The Drover's Wife

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY LAWSON

Henry Lawson, the son of a Norwegian miner and a women's rights activist, was born in the rural Grenfell goldfields of Australia in 1867. His mother edited a women's newspaper called *The Dawn* in addition to publishing poetry and fiction of her own. Lawson attended school as a boy but went deaf by age fourteen and, despite being an avid reader, failed his university entrance exams. He joined his mother in Sydney at age sixteen to continue studying and published his first poem, "A Song of the Republic," in *The Bulletin* at age twenty. He wrote for various newspapers beginning in 1890, and in 1892, *The Bulletin* paid for him to take a trip into the outback, where he witnessed the harsh reality of life in rural Australia firsthand. In 1896, at age twenty-nine, Lawson married Bertha Bredt, Jr.; she filed for divorce in 1903, however, citing physical abuse. By the time of their divorce, Lawson had established a reputation as one of the foremost Australian writers of his day. Nevertheless, he was both poor and an alcoholic, and was jailed for not paying child support. After his divorce he moved into a boardinghouse run by an older woman, Isabel Byers, who became his patron and a fierce advocate of his work for the remainder of his life. Lawson died in 1922 of a cerebral hemorrhage, and was honored with a New South Wales state funeral upon his death.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Lawson's work represented a backlash against the Romanticism prevalent in European and global English-language literature in the nineteenth century. Instead of romanticizing and glorifying nature and love, Lawson depicts these things in a starkly realistic style in "The Drover's Wife," attempting to convey the harshness of life in the outback that he had observed on his personal travels through the area. Australia gained independence from Britain only about a decade after Lawson published "The Drover's Wife," and the half-century leading up to independence saw the first small white settlements in the interior of Australia, originally sparked by a series of gold rushes beginning in 1851. However, it became clear to these early explorers of the outback that most of Australia's interior was too hot to ever become farmland, and as such most of the growth that took place in the nation in the decades directly before its independence from Britain took place in cities along the coasts. This growth halted suddenly in 1891 with the Great Crash, an economic depression that sparked a series of strikes throughout the 1890s but simultaneously gave birth to a newfound patriotism and nationalism exemplified in the work of writers like Henry Lawson. Lawson also notably makes only passing mention of indigenous Australians in "The Drover's Wife," reflecting common racist prejudices of his time; increased white settlement of Australia led to the widespread displacement and death of Aboriginals who had inhabited the continent for thousands of years, and stark discrimination persists against indigenous Australians to this day.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Much of Lawson's work focused on life in the bush and served as a nationalistic celebration of Australia during the country's late colonial period and early years of nationhood (Australia gained independence from Britain in 1901). Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson, known popularly as Banjo Paterson, was an important writer at the time who also set most of his work—primarily poetry and ballads—in the outback. His 1895 poem "Waltzing Matilda" serves as Australia's unofficial national anthem, and tells the story of an itinerant worker who catches a ram to eat while wandering in the bush, is subsequently pursued by local landowners and policemen for theft, and commits suicide to avoid capture. Also writing at this time was William Henry Olgivie, perhaps best known for his poem "Fair Girls and Grey Horses," published in 1898. Together, Ogilvie, Paterson, and Lawson are regarded as the three main Australian "bush poets," who recounted the hard work of outback settlers in verse form (Lawson, however, was the only one of the three who wrote significant amounts of fiction). All three were born in the 1860s and first published their work in *The Bulletin*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "The Drover's Wife"
- **When Written:** 1892
- **Where Written:** Australia
- **When Published:** July 23, 1892 in *The Bulletin*
- **Literary Period:** Colonial
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** The Australian outback
- **Climax:** The drover's wife successfully kills the snake that has been threatening her family
- **Antagonist:** The snake
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Postage stamps. "The Drover's Wife" is an important part of

the Australian literary canon and has been memorialized in many different forms. Most recently, in 2017, the story's cast of characters appeared on a postage stamp, the family and Alligator depicted opposite the threatening snake. The story has also been adapted for television and the stage, has been rewritten from different points of view by various Australian authors over the past century. Its title was also borrowed for a well-known 1945 painting by Australian painter Russell Drysdale.

Artifacts. Henry Lawson died in poverty and left everything he owned to his landlady and benefactor, Isabel Byers. This consisted only of two suits, a coat, a tie, a pipe, a pair of glasses, a matchbox, a walking-stick, a pencil, and two packets of tobacco.

PLOT SUMMARY

The bushwoman is alerted to the fact that a **snake** has just entered her small, ramshackle house deep in the Australian outback by her eldest son, Tommy. Tommy goes after the snake with a stick, and the family dog, Alligator, follows suit. Both are unable to catch the snake, however, which slips under the floorboards of the house.

Aware that a snake bite so far from help would be deadly, the bushwoman unsuccessfully attempts to lure the snake out. With the sun setting and a thunderstorm on the horizon, she sets up a bed on the kitchen table for her children, where they will be out of the snake's reach.

The bushwoman once dreamt of a more comfortable life and enjoyed being pampered by her husband, a drover. Ever since he lost everything in a drought, however, she has grown used to being alone and working tirelessly to ensure her family's survival. Although she does not see her husband very often, he treats her well. However, because he is gone for long periods of time, she is left to take care of the family on her own and protect them from the various threats they face in the bush. She once nearly died in childbirth, and only survived with the help of a local Aboriginal couple. When one of her children died, she rode nearly 20 miles with the child's body in search of help. She also once fought a bush-fire that nearly consumed the house, managing to put it out with the help of four bushmen who arrived at the last minute.

She has not always won against the assaults of nature: she cried after a flood broke through the dam her husband had built, and she lost two her two best cows to illness. But she has successfully fought off many wild animals, and also held her own against men who have come to the door while her husband is away. She has few pleasures in the outback, though she makes time to read the **Young Ladies' Journal** is sure to dress herself and her children up every Sunday and go for long walks through the bush with her baby carriage.

The bushwoman realizes that her candle is about to go out, so she goes to get some wood from the **woodpile**. When she does so, the woodpile collapses, causing her to realize that the Aboriginal man who constructed it must have deceived her by building it hollow. She begins to cry, but soon calms down.

Alligator suddenly approaches the partition between the kitchen and the rest of the house, and the bushwoman realizes that the snake must be emerging. She grabs her stick, but Alligator gets there first. The dog grabs the snake with his mouth and shakes it until it dies. The woman then throws the snake's remains into the fire. Tommy embraces his mother and promises that he will never be a drover like his father.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Bushwoman – The unnamed bushwoman is the main character in "The Drover's Wife," and the story centers around the challenges she faces raising a family largely on her own in the Australian bush. She has four children—Tommy, Jacky, and two daughters—with the drover, who is often away for many months at a time. The bushwoman has grown extremely self-sufficient over the years, though she still clings to various trappings of more "civilized" life—reading the **Young Ladies' Journal** and dressing up to go for a walk with her children every Sunday, for example. As a girl she dreamt of a comfortable life and she enjoyed being pampered by her husband early in their marriage by buggy rides and fancy hotel stays. After the drover's finances were devastated by a drought, however, both were forced to trade their creature comforts for a demanding, solitary existence in the outback. The bushwoman has since come to accept the inescapability of her fate and the harshness of life in the bush, which has robbed her of her more "womanly" nature (symbolized by her wearing trousers, which both amuses and frightens her children). In addition to depicting her struggle to protect her family from a **snake** that invades their home, the story enumerates the many threats that she has faced over the course of her life in the bush, which range from natural phenomena—fires, floods, and wild animals—to lascivious men who, realizing no husband is at home, occasionally come to her door. By the end of the story, the reader has a clear understanding of just how tough these many challenges have forced the bushwoman to become, both physically and emotionally, in order to ensure the survival of her family. That she remains unnamed throughout the story suggests that she symbolizes a generation who helped establish the foundations of white settlement deep in the Australian continent.

Tommy – At 11, Tommy is eldest of the bushwoman's children, and he shows a great deal of bravery throughout the story.

When the **snake** first appears, for instance, he grabs a stick and goes after the creature despite his mother's protests (accidentally whacking Alligator's nose in the process). Tommy also swears a great deal, eliciting further scolds from the bushwoman, and bickers with his little brother, Jacky. In many ways, it appears he is attempting to fulfill the role of "man of the house" in his father's absence. This is complicated at the end of the story, however: once the snake has been killed and its remains thrown into the fire, Tommy embraces his mother and tells her that he will never go droving like his father. This suggests that Tommy represents a better future for the next generation. He hopes to earn a living without leaving his family for long stretches, but notably will have an easier time surviving in the bush thanks to the foundation laid by people like his parents.

Alligator – Alligator, the family "**snake**-dog," attempts to kill the snake at the beginning of the story but is unable to catch it; as he attempts to burrow under house in pursuit of the reptile, the bushwoman restrains him because she knows that they "cannot afford to lose him." The family's reliance on Alligator reflects humankind's broader reliance on the natural world even as it seeks to dominate it. At the same time, however, the fact that Alligator is domesticated and seeks to protect his human owners could suggest the breadth of humanity's power to control nature. Indeed, the dog successfully catches and kills the snake at the end of the story, thereby saving the family.

The Drover – The drover never appears in the story, but his existence shapes much of the action that does take place. The bushwoman is notably defined in the title of the story as the drover's *wife*, reflecting the fact that her life consists mostly in waiting for him and raising his children in his absence. Despite these long absences, the bushwoman appreciates the drover, saying that "he is careless, but he is a good enough husband" who provides for his family: "if he has a good cheque when he comes back he will give most of it to her." Before losing everything in a drought years before the story takes place, the drover spoiled his wife with trips into the city, featuring buggy rides and hotel stays. He has a brother who lives on the main road, neatly twenty miles from his home in the bush, and his brother brings the bushwoman provisions "about once a month."

King Jimmy – An Aboriginal man who gets his wife, Black Mary, to help the bushwoman give birth in the bush. He is one of just two named indigenous characters in the story; the third indigenous character remains unnamed and is deemed untrustworthy by the bushwoman. Jimmy is described with direct reference to his "black face," underscoring his perceived otherness from the story's white characters. Though very likely not the author's intention, these details reflect the racism and prejudice that were common at the time of Lawson's writing.

Jacky – Jacky is the younger of the bushwoman's two sons. He bickers with Tommy when they are told to sleep, and has picked up a habit of swearing from his older brother. He and Tommy are the only two characters in the story granted proper names.

TERMS

Drover – A drover is a person who moves livestock long distances across land—essentially the Australian equivalent of the American cowboy. Drovers are paid for the number of cattle or sheep that they deliver to a new location at the end of each journey, and because they cover such long distances with the livestock in question, they can sometimes be on the road for years.

Bush – The bush refers to sparsely-inhabited rural areas in Australia. The bush is similar to the Australian "outback," but unlike "outback," which refers solely to arid landscapes, the bush can also refer to agricultural lands or green areas. In the story, bushwomen and bushmen are, accordingly, (white) settlers who live in the bush.

Squat – In an Australian context, to squat was to occupy a tract of land in the Australian bush during colonial times for the purposes of livestock grazing. Most Australian squatters had no legal rights to the land but came to own it by making use of it. The **drover** and **his wife** are squatters and obtained the land where the bushwoman and her family live by squatting on it.

Gin – Gin is Australian slang for an Aboriginal woman. When the **bushwoman** is sick and giving birth, an Aboriginal man, **King Jimmy**, goes to get his wife, Black Mary, who is called the "whitest gin in all the land."

Sundowner/Swagman – A sundowner or a swagman is an itinerant worker in the Australian bush. The **bushwoman** is sometimes visited by sundowners and swagmen who demand things from her when they realize that her husband is away.

Perambulator – A perambulator is the British and Australian word for a baby carriage. The **bushwoman** dresses up and goes out every Sunday with her baby in its perambulator to take long walks through the bush.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MINOR CHARACTERS

HUMANKIND VS. NATURE

The central problem facing the main characters in Australian Henry Lawson's 1892 short story "The Drover's Wife" is the presence of a **snake** in the floorboards of their shack in the Australian outback. The story begins when the snake first enters the house and ends when the mother of the family, a "bushwoman," finally kills the snake with the help of her dog, Alligator, thereby preventing it from hurting her four young children. With the bushwoman's final killing and disposal of the snake, Lawson illustrates the tenacity of white settlers when confronted with natural hazards in the Australian outback. By stretching the struggle with the snake out to the span of the entire story, as well as interrupting the narrative with stories of other difficult struggles against nature that the bushwoman has faced, he illustrates how all-consuming the fight against the forces of nature was for early white settlers in the Australian outback (the story is notably devoid of meaningful discussion of indigenous peoples). Even as Lawson details the power of nature, the bushwoman's victory suggests an ultimate assertion of humankind's inevitable dominion over the natural world.

The struggle to protect her family against constant threats to their lives takes up the majority of the bushwoman's time. Lawson recounts several stories that illustrate the ways that the woman has fought against nature: she has beaten a bush-fire, disease, a bull, and vicious birds. All of these short accounts involve a terrible struggle, but the bushwoman always wins in the end through a combination of wit and willpower. Though she does have an old shot-gun, her greatest weapon is often her "cunning"—which she employs, for instance, to scare crows away from her chickens. By asserting that crows may be cunning "but a woman's cunning is greater," Lawson implicitly raises human beings above other inhabitants of natural world by virtue of their intelligence.

Importantly, however, Lawson also partially attributes the success of the bushwoman—and thus to settlers writ large—in beating nature's threats to her ability to be in harmony with and make careful use of elements of nature. In the end, she is able to kill the snake only with the help of Alligator, who is described without sentimentality: Lawson says that Alligator "hates snakes and has killed many, but he will be bitten some day and die; most snake-dogs end that way." Although Alligator is depicted as just one among many snake-dogs, significant only in that he is useful, it is only through allying herself with this non-human creature that the bushwoman is able to protect her family. The bushwoman also notably shelters her children on a wooden "man-made table" beyond the snake's reach and at one point must go to gather more firewood, further illustrating her reliance on certain aspects of the natural world to survive. Together these details reveal that the bushwoman has not segregated herself from nature but rather sublimated elements of nature to suit her own needs—again suggesting a certain primacy of humankind.

Of course, Lawson is not suggesting that the fight against nature in the outback consists of constant victories. "There are things that a bushwoman cannot do," Lawson writes, noting how she was unable to prevent a flood from destroying a dam that had taken her husband, the drover, "years of labour" to construct. Following this failure in the face of nature's wrath, the bushwoman cried. Lawson includes this anecdote not to diminish humankind's power, but rather to underscore the immense power they are up against in establishing lives in the outback. This, in turn, makes human beings' eventual success all the more impressive, and again speaks to what the story perceives as the natural dominance of humanity.

The bushwoman's struggle to protect her family from the snake symbolizes the struggle of early white settlers in the Australian outback against nature. Lawson makes clear that spending their lives beating nature comes at a dear cost to the drover and his wife; at the same time, Lawson suggests that through their sacrifices, they are laying the groundwork so that the next generation can live more comfortably. This is reflected in the fact that both the drover and his wife are never given names, though their two older sons are named frequently ("Tommy" and "Jacky"). Though the generation of the drover's wife is likely doomed to live in obscurity, their work in the outback will create a on which the next generation of colonists will build—ensuring the continued dominance of humankind over the natural world.

GENDER

As a woman taking care of her household in the unforgiving outback while her husband, the drover, is away, the bushwoman is left in a strange position. She tries to maintain certain aspects of femininity that only have real importance in a societal context, like getting dressed up to push a perambulator through the outback every Sunday and reading the **Young Ladies' Journal**. At the same time, she is often forced to take on the role of a man to care for her family. Her circumstances push her into a much more ambiguous gender role than she would regularly occupy, as "her surroundings," Lawson tells the reader, "are not favourable to the development of the 'womanly' or sentimental side of nature." By depicting the traditionally masculine endeavors the bushwoman handily undertakes, Lawson implicitly rejects rigid stereotypes that would underestimate his protagonist on the basis of gender.

Because she lives in a harsh natural setting, the bushwoman must constantly do things that are not in line with traditional gender roles. When her house catches fire, for instance, she is forced to put on her husband's pants to fight it properly. The "sight of his mother in trousers greatly amused Tommy," Lawson writes, "who worked like a little hero by her side, but the terrified baby howled lustily for his 'mummy.'" The children's

reactions highlight how the drover's wife must ironically become nearly unrecognizable as a woman in order to be a good mother and protect her family. Though "she loves her children," she also "has no time to show" tenderness towards them. This suggests that beyond donning the outward trappings of masculinity, she is forced to reject stereotypically feminine sentimentality because of the harshness of her surroundings. Simply surviving takes priority over behaving in a way that society would deem proper for a woman.

Even as the ways that the bushwoman deviates from traditional female gender roles, however, Lawson emphasizes the power of such roles by showing how strongly people cling to them even when far removed from society. One of the bushwoman's "few pleasures" consists of dressing up herself and her children to take long walks with a stroller every Sunday, taking as "much care to make herself and the children look smart as she would if she were going to do the block in the city." This implicitly presents gender as a performance, one that entails putting on a costume of sorts and flaunting it before an audience. Even without "a soul to meet" in the wilderness, the bushwoman seeks to remind *herself* of her femininity. This, coupled with the fact that the bushwoman occasionally cries after particularly draining experiences trying to protect her family, complicates the story's rejection of gender roles by suggesting that there perhaps *is* something innate about femininity or masculinity; on the other hand, the complicated character of the bushwoman might suggest that neither role in rigid isolation can entirely encompass the human experience.

Ultimately Lawson highlights the artificial nature of gender roles while also making clear that, however socially constructed, gender stereotypes still have the power to shape behavior—and can have concrete consequences for women. Despite the clear absurdity of adhering to gender expectations in the outback, the bushwoman is still limited in certain ways as to what she can do and what she can expect from her life because she is a woman. While her husband goes off for months at a time and "may forget sometimes that he is married," she is stuck in the house with the children—because of her sex, her freedom is automatically restricted. She also faces certain dangers because of her gender that women face regardless of whether they live in cities or in complete isolation: sometimes a dangerous man will come by her house and, to protect herself from potential intrusion or assault, she has to lie that "that her husband and two sons are at work below the dam."

Lawson's portrayal of gender is complex, as he makes clear that life in the Australian outback forced early white European settlers into situations that they would never encounter in towns or cities. By showing how the bushwoman defies traditional gender expectations, as well as depicting how out of place certain performative practices of gender seem in the outback, Lawson illustrates the socially constructed nature of gender and highlights women's potential when freed from restrictive stereotypes. At the same time, the bushwoman's interest in the *Young Ladies' Journal*, her Sunday walks, and relative sentimentality suggest her interest in maintaining femininity. Her tears at the end of the story could suggest the stress of being forced into a more masculine role; that Tommy, upon seeing his mother cry, promises never to be a drover could also suggest the importance of moving to a more equitable distribution of labor regardless of gender in the future.

COLONIALISM AND RACISM

"The Drover's Wife" takes place in a colonial context, where white settlers are starting to move into new frontier territory formerly occupied only by Aboriginal people. Though the bushwoman is of European descent and thus represents the colonizers in the context of the story, Lawson also says that "her husband is an Australian, and so is she," implying that their families have been in Australia long enough that they feel a distinct claim to the territory. What's more, in the story, the bushwoman interacts with Aboriginal people only twice—and in both instances these people are portrayed as tricky or unserious. This, coupled with the fact that the white settlers are portrayed as fighting (and winning) a noble battle against nature, suggests that Lawson views Aboriginal people as lacking a legitimate prior claim to the land and further sees the white settlers as gaining such a claim by taming a barren natural landscape—a common, if ultimately racist and harmful, viewpoint at the time of Lawson's writing.

Lawson portrays the few Aboriginal characters who appear in the story as deceptive, untrustworthy, and silly. He also calls them "blackfellows," employing many negative racial stereotypes in their description. The first Aboriginal man to appear in the story is "King Jimmy." When the bushwoman is giving birth and "ill with fever," King Jimmy puts his "black face round the door post" and "cheerfully" offers to fetch his "old woman." Although King Jimmy is ultimately helpful, he is portrayed as unserious, and Lawson takes care to emphasize the darkness of his skin—thereby establishing his difference from (and, given the time period of the story, subordination to) the bushwoman.

The second and last time that an Aboriginal character appears in the story, the bushwoman asks a "stray blackfellow" to build a **woodpile** for her, a task for which she gives him an "extra fig of tobacco" and praises "him for not being lazy." However, she later learns that he has cheated her by building a hollow woodpile, and "tears spring to her eyes." Thus, the only other Aboriginal man in the story does something so deceitful that it reduces the bushwoman, who is portrayed as a resilient character, to tears. Lawson also calls the man who builds the woodpile a "stray," bringing to mind a dog and thus suggesting a similarity between

Aboriginal people and animals. Together, these details create a decidedly prejudiced image of Aboriginals as less noble—and, in turn, less worthy of their land—than the white settlers.

Notably, however, there aren't many Aboriginal characters in the story at all, despite the fact that many lived in the Australian bush at the time. This absence itself underscores their secondary importance in the white settlers' minds and suggests that the land in the outback is free for the taking. What's more, with the exception of King Jimmy and his wife, all of the victories and positive events in the story involve only white European settlers; positive portrayals of Aboriginal people are absent from the narrative. Lawson says that the drover and his wife "started squatting [where they live] when they were married," implying with the use of the word "squatting" that they were not legally given or sold the land but rather took it without seeking permission for its use. This paired with the heroic depiction of the bushwoman's victories over nature suggests that Lawson is legitimizing the bushwoman's use of the land. In this way, he implies that cultivation of the land creates a legitimate claim to it.

The attitude toward native Australians evident in this story was widespread during the colonial period in Australia and is in fact still widespread there today. Moreover, centuries of mistreatment of Aboriginal people in Australia has led to a situation where such people occupy a much lower social class on average than descendants of white European settlers, and often live separated from the rest of the Australian population. Taken in this historical context, the depiction of aboriginal people in "The Drover's Wife" gives the reader insight into the colonial and racist dynamics that existed in Australia a century ago, and therefore provides insight into how things came to be the way there are in the Australia of today—chiefly, the negative ways that aboriginal people are depicted in the story exemplify the racist attitudes that shaped land rights policy at the time, which subsequently shaped the legal and demographic patterns that still exist in Australia.

ISOLATION AND VULNERABILITY

The bushwoman and her children are constantly made vulnerable to danger for many reasons, chief among them their extreme geographical isolation. Lawson depicts the many ways that isolation can pose a threat to one's livelihood, health, and general wellbeing, and his illustration of the dangers that the family faces in the bush also underscores the extent to which life in society is full of comforts and resources that are easy to take for granted until one knows their absence. Moreover, Lawson seems to suggest that in the state of nature, represented by the bushwoman and her family, a person is forced to become especially strong because they are constantly close to death and fighting against it; the only way to survive in the face of this, suggests Lawson, is to grow a very thick skin.

The woman and her children live far from the rest of society, "nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilization—a shanty on the main road." This means that the bushwoman is forced to deal with most of the problems that arise for her family completely by herself. At times she receives help—she puts out the fire around her house with the help of bushmen, for instance, but this is only because they are there by chance. She is left to fight a flood on her property on her own, which results in her being overwhelmed by it; as Lawson writes, "There are things that a bushwoman cannot do."

Part of her isolation has to do with mobility. Her husband, the drover, is always on the move, but because she has to take care of her children and has no access to transportation, she is not only located far from the rest of society but is also stuck in the bush with no way to leave. This compounds her vulnerability further still, as she is unable to reliably flee any sort of threats that might overwhelm her in this isolated location.

Such threats are numerous. The bushwoman nearly dies while giving birth, for example, as she is "alone on this occasion, and very weak." She gets through this experience not because of professional medical help but because of help from an Aboriginal woman, an occurrence the bushwoman frames as luck or as a divine reply to her prayer for "God to send her assistance." Her survival is framed as largely due to chance, and it is suggested that it could easily have gone quite differently.

Additionally, the bushwoman has to kill many animals to protect her family, and thus her isolation inevitably breeds a certain comfort around or acceptance of death. When a "mad bullock" attacks her house, she is not only able to kill it to save her family, but also "skin[s] him and [gets] seventeen-and-sixpence for the hide." When she kills the **snake** and throws it in the fire, she watches it burn quite calmly. In starkest example of her exposure to death, following the death of one of her children, "she rode nineteen miles for assistance, carrying the dead child" as she searched for help—at once underscoring the tragedy of her isolation and the strength she has subsequently developed. She is able to face death stoically because, for her, it is simply a fact of life. She has grown comfortable with death in a way that may be unfamiliar to a city-dweller—suggesting that isolation brings one closer to danger, but also can make one more equipped to survive on their own.

Thus even as the bushwoman and her family are exposed to dangers that would be much easier to deal with if they had access to the standard resources available in a city, her isolation and resulting vulnerability actually ends up making her stronger. Because she cannot rely on others, she has to become someone who can (with the few exceptions of receiving sporadic help from other bushmen and Aboriginal people) rely entirely on herself. Therefore, Lawson suggests that isolation does not only create vulnerability, but also creates strength.

THWARTED DESIRE AND POVERTY

As a young woman, the bushwoman dreamed of living a comfortable and exciting life. Lawson says that "as a girl she built the usual castles in the air." Now, however, "all her girlish hopes and aspirations have long been dead." Having been through countless hardships in the bush, she has become used to a life devoid of the dreams of her youth, and has accepted the difficulty and instability of an existence so far removed from society. The contrast between the bushwoman's early desires and current harsh reality suggests that she still longs for the comfort and propriety she once imagined for herself, yet also that such desires are ultimately trivial and impossible when one has to spend all their time fighting for survival. The bushwoman has little time to seek higher joy or meaning in her life, and even as the story implicitly presents such desires as nothing more than fantasy, there is a sense of noble pathos to the fact that the bushwoman sacrifices her own comfort in order to push the boundaries of society for future generations. Importantly, the destruction of her dreams is also directly related to her extreme poverty, as access to wealth would have freed her from the immediate burdens that prevent her from fulfilling her childhood desires. Lawsons's story thus contrasts youthful flights of fancy with the often harsh, unforgiving reality of impoverished and practical adult life.

The bushwoman's girlhood "castles in the air" have primarily been destroyed because her isolated location, exposure to natural threats, and responsibilities as an effectively single mother. Yet despite Lawson saying that her "girlish hopes and aspirations have long been dead," certain actions suggest that she is keeping some of these aspirations alive. For example, by walking through the empty landscape every Sunday with a baby carriage, wearing her best clothing, she reveals her continued desire to be a part of polite society; however, as long as she is remains isolated in the outback, these remnants of her childhood aspirations are nothing more than fantasy. She attempts to maintain a connection to society, but the story emphasizes that there is no one around to see her efforts, and, as such, they are ultimately a rather pathetic imitation of the world she once dreamed of belong to. Furthermore, the bushwoman is ultimately—and understandably—too preoccupied with staying alive to have much time for anything else. This subtly suggests the shallowness and futility of certain social proprieties, even as the bushwoman continues to cling to them.

Though the harshness that characterizes the bushwoman's life results largely from her isolation, it is exacerbated by her poverty. Because she lives in such a humble dwelling, described as "built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs," the **snake** is able to enter this dwelling quite easily. This puts her family in a more vulnerable position than if they had a tightly-built, luxurious house. In this way, the bushwoman's poverty exacerbates her vulnerability.

Through brief flashbacks Lawson illustrates that the few times in her life that the bushwoman had access to money, she was indeed able to both be comfortable and experience luxury. Lawson says that "when [her husband] had money he took her to the city several times—hired a railway sleeping compartment, and put up at the best hotels. He also bought her a buggy, but they had to sacrifice that along with all the rest." Thus, during this period of relative wealth, her husband was able to provide her with security and comfort that freed her from having to focus on survival and brought her closer to her girlhood dreams. Once this period of time was over, she was forced back into a life focused on survival.

However, Lawson suggests that even though many desire lives of comfort, people are adaptable. Over time, the bushwoman came to feel *more* comfortable with her current circumstances than she would feel with a more luxurious life: Lawson says that "as a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it." Lawson is therefore suggesting that one can grow used to anything if one has to, to the point where one would "feel strange away from" adverse circumstances, and that choosing to accept one's lot in life and move forward, instead of giving up and abandoning one's family and responsibilities, is an alternative way to imbue life with meaning.

The life of the bushwoman illustrates quite starkly how isolation and harsh natural conditions in the Australian outback precluded the possibility of comfort for settlers there in the late nineteenth century. However, the position of the bushwoman as a settler on the Australian frontier also indicates that Lawson is suggesting that it is the poor who create the infrastructure necessary for comfort, not the rich. The bushwoman's toiling away in poverty is building a new frontier for the colonial nation and new opportunities for her children, who may grow up in a town: indeed, the drover "intends to move his family into the nearest town when he comes back" from tending his livestock. The bushwoman has perhaps sacrificed her own childhood dreams in service of the dreams of a growing nation.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE SNAKE

The snake that slips under the floorboards of the bushwoman's house at the beginning of the story represents the threat that natural forces pose to the (white) settlers in the Australian bush. The snake not only symbolizes the threat posed by the natural world because it is the bushwoman's main foe in the context of the story (just as

nature writ large is the bushwoman's main foe in the context of her life), but also because of the symbolic nature of snakes in general.

Starting with the role that the snake plays in the Genesis chapter of the Bible, in which a snake tempts Eve into sin, snakes have come to serve as powerful symbols of trickiness and the ruination of humanity in Western culture. In "The Drover's Wife," the snake in question is particularly tricky because it slips under the floorboards and hides, only emerging after many hours have passed. In other words, it becomes an *invisible* threat, as opposed to the serious but very visible threats posed by the other natural occurrences in the story—such as the wildfire, the flood, and the "mad bullock"—that the bushwoman has faced in the past. Thus, the snake represents the extent to which nature is unpredictable and, as such, hard to reliably defend oneself against. Furthermore, like an isolated Eve, the bushwoman is the only woman for miles, and one of few settlers at all in the enormous bush. Thus, if the snake kills her and her family, this can be understood to represent the "Fall of Man" on a smaller, national scale—especially in the context of Lawson's nationalistic beliefs; were the bushwoman to fail, this would suggest humankind's failure to tame the natural world. The bushwoman's defeat of the snake, then, suggests humankind's ultimate dominion over nature.

THE HOLLOW WOODPILE

Before the action of the story begins, readers learn that the bushwoman has paid an Aboriginal man to build her a woodpile, and he does it so quickly that she pays him "an extra fig of tobacco." However, the bushwoman discovers that this pile has been built hollow when she attempts to remove a piece of wood from it toward the end of the story. As such, the woodpile represents the lack of trust that the white settlers in the bush feel toward Aboriginal people. This symbolism exists in both the circumstances of the creation of the woodpile (it is a physical item that is built by means of an act of trickery) and in its physical form (it is hollow, and hollowness symbolically represents lack of authenticity—as in a "hollow promise" or "hollow friendship"—as its appealing outer appearance belies the lack of contents inside). This, in turn, reflects racist attitudes at the time of Lawson's writing towards the indigenous Australians being displaced by white settlers like the bushwoman herself.

THE YOUNG LADIES' JOURNAL

The bushwoman enjoys reading the *Young Ladies' Journal*, which contains fashion illustrations that she likes to look at, and, the reader must assume, depicts life in Australian cities and towns far from where the bushwoman is actually living. This magazine symbolizes the outside world in general, and specifically the social norms of that world, which still hold a strong appeal for the bushwoman despite being irrelevant to the life that the she is living. It is also significant that the bushwoman brings the magazine with her to read while staying up to keep watch for the **snake**, as it shows that she is consistently maintaining her connection with the human social world and not allowing her struggle against nature—even in the middle of an episode where she is being concretely threatened by it—to cause her to lose what makes her human.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Henry Lawson Treasury* published in 2015.

The Drover's Wife Quotes

❝ No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilization—a shanty on the main road.

Related Characters: The Drover, The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation, which appears in the second paragraph of the story, establishes the absolute barrenness of the landscape in which the bushwoman and her family live. Lawson here repeatedly emphasizes the lack of life present in the bush. There is no vegetation ("no undergrowth") and no structures—manmade or natural—"to relieve the eye." In remarking on the low level of water in the creek, Lawson further emphasizes the lack of the elements necessary to sustain life—here, water—which immediately gives the reader a sense of how hard it must be to survive in the outback. Finally, the statement that it is "nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilization" contrasts the setting of the story starkly with the concept of civilization. Not only is this location decidedly uncivilized, but by identifying this sign of civilization as a mere "shanty," the story further establishes just how far a person would have to go in order to encounter significant settlements like towns. The bushwoman and her family, then, are extremely isolated.

This quote also implicitly presents the bush itself as abandoned—the implication being that it is free for the taking by white settlers like the drover and his wife. This is in keeping with the story's general treatment of Aboriginals,

whom it fails to depict with any real nuance. This was reflective of colonialist and racist attitudes towards indigenous people at the time of Lawson's writing.

> As a girl she built the usual castles in the air; but all her girlish hopes and aspirations have been long dead. She finds all the excitement and recreation she needs in the *Young Ladies' Journal*, and Heaven help her! Takes a pleasure in the fashion plates.

Related Characters: The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 46-47

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator reveals details about the bushwoman's backstory as she waits for the snake to emerge. She "built the usual castles in the air"—that is, dreamt of a fabulous life—when she was a young woman, but her life since the drought of 1818 has been anything but comfortable and glamorous. Her disillusionment with her youthful dreams and her adaptation to the harsh life that she is living in the bush show that she has forged an alternative form of meaning with her life by making the best out of what she has.

However, despite her acceptance of her life and her commitment to caring for her family the best she can, she cannot give up *every* form of connection to civilization: her interest in fashion and in the way of life depicted in the Young Ladies' Journal suggests an ongoing desire for forms of social meaning that are only possible in the context of a city or a town. Therefore, though she has accepted her lot in life, and in committing to it has given it a special kind of meaning, she still takes pleasure in imagining a way of life that is radically different from her own and that lines up more closely with her childhood dreams.

> He hates snakes and has killed many, but he will be bitten someday and die; most snake-dogs end that way.

Related Characters: Alligator

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

The unsentimental way in which Alligator is described highlights his usefulness as a tool in the bushwoman's household, as opposed to him being important as a beloved pet. First of all, this emphasizes the ways in which the harshness of life in the bush eliminates many of the possibilities for tenderness and love that are present when one lives in a secure environment and does not experience constant threats to one's life. Additionally, it indicates the ways that humans must rely on and collaborate with certain elements of nature in order to ensure survival in the bush.

> The sight of his mother in trousers greatly amused Tommy, who worked like a little hero by her side, but the terrified baby howled lustily for his 'mummy.'

Related Characters: The Drover, Tommy, The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48-49

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator recalls a time when, while fighting the enormous bush-fire threatening her house, the bushwoman was forced to put on a pair of her husband's pants in order to deal with the fire effectively. This demonstrates the impractical nature of women's clothing in a setting where women have to do physical labor, implicitly casting femininity as incompatible with the bush while also, somewhat paradoxically, asserting women's strength.

The fact that these necessary clothes amused Tommy and deeply upset the baby suggest that the children have grown so used to their mother wearing feminine clothing that they are confused and surprised when she wears practical male clothing instead. This further emphasizes the strength of gender roles, which retain a level of power even when removed from a societal context in which those roles make sense.

She stood for hours in the drenching downpour, and dug an overflow gutter to save the dam across the creek. But she could not save it. There are things that a bushwoman cannot do.

Related Characters: The Drover, The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

While reflecting on her various trials while living essentially alone in the bush, the narrator recalls a time when the bushwoman couldn't stop a flood. Her inability to save the dam that her husband worked so hard to build highlights the tension at the heart of Lawson's depiction of the relationship between humankind and nature: while the bushwoman usually triumphs in her fights against the elements, thereby suggesting the ultimate ability of humankind to "tame" nature, she is still only one person, which limits the extent to which she can control her environment in her favor. In saying "there are things a bushwoman cannot do," Lawson points to the manner in which even the strongest, most resourceful, and most tenacious individual is made vulnerable by isolation, and is thus prevented from being able to achieve feats that might be doable with the help of even just a few compatriots.

The crows leave in a hurry; they are cunning, but a woman's cunning is greater.

Related Characters: The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

When crows and other birds go for the bushwoman's chickens, she successfully fends them off. Here Lawson demonstrates the extent to which the bushwoman is able to use her resourcefulness and ingenuity to protect her family. Instead of using actual force or legitimate threat to scare away the crows, she tricks them into thinking she is shooting at them, when she is in fact posing no real threat to them with her broomstick. This illustrates the creativity that the bushwoman has been forced to develop in order to survive her life in the bush. Lawson's phrasing here also delivers insight into how he views gender, as his statement that "a woman's cunning is greater" suggests that women inherently have a special form of cleverness, which complicates his later illustrations of the constructed nature of gender roles and further suggests that he thinks that there is additionally a biological or natural element to gender.

On Sunday afternoon she dresses herself, tidies up the children, smartens up baby, and goes for a lonely walk along the bush-track, pushing an old perambulator in front of her.

Related Characters: The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

After detailing the many ways the bushwoman survives in the bush, the narrator reveals her one luxury: dressing up and walking around like a proper society woman. The absurdity of the fact that the bushwoman "dresses herself" and "smartens up the baby" in order to go on "lonely" walks where she is seen by no one other than her children underscores just how constructed gender roles are, and just how important an audience is in order to make such roles have any meaning at all. This weekly ritual—especially in concert with her interest in the Young Ladies' Journal—underscores the extent to which the bushwoman has clung to dreams of a socially relevant life in a city or town despite the isolation that she has grown used to, and in this way also underscores just how much personal importance gender roles can have even for those who are divorced from a social context in which those roles are socially important.

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

Related Characters: The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Lawson's claim that the bushwoman's "surroundings are not favorable to the 'womanly' or sentimental side of nature" suggests that although he conceives of gender as in part socially constructed, he also is suggesting that there exists an objectively "womanly or sentimental side of nature"—and therefore that gender has an innate, natural component to it that can be nurtured or hindered. Lawson's equation of sentimentality womanhood suggest an adherence to a very traditional idea of how gender works, and insists that typical femininity has no place in the bush. Even as Lawson holds his heroine up as an example of an extremely capable, strong person, he tempers this characterization by insisting that she survives only because she acts like a stereotypical man.

> He was the last of his tribe and a King; but he had built that woodheap hollow.

Related Characters: The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

The bushwoman goes to get more firewood only to discover the that woodpile she'd earlier paid an Aboriginal man to build is hollow, a revelation that causes her to burst into tears. The juxtaposition of the royalty of the Aboriginal man who tricks the bushwoman with the fact that he cheated her suggests that even Aboriginal royalty, the class of people traditionally expected to be the most noble in a given society, are tricksters. This emphasizes just how nefarious Lawson expects Aboriginal people to be, and thereby points to the tradition of racist colonial thought in which Lawson is writing.

Furthermore, the fact that this man "was the last of his tribe" paints him as obsolete: while he and his fellow Aboriginal inhabitants are currently still there, living alongside the white settlers, the fact that he is both the last of his tribe and a trickster, in comparison to the more plentiful white settlers, emphasizes the rightful claim that Lawson seems to believe the white settlers establish to the land through their "honest" work.

> Presently he looks up at her, sees the tears in her eyes, and, throwing his arms around her neck exclaims:

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

Related Characters: Tommy (speaker), The Bushwoman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Tommy says that he won't go droving as a direct response to his mother's tears once the snake has finally been killed. Thus, his statement can be read as an attempt to comfort his mother, especially as it is accompanied by an embrace. He does not want to live the life of his parents, and instead ostensibly yearns for a more stable existence.

This statement can be read as the expression of new possibilities for the future that do not involve such dangers as extreme isolation and snakes. This statement in combination with the fact that the family is planning on moving to a town as soon as the drover returns from his current job indicate that the hard work of the bushwoman and her contemporaries is setting up the next generation for a better life, and that their efforts to survive the different dangers that surround them are not in vain.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE DROVER'S WIFE

In a ramshackle, two-roomed house, isolated from the rest of society in the midst of a barren landscape, four children play. Their mother works in the kitchen, which forms a structure separate from the rest of the house. The bushwoman's husband, a former squatter turned drover, is away with his sheep.

Here the reader is introduced to the theme of isolation. Not only is the family's home located very far away from the rest of society, making it vulnerable to the forces of nature, the drover himself is also away, meaning that the bushwoman has to take care of her children without help.

When one of the children shouts that he sees a **snake**, the bushwoman rushes into the room, grabs her baby, and then picks up a stick. The child who shouted, Tommy, declares that he'll beat the snake, despite his mother's sharp protest, and goes after it along with the family dog, Alligator. Both are unable to catch it, however, and the snake slips through a crack in the floor and under the house. The bushwoman must restrain Alligator as the dog tries to follow the snake, as "they cannot afford to lose him."

The bushwoman's quick action in keeping her children away from the snake suggests that she has done this before, and thereby establishes the constant nature of the threat that her family must face in the outback. However, Alligator's attempt to catch the snake along with the fact that the family "cannot afford to lose him" establish that the family must depend on certain non-human actors to stay alive.

The bushwoman tries to tempt the **snake** to come out with milk, to no avail. Night is falling, and a thunderstorm is coming, so she takes some firewood into the earthen-floor kitchen and sets up a bed for her children on the kitchen table. Tommy and his little brother Jacky bicker about the snake and the noisy opossums outside until all of the children finally fall asleep. The bushwoman sits and waits, sewing and reading the **Young Ladies' Journal**.

Choosing to move her children into the safe kitchen and create a bed for them on the table shows how resourceful the bushwoman has become in taking care of her family. The natural conditions around her change at all times, so she must constantly adapt to new threats creatively in order to keep her family safe.

The bushwoman hasn't heard from her husband for six months, but after years living in the bush, she has grown used to his absence. Her husband once had the means to spoil the bushwoman, but was "ruined" by a drought and moved his family to their current home, where the closest remnant of civilization is her brother-in-law's shanty on the main road nearly 20 miles away. The bushwoman once "built castles in the air," but has long since abandoned her "girlish hopes and aspirations."

The fact that the bushwoman's girlhood dreams were satisfied for a while, until her husband lost everything, throws into even starker relief just how much her hopes were thwarted, and just how bleak the reality of her current impoverished life is. However, she is now used to being alone and poor, which suggests the necessity of accepting one's lot.

The bushwoman has given birth twice in the harsh conditions of the bush, one of the births nearly causing her death. She only survived due to the help of an aboriginal man with a very "black face" called King Jimmy, who brought his wife, Black Mary, to help with the birth. On a separate occasion, one of her children did die, and she had to ride 19 miles for assistance with the child's corpse.

The bushwoman's difficult birth and the death of her child serve as the first illustration of the harshness of her life in the bush. Moreover, King Jimmy is the first Aboriginal person introduced in the story, and the fact that he is portrayed as unserious underscores the racist nature of Lawson's depiction of indigenous people.

Alligator, who is "not a very beautiful dog," lives chiefly with the family to protect them, especially against snakes. He is "afraid of nothing on the face of the earth" and will probably die from a snakebite one day.

This description of Alligator underscores how Alligator's importance to the family is primarily utilitarian instead of sentimental, and therefore the ways that the family needs to collaborate with non-human actors to survive.

The bushwoman once fought a bush-fire that she was only able to effectively put out by wearing her husband's pants, which amused Tommy but scared her baby, who wept. She was only able to beat the fire with the help of four bushmen who arrived at the last minute, and afterwards she was so covered in soot that her "baby screamed and struggled convulsively, thinking it was a blackman," and Alligator attacked her until Tommy was able to pull him away.

This episode introduces the theme of gender. The negative reactions to the bushwoman's reliance on men's clothes to complete a traditionally masculine task (fighting a fire) emphasizes, firstly, how such tasks are unavoidable for women living in the bush; secondly, it shows how gender roles are so influential they even manifest in the seeming middle of nowhere.

Once the bushwoman fought a flood, digging an overflow gutter in order to try to save a dam that her husband had built over the course of years. However, she was unable to save it and cried when she saw it was ruined, thinking of how sad her husband would be when he came home from droving and saw the destruction of his efforts.

This episode shows how, in the fight between human beings and nature in the bush, people do not always win.

The bushwoman fought a plague of pleuro-pneumonia among her animals by giving them medicine and practicing bloodletting, but the disease still killed her two best cows, which also made her cry. She also fought a "mad bullock" that attacked her house for a full day until she managed to shoot it through the cracks in the wall, and she was able to skin it and get money for its hide. She also regularly fights off crows and eagles attempting to steal her chickens by pretending that her broomstick is a shotgun and "shooting" at them, shouting "Bung!" to make them think they are in danger.

The bushwoman's ability to fight off all of these animals and diseases demonstrates her tenacity and ingenuity in keeping her family safe. At the same time, the struggles presented here illustrate the variety of natural threats she faces on a daily basis, as well as the variation in her ability to successfully fight them off.

The bushwoman is occasionally visited by drunk bushmen who ask if her husband is around, and in these instances she usually lies to them and tells them that her husband and two sons are working nearby. The week before the **snake** arrived, a bushman came by, demanding food. She fed him but he refused to leave, saying that he was going to spend the night, until she threatened him with a long metal bar and Alligator.

In contrast to the wild animals and natural disasters that the bushwoman must fight off regularly, representing the threat of nature, the licentious men who lurk around the bushwoman's house represent threats from other people. This is a sort of threat that she would encounter regardless of where she lived due to her gender.

Every Sunday, the bushwoman dresses herself and her children up in their Sunday best and goes walking with the children and a perambulator through the bush, even though "there is nothing to see […] and not a soul to meet." The bush is monotonous and enormous, which makes "a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go." However, the bushwoman is used to the loneliness.

The bushwoman's weekly practice of walking through the bush in her Sunday best shows how important it is to her to maintain some semblance of femininity, even though she doesn't live in a societal context that would give her actions meaning.

The bushwoman is "contented with her lot" and loves her husband, but does not show her love for her husband or children outwardly, which leads her children to think that she is harsh.

The bushwoman is forced into a position of harshness by the difficulty of her life, which emphasizes how hard it is for her to maintain femininity (here, represented as sweetness) when faced with the brutality of the outback.

It is nearing morning, and the bushwoman realizes that she is out of candles, so she goes to fetch some wood to burn from the **woodpile**. However, the pile collapses, and she realizes that the Aboriginal man she had paid the day before to build the woodpile had only been able to build it so quickly—a feat for which she gave him "an extra fig of tobacco"—because he had built it hollow. She begins to cry, and tries to wipe her tears away with a handkerchief, which proves to be full of holes. This makes her laugh, and it reminds her of a time that she cried and her cat meowed along with her, which also made her laugh.

The collapse of the woodpile casts the Aboriginal man who built it as a crafty and untrustworthy person, and he appears even more untrustworthy in comparison to the honest and hardworking bushwoman. Thus, this anecdote sets up a paradigm that paints the white settlers as hardworking and deserving of success and the Aboriginal inhabitants as selfish, unreliable, and unkind (indeed, the Aboriginal man makes the bushwoman cry).

Daylight is nearing when suddenly Alligator expresses interest in a crack in the wall, and the bushwoman grabs her stick. A black **snake**, five feet long, slithers out from a crack in the partition between the house and the kitchen. Alligator jumps toward it, first missing it, and then finally catching it and shaking it to death, breaking its back and crushing its head. Tommy wakes up, grabs his stick, and tries to help kill it, but his mother holds him back. The bushwoman then lifts up the snake's carcass with her stick and throws it into the fire. The bushwoman, Tommy, and Alligator all calmly watch the carcass burn. Tommy then notices that his mother is crying, embraces her, and promises he will never become a drover.

Alligator's—and by extension the family's—triumph over the snake suggests the ultimate triumph of human beings over nature, and thus the ultimate success of Australian settlement in the bush and the Australian nation as a whole. Tommy's promise that he will never become a drover then implies that the hard work of the bushwoman's generation in fighting nature will pay off in that it will allow the next generation to build better lives for themselves.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

McConnell, Reed. "*The Drover's Wife.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 28 Mar 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

McConnell, Reed. "*The Drover's Wife.*" LitCharts LLC, March 28, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-drover-s-wife.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Drover's Wife* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Lawson, Henry. The Drover's Wife. Penguin. 2015.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Lawson, Henry. The Drover's Wife. New York: Penguin. 2015.