms demanded rhythmic body movements instead of complex steps and new dance forms developed. At the Tivoli patrons were invited onto the stage at the end of performances to learn steps like the Turkey Trot.⁶⁹

The international vaudeville repertoire both projected and contributed to shaping the sort of modern consciousness which helped people adapt to a rapidly changing and competitive urban milieu.⁷⁰ While vaudeville songs continued to give expression to Victorian themes which characterised urban life as dark and dangerous beneath its gaudy allure, themes associated with modernity also emerged. They encompassed a variety of ideas and motifs centred on the city, and reflected a re-ordering of priorities, a change in subjectivities, changing roles for women and a trend towards individual gratification and emotional expressiveness. A major shift occurred in the way the city was represented. It came to be seen as the embodiment of glamour, excitement, thrills. New words such as 'fascinating' and 'razzmatazz'

entered the vaudeville vocabulary to express the mood of modern urban life. Tin Pan Alley songs such as 'How Ya Gonna Keep 'em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Paree)' associate city life with good times, sophistication, the high life. Country life by contrast is dull and country people bumpkins:

I love the cows and chickens,
But this is the life, this is the life;
I love to raise the Dickens,
While I'm Cabareting,
Where the band is playing,
I love the home-made cider,
But I'd rather have wine,
No more picking berries,
Me for cocktail cherries!⁷¹

Nostalgia for a rural home, a standard theme of classic sentimental ballads, is ironised:

I want to go back to the farm;
Far away from harm,
With a milk pail on my arm,
I miss the rooster, the one that useter
Wake me up at 4am.⁷²

The plodding rhythm and clumsy rhymes suggest the gaucherie and tedium of life on the farm. And, if we needed more signals, the notion that the singer might miss being woken up by screeching poultry at 4am is rather too far-fetched to be taken at face value.

The romantic ballad gave way to verse/chorus songs set to modern dance rhythms which accommodated modern meanings and sensibilities. The heavy-handed sentimentality of the romantic vaudeville ballad was outmoded in an atmosphere where everyone wanted to seem smart. Tin Pan Alley songwriters, including many in

Australia, rang their own changes on the genre with new thematic content set to offbeat rhythms. Changes in the way male/female relations were represented emerge which were at once suggestive and playful. Some modern ballads were hard-edged and world-weary expressing states of mind associated with an alienated modernist subjectivity—disaffection, disgust with the meaninglessness of life, ennui, the existential angst. The tedium of living is more likely to defeat one than liquor or poverty:

Tired of kicking, tired of strife, tired of living with a tiresome wife,
Tired of sunshine, tired of dew, you're tired of me and I'm tired of you...
Tired of money, none to spend, tired of wond'ring when the war will end,
Tired of the stars up in the sky, when death comes I know I'll be too tired to die.⁷³

Comic songs began to rely less on wink-wink-nudge-nudge innuendo and more on wit and whimsy. Although the pathetic ballad about the fallen woman continued to be a vaudeville staple songs with a modern emphasis offered an entirely different set of narratives. New structures of feeling found expression in a broader spectrum of social roles for women. Female singers dispensed advice to less experienced women on how to survive in the big city, often, but not invariably, via the catching of a viable man since marriage was still the fate of the vast majority of women. Women were represented, however, as proactive players in the mating game rather than as passive objects waiting to be chosen by a man. The romantic ideal is displaced by a shrewd, tactical, even cynical attitude. In 'I Might Learn to Love Him Later On' a housemaid speculates about 'a titled gent' of eighty-five:

Tho' he stutters and he dribbles, they accept the cheques he scribbles,
So I might learn to love him later on'.⁷⁴

Girls were counselled to be cool and to stay in control:

Oh girls, attention, and pray my warning take,

When you tell a man you love him, well that's a great mistake,
But tease him, and show him a thousand moods a day,
Oh girls, as sure as fate you'll get there right away.

In a new twist on the commodification of female purity women are advised not to squander their sexual capital but to use it cleverly:

Poor little maid of 17, not very much delight had seen,
'Ere the Adonis she adored, seemed so to speak—well—bored.
'I have been' she said, 'Too stand off with him maybe'.
Quite the reverse of that we fear,
Oh dear, oh dear, just 17.⁷⁵

Sexually accommodating women began to be portrayed not as soiled doves but as smart cookies (from a female perspective) or good sports (from a male perspective). Virtue was going out of style and being replaced by a shrewd sophistication which strategically deployed sexuality for advantage. Peiss has described the 'charity girls' of New York⁷⁶ and Kylie Tennant their counterparts in Sydney.⁷⁷ These were modern girls who managed to live a more glamorous and entertaining life than others of their class by augmenting modest wages with gifts and treats from men:

How do you do it Mabel, on twenty dollars a week? (or 30 shillings a week)...
Tell us how you are able on twenty dollars a week?
A fancy flat, and a diamond bar, twenty hats and a motor car.
Go right to it, but how do you do it, on twenty dollars a week?⁷⁸

As a corollary of these new attitudes to female sexuality, being attractive to men, making the most of their personal assets, was becoming an important goal for women. The use of cosmetics once an indicator of compromised moral status was becoming usual. Even married women, formerly considered out of the race, were urged to keep themselves attractive for their husbands, a message which was later to become a commonplace of women's magazines:

When you're married girls always wear your Sunday clothes,
Don't forget your baby bows,
And the little bit of powder for your nose!
When you're married girls, be as fascinating as you can,
It's not the bit of fish but the parsley round the dish
That tickles the poor old man!⁷⁹

Vaudeville was seemingly strengthened by modernity, buoyed by a wave of pleasure-seeking on a new scale. But with the introduction of ragtime and moving pictures vaudeville song genres, formulaic in structure and governed by tradition, lost some of their power. Vaudeville conventions were ignored and audience expectations shattered. Songs began to refer to other popular cultural forms which were competing with vaudeville for the allegiance of the lower class. Film stars, cartoon characters, sportsmen— all were part of the cult of celebrity which undermined the power of vaudeville traditions and stock characters. Although early forms of modern popular culture were enacted on the vaudeville stage, other, ultimately more influential forms of that culture would soon overtake and undermine the power of the tropes, stock characters and genres that had exerted such a powerful attraction for audiences.

¹ Simon Frith quoted in Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, Milton Keynes, PA, Open University Press, 1990, p229.

² Kift, Dagmar, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p80.

³ 'The Ragged Jacket', *Imperial Songster no.113*, [Sydney, n.d], p21.

⁴ 'The Brave Sons of Toil', *Imperial Songster no.92* [Sydney, 1910?], p28.

⁵ 'Don't Put the Poor Working Man Down', *Imperial Songster no.92*, p47.

⁶ A character in one of JB Priestley's novels (*Lost Empires: Being Richard Herculastle's account of his Life on the Variety Stage from November 1913 to August 1914 together with a Prologue and Epilogue*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1965, p276) remarks that 'as soon as the English go to music halls they love the Irish'.

⁷ 'When Ireland Belongs to the Irish Again', *Imperial Songster no.123* [Sydney, 1918?], p17.

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- ⁸ 'I Was a Good Little Girl Till I Met You', *Imperial Songster no.123*, p32.
- ⁹ Crooning grew out of microphone technique in the 1930s.
- ¹⁰ Vicinus, Martha, *The Industrial Muse: a Study of Nineteenth-Century British Working Class Literature*, London, Croom Helm, 1974, p239.
- ¹¹ The term 'jingoism' is in fact derived from the vaudeville song 'We Don't Want to Fight (But by Jingo if We Do)'.
- ¹² Clark, CMH, *A History of Australia V: the People Make Laws 1888-1915*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981, p208.
- ¹³ 'He Was Only a Private That's All', *Imperial Songster no.71*, [Sydney, n.d], p71.
- ¹⁴ Stedman-Jones, Gareth, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870-1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class', *Journal of Social History* 7(1974) p461.
- ¹⁵ 'Why Can't Each Nation be at Peace', *Imperial Songster no.73*, [Sydney, n.d], p41.
- ¹⁶ Stedman-Jones has described how the London working class underwent a cultural re-making between 1870 and 1900 reflected in a decline in interest in class-based politics and the rise of 'popular imperialism' in the repertoire of the late-Victorian music hall.
- ¹⁷ About 16,000 men went to South Africa between 1899 and 1902 (Beverley Kingston, *The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 3, 1860-1900: Glad, Confident Morning*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1988, p292).
- ¹⁸ 'God Speed Our Soldiers—May They Return Again', *Joe Slater's Imperial Songster no. 35*, [Sydney, n.d], p19.
- ¹⁹ 'Old England Must be Master, on the Land and on the Sea', *Babes in the Wood Pantomime Songster: Patriotic Edition*, Sydney, Joe Slater, [1914?], p20.
- ²⁰ 'The Boys of Australia's Little Navy', *Imperial Songster no.113*, p15.
- ²¹ McQueen, Humphrey, *A New Britannia: an Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1970, p38.
- ²² Rickard, John, *Australia: a Cultural History*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1988, p122.
- ²³ 'Boys of the Dardanelles', *Joe Slater's Peace Songster*, [Sydney, 1918], p12.
- ²⁴ 'Me! Me! Me!', *Imperial Songster no.78*, [Sydney, nd], p12.
- ²⁵ 'The Red Cross Nurse', *Joe Slater's Peace Songster*, p27.
- ²⁶ 'All Heroes Don't Go to War', *Imperial Songster no.104*, [Sydney, n.d], p39.
- ²⁷ *Joe Slater's Peace Songster*, p12.
- ²⁸ Priestley, p106.
- ²⁹ 'When the Gentle Breezes Blow', *Joe Slater's Imperial Songster no.43*, Sydney, [1901?], p13.

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- ³⁰ 'Hulloa! Hulloa! Hulloa!', *Imperial Songster no.38*, [Sydney, 1901?], p36.
- ³¹ 'When Father Gets the Sack', *Special Tivoli Songbook*, [Sydney, n.d], p12.
- ³² 'Dolly Gray', *Joe Slater's Imperial Songster no. 43*, p35.
- ³³ 'Must You?', *Tivoli Songster no.33*, [Sydney, n.d], p7.
- ³⁴ 'Ain't Yer Goin' to Have One?', *Her Majesty's Songster*, Sydney, Joe Slater, [1917?], p5.
- ³⁵ *Imperial Songster no.122*, [Sydney, 1917?], p25.
- ³⁶ 'How Dare You?', *Imperial Songster*, [Sydney, 1910?], p43.
- ³⁷ *Imperial Songster no.104*, p33.
- ³⁸ *Imperial Songster no.38*, [Sydney, n.d], p88.
- ³⁹ 'Love to All', *Joe Slater's Imperial Songster no.43*, p15.
- ⁴⁰ Walker, Robin, 'Aspects of Working-Class Life in Industrial Sydney in 1913', *Labour History*, 58 (May 1990), p37.
- ⁴¹ 'A Proper Married Man', *Her Majesty's Songster*, p25.
- ⁴² 'How Dare You?', *Imperial Songster*, p43.
- ⁴³ 'I Wonder Why?', *Tivoli Songbook no. 30*, [Sydney, n.d], p1.
- ⁴⁴ 'They Never Leave You Alone Till They Get You', *Imperial Songster no.166*, [Sydney, 1918?, np].
- ⁴⁵ 'He Was a Good, Kind Husband', *Imperial Songster no.22*, [Sydney, n.d], p6.
- ⁴⁶ 'He Was More Like a Friend than a Husband', *Special Tivoli Songbook*, p44.
- ⁴⁷ 'Pulling 'Em Out', *Imperial Songster no.29*, [Sydney, n.d], p20.
- ⁴⁸ 'The Lady Doctor', *Imperial Songster no. 92*, p29.
- ⁴⁹ Waterhouse, Richard, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: the Australian Popular Stage 1788-1914*, Kensington, NSW, University of NSW Press, 1990, p130.
- ⁵⁰ See Lake, Marilyn, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', *Australian Historical Studies*, 22 (1986).
- ⁵¹ See for example Twopeny, REN, *Town Life in Australia (1883)*, facsimile edition, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1973, p57.
- ⁵² 'I'm Looking for a Situation', *Imperial Songster no.147*, [Sydney, n.d], p30.
- ⁵³ A vaudeville wrestler.
- ⁵⁴ 'My Old Woman', *Imperial Songster no.147*, p10.
- ⁵⁵ 'Come Where There's Booze for All', *Joe Slater's Imperial Songster no.43*, p20.

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- ⁵⁶ 'I Murdered Him Last Monday', *Imperial Songster*, p119.
- ⁵⁷ *Imperial Songster no.104*, p4.
- ⁵⁸ 'Saveloy', *Imperial Songster no.83*, [Sydney, 1908?], p26.
- ⁵⁹ 'Corned Beef and Carrots', *Imperial Songster no.92*, p39.
- ⁶⁰ 'Tripe', *Imperial Songster no.68*, [Sydney, 1918?], n.p.
- ⁶¹ 'It's Nice to Get Up in the Mornin' (But it's Nicer to Lie in Bed)', *Imperial Songster no.109*, [Sydney, n.d], p44.
- ⁶² *Special Tivoli Songbook*, p25.
- ⁶³ 'It's Nice to Get up in the Mornin' (But it's Nicer to Lie in Bed)', *Imperial Songster no.109*, p44.
- ⁶⁴ *Imperial Songster no.83*, p24.
- ⁶⁵ Singer, Ben, 'Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism' in Leo Charney and Vanessa R Schwartz eds, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p88.
- ⁶⁶ Hobsbawm, EJ, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, London, Guild, 1987, p237.
- ⁶⁷ Bard, Katrina J, *The History of Vaudeville in Australia from 1900 to 1930*, MA thesis, p37.
- ⁶⁸ 'It's Got to be in Ragtime', *Imperial Songster no.104*, p21.
- ⁶⁹ *Tivoli Programme* [Sydney, no pub details] 18/8/14.
- ⁷⁰ See for example the section on vaudeville in Barth, Gunther, *City People: the Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980.
- ⁷¹ 'This is the Life', *Imperial Songster* [no number, Sydney, 1914?], p6.
- ⁷² 'I Want to go Back to Michigan (Down on the Farm)', *Joe Slater's Babes in the Wood Songster* [Sydney, 1913?], p12.
- ⁷³ 'I'm Tired', *Tivoli Songbook*, p9.
- ⁷⁴ 'I Might Learn to Love Him Later On', *Imperial Songster no.134* [Sydney, n.d, n.p].
- ⁷⁵ 'Just 17', *Imperial Songster no.71*, p37.
- ⁷⁶ Peiss, Kathy, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-century New York*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986, p110.
- ⁷⁷ Tennant, Kylie, *Foveaux*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1939, p296.
- ⁷⁸ 'How Do You Do It Mabel?', *Joe Slater's National Songster* [Sydney, 1915?], p27.
- ⁷⁹ *Imperial Songster no. 104*, p42.

Part 3

The Street

Chapter 7

Larrikin Days

From the 1880s until the outbreak of World War One a spectre haunted Sydney, the spectre of larrikinism. These lower-class youths gathered in rowdy groups on street corners, lurked in blind alleyways with evil intent and roamed the parks in predatory packs. Their body symbolism conveyed rampant masculinity and latent menace. They inspired fear, loathing and revulsion in the hearts of respectable citizens but also, perversely, fascination. The word 'larrikin' is now part of the lexicon, sentimentalised and domesticated to mean a carefree, mischievous character, irreverent but fundamentally innocuous. When the word was new however it had no such benign connotations.¹ It appeared frequently in the press, in letters to the editor and in sententious editorial pieces, used as a synonym for gangsters, criminals, degenerates and deviants. If not directly accused of criminality larrikins were pilloried for the outlandish spectacle they created, their appearance and mannerisms of speech and dress reviled or ridiculed. They were typified as idlers, loafers, shirkers, lacking in character and self-discipline, a retrogressive threat to the ethos of progress which drove official colonial society.

Large transformations were happening in cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which bear on the phenomenon of larrikinism. Modernity was bringing about transformations which were readily apparent in the public sphere, notably in Sydney's changing landscape. Narrow, twisting streets found 'unsuitable...for the practical wants of a large city' were being widened and straightened.² Ramshackle structures were replaced by imposing public buildings, vast warehouses and department stores built to accommodate the expanding processes of government, trade and commerce. As a

corollary large numbers of poor people were systematically cleared out of the city when their houses were resumed and demolished. Changes which aligned with the needs of business interests to reclaim residential spaces were represented in general terms of the public good, expressed in a vocabulary of expansion and renewal. But beneath the façade of progressivism, the pride in civic improvement and economic growth that characterised Sydney and other cities of the western world was a lurking fear.³ 'Rational fear' of specific urban problems such as crime and disease outbreaks was entangled with what Briggs has called 'romantic fear' whose origins were in the shifting, intangible realm of the social imaginary.⁴

The ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the structure of perception in which larrikins were enmeshed illustrated the tension between 'life's possibilities and perils' which Berman has described as a key attribute of modernity.⁵ The crisis of the new was affecting people of all classes and conditions in ways which emphasised disjunctions between the modern public sphere and developments in the realm of the popular, for as O'Shea expressed it 'modernity is not one discourse, but the site of intersection of several, which do not sit easily together'.⁶ In important ways larrikins were in the vanguard of these transformations, although there was no awareness in turn-of-the-century Sydney that they were the harbingers of a new order. Their lifestyle was symptomatic of a canon of manners and mores which would become widespread with the entrenchment of mass culture. They were part of a wholesale cultural transformation which was challenging old certainties, generating confusions about high and low, about the civilized and the degenerate in the world of social relations as well as that of mass culture.

Larrikins represented the unruly, demotic dimensions of modernity. Stratton has convincingly argued that they were the first Australian manifestation of spectacular lower-class youth culture, a social

phenomenon organised around age and class and expressed in the creation of style.⁷ Such sub-cultures were called into existence by modernity, specifically the early stirrings of consumer culture. The street presence of larrikins and their heterogeneous cultural practices were at odds with the tone of the rational bourgeois city. In the city centre where activities were increasingly regulated larrikin street life was directly in the firing line. Gangs of unruly young men were not a new sight on the streets of Sydney. Antecedents of the larrikins can be identified for example in packs of youths such as the Cabbage Tree Mob who engaged in vexatious activities like larking and holding the street in the early 1840s.⁸ But the continuities of young male street behaviour notwithstanding, there were specific qualities of larrikinism which marked it as a modern phenomenon. They dressed, acted and spoke in ways different to their parents (as well as some of their peers) and their public presence and spectacular practices ensured that they stood out from their surroundings. They wanted a better time on the streets and more leisure consumption which placed them at odds with the aspirations of the respectable working class who sought betterment in a life in the suburbs and an improved standard of living. They acted in defiance of the expectations of the dominant culture by refusing the boredom and monotony of lower-class life. They demanded more enjoyment in their daily existence. They valorised leisure over work. They affirmed their selfhood, they acted, they manifested will. As Murray saw it, they were fighting for the right to express themselves.⁹

Larrikins attempted, through ritual and style rather than political activity, to resolve problems associated with their subordinate class position. For all the distinguishing practices of their sub-culture they shared the same life experiences and subordinate social position, were subject to the same 'determining matrix of experiences and conditions' which fundamentally shaped the lower-class culture from which they came.¹⁰ Although they lacked a coherent vision of how society was

structured, clearly they understood and sharply experienced the realities of class inequality in their everyday lives. Their disaffection was not contained by the organised resistance of the labour movement and their alienation from its official associations ensured that they were not subversive in the political sense. Their resistance was situated in the realm of the everyday and their mobile presence facilitated strategic deployment of their rituals of contestation. In the larger context social relations were being transformed by a process which attempted to incorporate the lower class into the bourgeois hegemony.¹¹ Following the industrial unrest of the 1890s an impulse to emphasise a new harmonious social order free from class antagonism emerged and gained strength as Federation subsumed the discourse of class into that of nation.¹² In their enactment of heterogenous practices larrikins resisted the homogenisation of everyday life which this entailed thus contradicting the unifying notion of a classless, cohesive society.

But in the drive to conceal the fundamentals of class difference the spectacle of classlessness was privileged over its reality, an expedient rejected by the larrikins. They refused to be more like the middle class, preferring to emphasise their difference, to conspicuously display their otherness, thereby shattering what Hebdige has called the myth of consensus.¹³ At key points they contested the dominant system of values by their appearance, behaviour and disruptive street presence and their sub-culture prevailed in defiance of the social and economic forces which marginalized them. Their very ability to cause trouble was a symbol of agency in the face of political and economic disempowerment. By flouting the code of normative behaviour which governed middle-class public culture larrikins insisted on their presence and demonstrated their agency to a dominant class which wished them gone.

Larrikinism became tangible through its representations, most notably through mass-mediated narratives of deviance which offered imaginative access to lowlife to a respectable readership. Though relegated to the fringe of society larrikins occupied a central place in the imaginative life of the city. In this shadowy realm where 'ideology and fantasy conjoin[ed]' inchoate fears formed which found a focus in larrikins and other outsider groups.¹⁴ Because representations of larrikins grew out of both the real and the imagined landscapes of Sydney the empirical 'reality' of the phenomenon is difficult to define. In London detailed and systematic study of inner-urban areas had produced a significant volume of empirical data among which the parliamentary Blue Books on sanitation and living conditions and Charles Booth's demographic surveys were the best known. Such information allowed urban social and environmental problems to be delineated with at least some degree of empirical accuracy. But in Sydney officialdom seemed to have little faith in the value of research and only minimal statistics were compiled by the government statistician.¹⁵ This allowed assertions about the dangers of urban life to go largely unchallenged by objective evidence. Sydney thus became a fertile discursive site where concern with urban problems seemed to be related less to material circumstances than to the psychic universe of the middle class.

The meanings assigned to the social facts of larrikinism by contemporary representations were frequently at odds. Accounts left by larrikins themselves are non-existent. Stratton's analysis indicates why this might have been so: in common with other youth subcultures the phenomenon of larrikinism existed only at the level of the visible, of spectacle.¹⁶ When not collectively enacting the practices of the sub-culture they blended into the lower-class background from which they emerged. Larry Foley, a pugilist who allegedly became leader of the infamous Rocks push after defeating its former leader in a boxing

match, has been styled as a larrikin in retrospect in Roberts' popular biography.¹⁷ A contemporary portrait engraving of him, however, shows a prosperous-looking, rather grim-faced burgher. In other representations larrikins were variously depicted as gangsters who secretly controlled the power structures of the city, vicious street criminals or deprived lads whose lives were blighted by poverty and social inequality. Subtexts hinted at powerful, unacknowledged conflicts which sprang from class difference, the crisis of male power and the pressures of modernisation.¹⁸

In the popular press the discourse of larrikinism was articulated through a range of genres—articles, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, cartoons and facetious pieces— each with a distinctive rhetorical stance. It was press representations which triggered a reaction from the dominant class that Morgan argues¹⁹ amounted to a 'moral panic' thus making the larrikin the first Australian youth folk devil.²⁰ Sporadic reports of larrikin outrages concentrated and focussed the discourse in a mutually formative relationship between social experience and representation. One of the earliest examples was the Bondi incident, thereafter enshrined in larrikin slang.²¹ On Boxing Day 1884 in the 'Cliff House' dancing saloon an altercation flared up which spread and spilled outside culminating with a group of larrikins pursuing two police constables and hurling them down a cliff. The perpetrators were charged and three alleged ringleaders sentenced in Darlinghurst Court to ten years imprisonment.²²

Two years later another, graver crime further crystallised aspects of the larrikinism debate and broadened its parameters. On September 9 1886 Mary Jane Hicks, a sixteen-year-old orphan girl, was raped at Mount Rennie, a desolate area of scrub near Waterloo. Twenty or more youths were party to the crime either as perpetrators or observers.²³ A massively publicised trial resulted in nine of the

accused being sentenced to death.²⁴ The case generated fevered speculation on 'the depth of evil to which lawless youth is capable of descending'.²⁵ It was a subject which led writers into murky waters, precipitating a spate of soul-searching which sought the causes of larrikinism in the colony's dark history, the degeneration of the race and the decline of religion and patriarchal authority.

Despite the shocking nature of the crime, when capital sentences were handed down to seven of the defendants by Justice Windeyer there was horror in some circles that such young men were to be hanged. The *Bulletin* condemned the convictions as an expression of moral Puritanism, adopting a misogynistic position that defended male power and typified victims of sexual assault as vengeful and untrustworthy: 'One never hears of the forcible defilement of chaste and circumspect women'.²⁶ It launched a campaign in support of the condemned men calling for the commuting of their sentences and accusing the mainstream press of echoing 'The cry for blood that went up from the Bench'. In an interesting footnote to the case: when four of the Mount Rennie accused were eventually hanged in Darlinghurst Gaol an extraordinarily large number of official guests were present many of whom had vied with each other to obtain passes from the gaol's governor.²⁷ The *Bulletin* was right it seems in its perception that the lust for punishment was very much alive in the colony flourishing not far beneath the façade of bourgeois moral righteousness.²⁸

The larrikinism debate continued in the wake of the executions although its shrill intensity was somewhat modulated. Some sectors of the press took a liberal, humanitarian position. The *Bulletin* blamed the phenomenon on inequality and the pinched existences of the mostly impoverished youths and proposed ameliorative solutions such as the provision of gymnasia and other recreational opportunities.²⁹ The labour papers variously blamed deprivation, class inequality and the hypocrisy and indifference of a 'wealthy, callous, sham-religious

'society'. Accusations were made that Australian society was too ready to censure, and had made no effort to recruit these troublesome youths to socially constructive roles. The solution according to the *Australian Workman* lay in 'a healthy, natural order of things' where 'there are no privileged classes'. Though such statements framed a political analysis of sorts, more immediate causes were identified in the private sphere. The larrikin's bleak home life was invoked, the debilitating effects of poverty seen as cultural/aesthetic as well as socio-economic. 'Down-hearted, poverty-stricken parents' presided over 'pitiful, cheerless home[s]...devoid of ...books, music, company...poorly furnished [with] a few wooden chairs, a rickety table, perhaps a broken-backed sofa...dirty, fractured china ornaments disfigure the mantelpiece'.³⁰ It was such joyless surroundings rather than mischievous intent that drove youths into the streets claimed the paper. This analysis foreshadowed modes of social practice which produced new taxonomies of pathology which, from the end of the nineteenth century, sought to re-classify problematic groups and individuals as subjects for treatment rather than punishment.³¹

But such sympathetic analyses were not common. The mainstream press almost unanimously took a punitive approach criticising the corrective regime as ineffectual and half-hearted and urging the judiciary to harsher measures to control larrikinism. Press articles triggered responses from readers whose specific authority derived from their presumed status as spontaneous protests from customarily silent citizens. Thus was a community of censorious opinion created. A letter from 'Devoir' to the *Sydney Morning Herald* was typical of the genre. The correspondent complained of a group of young men who habitually congregated on a vacant lot in Stanmore Road, where they passed their time 'smoking,...using language which is not fit for any decent person to hear [and]...making remarks to any unprotected female'. Like other law-abiding citizens 'Devoir' saw a threat to law and

order in such unsanctioned street behaviour and called for more police intervention.

Another *Herald* correspondent with the sobriquet 'A Law Abiding Citizen' criticised the 'absurdly low penalties' imposed by magistrates and called for 'six months' imprisonment with a taste of the lash'.³² In this critical milieu the facts of larrikinism were obscured by a preoccupation with the type of person the larrikin was thought to be. The principle that the punishment should fit the crime was replaced by the notion that the punishment should fit the criminal.³³ Physical correction, particularly flogging, was widely advocated as a more effective deterrent than prison and more appropriate for the deviant larrikin. The sensational press was as vengeful as the conservative papers.

The cat is the cure for this curse of the community, pushism, and the most stringent, even cruel law that could be passed would not be too severe to meet this hideous blot on our boasted civilisation.³⁴

Two weeks after the Mount Rennie incident, parliament overwhelmingly rejected the Abolition of Flogging Bill.³⁵ But even flogging was scorned as insufficiently harsh. The *Dead Bird* inquired in facetious vein 'If the lash as laid on to the larrikin's back at Darlinghurst Gaol would tickle the hide of a mosquito?'.³⁶

The emphasis on physical punishment in both editorial commentary and correspondence signalled a complex of discourses and symbolics associated with the colony's penal origins. If we step back in time for a moment to examine the socio-historical precedents, the colony's strong tradition of ready resort to official violence comes into focus. In the early years capital crimes were numerous and included burglary, robbery, murder and rape. Floggings were administered for a host of lesser offences.³⁷ After 1840, when transportation ceased, the level of

state inflicted violence declined but a punitive mentality persisted. As the *Bulletin* observed 'Owing to the early circumstances of N.S.Wales [sic] the feeling among the ruling classes in favour of capital and corporal punishment is still strong'.³⁸ The moral image of colonial society which officialdom was concerned to project was reliant on a brand of civic revisionism which entrenched attitudes of denial of the darker aspects of the penal past. The convict era was, however, strongly present in the social imaginary and despite official scorn for 'scribes whose gutter pleasure is to air the hideous past'³⁹ there were voices raised which aimed to bring it into contemporary consciousness. The topic may have been especially to the fore of the public mind in the late 1880s. Through 1888 the *Bulletin* ran Gayll's series 'History of Botany Bay', tales of 'rum, the cat and the gallows', gruesomely illustrated by Hop and May, which highlighted the early colony's brutal methods of control and deterrence.⁴⁰

Physical punishments were still extensively used in prisons and larrikins, who constituted a significant proportion of the short-term prison population, bore the brunt of their application. A special classification, class seven, (for youthful first offenders) was aimed specifically at them. Although on average the sentence of a class seven prisoner lasted less than a year conditions were grim. They were kept in 'rigorous' seclusion on a periodic bread and water diet and not allowed visitors nor to write or receive letters.⁴¹ When Frederick Neitenstein, former Commander of the industrial training ship *Sobraon* became Comptroller-General of Prisons in 1895 he attempted to humanise the treatment of young offenders.⁴² He phased out solitary confinement, did away with use of the gag and by 1903 a newspaper article could claim that 'the lash has been practically abolished'.⁴³

Underlying demands for a return to the violent methods of the past was an ongoing discourse of deviance with roots in the early colony. When

convicts were no longer being transported the deprecation of difference continued to demand an outsider group to bear disparity and diversity. As Cohen puts it 'we can only know what it is to be saintly by being told just what the shape of the devil is'.⁴⁴ Larrikins contained in their heterogeneity the low other whose existence was necessary to affirm the selfhood of the bourgeoisie. They were a latter-day embodiment of the 'old convict spirit' enacting the transgressive role once associated with convicts. Convicts no longer worked on the roads in gangs, but larrikins were seemingly a return to the streets of the repressed sprung up from the very stones to re-enact the ignominy of the repudiated other.⁴⁵

By selectively condemning the larrikin sub-culture critics were also reproving the lifestyle and behaviour of the entire lower class. The maintenance of boundaries of class was especially important in Australia where a 'democratic...levelling' tendency was sometimes perceived to have gone too far. As Twopeny observed:

The lower middle-class and the upper middle-class are much less distinct than at home, and come more freely and frequently, indeed continually, into contact with each other'.

In his judgement: 'this is excellent for the former but not so good for the latter.'⁴⁶ Etiquette manuals, those 'catalogue[s] of proprieties',⁴⁷ defined standards by which to assess others, offering guidance to a status-conscious middle class on how to distance themselves from their social inferiors. Though entirely absent from etiquette manuals in name, the lower class is strongly present in a symbolic sense; the respectable ideal they described can be said to define, in negative outline, repudiated lower-class conduct. Their role was an exemplary one embodying a paradigm of undesirability for the instruction of their social betters. Bourgeois readers were implicitly invited to observe and identify the loss of status contingent on transgressions of 'civilised' behaviour. Moral inferiority was easily extrapolated from lapses in

propriety thus implicitly justifying the subordination of those who failed to conform and the ascendancy of those who did.

It was the collective larrikin presence of the push that aroused the deepest fears. The mass larrikin violence that erupted on occasion against the police and rival pushes was constructed as craven, debased and detestable. The larrikin, lethal enough in packs, was a jackal, a cur, it was said, who if confronted alone 'shirk[ed] aside like a beaten hound'.⁴⁸ But the collective nature of larrikin aggression may have had more significance than as an emblem of cowardice, may indeed have been a tactical ploy, making it harder to identify and prosecute individual perpetrators. In another mode the push was formulated as a secret society characterized by strict rules and membership observances and arcane rituals. This construction is, as Stratton points out, characteristic of the middle-class myth of the gang which 'invokes the structure of misrule to constitute the Other which produces disorder as the inverse of the system which institutes order'.⁴⁹ The *Bulletin* endorsed the notion of a tightly organised larrikin association whose hallmark was secrecy enforced through a code of silence. The pushes, it was claimed, had the measure of their official enemies, wielded political influence and controlled a substantial pool of funds.⁵⁰ Ambrose Pratt advanced a similar notion which he elaborated in detail in a widely-read article in *Blackwoods Magazine* purportedly based on his own experiences as a lawyer retained by an important push. According to Pratt each push was ruled by a King who controlled all internal business including the disbursal of funds, the meting out of rewards and punishments and decisions about systematic conflict with police and rival pushes. They were contemptuous of the law, rendered ineffective because 'very few private individuals dared to bear witness against a member of a push'.⁵¹ As well as citizens, the police, witnesses in court, judges and members of parliament were all allegedly bound by fear. The power of the pushes was such, Pratt claimed, that they were able to influence the outcome of parliamentary

elections. His larrikin novel, *King of the Rocks*, published in 1901 reinforces the notion of the push as a highly organized criminal fraternity with powerful webs of influence. 'You would be surprised if you knew half the extent of the quiet power I exercised in Sydney...My nod has made or broken many strong men before today' says Julian Savage, the push king.⁵² Pratt's images of intricate webs of intrigue carried considerable potency but were dismissed by some as fantasy. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for example said:

We have our larrikins in Sydney—young men mostly with an exuberance of vitality and a deficient supply of common sense. They are more mischievous than malicious, and they are in no sense the danger to the community which the fanciful 'Blackwoods' article supposes them to be.⁵³

This was probably right. Assertions of widespread and powerful larrikin influence belied the actual marginality of these lower-class youths within class and power structures.

As well as constructing images of fear in the form of the violent but cowardly pushes, sinister lords of misrule, the press produced comic images which provided another mode for negating the larrikin other. From the 1890s and increasingly after 1900 the larrikin was a stock figure in graphic images whose structure of feeling was derived from ridicule rather than revulsion. Cartoons, notably those in the *Bulletin*, were a common satirical genre. In their typification of the larrikin as an absurd figure they express and emphasise the class divisions which, though denied by consensual bourgeois discourse, were affirmed and promulgated in the popular press. Certeau viewed such satirising of difference as a measure of defeat, reflecting the disposition of a people's culture to become all the more 'curious' the less they are to be feared.⁵⁴ Graphic representations of larrikins mediated conceptions of the body's meaning. The physical points they stressed were their unprepossessing physicality and ludicrous fashions. Larrikins were depicted as physically inferior, weedy, the very incarnation of urban

degeneracy.⁵⁵ Whereas the male of the species is portrayed as small and ratlike, donahs, their female associates, are de-feminised, large, hard-faced and square-jawed. The drawings of Durkin and Hop border on the grotesque in their efforts to make manifest the deviant larrikin character.⁵⁶

Emphasis on the larrikin's physical inferiority may have masked a fear of his unbridled maleness, which posed a threat to the bourgeois male at a time when he was beleaguered by larger changes in social and sexual relations. Larrikins contested those 'regulations of the body' which govern appearance, language and demeanour and which convey to others the submissiveness of a social subject, a notion that will be discussed further in chapter eight. The informality of their public assemblages and their refusal of strict bourgeois standards of self-restraint defied the disciplined norms of the bourgeois male body. Rules of public conduct dictated that the proper bearing of middle-class men was alert, controlled, upright, quasi-military, communicating a high level of awareness of their surroundings and a readiness to respond interactively.⁵⁷ 'Vulgarity' of demeanour which compromised this ideal, like lounging, leaning, standing with the feet wide apart, humming or singing, standing with the arms akimbo, yawning and fidgeting were all frowned upon.⁵⁸ Measured by such standards the larrikin body represented a dissolution of restraint, a refusal of self-governance. Larrikins slouched or leaned against lamp posts, they sang snatches of vaudeville songs, they practised dance steps, breakdowns, quicksteps and double shuffles.⁵⁹ The emotional structure thus expressed bespoke negligence, carelessness, an absence of respect and mindfulness.⁶⁰ Their demeanour communicated a 'looseness of orientation' which in Goffmann's terms reflected the status of the outsider.⁶¹

Facetious verses in the newspapers were the verbal equivalent of cartoons. They were characterised by stereotyped characters and

situations enlivened by tortured transliteration of larrikin argot. In 'Uncle Bill, The Larrikin's Lament', the eponymous Bill is a petty thief, a brawler, sworn foe of the police, and ultimately, a snitch who turns Queen's evidence in court.⁶² The narrative of another, untitled poem in *Truth* traces a larrikin picnic at Chowder Bay which degenerates into a free-for-all with members of another push and coppers indiscriminately joining in.⁶³ Gang violence is presented as a leisure pursuit, characterised in the language of slapstick comedy rather than as riot and mayhem. Lawson's *Captain of the Push* is a famous example of the genre:

As the night was falling slowly down on city, town and bush,
From a slum in Jones's Alley sloped the Captain of the Push;
And he scowled towards the North, and he scowled towards the South,
As he hooked his little finger in the corners of his mouth.
Then his whistle, loud and shrill, woke the echoes of the 'Rocks',
And a dozen ghouls came sloping round the corners of the blocks.⁶⁴

His ribald rejoinder, *Bastard from the Bush*, proposes the bushman as a rival of the city larrikin in all forms of infamy.⁶⁵ While violence was seen as threatening in its collective male forms, violence against women, another hallmark of the larrikin sub-culture, was generally presented as a subject for mirth. Murray claims that for the female associates of larrikins 'a black eye was a frequent enough accolade of picnic, dance or street fight'.⁶⁶ Dolly, one of the hands at Spats' factory welcomes a fight between men because 'while these blokes is fightin' each other they ain't fightin' me'.⁶⁷

Larrikins have also left an impression in the literary world. They were striking and dramatic enough and typical enough of city life to spark a number of fictional treatments after 1910 when some authors were breaking with the bush tradition and attempting to portray urban types in literature. McCartney coined the term 'larrikin literature' to designate this work.⁶⁸ Edward Dyson, a one-time *Bulletin* writer, produced a

series of books from 1911 to 1913 which drew heavily on his own youthful work experiences. His ensemble of characters were drawn, in his words, from 'a large circle of acquaintances earning honourable if humble subsistence in jam, pickle, lollie and biscuit factories, in tobacco factories, rope works and paper mills'. The books depict a group of hands at Spats's factory chronicling their day to day amusements, romances and upsets. As characters they are normalised, represented, not as the deviant other but as 'true types of a pronounced Australian class not previously exploited for the purposes of the makers of popular fiction'.⁶⁹ The factory setting, with its spirited day-to-day interaction between male and female, boss and worker, old hand and newcomer conveys something of the vibrancy that must have attracted young people to such heterosocial workplaces. Dyson captures the distinctive quality of the banter between the hands, richly humorous, but hard-edged, with a tough irony which eschewed emotionalism. Larrikin argot, insofar as it was separate and distinguishable from lower-class speech in general, was somewhat rougher in tone than mainstream slang.⁷⁰ Even in the preliminaries to courtship there was no room for sentimentality:

The uninitiated might have thought the greeting and the response bitter, even vindictive. They were nothing of the kind. Often they were the preliminaries to an amorous friendship, and led to votive plates of hot peas and sociable rides in the swing boats at the gay market on Saturdays.⁷¹

Whereas larrikins were commonly represented as loafers and shirkers donahs were epitomized as factory workers. In the 1890s significant numbers of young lower-class women became wage workers as the locus of employment shifted from domestic service to factories.⁷² The trend was deplored by conservative social commentators who blamed the mingling of young people of both sexes in the workplace for an increase in vice.⁷³ The Police Commissioner saw factory work as responsible for a dangerous combination of circumstances: 'large

numbers of young people of both sexes now find employment in factories, where they can earn good wages, giving them the command of money and long hours of leisure, unrestrained by parental control'.⁷⁴ There was no doubt that the work itself was gruelling. Reports on conditions in factories documented workplaces that were airless, damp, dirty, freezing in winter and an inferno in summer.⁷⁵ The lot of the workers was chronic discomfort at best and injury or debilitating illness at worst. On a hot day at Spats's for example the female hands 'go off' (faint) one by one in the 103 degree heat.⁷⁶ But for the young women who chose it, the work had its attractions. No matter how exploitive, factories were at least sociable places, while domestic service often meant loneliness in an alien social environment. In Louis Stone's *Jonah* when Ada leaves her job at the boot factory to marry Jonah she is miserable without the gossip and companionship.⁷⁷ Dyson's books provide ample evidence of the appeal of the factory environment. Class and sex skirmishes keep it humming. The female hands, known as 'The Beauties' with their continual larking and banter lend the factory 'a peculiar spirit of hoydenish frivolity' which 'helped to ward off weariness and break the tedium'.⁷⁸ Despite its hard conditions, its rules and its tedium, the Beauties manage to repossess, symbolically and experientially, the workplace, their humour and small subversions triumphing over the alienating effects of drudgery.

Another fictional account, Stone's *Jonah*, was published in 1911, the same year as the first of Dyson's books, though it is set somewhat earlier around 1900. It traces the fortunes of Jonah Jones, a hunchbacked larrikin, who progresses from a life of poverty and petty crime to wealth and success as the proprietor of a shoe emporium. Stone's literary intent was more serious than that of Dyson. He was influenced by the French naturalist writers and followed them in his preoccupation with authenticity and accuracy of detail. His setting, the lower-class neighbourhood of Waterloo, its way of life and its inhabitants, including the local larrikin push and their factory-hand

girlfriends, are painstakingly observed. In Stone's Balzacian view of the human panoply the lives of his lower-class characters are as worthy of serious literary treatment as those higher up on the social scale. Courtship rituals, ceremonial *rites de passage*, ritual violence and enterprise, both licit and illicit, are presented in their specifics. In his view larrikins were not unchangingly aberrant or degenerate types but were moving through a life phase: 'the larrikin never grows old'.⁷⁹ Ultimately all are claimed by domesticity and enterprise. Stone's generally dispassionate view is occasionally displaced by the sort of tendentious moralising which characterised images of deviance in the press, which Dyson manages to avoid:

The Cardigan Street Push, composed of twenty or thirty young men of the neighbourhood, was a social wart of a kind familiar to the streets of Sydney...They were the scum of the streets. How they lived was a mystery, except to people who kept fowls, or forgot to lock their doors at night. A few were vicious idlers, sponging on their parents for a living at twenty years of age; other simply mischievous lads, with a trade at their fingers' ends, if they chose to work.⁸⁰

CJ Dennis's *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, published in 1915, is a long poem, reminiscent in its verse mode and sometimes excruciating transliteration of idiom, of the facetious poems which peppered the popular press. Dennis's laboured rendering of larrikin slang has an exaggerated, vaudevillean quality which was criticized as inauthentic even when the works were published. It was derived indirectly from the literary conventions of Cockney speech (especially, as Waters notes, the work of Kipling) rather than from careful listening to local vernacular.⁸¹ This probably reflects both Dennis's lack of first hand knowledge and his objective to entertain by exploiting established stereotypes.⁸²

The sentimentalised and oddly bowdlerised larrikin characters are, significantly, strikingly at odds with the despised mass-mediated

images of a few years earlier. A strong homiletic strain reinforces idealisation of the bush and its anti-urban underside a national dichotomy which Dennis himself had been influential in establishing through his earlier work in the *Bulletin*. Although the Bloke begins his career as a city tough he is ultimately claimed by domesticity and the rural idyll when he marries his sweetheart Doreen and embarks on a blameless life as an orchardist.

I've seen the leery bloke that bore me name
Clean to the pack wivout one pearly tear;
An' frum the ashes of a ne'er-do-well
A bloomin' farmer's blossomin' like 'ell.⁸³

The contradiction of an important national myth which the larrikin represented is here resolved. Larrikins were the antithesis of the ideal, open-air Australian life located in the bush which was promulgated by radical nationalists in the 1890s and by the turn of the century had achieved a powerful hold on the national imagination. They bore the legacy of an anti-urban tradition which saw the city as a social malformation and larrikins as its degenerate natural inhabitants. They were part of a structure of perception which had resulted in the accretion of a cluster of contrasting images around the city/bush antithesis.

As a redeemable larrikin Dennis's hero offered a reassuring message to a skittish middle class. The Bloke's combativeness, his lack of social graces, his forthrightness were represented as part of his rough-hewn charm. His propensity for violence was constructed as hot-headedness, a product of youthful high spirits. He was reassuringly malleable, evolving smoothly from anti-social youth to productive family man, from shiftless city-dweller to steady tiller of the soil.

The *Sentimental Bloke* was a runaway success. It sold over 87,000 copies in Australia and New Zealand.⁸⁴ Dennis alone among writers of

larrikin literature attained best-seller status. Neither Dyson nor Stone achieved anything like his sales. The reasons for this must be sought in the complex relations between representation, ideology and emotional experience. Waters suggests that a positive representation of larrikins was palatable because they were by this time no longer the disturbing feature of city life they had once been allowing people to accept a more benign construction. However probably more significant was the outbreak of war which suddenly and totally changed the social landscape. Patriotic appeal combined, as Waters suggests, with the accident of its publication in wartime (copies were distributed to troops in the trenches) boosted sales enormously.⁸⁵

With the outbreak of World War One a productive outlet for male aggression which had formerly posed a threat to civil order was created in one fell swoop. In *The Moods of Ginger Mick*, Dennis's sequel to *A Sentimental Bloke* the nexus of the larrikin and the war is made explicit. Ginger Mick finds his true calling in life when he is transplanted, unreconstructed, to the trenches.

'E's one uv our brave boys, all right, all right.
'Is early trainin' down in Spadger's Lane
Done 'im no 'arm fer this 'ere orl-in fight.⁸⁶

Dennis makes the important and timely point that violence is not always anti-social, and when it is called for in the name of nation the larrikin and his ilk have their uses.

An' them that shudders at the sight o' gore,
An' shrinks to 'ear a drunken soljer's oath,
Must 'ide be'ind the man what 'eaves the bricks,
An' thank their Gawd for all their Ginger Micks...
Once, when they caught me toppin' off a John,
The Bench was stern, an' torked uv dirty work;
But, 'Struth! it's bonzer 'ow me fame's come on
Since when I took to toppin' off the Turk.⁸⁷

These poems formed part of a larger body of images and narratives which reinforced the notion of the usefulness of combative young men as cannon fodder. The spirit, physical courage, self-reliance and adventurousness of lower-class youths was suddenly at a premium. In the vaudeville song 'Boys of the Empire' for example there is a sense that in terms of class approbation the tables have turned:

Here's to the boys of a real rowdy sort – Boys fond of humour and brimful of sport;...

I don't refer to the young laddies,

They ought to be safe at home with their mas,

I mean the boys with plenty of go...⁸⁸

Dennis established, and made available thereafter, a more positive image of the larrikin. The Bloke and Ginger Mick represent the entrance onto the historical stage of the loveable larrikin signalling the beginning of a tradition which has now been thoroughly debased by sentimentalism. Representations of larrikins had hitherto been, *ipso facto*, unloveable, the very name used as a term of abuse.⁸⁹ A rhetorical conceit among conservatives was to typify Labor leaders and fellow travelers as larrikins with all the negative attributes that the label implied.⁹⁰ Paddy Crick, criminal lawyer and member of the New South Wales Parliament, was labeled a 'licensed larrikin' by his critics and appears in a cartoon by Will Dyson attired in the larrikin rigout of tight trousers, pointed boots, collarless shirt and billycock hat.⁹¹ Though it is true that Crick made a point of eschewing the sober uniform of men of the governing class the graphic reference was probably more associative than literal.

The phenomenon of the larrikin menace was thus laid abruptly to rest his transformation from 'social excrescence' to hero complete. In being prepared to die for their country not only were they affirming the transcendant worth of nation but their own transition from other to

selfhood was achieved when they were subsumed into a fighting force defending nation and empire.⁹²

¹ It retains something of its original aura of aggressiveness when applied to corporate bullies like Kerry Packer or vitriolic 'shock jocks' like the late Ron Casey.

² Twopeny, REN, *Town Life in Australia* (1883), facsimile edition, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1973, p21.

³ Most of them produced their own versions of the larrikin. The Hooligans of London, the Bowery Boys of New York, the Scuttlers of Manchester, were all reviled as disgraceful outgrowths on the faces of their respective cities.

⁴ Briggs, Asa, *Victorian Cities*, Berkeley Ca, University of California Press, 1993, p85.

⁵ Berman, Marshall, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, New York, Penguin, 1988, p15.

⁶ O'Shea, Alan, 'English Subjects of Modernity' in Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea eds, *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, London, Routledge, 1996, p19.

⁷ Applying the work of Cohen, Hall, Humphries and others.

⁸ Murray, James, *Larrikins*, Melbourne, Lansdowne, 1973, p30; Charles H Bertie, 'Old Pitt Street', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 6:2 (1920), p88.

⁹ Murray, p158.

¹⁰ Hall, Stuart and Tony Jefferson eds, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, London, Routledge, 1996, p15.

¹¹ Reiger, Kerreen, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernising the Australian Family 1880-1940*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1985, p214.

¹² Rowse, Tim, *Australian Liberalism and the National Character* (Theses on the Left), Malmesbury, Vic, Kibble Books, 1978, p97.

¹³ Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, London, Routledge, 1979, p18.

¹⁴ Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London, Methuen, 1986, p25.

¹⁵ Fitzgerald, Shirley, *Rising Damp: Sydney 1870-1890*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1987, p198.

¹⁶ Stratton, Jon, *The Young Ones*, Perth, Black Swan Press, 1992, p2.

¹⁷ Later in life, though a teetotaler himself, Foley was a successful publican and a prominent Sydney citizen.

¹⁸ Conflicting media images remind us of Mary Poovey's observation that the realm of representation is one of shifting, ambiguous, often contradictory meanings where

ideology is simultaneously constructed and contested (*Uneven Developments: the Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p2-3).

¹⁹ Morgan, George, 'The Bulletin and the Larrikin: Moral Panic in Late Nineteenth Century Sydney' *Media International Australia* 85 (1997), p 22.

²⁰ See P Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, London, Granada, 1973.

²¹ SJ Baker (*The Australian Language: An Examination of the English Language and English Speech as Used in Australia, from Convict Days to the Present, with Special Reference to the Growth of Indigenous Idiom and its Use by Australian Writers*, Melbourne, Sun, 1966, p127), tells us that to give someone Bondi was a larrikin expression meaning to manhandle a person.

²² Murray, p184.

²³ For discussion of the broader issue of the policing of sexual assault in the period see Judith Allen's *Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Australian Women since 1880*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1990.

²⁴ Walker, David, 'Youth on Trial: the Mt Rennie Case', *Labour History* 50 (May 1986), p28.

²⁵ *Sydney Mail* 4/12/86.

²⁶ *The Bulletin* 18/12/86, p4.

²⁷ Ramsland, John, *With Just but Relentless Discipline: a Social History of Corrective Services in NSW*, Sydney, Kangaroo Press, 1996, p66.

²⁸ *The Bulletin* 18/12/86, p4.

²⁹ *The Bulletin* 23/4/87.

³⁰ *The Australian Workman* 29/11/90, p4.

³¹ See Reiger and Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans by Robert Hurley, New York, Pantheon, 1979.

³² *Sydney Morning Herald* 19/9/04, p8.

³³ Cohen, Stanley ed, *Images of Deviance*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1971, p13.

³⁴ *Truth* 24/7/92, p3.

³⁵ Walker, p37.

³⁶ *The Dead Bird* 7/10/93.

³⁷ Grabosky, Peter N, *Sydney in Ferment: Crime, Dissent and Official Reaction 1788 to 1973*, Canberra, ANU Press, 1977, p11.

³⁸ *The Bulletin* 18/12/86, p4.

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- ³⁹ Quoted in Hughes, Robert, *The Fatal Shore: a History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia 1787-1868*, London, Pan Books, 1987, p.597.
- ⁴⁰ Lawson, Sylvia, *The Archibald Paradox: a Strange Case of Authorship*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1987, p138.
- ⁴¹ Ramsland, p66.
- ⁴² A government training ship for neglected boys and youths anchored in Lavender Bay.
- ⁴³ Ramsland p153.
- ⁴⁴ Cohen, p10.
- ⁴⁵ A point also made by Lynette Finch in 'On the Streets: Working Class Youth Culture in the Nineteenth Century' in Rob White ed *Youth Subcultures: Theory, History and the Australian Experience*, Hobart, National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, [1993].
- ⁴⁶ Twopeny, p90.
- ⁴⁷ Goffmann, Erving, *Behavior in Public Places*, New York, Free Press, 1963, p6.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted from the *Bulletin* in Morgan, p20.
- ⁴⁹ Stratton, p45.
- ⁵⁰ *The Bulletin* 10/1/85, p4.
- ⁵¹ Pratt, Ambrose, "'Push" Larrikinism in Australia', *Blackwood's Magazine*, July 1901, p27.
- ⁵² Pratt, Ambrose, *King of the Rocks*, London, Hutchinson, 1900, p339.
- ⁵³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 10/8/01, p8.
- ⁵⁴ Certeau, Michel de, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p120.
- ⁵⁵ They echo the tone of written descriptions; see for example Nat Gould, *Town and Bush*, London, Routledge, 1896, p106.
- ⁵⁶ The fact that so many bourgeois commentators associate the larrikin class with physical stuntedness and inadequacy is curious given the lack of hard evidence to support this view. As Gandevia reports, as the nineteenth century progressed, 'the distinctions [in physical dimensions] between rural and urban and between upper and lower classes became minimal in the Australian population' (Gandevia, Brian, *Tears Often Shed: Child Health and Welfare in Australia from 1788*, Sydney, Pergamon, 1978, p61).
- ⁵⁷ Manners thus become 'the site of a profound interconnection of ideology and subjectivity, a zone of transcoding at once astonishingly trivial and microscopically important' (Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London, Methuen, 1986, p90).

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- ⁵⁸ *Australian Etiquette or the Rules and Usages of the Best Society in the Australasian Colonies, Together with their Sports, Pastimes, Games and Amusements*, Sydney, McConnell, 1885, p289.
- ⁵⁹ McConville, C, 'From Criminal Class to Underworld' in *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History*, ed Graeme Davison, David Dunstan and Chris McConville, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1985, p72.
- ⁶⁰ Norbert Elias maintained that all social groups have an emotional structure which shapes manners in specific settings, and even the personalities of the individuals in them (*The Civilizing Process: the History of Manners, vol I The History of Manners*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1978).
- ⁶¹ Goffmann, p203.
- ⁶² *The Bulletin* 2/6/88.
- ⁶³ *Truth* 27/9/96, p1.
- ⁶⁴ Lawson, Henry (downloaded from <http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/L/LawsonHenry/verse/popular>)
- ⁶⁵ Louis Esson's 'Jugger' was an example of the verse genre with more serious literary intent.
- ⁶⁶ Murray, p37.
- ⁶⁷ Dyson, Edward, *Fact'ry 'Ands*, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Co Ltd, 1912, p63.
- ⁶⁸ McCartney, Frederick T, *Australian Literary Essays*, Sydney Angus & Robertson, 1957, p76.
- ⁶⁹ Dyson, *Factry Ands*, pvii.
- ⁷⁰ Sidney J Baker (p122) argues that larrikin speech was 'far more typical of Australia than we might anticipate'.
- ⁷¹ Dyson, Edward, *Benno and some of the Push*, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Company, 1911, p154.
- ⁷² O'Brien, Anne, *Poverty's Prison: the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1988, p93.
- ⁷³ NSW Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission 1886-87. *Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*, 5 Oct 1887, Sydney, Government Printer, 1887, p118.
- ⁷⁴ NSW Police Department, *Report for 1883/84* [Sydney, Government Printer], p2.
- ⁷⁶ Dyson, Edward 'A Very Hot Day at Spats' in *Factry Ands*, p52.
- ⁷⁷ Stone, Louis, *Jonah*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1991, p126.
- ⁷⁸ Dyson, Edward, *Benno and Some of the Push*, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Company, 1911, p100.
- ⁷⁹ Stone, p149.
- ⁸⁰ Stone, p45.

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- ⁸¹ Waters, Edgar P, *Some Aspects of the Popular Arts in Australia 1880-1915*, PhD thesis, ANU, 1962, p233.
- ⁸² According to Waters Dennis had reputedly only ever met one larrikin, a young man from Melbourne who happened up to Toolangi when he, Dennis was staying there.
- ⁸³ Dennis, CJ, *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1957, p94.
- ⁸⁴ Ashton, Paul with Kate Blackmore, *On the Land: a Photographic History of Farming in Australia*, Kenthurst, Kangaroo Press, 1987, p120.
- ⁸⁵ Waters, p255.
- ⁸⁶ Dennis, CJ, *The Moods of Ginger Mick*, Sydney Angus & Robertson, 1976, p30.
- ⁸⁷ Dennis, *Ginger Mick*, p80.
- ⁸⁸ *Tivoli Songster no 31*, Sydney, [no pub details, 1915?].
- ⁸⁹ See Rickard, John, 'Lovable Larrikins and Awful Ockers: Australian Masculinities', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 56 (March 1998) 78-86.
- ⁹⁰ See for example [Sandy McTavish] The Author of Rafferty, King of Australia, *Our Noble Selves: a Study in General Invective*, [Sydney, 193?]; the author also styles larrikins as mainly Irish (p.135).
- ⁹¹ Pearl, Cyril, *Wild Men of Sydney*, London, Universal, 1970, p65.
- ⁹² Willis, Anne-Marie, *Illusions of Identity: the Art of Nation*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1993, p159.

Chapter 8

‘The Haymarket Swell’: Larrikin Fashion

If there was no consensus on what the social origins and behavioural markers of a larrikin were everyone in Sydney knew the meaning of the phrase ‘of larrikin appearance’. ‘A typical larrikin is easily distinguishable from an ordinary ne’er-do-well’, observed Nat Gould in 1896, ‘he has a language, manners and dress peculiarly his own’.¹ In the argot of the street the word which epitomized the totality of larrikin style was ‘leery’.² The leery style, which represented the pinnacle of odium for the respectable middle class, was the essence of sharpness for larrikins and their peers. It was above all conspicuous, marking them out as special against the backdrop of the drab, workaday neighbourhoods where they lived and the tightly buttoned crowds on the city thoroughfares where they congregated. Larrikin style was communicated through both appearance and behaviour. In this chapter I will deal with their mode of dress and other visible appurtenances which were an important medium for expression of their disdain for the normative values of respectability.

The visual elements of dress carry, beyond their functional properties, symbolic meaning, the importance of which is intensified by urban life. Daily contact with hordes of strangers generates a need to use dress as a way of knowing one’s fellows and to notice and interpret it as a set of signs conveying social and cultural meaning. Conversely, a need also exists to assert one’s own uniqueness within a homogeneous sea of humanity. As the urban theorist Simmel observed, in the face of rapid and bewildering urbanization our only recourse is to cultivate a sham individualism through the pursuit of fashion or the adoption of marks of individual eccentricity.

The symbolic import of dress takes on added intensity within sub-cultures. Stratton has located larrikin resistance within the area of personal presentation referred to by the blanket term 'style'. He has drawn on the work of Hebdige, among others, who emphasizes the importance of clothing as text:

What distinguishes the visual ensembles of spectacular subcultures from those favoured in the surrounding culture is intentional communication. It directs attention to itself; it gives itself to be read.³

Larrikin fashion simultaneously signalled rejection of conformist respectability and allegiance to their own sub-culture. Larrikins and donahs, their female counterparts, dressed to be noticed. Clothes were for them an important medium for expression of selfhood. The dash and swagger necessary to carry off a lower-class style statement was bound to cause affront. Dress and appearance were sensitive areas in class demarcation and a widely-held view among the bourgeoisie was that the proper demeanour for the lower class was one of deference and self-effacement. In consequence, any attempt to create an effect, to stand out, was likely to be regarded as unseemly and extravagant and condemned as meretricious. Another reason for antipathy was that lower-class style was regarded as an attempt to ape their betters and thus symbolically appropriate their higher status. It may also have been, as Rosenzweig suggests, that middle-class complaints about lower-class extravagance and thriftlessness were triggered by resentment of the nascent prosperity which showy fashions and expressive behaviour signalled.⁴

Larrikin style was not restricted to the pushes but was adopted by other young lower-class males who identified with the incipient spectacular youth culture that larrikinism represented.⁵ Adoption of such a style immediately made the wearer conspicuous and labeled him or her as one who had veered from the path of convention and

propriety. This carried both rewards and dangers. Important cultural capital accrued from flashy clothes which enhanced one's peer status and ability to attract the opposite sex. But they also carried risk, making one instantly recognizable as fair game by rivals and a likely target for police.

To begin to understand the impact of larrikin dress it is necessary to know something of the context of conventional dress within which it was situated and to which it constituted a reaction. Middle-class male dress in late nineteenth-century Sydney, as it was throughout the western world, was drab and unobtrusive. Its *leitmotif* was sumptuary renunciation. From the middle of the century colour, decoration and display were banished entirely from respectable male attire. A gentlemen 'dressed soberly, shunning the affectations of the social-climbing "swell" and, still more, the fashion-conscious dandy who strove to be conspicuous above all else'.⁶ A sober, practical and manly style had been adopted by the rising middle class in England, captains of industry and professional men who were concerned to set themselves apart from the old, decadent aristocracy with its overwrought fashions and habits of conspicuous consumption. Their style expressed the Victorian virtues of industry, temperance and restraint. Its apogee was the dark, three-piece suit, sometimes ornamented with a watch chain, which by the second half of the century had become a virtual uniform for respectable middle-class males.⁷

Australian male style had been directly appropriated from English fashion. Photographs of crowd scenes in Sydney in the decades either side of Federation show multitudes of men in business mode in city streets or taking their leisure in parks or on the foreshores of the harbour all clad in dark suits. A variation adopted by younger men was the Norfolk jacket and straw boater. In this far-flung settler colony the gaze of the cultural elite was turned towards England which extended

to modeling their garments on those of the English 'gentleman' class. Despite the warm climate men did not adopt the light, pale tropical style of Englishmen in the non-white colonies, restricting themselves to such restrained modifications as the wearing of white waistcoats in summer.⁸ Twopeny, for example, though he concluded that black was impractical in such a dusty place, believed in defiance of the climate that tweeds were better than any other fabric for both wear and appearance. 'For my own part', he declared, 'I wear them winter and summer'.⁹

The clothes of late nineteenth-century middle-class women were more elaborate and expressive than men's, reflecting, according to Thorstein Veblen, the status of their husbands or fathers and their role as vehicles for conspicuous consumption.¹⁰ The bustle was still in evidence in 1890 though it had all but disappeared by the middle of that decade. Skirts were long, clinging and trailing. A noticeable trend as the century drew to a close was for more severe women's streetwear. Drab colours and plainness became fashionable and the tailored costume made its appearance in sturdy fabrics such as serge and twill.¹¹ Women affected collars, ties and straw boaters.¹² In other words, women's clothing was looking more like men's. The trend away from decoration and towards practicality accompanied the enormous popularity of the bicycle which brought significant advances in social freedom for women who were also taking up other vigorous sports and modifying their dress to suit. The symbolic message of the trend announced that women were laying claim to a share of male freedom and privileges and were signalling their readiness to move into the world of work.

A prime concern of middle-class women was to clearly mark by their dress the social distance between them and their social inferiors. In the face of lower-class imitation of middle-class style they took refuge in the avoidance of vulgarity expressed in deliberate simplicity of design

and muted colours—what Roche calls ‘refined abnegation’.¹³ The ideal was austere. Both men and women avoided elaborate shows of finery on the street favoring wardrobes that were cloaks of genteel anonymity. Women were advised that ‘dress should be quiet and plain, without any attempt at display’.¹⁴ They were steered away from ‘loud’ or ‘glaring’ colours towards black or ‘sober grays, and browns, and olives’.¹⁵ Cosmetics and heavy perfumes, overly rich materials and lavish displays of jewelry were of course forbidden. The emphasis was on grooming and details which were highly reliable as class markers. Fine points such as the quality and state of gloves and shoes were of utmost importance. Lapses such as frayed or muddy skirt edges were a dead giveaway.

The claim to simplicity was somewhat disingenuous. Dresses which appeared to be artless and plain had a wealth of inconspicuous detail in the form of pin-tucks, pleats and insertions which required considerable time and ‘supreme virtuosity with the needle’ to execute.¹⁶ Further, the ethos of austerity was literally superficial, stopping at the outer garments. Beneath the plain tailored skirts of fashionable women were hidden a wealth of petticoats of extreme fineness and elaboration.¹⁷ And though their outer costume might be mannish, the body beneath was sculpted by corsets into an hourglass exaggeration of the female shape. Although tight lacing was critiqued by the medical profession and advocates of rational dress because it was thought to derange the position of the internal organs and cause various ailments,¹⁸ large numbers of women of all classes clung to it.¹⁹

The first and most obvious difference between the clothes of the middle and those of the lower class was their cost in materials and labour. The clothes of the better-off were usually custom-tailored, in the case of men’s suits, or fitted and sewn by a professional seamstress in the case of women’s dresses. In inferior, off-the-peg copies the business suit also became the dress of many working-class

men. To judge from the plentiful documentary references denigrating 'slops' and ready-made suits, there was a great cultural chasm separating tailor-made and mass-produced clothing which would have been obvious at a glance. Adams refers to the 'antagonism' which existed between cheap and expensive clothes: 'Between a 6 guinea suit and one advertised in the papers there can be no truce'.²⁰

The second main point of divergence was the high degree of specialisation in the wardrobe of the middle class. Specific types of outfits were designated for daytime, sports, evening wear and other occasions. Even finer distinctions were made for women's clothes with special morning-gowns, tea-gowns and so on. This reflected the more variegated pattern and more elaborate social rituals of middle-class life as well as providing an outlet for conspicuous consumption.

The third was the degree of care and maintenance given to clothes. When every garment had to be washed by hand and pressed with a flat iron heated on the stove, when linen was expected to be snowy-white and rigid with starch, the time and effort expended in keeping clothes looking presentable was considerable. With the invention of the trouser-press in the mid-1890s men's suits had to be pressed into knife-edge creases for 'eternal enmity broods between the trousers that are tubular and the trousers that are creased'.²¹ The complicated tucks and frills and flounces of women's dresses needed to be ironed into smoothness and definition. White was considered appropriate for the clothing of babies and young children and for the pinafores worn by girls up to adolescence and it had to be crisp, spotless and wrinkle-free. The portions of men's shirts which showed at the margins of the suit, the collars and cuffs were even more important as a gauge of social status than the suit itself. The boiled shirt along with the stiff (detachable) collar, was the hallmark of respectable male attire. The state of a man's linen was probably the most important sartorial indicator of his social position. We are told for example that the perfect

linen of a wealthy acquaintance 'instantly raised a mile-high social barrier' between him and the raffish artists, journalists and ne'er-do-wells in Lindsay's autobiographical novel.²² Linen was a convenient way of classifying the wearer and gauging his or her position on the social scale.

Roche has demonstrated how clean, white linen became an effective marker in social topographies,²³ assuming symbolic importance as a 'testimony to the cleanliness and whiteness of bodies and souls'.²⁴ The lower class might be able to purchase cheap versions of fashionable garments with comparative ease but stiff and spotless shirtfronts, collars and cuffs were not so easy to emulate. A great deal of laundering and ironing was essential to the middle class in order to maintain their appearance of respectability. This work was undertaken by servants in all but the poorest middle-class households. The great significance of linen as a social marker helps to explain why laundering amounted almost to an obsession among the respectable. The fact that a whole section of the 1907 Australian Exhibition of Women's Work was devoted to laundry work is indicative. Competitive categories included 'Best washed and ironed child's muslin skirt with two or three frills', 'Best washed set of infant's flannel underwear, not new (process of washing to be explained in writing)' and 'Best washed and ironed man's collar'.²⁵

Thus dress was a vital indicator of social class. But perhaps even more significantly it conveyed positioning on the scale of respectability, the complex ideals of which as Bailey points out 'were expressed in terms of style and appearance as much as in a set of beliefs and attitudes'.²⁶ Though the poor were necessarily restricted in their choices and shabby garments might be unavoidable for them, respectability required that they must be always washed, mended and ironed. The badge of cleanliness and neatness, among other things, marked lower-class people out as worthy recipients of due respect and the

ameliorative benefits which officialdom in its various forms could bestow.

The division between the respectable and the non-respectable poor is clearly illustrated in street photos of turn of the century Sydney. Children are often present. The street was their playground and they were doubtless drawn by the unusual presence of a photographer. Those from respectable families stand out. They have clean faces, they are shod, the girls wear laundered white dresses and their hair is tied with ribbons. It is remarkable how much time and energy their mothers, who must have had little enough of either to spare, were willing to devote to the washing and mending required to ensure that their children were well turned-out. This brings to mind Goffmann's observation that 'efforts to move upward and efforts to keep from moving downward are expressed in terms of sacrifices made for the maintenance of front'.²⁷ Such efforts have often been regarded as aspirational in nature. But as Hoggart observantly remarked, 'cleanliness, thrift and self-respect arise more from a concern not to drop down, not to succumb to the environment, than from an anxiety to go up'.²⁸ As one woman explained, 'I have a great fear of getting into the degraded condition in which I see some people, and that is why I sew so much'.²⁹ But the demands of respectability could also be turned against the ruling class, the hallmarks of respectability dissembled and used for advantage by the poor. Goffmann refers to a ploy of street beggars known as the 'clean family dodge' in which a family appears in tattered but incredibly clean clothes, the faces of the children glistening from a layer of soap buffed to a shine.³⁰

The only differentiation in the clothes of the poor was generally between work or everyday clothes and Sunday best although the very poor often could not stretch to this. Even for ceremonial occasions, such as weddings, special clothes were not commonly worn.³¹ Overall there was considerably less ceremony in lower-class lives than in

those of their betters.³² Such occasions were less formal for lower-class people who had less money, less time, and a smaller audience for whom to enact rituals.

In Sydney, poor people purchased ready-made garments, or slops, from clothing stalls at the markets or the cheap stores concentrated south of the Town Hall. These shops were 'festooned with clothing, boots and shoes, remnants and drapery, all overflowing onto the sidewalks in a manner 'suggestive of Burra Bazaar in Calcutta', a far cry from the discreet displays of goods in the great city department stores.³³ But cheap though slops were they were nonetheless beyond the reach of the very poor who had to make do with second-hand clothes. The numerous old-clothes shops that dotted the city from the Haymarket to Darlinghurst catered to their needs. Children mostly wore hand-me-downs sometimes cut-down from adult garments by their mothers. Homemade clothes, even among the poor, were low-status. The hands at Spats' factory, for example, made merciless fun of the baggy, home-made trousers of a new employee.³⁴

But despite a limited palette lower-class people were able to exercise a degree of cultural agency in what they chose from the range of clothing available to them. Although there was no specialized marketing of fashions to youth, young people could, by selection, modification, combination, inflection and emphasis express themselves through the clothes and accessories that were available to them. Thus could larrikins make choices to create a conspicuous personal style which signalled rejection of middle-class expectations. In an age when hard work and self-discipline were held in high esteem larrikin dress signified sumptuary display and symbolic idleness. Writers who recorded physical descriptions leave the reader in no doubt as to how the style was perceived by outsiders. For Nat Gould:

A larrikin, when in full dress, presents an extraordinary spectacle. He has a slouch hat, stuck on the back of his head in order to fully expose the greased fringe or curls that cover his low forehead.... He wears no collar, but a bright coloured handkerchief round his neck. His coat hangs loosely on him, and he has no waistcoat. His trousers are fastened tightly round his waist by a strap at the back, and his shirt-front bulges out and hangs slightly over in front. His nether garments he pays particular attention to. They are the 'hall-mark' of genuine larrikinism. They fit tightly all the way down, and then are bell-shaped at the bottom—the wider the better, in order to show very little of his boots. The larrikin, if he takes pride in anything, does so in his feet. He cramps and pinches them, and has high, cut-under heels on his boots, which give him a stilted, jerky walk. He seldom carries a cane as it would interfere with his exercise in the bottle and brick throwing department.³⁵

The *Bulletin's* facetious rhetorical tone signalled disdain:

On all sides do I behold the delightful larrikin—the gorgeous Haymarket swell—clothed in peg-top trousers, high-heeled and very tight boots, short coat, frilled shirt, and greasy—aye, very greasy hair—which lies plastered down upon his head.³⁶

The sneering tone which often characterized representations of larrikins aimed to undercut the swagger of their style which was emblematic of youthful defiance with dangerous undertones of sexuality.

Although the ethos of the sub-culture was aggressively masculine the larrikin sartorial style was that of a lower-class dandy. The middle-class male had done away with all non-functional decorative elements of dress. His only bit of sparkle was a decorative fob chain which crossed a dark serge waistcoat beneath a suit coat and which held a watch, the badge of the self-regulated capitalist man. In contrast the larrikin revelled in conspicuous display. His dandyism did not aspire to the 'elegant simplicity' affected by Beau Brummel but its opposite—cheap flash and dash. He wore jewellery, insets or contrasting buttoned plackets on the backs of his jackets and gaily-patterned

cummerbunds. Randolph Bedford's description of the push leader Brummy Jones serves as an example:

He had a heavier silver watch-chain than any other; his hard felt hat was flatter and wider in the brim; the little finger of his right hand bore an enormous ring; they eyelets in his boots were a bright blue; and his boots were tied with crimson laces.³⁷

It would be wrong, however, to over-emphasise the uniqueness of larrikin style. There was significant common ground with mainstream style. The sumptuary renunciation of the middle-class male was resisted but they were not the only young males to dress for effect. An observer of Melbourne life tells us that:

the poorly paid clerk half starves himself in order to appear well dressed, and have a brief flutter among the many-hued butterflies who disport themselves daily on the hard flags of Collins Street.³⁸

More obviously, there was a degree of overlap with the style of the sporting sub-culture whose members favoured bowlers and checked suits or waistcoats of the 'loud' variety.³⁹ There was also a high degree of similarity between the Sydney larrikin's costume and that of urban youth gangs in other cities of the western world⁴⁰ such as the London Hooligans and the Birmingham Peaky Blinders.⁴¹ The Manchester Scuttlers for instance distinguished themselves from other young men in working-class neighbourhoods by wearing:

a uniform of pointed clogs, ...bell-bottomed trousers, cut like a sailor's and measuring ...twenty-one inches round the foot and 'flashy' silk scarves. Their hair was cut short at the back and sides, but they grew long fringes which were...plastered down on the forehead over the left eye. 'Pigeon-board' peaked caps were also worn tilted to the left, and angled to display the fringe.⁴²

One Sydney commentator was particularly outraged by the practice of 'female impersonation' which he observed in the form of '[t]wo larrikins of note, dressed in full feminine attire, [who] even had the audacity to appear in a public theatre, and seat themselves in the pit'.⁴³ What was the import of this fascinating incident? Was it a random and unique occurrence or does it indicate an established practice of cross-dressing? The answers can only be guessed at.

The larrikin rig presented the male body as centred on the genitals. The trousers were secured firmly at the back with a strap to maximize tightness around the hips and thighs, a style which brings to mind a song of the vaudeville *lion comique* George Leybourne, 'How Did You Get Those Trousers on and Did it Hurt You Much?' The tightness of the trousers had the effect, more pronounced in an age where underwear was not always worn by lower-class men, of outlining and drawing attention to the genitals. To further emphasise the crotch area jackets were either short all round or hip-length at the back tapering up to waist-length at the front. In contrast the jacket of the bourgeois suit was uniformly hip-length and the trousers were tailored and pressed into creases concealing and belying the shape of the body beneath. As Goffmann reminds us an important part of the proper management of personal appearance by men is the constant care to ensure that their trousers are buttoned and that no erection bulge is visible.⁴⁴ As he points out the display of these parts of the body is not only a symbol of sexuality but also conveys 'a laxity of control over the self—evidence of an insufficient harnessing of the self for the gathering'.⁴⁵ The exhibiting of the essential and undaunted maleness of the larrikin can be seen as a manifestation of the ungoverned body, a refusal of the unremitting management of the self which was one of the hallmarks of bourgeois respectability.

The most important item in a larrikin's outfit were his boots. They were sometimes referred to as 'Romeos' suggestive of their role in sexual

display.⁴⁶ The boot was more than mere footwear to Jonah the larrikin protagonist in Stone's novel. It was his talisman. He makes his way on the streets early in life with his fancy but lethal boots and later grows rich when he opens a shoe emporium whose emblem is a huge silver shoe hung outside. Boots and shoes were of universal importance at a time when most people led a pedestrian existence and roads and footpaths were unsealed and dirty. Lower-class children, boys in particular, often went barefoot. As late as 1920 a visitor at Redfern public school counted only 95 out of 400 boys wearing boots though nearly all the girls were shod.⁴⁷ Footwear was also the most expensive single item of clothing for lower-class people. The working man's boot was generally a Blucher, crude and thick-soled, made for rough work and long wear and cheap (they could be purchased for seven shillings and sixpence). The dandyish larrikin boots were the antithesis of the Blucher boot. They rendered strenuous manual labour impossible, a message which signalled defiant idleness. All but hidden by the wide flare of bell-bottomed trousers they were the larrikin's pride and joy. They were pointed and worn very tight showing the outline of the toes within. The heels were high, which gave the wearer added stature, and inward-sloping to an exaggerated degree. Some are said to have had enamel-work on the toe-caps or an inset mirror for the purpose of seeing up girls' skirts.⁴⁸ The tightness of the boots and the extreme inward slope of the heel forced the wearers to assume a peculiar mincing gait which made them look as though they might topple over. In kicking encounters, however, the points were useful and deadly.

Murray claims that the much-prized boots were reserved for special occasions such as picnics and dances.⁴⁹ It is unlikely, for example, that those larrikins who had jobs would have been permitted to wear their distinctive attire in the workplace. Indeed it is probable that the whole larrikin rig-out was not everyday wear but reserved for occasions when he was sallying forth with his push or participating in a social occasion.

Larrikinism was, to use Hebdige's words, a 'marginal discourse...within the broad confines of class experience'.⁵⁰ Thus, while larrikin fashion was largely derived from, and is here considered as a variant of mainstream lower-class clothing, as an expression of sub-cultural style it is likely to have been despised or ridiculed or feared by other lower-class people as by the bourgeoisie. Chiller, a larrikin coxcomb from Spats's factory, encounters disapproval from the female quarter. He wears his hair plastered forward onto his forehead and affects a red neckerchief and the ubiquitous high-heeled boots. He renounces these fancy trappings however when Minnie, a girl on whom he is keen, takes a dim view. When she refuses to be seen 'with a bloke what done-up 'is 'air dead leary', 'the elaborate festoons ...disappeared from Chiller's brow'.⁵¹ He abandons both his red neckerchief when Minnie declares it 'ain't respectable' and his bob-tailed coat with buttons when she labels the wearers of such apparel 'lurchers 'n' rats'.⁵² He lowers his boot heels and discards a prized black-and-white sweater because it suggests disreputable sporting connections. Chiller's renunciation of leery style at Minnie's behest is a step in the direction of the fate which ultimately overtook all larrikins, doomed to be claimed by the ineluctable realities of family and domestic life.

Although larrikin fashion appeared uniform to casual outside observers, as with all spectacular subcultures, fine inflections of style and status were charged with significance and conveyed considerable information about the wearer. Bourdieu observed that a work of art 'has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded'.⁵³ This is no less true of subcultural style. Relatively minor details of larrikin dress carried meaning for those who knew how to decode them. The subtle variations which allowed others of his class to read the signals contained in the larrikin's sartorial presentation are now difficult to

know. We can, however, attempt to interpret what symbolic import it might have had from a historical perspective.

As Hollander has observed, clothing can express 'not only actual rank but also the desire for a change in rank'.⁵⁴ The larrikin on the other hand was expressing his lack of interest in aspiring to the middle class, a goal which was at the core of respectability. Larrikin dress either parodied or undercut middle-class style. It represented an inversion of respectable dress by which the wearers signaled that they embraced the otherness constructed for them by bourgeois discourse. The message of larrikin style was not the endorsed one of wishing to better himself, to ascend to the ranks of the middle class via the precepts of respectability, but of flaunting his low status as a badge of pride. When respectable men wore their hair pomatumed into shiny neatness, 'parted with the oily precision characteristic of Sunday-school superintendents and reputable young barbers',⁵⁵ larrikins wore theirs combed forward in a greasy fringe; whereas the trousers of 'decent' men were pressed into sharp creases which concealed the shape of the body beneath, larrikins' were as tight as fleshings, flaring showily at the bottom.

The larrikin refused to submit to the discipline of the three-inch collar. The sports shirt, with soft, attached collar, existed by the 1890s but was not in general use. Collars were a separate item requiring to be fastened on by one means or another to the shirt. The larrikin generally went collarless. His shirt, too, was soft and unstarched allowing it to 'sag out over his trouser's top in a rather untidy fashion' in contrast to the starched shirtfronts of the responsible middle-class male. When he did put on a collar it was made out of paper,⁵⁶ a material considerably less restrictive and less permanent than starched linen or celluloid. Rigid shielding of the male neck with stiff wing collars anchored firmly in place with neckties was *de rigueur* in polite society, the only exception being sports clothes. A hapless lawyer in Lindsay's *Cousin*

from Fiji, for instance, was not even permitted to remove his collar in his own home, the women of the house refusing to tolerate 'an indecent exposure of his neck'.⁵⁷ Bailey sees the rigid collar as 'expressive of a deeper tension within capitalism itself on the admissibility of pleasure and consumption in a work-centred culture'.⁵⁸ If we accept Bailey's view then the larrikin's refusal of the collar and the starched shirtfront can be read as a defiantly hedonistic gesture, another epitomisation of the unruly, ungoverned body.

The variety of hats worn by larrikins reflected the broad variance in mainstream male headgear. Though the suits of middle-class men were remarkably uniform Sydney men were observed to wear a great variety of hats—high, low, straw, felt, white, black, beaver, broad-brimmed and narrow-brimmed.⁵⁹ Some larrikins wore straw hats or 'nan-nans', a later variant of the cabbage tree hat of the early nineteenth century. Others wore small round hard hats, an exaggerated version of the bowler with a smaller brim. Soft slouch hats, generally black, were also worn either tipped rakishly over the left ear or 'stuck on the back of the head in order to fully expose the greased fringe of curls that cover the low forehead'.⁶⁰

Larrikinism has been identified as a male sub-culture. Women did not participate fully in its rites and practices. In clashes with police and other pushes, for example, women played no part. They nonetheless appear to have identified with and played a role in some aspects of the sub-culture. In common with larrikins they adopted a mode of dress and behaviour that was distinctive and spectacular. The term 'larrikiness' was used in the press to refer to the young women who consorted with larrikins but this seems to have been strictly an outsider term. In larrikin argot women of the sub-culture were referred to by a variety of names including donahs, clinahs, fowls, gigglers and lumps of fat. 'Donah' was perhaps the most commonly used.

Donahs were young, lower-class urban women, many with jobs, who were conscious of their appearance and had some money to spend on dress. Their clothes were often exaggerated versions of the latest middle-class fashions. Dressing in imitation of their betters was disapproved of, seen as a desire to appropriate higher status, perhaps even to marry into a higher social class. But just as frequently donahs rejected mainstream fashion in favour of a more distinctive stylistic path. In the southern parts of Sydney young girls were to be seen 'flashily and cheaply dressed and bearing upon their features the marks of precocious vice'.⁶¹ They scorned the ethos of restraint and austerity prevailing in bourgeois women's fashion in favour of 'violent colours, fancy velvet jackets, and a profusion of ostrich feathers'.⁶² The 'get-up' of Miss Mushey Madden, from the Rocks, a habituee of the Lutetia Dancing rooms, for example, consisted of 'very bright red bodice, brilliant blue skirt, yellow neckerchief and large hat with tropical luxuriance of flowers on top'.⁶³ Another specimen of the fashion-conscious lower-class girl is Miss Dolly Hopgood from Spats's factory, 'a saucy young lady of about 16' who hailed from 'a push-ridden suburb'. She affected high-heeled boots and her dress was 'ribbed with cheap black lace, like the hoops on a barrel'; her hat was 'a wide-brimmed 'gem', skewered so far forward that in her walks it preceded her by about half-a-yard'.⁶⁴ It was inevitable that such a gaudy, exuberant and expressive style, so conspicuous in the sedate sea of grey, olive and brown of respectable women's street wear, would be labelled vulgar. The costumes of donahs were ridiculed as tasteless and ugly and writers often took an almost sensual delight in overdrawn descriptions. 'Very few of them display good taste in their mode of dressing', noted one commentator; 'doubtless they think taste of that kind would be misplaced'.⁶⁵

One of their fashion hallmarks was the outsize Gainsborough hat.⁶⁶ The donah's 'huge hats with feathers announced her from afar'.⁶⁷ Even in the 1890s when tiny hats with veils became fashionable it

seemed that donahs continued to wear wide-brimmed hats with lavish trimming. Riotous with ostrich plumes, flowers, bows and other ornaments, they signified extravagant femininity and attracted the attention of passers-by who could not help but notice the wearer. The hat worn by the fictional Aggie to the butchers' picnic in *True Eyes and the Whirlwind* for example was 'a masterpiece of pink straw, green tulle, and black feathers, crowned by a very large brassy buckle inlaid with precious stones of glass'.⁶⁸ Hats seem to have been as important for the donah as boots were for her consort. 'Feathers' Murphy, a possessor of multiple specimens, was the envy of her fellows at the factory: 'Three new hats last month she had, all (bitterly), I suppose, from different blokes (fiercely)'.⁶⁹ This quote suggests the specific importance of the hat as an accoutrement for the donah. It also suggests that hats, and perhaps other items of clothing or decoration as well, were bought for them by their larrikin boyfriends. If so this was consistent with the practice observed in both English and American cities among lower-class young women of accepting gifts of clothes from men.⁷⁰ The *quid pro quo* may have been anything from sexual favours to the reflected glory of being seen in the company of a well-dressed female.

The attempts of young lower-class women at modishness and display were frowned upon even more severely by middle-class moralists than those of their male counterparts. Their extravagance contravened the respectable ideals of thrift and frugality. Twopeny disapprovingly commented that 'I have often seen our servants with hats or bonnets on, which cannot have cost them less than three or four pounds'.⁷¹ The blurring of distinctions between prostitutes and young women who dressed flamboyantly and participated in street life was another feature of middle-class commentary. William Lane's characterisation of a 'high-heeled, tightly corsetted, gaily-hatted larrikinness' confirms that donahs and prostitutes, at least in terms of fashion, did share considerable common ground, both favouring an excessive femininity

and conspicuous style in which vivid effects and sexual allure were more important than modesty and good taste. For other women who aspired to respectability but lived in lower-class neighbourhoods—‘cheek by jowl with prostitutes etc’— it was necessary to emphasise their difference from their non-respectable neighbours. Such women strove to avoid flashiness as carefully as they strove for neatness and cleanliness. The earnest Nellie in *Workingman’s Paradise*, for example, dresses with puritan simplicity ‘in a severely plain dress of black stuff, above which a faint line of white collar could be seen clasping the round throat’. Her plain and simple garments were equated with virtue. Her refinement, delicacy and modesty stood out among the slatternly and foul-mouthed women around her. In an oblique reference to her virginity we are told: ‘Her ears had been bored but she wore no earrings’.⁷²

The feminine shape of donahs was accentuated by nipped waists and ‘dress improvers’ which they seem to have clung to after the bustle had disappeared from mainstream fashion in the mid-1890s.⁷³ Skirts were worn short enough to clear the ankle, their fullness accentuated by multiple petticoats. The feet were thus left free for dancing and the fancy boots, the counterpart of the larrikin Romeos, were displayed to effect. The boots were of the high lace-up type, some decorated with ‘embroidered designs, and the names of lovers worked on the tops’.⁷⁴ They showed off a dainty foot to advantage. The larrikin, consistent with his preoccupation with footwear, had a fetishistic regard for the female foot. Stone tells us that ‘the high instep was a distinguished mark of beauty among the larrikins, adored by them with a Chinese reverence’.⁷⁵ The extravagant style of the two ‘Café belles’ in an engraving by Whitelocke reinforces descriptions from the press and literature of fashion-conscious working girls, confident and attention-seeking.⁷⁶ The hair of the belles is frizzed and their hats are laden fore and aft with decorative trimmings. Their skirts are short, showing tiny boots and a glimpse of gaily striped stocking, and are swathed in

extravagant sweeps of fabric, one held with an outsized buckle. One of the belles is ostentatiously smoking a cigarette, an unconventional habit signifying boldness which was to become a signifier of the modern woman in the 1920s.

The hair of the donah was among her distinctive features. Among fictional ones a disproportionate number seemed to be red-haired. Aggie Alston in *True Eyes and the Whirlwind*, Pinkey in *Jonah*, Dolly in *Benno and Some of the Push* are all ginger-haired. Randolph Bedford goes so far as to claim that most donahs were red-haired.⁷⁷ Red hair and the colouring that usually accompanied it were not admired by those with genteel taste perhaps because it was associated with the Irish. Frizzed fringes were popular across all classes particularly after Queen Alexandra, who favoured the fashion, ascended the throne in 1901. The *Bulletin* claimed that women covered their foreheads with fringes to 'keep from looking like a death's head on a toasting fork'.⁷⁸ Donahs seem typically to have exaggerated the fashion. The desired frizzed effect was achieved with hot curling tongs. As a result of their excessive use hair often broke off inelegantly into a 'short and stubby' fuzz.⁷⁹ Unfortunate women who suffered this fate could resort to the use of false fringes which were widely advertised in the popular press. Some young women about town reportedly wore their hair 'cropped close like a boy's, with a few frontal curls left to show the femininity of the wearers'.⁸⁰ This may have been due to the depredations of the curling iron but it also suggests resistance to the fetishistic Edwardian regard for a head of long and luxuriant hair, summed up by the adage that 'a woman's hair is her crowning glory'. It also hints at gender ambiguity.

In this regard some young Sydney women went further. Writing in the 1870s an observer reported seeing 'two girls of about 17 years appeared in the habiliments of a developed larrikin of the present time, even to the indented billycock hat and high-heeled boots'.⁸¹ Appearing

on the street in male dress was a bold and defiant gesture. The girls were laying symbolic claim to male freedoms perhaps making a bid for full participation in larrikin culture. This incident, read in conjunction with the report of male larrikins dressed as females mentioned earlier, raises questions as to whether, and if so to what extent, larrikin culture confronted normalising gender discourse. Although the ethos of the sub-culture was heavily male and oppressive to women in many ways these incidents raise the possibility that the cross-currents of gender within the sub-culture may have been more complex and ambiguous than has been suspected. They may also have represented a carnivalising gesture inverting as they did one of the core propositions of societal structure. From the subject's perspective the significance of creating such a ritual spectacle, which seems to have gone beyond the prevailing subcultural stylistic rituals of resistance, may have been that it made it possible to imaginatively inhabit a new order, to, in Bakhtin's words 'extend the narrow sense of life'.⁸²

¹ Gould, Nat, *Town and Bush*, London, Routledge, 1896, p99.

² Alternatively 'leary' or 'lairy' (flashily stylish). An older English use of 'leery' given by SJ Baker (*The Australian Language*, Melbourne, Sun, 1966, p125) is wide-awake, knowing, cunning. Chris McConville records that one of the Melbourne pushes called themselves the Hoddle Street Lairies (McConville, 'From Criminal Class to Underworld' in *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History*, ed Graeme Davison, David Dunstan and Chris McConville, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1985, p74).

³ Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, London, Routledge, 1979, p101.

⁴ Rosenzweig, Roy, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p47.

⁵ See Jon Stratton, *The Young Ones*, Perth, Black Swan Press, 1992, p55; also the entry for 'Larrikins' in volume five of AH Chisholm ed, *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, Sydney, Grolier, 1965.

⁶ Kasson, John, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1990, p118.

⁷ Flower, Cedric, *Duck and Cabbage Tree: a Political History of Clothes in Australia 1788-1914*, Angus & Robertson, 1968, p114.

⁸ Adams, AH, *Galahad Jones*, London, Lane, 1910, p2.

⁹ Twopeny, REN, *Town life in Australia*, (Facsimile of 1883 edition), Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1973, p81.

¹⁰ Veblen, Thorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1979.

¹¹ Flower, p114.

¹² See for example Norman Lindsay, *The Cousin from Fiji*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1945, p71.

¹³ Roche, Daniel, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the 'Ancien Regime'*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p58.

¹⁴ *Australian Etiquette, or the Rules and Usages of the Best Society in the Australasian Colonies, together with their Sports, Pastimes, Games and Amusements*, Sydney, McConnell, 1885, p357.

¹⁵ *Australian Etiquette*, p350.

¹⁶ Lindsay, Norman, *Rooms and Houses, an Autobiographical Novel*, Sydney, Ure Smith, 1968, p111.

¹⁷ Laver, James, *Taste and Fashion, from the French Revolution to the Present Day*, London, Harrap, 1937, p139.

¹⁸ Laver, p132.

¹⁹ Corsetting has also been seen as repressive by feminist historians. David Kunzle has challenged this narrative arguing that its dangers were non-existent and that women tight-laced because it combined two things not usually found in pre-modern female clothing: sexual allure and respectability (Kunzle, David, *Fashion and Fetishism: a Social History of Corsets, Tight-Lacing and other forms of Body Sculpture in the West*, Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 1982).

²⁰ Adams, p66.

²¹ Adams, p66.

²² Lindsay, *Rooms and Houses*, p166.

²³ Roche, p154.

²⁴ Roche, p170.

²⁵ *First Australian Exhibition of Women's Work 1907*, Official Souvenir Catalogue, [Melbourne, no pub details, 1907], p349-351.

²⁶ Bailey, Peter, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p176.

²⁷ Goffmann, Erving, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1959, p46.

²⁸ Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1957, p78.

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- ²⁹ Reiger, Kerreen M, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernising the Australian Family 1880-1940*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1985, p79.
- ³⁰ Goffmann, p50.
- ³¹ See for example, Louis Stone, *Jonah*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1991, p55 and p137.
- ³² Gareth Stedman-Jones records that weddings in late nineteenth-century London were attended by similarly little ceremony ('Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London 1870-1900', *Journal of Social History* 7 (1974), p473).
- ³³ Inglis, James, *Our Australian Cousins*, London, Macmillan, 1880, p174.
- ³⁴ Dyson, Edward, *Fact'ry 'ands*, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Co, 1912, p105.
- ³⁵ Gould, p106.
- ³⁶ Quoted in James Murray, *Larrikins*, Melbourne, Lansdowne, 1973, p37.
- ³⁷ Bedford, Randolph, *True Eyes and the Whirlwind*, London, Duckworth, 1903, p128.
- ³⁸ Freeman, John, *Lights and Shadows of Melbourne Life*, London, Sampson Low, 1888, p83.
- ³⁹ Lindsay, *Rooms and Houses*, p72.
- ⁴⁰ It is interesting to speculate whether this was a result of cultural exchange via the population of seamen who came and went through Sydney and other port cities, as was the case with the fashions and music of 1950s youth sub-cultures.
- ⁴¹ See A Humphries, *A Secret World of Sex: Forbidden Fruit, the British Experience 1900-1950*, London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1988, p159.
- ⁴² Davies, Andrew, 'Youth Gangs, Masculinity and Violence in late Victorian Manchester and Salford', *Journal of Social History* (Winter 1998), p5 of downloaded copy.
- ⁴³ *Vice and its Victims in Sydney, the Cause and Cure* by a Pupil of the late Professor John Woolley, Principal of Sydney University. Sydney, Published for the proprietor at Edwin H. Becke's...1873, p120.
- ⁴⁴ Goffmann, Erving, *Behavior in Public Places*, New York, Free Press, 1963, p26.
- ⁴⁵ Goffmann, *Behavior in Public Places*, p27.
- ⁴⁶ Baker, p120.
- ⁴⁷ Walker, Robin, 'Aspects of Working-class Life in Industrial Sydney in 1913', *Labour History*, 58 (May 1990), p41.
- ⁴⁸ Flower, p115.
- ⁴⁹ Murray, p33.
- ⁵⁰ Hebdige, p74.
- ⁵¹ Dyson, p112.

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- ⁵² Red ('red as the blood which some would cause to flow') was the colour favoured for the larrikin neckerchief, worn instead of a tie.
- ⁵³ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1984, p2.
- ⁵⁴ Hollander, Anne, *Seeing Through Clothes*, New York, Viking, 1975, p355.
- ⁵⁵ Dyson, p112.
- ⁵⁶ Murray p33.
- ⁵⁷ Lindsay, *Cousin from Fiji*, p45.
- ⁵⁸ Bailey, Peter, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p119.
- ⁵⁹ Maynard, Margaret, *Fashioned from Penury: Dress as Cultural Practice in Colonial Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p82.
- ⁶⁰ Gould, p106.
- ⁶¹ [Grey, Harold], *The Moocher, Scenes in Sydney by Day and Night*, [Sydney, nd, no pub details], no1, p5.
- ⁶² Flower, p115.
- ⁶³ *The Jury* vol 1 no 9, May 3, 1902, p9.
- ⁶⁴ Dyson, Edward, *Benno and Some of the Push*, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Company, 1911, p59.
- ⁶⁵ [Grey, Harold], p4.
- ⁶⁶ See for example Lane, William, *The Workingman's Paradise: an Australian Novel*, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1980, p39.
- ⁶⁷ Murray, p34.
- ⁶⁸ Bedford, p130.
- ⁶⁹ *The Jury*, vol 1 no 9, May 3, 1902, p9.
- ⁷⁰ Humphries, p155.
- ⁷¹ Twopeny, p56.
- ⁷² Lane, p169.
- ⁷³ Bedford, p130.
- ⁷⁴ Flower, p115.
- ⁷⁵ Stone, p110; the Chinese reference presumably alludes to the historical 'lily-foot' fetish.

⁷⁶ Whitelocke, Nelson P, *A Walk in Sydney's Streets on the Shady Side*, Sydney, N. Whitelocke, 1885, [np].

⁷⁷ Bedford, p128.

⁷⁸ *The Bulletin* 7/3/91, p8.

⁷⁹ Bedford, p128.

⁸⁰ Freeman, p47.

⁸¹ *Vice and its Victims in Sydney*, p48.

⁸² Bakhtin, MM, *Rabelais and his World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky, Bloomington, Ind, Indiana University Press, [1984], p177.

Chapter 9

Everyday Resistance: Larrikin Street Life

Larrikins took possession of Sydney. They colonized the streets and other public spaces, and appropriated the parks, markets, vaudeville theatres, dancing saloons and picnic grounds of the city. They congregated at cricket tests, football matches and boxing events, barracking rowdily and creating disturbance. They used the city as a stage on which to enact their subversive style. Through the larrikin habitus¹ were enacted a range of everyday resistances aimed at 'foiling the other's game'² by subverting such spaces that were instituted and defined by the middle class. They lacked the power of representation through the dominant institutions of the day. They did not have access to the press or other public forms of the written word for example. But they did have the ability to inscribe the city with new significance by making themselves visible through style. To use a notion of Certeau's, they 'metaphorised the dominant order', made it 'function in another register'.³

The construction of larrikins as a symbol of difference, of deviance, was closely enmeshed with Sydney's geographical spaces and the ways in which they were imagined. In socio-spatial terms Sydney was a deeply segmented city where separate zones with designated uses constituted what the urban theorist Park called 'a cluster of separate worlds'.⁴ In the spatial encoding of the city the larrikin identity was dispersed across three separate zones—the inner-city slum neighbourhoods, the waste spaces on the margins of the city and the streets of its business and commercial heart. The symbolic relation between larrikins and the places where they assembled thus defined a

transgressive moral order which mirrored the spatial organization of the city.⁵

The inner-urban slum neighbourhoods were typified as the natural habitat of the larrikin. The middle class were abandoning the city in droves, in search of a *rus in urbe* in the rapidly developing suburbs.⁶ The inner-city areas on which they turned their backs were, in Engels' words relegated to 'separate territories, assigned to poverty' associated with moral degeneracy, insanitary living conditions and criminality.⁷ Described in terms of labyrinthine backstreets, noisome alleys and dank, decaying houses they were typified as alien territory where the tenets of order and civility did not hold and where urban depravity thrived. Onslaughts were made by the City Council from 1900 on the old slum purlieus many of which were demolished in the name of progress. The rhetoric which accompanied this 'urban renewal' linked environmental with moral reformism: 'As long as we have such streets as are to be found in Woolloomooloo, Surry Hills and, in fact, right throughout the city and near suburbs, we shall be faced with a sickly, immoral and degenerate section of citizens' declared one reformer.⁸ The City building surveyor agreed, maintaining that the importance of the demolitions was as much to 'prevent immorality' as 'to preserve the health of the Citizens and beautify the City'.⁹ Contemporary observers readily made a connection between the old inner-city environs and the bad character of their inhabitants. Ambrose Pratt for example claimed that, even after the old convict element had been absorbed into the general populace:

In the cities and heart-centres there remained... a truculent and intractable element ...associated together from sympathy and similarity of disposition. These creatures established themselves in separate communities, and being for the most part idle and criminally inclined, selected for their abodes places whose topographical conditions suited their requirements.¹⁰

The anxiety engendered by the slums was derived largely from their mythic power which resonated strongly in the psychic world of the urban bourgeoisie. Their image as a place of menace drew on Victorian anti-urban discourses coloured by exposes in the 'Lights and Shadows' genre.¹¹ Criminality reigned here unchecked for the police, it was alleged, dared not venture into the laneways of the Rocks or city black spots like Durand's Alley. The language of representation was highly coloured:

narrow lanes, tiny stone houses—dirty, dark and evil-looking—a network of by-ways and purlieus admirably adapted for the quick passage of feet justice-hunted, where one could easily be lost or lose one's pursuers... The streets were dark and lonely; the municipal lamps...in every case unlit or perhaps put out... Strange calls and counter calls echoed through the night.¹²

The slums were marked as places beyond the civilizing influence of law enforcement where unruly street life could flourish unimpeded. As no-go areas for respectable citizens they were symbolically conceded to the larrikins. Thus were the discourse of larrikinism and the anti-slum discourse closely intertwined.

Also encoded as dangerous places where deviance flourished were the waste spaces on the city's outer perimeter. Areas like the Lachlan Water Reserve, originally a swamp, which extended to the south of the city and Moore Park, a stretch of sandy, hilly scrubland to the east were neither bush nor town and lacked the amenities of either. Untracked, they were outside the regularizing grid of roads, footpaths and tramlines that criss-crossed Sydney and, like the slums, were beyond the effective reach of the police. The dangers of Moore Park which surrounded Mount Rennie were well publicised. It was, claimed one paper:

infested with gangs of the worst larrikins to be found about the city—touts, gaolbirds and roughs, toughs and vagrants, of both sexes and all descriptions. Scenes of brutal ruffianism and low debauchery are matters of daily occurrence there, and, in fact, it is dangerous for a decently dressed stranger to venture into the bush at the back of Mount Rennie or Mount Steel.¹³

Just a few miles south of Moore Park, spectacularly situated on a small coastal peninsula, was another socially and geographically marginal place—La Perouse, home to a settlement of Sydney's Aboriginal people. It has been described by Shirley Fitzgerald as 'the city's back doorstep, which housed its human rejects as well as being a useful dumping ground for its nightsoil'.¹⁴ La Perouse was also periodically frequented by larrikins. The sporting paper *The Bird O' Freedom*, using the rhetoric of exposure, published an article with liberal sub-heads ('Rum and Gin', 'White Toughs Infest the Camp', 'A Larrikins' Debauch') describing the lumpen weekend revels staged there. The 'blacks' camp' it claimed, was 'a resort for members of the push' who went there to drink, gamble and carouse with women. The scene there on Saturday nights it was said 'beggars description. It is A WILD SATURNALIA in which whites and blacks are mingled without regard to sex or decency'. The settlement's remoteness from a police station meant that the larrikin could 'indulge his lustful, mischievous desires with impunity'. References to 'half-caste' children running around the settlement underlined the condemnation of miscegenation which accompanied the discourse of eugenics.¹⁵

Together with the slums, the wastelands were repudiated as dangerous places by the bourgeoisie, symbolically consigned to the larrikins and other deviants who 'infested' them. The incautious or those who did not know Sydney might be foolhardy enough to wander there after dark but prudent citizens knew that those who ventured there could expect to meet with foul play and simply avoided them.

But larrikins refused to be contained within the slums and waste spaces. Indeed their mobility, the spatial fluidity of their presence was a key component of their menace. They spilled out of their lower-class neighbourhoods into the respectable districts of the city. When they staked a claim here it was more vigorously contested. The business and commercial district, heart of the world of commerce, government and law was claimed by the bourgeoisie as its own. This was a time when the city streets and public places were being modernized to align with commercial interests. Residential areas at the southern and western reaches of the city were cleared to make way for warehouses and commercial premises. Glittering shops with large windows encouraged a new kind of consumer capitalism, reliant on spectacle.¹⁶ Streets like Elizabeth, George, Oxford and William were widened to ease the flow of traffic.¹⁷ The improved character of the commercial heart of the city was rational, prosperous, substantial and wealth-generating. The transformed streets lined with imposing sandstone piles were fitting conduits for a modern, prosperous and businesslike citizenry. They formed an antithesis to both the blind alleys of East Sydney and the bleak expanses of Moore Park and Mount Rennie. Larrikins had no official place in these spaces encoded as the epicenter of a modern, progressive city. Although the modernization of the city in the early years of the twentieth century was represented in terms of progress, benefiting all citizens equally, we cannot doubt that the processes of urban renewal represented the working out of ideology, for, as Certeau reminds us, space as a social fact is always political and strategic.¹⁸ The re-defining of legitimate uses of space which it entailed privileged the public over the private, the new over the old and the rational over the emotional and in doing so raised fundamental questions regarding who among its citizenry had a right to the city.

Perception of the larrikin presence as corrupting was emphasized by the language which was commonly used to describe it. Consistent with

their construction as the low other the larrikin presence was narrated using a vocabulary of pollution which was shared with the City Council's sanitation officials such as the Inspector of Public Nuisances. Words like 'infesting', 'contaminating', 'sully' were invoked to describe their bodily presence, the 'vile expectorations' they spat onto the footpaths and the noxious smoke they exhaled from pipes. The larrikin was regarded as an inveterate, even accomplished smoker.¹⁹ '[S]moking is a science with him; he can swallow a cloud, drink a glass of water, and emit the smoke five minutes afterwards'.²⁰ Another despised habit was spitting. Murray tells us that 'the average larrikin prided himself on the distance he could spit, and it was a special larrikin practice to spit through the teeth'.²¹ The use of chewing tobacco by some larrikins made the habit doubly obnoxious, 'converting the pavement into a beastly puddle of expectoration'.²² Thus was the presence of the low other transcoded through the topography of the city into 'dirt' contaminating and disfiguring the city as surely as did dead horses in the roadway and rotting garbage in the lanes.²³

The foulness of their language and lewd remarks to women were also represented as polluting, judged by critics as 'not fit for any decent person to hear'.²⁴ Such views highlighted the important role played by language in the classing process. Swearing and profanity were among the markers of lower-class culture and middle-class charity and church workers who had direct contact with the lower classes often expressed horror at their common speech.²⁵ Stratton has suggested that educating lower class children was a means not only of instilling knowledge but of imbuing them with the lived culture and the manners of middle-class life.²⁶ More direct attempts by the bourgeoisie in the second half of the nineteenth-century to stifle the language of the urban lower class by targetting lower-class youth socialising on the streets have been described by Finch.²⁷

Larrikins critiqued the bourgeois spatial order by breaching middle class codes of public conduct in ways that were oblique, non-verbal, corporeal. They advertised their avoidance of productiveness in favour of spectacular consumption. Their favoured pastimes of smoking, drinking, gambling, reading sensational newspapers, going to the theatre and dressing up represented erosion of both thrift and self-effacement, Victorian virtues expected of the lower class. Their idle street life expressed resistance to the ethos of industriousness, another of the cornerstones of Victorian morality. As one writer characterized it, the street was their assembly rooms,²⁸ another saw it as the larrikin version of the Gentlemen's club.²⁹ Using the streets for amusement, or merely for passing the time challenged the rational order of the bourgeois urban world which dictated that their only proper use was for getting from one place to another. Lolling or loitering aimlessly has always been regarded with suspicion and the police were flooded with complaints about the 'bands of disorderly youths' who assembled at various places in the city.³⁰ Their presence in a public place 'without an orientation to apparent goals outside the situation' broke the rule of public behaviour against 'having no purpose' described by Goffmann.³¹ The idleness of larrikins, the impression they gave of having nothing to do and ample time in which to do it, was part of the insouciant performed character of the sub-culture. They flaunted their indolence and thwarted bourgeois expectations that they should have been at work, or looking for work, or at least improving themselves at the Mechanics Institute. As one resident of the fictional Cardigan Street in *Jonah* wryly observed: 'If smokin' cigarettes, an' spittin', and swearin' was 'ard work, they'd all die rich men'.³² Many of course were in work, though this was often of an intermittent, casual type.³³ The street trades which some larrikins favoured were often perceived as merely a cover for more nefarious activities.

The threat they posed to respectable citizens was more symbolic than real. Loitering larrikins endangered not so much personal safety as the armour of bourgeois dignity and self-containment. Their habit of boldly scrutinising or accosting strangers penetrated the ego-boundaries of respectable pedestrians, puncturing the carefully contrived surface of the bourgeois self. A characteristic larrikin trick was to assail passers-by by a variety of means including knocking off their hats, spitting, making impertinent remarks and so on and enjoying their resulting discomfiture. Correspondents to the newspapers claimed that they could not venture abroad without the risk of exposing themselves to such effrontery from groups of youths. Such conduct breached the code of civil inattention which dictated that strangers encountered in the ever-moving urban environment should be politely ignored.³⁴ Simmel saw this studied impassivity as a psychological defense against the excess of sensory stimulation characteristic of urban life.³⁵ It also served to reinforce social barriers and acted as a defence mechanism against dangerous or otherwise unwelcome encounters with strangers.

The uncivil attentions of larrikins were not randomly bestowed. Women were a prime target. From late in the nineteenth century middle-class women were venturing out of the home and onto the streets lured by the attractions of expanded opportunities for shopping, notably the department stores. This new role of consumer entailed exposing themselves to the public gaze which carried its own dangers.³⁶ The public sphere was still problematic for women necessitating the careful management of street behaviour. They were careful to avoid socialising or even speaking to men in the street 'lest it be assumed that liberties can be taken with them'.³⁷ To avoid the possibility of being taken for a prostitute a woman had to adopt a strategy of rigorous self-governance:

The true lady walks the street, wrapped in a mantle of proper reserve, so impenetrable that insult and coarse familiarity shrink from her... She is always unobtrusive, never talks loudly, or laughs boisterously, or does anything to attract the attention of the passers-by. She walks along in her own quiet, ladylike way, and by her pre-occupation is secure from any annoyance to which a person of less perfect breeding might be subjected.³⁸

But it was not only women who were vulnerable to larrikin harassment. The Chinese who were a common and conspicuous presence in inner-Sydney were another of their habitual quarries.³⁹ Larrikins upset their vegetable carts, yanked their queues and otherwise tormented them. Murray believes that the relative prosperity of Chinese street vendors who owned horses aroused larrikin envy.⁴⁰ Another source of resentment may have been that both groups were in competition for the same sort of work, for both larrikins and Chinese favoured small-scale *petit bourgeois* enterprise over working for wages.⁴¹ The Salvation Army too was a traditional larrikin foe. The Army's opposition to popular lower-class cultural pursuits was no doubt provoking and its street-based methods made it a ready target. McConville recounts⁴² how during the 1880s the inner suburbs of Melbourne became a battlefield between the Salvationists and the larrikins who formed themselves into 'devil's armies' carrying clubs and torches and marching at the front of the Salvationists singing parodies of their war songs.⁴³ Other larrikin victims were the street preachers of all persuasions who were a familiar feature of Sydney life. In Niland's *The Big Smoke* freelance gossellers Mr Halley and Miss Crotty are heckled and baited by larrikins when they attempt to set up a harmonium for a street concert of hymns.⁴⁴ It seems that any person who displayed eccentricities of dress or person in public was liable to be assailed. The behaviour of larrikins in this regard can be read as an expression of the fiercely conformist mood which Manning Clark believes held sway in Australia at the time, where 'the original, the fanciful and the odd were attacked with equal ferocity on the street and in the legislature'.⁴⁵ Although they enacted rituals of resistance in the

cultural sphere, larrikins were authoritarian in their deprecation of difference and predatory in their petty criminality.⁴⁶ It can also be seen as a process of displaced abjection whereby 'low' social groups turn their figurative and actual power, not against those in authority, but against those who are even 'lower'.⁴⁷

Consideration of the place of larrikins in the city thus far has been restricted to males. The role of young lower-class women on the streets warrants separate consideration. Although they were represented as 'larrikinesses' such constructions were problematic for the main reason that the role of women in the larrikin sub-culture was marginal and contingent. In the discourse of the slum 'larrikinesses' as such do not appear. Rather women who people bourgeois slumscapes are constructed as countertypes to the idealised domestic queen, subsumed into versions of the Victorian archetype of the prostitute, described as 'base', 'loose', 'slatternly' and so on.⁴⁸ Instead of being neatly contained within their rightful sphere of the home they spill into the streets from front doorways or 'lean...over balconies half-clothed'. Swarms of their 'frail' or 'undersized' children play in the streets. Here and there appears a house like an 'oasis in the desert of the slum' where a 'heroic' attempt has been made at cleanliness and order, with whitened front steps and starched, if threadbare curtains. Such signs of a striving after something better only reinforce the general impression of squalor. The qualities of the idealised housewife and mother—neatness, cleanliness, gentle manners, home industry, maternal watchfulness—have been stripped away from the women who people these representations, leaving a female version of the low other.

In that other spatial zone haunted by the larrikin presence, the city's waste spaces, women are merely a shadowy half-presence. They appear either as marginalized vagrants or hapless, if never entirely innocent, objects of male lust and violence. A series of well-publicised

rape cases in the 1880s and 1890s serves to illustrate this. Prior to the infamous Mount Rennie case, discussed in chapter seven, similar crimes involving gang rape and murder had occurred in Woolloomooloo in 1883 and Mount Carmel in 1884, both resulting in the acquittal of the men accused of the crimes.⁴⁹ Such atrocities confirmed that these scrubby, lawless places were no place for women.⁵⁰

It is only in the city proper that larrikinesses appear as high profile public figures emphasizing the increasingly conspicuous role of young lower-class women in the burgeoning heterosocial street life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The lure of pleasure brought them out of the confines of the home and away from the restrictions of family life to seek fun and diversion on the streets. Their demeanour made their purpose plain. They rejected the 'mantle of reserve' so carefully cultivated by middle-class women in favour of racketty manners and loud clothes. Above all, they sought the company of men, which made their street presence controversial and generated a complex of moralizing and regulatory discourses. In the view of some moral reformers, participating in street life compromised a woman's moral character to the extent that she was indistinguishable from a prostitute. Compounding the issue, as Judith Allen demonstrates, the label 'prostitute' was itself used loosely in this period.⁵¹ As a result, as Finch points out, the female companions of larrikins were often assumed to be prostitutes.⁵² Some probably were. But the majority were factory girls, waitresses and domestic servants who had chosen sexual assertion over modesty and self-expression over demure self-effacement.

The alarm caused by the presence of young lower-class women on the streets sprang partly from the Victorian public/private sphere discourse, still powerful in the late nineteenth century, which promulgated the notion that women's place was in the domestic realm

under the surveillance of some patriarch or other. For most of the nineteenth century unaccompanied women had no place abroad in the public realm. At designated times and places middle-class women participated in a ritualized promenade of display that had been a feature of Sydney life since early in the century. Well-dressed couples and families would sedately stroll 'The Block' between Hunter and King Streets on Saturdays or the Botanic Gardens on Sundays, seeing and being seen, modelling the latest fashions and enacting the social rituals of their class.⁵³ But these occasions were conducted *en famille* and women were accompanied by husbands or other male connections. Although this was changing by the 1890s there was still some delicate social and personal terrain to be negotiated, particularly for young, single women.

The numbers of young women ranging about the streets provided ample evidence for critics that the children of the lower class were unsupervised and undisciplined. Such assertions highlighted important points of difference between lower- and middle-class child-rearing practices which, Finch argues, constituted one of the points of moral reference in the bourgeois construction of the discursive category of a lower class.⁵⁴ Normative practice for the bourgeois family was to draw a *cordon sanitaire* around children.⁵⁵ Demands were made for a similarly high level of chaperonage and surveillance of lower-class children and adolescents and for stricter discipline at home. Such criticism failed to acknowledge the role played by the material conditions of inner-city life. Small, cramped houses meant that it was often not comfortable or even physically possible for all family members to be at home together. Further, lower-class children and youths who were expected to contribute something to the household economy from an early age might have laid claim, with some justification, to a commensurate degree of personal freedom. It is to be expected, for example, that the significant number of lower-class girls

who worked for wages would be more independent and self-directing than their home-based, middle-class counterparts.

Class mores also diverged on the matter of degree of tolerance for extra-marital sex. The strict standards of sexual propriety which were the middle-class standard reflected the reality of diminished chances in the marriage market that a tarnished reputation could incur. Stringent conditions were imposed on young, unmarried women whose virtue was commodified at a premium and great importance was attached to policing their associations:

Parents should...always be perfectly familiar with the character of their daughter's associates, and they should exercise their authority so far as not to permit her to form any improper acquaintances.⁵⁶

Whereas it was conceivable that a 'married lady' might venture abroad alone at night without hazarding her good name it was considered necessary to make provision for an escort for a single woman in such circumstances.⁵⁷ The period of courtship when a prospective husband who had yet to be fully secured might press claims for intimacy was a particularly hazardous time. Female coyness was urged. As one manual of etiquette put it 'a lady should not be too demonstrative of her affection during the days of her engagement. There is always a chance of "a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip"'.⁵⁸

The path to marriage for lower-class girls was however quite different. It could include short term romances involving sex with one or a number of men. The fetishisation of virginity was absent and occasional 'slips' were regarded philosophically. When Billy, the middle-class protagonist of *True Eyes and the Whirlwind* seduces Aggie, a donah attached to Brummy Jones's push, he is stricken by post-coital pangs of conscience. He frets about having compromised her 'good name' and wonders guiltily what her mother would say. But Aggie laughs at his scruples. Even if her mother knew, she declares,

'what would she care?'.⁵⁹ In another fictional example from *Jonah*, when Ada leaves work at the boot factory to have her child we are told 'her disaster created no stir. Such accidents were common'.⁶⁰ When the child is born his father, Jonah, moves unceremoniously into the house Ada shares with her mother and an instant family is created. Eventually, but not immediately, Jonah and Ada marry. Marriage was an upward status movement for women. Annie, one of the hands at Spats's, returns to the factory with a baby after an absence boastful about her new standing:

'Course you know I'm married?' said Annie.

'Go on', cried Bell. 'Was that lately?'

'Bless you no', answered Annie—'a week ago!'⁶¹

When modernity swept through the lives of lower-class women and they began to assert themselves in the pursuit of enjoyment some old certainties were disrupted. Kathy Peiss has described the trend towards a pleasure-oriented culture that transformed the lives of young working women in turn-of-the-century New York one of the most fundamental components of which was a shift from homosocial to heterosocial culture.⁶² Young women used the streets as a place to meet the other sex, to flirt and socialize away from the restrictions of home or workplace. Although picking up acquaintances in public places was judged by middle-class standards to indicate 'low breeding in the extreme'⁶³ the practice was common among young lower-class women.⁶⁴ In Australia the Victorian ideology of spatial and psychological separation of men and women, was, as Rickard notes, particularly strong and its effects extensive.⁶⁵ When so much of life was conducted on sex-segregated lines heterosocial activity of almost any sort was liable to cause alarm.⁶⁶

The city's public spaces offered ample opportunities for entertainment, socialising and self-display. In the Domain, for example, larrikins

paraded in groups, heckling speakers and chiacking among themselves. Modelled on London's Speakers' Corner the Domain was a Sydney institution and on Sundays, particularly in winter, was 'the city's chief place of recreation'.⁶⁷ Public spectacle was provided by orators of every stamp—socialists, anarchists, phrenologists, 'believers in the Lost Ten Tribes' and of course the Salvation Army—thundering and haranguing and exchanging repartee with onlookers.⁶⁸

The Saturday markets too were a huge carnival for young lower-class men and women. They were the department store, assembly hall and refreshment rooms of the poor, dominating the city, 'spreading their wares, smells and characters from Paddy's and Belmore's stalls, to the Queen Victoria shops and the fish market at Woolloomooloo'.⁶⁹ Louis Stone described the scene at Paddy's:

On Saturdays the great market, silent and deserted for six nights in the week, was a debauch of sound and colour and smell. Strange, pungent odours assailed the nostrils; the ear was surprised with the sharp, broken cries of dealers, the cackle of poultry, and the murmur of innumerable voices; the stalls, splashed with colour, astonished the eye like a picture, immensely powerful, immensely crude. The long rows of stalls were packed with the drift and refuse of a great city. For here the smug respectability of the shops were [sic] cast aside, and you were deep in the romance of traffic in merchandise fallen from its high estate—a huge welter and jumble of things arrested in their ignoble descent from the shops to the gutter.... There was no caprice of the belly that could not be gratified, no want of the naked body that could not be supplied in this huge bazaar of the poor; but its cost had to be counted in pence, for those who bought in the cheapest market came here.⁷⁰

Gatherings of young lower-class people enacting collective modes of enjoyment were frequently remarked with disapproval by middle-class commentators. 'The disgraceful scenes that take place in and around the Belmore markets, on a Saturday night, surpass all description' wrote one.⁷¹

City parks and gardens too, laid out by civic leaders with the quiet refreshment and sedate promenading of the urban bourgeoisie in mind, were appropriated by lower-class youth for socializing, courting and other non-sanctioned activities. Their presence was represented as a blight. Nat Gould, for example, observed:

On Sunday morning the larrikin loves to invade the spots where people stroll for pleasure, and the Botanical gardens are not free from his baneful presence. The police do all in their power to stop this, but they cannot be everywhere, and the larrikin always bides his time, and seizes a favourable opportunity for operations. These human brutes look like some foul excrescence upon the earth when seen in such a spot as the Botanical gardens.⁷²

For *Truth* the proper use of parks was as 'pleasant recreation grounds for our citizens' where invalids and delicate children might enjoy 'fresh, pure air'. In an expose it denounced Green Park in Darlinghurst as 'the regular haunt of the scum of the city...which would discredit if that were possible THE LOWEST SLUM IN CHINATOWN'. The writer had there observed a parade of lowlife including girls 'of the larrikin class' loudly conversing about friends in gaol, several drunken women growing quarrelsome over a bottle of gin and a group of young men playing two-up.⁷³

The challenge to the normative spatiality of urban social life which larrikins posed was made more pointed by their flouting of temporal conventions. An example was their nighttime use of Sydney's parks. Until 1904 the parks were unlit so when night fell they ceased to have any legitimate function other than to wait in deserted expectancy for the visitors daylight would bring. But the darkness which signalled potential danger for the respectable made them conveniently private for a range of activities by the non-respectable. Foremost among these were drinking, gambling and sex. Claims were often made couched in

a rich array of euphemisms that larrikins and their girls 'outraged decency' in the parks. Among the young sex was commonly conducted outdoors because of a lack of suitable indoor opportunities. In the overcrowded neighbourhoods of inner-Sydney it was, ironically enough, only in the streets, parks and other public places that young people could find a modicum of privacy. Stone has described the manner in which Jonah and Ada conducted their courtship in parks 'sprawled on the grass in obscure corners'.⁷⁴ Another larrikin couple, a 'donah, with a hat like a tea tray, nurs[ed] her bloke's head in her lap as he lay full length along the seat. And they exchanged caresses with a royal indifference to the people who were sauntering along the paths'.⁷⁵ Any outdoor area with hidden spots offered possibilities. At the butchers' picnic at Cremorne Billy, the protagonist of Bedford's *True Eyes and the Whirlwind*, indulges in some alfresco sex in the bush under the gum trees.⁷⁶ Sex offered excitement and pleasure in a milieu where such experiences were hard to come by as well as provoking a gratifyingly shocked and indignant reaction from respectables.

When Ambrose Pratt observed that larrikins 'primarily...seek amusement' he identified a key driver of their existence, for the larrikin sub-culture assumed its most complete form in the realm of leisure.⁷⁷ As well as colonizing the streets young people 'of the larrikin class' were also conspicuous at those commercial sites of popular pleasure which they could afford and which would admit them. In the late nineteenth century the increasing commodification of leisure was changing the nature of social life. Older style union- or church-based activities were being replaced by commercially organized dances, excursions and other forms of mass entertainment. Peter Bailey has shown how conflicting sets of behavioural standards could turn commercial leisure spots into sites of class confrontation for 'leisure was one of the major frontiers of social change in the nineteenth century and like most frontiers it was disputed territory'.⁷⁸ Though

liquor was an important element in their social life pubs were not among preferred larrikin haunts. When licensed premises came under scrutiny in 1887 from the Intoxicating Drink Inquiry witnesses spoke of drunk and noisy larrikins in the streets and on the harbour but not as a conspicuous or identifiable presence in pubs. The workings of the regulatory regime which controlled liquor licensing may have been a deterrent particularly in its effective exclusion of women. Whereas older, married men tended to flee the constraints of domesticity for the homosocial attractions of the pub, young, single larrikins placed greater value on the company of women and its sexual promise. Another disincentive was that dancing and gambling, those other larrikin delights, were prohibited in licensed premises. According to Murray it had been common for larrikins to gather in pubs to play billiards and bagatelle until such gaming was banned.⁷⁹

Among the microspaces of the city the larrikin presence was most vigorously contested in its leisure places. Sites where larrikins most frequently assembled were vaudeville theatres, dancing saloons and harbourside picnic spots.⁸⁰ In particular, larrikins and their donahs were a conspicuous presence at Sydney's dancing saloons for as Pratt remarked 'larrikins love dancing above all other human pleasures, and indulge the passion whenever they find the opportunity'.⁸¹ In 1885 there were twenty-six such saloons in the inner city,⁸² Blakes's Buildings in lower George Street being an especial larrikin haunt.⁸³ Larrikins were not alone in their enthusiasm. A rage for social dancing spread across the cities of the western world in the late nineteenth century which was shared by numerous Sydney citizens.⁸⁴ As the *Australian Star* recorded: 'most Sydney people are fond of dancing, a huge percentage of the population is passionately, madly devoted to it. Some there are who almost live for it'.⁸⁵ Indeed it would be difficult to overemphasise the cultural importance of dancing at a time when opportunities for participatory entertainment and self-expression were few.

Dancing as a form of amusement was contested however by hard line evangelical protestants. Its heady mixture of music and bodily contact, especially with the added stimulus of liquor, made it suspect to moralists. It was alleged that young girls, excited by the music and giddy with whirling about, allowed men to take liberties and that illegitimacy and infanticide were the result.⁸⁶ Even 'girls belonging to good families' it was claimed had 'fallen through dancing'.⁸⁷ The subtext of such reactions was fear triggered at least in part by the promiscuous tendencies of modern popular culture. Class barriers were being eroded in the wholesale pursuit of pleasure for which the well-brought-up daughters of the middle-class showed no less enthusiasm than did rowdy donahs.

Among the Protestant churches the Baptists and the Methodists preached against dancing although the position was not unanimous in either. An account of a debate on the subject which took place at the 1907 Methodist Conference found its way into the press. It reveals that while some churchpeople condemned dancing as 'an evil that detracts from religious thoughts', others took a more moderate position, urging cautious tolerance. One opponent who seemed to have an excellent grasp of the attractions of dancing saloons observed:

Where the dancing is good, the company is bad, and vice versa. Girls who are fond of dancing are good dancers; and...they are not too much concerned with regard to their partner's character, so long as he can dance well.

Like the pub the 'city dancing shop by night' was painted in lurid shades. Patrons in the grip of dancing mania were said to indulge their passion in 'unhealthy, badly ventilated rooms' where 'the mind, as well as the body, suffers'. Dancing was constructed as a progressive addiction, one critic claiming that 'like drink...if indulged in too much, [it] becomes a vice'. There were other parallels with the drink question.

Excessive indulgence in dancing was linked with a complex of discourses encompassing both negative eugenics and the censure of lower class leisure pursuits. Those who unwisely continued to indulge the pernicious habit after marriage, it was claimed, produced offspring who 'do not make a mark in the world, and, when they are not members of a 'push'...they will form the fringe of society—a useless fringe—good for little save the absorption of cigarette smoke, and discussion of the chances of a horse they never saw'.⁸⁸

From the perspective of their patrons, however, dancing saloons were clearly important sites for heterosocial enjoyment. Both girls and boys paraded themselves in the hope of attracting a partner for dancing and perhaps other forms of dalliance. Stone's Jonah, for example, is first struck by his future wife Ada when he notices her skill at dancing though she was not otherwise attractive in either person or character.⁸⁹ Larrikins and donahs devised their own dance steps which challenged mainstream styles and ensured that they stood out on the dance floor. At Bob Fenner's dance room on Saturday nights Jonah and Ada demonstrated their skills in the 'true larrikin style' known as cass-dancing, 'revolv[ing] slowly on a space the size of a dinner plate, Ada's head on Jonah's breast, their bodies pressed together, rigid as the pasteboard figures in a peepshow'.⁹⁰ While donahs could dance wildly kicking up their legs to show their striped stockings and multi-coloured petticoats in the manner of the can-can, then popular on the vaudeville stage, cass dancing was a step unique to the larrikin sub-culture.⁹¹ The nuances of the style were probably lost on outsiders. A critic who described 'couples in the grip of dancing mania revolv[ing] grimly around the room without any jollity or fun or humour' may well have been describing cass dancing. If he was he clearly failed to get the import of its strange formality. Larrikins also congregated at ice-skating rinks where they performed a spirited version of skating known as 'rinking' skating so fast and wildly that 'the skates were as hot as hell's fires'.⁹² As with dancing they created a style that was their own

carrying the performance to extremes and going beyond the bounds of what was considered seemly.

The larrikin presence contributed to the disreputable image of inner-city dancing saloons. Boisterous, non-genteel expressions of enjoyment by lower-class patrons antagonized middle-class patrons and elicited complaints of disorderly behaviour. On their part the police expressed frustration claiming that, though they were often called upon to act, they were legally powerless to do so. The Commissioner declared in his report for 1885:

Among other schools of vice the dancing saloon is probably one of the most pernicious. Practically they are at present uncontrolled... Legislation would however be desirable to give more definite powers of inspection and regulation. Complaints are constantly made to me of the disorderly, immoral and obscene behaviour of people frequenting such saloons.⁹³

When violence did erupt it was generally attributed to larrikins. An account of one incident illustrates how cultural antagonism could segue into violent conflict:

Constable Jones took his wife to a dance at Surry Hills on Saturday night; he was dancing peacefully when he was called away to check the exuberance of other dancers, who had taken more than was good for them. He was about to resume dancing when he heard the remark: 'There's a 'mug' copper; let's put in the boot'. In a trice he was surrounded by ruffians, who felled him, kicked him in brutal fashion, and left him on the floor unconscious and bleeding.⁹⁴

Such sporadic incidents could flare up into more serious confrontations as happened at a dancing pavilion at Bondi on Boxing Day 1884, an incident referred to in chapter seven. A fight which had broken out among larrikins over a girl spilled outside and when two local policemen tried to intervene the brawlers turned against them, gave

them a beating and flung them over the cliffs.⁹⁵ The public outcry that followed led to the closing of the dancing pavilion.

The spaces surrounding the saloons were allegedly used for unsanctioned sexual activities. A police officer reported seeing in the vicinity of a dancing saloon in Glebe 'boys and girls...in adjacent paddocks with their clothes deranged as if they were carrying on immoral practices'.⁹⁶ These areas were also used for drinking. The 1887 Intoxicating Drink Inquiry heard that it was common practice for dance hall operators to situate their premises 'very near to a public house if they can' so that patrons could easily obtain liquor which was then consumed outside.⁹⁷

Dancing saloons operated at night and were patronized predominantly by the young which kept a lot of middle-class people away. Picnic grounds such as those at Chowder Bay, Bondi and Clontarf, however, brought respectable citizens with their families out *en masse* on fine weekends and holidays when 'everybody in Sydney, including the charwoman, goes picknicking'.⁹⁸ One commentator enthused:

We are blessed with beauty spots around the harbour...and at each and every one of these there is an open pavilion erected where, on public holidays, the fullness of their patronage is proven by the crowded condition of the excursion steamers which ply thereto at cheap rates.⁹⁹

Heterogeneous throngs, all bent on outdoor recreation flocked to such spots which became sites of class encounters. Prudent middle-class citizens who studiously avoided dubious areas like the back alleys of Waterloo and Surry Hills might yet encounter roughs and undesirables while enjoying a wholesome Sunday out-of-doors. Complaints were made by genteel pleasure-seekers about the behaviour of lower-class young people on excursion ferries, at picnic grounds, and on beaches. Reports emphasised the drunkenness, rowdiness and indecency of the crowds. The organizers of private gatherings made attempts to

regulate these occasions by excluding undesirables. An advertisement for a Hibernian Society picnic at Chowder Bay promised that 'every precaution will be taken by the police and a specially strong committee to completely exclude larrikins'.¹⁰⁰ But the operators of commercial places of amusement were naturally less inclined to disallow paying customers.

An incident which occurred at Clontarf in the summer of 1880, the reporting of which landed the *Bulletin* in a civil suit, illustrates the clash of opposing behavioural standards and expectations. On a sunny Boxing Day¹⁰¹ William Traill, a *Bulletin* writer, took a ferry from Circular Quay to the Clontarf picnic grounds. There, in a holiday atmosphere, people were eating, drinking, dancing and generally enjoying themselves. But the behaviour of the crowd so shocked Traill that he was moved to write a highly critical leader on the experience. In it he described the scene in the florid language of revulsion—'a saturnalia of vice', 'open, reckless and flagrant immorality', 'the devil had broken loose', 'Horace has no descriptions more revolting'. The proprietors of the picnic grounds took umbrage at what they considered to be unjustified slurs on a well-run place of amusement and promptly sued the *Bulletin* for damages. When the case came to court the jury agreed finding in favour of the plaintiffs who were awarded nominal damages.¹⁰²

Traill's priggish outburst and its aftermath in court highlighted a divergence between two quite different sets of assumptions about what constituted reasonable, civilized conduct. It was clear that behaviour which was normal for a lower-class crowd in holiday mood could move the middle classes to indignant protest. This is underlined sharply by the conflicting eyewitness accounts of the occasion, so different as to make one wonder if they could have been describing the same incident. Whereas the master of the excursion ferry testified that 'the class of people going to Clontarf is respectable', another observer, a

medical student, gave evidence that 'it was not a fit place for any person to go'.¹⁰³ Reports were roughly evenly divided as to whether the gathering had been a decorous assemblage or a vile debauch. There may have been another unacknowledged dimension at work here. It is likely that a looked-for attitude of deference was absent from the noisy merrymaking and boisterous high spirits of lower-class revellers and critics may have detected a note of class antagonism. Rosenzweig describes the comparable behaviour of an American holiday crowd which, while it represented 'a release from, and an implicit rejection of, the discipline, order, hierarchy, and sobriety of the work place and work day', could also at times 'serve as a vehicle for expressing the hostility felt toward social betters and bosses whose rules governed on other days of the year'.¹⁰⁴

One response of the middle class to larrikin onslaughts on shared territory was to demand a higher level of regulation of both the streets and popular places of amusement. When the police were pressed to clear away groups of unruly youths from street corners or to put a stop to rowdy behaviour and bad language in dancing saloons contestation of space and conflicting cultural practices became entangled with shifting notions of criminality. The oft-repeated police reply to such appeals was that they were powerless to act because the rough, rude or merely purposeless behaviour which the respectable public found so objectionable was not technically unlawful. As the Police Commissioner expressed it the evil of larrikinism was 'a moral one, to a great extent beyond the scope of the statute laws'.¹⁰⁵

In fact the police had considerable power to control street life and were evidently not loath to use it. Summary offences were numerous and the vagrancy laws were broad in scope, prohibiting a wide range of public behaviours.¹⁰⁶ Young people on the streets were often arrested on vagrancy charges as a consequence of a public complaint or for drunkenness, offensive language or riotous behaviour. Ambrose Pratt,

generally no larrikin sympathizer, reported an incident he witnessed late one night in Elizabeth Street:

I observed a constable accost, arrest, handcuff and then violently assault a young man who appeared to me to be quite inoffensively proceeding...in the direction of Belmore Park.

On the following morning at Central Police Court Pratt was surprised to learn that the man 'was accused of vagrancy, of having no lawful visible means of support, of being a suspicious character, of loitering, and finally of assaulting an officer in the execution of his duty'.¹⁰⁷

It is not difficult to imagine that such random instances of harassment were a routine part of street life. The New South Wales legislature was convinced, however, by arguments that the powers of police were inadequate and in 1891 agreed that they should be armed to counter the larrikin menace. In the following year the *Disorderly Conduct Suppression Bill*, also aimed specifically at larrikins, invested police with additional summary powers.¹⁰⁸ Thereafter young men swelled the short-term prison population as class seven prisoners, a category for youthful offenders.¹⁰⁹ Physical punishments were widely considered the most appropriate for larrikin types. Though their crimes were mostly of a minor nature and their sentences short, conditions were excessively punitive and included floggings, long periods of solitary confinement and 'hard fare' or bread and water diet.¹¹⁰

The extreme viciousness with which the unruly larrikin body was subordinated to the will of the state hints at the presence of mechanisms of sublimation in the Freudian sense of the term. The constraints of Victorian moralism, as Freud saw it, rigorously suppressed the sexual and aggressive drives of the bourgeoisie. As a consequence disinhibited behaviour held for them a perverse and unacknowledged appeal.¹¹¹ Though their public life of conspicuous

consumption and display was invalidated by the dominant class larrikins nonetheless seemed to have a greater vitality, a larger capacity for enjoyment. Schwarz says of their London counterparts:

If the young hooligan was a product of dark places at the same time he embodied the exuberance of a popular modernity, openly negotiating and making his own the pleasures of the city.¹¹²

The aspect of larrikin existence I have looked at in this chapter—street life—was linked with the city's spatial politics, with transformations in the world of leisure and mass culture, with changing notions of criminality and with changes at the psychologically formative level of subjectivity among other phenomena associated with modernity. The historical actuality described here was quickly to change however under the continuing evolution of such forces. Class divisions were blurred by mass culture; ongoing urban renewal and development threw up new zones and changed the nature of old ones; new forms like cinema and palais culture replaced the vaudeville theatres and dancing saloons. And in a forceful and sudden effect the outbreak of war cleared large numbers of young men out of the cities, many of whom would not return. After the war a new social landscape unfolded in which a transformed urban economy operating on a larger scale saw the unstructured larrikin pushes replaced by the organized criminal fraternities of the razor gangs.¹¹³ But despite continuing attempts to eradicate street life, lower-class young people continued to lay claim to the streets for romance, revelry and occasional devilry.

¹ Bourdieu's term.

² Certeau, p18.

³ Certeau, Michel de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, p32.

⁴ Quoted in Sennett, Richard ed, *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969, p15.

⁵ Sennett, p95.

⁶ See Paul Ashton, "'Our Splendid Isolation': Reactions to Modernism in Sydney's Northern Suburbs", *UTS Review* 6:1 (May 2000) 41-50.

⁷ Briggs, Asa, *Victorian Cities*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, p26.

⁸ Yarrington, Reverend SD, *Darkest Sydney*, Sydney, [no pub details], 1914, p9.

⁹ Quoted in Alan Mayne, *Representing the Slum: Popular Journalism in a Late Nineteenth-Century City*. Melbourne, University of Melbourne History Department, 1990, p57.

¹⁰ Pratt, Ambrose, "'Push" Larrikinism in Australia', *Blackwood's Magazine*, July 1901, p32.

¹¹ Elizabeth Wilson ('The Invisible Flaneur', *Labour History* 50 (May 1986), p109) sees the labyrinthine lanes and alleys of the city as emblematic of the disintegration of masculine potency. Their natural inhabitant was the larrikin, who, with his tight trousers, macho swagger and free way with women might be seen as an embodiment of that lost potency and a symbolic threat to the power of the middle-class male.

¹² Pratt, Ambrose, *King of the Rocks*, London, Hutchinson, 1900, p273.

¹³ Murray, James, *Larrikins: Nineteenth Century Outrage*, Melbourne, Lansdowne Press, 1973, p159.

¹⁴ Fitzgerald, Shirley, *Rising Damp: Sydney 1870-1890*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1987, p29.

¹⁵ *Bird O'Freedom* 23/6/94, p4.

¹⁶ Finch, Lynette 'On the Streets: Working Class Youth Culture in the Nineteenth Century' in Rob White ed *Youth Subcultures: Theory, History and the Australian Experience*, Hobart, National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, [1993], p76.

¹⁷ See Christopher Keating, 'The Death of the Inner Suburbs: Community and Slum Clearance in Sydney 1900-1930, in DB Waterson, ed, *Studies in Twentieth Century Australian History*, Sydney, Macquarie University, 2001.

¹⁸ Certeau, p103.

¹⁹ Smoking was not distinctive to larrikins but was part of a cross-class male culture. It was estimated that about three-quarters of Australian men smoked, mostly pipes (Robin Walker, *Under Fire: a History of Smoking in Australia*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1984, p5). To bourgeois spectators however larrikins smoked conspicuously, obtrusively and offensively.

²⁰ *Australian Workman*, 29/11/90, p4.

²¹ Murray p156.

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- ²² McConville, Chris, 'From "Criminal Class" to "Underworld"' in Graeme Davison, David Dunstan and Chris McConville eds, *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1985, p72.
- ²³ See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London, Methuen, 1986, for discussion of how high/low categories have been used in the realms of the physical body, geographical space and psychic and social forms.
- ²⁴ *Daily Telegraph* 26/1/05 p4.
- ²⁵ It was not only swearing which distinguished larrikins linguistically. In common with other subcultures they had a distinctive argot of their own sometimes so obscure that outsiders could not understand it (Sidney J Baker, *The Australian Language*, Melbourne, Sun, 1966, p122). But it was their swearing which attracted most attention and evoked the most extreme reactions.
- ²⁶ Stratton, Jon, *The Young Ones: Working Class Culture, Consumption and the Category of Youth*, Perth, Black Swan, 1992, p18.
- ²⁷ Finch, Lynette, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1993, p136.
- ²⁸ Bedford, Randolph, *True Eyes and the Whirlwind*, London, Duckworth, 1903, p127.
- ²⁹ Stone, Louis, *Jonah*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1991, p4.
- ³⁰ NSW *Police Report* for 1892, [Sydney, Government Printer], p2.
- ³¹ Goffmann, Erving, *Behavior in Public Places*, New York, Free Press, 1963, p58.
- ³² Stone, p21.
- ³³ Murray, p69.
- ³⁴ Goffmann's term.
- ³⁵ Sennett, p8.
- ³⁶ Finch ('On the Streets') argues that larrikinism was a construct used to deny the streets to lower-class youth at a key point in the development of consumer culture when middle-class women were emerging onto city streets in this new guise as shoppers.
- ³⁷ Goffmann, p141.
- ³⁸ *Australian Etiquette or the Rules and Usages of the Best Society in the Australasian Colonies, Together with their Sports, Pastimes, Games and Amusements*, Sydney, McConnell, 1885, p153.
- ³⁹ On at least one occasion this was expressed through racist activism. Humphrey McQueen refers to an incident following an anti-Chinese meeting in Hyde Park in 1878 when larrikins rampaged up George Street attempting to set fire to Chinese shops and businesses (*A New Britannia: an Argument concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1970, p46).
- ⁴⁰ Murray, p54.

⁴¹ In Stone's *Jonah* Jonah's mate Chook sets up in a small way as a greengrocer in Waterloo, a business in which the Chinese community was particularly prominent. In Dyson's *Fact'ry 'And*s one of the hands at Spats' factory considers as a career change taking up 'Chinaman's work' operating a rabbit barrow (Edward Dyson, *Fact'ry 'And*s, Sydney, NSW Bookstall Co, 1912, p103).

⁴² McConville p134.

⁴³ A similar antagonism towards the Salvation Army was displayed by London hooligans who mobilized into an opposing 'Skeleton Army' attacking the musical gatherings of the Salvationists in ostensible defence of the sanctity of the Sabbath (Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: a History of Respectable Fears*, London, Macmillan, 1983, p124).

⁴⁴ *The Big Smoke*, Darcy Niland, London, Angus & Robertson, 1959, p92.

⁴⁵ Clark, CMH, *A History of Australia V: the People Make Laws 1888-1915*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981, p335.

⁴⁶ In other examples: sections of the labour press took exception to the fact that larrikins preyed on fellow members of their own class, robbing drunks and sailors ashore in the Rocks; larrikins also acted as strike-breakers during the maritime strike of 1890 (*Australian Star* 4/9/1890) although this was more likely to have been because of the opportunities it offered for fighting rather than a political statement.

⁴⁷ Stallybrass, p19.

⁴⁸ Boyce, Archdeacon FB, *The Campaign for the Abolition of the Slums in Sydney*, Sydney, William Andrews, 1913, p11.

⁴⁹ Allen, Judith A, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Australian Women since 1880*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1990, p54.

⁵⁰ Or, for that matter, for vulnerable males; Murray records an incident reported by a police constable who encountered a homosexual attack on a young boy at Mount Rennie (Murray, p154).

⁵¹ Allen, p20.

⁵² Finch, 'On the Streets', p77.

⁵³ See for example Louis Stone, *Betty Wayside*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, [n.d.], p66, and Nat Gould, *Town and Bush*, London, Routledge, 1896, p77.

⁵⁴ Finch, *The Classing Gaze*, p10.

⁵⁵ See Donzelot, Jacques, *The Policing of Families*, New York, Pantheon, 1979.

⁵⁶ *Australian Etiquette* p190.

⁵⁷ *Australian Etiquette* p163.

⁵⁸ *Australian Etiquette* p199.

⁵⁹ Bedford, p134.

⁶⁰ Stone, *Jonah*, p13.

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- ⁶¹ Dyson, p38.
- ⁶² Peiss, Kathy, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986, p6.
- ⁶³ *Australian Etiquette*, p181.
- ⁶⁴ Nor was it unknown among the middle class; see for example Norman Lindsay, *The Cousin from Fiji*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1945, p97.
- ⁶⁵ Rickard, John, *Australia, a Cultural History*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1988, p182.
- ⁶⁶ Jill Julius Matthews has shown how this was changing, documenting the increasing practice of women drinking outside the home in the company of men in the first two decades of the twentieth century ('Normalising Modernity', *UTS Review* 6:1 (May 2000)).
- ⁶⁷ Rodd, LC, *A Gentle Shipwreck*, Melbourne, Nelson, 1975, p127.
- ⁶⁸ *Illustrated Sydney News* 15/7/93.
- ⁶⁹ Murray, p76.
- ⁷⁰ Stone, *Jonah*, p70.
- ⁷¹ *Vice and its Victims in Sydney, the Cause and Cure*, by a Pupil of the late Professor John Woolley, Principal of Sydney University. Sydney, Edwin H. Becke, 1873, p47.
- ⁷² Gould, p77.
- ⁷³ *Truth* 16/11/90, p7.
- ⁷⁴ Stone, *Jonah*, p11.
- ⁷⁵ Stone, *Jonah*, p96.
- ⁷⁶ Bedford, 133.
- ⁷⁷ Pratt, 'Push Larrikinism', p32.
- ⁷⁸ Bailey, Peter, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p5.
- ⁷⁹ Murray, p91.
- ⁸⁰ The gallery of the vaudeville theatre with its cheap bench seating was acknowledged as 'belonging exclusively to the larrikin class' (John Freeman, *Lights and Shadows of Melbourne Life*, London, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888, p77). The role of larrikins in the vaudeville audience is described in chapter five.
- ⁸¹ Pratt, "'Push" Larrikinism', p33.
- ⁸² *NSW Police Report* 1885, p2.
- ⁸³ Murray, p36.

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- ⁸⁴ See EJ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, London, Guild, 1987, p237; and Jill Julius Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace: Sydney's Romance with Modernity*, Sydney, Currency, 2005, p30.
- ⁸⁵ *Australian Star* 13/7/05, p1.
- ⁸⁶ Kift, Dagmar, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p139.
- ⁸⁷ *Daily Telegraph* 6/6/07, p6.
- ⁸⁸ *Australian Star* 13/7/05, p1.
- ⁸⁹ Stone, *Jonah*, p11.
- ⁹⁰ Stone, *Jonah*, p18.
- ⁹¹ Murray, p34.
- ⁹² Murray, p91.
- ⁹³ *NSW Police Report* 1885, p2.
- ⁹⁴ [McTavish, Sandy], *Our Noble Selves: a Study in General Inveective*, [Sydney, no pub details, 193?], p8.
- ⁹⁵ Murray, p84.
- ⁹⁶ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission 1886-87, *Minutes of Evidence*, 5 Oct 1887, Sydney, Government Printer, 1887, p153.
- ⁹⁷ Intoxicating Drink Inquiry, *Minutes of Evidence*, p126.
- ⁹⁸ Adams, AH, *Galahad Jones*, London, Lane, 1910, p261.
- ⁹⁹ *Australian Star* 13/7/05, p1.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Australian Workman* 21/6/03, p2.
- ¹⁰¹ Sydney larrikins seemed to have been especially frisky on Boxing Day.
- ¹⁰² Lawson, Sylvia, *The Archibald Paradox: a Strange Case of Authorship*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1987, p93.
- ¹⁰³ Lawson, p93.
- ¹⁰⁴ Rosenzweig, Roy, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p77.
- ¹⁰⁵ *NSW Police Report* 1883/84, p2.
- ¹⁰⁶ See for example Susanne Davies, "'Ragged, Dirty... Infamous and Obscene': the 'Vagrant' in late Nineteenth Century Melbourne" in David Philips and Susanne Davies eds, *A Nation of Rogues?: Crime, Law and Punishment in Colonial Australia*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1994, p145.
- ¹⁰⁷ Pratt, "'Push' Larrikinism", p30.

¹⁰⁸ Grabosky, Peter N, *Sydney in Ferment: Crime, Dissent and Official Reaction 1788 to 1973*, Canberra, ANU Press, 1977, p95.

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Conclusion

The socio-cultural aspects of modernity, so decisive in this phase of Australia's history, affected lower-class culture in Sydney in complex, even contradictory ways. When we talk of the transformation of life by modernity we are talking about effects that were both destructive and beneficial; about major and minor changes and in some areas scarcely any change at all; about the opening up of new opportunities and the closing off of old ones; about rising wage earning capacity and continuing poverty. Political advances gained through the strengthening of the labour movement and the formation of the Labor Party in the late nineteenth century meant that the lower class had a public voice. But arguably more decisive in its effect on everyday life was the development of commodity culture which created a discourse of desire and valorised self-expression through consumption. The loosening grip of religion meant that the lower class could not so easily be morally bullied by the middle class over its chosen forms of leisure.

The vigorous contestation of public drinking which characterised the last quarter of the nineteenth century continued as the temperance movement gained strength and won political support in the early years of the twentieth century. Local Option reduced the number of pubs in the city. Private bars and Sunday trading were suppressed and 6 o'clock closing was imposed during World War One. Thus were widespread lower-class drinking practices outlawed, leaving room for the sly grog trade to flourish as never before. Political resistance to measures which further restricted the availability of liquor was exercised by labour and populist representatives in the legislature, though not often with success. But the temperance movement did not win every trick. Efforts to have the employment of women in licensed premises banned failed and barmaids remained a fixture in Sydney pubs. A regime of strict control of liquor prevailed until well after the

Second World War, perpetuating a restrictive social environment increasingly out of step with liberalising public attitudes. An ethos of enjoyment gained ground and greater emphasis was placed on leisure pursuits, not just for the idle rich but for everyone.

Vaudeville was the favoured theatrical entertainment of Sydney's lower class. It provided sentiment, spectacle and novelty but the totality of the vaudeville experience had other dimensions. Audiences were actively engaged in a dialogue with artistes through which they exercised a significant degree of control over the performance. The stylised repertoire with its tightly structured genres and conventions offered a rich storehouse of narratives which directly related to the hardship and conflicts as well as the pleasures and aspirations of lower-class life. It was also a medium for a range of discourses of the modern, promulgating the ethos of glamour, praising urban life and providing its audiences with cultural capital to help them make their way in a competitive city. Though stigmatised by social purity advocates and rational recreationists as vulgar, and by nationalists as un-Australian, vaudeville's decline was due not to organised or systematic contestation but resulted directly from competition from other forms of popular entertainment. New technologies such as film and radio enhanced both the reach and narrative impact of content which quickly overwhelmed the potent but circumscribed attractions of vaudeville.

Lower-class youth culture spilled out of the theatres, pubs and slum neighbourhoods onto the streets in the guise of the larrikins. Associated with a series of violent rapes and street clashes with police in the 1880s they sparked a wide-ranging debate on the moral condition of the colony and the effect on the population of its tainted origins. Larrikins congregated on street corners, in dancing saloons and at harbourside picnic grounds to enact rituals of resistance through style and performativity. Their dress, manners and mores

expressed opposition to the prevailing bourgeois ethos of order, rationality and restraint. At a time when modernisation was re-shaping the city to accommodate the interests of an expanding retail and commercial sector and when middle-class women were emerging into the public sphere to patronise city shops and department stores, their street presence in the company of their gaily attired donahs was contested. They rejected bourgeois expectations that the lower class should be industrious, deferential and self-effacing, flaunting their idleness and lower-class dandyism under the noses of a disapproving urban citizenry.

Modernisation provided new opportunities for the exploration of selfhood, but in the bourgeois public sphere it was sweeping away chosen modes of living of the lower class. Previously unregulated areas of private life were brought within the ambit of the new helping professions, thus undermining traditional ways and practices in favour of 'scientific' methods of household management and child rearing. Old inner-city residential neighbourhoods were being demolished to make way for warehouses, breweries and factories, their residents displaced but not re-housed. New suburbs were built, colonised by the middle class and idealised as both environmentally salubrious and morally superior. Unwillingness to move to the suburbs was interpreted as a preference for squalor and vice. Nonetheless numbers of lower-class people did cling to the inner-city, some pockets of which survived long enough to become gentrified from the 1960s. The larrikins were also swiftly cleared away, siphoned off like thousands of other young Australian men to wage the First World War on behalf of European powers who wanted a greater share of international markets and access to sources of wealth.

Modernity in the form of American popular culture began to be experienced in Australia in the early twentieth century. From the 1920s

onward it was to have an enormous impact on daily life across all sectors of the populace.

Changes in public tastes and deeper changes in subjectivities of which there were indicators in lower-class culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reached their full power. One of the major changes was an increasing penetration of the populace by mass culture and a resultant blurring of class boundaries in the universal appeal of new forms of entertainment, most notably the cinema. Whereas bourgeois moral reformers had made systematic efforts to regulate lower-class leisure in the second half of the nineteenth century, cultural influence in the other direction became evident as the twentieth century progressed. Lower-class young people were early adopters of new modes of behaviour generated and shaped by commercial entertainment and heterosocial culture.

The conclusions that I have reached as a result of the inquiry that is this thesis are partial and contingent. One reason for this is that no single construing of the texts can do justice to the range of styles, experiences and meanings encompassed by the cultural institutions I have investigated. Moreover any generalisations made about lower-class culture need to be qualified in light of the partial nature of the investigations from which they are derived. Extension of the analysis to include sport, gambling and the tabloid press, for example, might yield quite different results. Clearly, more work is needed. There are numerous directions that such work might take. Interest in urban history and popular culture is already in evidence among historians. But the vast field of everyday practices and lived culture has barely begun to be explored.

One potential avenue for inquiry is material culture whose use has tended to be restricted to archaeologists while historians continue to privilege written records. Although I did not consider objects as texts for this work, I believe that to have done so might have provided

surprising insights. A conversation with Wayne Johnston, Archaeologist at the Sydney Harbour Foreshores Authority, suggested numerous lines of inquiry that might be pursued using artifacts from archaeological sites and the extensive records of excavations conducted in Sydney. Artifacts themselves, whether they are fragments dug up from sites or objects of virtue preserved in museums, provide unique information which often cannot be derived from written documents. Material culture carries direct, unmediated signals from the historical subject to the historian, offering a rare opportunity for a shared physical experience. It is a cause for regret that in the end I had no time to pursue this option.

The aim of this thesis, in the last analysis, is not to substantiate a particular view of history or to discredit another. It is merely to shed some light on the quotidian lives of the Sydney people of the past which for good or ill still resonate in the city of today. I can think of no more fitting way to conclude it than to quote from Lefebvre: 'Where is genuine reality to be found? Where do genuine changes take place? In the unmysterious depths of everyday life'.

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