"UNSUSPICIOUS AND INNOCENT OF WRONG": READING THE MOUNT RENNIE OUTRAGE AS A ROMANCE OF VICTORIAN GENDER AND POLITICS

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The choice of the word "romance" to describe a violent crime against a woman may seem ill-advised or repugnant. Yet if one separates textual accounts of crimes in both secondary and primary sources from the actual experiences of those involved, "romance" may be a more appropriate definition than first thought. Generations of Australians have woven romantic narratives around a much-publicised pack rape, which captured public attention from the time that it was first reported to police in Sydney, New South Wales on 9 September 1886. The Mount Rennie Outrage, as the crime was commonly referred to by contemporary Sydney journalists, could in no way be defined as a "romance," yet public life in New South Wales over the period September 1886 to January 1887 was dominated by an extraordinary widespread obsession with, and commentary on, this crime committed by working-class youth on unkempt open space at the edge of urban Sydney. The Mount Rennie/Moore Park area was regarded during the mid 1880s, prior to the picturesque development and beautification of nearby Centennial Park by 1888, as a somewhat isolated wasteland.

Detailed narratives of sexual violence and crimes were freely circulated in the colonial Australian press in a textual voice that was more tabloid, racy and frank than that accepted from the late twentieth century Australian press. The openness of this press discourse confounds any *a priori* assumption of Victorian "prudery." Despite the frequent appearance of narratives of sexual violence in the Australian press, it could be argued that accounts of the Mount Rennie rape case, by their numerical frequency and the breadth of cultural cross references that are invoked in discussing the crime, achieved a singular level of cultural production which has far wider references than legal history. Press commentary was galvanised immediately, covering a range of subjects from protection of women, public law and order, the nature of colonial society, the rights of women to employment and mobility, and the morality of capital punishment—as four of the young men charged were hanged in January 1887.

The content of press reporting of the crime forms the subject of this essay. The *Bulletin* makes reference to the rape in editorials across more than a decade from 1886 to 1897, consistently using the case as a touchstone to female duplicity. A number of newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Globe*, the *Evening News*, and the *Echo* also frequently published detailed narratives describing the crime. In mid 1895 the *Australian Star* agitated for a re-opening of the case through a long series of feature articles, each one stretching a full page column or more.

The timing of this demand for a public inquiry was significant. It followed the revelations of the Royal Commission into the George Dean case, a sensational trial of

1895 involving a ferry captain's attempts to murder his wife. Demands for an investigation into the supposed miscarriage of justice in the Dean case were predicated greatly upon the same issues that were raised by agitation against the Mount Rennie trial and verdict: female mendicancy and sexual profligacy versus honest proletarian male protestations of innocence. The Dean case also rapidly attained a political dimension parallel to that of the Mount Rennie case in that radical elements in Sydney, notably certain early "Labor lawyers" and politicians, used it as a platform to demonstrate the disempowerment of working-class men in the colonial legal system. Moreover the social justice arguments in both the Mount Rennie and Dean cases were based upon sidestepping any rights or consideration of working-class women. However, alongside the political/class dimensions of the Mount Rennie case, an equally powerful series of concepts were under discussion: issues of gender identity and gendered behaviour, the appropriate demeanour of women, and the interaction of men and women both criminal and sweetly romantic. For historians tracing the nature and disposition of "romance" in nineteenth-century society, the ease with which the sentimental and the salacious were intermingled in the Mount Rennie case provides fascinating and unique evidence.

This press discourse generated by the Mount Rennie Outrage was multi-layered and complex, marked by richly emotional embroidery and detail which fully justifies the name "romantic." Previously I have examined the misogyny of the romantic political fabrications woven by left-wing Australian nationalists from the 1880s onwards ("Accept Any Woman's Word?"). Here I will concentrate also upon the more conventional romance of relations between the sexes, especially through newspaper commentaries. I wish to suggest that the Mount Rennie Outrage was written as a romance of Victorian perceptions of gender and "lady-like" sensibilities as understood in both elite and popular sites.

I wish to refer to recent scholarship, especially that of Judith Walkowitz upon the placement, impetus and use of popular narratives of sexual danger in late Victorian society. I will also refer to writings of Anna Clark who concentrates more on the early Victorian period, but raises interesting questions about the political and allegorical use of narratives of violence against women. Moreover Clark suggests how the assumptions and proscriptions regarding appropriate female sexual conduct constructed by these popular narratives continued throughout the later nineteenth century and even to the present day (*Women's Silence* 128-34).

Adrienne Munich's *Queen Victoria's Secrets* provides a lateral, but telling cross-reference to both the gender and political romances written around the Mount Rennie case. I suggest that not only does Munich's text present paradigms of gender and power in the nineteenth-century British empire that facilitate insight into the issues behind the Mount Rennie case and the sometimes harsh gender politics in early Australian republicanism and radicalism, but also that Australian evidence further underpins Munich's arguments about the misogynist anxieties that lurked within the British empire. Objections could be raised that the overall strategy of freely cross-referencing from the local detail of nineteenth-century Australian newspapers to the broad spectrum of recent Anglo-American scholarship, ironically perpetuates an imperial perspective

from the centre to the margins that ought to be superseded in writing upon Australia. My intentions are the opposite. I aim to focus attentively upon certain contradictions of the Australian condition by exposing the romantic hyperbole that essentialises a constructed and manipulated definition of the "inherently" Australian. This essentialist "Australian" identity has long been frequently defined primarily through its neat and clean demarcation from the "British." Therefore by-passing known and familiar perspectives of Australian academic literature is intended to provide a more lateral range of ideas with which Australian primary sources can resonate, without denying the insight and scholarly professionalism provided by the many Australian texts that remain unreferenced in this particular article. "Romance" aids this project at various levels, from defining familiar gender divisions in Victorian social behaviour to identifying the volatile emotive basis of the longstanding Australian cultural discourse that advocates the pro-nationalist, pro-republican vision of the *Bulletin*.

Discussing the Mount Rennie crime as a quasi-literary production in terms of the narrative content of reportage of the event also resonates with certain early discussions of the crime. Some commentators framed the story in its first appearance in the press as if the crime spoke of something familiar and known, a fixture of colonial experience. "Another story of gross outrage on a girl is published in the papers today. The details are horrible" (*Queenslander* 25 September 1886, New South Wales correspondent, written 11 September). Thus such rape cases could be regarded by both readers and writers as something familiar.

From abundant possibilities for quotation, I have chosen the most consciously stirring and provocative. Many newspaper articles betrayed the fantasy impetus behind press and popular perceptions of the Mount Rennie case throughout 1886-1887. As they are now unfamiliar and not in general scholarly circulation, I will quote one at length. The singular nature of these accounts, the language and incidents that were selected for public circulation, and the clarity of the gender constructions thus brought to the general reader of the day are best demonstrated by reproducing a substantial extract.

These narratives also demonstrate the rich information base provided by colonial Australian urban newspapers, informing perceptions of "Victorian" Australia. Such early newspapers, densely written, consciously high-flown and "literary" in narrative tone and vocabulary, present conflicting, shifting images of social and political mores, pluralist values and a remarkably cosmopolitan outlook. Events from Britain, Europe, America and more distant cultures were frequently and routinely discussed. These publications give the modern reader a different focus from the strongly nationalist image of nineteenth-century Australian experience that has progressively developed throughout twentieth-century scholarly usage. Discussing the Mount Rennie Outrage not only pinpoints an early scandal, but also highlights the range of material that remains underexplored in Australian historiography.

The victim, a domestic servant Mary Jane Hicks, undoubtedly captured public imagination. She was sixteen years old, an orphan educated at a convent school and a relative newcomer to Sydney. Her anonymity and lack of identifiable background made her a figure around whom romantic speculation could be unfolded. She was not marked

by her known behaviour—a working-class "widow," deserted wife or an older woman with a string of convictions for drunkenness, exposure etc—all of which were charges aimed at controlling/harassing visible prostitution in urban areas. Hicks's survival meant that the narrative was not foreclosed, as it had been previously when larrikin gangs killed their female victims in a number of violent rape cases that caused widespread anxiety in the early to mid-1880s in Sydney. Hicks also captured public attention as she stood as perpetual reminder of her own narrative. Especially if she were constructed as girlish innocent, her survival brought public speculation inexorably to the nature of the crime. She was reassuring proof of masculine sexual potency and the inevitability of feminine vulnerability/submission.

The romantic and fantasy elements of gender identities as promulgated through the public perceptions of the era were developed particularly in the Sydney newspapers the Globe and the Evening News. The accounts in these two papers invoke a fanciful, detailed and emotive narrative of female innocence and its eventual betrayal. These accounts are clearly meant to be vicariously arousing, and are almost pornographic despite their public circulation.

Mary Jane Hicks's "normalcy" and "decency" were carefully emphasised. For example, in the description of Hicks quoted below, a paradigm of ideal womanhood was built up, only to be destroyed for the public's pleasure as the crime unfolded. Women were dependent, passive and virtuous. They were more at home in the cloisters than everyday life, but—alas—forced to fend for themselves in the outside world. Life itself was already a rape, an outrage, as the "true" woman had been taught to be innocent, unsuspicious of wrong and dependent on men. However men, in turn, had license to be far different to how women expected them to be. Then the journalist dwelt upon details of the attack. Fables and fairy tales such as Little Red Riding Hood, with its image of the predatory wolf prowling after female virtue, were invoked. Highlighting the predetermined, literary character of the Mount Rennie narrative, the writer even defined the rape as "a story that is too well known." Despite the rhetoric of applauding female virtue and innocence, nature (and the shape of the narrative interest) was firmly on the side of the villains. After all, their "brutality" was "born of desire" and they easily succeeded in overpowering Hicks, whose "dreadful fate" and even her identity were predicated upon her being sensitive and susceptible, "unsuspicious and innocent of wrong." A woman was most demonstrably a perfect woman when she displayed more delicacy and refinement than base natural instincts, yet remained unable to fight back. Policing and mapping this divide of "swaggering masculinity" from "vulnerable femininity" has been identified as the purpose of certain mainstream genre images in Victorian visual art (Tracy 284-85).

In the words of the *Evening News*:

> Mary Jane Hicks is an orphan, and, left without natural protectors at an early age, was brought up in the R.C. orphanage at Bathurst. Educated by the virtuous women of that institution, what should she know of the ways of this wicked world. Unsuspicious and innocent of wrong, she was trusting of humanity, and had no thought that wrong

> would be done to her by those whom she had been taught to look upon as the champions of womanhood and the guardians of virtue, and was she to know that in this great city ruffians, to whom virtue is unknown, are to be found; did she dream that the wolf with hungry eye looked upon the lamb that was destined to become his prey. Her intention was to obtain honest labour, that with her own hands she might earn the wherewithal to live honestly and prudently.
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> She went to the dreadful fate which met her. Passing through the bush this scheming villain suggested that she should rest while he plucked flowers for her. She sat beneath a tree and he left her—first throwing a handful of flowers in her lap—to inform his comrades that a victim awaited them. In a few minutes he returned and attempted to assault her. With a brutality born of desire, he threw her on the ground, and attempted to accomplish his purpose.
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> But help was at hand. Stanley the one man in that company of savages, rushed to her assistance. But he was one—a man amid a gathering crowd of brutes. They attacked him, sticks were used to belabour him, stones were hurled and knives drawn and flourished. He was beaten to the earth and forced to fly for his life, leaving the girl to the tender mercies of ruffians to whose ears the word mercy conveys no meaning till it is used in the effort to shield them from the consequences of their act.
>
> Why dwell upon the sequel, why tell again a story that is too well known. Stanley gone, the girl was in the hands of her persecutors. She was not a willing victim. Her clothes were torn from her body, and while two of the ruffians held her, a third sated his appetite. The act was repeated until nature in the unequal struggle sent insensibility to the tortured girl. While she lay there dazed and senseless the lustful riot continued, until the last beast in human form had gratified his passion she was detained there. She recovered her senses, and was walking away aimlessly when four others came up and she was compelled to submit to their desires. Her money, a trifle, was stolen from her during the progress of the assault, and Hill, (the most recently reprieved) gave her, out of the liberality of his flowing heart, one shilling to liquidate his liability. She was allowed to stand for a little time, and the cry of "police" decided her assailants upon beating a precipitate retreat. (*Evening News* 7 January 1887)

Other examples of florid prose include the *Globe,* a Sydney paper aimed primarily at a working-class audience, which contributed such details as: "Like wild beasts they tore her clothing from her body, and it was only when a party of police was descried in the distance that the unfortunate victim was left half dead" (11 September 1886). The eminently respectable *Daily Telegraph* (at this date not a tabloid) contributed: "She

screamed aloud for aid, but heedless of her resistance or her appeals for pity, they threw her down and some of them criminally assaulted her whilst others held her firmly on the ground. At about this time a respectable working man was attracted by this disturbance. On going to the spot he bravely tried to rescue the girl, but her assailants with characteristic cowardice beat him back with sticks and other missiles" (11 September 1886).

One notices that whilst animalistic behaviour represented a tacit essentialism in the male, press accounts of the Mount Rennie Outrage also held up an ideal of different masculine behaviours: the laws of chivalry. Such romantic systems of male behaviour on occasion were attributed to certain working-class subjects in local Australian settings. Note the key distinguishing factor of "man" versus "brute" or "wild animal." The presiding judge at the trial commended Stanley, the man who tried to rescue Hicks, as "the only man who had shown a proper spirit of manliness" (*Daily Telegraph* 29 November 1886). Once, mourned the *Evening News*, in the vanished "days of chivalry" men were ready to lay down their lives to preserve the honour of their women" (29 December 1886). Not everyone believed in Camelot however: the Melbourne newspaper *Table Talk* regarded the Mount Rennie Outrage as a medieval throw-back, incompatible with modern "civilisation." For *Table Talk*, the Mount Rennie rape was a recollection of "the worst horrors of a city given up to be sacked by drunken and licentious soldiery in the middle ages . . . it brings to our door the worst humiliation of the dark ages" (24 December 1886).

That this florid, sensuous narrative was not the inevitable way in which colonial Australians imaged rape can be seen by examining another case. The Mount Rennie Outrage was first discussed in the newspapers with another case, headlined by the *Daily Telegraph* as "Another and Similar Case." "The details," it claimed, "are not quite so shocking as the Moore Park Case, but they are repulsive enough" (11 September 1886). Nellie Cavanagh reported to police that she was raped on the same day as Hicks in Sydney during the evening. The committal hearing before a magistrate was opened on 17 September—on the very same day and in the same court where the Mount Rennie charges were first heard. However, Cavanagh did not present such an appealing figure for speculation as did Hicks and her case proceeded no further. The *Evening News* noted that Cavanagh was "a girl of about seventeen years old and very self-possessed demeanour." Even worse, she lived "with a young man" and had been newly discharged from hospital following treatment for venereal disease. After two days of reviewing the evidence, the magistrate "did not think, taking into consideration the number of falsehoods palpably told by the prosecutrix, that he would be justified in sending the accused to trial" (17, 18 September 1886).

Conversely, details of the evidence in the Mount Rennie trial merely served to underline Hicks's status as a public paradigm. She had been waylaid when looking for work and lured further away from populated sites by an invitation from members of a criminal gang posing as helpful strangers to look for "nicer flowers" deeper in the bush. Possibly the flower-picking episode, which provided the most obvious overlap with popular Victorian images of romance and courtship in visual arts, literature and music,

helped catalyse widespread public interest in the rape case. Flower picking was seen as crucial and causative to public understanding of the crime, and shaped the characteristic narratives presented in the press. That flower picking was seen as an essentially female activity, and one that any young woman would gladly take part in, provided an alibi, so to speak, as to why a girl, imaged as innocent and respectable, could be lured and trapped by unscrupulous men. Moreover, the criminal status of the defendants appears to have been further proven for their contemporaries by their underhand manipulation of courtship and romantic narratives. The presiding Judge William Windeyer made specific reference to flower picking in his summing-up speech as reported in the newspapers, allowing some insight into how highly symbolically charged this simple action was:

> She was taken in the direction of a house, and then in another, upon a suggestion that she should go and pick flowers. This man no doubt in that way obtained her confidence, and she expected that he had no motive; but after they had been picking flowers for some time, at the young man's suggestion, they sat down, and the man attempted to assault her. (*Daily Telegraph* 29 November 1886)

During the trial a cast-off glove and scattered, wilted flowers from the bouquet that she had been gathering were brought into to court as official exhibits. Consciously or unconsciously, the prosecution invoked symbols that were used widely in the visual arts at the time. The most famous example of the discarded glove is that lying at the feet of the adulterous couple in Holman Hunt's *Awakening Conscience* (1854), suggesting that the woman bought for pleasure could be all-too easily cast aside. Flowers not only suggested defloration in their wilted, trampled state, but as scholars have noted they functioned as a type of Ruskinian shorthand for the essential nature of the "lady" (Nunn 29-30). Indeed in the context of Victorian scholarship, the Mount Rennie outrage serves to document how far conventional symbolism of courtship and romance could be refracted into a different and distorted context, yet still maintain much of its familiar meaning.

Australian radicals and bohemians consciously argued against this image of flowerlike innocence in favour of a model of knowing, vindictive worldly women consciously using their sexuality to manipulate men (*Bulletin* 25 April 1896). Women were not only in control of the images that they projected but also of men's reaction to expected female identities and behaviours. Radicals emphasised the sexual, knowing qualities of young girls, especially of the working-classes—despite the fact they were keen to paint themselves as friends/advocates of the "people" rather than the elite. Jules Francoise Archibald in particular consistently circulated, under the guise of "realism," an image of womanhood that embodied a self-serving sexual fantasy. His construction of female sexuality centred upon pliant, available, yet duplicitous women, simultaneously denying the conservatives' idealisation of women.

For this reason, the Bulletin urged New South Wales to adopt a Contagious Disease Act, as in Queensland and Tasmania: what was "the risk of destroying the

reputation of an innocent woman now and again" in comparison to "the future welfare of the nation's children?" (22 January 1887). Another public figure who articulated the same vision of female sexual behaviour was the Sydney politician—with impeccable connections to artistic and bohemian circles in both London and Sydney—Bernhard Ringrose Wise. His discourse particularly coloured legislative moves to raise the age of consent, an issue as intensely debated in Australia as in Britain in the late nineteenth century. Wise told lurid tales—both sexually figured, yet supposedly analytical and scientific in intent—about working-class girls who gave their favours away freely to friends and family (Finch 92). In discussing another rape case A.G. Stephens of the *Bulletin* emphasised how the victim judiciously removed more flamboyant trimming from her hat before being called to give evidence (A.G. Stephens n.p). Again the issues at stake were not so much a working model of "reality" as perception, stereotypes and sensibilities—and (thus I would argue) are eminently romantic. Radicals saw themselves as superior to or more incisive than gullible conservatives, including first-wave feminists, who deluded themselves with fantasies of female innocence (Peers "Accept Any Women's Word?" 133).

The "romance" of Mount Rennie preserved in both scholarly and popular Australian consciousness from the 1880s onwards, is that spun by the celebrated *Bulletin*. This radical, reformist and deeply self-conscious newspaper wrote a nationalist political romance that has proved deeply influential in Australian culture, substantially dictating how later generations have interpreted the crime. Moreover, the figure of the working-class white male has always carried a strong romantic fervour in Australia. Indeed for later generations, Mary Jane Hicks is dismissed as a liar whilst the male becomes a symbol replete with innocence and spiritual significance. This image of the "sorely tried" working-class male as seer and suffering innocent has illuminated Australian culture in later periods (Peers 135-37, 140-41; Jolly 51-54; Walker 133-41).[1] Ironically, even as this vision is characterised in terms of an Australian "truth"—that is a political realism of class, economics and "clean" Marxian dialectics, or even the ribald anti-authoritarianism of the Australian "larrikin"—the image of the working-class man as simultaneously criminal and visionary "artist" can be named as a fantasy informed by the elitism of aestheticism and bohemianism. Aestheticising the criminal as artist-*auteur* "implies the Sadean claim that freedom and sovereignty are achieved by enacting crimes of 'inconceivable' imagination; that to the 'man of genius [is] reserved the honour of shattering all the links and shackles' of constraining convention" (Lenore Stephens 22).

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[1] With the recent Australian film *Blackrock* (dir. Nick Enright 1997), the association of troubled male innocence and the crime of rape (with the implicit erasure of the female victim) is upheld, as well as the focus on "traditional" Australian male values in the context of a gang rape case. The case upon which this film was based ended—like many nineteenth-century Australian gang rapes—in murder. In "Accept Any Woman's Word?" and "The Tribe of Mary Jane Hicks," I have suggested that the Australian tendency to concentrate on justice and punishment issues in relation to the Mount Rennie case turns a strange and troubled mirror on Australian cultural pre-conceptions. Compare Lenore Stephens's discussion on Jack the Ripper which highlights the multiple means by which "Victorian" crimes, still police social and gender boundaries today. Present-day Australian fascination with or aestheticisation of the Gatton (Qld.) rapes and murders (1897) also bears scholarly investigation.

That this masculine emphasis in the narratives of sexual crime could reflect localised Australian patterns of cultural mythmaking can be seen by cross-referencing to the work of British academic Anna Clark, who has traced left-wing political uses of narratives of rape and seduction. Such narratives centred upon predatory upper-class men and outraged women in the nineteenth century. However, this frequently told tale was to some degree a romantic fabrication. Evidence suggests that women were as likely to be violated by class peers as by men of higher classes (Clark "Politics" 56-58; *Women's Silence* 129). Both the British myth of the predatory squire and the Australian myth of the "innocent" male betrayed by the voracious female exculpated working-class men's sexual behaviour.

In 1886-1887 there was originally some left-wing advocacy of Hicks's innocence, social obscurity and subsequent powerlessness, from which position the vulnerability of working-class women generally to random attacks was by implication also under discussion. Amongst such comments was a letter to the editor of the *Evening News* by one John Bridge. He believed that arguments for clemency towards the rapists reflected Hicks's working-class status. Not until "the daughter, sister or wife of one of our leading men" were attacked, would there be effective prosecution of rape (31 December 1886). However, this pro-woman interpretation has not survived as the dominant and accepted construction. Prior to feminist interventions, the crime has mostly been discussed in terms of unjust imprisonment of working-class males and the morality of capital punishment. In its most extreme permutations, the Mount Rennie crime has embodied Australian republican discourses, in that the victim, the judiciary and the government were seen to be symbols or agents of British control and influence over Australia. Therefore innocent Australian men were seen as "suffering" under "foreign," that is, British law.

Romance interweaves with the political in the—at first—unlikely vision of Mary Jane Hicks as symbol of British power. The melding of discourses of colonial political hierarchies with the gendered story of the innocent male betrayed by female lies is enabled by romanticising the libertarian power and promise of uncurbed male sexual self-expression. A series of linked issues around sexuality—the justness and inevitability of male sexual potency, the masculine "right" to sexual autonomy, and sexual perversion as a cornerstone to female personality (for the *Bulletin's* continual catchcry was that women "enjoyed" violent sexual contact and cried "rape" afterwards [7 January 1888])—were politicised by the *Bulletin*. The *Bulletin*'s commentaries on the Mount Rennie case formed part of a consistent corpus of references to various late-nineteenth-century Australian sexual crimes. Routinely, such crimes were spun out to have political resonances, frequently in terms of issues such as feminism, female suffrage and the age of consent. The *Bulletin* used this political/sexual nexus as a site for promulgating arguments about systematic injustices in colonial Australian society: "The fact is that in the Mount Rennie case, 'the Push' were lynched by 'good society' and its organs the newspapers" (5 December 1896).

Yet these issues of gender power and contestation were informed equally by the wider anxiety of the relationship between Australia and Britain—that maternal romance

gone so wrong. In the wake of Adrienne Munich's extraordinary, thought-provoking *Queen Victoria's Secrets*, Archibald's stance becomes less surprising or perverse. Munich's text raises issues about Queen Victoria, imperialism, and female assertiveness in nineteenth-century society (together with Queen Victoria as a *de facto* icon for feminism), that allows consideration of the complex articulation of Archibald's personal obsessions. Tracing the multiple and contradictory symbolic identities of the queen held by her subjects during her reign, suggests means by which Archibald's radical political agendas, including judicial reform or Australian republicanism, became interwoven with his erotic fantasies and an apparent fear of female domination.

Whereas conservative sources, from the trial judge and the respectable Sydney Morning Herald to the sensational tabloids such as the Evening News and the Globe, all firmly subscribed to belief in Hicks as "outraged" maid—the despoiled innocent girl, over whom tears could be shed—political radicals such as Archibald's *Bulletin*, John Norton's notorious *Truth* newspaper and the *Australian Star* constructed Hicks as a transcendent, polymorphous female dominatrix, a vision of womanhood far beyond the agency of a teenage female orphan who worked as a nursemaid. Surely this vision of womanhood is akin to the recondite sexualised readings traced by Munich (156-86) of Queen Victoria, especially the idea of Victoria as a massive goddess-mother figure who foreclosed on the autonomy of her imperial sons (197-210; cf. David 197). Only the grotesque and vast maternal bulk of this particular symbolic Victoria, traced by Munich, would need a gang of twenty or more men to subdue her. The *Bulletin*'s governing female dominatrix foreclosed on masculine identity as independent citizen by threatening to send men to prison or the gallows. In political terms Australian men were beholden to an overbearing female figure in that duty demanded that their ultimate loyalties were due to Britannia, the motherland and Queen Victoria. Thus a colonial governor who refused to countenance demands from Sydney radicals to free the Mount Rennie rapists was seen by the *Bulletin* to fail in the great test of proving whether he was a "man or a mouse" (6 February 1888). Imperial sycophancy emasculated Australian male citizens.

For Archibald, Hicks was centrally implicated in the structures of power and aligned with the establishment. The following extract also exemplifies the vindictive rhetoric that he invoked against Hicks, and women *per se*, over nearly twenty years of journalism. Twentieth-century Australian scholarship has generally been wary of confronting or critiquing Archibald's misogynist prose in any detail, some suggesting in fact that these passages were intended to be humorous, but a fair case could be made for suggesting that they betray elements of unstable, certainly bizarre, viewpoints:

> Let us not hear in future of charming young ladies, who, with the assistance of brutal laws, brainless governors, and degraded juries, bred in a colony with a convict past, manage to secure the hanging of a batch of babies, after criminal trials so disgracefully conducted that they should make men hesitate to call themselves Australians. . . . Let us not again hear of a crowd of well-dressed noodles gathering at

> government house, and by their advocacy of the cause of Miss MARY JANE HICKS, putting their wives, their sisters, their daughters, their mothers—presumably virtuous women—upon the same level as the professional prostitute. (7 January 1888)

The issues of sex and class are not to be taken at face value here. Through his ironic description of Hicks as a "charming young lady," Archibald promotes the very conflation of respectable woman and prostitute that he claims to decry. Indeed like all nineteenth-century bohemians, he is deeply implicated in the very system he seeks to affront or transgress. The editorial sizzles with the forbidden erotic frisson of erasing the demarcation of good and bad women. Again one suspects the audience for these editorials are upper-middle-class male rebels seeking to transcend the curbing, confining influence of female social relations.

Although Munich's scholarly *tour de force* is unmistakably a late-twentieth-century text, in its lateral thinking, its striking symbolic leaps, its preference for anomaly and irony ahead of Marxian dialectics, and its post-modernist investigation into the pluralism and mutability of stories, the ideas that she discusses were not entirely alien to nineteenth-century Australians. Most remarkable is Archibald's long editorial in which Queen Victoria and Mary Jane Hicks, if not entirely conflated, were imaged as close partners, when the *Bulletin* declared that the Mount Rennie rapists were the ghosts at the feast of imperial celebration to mark the centennial of settlement in New South Wales and the unveiling of John Edgar Boehm's statue of the Queen in Sydney. Here not only were the rapists "victims" of Mary Jane Hicks's calculating duplicity and shifting notions of acceptable sexual practises, but "victims" of Victoria and the system over which she presided (4 February 1888). Archibald's vision of the Mount Rennie rape case as an expression of an authoritarian political system and as a demonstration of the cruel injustice imposed upon Australia by colonial authorities through governor generals, vicious judiciary and the elite classes of local colonial society, rather than as a violent sexual attack upon an actual woman found its ultimate expression in a series of unpublished drafts for an essay "An Appeal to Caesar," now held with Archibald's papers in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. Both Mary Jane Hicks or Queen Victoria were absent; female power over men either as constitutional monarch or unfair complainant was thereby exorcised. For Archibald, the rape case here outlined the shape of British domination over Australia.

Archibald frequently imaged woman as inherently conservative—from her intense religiosity to the ease by which she may be "bought," from her tendency to "scab" by undercutting the male worker to her hysterical adoration of the royal family. This range of female aberrances were imaged in an intensely political context: "The Tories are anxious to extend the franchise to women, to put her on a footing equal in every respect to men, yet they hang seventeen year old boys for alleged rape, while they pardon women for the commission of calculating, cruel and Wainwrightish murders" (1 October 1887). This natural linking of women and the British crown was not only Archibald's obsession; nineteenth-century Australian feminists used the example of

Queen Victoria's high reputation to justify the entrance of women into the political arena. They particularly invoked the vein of imagery that presented the British empire as family under the wise rule of the mother-queen to assert first-wave feminist values into public life (Irving). A subterranean vein of Australian republicanism imaged Australian independence as the struggles of adolescent youth to free himself from a repressive, all-powerful mother, predicated upon the *a priori* belief in women as conservative and also in Australian women's supposedly sycophantic adoration of British royalty. In this context, ideas still persist about the inherently gendered and familial nature of the British-Australian link, invoked satirically by a feminist academic: "Is this latest call for republicanism based on a revolt from the femaleness of Britannia? Again the British monarch is female, apparently indefinitely; she can ill afford to hand over the reign to a son who is unable to rule in his own home" (Bullbeck 91).

In the 1880s and 1890s, however, romance was not to be found in the proletarian status of the imprisoned men as political martyrs and oppressed heroes, but in hinting that the protagonists belonged to the elite classes. John Norton in the *Truth* denied that there was a "blue blood" amongst the imprisoned men (28 November 1897), but rumours were rife in Sydney and formal notices denying connections between the rapists and prominent families were published in several newspapers. Yet these rumours clearly persisted and Archibald even claimed that one was an illegitimate connection of a "rich Sydney Family" and the other a nephew of a cabinet minister and cousin of a high official in the civil service (4 February 1888). This image seems redolent of Dickens's *Dombey and Son* in suggesting that prosperous respectable families had shadowy parallels in less stable circles of society.

At the date of the crime romance wove a tale of innocent, upright boyhood for the rapists. The *Globe* wrote an imaginative New Year's Day essay about the incoming year (1887) flying over Sydney and stopping to view various human activities. At Darlinghurst Jail, 1887 watched a youth "lying under the ban of a dread law":

> He has been dreaming of boyhood's games. 'Twas only yesterday he shouted and joyed with his companions on the cricket-field, but what a measureless chasm between the Then and the Now! . . . He fancies he hears the cry of "Over!" and makes a movement to take another position on the field. He is deluded for only a second. He lifts his leg; it is held in an awful embrace of iron . . . he hears the clank of the irons blend with the chiming of the bells . . . a half uttered prayer "My God! my God!" causes the warder on watch to take a noiseless step from the corner where he has been reading by the dim gas-jet. "Can I do anything for you?" he murmurs in accents chastened with pity. "Nothing. My last New Year," comes the muffled reply. For it is the cell of the condemned. (1 January 1887)

An image of innocent childhood, the "then and now" or "look on this picture and on this," was used here to accentuate the horrors and hopelessness of imprisonment, suggesting yet another means by which romantic fancy could employ themes of crime

and punishment. The childhood normalcy represented here could also serve to normalise the protagonists' violence as acceptable within a gamut of sexual behaviour, a stance suggested in the late nineteenth century by the statements of Wise and Archibald.

Hicks was moved across the classes for the sake of making her a more attractive and pleasing victim. She was described as looking more like a nursery governess than a servant. She appeared to have much intelligence and displayed "no small powers in a young girl without any pretensions to intellectual training" (*Globe* 24 November 1886). Hicks was clearly read as a lady in spirit and character. The shape of the narrative was constantly informed by the assumption of Hicks's "innocence," which added piquancy through the drawn-out prelude of near-danger and near-successful rescue. Hicks's innocence was articulated in the manner in which she was betrayed by her vulnerability in trusting the young men and strangers who suggested that she pick flowers with them. Even at the same time as the *lady*'s a-sexuality was emphasised and affirmed, there was a discreet fascination in branding the capacity to suffer onto such paragons. True nobility in womanhood was predicated upon suffering and sacrifice. Women were "educated 'not for self development but for self renunciation' and for 'wifely subjection'" as Ruskin attested (qtd Sangari 721). As noted above, the flowers that Hicks gathered with the young men who would later attack her can be read in colonial newspaper accounts as a touchstone to a particular type of womanhood: gentle, dependent, submissive.

One could also suggest that the Mount Rennie Outrage was an antipodean expression of the tensions and forces identified by Walkowitz in *City of Dreadful Delight* which ensured the circulation of sensational sexual narratives in Britain during the 1880s (5-7, 10-13, 24-30). There was increasing mass literacy and new forms of popular urban literature were developing to meet the needs and desires of the reading public (96). At least two scandals discussed by Walkowitz—Stead's sensational press campaign the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" and the Jack the Ripper crimes—were known in Australia and faithfully followed by the press. Walkowitz suggests that these sexual scandals followed established melodramatic tropes which were already familiar to working-class audiences (85-87). The plot of melodrama depended upon a working-class, naive, virtuous, but endangered heroine (rescued in the theatre but less often in real life), exposed to threats from upper-class villains. This translated into perceptions of "real life" scandals through figures such as Jack the Ripper, often believed at the time to be a "gentleman," or the wealthy clients of brothels who purchased working-class virgins from procuresses. Melodrama encompassed an outlet for feelings of disempowerment—for in the theatre the upper-class male must reap the consequences of his actions—and for protest against the sexual mistreatment of lower-class women.

The passive innocence of the romantic heroine of humble origins—the deserving working-class maid—is also highly charged in broader political discourses as well as in terms of melodrama's expected theatrical/entertainment context (Clark "Politics" 58, Walkowitz 102-05, 119-20). It has earlier been argued that whilst this equation of the vulnerable status of working-class protagonists in the face of power imbalances, with

the threatened, working-class, yet genteel, maid of popular fancy, was felt and understood in 1880s Australia, such sentiments have not been expressed by subsequent generations of Australians, who at best ignored Hicks or frequently actively reviled her in recounting the crime. Archibald's identification of Mary Jane Hicks as a prostitute has no secure archival foundation and relates to well-known paradigms through which nineteenth-century working-class women were judged. The passivity of the melodrama heroine could symbolise working-class perceptions of powerlessness. It could also be symptomatic of a desire to ennoble working-class women, because the capacity to suffer became for the Victorians a signifier of innate respectable womanhood and delicacy (Tracy 280-81, 284-85, David 58-59, 63-64).

The question was not only the equation of female passivity with a superior tone of character. Clark suggests that as well as economic and employment rights, working-class Victorian radicals (with the exception of Owenite socialists) claimed the social and familial privileges of the Victorian middle-class patriarch ("Politics" 62, *Struggle* 267-68). Therefore a passive working-class woman also inferred the presence of an active autonomous—non-oppressed—working-class man. Gender was a card that nineteenth-century radicals played to demonstrate the manliness of working-class males, thereby proving their suitability and worthiness to enter the political arena. Against the deserving working-class male as citizen could be placed the non-citizens, women of all classes, whose proper sphere was domesticity. The acceptance of this gender division in radical circles is symptomatic of two contradictory movements. In the name of social stability, the upper-classes had an interest in encouraging the extension of patriarchal structures into lower-class life. Working-class political bodies consciously absorbed middle-class social values to ensure the support of radical sympathisers from higher-class levels (Clark *Struggle* 268-69). A passive "virtuous" woman could thus be read as a deeply political symbol in both working- and middle-class contexts, rather than as alien to radical and citizenship discourse, as is frequently assumed in the twentieth century. Considering both the historiography of the Mount Rennie case and the influence of the Bulletin in light of Australian cultural identity arguments, again the subtle, multiple and contradictory layers of nineteenth-century arguments serve to identify the strong romantic-bohemian impetus in Australian twentieth-century historians' stronger focus upon the working-class male as an innocent sufferer.

The somewhat forgotten political resonances of the "respectable" woman, as understood in Victorian popular and lower-class sources, also expose the emotive fantasy of romanticising the "unruly" working classes in secondary sources and critiques of Victorian sexual and social mores. Without further analysis, this idealisation of nineteenth-century working-class sexuality as a harbinger of twentieth-century "freedom" has a particular Australian inflection in the work of Lyn Finch. Ironically, at the very point that the "libertarian" twentieth-century discourse seeks to reveal or prove its distance from "Victorianism," it betrays its deep debt to notions of decadence and aesthetic superiority (with its unspoken class privileges and identifications) that are intensely Victorian in terms of the late-nineteenth-century bohemian male's placement

of himself outside of society[2]—and deeply romantic, through Victorian understandings of French romantic theorists such as Gautier and Baudelaire. Conversely, "melodrama claimed morality as a working-class prerogative" (Clark "Politics" 52).

With Australia mirroring the patterns of expanding readership in Britain, press discussion of the Mount Rennie Outrage partly conformed to melodramatic patterns. Hicks was imaged as passive, endangered, yet working-class, in popular papers such as the *Evening News* or the *Globe*. Hicks's particular—and positive—relationship to the interests of the working class was emphasised when she was described as a "daughter of the people" by Judge William Windeyer in his sentencing speech, suggesting that she was a symbolic and exemplary figure:

> Outrages such as that of which the prisoners had been found guilty, were not committed upon the children of the rich who went about under protection of servants, but upon the daughters of people, who in pursuit of their honest avocations were compelled to go about, exposed to such outrages as had been committed in the present case. (*Argus* 29 November 1886)

Compare:

> Outrages such as this are not committed on the children of the rich, the surroundings of whose lives give them protection, but upon the daughters of the people, who in the pursuit of their honest avocations are compelled to go about alone, exposed to the attacks of such gangs of ruffians who choose to assault them . . . our pity must be reserved for the homes that are desolated and the victims who are wrecked for life by outrages such as these. (*Sydney Morning Herald* 29 November 1886)

The rape was described as "a terrible outrage against this girl and our humanity" (*Daily Telegraph* 14 September 1886). The same article demanded that the "mothers and fathers of the thousands of unprotected girls, whose calling is such that they have not the protection, that others possess" clamour for an effective punishment of rapists. Both admirably virtuous/genteel and working-class, Hicks is the archetypal melodrama heroine-victim. The "Waterloo Push," the gang named after the purlieu where they were dominant, as working-class men were not the archetypal melodrama villains, (traditionally imaged as upper-class). The melodrama analogy breaks down here, unless the rumours linking the gang to Sydney's elite can be seen as a faint refraction from the melodramatic trope.

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[2] At this point one should recall the discourse that casts Jack the Ripper as an avant garde hero, and the idea that the criminal and the master detective are both supreme (and pendanted) examples of the male intellect in action (Lenore Stephens 18-24). One could note "Jack's" appearance in Alban Berg's opera *Lulu*, for example.

It must not be overlooked that the image of Hicks as the "honest daughter of the people," as circulated by the judge and the newspapers is a patronising, patriarchal construction of a deserving and docile under class that gratified upper- and middle-class observers. Yet social and cultural fantasies of late-twentieth-century intellectuals equally obscure the degree of agency that certain working-class audiences constructed for themselves through romantic and melodramatic discourses. Of course these images of working-class female purity existed simultaneously with the familiar narrative trope whereby all working-class women were read as insistently and essentially sexually active by the superior classes (cf. Lenore Stephens 27-28). As I have mentioned earlier, nineteenth-century Australian radical theorists and politicians upheld these views as assiduously as conservatives:

> The *Bulletin* does not say that any and every woman however degraded, is not entitled to physical protection, but its holds that every woman who desires the full protection and avengement awarded by the law to female innocence must comport herself as a pure woman, and not invite attention by the tricks of the wanton. (18 February 1888)

One specific popular British narrative of florid sexual romance can be linked to the Mount Rennie rape. The Sydney trial overlapped the opening of an equally sensational trial in London in 1886 and, via the agency of international cable services, accounts of both trials appeared simultaneously in the Australian press. Lady Colin Campbell's divorce trial in late November 1886 presented a threatening narrative of the implicit prodigiousness of feminine sexual desire as voracious and polyandrous. Advocates of the imprisoned men threw precisely the same accusations at Hicks. The Campbell case was a London society divorce, but was widely reported, even in Australia. The divorce was memorable not so much for the detail of high-society scandal, but for the manner in which class-based distinctions of female character and sexual behaviour became disturbingly blurred for a Victorian audience. As the *Standard* newspaper in London proclaimed: "Lady Colin has not shown that her life was ordered on the lines which a woman in her position was bound to follow" (qtd Fleming 43). Cross-examination revealed that Lady Colin Campbell smoked cigarettes, went about alone, often using public hansom cabs and was visited by men who were not her close relatives, frequently without supervision of other respectable women and class peers (Fleming 41, 147, 150, 187). The Campbell divorce prompted widespread discourse and speculation upon the issue of "feminine desire." If the defence emphasised Gertrude Campbell's promiscuity in order to exonerate her husband, accused of mistreating her, then this argument raised the disturbing possibility that promiscuity (and therefore an unlady-like interest in sexual pleasure) could make itself apparent in women beyond the working classes.

The Mount Rennie and Colin Campbell cases were often typeset in proximity in Australian newspapers. Articles on the divorce case, referred to by the *Evening News* as "The Scandal of the Century," appeared in the Australian press concurrently with the Mount Rennie case, reinforcing the topicality of the "woman question" during the

period. Even in rural Victoria, the stories were run in close proximity on one page in small country papers like the *Colac Reformer* ("News By Cable" and "The Mount Rennie Outrage Nine of the Prisoners Sentenced to Death" *Colac Reformer* 30 November 1886). The *Bulletin* consciously linked Mount Rennie and the Campbell Divorce in their attack upon the muckraking tendencies of the popular press. In a cartoon, staff of the *Evening News* and the *Globe* are picking up scraps of paper from a rubbish bin along with sundry dead rats and cats (8 January 1887). Most of the sheets are labelled in general terms—"a family quarrel," "divorce," "a beautiful outrage" [that is rape]—however, one sheet is inscribed "Colin Campbell Case Special From . . ." and another is labelled "Reasons why the Mount Rennie Convicts should be Hung." A *Bulletin* editorial described the Campbell Divorce case as "simply the most revolting details of a filthy law suit shipped from England, *specially telegraphed* from Adelaide in all its disgusting nakedness" and slated the rival *Evening News* for further circulating the details of the case to girls and women in particular (8 January 1887). Articles on Mount Rennie are found in columns to the left and right of this discussion of the Campbell Divorce followed up by the *Bulletin's* denunciation of the *Evening News*. Considering that the *Bulletin* conflated respectable women and prostitutes consciously and consistently, and regarded all women as unreliable and deeply sexually perverted, it seems surprising that it defended the respectable family on this occasion.

With the Campbell divorce, Australian and British realities mirrored each other closely within an almost simultaneous timeframe. Furthermore, the fact that female transgressions could be traced from continent to continent and from class to class seems to have added urgent impetus to the almost apocalyptic fervour with which Archibald imaged female venery and falsehood. A female vindictiveness that transcended class conflict was emphasised by Archibald when the *Bulletin* linked the Australian working-class larrikins of Mount Rennie and the British nobleman Sir Charles Dilke, whose career was shattered in another sensational late-Victorian divorce case, as parallel victims of female lies (15 January 1887). The passage was printed the week after the Mount Rennie executions and the mention of choking "with a halter" emphasises the cross reference:

> The news is welcome here to those who have all along viewed the case as one in which a gifted and accomplished statesman has been made the victim of machinations or exigencies of a woman driven to desperation by causes that have yet to be explained. . . . Sir Charles Dilke is by no means the only man who has suffered from the inexplicable inventiveness of the other sex. When a woman once begins to lie touching matters of the sort in question, she displays such wonderful skill in fabricating the smallest details of her story, in fitting these together, and in throwing over the whole an aspect of *vraissemblence*, as to deceive the acutest masculine minds . . . Many a man's life has been blasted and many a man's life has been choked out

> of him with a halter through stories emanating from the astounding inventiveness of the female mind. (18 January 1887)

The rapid translation of an individual woman into a representative of essentialist gendered behaviour to create a universalising argument is quintessential to *Bulletin* discourse on gender and political power in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, it is particularly indicative of the hysterical, unstable edge to the *Bulletin*'s voice.

With the Dilke case, women's treachery increasingly assumed the dimensions of some vast imperial plot. The conflation of masculine interest across borders of class, imperialism and colonialism should be noted alongside more conventional images of the *Bulletin* as a catalyst for Australian cultural and political nationalism. The Dilke article again suggests that colonial Australian cultural discourses may not have been so independent of the larger imperial British picture as many popular twentieth-century Australian cultural narratives insist.

As already noted, although historians in Australia have traditionally treated the Mount Rennie case as an issue of social justice, the impetus behind the case is equally that of set genres, tropes and romantic narratives. In particular press accounts of the rape promulgated the romance of essentialist conceptions of gendered behaviours: that male sexuality was frequently animalistic but equally not-to-be-resisted (alongside contradictory discourses of male chivalry) and that the "true" woman was gentle, passive and innocent. A true lady demonstrated her gentility by graceful submission, even, so social myth delicately implied, in rape. In addition the rape also enacted a type of aesthetic discrimination. The "unenlightened"—both the conservative elite and the uneducated tabloid readers—were indulgent towards women, presenting an innocent vision of femininity. Radical intellectuals, conversely, favoured a more sexualised image (which they saw as realistic and incisive) of woman as promiscuous, but ready to hide her prodigious appetite with cries of rape. For the radicals the case became a point to assert intellectual rationality over sentimentality, highlighting the romance of the male as citizen and the defence of the democratic rights of the male citizen. On a more basic level (but judiciously minimised in early radical texts about the Mount Rennie case), bohemian culture marked its distance from respectable society through validating sexual potency and transgression.

Through images circulated and validated by the Mount Rennie debate, Australian cultural values in the 1880s and 1890s can be read as parallel to rather than alien to "British" Victorian values. One could suggest the constructions of femininity and romance, documented in accounts of the rape, particularly expressed sentiments that are familiar from examination of British sources—from the press to literature and visual art. Moreover, one may question whether the potentially lethal female of authority, whom Archibald's male citizens feared, was a sixteen-year-old orphaned domestic servant resident in Sydney or the omnipotent imperial figurehead? Despite Australian nationalist discourses that continue to the present day, the perceived and self-proclaimed singularity of Australian nationalist/republican culture is, by implication, also under discussion when examining cultural cross-references of Mount Rennie. The loss of

liberty occasioned by female desire was not simply the imprisonment of young working-class men in Sydney. Was this loss of liberty the central irony within the British empire, whereby all the masculine achievement, energy and endeavour, catalysed by the empire, simply affirmed the authority of a female leader?

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