

# The Woman in the Boy: The Feminine Ideal in the Fictional Australian Public Schoolboy and its Removal, 1875-1920

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Juvenile literature is an important resource for considering constructions of masculinity. The closeness with which society monitors what it tells its children and the pedagogical intent of children's books dictate that they reflect society's ideals particularly clearly. Changing constructions of manliness are evident in the changing fictional depiction of the idealised Australian public schoolboy between the 1870s and the 1910s. Robert Richardson's stories, written in the 1870s, attempted to counter the allegedly brutalising influences of masculinity by constructing an effeminate and religious manliness through academic and pious male heroes open to feminine influence. By the 1910s, however, Mary Grant Bruce and Lillian Pyke, responding to new national mythologies, needs and dangers, constructed heroes who were muscular, athletic and patriotic, and placed little emphasis upon religion and academic achievement. They also removed feminine influences from the boy. An effeminate construct in the 1870s, the ideal public schoolboy of the 1910s was a much more masculine and anti-feminine creation.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to examine how the changing ideals of the Australian public schoolboy, as reflected and constructed in Australian juvenile literature between 1875 and 1920, relate to changing representations of femininity, particularly in terms of the mothers of boy heroes, and boys possessed of feminine character qualities. Historians of gender have long recognised that gender operates as a system, that masculinity and femininity are relational, and that constructions of one play a significant part in the construction of the other (Scott 1988, 29; Roper and Tosh 1991, 7). This article will show that as the idealised public schoolboy of Australian juvenile literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became more overtly masculine, more rugged, athletic and militaristic, authors adopted deliberate strategies to marginalise femininity in the character of the ideal boy. Boys were purged of feminine traits, mothers moved from being moral guides to potentially corrupting influences, and effeminate boys were drawn as a villainous "other" in the gendered dichotomies that helped define the ideal.

"Masculinity" and "femininity" are terms which are just as discursive as "manliness." There is no natural reason, for example, why religious devotion should be seen as a

character trait which is more feminine than masculine. However, in at least the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, there is a great deal of congruence in the qualities which writers of boys' stories (in common with many other commentators on boyhood) located in the feminine and masculine spheres. Studiousness, religious piety, passiveness, patience and humility were generally identified as feminine. Physicality, aggression, activity and a range of other similar character qualities were identified as masculine. Writers of the public school stories did not so much debate the categories of masculine and feminine as attempt to define manliness as a certain blend of feminine and masculine qualities. This article suggests that feminine qualities were gradually purged from manliness, while masculine qualities became much more important.

## AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL STORIES

Australia does not have an extensive tradition of public school literature to compare with the English public school story genre which, from the publication of Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in 1857, was both extensive and extremely popular. Robert Richardson wrote the first Australian public school stories in the 1870s and, although another did not appear until 1910, a rash of publications from Mary Grant Bruce, Lillian Pyke, Eustace Boylan and Ethel Turner have left us a resource of some twenty stories which used the public schoolboy as a model for Australian children to aspire to.<sup>1</sup> In constructing public schoolboy heroes, these works were partly a reflection of educational ideologies already formulated in Australian schooling. The educational priorities which they promoted, such as classical scholarship, athleticism and militarism, were first formulated and promoted in the public schools themselves, not in literature. Literary theory has it that meaning is created through language, but the language of schoolboy fiction is not to be privileged. The language of headmasters' speeches, school publications, songs and poems, not to mention the rhetoric of clergymen, nationalists, militarists and a range of others with an interest in education, were all as, or even more, important in the production of meaning as public school stories.

Yet public school stories remained important. They added certain accents to the construction of the public schoolboy hero, allowed him to act and proceed in ways impossible for the real life public schoolboy, offered a vicarious public schoolboy experience to those not among the few privileged to attend these schools, and served as a vehicle where the competing and often disparate interests of nationalists, militarists, scholars and others could be reconciled or prioritised. The meanings which authors invested in the public schoolboy were not entirely original, but remained an important element in the construction and dissemination of the idealised public schoolboy. Richard Phillips has argued that colonial adventure stories mapped the gendered cultural and social spaces of the colonies in the same way that cartographers mapped the land, and the same can be said of public school stories (Phillips 1997, 1-21).

I have argued elsewhere that the educational ideologies of Australian public schools changed significantly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, moving from emphasising godliness and good learning to a greater concern with physicality and

athleticism as expressions of secular attributes of manliness and, finally, to a greater emphasis on militarism from the end of the nineteenth century (Crotty 1997). A similar shift is evident in public school stories. Heroes of the 1870s were intellectual, godly and self-sacrificing, in the tradition of Thomas Arnold and possessing just a touch of Charles Kingsley's Christian manliness. Later heroes tended to be much more militaristic and athletic, the sorts of boys who would have been prefects and heroes under L. A. Adamson or James Cuthbertson as they stood at the respective helms of the athletic and games-oriented Wesley College and Geelong Grammar School.

The change in the hero figures was, however, much more than simply a response on the part of authors to changes they perceived in Australian middle-class educational ideology. As the concerns of the Australian middle-classes changed, so too did the proselytising of the authors of boys' stories. In the 1870s, like a number of social commentators of their time, they tended to think, write within, and help to constitute a religious discursive economy, and were concerned to ensure that boys who were religious, intellectual and self-sacrificing were elevated over the more ruggedly masculine, aggressive and self-oriented boys. Later authors were more concerned with the perceived interests and requirements of the Australian nation; refuting fears of racial decline, developing the muscularity and physical activity that would counter the degenerative effects of over-civilisation, and encouraging militarism and national and imperial loyalty. Writers of the Australian public schoolboy thus manipulated the figure to promote their different gender ideals which, in turn, rested upon their different intellectual and cultural environments. They did not simply provide screens onto which gender ideologies could be projected, but were collectively one of the elements which mixed the different concerns of the time to formulate gender ideologies, making them readable and disseminating them to all who read their stories.

#### ROBERT RICHARDSON AND THE EFFEMINATE BOY HERO

Robert Richardson wrote the first Australian public school stories in the mid-1870s. Indeed, he was the only Australian author to write public school stories set in nineteenth-century Australia, which may appear to make analysis of changing ideals of manliness problematic. Richardson, however, in presenting effeminate, godly and intellectual hero figures, mirrored both 1870s educational ideals and the themes of many of the widely-produced adventure stories of his period (Dixon 1995). His representations are thus typical rather than exceptional.

In his 1876 story, *A Perilous Errand; Or, How Walter Harvey Proved His Courage*, Walter becomes a hero by selflessly laying his life on the line to procure medicine for another boy, one who has been taunting him and making his life unpleasant. One of the reasons why Walter is teased is that he is effeminate, unable or unwilling to participate in the usual boyish pursuits of sports and games. He is described by Richardson as:

a boy with bright blue eyes, a smooth red and white complexion, that many a young lady would have envied.... His figure was nothing to boast of; his face was the best part about him. Besides the bright blue eyes and the fine complexion, its expression helped much to make it a

pleasant one; it had a kind of sweetness in it that one sees more in girls' faces than boys'. Yet he hadn't an unmanly look either, though it might have struck a hasty observer that he leaned that way (Richardson, 1876a, 55-6).<sup>2</sup>

Even to an observer who is not hasty, Walter Harvey is clearly an effeminate hero figure, far removed from the muscular athlete usually associated with the nineteenth-century public school story.

The great change in literary constructions of manliness is immediately evident if Walter Harvey is compared with Jim Linton, one of the heroes of Brace's *Billabong* series. Jim is described in *Mates at Billabong* as:

a big quiet fellow, very like his father; not over-brilliant at books, but a first-rate sport, and without a trace of meanness in his generous nature. At school he was worshipped by the boys—was he not captain of the football team, stroke of the eight, and best all-round athlete?—and liked by the masters, who found him to be careless over work but absolutely reliable in every other way. Such a fellow does not win scholarships, but he is a tower of strength to his school (Bruce 1911, 16).

Such descriptions of the boy heroes from these different eras could be repeated almost indefinitely. In the thirty-five years between these two stories and the different descriptions of their central male heroes, the ideal of public school manliness clearly underwent great changes. Jim Linton and Walter Harvey are like chalk and cheese and represent very different ideals. Boys such as Jim would have frowned upon Richardson's heroes and would not have understood them. At best the idealised public schoolboy figure of the 1910s would have considered his 1870s counterpart a sissy. At worst he would have harassed him for being a toad, a stew-pot or a Mummy's boy; in short, for being a girl.

In formulating and reformulating manliness, authors of both periods exploit the feminine, in diametrically opposite ways. Richardson writes in an early-to-mid Victorian tradition which portrayed the godly world and the adult world as providing the models to which children should aspire (Nelson 1991, 7-8). Gender ideals were not strictly differentiated, and girls and boys both needed to learn to be godly, "obedient, courteous, self-disciplined, honest, sensible, and neither foolishly timid nor recklessly brave," qualities typically associated with femininity (Nelson 1991, 9). Masculinity was identified with a certain beastliness, which boys needed to grow out of. The situation was exacerbated by the colonial context where it was feared that boys' moral sense was declining, and that Australian boys would become, in Henry Kingsley's words, "lanky, lean, pasty-faced, blaspheming blackguards, drinking rum before breakfast, and living by cheating one another out of horses" (White 1981, 68).

Richardson's models were probably English children's novels (given the virtual absence of any Australian material at the time) and his most likely public schoolboy story model would have been *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). Richardson's heroes resemble the tender and effeminate George Arthur who, as Claudia Nelson argues, leads Tom away from his false muscular manliness towards a more gentle and feminine manliness by the end of the story, when Tom has become, "a real man, gentle, pious, humble, obedient, disciplined and ready to cry on affecting occasions" (Nelson 1991, 42-4). Richardson's hero figures and the ideals of his stories bear a remarkably close

resemblance to Thomas Hughes' famous constructions.

Richardson's attempts to show the folly of muscularity and boy culture, and to praise instead moral, feminine virtue, godliness and adulthood translate into five very similar narratives. In all of his school stories one distinctly unmasculine character is excluded from the favour of the dominant group of boys within the school, this group generally comprising the more overtly masculine boys who are best at games, the wealthy, the wags, and often including the school captain. The ostracised, however, in acts which involve a blend of forgiveness, courage, self-sacrifice and humility, turn out to be the real heroes. The villainous boys, in the manner of Tom Brown, reach moral enlightenment through the example set before them. All ends in happy reconciliation and the morally superior character usually receives some reward for his goodness.

The effeminacy of Richardson's heroes is most obvious in their physiques. They lack any masculine ruggedness, are usually finely built, with pale skin, and are unathletic. They are also often symbolically emasculated through being physically lamed. Philip Hay and Ernest Pottle, although not the main characters of their respective stories, are both moral exemplars and are both lame, while Philip Freeling, hero of *The Cold Shoulder*, carries a shoulder injury which renders him unable to fight George, one of his tormentors. Lame and unathletic boys are contrasted with masculine villains who are more strongly-built, less godly and invariably good at games. Will Bayliss, for example, Walter Harvey's main persecutor, is described as "a strong, sturdy fellow, with a frame like well-seasoned oak-wood, and muscles like whip-cord" (Richardson 1876a, 63-4).

It is significant too that most of Richardson's hero figures are the sons of widows, thus lacking masculine socialisation. Their mothers teach them to be self-sacrificing, humble, and most importantly, godly. In *The Cold Shoulder* Philip is advised by his mother to look for solace from the persecution of his more masculine schoolmates in the Almighty: "Try to feel that God is near you always in your everyday life, that He is really your Father, and fear nothing but what would pain Him" (Richardson 1876b, 60). Similarly, in *The Boys of Springdale*, Steven Kent finds a refuge from the persecution of his school fellows in reading the Bible with Philip Hay, an injured boy he is helping, and with his widowed mother. The lack of paternal influence allows the feminine side of the boys' characters to dominate, and it is this that makes them morally superior.

Mothers are thus a source of moral goodness, providing most of the moral direction for boys. This can, however, also be supplied by adult male figures, such as headmasters and their assistants, who have presumably already shed the false manliness of boyhood masculinity and graduated to a higher level of feminine moral and spiritual maturity. Claudia Nelson has suggested that whereas femaleness and womanliness were usually seen by Victorians as essentially the same thing, manliness had to struggle to overcome maleness (Nelson 1991,1-2). This is clearly evident in Richardson's stories where the women are highly developed morally, but where the boys have to battle to overcome their natural predisposition towards a bestial brand of masculinity, instead learning and acquiring the essentially feminine qualities of godliness, tolerance, humility and forgiveness on their way to a more highly developed manliness. Manliness is thus constructed as essentially feminine.

## MARY GRANT BRUCE, LILLIAN PYKE AND THE MASCULINE BOY HERO

After the flurry of public school stories written by Richardson in the mid-1870s, there was a break of thirty-five years before more stories including Australian public schoolboys appeared. Bruce's *A Little Bush Maid* (1910) was the next, though it was not a public school story as such, instead being the first of her famous Billabong series. Following *A Little Bush Maid*, the 1910s witnessed a burst of juvenile literature in which public schoolboys were central characters. Five more Billabong books followed before the end of the decade, as did two stories by Bruce about Dick Lester, a schoolboy who goes to school in Melbourne after growing up on a station at Kurradjong.<sup>3</sup> Lillian Pyke wrote three of her four public school stories in the 1910s, these being *Max the Sport* (1916), *Jack of St Virgil's* (1917) and *A Prince at School* (1919).<sup>4</sup> In *The Cub*, *Captain Cub* and *Brigid and the Cub* Ethel Turner wrote of an anti-hero, John Calthrop, who was transformed into a hero by the war, while Eustace Boylan, a Jesuit priest and teacher at Xavier College, Melbourne, attempted to fuse religion with the more muscular and secular ideals coming to predominate in most schools in his *The Heart of the School* (1919).

But it is Bruce and Pyke who produced the dominant literary discourses and constructions of the Australian public schoolboy: Bruce because of her vast popularity, and Pyke because she attempted faithfully to reflect the ideologies of the public schools, particularly Wesley College where her son Lawrence was a pupil. Her second public school story, *Jack of St. Virgil's* was even dedicated to the headmaster of Wesley College, L. A. Adamson. The headmaster of St. Virgil's is known as "The Chief," a term also used to describe Adamson, while St. Virgil's is a thinly disguised Wesley, with the colours of royal blue and gold as opposed to the real Wesley's colours of purple and gold. Pyke's stories are also the closest thing we have in the early twentieth century to a secular public school story. The action is more school-bound than in the stories of Bruce and Turner, and her stories reflect the ideals of the dominant and relatively secular public school establishment more so than Boylan's religious *The Heart of the School*.

In their stories Bruce and Pyke illustrate concerns much different from those of Richardson. Whereas Richardson's overriding priority and discursive framework was religious, Bruce and Pyke operate within a framework dominated by the perceived needs and myths of the nation. Society had become more secular in the intervening years, Australia had become a federated nation, and fears of colonial degeneration were being replaced with a feeling, if rather tentative, of colonial superiority. Australian fears, moreover, were directed more at perceived external threats (such as German rivalry with the British Empire and the threat of Asian invasion) rather than internal class or moral conflict (Dixon 1995). Religion is thus relatively unimportant to Bruce and Pyke, and the emphasis is heavily upon the type of boys who will fight for their country and the empire against external enemies, as well as developing the Australian nation by mastering its wilderness. To create such boys Bruce and Pyke appeal to Australian mythologies such as mateship and the redemptive influence of the bush. In both what they write and how they write, Australian-ness is central.

Because of the different discursive framework within which they write, because

their boys have to be able to fight the land and protect the Empire and the nation, and because their heroes are supposed to be national symbols rather than quasi-religious martyrs, Bruce and Pyke produce heroes who are invariably tall, tough and muscular. Max, hero of *Max the Sport*, is, for example, described as:

a fine specimen of an Australian athlete.... Broad of shoulder and deep of chest, he stood quite six feet, and though he had no superabundance of flesh, his bones were well-covered, and he turned the scale at about twelve stone. His race was well-browned from exposure to sun and wind, but beneath the tan, there was a healthy glow in his cheeks. His dark eyes were alight with intelligence and his square chin showed a determined...nature (Pyke 1916,59).

Their heroes excel at games, fight bush fires, save drowning girls, kill snakes, work like demons, are ready to use their fists in fighting for a just cause, and only rarely do anything that could be considered religious or studious. When the war comes they have little hesitation in signing up and playing their part, in chivalrous fashion objecting particularly to the unmanly treatment of Belgian women and children by the Germans. The gender identification of qualities of physical hardihood, athleticism and militarism established by Richardson is not challenged by Bruce or Pyke. They, like Richardson, saw such qualities as belonging in the masculine sphere. What they do is construct manliness as an ideal achieved by the cultivation of masculine attributes rather than their suppression.

This is achieved partly by playing up the inherent goodness of the qualities of the muscular Christian, the athlete and the warrior, but also through deliberate strategies on the part of Bruce and Pyke to suppress or downplay feminine qualities, attributes and influences. Boys are purged of their femininity by being isolated from feminine influence, mothers are portrayed as dangerous or incidental to the development of a manly character, and effeminate boys are portrayed as villains.

In Richardson's stories boys draw strength, moral courage and spiritual guidance from their mothers. But in the Billabong stories there is no mother - Jim's friend Wally Meadows is an orphan who is adopted by the Linton family, while Mrs Linton died when the Linton children were still very young. Brownie, the rotund cook, is the only adult female figure at Billabong, and she is largely a comic figure, certainly no source of moral wisdom or spiritual guidance. Jim and Wally thus grow up in masculine environments - a male dominated household, the bush and the boarding house at Melbourne Grammar School.

If mothers are not removed from their boys, boys have to be removed from their mothers. In Bruce's stories about Dick Lester, Dick's father writes to his mother from where he is occupied on business in England that the time has come for Dick to let go of his mother's apron-strings: "he must learn things that you cannot teach him, and it's time he began." Dick's mother is initially reluctant to send her beloved son away, but realises that "he knows best, Dick." Dick replies: "Oh, of course.... He's a man: of course he'd understand about a boy" (Bruce, 1918, 18-19). The response is telling because it encapsulates the idea that a mother cannot train a boy's character into that of a manly individual; only a man, usually in the form of father, schoolmaster or senior student, is qualified to do so.

Other authors also remove maternal influence, often when an absent father has

exposed the boy to the danger of a feminine home environment without appropriate masculine elements. In Pyke's *Max the Sport* Max's father dies an heroic and selfless death when Max is very young. In *Jack of St. Virgil's* Jack lives with foster parents, not knowing who his real parents are, while Andi, of *A Prince at School*, is a Vilatongan prince whose throne has been usurped by German interests, and who lost his father in the coup. All three boys are removed from their feminine home environments and sent to the masculine environment of the boarding school where they learn to be men, acquiring the ethics of honour, team-work and playing for one's "side," and developing their physical and athletic abilities. The public school thus moves into the gap created by the absent father. Even in Eustace Boylan's *The Heart of the School*, a much gentler and less aggressive text than most contemporary public school stories, designed to show that boys can be religious and manly at the same time, Peter Jackson must leave home for the boarding house of Xavier College. His governess, the mystically named Miss Moonlight, does not strike Peter's father as the most desirable of influences:

I am uneasy about the boy.... He is far from robust He spends altogether too much time in reading; it is unnatural in a boy of his age. He dreams away too much of his existence, and Miss Moonlight's influence has, I fear, been injurious to him...it is about time he was taught to plant his two feet in hard realities. The boy wants more life. He needs the activities and the practicalities of a good school with its companionships and its varied interest (Boylan 1919, 28-30).

Vigour and practicality are qualities located in the masculine sphere which need to be taught by men. Similarly, Max's mother is keen for Max to attend a public school as she fears that he has had too much of what she terms "petticoat government" (Pyke 1916, 219).

Where the mother is present, her role is restricted to looking after the bodily health of the children - the character is the father's domain, or the school's as a sort of surrogate father. As Max's mother says to her husband shortly after Max's birth:

Now, Jack, you will have to do your part, and I'll have to do mine. I will keep his body healthy and see he gets the right environment-I don't want nun to grow up a curled darling in sashes and petticoats. I want him to be a man-child; in fact a Sport, and that's where you come in. (Pyke 1916,9-11).

Mothers are thus expected to raise healthy boys who, at the beginning of adolescence, are to be handed over to the school, the father, the cadet corps, sports teams or the boy scouts and other groups for training in their role as makers and protectors of the nation. Mothers were an important moral influence upon boys in their formative years, but from adolescence their role was much more limited. When, in *Dick* (1918), Dick's mother first takes him to school, she leaves him with the advice to "be a man, and go straight" (Bruce 1918,138). With these parting words she hands her son over to the school where his moral fibre will be tested and his character formed:

He turned then, when she had passed through the gate, and marched back up the path and into the house, with his shoulders square and his head well up. Mrs. Lester watched him, but he did not look round. Perhaps he could not. The big grey door closed behind him (Bruce 1918,139).

The mother is the self-sacrificing figure who overcomes her fears for her boy's safety to recognise that he must leave her to become a man. Max's mother, initially reluctant to see her son depart for war, realises that she must let him go, as does John Calthrop's mother. A particular poignancy is added to the ideal by the fact that many of these stories were written in wartime in non-conscripting Australia, where women were called upon to sacrifice their sons for the national and imperial cause (Shute 1995).

Motherly influence needs to be controlled because, if the maternal influence upon the boy is too great, he will grow up soft, spoilt and unmanly. In short, mothers are likely to produce effeminate boys, and effeminate boys, the heroes in the earlier stories of Richardson, come to fill the role of villain in later stories. Cecil Linton, for example, an effeminate townie inflicted upon the good people of Billabong, is the major villain of *Mates at Billabong* (1911). With his pale skin, slender build and fastidious dress, Cecil is immediately physically differentiated from the manly Jim and Wally (Bruce 1911, 33). He is further isolated by his class consciousness, his poor horsemanship, his distaste for the bush and his preference for the classic English poets over the more Australian Gordon. He commits the ultimate act of villainy by riding Norah's beloved horse, Bobs, without her permission and killing it in an accident largely of his own making. His selfishness, urbanity and lack of sympathy with the "real" Australia of the bush are constructed as feminine attributes.

Cecil's effeminacy stems from defective parenting in that his mother has had too great a role in his upbringing. There has been little paternal influence and Cecil has not spent sufficient time in the masculine spaces of the boarding school or the bush. As David Linton, the father in the Billabong stories, says to his daughter Norah when railing against Cecil:

Of all the spoilt young cubs!-and that's all it is I should say: clearly a case of spoiling. The boy isn't bad at heart, but he's never been checked in his life. Well, I'm told it's risky for a father to bring up his daughter unaided, but I'm positive the result is worse when an adoring mother rears a fatherless boy! Probably I've made rather a boy of you-but Cecil's neither one thing nor the other. (Bruce 1911,38).

Whereas the effeminate boy was the hero of Richardson's stories, he is often the villain of Bruce's. Mothering once made boys moral and religious, thus superior to their pagan and amoral masculine fellows. By the early twentieth century it makes them overly refined, fastidious and frail, liabilities which rendered them a poor match for the more brave and rugged.

If manliness was increasingly masculinised and de-feminised, so too was femininity. This is perhaps most obvious in the figure of Norah Linton, the main character of the Billabong series. Norah is a rejection of Victorian norms of genteel femininity in that she rides astride, helps to round up the stock, detests female finery, and goes so far as to declare herself "three parts a boy" (Bruce 1911,115). When the war comes she plays her part, helping to catch a German spy, running a refuge for exhausted soldiers on leave, and knitting woollens for the fighting men. To some extent she is a feminist creation in breaking out of restrictive feminine roles, but in other aspects of her character (such as her excellent cooking and her readiness to shed tears) she is restricted to traditional

feminine roles, an illustration of the contemporary tension in Australia between women as home-makers and women as the helpmates of men (Quarty 1993, 22). However, what defines Norah as a hero are her masculine qualities and her enthusiastic participation in masculine activities such as fighting bush fires, general station life, and war.

In other stories, too, women are praised for their participation in the Australian bush life. One traveller on the same boat as Dick Lester suggests to Miss Simpson, a passenger expounding the virtues of feminine decorum, that:

I reckon...that some of our old hands would have been in a bit of a hole if their womenfolk hadn't been willin' to lend a hand outside. My old grandmother.. .came to Sydney...and married and went up into the Never-Never country. After that there wasn't anything she didn't do, from fightin' blacks and bush fires and floods to helpin' clear the land and build the house... Lots like her, of course. Reckon they made Australia. (Bruce 1920,52).

The qualification is made that these women "had decorum" which they never lost, "even when they did a man's work" (Bruce 1920,52). Holding on to their feminine decorum is admirable, but their heroism again lies in their participation in the masculine pursuit of taming and settling the Australian wilderness. To be heroic requires that women participate in the masculine Australian myth.

The masculinisation of women is less extreme in the novels of Ethel Turner and Eustace Boylan. This is partly because Ethel Turner, English-born, raised in a feminine household and writing books about girls more than boys, was less concerned with constructing the Australian male. It is significant, however, that John Calthrop still has to escape his feminine surrounds to realise his manliness, and that the women in the stories achieve self-realisation through shedding some of their (female) affectedness and participating in the (male) war effort by knitting socks and jumpers and performing other voluntary war-work. In Boylan's story, much gentler and more religious than those of Pyke and Bruce, women are not masculinised but remain a threat to the achievement of manliness in the figure of Miss Moonlight.

## MASCULINE NATIONAL ECONOMIES AND FEMININE AUTHORIAL ENTRAPMENT

The puzzle in the development of manliness as constructed in the figure of the Australian public schoolboy would appear to be that the most aggressively masculinist texts are produced by women who, as authors, might be seen as agents in their own oppression. Why, one might ask, would women produce such stories which trivialise and marginalise their own sex? The answer, I believe, lies in the fact that they locate themselves in a nationalist discourse which is masculinist and misogynistic.

Kay Schaffer has convincingly argued that writers are limited by and trapped within the discursive frameworks and economies within which they operate, and that women writers are frequently limited by masculinist or patriarchal discourses (Schaffer 1988). Both Bruce and Pyke locate themselves within an Australian discursive tradition, established in the late nineteenth century, which has been frequently described as masculinist and excluding (Magarey et al. 1993, xvii-xix). The setting is largely irrelevant

in Richardson's stories, but it is central for both Pyke and Bruce as a sense of Australian-ness and Australian national pride are very important, reflecting the contemporary preoccupation with forging and promoting a distinctive national identity. In Pyke's stories, Max, for example, decides that he would rather remain in Australia to attend university, turning down the opportunity to study in England, and when war breaks out he joins the AIF rather than the British Army. Her boy heroes come from or spend time in the bush, and the mythical Australian value of egalitarianism is strongly promoted.

A distinctive Australian identity is even more central in Bruce's stories, where the Australian masculine bush is frequently posited against the effeminate English city. All her main characters come from the bush and adore their native land, and it is with heavy hearts that the Lintons leave it behind and sail to England so that Jim and Wally, somewhat paradoxically, can join the British Army. England seems strange and foreign to them, and they yearn for home. Although awed by English history and culture, they find London gloomy, and the English themselves are not up to much, even being effeminate, and certainly not as manly as the Australians. There are constant references to Australians towering over their English counterparts, and all Australians are taller, bigger and more tanned. This contrasts sharply with Richardson's boys, who are "somewhat sparer and less squarely built than English lads generally are, and with little of the colour in their cheeks that is bred of northern winters" (Richardson 1876b, 5). Dave Linton, meanwhile, observes that the war "is going to do big work in strengthening English shoulders - morally and physically," the implication being that English shoulders, always a metaphor for moral and physical well-being and uprightness, need such straightening (Bruce 1916, 35). There is a constant gentle mocking of the English class system, English effeminacy and English affectedness. England is portrayed as old, tired and worn out, still a place of culture, still centre of Empire and still worth fighting for, but essentially yesterday's country. Australia, on the other hand, is youthful, vigorous and masculine, a place of and for young people, a land of opportunity. Such assertions of the superiority of Australia over England, and in particular the superiority of Australian men over their English counterparts, were a feature of Australian identity in the late nineteenth century when it was increasingly felt that sport, the climate and the outdoor life were producing a race superior to the over-civilised English (White 1981,75).

Australia emerges triumphant over England in the same way that masculinity prevails over femininity. Australia represents the bush, youth and manliness, and Jim and Wally, as young males from the bush, emerge as national symbols, or something of an Australian type. This can be seen in their frequent descriptions in nationalistic terms as "fine specimens of loose-limbed Australia" rather than as simply "loose-limbed," and as "tall young Australians" rather than as just "tall and young." England, by contrast, represents urbanity, affectedness and effeminacy. It is significant that Cecil Linton, an effeminate Australian, is represented as not being a "real" Australian. He prefers English poetry to Australian, does not conform to Australian myths and stereotypes, and is from the city, which itself is seen as English; or at least not the real Australia because it is not the bush. When the Lintons return from England at the end of the war, Cecil is somewhat disparaging and wonders that five years abroad has not made them a little "less Australian." Australia

is posited against England in the same way that manliness is posited against effeminacy, and the bush against the city.

Brace's stories and, to a lesser extent, Pyke's, are indicative of the appropriation of the bush ethos and the bush legend by middle-class Australian culture, attributed by Richard White to "a general context of changing Western ideas, tastes and attitudes, which included new imperialism, social darwinism and the exalting of the common man, as well as the desire to create a nationalist symbol" (White 1981,104). Jim, Wally, Max and other public schoolboy heroes of the period are middle-class versions of the bush man of the Australian bush legend. Russel Ward has characterised the mythical Australian bush male of the period as one who is practical, rough and ready, quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others, sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally, disinclined to hard work without good cause, and who "swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion" (Ward 1958,1-2). Jim, Wally, Max and other public schoolboy heroes do not drink, gamble or swear and are somewhat more inclined towards hard work than Ward's caricature, reflecting middle-class values of temperance, thrift, manners and industriousness. But in their egalitarianism, their mateship, lack of affectedness, practicality and secularity, they are essentially middle-class variants of the bush type. Pyke and Bruce thus combine their perception of the needs of the nation with national mythologies in the formation of the national type of manly figure, an indication, in Richard White's words, of the "success with which the middle class had laid claim to the imagery of Australia" (White 1981, 124). Because Pyke and Bruce locate themselves within this Australian nationalist tradition they must abide by its rules, particularly its masculinity and misogyny. Femininity has to be marginalised or suppressed. It is significant that Bruce, who writes in a more overtly nationalist vein than Pyke, also suppresses femininity to a greater degree. She has to - she adopts the discursive framework of the Australian legend more thoroughly and must adhere to its conventions more rigidly. Discourses can be challenged; they evolve and change as authors construct different stories and readers make different cultural choices. But they tend to alter slowly, and the Australian nationalist tradition was one which had a powerful influence over Bruce and Pyke, one which they were not able, even had they been willing, to overthrow without rendering their works "un-Australian."

The Australian legend aside, the characters of Pyke and Bruce are also reflections of national priorities of physical strength, health, militarism and imperial loyalty. The Australian legend and the ideals of Australian citizenship (including its racial aspects) combined to create a framework within which the Australian type could be formulated; a boy who is tough, athletic, chivalrous, nationalist, imperially loyal, masculine and militaristic.<sup>5</sup> Gentle, intellectual and religious boys would have stood only a slight chance as the heroes of juvenile literature in the early twentieth century. Gentle, intellectual and religious Australian boys would have stood no chance at all. Such heroes were an impossibility. In the discursive economies of Australian nationalism such creatures simply did not exist, nor did they suit the perceived requirements of the Australian nation. Even if they had been thinkable, they certainly would not have been marketable. Even in the stories of Eustace Boylan and Ethel Turner, in which they attempt to show that religion

and social concern are not necessarily antithetical to manliness, attempts to reformulate the masculine actually end up reformulating religiosity and socialism. Boylan's hero, for example, is religious. But to be acceptable as a hero he has to come from the bush, display a keen enthusiasm for the school's sports, and fight for his country when the war comes.

## CONCLUSION

Clearly then, the trend in Australian public school fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to emphasise a more muscular manliness, and in doing so to shift from praising feminine qualities and influence to suppressing them. Humility, religious piety and academic excellence faded in importance and anything that might be seen as feminine came to be thought "not manly." The role of the mother was severely circumscribed and she was portrayed as a dangerous influence upon the character of a boy. Manliness was defined in increasingly rugged and muscular terms, and the feminine boy moved from hero to villain. These changes occurred despite the feminine authorship of some of the later stories which I have examined. This illustrates not only the limiting and oppressive aspects of the new manliness, but also the extremely limiting influence that the nationalist bush ethos and the perceived requirements of the new Australian nation had upon the possibilities for middle-class gender construction for both male and female. Glorification of rugged Australian masculinity in Australian children's literature thus involved, as an essential element, marginalisation of femininity as foreign to the Australian nation.

Such developments are also evident in other arenas for the construction and socialisation of young Australian males. Schooling focused more on the rugged and militaristic athlete than on the moral and religious scholar, boys' adventure stories promoted increasingly violent constructions of manliness ever more removed from the domestic realm, and youth groups tended away from religiously inspired, morally concerned and often anti-masculine "boy rescue" movements towards the more militaristic and overtly masculine Boy Scouts. Public school stories were just one of the cultural practices which sought to distance masculinity and femininity, but they did so with particular clarity, being particularly transparent cultural forms which say: "look this is how things should be, this is the proper, ideal pattern of social life" (Skorupski 1976, 84). An androgynous "mummy's boy," the 1870s hero was transformed into the muscular athlete and warrior of the 1920s.

## NOTES

- 1 It is difficult to assess exactly why there should be such a gap after Richardson's stories, and then such a flurry of public school stories in the 1910s, but I suggest three main reasons. The first is the rising profile of the public schools, evident in their growing number, increasing enrolments, and increasing public interest in events such as the Head of the River races, other public school sporting contests, and non-sporting ceremonies such as speech days. The second is the general rise in the demand for and production of Australian nationalist literature. Until the 1890s English public school stories would have been of as much, if not more, interest to

- Australian readers as Australian ones. I doubt this was the case after about 1900. And thirdly, the war, and in particular the Anzac experience, created legends about Australian masculinity which public school story authors could both further and exploit.
- 2 Richardson's other public school stories published in the 1870s were *The Boys of Springdale*; *Or, The Strength of Patience* (1875); *Our Junior Mathematical Master* (1876); *The Cold Shoulder*; *Or, A Half-Year at Craiglea* (1876); and *The Boys of Wlloughby School* (1877).
  - 3 The Billabong books published in the 1910s were *A Little Bush Maid* (1910); *Mates at Billabong* (1911); *Norah of Billabong* (1913); *From Billabong to London* (1915); *Jim and Wally* (1916); and *Captain Jim* (1919). Bruce also wrote a number of other non-Billabong stories in this decade, the two which concern me most here being *Dick* (1918) and *Dick Lester of Kurrajong* (1920).
  - 4 Pyke's fourth public school story for boys. *The Best School of All* (1921), falls just outside the time period of this study.
  - 5 For an interesting discussion of the way in which the bush legend was manipulated in some Australian children's literature in the war years to serve different ideological functions, see Walker, David. 1978. "War, Women and the Bush: The Novels of Mary Grant Brace and Ethel Turner". *Historical Studies* 18 (71): 297-315.

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