

Inspiring Womanhood

A re-interpretation of The Dawn

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Abstract

This thesis explores the diversity of content and ideas found in Louisa Lawson's *The Dawn*, Australia's first successful magazine 'by women and for women', showing that every element of the journal promoted a womanhood ideal for Australian women. Though remembered for the challenging arguments it made for women's rights, most of the journal was taken up by beauty tips, household hints, recipes, women's stories, health ideas, fashion articles and the like. This thesis examines such elements, noting how they served to help readers progress towards its womanhood ideal. It highlights the way that *The Dawn*'s discourse on women's right was integrated into this ideal. It also analyses some of the key themes and ideas central to the ideal constructed in *The Dawn*, such as motherhood, beauty, and success in work and study.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to every woman who has ever felt that there is nothing special or empowering about being a woman.

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Inspiring Womanhood: A re-interpretation of *The Dawn*

Probably the most influential cause of our success has been the view we have taken of women's interests, a view in no way similar to the popular notion of the affinities and tastes of womanhood. The fact is, women are tired of seeing themselves “damned with faint praise” in society journals... The mass of women want to have themselves fairly represented...¹

Representing the hopes, hurts, and hungerings of women for seventeen years between 1888-1905, *The Dawn*, Australia's first journal 'by women and for women',² challenged and re-defined notions of womanhood in Australia at the close of the nineteenth century, and inspired women with its ideals for years to come. Its leading comment in May, 1888, boldly proclaims the grounds upon which the journal had been established:

Woman is not uncompleted man, but diverse.” says Tennyson, and being diverse, why should she not have her journal in which her divergent hopes, aims, and opinions may have representation.³

Here in the journal's very first statement is reflected the thought which would drive it for almost two decades: Woman is 'divergent' to man. Let us discover and celebrate the nature of her divergence. Every aspect of *The Dawn*, whether the feature articles, the advertisements, the regular columns or the handy tips, contributed to the constant picture it was building of Australian women, designed to encourage and inspire the hitherto unrepresented 'mass'.

For over a century, historians have applauded *The Dawn's* editor, Louisa Lawson, for her efforts in creating the journal, and for her other contributions to the women's rights movement of the

¹ *The Dawn*, May, 1890, p. 7.

² *The Dawn*, May, 1888, p. 1.

³ *The Dawn*, May, 1888, p. 1.

late nineteenth century which flowed into the twentieth century.⁴ This period of women's advocacy has often been described as 'first-wave feminism', and I will at times refer to it thus in this thesis. The arguments made for women's rights and liberty in *The Dawn* made it a valuable proponent of first-wave feminism, and history has most often remembered it for this. Though every edition of the journal contained some critical social commentary and the occasional treatise on women's rights, the journal's meat, the vast quantity of its page space, was filled by stories about women, recipes and tips for women, fashion updates of interest to women, and advertisements directed at women. These elements of *The Dawn* constantly educated and inspired women readers to know and embrace their womanhood. They reveal that a discourse on the nature and needs of Australian womanhood was constantly shaping its message.

Despite this, historians have mostly remembered *The Dawn* for its feminist agenda, recognising it to be an important landmark in the process of raising a national consciousness about women's issues in Australia. Cultural historians who have sought to analyse the feminist movement of the 1890s and early 1900s have often simply referred to *The Dawn* as an important 'feminist magazine' because of its stance on women's rights in marriage, work, and politics.⁵ Anne Summers typified the journal as 'abrasively feminist', noting how it pointed out the 'injustices' faced by women, demanded women's suffrage, and highlighted "the achievements of women in any extra-domestic activities."⁶ Such analyses of the text are fair to the extent that Lawson was an important and influential feminist of her time and her feminist values certainly shaped and drove the journal throughout its seventeen year existence, however, they do not attend to the vast amount of interest

4 Lawson has been remembered for her work alongside Rose Scott and Lady Windeyer organising the Women's Suffrage League (W.S.L.) of New South Wales in 1889. She gave many public presentations before the W.S.L. and the Dawn Club on suffrage and women's rights during the 1890s. The Dawn Club was a Sydney group started up by Lawson in 1888 to which women could come to share their stories of abuse and discuss social reform. When the W.S.L. celebrated the winning of the vote in 1902 the organisation formally thanked Lawson for her work, hailing her the 'mother of womanhood suffrage.' For details of this event and Lawson's contribution to the W.S.L. and the Dawn Club, see: Brian Mathews, *Louisa* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1987); Lorna Ollif, *Louisa Lawson: Henry Lawson's Crusading Mother* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1978)

5 For example: Desley Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context: Conflicting Masculinisms in the New South Wales Public Service Bill debates of 1895', *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s*, ed. Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley, Susan Sheridan (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993) p. 55; John Docker, 'The Feminist Legend: A new historicism?', Magarey [et al.], *Debutante Nation*, p. 25.

6 Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1994) p. 350.

in *The Dawn* taken in pursuits which were not specifically feminist such as home-decoration, cooking, and fashion.

Feminist historians of more recent times have also commented little on the diversity of content and ideas published in the journal, but note that it was highly important to the progress made by women in nineteenth and twentieth century Australia because it “gave women an opportunity to express themselves publicly.”⁷ Marilyn Lake was one of the first feminist historians to include in her description of the journal the fact that *The Dawn* promoted 'a new ideal of woman'.⁸ I have found her brief summary of the journal to be one of the most attentive and fair amongst the plethora of comments made by historians about the nature of the journal. Where most have simply recognised *The Dawn's* contribution to first-wave feminism due to its espousal of women's rights, Lake points out that the journal also challenged society with its reformatory ideals for the nation as well as womankind. For the most part, however, feminist historians have not seriously analysed the content of the journal nor extrapolated on the way it challenged women, and thus the centrality of a womanhood ideal in the magazine has been recognised but rarely.

Penny Johnson and Sharyn Pearce have both mounted useful arguments about the type of feminism inherent to *The Dawn* which has greatly aided me in my reading of it. They both perceive the journal to be an exponent of 'expediency feminism', a concept developed by Judith Allen which essentially describes the type of feminism in which women seek greater access to the public sphere in order that they might reform and influence it with their 'private sphere' morals and values.⁹ This is a good characterisation of the type of feminism displayed in *The Dawn*, for as we shall see at various points in this thesis, the belief that women could transform the nation if given the suffrage and other rights was commonly preached by its writers. *The Dawn* certainly tied development of

7 Kirsten Lees, *Votes For Women: The Australian Story* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995) p. 71. See also: Patricia Grimshaw [et al.], *Creating a Nation, 1788-1990* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1996) p. 153.

8 Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999) p. 22.

9 Penny Johnson, 'Nineteenth Century Australian Feminism: A study of the 'Dawn'', *Australia 1888 Bulletin*, No. 13, 1984, p. 73. See also: Sharyn Pearce, *Shameless Scribblers: Australian Women's Journalism 1880-1995* (Queensland: Central Queensland University Press, 1998) p. 21.

Australian women to the development of nation. Pearce's assessment of the journal as committed to the 'elevation of woman' in every sense strikes the greatest accord with my interest in its commitment to a womanhood ideal. She does not focus on the rights commentary present in the journal, but ultimately opines that "Lawson's contribution to Australian journalism [epitomised in *The Dawn*] may perhaps be best described as an extended investment in the dignity of women."¹⁰ This, I believe, effectively captures the encouraging and idealistic tone of the journal, which was more often expressed in its advice on home-management and beauty than in treatises about women's rights.

This thesis will explore the multitude of pieces and advertisements concerned with or directed at women in *The Dawn* which came as stories, tips, celebrations and guidance to Australian women. In so doing, it will reveal that the journal was constantly constructing an ideal of Australian womanhood, and that its first commitment was to helping women access this womanhood. Discussions of women's rights and liberation fit aptly into this cause, and in each chapter we shall see how access to certain rights was considered necessary to allow women to develop into the ideal Australian woman. The subject of true womanhood was the common ground on which most ideas and values espoused by *The Dawn* could meet. By analysing the journal through the lens of 'ideal womanhood' we gain a better understanding on how the diversity of topics addressed in the magazine relate to each other. In essence, *The Dawn* was more concerned with exciting a new culture of womanhood amongst Australian women than with any other issue. The variety of political, national and social issues presented by the journal all relate to and are integrated into its womanhood discussion.

This thesis does not challenge the general belief amongst historians that the *Dawn* made a valuable contribution to first-wave feminism. Nor will it discredit those who have seen the journal's discussions of women's rights as a key expression of its feminism. Instead it will highlight an

¹⁰ Pearce, *Shameless Scribblers*, p. 39.

element of its feminism which has been little recognised, yet is central to unifying the diversity of topics and stories within it: namely, a constantly developing ideal of Australian womanhood. Ultimately, I hope that my analysis of *The Dawn* will raise questions about the relevance of idealised womanhood amongst feminists and reformers in general in Australian society at the turn of the century.

The whole of the journal's content is of interest to this discussion: recipes, poems, fashion tips, patterns, tales of women from far and near, discussions of home and country, craft lessons, health advice, gardening pages, and advertisements. This thesis draws on knowledge obtained from an analysis of every edition of *The Dawn*, 1888-1905, though it will not refer to or address each edition individually in its discussion.

The opening chapter of this thesis takes a global perspective, showing how an international culture of feminist idealism combined with a growing culture of nationalism in Australia were constantly influencing *The Dawn*, creating a sense that the new nation needed a 'new woman'. Discussions of the 'New Woman' or the 'Coming Woman' existed in the U.S.A. and England for almost two decades before becoming popular in Australia, yet they took on new meaning and shape in *The Dawn* when it began to define how the 'New Woman' functioned in and for the Australian nation. Nationalism was passionately advocated by the journal and the inclusion of women in the national story of the past, present, and future, was a common theme amongst its tales of women. The aim here is to shed light on the two key topics in the journal which were constantly fuelling discussions of the ideal Australian woman.

The remaining chapters focus on key facets of the womanhood ideal which *The Dawn* espoused. Chapter two analyses the journal's commentary on women as mothers and housewives. As it defended overworked, unpaid women in the home, *The Dawn* called for a greater recognition of the central role such women played in the home and nation as carers of the next-generation. It

inspired women to rest more and work with efficiency, providing tips to help them do so, that they might be constantly becoming healthier, wiser mothers and happier wives. The ideal of Australian womanhood saw the innate benevolence and love of the mother-heart liberated to function more effectively in the home and world. This chapter will look at the ways the journal sought to help its readers progress as mothers and housewives, as well as the way it often portrayed the mother and housewife as the hope of society.

The third chapter will look at beauty and *The Dawn's* treatment of it. Beauty is one of the more paradoxical subjects addressed by the journal, yet on every side of its beauty paradox it attempted to inspire readers to pursue the beauty of the ideal Australian woman. In looking at advertisements, fashion tips, beauty articles and home-decoration pieces, we will discover that *The Dawn* celebrated the purity of the Australian woman and perceived her to be the decorative jewel of the nation. It encouraged women to express this through the art of self-adornment and the maintenance of a healthful appearance. It was committed to helping women access their beautiful selves and convinced that drudgery and enslavement was causing bitterness and ugliness amongst the 'purer' sex.

In the fourth and final chapter *The Dawn's* celebration of the skill and aptitude of women is examined. Stories of women's invention and skill at work were a frequent feature in the journal and served as examples of the way the Australian woman was developing into the woman of tomorrow. The journal advised women in how to develop and hone their skills, informed them of institutions which would teach them new skills, and celebrated the ways in which women's skill was changing the nation. The ideal of the crafty, handy, and independent Australian woman was constantly being promulgated by *The Dawn's* vast focus on women's skills and contribution to society. Women's education and intellectual contributions were also a topic of great interest in the journal which will be discussed in this chapter.

In bringing the key aspects of *The Dawn's* womanhood ideal to light I seek to show the way idealism and a reformist agenda in regards to Australian womanhood were the driving force behind much of its content and feminism. The conclusion of this thesis will discuss how the ideal promulgated by *The Dawn* continued to affect discourses on Australian womanhood for years after it stopped being published. I will also briefly consider the extent to which the next generation of women affected the nation and succeeded in the ways imagined by Lawson. Ultimately, however, I intend only to prove the existence of a constantly developing ideal of Australian womanhood in *The Dawn* which brings a unity and sense of purpose to its diversity of ideas and information.

Australia's 'New Woman'

When *The Dawn* first went to print, in May 1888, its title was accompanied by the clarifying catch-phrase: “A journal for Australian women.” This slogan was later changed to: “A journal for the Australian Household”, as the magazine's audience expanded to include children and even men from the mid-1890s onwards; however, women were always the journal's main target and concern. *The Dawn* confidently introduced itself in its first ever leading article as an advocate for every women, “a phonograph to wind out audibly the whispers, pleadings and demands of the Sisterhood.”¹ In this same introduction Lawson took care to clarify the breadth of *The Dawn*'s focus, revealing that the journal would be speaking to Australian women about much more than women's rights:

We wear no ready-made suit of opinions, nor stand on any platform of women's rights which we have as yet seen erected. Dress we shall not forget... nothing concerning woman's life and interest lies outside our scope.²

Amongst *The Dawn*'s explorations of every topic and product of interest or relevance to women from month to month, the subject of a 'New' or 'Coming' woman which every reader could aspire to, was highly prevalent. Ardent articles, short stories and poems which romanticised the possibilities and models of the woman of tomorrow were a constant part of the magazine's monthly minutiae. She was a phantom discussed and heralded by feminists the world over, an ideal under which suffragettes and woman's rights advocates of cultures oceans apart could connect. The new and inspiring womanhood held up by *The Dawn* for all readers was modelled on and shaped by the 'new woman' imagined and exemplified by women in America, Britain, France, and all over the world. Tales of women's development and advocacy around the world, related in *The Dawn*, highlighted

1 *The Dawn*, May 1888, p. 4.

2 *The Dawn*, May 1888, p. 4.

the coming of a new type of woman amongst the human race. Lawson took this international ideal and tied it to the mast of nation. She made it distinctly Australian by imagining the role that the coming woman would play in the development of Australia and by portraying her in light of the various crises and fads of the nation. This chapter seeks to argue that themes of nationalism and discussions of the international 'new woman' constantly fuelled *The Dawn's* reflections on the ideal Australian womanhood. It sought to discover the place of the 'New Woman' in Australia, to bring women into the story of the nation, past and present. Most of its content was directed towards helping Australian women become the 'New Woman'.

From 'New Woman' to Nation

Though many historians mark the early twentieth century and the onset of World War One as the era in which international movements for women's rights first truly flourished,³ it is clear that an international consciousness existed for decades before, and that the internationalisation of several women's groups during the 1880s was forging connections between feminist reformers worlds-apart at the time that Lawson embarked on her editorial adventure.⁴ *The Dawn* was highly fascinated with the progress and achievements of women all around the world and updates on women in the world would often cover everything from the sitting of a female lawyer as a juror in an important court case in New York city, U.S.A,⁵ to the renowned healing powers of female masseurs in Asia.⁶ Barbara Caine and other historians of *fin de siècle* England have noted that from the early 1890s discussions of the 'New Woman' increased greatly amongst reformers and women's advocates in Britain.⁷ Clippings from popular American journals, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times*

3 See: Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1997); Lenore Coltheart, 'Jessie Street and International Feminism', *Hecate*, Vol. 31, no. 1, 2005, pp. 182-194.

4 The first international women's rights organisation was formed in 1888, the same year that Lawson set out to create *The Dawn*. See: Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, p. 4.

5 *The Dawn*, January, 1898, p. 10.

6 *The Dawn*, August, 1889, p. 15.

7 Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 131; See also: Cecily Devereux, 'New Woman, New World: Maternal Feminism and the New Imperialism in the White Settler Colonies', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1999, pp. 175-184.

show us that the 'Coming Woman' was a topic of cultural fascination in the United States as well from the middle of the nineteenth century, and national meetings of women had even been held to discuss the topic.⁸ Ideals of the equipped, healthy and educated woman of the future were inspiring women the world over in the final decades of the century, Lawson and her co-writers no less. They were well and truly transfixed and inspired by the prospect of this 'coming woman' and wrote of her regularly:

It is to women the world must look for salvation, and before this “coming woman” the army of priests and clergy, the numberless charitable societies, the cranks – one and all – will give way, and men will see themselves as they are and be ashamed.⁹

Articles and poems which described this emerging ideal were plentiful in *The Dawn*; many were simply, yet clearly, titled 'The Coming Woman' or 'The New Woman',¹⁰ and were romantic portrayals of the salvation offered to the world by this new generation of women: “In ‘the coming woman’ the earnest prayers and longings of humanity will be fulfilled, for she will be a creature ‘nobly planned, to warn, to comfort, to command’...”¹¹ In another such piece from April, 1893, Lawson comments on the lack of a strong or prevailing ideal for women in Australia despite constant public commentaries on their failings:

It would be somewhat interesting... to be informed just what a woman should do. We hear no end of talk about what she should not be and do; but the ideal woman does not seem to be described in any of the current literature.¹²

The fact that Lawson felt there was no compelling cultural ideal for women to aspire to in Australia was a likely motivation behind *The Dawn's* constant references to the idealised 'New

8 “The Coming Woman's Congress”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 3, 1875, p. 4; “The Coming Woman”, *New York Times*, October 4, 1900, p. 6.

9 *The Dawn*, April 1897, p. 14.

10 Examples include: “The Coming Woman”, *The Dawn*, January, 1890, p. 12; “The New Womanhood”, *The Dawn*, October, 1892, p. 11; “The New Woman”, *The Dawn*, December, 1897, p.8; “The Coming Woman”, *The Dawn*, April, 1893, p. 11; “The Coming Woman”, *The Dawn*, March, 1897, p. 13-14.

11 *The Dawn*, January, 1890, p. 12.

12 *The Dawn*, April 1893, p. 11.

Woman'. Furthermore, the values espoused by the journal regarding women's place, beauty, and ability, all worked to provide the Australian ideal for women which Lawson felt had been lacking in society. We shall look more closely at the key aspects of this ideal in the following chapters of this thesis.

Stories of individual and collective growth or achievement among women around the world also provided evidence of the presence of this 'New Woman' in the world. *The Dawn* kept in touch with the developments of women and women's rights around the world, regularly updating its readership on the progress made for women's equality in every country.¹³ Yet, for every story of women's political and civil evolution around the world there were two detailing the progress made by women in education, work, independence and creativity - "There is a wide-awake young woman in Chicago who is supporting herself quite comfortably by taking care of other peoples' birds and flowers."¹⁴ Though we shall look more closely at the presence of such stories in *The Dawn* in the later chapters of this thesis, it is appropriate to mention them here as they provided constant examples to readers of the 'Coming Woman' so often related in the journal. For Lawson and her team, portraying the growth and development of women around the world in all things, whether as a result of rights or human effort, was key to relating the constant evolution of women into the 'coming woman'. Every achievement of womankind, no matter how small, contributed to the story of women's progress to new womanhood.

Though interest in women's development was a driving force behind the magazine, the subject of national development was also frequently addressed by the journal's writers and contributors. Marilyn Lake commented that 'like many Australian suffragists Lawson was an ardent

13 For Example: "The Women of Iceland", *The Dawn*, October, 1896, p. 16; "Suffrage Notes", *The Dawn*, May, 1898, p.14 – an update on the goings of the Suffrage campaign in England; also, the regularly featured article "From Far and Near" gives details of the many inspiring cases of women around the world such as the flower lady of Chicago mentioned in this chapter. We shall look at more such updates and articles in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

14 *The Dawn*, December 1897, p. 11.

nationalist, committed to the project of building a new society in the New World'.¹⁵ Before creating *The Dawn*, she had spent two years writing for *The Republican*, a Sydney newspaper which called for Australian independence from Britain. She also penned several nationalistic short stories and poems which would later be celebrated by many Australians, such as 'Australia Felix' and 'A Plea for Australia'.¹⁶ Her love for, and interest in, the future of Australia did indeed impact upon the way *The Dawn* broached the topic of nation.

Society-building through the medium of social commentary and critique was definitely a function of *The Dawn's* complex agenda. Pieces on matters of local and national importance such as "Our education System", a critique of "the system of education practised in the colonies";¹⁷ or "The Australian Flag", an article arguing for the creation of a national flag,¹⁸ were common. Though not typically engaged in reporting the general news of the nation, the journal did keep up with various events and projects which were important to the development of a healthy nation or a positive national identity. For example, in 1895 *The Dawn* reported on a campaign to have Sir John Robertson instilled in the national memory once and for all:

The late Sir John Robertson was the father of the system for settling farmers on the land known as "Free Selection"... He stands forward as the first prominent figure in Australian legislation... The agitation to have a national monument placed over Sir John Robertson's grave was started a few weeks ago in Sydney, and influential meetings have been held in the city and elsewhere.¹⁹

Nationalistic poetry and short stories were also an occasional feature of *The Dawn*, evoking a love for the land and a celebration of its possibilities among the journal's audience,²⁰ however, most of *The Dawn's* discourse on nation was centred around the possibilities of the nation as shaped by the possibilities of women in the nation. Happy homes, healthy families, effective welfare, good

15 Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999) p. 21.

16 Both can be read in *Louisa Lawson: Collected Poems with Selected Critical Commentaries*, edited by Leonie Rutherford and Megan Roughley with Nigel Spence (Armidale: University of New England, 1996).

17 *The Dawn*, May 1898, p. 13.

18 *The Dawn*, December 1891, p. 16.

19 *The Dawn*, July, 1895, p. 13.

20 For example: 'Australia', *The Dawn*, April, 1895, p. 21; 'A Young Australian', *The Dawn*, April, 1898, p. 26.

education, and financial security for all were the backbone of a strong and flourishing nation, and the true Australian woman could ensure such things. In each of the following chapters we shall look more closely at how each element of *The Dawn's* Australian womanhood related to nation-building and the future of Australia. Interestingly, the journal did not simply build a discourse of future national glory that was centred around women's development, but also strove to bring women into the existing national discourse, re-inserting them into stories of the past and present where their part had never been known. In the following section we shall look at some examples of how this was done, reflecting constantly on how stories of women and Australia served to prop up the feminine ideal which *The Dawn* was espousing.

Women in the Australian Story - Stories of Australian Women

In the 1990s, four female historians came together to write a new version of Australian history which would look at the untold stories of women, aboriginals and other minorities, in the process of 'creating a nation'. They began their work with an explanation:

The creation of nations has traditionally been seen as men's business. In the fomenting of revolutions, the forging of new political orders and the fashioning of national identities, men have positioned themselves as the main players. We wish to challenge this view of history, by asserting the agency and creativity of women in the process of national generation.²¹

Feminists of every era have sought to bring women and their stories more to light, in the prevailing historical discourses of their times. Just as Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath and Quartly attempted to re-involve women in the story of the Australian nation when they wrote *Creating A Nation*, so had Lawson and other feminists a century earlier. Whether in its arguments that motherhood and housewifery were the unappreciated labours on which the nation depended, or in its celebrations of

21 Grimshaw et al., *Creating A Nation* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1994) p. 1.

the contribution women had made to the arts, industry and various humanitarian causes, *The Dawn* was committed to highlighting the ways women had shaped and were shaping the nation. Though stories of influential women of the past were much rarer than those of the present, several cases did exist. For example, in a piece celebrating the Australian home-fostering system for orphans (the leader of its kind in the world according to an American appraisal) the role of women in setting up this system was duly recognised:

It should be said that two women of clear perception, with reference to what should be done, Miss Clarke and Miss Catherine Spence, destroyed the orphan asylums of Australia, robbed the continent of its orphans, and saved these colonies from a horde of criminals and dependants.²²

Even stories as simple as that of a 97 year old, named Miss Horton, who came to Australia as a child on the same ship as Governor Macquarie, the H.M.S “Hindustan”,²³ served to show that women had been present in white Australian history from its earliest times.

Stories of national interest were retold with a particular emphasis on the involvement of women. When a fire destroyed a hotel and three shops in Coraki, N.S.W in late 1897, many newspapers around the country simply reported the event by giving details of the day, the place, and the estimated cost of the damage caused by the fire, most putting it at around £4000.²⁴ The *Sydney Morning Herald* was one of the few papers to give a more detailed report of the incident and included details of how the fire was eventually put out by the efforts of both male and female townsfolk.²⁵ When *The Dawn* mentioned the event in December that year it was for the purpose of highlighting women's involvement in the saga: “Women gave great assistance in extinguishing the fire at Coraki, N.S.W., on Sunday, 21st Nov., with buckets of water from the river.”²⁶ This was the full report given by *The Dawn*. The balance of interest in this report, with the focus being so

22 *The Dawn*, October 1894, p. 10.

23 *The Dawn*, December 1897, p. 3.

24 Examples of these brief, factual reports on the 1897 Coraki fire include: *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, Tuesday, 23 November, 1897, p. 5; *Barrier Miner*, Tuesday, 23 November, 1897, p. 1; *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, Friday, 26 November, 1897, p. 14; *South Australian Register*, Tuesday, 23 November, 1897, p. 5.

25 *Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday, 23 November, 1897, p. 5.

26 *The Dawn*, December, 1897, p. 11.

clearly on women, serves to highlight the fact that ultimately the journal was much more concerned with news regarding women around the nation than it was with the general news of the nation.

A fascination with the stories of women around the nation is further exemplified in *The Dawn's* various pieces dedicated to informing readers of the progress being made by women in *The* other Australian colonies. Such pieces, often titled as simply as 'Queensland Notes', or 'South Australia Notes', updated readers on the work of various political or social movements around Australia in which women were involved.²⁷ Some of the social development movements reported on were not concerned with women's rights per se but were of interest to *The Dawn* purely because women were involved in them - "The Early Closing Association is one of the few unions which admit women equally with men."²⁸ It was enthused to see women campaigning in Temperance groups, such as this, but was also keen to reveal the kind of things Australian women were individually achieving for the nation: "A lady who is a member of the Australian Health Society, Melbourne, is endeavouring to form a similar society in Brisbane; it is certainly much required."²⁹

Attempts to define the quintessential Australian were at the heart of cultural discourses and contests held between artists, politicians and the media in the 1890s. Many historians have recognised that questions and understandings of masculinity and femininity often underpinned these contests.³⁰ *The Dawn* was very much a part of these discussions, constantly seeking to invent and popularise an ideal of womanhood, yet also desirous to prove that women had, and had always had, a place in the nation. The influence of notions of the 'New Woman' combined with Lawson's arrant patriotism naturally directed the journal towards discussions about the character and place of Australian women – the topics of 'New Woman' and 'Nation' pointed to the perennial need for an ideal of Australian womanhood.

27 For example: 'Queensland Notes', *The Dawn*, October, 1891, p. 23; 'South Australia', *The Dawn*, March, 1890, p. 16.; 'South Australia', *The Dawn*, September, 1889, p. 9; 'South Australia', *The Dawn*, July, 1889, p. 14; 'South Australian Notes', *The Dawn*, October 1891, p. 23; 'Queensland Notes', *The Dawn*, April, 1891, p. 7.

28 *The Dawn*, July, 1891, p. 9.

29 *The Dawn*, October, 1891, p. 23.

30 See for example: Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation*, pp. . 177-203; Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context.' in Magarey et al. (ed.), *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993) pp. 1-15.

In this chapter we have discussed some of the ways *The Dawn* treated the 'New Woman' and 'Australia', yet in comparison to the vast amount of space committed in the journal to the topics of home, motherhood, beauty, work and women's aptitude, these subjects pale in significance. In the next three chapters we shall examine the areas of women's interest on which *The Dawn* was most focused; we shall see the values to which it gave the most space. These chapters will show that though women's rights and equality were a key interest of *The Dawn*, its greatest concern was with women's identity and ideal womanhood; rights were seen as tools in the process of creating the perfect Australian woman.

Nurturing a Nation: Mothers and Housewives

How strange it is, that with all our troubles and disappointments, all our grumblings and groaning about the injustice of our marriage laws and the tyranny of that dreadful creature – man, we are yet ready to hand over our daughters into the “holy estate of matrimony”. Is it not that we as mothers, know in our own hearts that the best and truest life for the great majority of women is found in the position of wives and mothers?¹

A paradoxical view of motherhood as both a delightful opportunity and an oppressive duty was intrinsic to *The Dawn's* discourse on women and the home. The journal constantly sought to raise mothers and wives up in the eyes of the world by celebrating the piece they brought to societal development, yet also inspired the public with a vision of the potential nestling within these women. Louisa Lawson's experiences of poverty and complete family responsibility as a young mother had made her fully aware of just how taxing the tasks of motherhood and home management could be. She empathised with the weary mothers of the nation, seeking not only to recognise their efforts but also to make their burdens lighter through the provision of handy mothering and house-keeping tips. Lawson and her co-writers spoke up about the greater benefits to the family and to society of caring for Australian mothers and offered ideas about how to do this. They also regularly suggested the positive effects which the inclusion of mothers in the public sphere would inevitably have on the development of a great nation. With every challenging sermon, handy tip and poignant celebration it published for and about Australian mothers, the journal was advancing an ideal of the Australian mother of the future: a mother who is rested and healthy, celebrated and rewarded for her work, secure in life, and equipped to transform family and nation with her home-life skills and values. This chapter

¹ *The Dawn*, March 1893, p. 11.

will analyse some of the arguments, lessons and tips directed at Australian mothers in *The Dawn* in order to see how an ideal of motherhood was constantly being constructed through them.

Recognising Women's Work at Home

Recognising the work of women in the home as mothers and housewives was a high priority for the writers of *The Dawn*. 'Worn Out' is a short narrative about the mother of eight and wife to Farmer Grey who worked so tirelessly throughout her married life that she simply died from exhaustion one evening:

She was busy every hour of the day. She milked and made butter, worked in her garden, cooked for 'hands,' raised and sold chickens... She could, and did, when father was rushed, go out into the fields and cut corn for half-a-day, and then come into her hot stuffy little kitchen and get dinner for 14 people, and yet - "mother was not strong." (From 'Worn Out'- September, 1889)²

The tale was featured in an early edition of *The Dawn* and was the first of many short stories and articles blazoned by the magazine about women running themselves into the ground as they laboured for their families. The comment that Mrs Grey was considered 'not strong', despite her tireless efforts, is a sarcastic reflection on notions of women as the feeble sex which permeated society at the time which failed to recognise women's inherent strength and courage.³ The journal loudly condemned those men who verbally praised their wife or mother, yet never extended a hand to help the 'poor woman'. A piece from 1892, titled 'Love in Name Only', tells of how women in such slave-like situations are prone to mental break-downs, and would eventually land themselves

² *The Dawn*, September 1889, p. 18.

³ *The Dawn* often complained about 'febleness' stereotypes in pieces like: "The Wreck of the Tasmania", an article which complained of how in reports about the shipwreck of the *Tasmania* in 1897, the media had generally portrayed the women involved in the accident as less courageous than the men - "Is it not time to explode the idea that woman is less cool and collected when in danger than a man - that she always screams, or faints, or gets in the way, while a man is always brave, or calm, or ready to die." - *The Dawn*, September 1897, p. 9. Also see: 'Strong Womanhood', *The Dawn*, January 1899, p. 22.

in the cell of a mental asylum. It bitterly poses the question: Should being a 'good woman' ever mean becoming a slave to household drudgery and family demands?

We stood beside such an one a few days ago within the walls of the Parramatta Asylum for the Insane, "a good little woman" driven there by the inhuman brutality of her husband and sons, who, even now, swear by her goodness."⁴

Naturally, in reacting to such stories the journal entered into a discussion of what it actually looked like to be a 'good' and effective mother and housewife. As it cast its ideals and lionised the role of the mother in the nation, *The Dawn* was shaped by several key popular ideas about women. Its discourse on women in the home centred on Victorian middle class ideals of the mother as 'the angel' of the family - good natured, submissive and pure⁵ - yet it was also influenced by an increasing awareness of the hardships and abuses faced by women in the home which were being brought to public attention throughout the 1880s and 90s. Various Temperance groups had been circularising stories of women's abuse and oppression at the hands of drunk or irresponsible husbands for decades. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was the largest and most influential of such groups, coming into existence in the 1880s, and greatly increasing the profile of public debates on Temperance and other social purity issues. The WCTU's call that women should have economic independence and the vote in order to protect themselves, their children, and the future generations from the cruelty of men was a foundational cause of the growing feminist consciousness of the time.⁶

Lawson's own experiences as a mother and wife had not been easy. Throughout the 1860s

4 *The Dawn*, June 1892, p. 12.

5 Deborah Gorham, *Victorian Girl* (London: Croom Helm, 1982) p. 4.

6 The WCTU was not so much interested in women's rights in general as it was in the social reform that could be brought about if women were allowed to vote on issues such as alcohol consumption and gambling. As females interested in public policy they showed that women were in fact interested in and greatly affected by politics. For more information on the ways the WCTU shaped feminism in the late 1800s read Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, pp. 353-356; Lake, *Getting Equal*, pp. 23-27. *The Dawn* at times updated its readers on the progress of various branches of the WCTU around the nation. Its adamant support for the organisation and its aims can be seen in articles such as: 'The Hereditary Influences of Alcohol', *The Dawn*, October 1889, p. 21; 'On Temperance', *The Dawn*, February 1890, p. 11; 'The Triennial Convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Australasia', *The Dawn*, May 1894, p. 10; 'Woman's Christian Temperance Union', *The Dawn*, December 1889, p. 20.

she had been dragged around the gold fields of New South Wales and Victoria by her gold-obsessed husband, Peter, forced to care for their children in muddy tents and huts; at times living on nearly nothing due to Peter's poor luck as a digger. She was able to find a more stable source of income by learning tailoring while pregnant and making dresses wherever they were settled. Later on her thriftiness in opening a shop from their home on a popular gold-field brought the family a good deal of financial security for a time.⁷ Her friendships with other thrifty women and diggers' wives were a constant encouragement and source of help to her during this period of her life. In the 1870s the couple struggled to survive on a free selection in Eurunderee, Louisa working as a successful post mistress; and in the final years of the decade Peter regularly absented himself from family life, for long periods, in order to head out in search of work or gold. Finally in 1883 Lawson decided to move to Sydney and raise the children on her own in an environment where job opportunities and income were less volatile.⁸ In all this struggle she never gave up on her private passions, regularly reading, gardening and getting involved in community campaigns.⁹ Louisa felt strongly that such endeavours were essential to the maintenance of a woman's true personality and dignity in the home. She writes often of the fate of mothers who forget to tend to these things amidst the business of life:

If ever there was a slave to her family that woman was one. She never got time for reading or studying, and her husband and children grew entirely away from her until there was nothing left of her but a household drudge.¹⁰

In presenting the stories of weary and hard-working women, such as those related here, the writers of *The Dawn* sought not only to express just how much women contributed to family survival and well-being, but also to show that mothers and housewives were a key piece in the story

7 Louisa's life on the Goldfields is described in detail by biographers Brian Mathews and Lorna Ollif in: Brian Mathews, *Louisa* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1987) pp. 89-123; Lorna Ollif, *Louisa Lawson: Henry Lawson's Crusading Mother* (Sydney: Rigby, 1978) pp. 15-33.

8 For details on the move to Sydney and the issues surrounding Louisa and Peter's separation see: Mathews, *Louisa*, p. 131; Ollif, *Louisa Lawson*, p. 34; De Vries, *Strength of Purpose*, p. 152.

9 Campaigns which Lawson was involved in include a campaign to build a monument for the poet Henry Kendall, see: Ollif, *Louisa Lawson*, pp. 42-48; the campaign to build a bush school in Eurunderee, see: De Vries, *Strength of Purpose*, p. 151. For details of Lawson's personal hobbies and passions, such as gardening, see Mathews, *Louisa*.

10 *The Dawn*, June 1894, p. 12.

of societal development and survival in the colonies because of the way they supported their families. The national heroine is presented time and again in the magazine as a:

Quiet, unnoted wife, mother, sister, who untiring, year in, year out, plods through her uneventful, unexciting days; making beds, cooking meals, mending... with an unconscious heroism and unselfish abnegation which look for no reward save in the well-being of those loved and cared for.¹¹

The future of the nation could be safely entrusted to these heroines, who were “setting an example to their children of thrift and housewifely skill,” rearing a future generation which would show the world how aptly the “colonial girl” could fulfil her role as mother.¹² To see such women better cared for and appreciated, to see their selflessness and labour recognised and rewarded, motivated Lawson to use the journal as a pulpit from which to preach about how the public should treat these 'angels', as well as offer immediate advice for the home which would lighten their burdens. *The Dawn* brought to light many ways the family and nation could better invest in its mothers and wives.

Developing the Mother Race

As interest in science, human development, and race degeneration, grew throughout the nineteenth century, public concern over woman's maternal duty and impact also increased. Carol Bacchi points out that two racial development theories in particular shaped the way women were thought to affect the race in Australia: environmentalism and eugenics. Each theory shared the conclusion that ultimately “woman's chief duty lay in the breeding and care of new citizens.”¹³ Lawson and her co-writers, like many suffragists, were more

11 *The Dawn*, September 1889, p. 7.

12 *The Dawn*, June 1894, p. 10.

13 Carol Bacchi, 'Evolution, Eugenics and Woman: The impact of scientific theories on attitudes towards Women,

influenced by environmentalism than eugenics.¹⁴ They believed racial degradation was brought about in families whose mothers were poor, exhausted and abused:

Nine-tenths of the sufferings of women are totally needless, and, instead of promoting the advantage of the race, are greatly to its detriment.¹⁵

This problem could be reversed, however, by teaching women to function in a healthy, educated manner within the home, and by allowing them true financial security. Thus many articles in *The Dawn* are dedicated to encouraging families and society to care about and invest in the health, education and economic independence of mothers and housewives.

What does a woman require for this great and sacred work of rearing her children for God and their country's service and their own honour and happiness? She needs in the first place, health for herself... health is the only stable foundation for the integrity of home life, physical or moral.¹⁶

Comments about women's health in *The Dawn* are often characterised by a propensity to align physical well-being with the well-being of the soul or heart, as is the case here. Essentially, if a woman was not physically able to do her daily work due to exhaustion or abuse, she would also be unable to teach and exemplify spiritual health and strength to her family. As well as condemning families that treated their mothers like slaves, *The Dawn* put forward many practical ideas about how sons and daughters could ease their mother's load or reward her for her constant work by, for example, making her a new summer bonnet, since naturally she would have "little time to spend on her own adornment."¹⁷ Tellingly, many of the appeals for women to have rest were directed at the weary housewives and mothers

1870-1920', in *Women, Class and History: Feminist perspectives on Australia 1788-1978*, edited by Elizabeth Windschuttle (Melbourne: Fontana Books, 1980) p.139.

14 Eugenics asserted that the path to racial strength and purity was through controlled breeding patterns. See Bacchi, 'Evolution, Eugenics and Women', p. 139.

15 *The Dawn*, November 1889, p. 22.

16 *The Dawn*, October 1889, p. 8.

17 *The Dawn*, February 1894, p. 14.

themselves - most of them delivered in a stern didactic tone:

Do not forget, busy mothers, that it is often more virtuous to take a midday nap than to be industrious when you are tired. If muscles and brains are exhausted, a physician's 'pound' of cure will be necessary. The ounce of prevention is much more economical.¹⁸

The Dawn, however, went further than simply encouraging women to take a break now and then. It was actively involved in making their lives easier through the provision of hundreds of household tips and recipes each month designed to make home life more efficient, simple and pleasant. Regularly featured columns such as 'Recipes' and 'Household Hints' ensured that readers always had at hand a plethora of new ideas about how to cook, clean, decorate, garden, manage and mend, which might lighten the burdens of women at home.¹⁹

A monthly column titled 'Medical Notes' provided women with up-to-date scientific information about how to handle certain types of illnesses and ailments within the home. The educational tone of the column is consistent with the journal's vociferous assertions about the importance of educating women in order that they can be better mothers:

Statistics prove that Vassar students who have married have borne better offspring. It stands to reason that the woman who understands her organisation will exert a better influence over her household than does her sister who sins from ignorance of the laws which govern humanity.²⁰

18 *The Dawn*, May 1894, p. 14.

19 Here is a list of a selection of household tips and articles published in only a few editions of *The Dawn* from 1892 – they highlight the frequency of such pieces in the journal: *The Dawn*, January 1892: 'Toilettes for girls', p. 13; 'Novelties', p. 20; 'Dairy and Farm Notes', p. 24; 'Recipes', p. 25; 'Useful Hints', p. 25; *The Dawn*, February 1892: 'Dairy Hints, etc.', p. 14; 'Useful Hints', p. 22; 'A drink for health', p. 22; 'Training of Children's Features', p. 23; 'Evening Amusements', p. 24; *The Dawn*, March 1892: 'Home remedies', p. 11, 'Diphtheria', p. 20. Part way through 1892 the journal became more focused on the household and articles such as these doubled in presence in every copy. Penny Johnson has also noticed this early increase in household related articles. See: Johnson, 'Nineteenth Century Australian Feminism: A Study of *The Dawn*', p. 77.

20 *The Dawn*, January 1891, p. 12.

The thorough education of women was considered highly conducive to the healthy moral and physical development of the family, and thus the nation. The future of the race was intricately linked to the development of women, which was most commonly hindered by poor health and lack of education. Allowing women to rest made them more spiritually and emotionally able to guide and serve their families well. Allowing them to learn increased their chances of raising bright and healthy children. "The plastic unformed characters of the coming generation"²¹ - the future of the Australian race - lay in the hands of its mothers and housewives. Thus we can see that according to *The Dawn* it was only when the ideal mother - educated, healthy and strong - flourished that the race could flourish as well.

Health and education were not the only ingredients necessary in creating the ideal mother and household. Lawson also thought that if mothers were granted economic independence from their husbands, families would be assured of more financial security now and in the future. Thus cycles of poverty and hunger which were marring the development of a strong nation might be permanently stifled. The WCTU and other women's groups of the era, such as the Women's Suffrage League, were arguing that national poverty was the clear result of the alcoholism, idleness and poor financial decision-making, of irresponsible fathers and husbands. *The Dawn* often reflected such beliefs:

The general assumption that men should have full control of the family finances, denying a wife command or potential power in the management of the money or property she helps to earn, causes two-thirds of all domestic trouble. A man may gamble, or mismanage his business, but his wife is without redress.²²

Not only were women forced to care for 'wretched' families because of their lack of financial control, but they were also likely to become a burden on their families in old age or when their husbands had passed away. For the mother whose pride and dignity were found in her life-

²¹ *The Dawn*, May 1888 p. 4.

²² *The Dawn*, August 1889, p. 8.

long, selfless support and service of others, the notion of becoming a financial burden to one's family was particularly shaming. An article titled 'Is it Right to give all to the children?', from August 1892, details the stories of several women who were forced to endure such shame when their husbands died, having left all their property and wealth to their sons, as was tradition.²³ Though they were poorly looked after, these women never felt able to assert their rights in their own families because of a sense that they were a great burden. *The Dawn* sought to remove this shame from women by suggesting that if allowed to manage her own income a woman would be much less likely to burden her family in this way. It reminded readers of the security that the economically independent mother could provide for her children and of the example she would set to reckless men.

The Dawn's belief that the financial independence of women would create happy mothers, and thus happy homes, filled with more love and goodness, was a popular idea amongst suffragists and women's advocates of the time. Many feminists asserted that for centuries women had stumbled into unwise or unhappy marriages due to their lack of economic security, lured by the prospect of a husband with a stable income.²⁴ The journal advised women to get their finances and economic security in order while single so that they could be sure to choose marriage for the 'right reasons': a passion to serve those you love in the 'vocation' of mother and wife.²⁵ The strength of a nation was rooted in the health and happiness of its families. Thus investing in the health, education and security of mothers was interpreted as essential to the effective nurturing of a growing nation.

²³ *The Dawn*, August 1892, p. 17.

²⁴ Docker, *The Nervous Nineties*, pp. 3-16.

²⁵ *The Dawn*, Vol. 2, No. 2, June 1889, p. 5.

The Mother-element and the State

The inclusion of women in the political affairs of the colony was a favoured subject in *The Dawn*:

Give women an interest in the affairs of the nation and let their views be widened, for it is in the interest of all men to have intelligent housekeepers, and the interest of all the world to have intelligent mothers.²⁶

The belief that inclusion in politics would only raise the dignity and intellect of women meant, in Lawson's view, that the home would also develop in these things: "From thoughtful women will come noble sons, and the enfranchisement of women must make the thoughts of women wider."²⁷ Thus updates on the successes and failures of women's suffrage movements around the globe dotted the pages of the journal and discussions on the importance and benefits of female suffrage featured regularly. The argument that mothers should have a say in the type of nation in which their children would grow up was widely held by supporters of female suffrage. *The Dawn* came out strongly in support of this argument: "She must have a voice in governmental affairs. The woman and mother-element must be brought into those functions which are to affect the destinies of our sons and daughters."²⁸ The 'mother-element' which the journal predicted women would bring to politics can be understood as the selfless service and benevolence of the mother which stemmed from her higher morality. The 'mother-element' existed 'in most women' according to *The Dawn*: "Many have it who have not honoured a man by taking his name."²⁹ By bringing this motherliness into the public sphere it was thought that the comfort and morality

26 *The Dawn*, May 1889, p. 13.

27 *The Dawn*, May 1889, p. 4.

28 *The Dawn*, April 1890, p.11.

29 *The Dawn*, March 1897, p. 18.

of the nation would ultimately be raised: “any nation must gain considerably in humanity and material progress where women are allowed [the vote].”³⁰

As evidence of women's potential to comfort and morally raise the nation, *The Dawn* frequently told of the positive things women were doing in the world which reflected their motherliness. Each edition of *The Dawn* presented stories of women's benevolent and philanthropic endeavours, such as that of Mademoiselle Dumas, a ninety-six year old parisienne who spent the last decade of her life doing charitable work in the women's prison of St Lazair.³¹ Local heroines like Mrs Ipkendanz “who so generously housed and otherwise provided for a number of families during the recent floods” in Marrickville, Sydney, were also presented monthly.³² Alongside these stories of individual women the journal regularly informed its readership of the good being done across the nation by women's organisations such as the WCTU, social purity groups, and local option leagues. In campaigning for social reforms which would ensure a safer, stronger country for their children, women were revealing the extent to which their mother instincts were tied to the politics of the nation. *The Dawn's* celebrations of women who vied for social reform or provided for the needy in society highlight the type of active motherliness it was calling its readership into. Every woman, whether married or not, could display the mother-element:

Its qualities make her fruitful in devising means for the comfort and relief of the dependant ones. It enables her to watch and work longer than others... This quality of unselfish, forgiving love makes women most pre-eminently successful as teachers, nurses, and in all manner of philanthropic work.³³

The ideal of national womanhood which was constantly under construction in *The Dawn* was heavily tied to the popular identities of mother and housewife. Lawson sought to make readers understand just how essential mothers had been to the survival of the family and the nation thus far, as well as portraying what their role in strengthening the race and nurturing a new nation would be. For

30 *The Dawn*, July 1892, p.13.

31 *The Dawn*, June 1889, p. 8.

32 *The Dawn*, July 1889, p. 10.

33 *The Dawn*, March 1897, p. 18.

the nation and its families to continue developing in health and moral standing mothers and housewives needed to be included in the political process, and certain investments needed to be made in their development and security within the home. Opinions in *The Dawn* about the positive influences of women on national development extended beyond the perspectives and efforts they brought to the table as mothers and housewives: it regularly told of the maternal benevolence women were already bringing to society through their philanthropic endeavours. Thus the developing, socially active, politically empowered mother was a key figure in *The Dawn's* imaginings of the ideal Australian woman. In the following chapters we shall see how Lawson envisioned women also shaping the nation through their beauty and their contributions to the male-dominated spheres of intellect and invention.

Tending to Beauty: Transforming self and society

It is surely no sin to wish to be beautiful, for the natural world is full of beautiful things... We have plenty of exhilarating sunshine out of doors, and why not take the sunshine into our homes? ¹

The Dawn constantly attended to matters of feminine beauty and character with enthusiasm and delight. Like a ray of 'sunshine' in the home, a woman's beauty would bring warmth, joy and light into dark spaces. Each edition of the journal is weighed down by beauty tips, products and fashions. Lawson's attention to cultures of femininity and beauty threw up challenges to the popular belief that as women progressed and developed they would lose their traditional womanly beauty and increase in masculinity. The *Dawn* identifies the nature of female beauty as that which flows from a woman's grace, purity and uprightness of heart which is outwardly reflected in her conduct and appearance. The influence and importance of female beauty on a societal level is regularly discussed in the journal, particularly in comparison to the national degradation caused by male depravity. The way Lawson re-worked cultural notions of beauty and femininity and made them a key element of the new Australian womanhood was fundamental to engaging thousands of women with the women's rights discourse of the 1890s. The *Dawn* inspired women with a vision of their inner beauty and, paradoxically, helped them to display it outwardly; yet it also challenged society with the notion that this inner beauty had a place and a role in the public sphere. Just as woman's 'mother-element' could nurture the nation through love and moral action, women's 'true beauty' could purify and refine the race through exemplifying grace and virtue.

This chapter will show how through beauty related advertisements, articles, and tips, the *Dawn* was constantly promoting an ideal about 'true' beauty and attempting to make it accessible and attainable for every Australian woman. Furthermore we shall see how some of the journal's

¹ 'How to be beautiful', *Dawn*, November 1889, p. 12.

inherent contradictions related to beauty further reveal its struggle to inspire women of varied experiences and stances with this ideal. Throughout the discussion, the perceived role of this beauty in Australian society, will increasingly come to light.

True Beauty

Poems were a popular medium in which land, country and citizen, could be idealised and imagined in nineteenth century Australia, and were a common feature of many public papers and journals. The poetry of the *Dawn*, though sourced from a wide range of contributors, always complimented and clarified the values and ideals which were being communicated in its other content. One such poem, titled *Be a Woman*, declares the beauty of women to be epitomised in the use of their spiritual, intellectual, and physical faculties for the greater good of humanity:

Yes, a woman! Brightest model
Of that high and perfect beauty
Where the soul and mind and body
Blend to work out life's great duty.²

This 'perfect beauty' is an adaptation of the domesticated, Victorian beauty of the quietly submissive housewife and mother, to that of a moral guide and model to the world: 'Woman...On the catalogue of virtue there's no higher, holier name.'³ 'Perfect beauty', according to the *Dawn*, was a beauty of the soul; the truly beautiful woman was an 'angel of goodness and tenderness and truth.'⁴ Outer beauty grew from and was rooted in the beauty of the heart:

To have a bright, sunshiny face, you must first gain a golden heart, for the one is the reflection of the other, and this is the way: Be considerate of others and their comfort.
Think the best of every human being, and do not impute evil motive to anyone. Be

² *Dawn*, September 1890, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.* p. 15.

⁴ 'The New Womanhood', *Dawn*, October 1892, p. 12.

thoughtful. Be loving. Be generous with words of praise.⁵

Though the duty of mother and wife were considered the highest callings of woman,⁶ she was capable of angelic beauty outside of these roles. Benevolence and mercy towards the lowly, a compassion for humanity beyond the domestic sphere also made a woman beautiful. The journal encouraged young women to seek this type of beauty above all others, assuring them that men generally admired women,

not only for their purity, but for their philanthropy, for their high ambitions, for their work in rescuing the fallen, in tending the sick, in succouring the poor... [for doing their] share of the great, sad, hungry world's work.⁷

Alongside constant encouragements to cultivate and attend to the development of true beauty the journal published hundreds of articles and advertisements about the up-keep and adornment of a woman's physical appearance. Woman's role as the harbinger of joy and light to every space was further performed in the realm of dress and appearance. Products which would help women maintain or develop their outer beauty were advertised throughout the magazine:

Ladies! Ladies! Ladies! "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." Why have a sallow or dull complexion when one bottle of Prof. Devon's celebrated Complexion Lotion will restore the face to the softest and purest maidenly loveliness.⁸

When depicting the feminine ideal *The Dawn* often employed a language of purity, particularly in its advertising. Social fears about impurity and race degeneration had been at the centre of several national debates in England and the Australian colonies in the late nineteenth century. From the 1870s women's bodies were regarded with heightened public suspicion, as the

5 *Dawn*, January 1891, p. 11.

6 Pearce, *Shameless Scribblers*, p. 24.

7 'The New Womanhood', *Dawn*, October 1892, p. 11.

8 *Dawn*, November, 1892, p. 8.

site from which all venereal disease and impurity was born and spread.⁹ Thus purity became a quality greatly desired in and by women which characterised both the soul and the body, and women's advocates became highly concerned with challenging the impugned purity of their sex. The *Dawn's* multiplicity of articles and advertisements concerned with purity highlight women's growing interest in this quality throughout the period of its publication.

Purity was thought to be best outwardly reflected through a tidy appearance and a pretty, pale complexion; hence an advertisement for Cadbury's Cocoa from an 1894 edition of the *Dawn* features a beautiful young woman with pale white skin drinking a cup of Cadbury's Cocoa, under which is the tag line: "Cadbury's Absolutely Pure Cocoa, the typical cocoa of English manufacture."¹⁰ The purity of Cadbury's Cocoa is likened to the purity of 'the typical *woman of English manufacture*.' The journal undoubtedly relied on the money paid by such advertisers to function from month to month; yet its advertisements provide helpful insights into popular notions of beauty which influenced the ideal of female beauty espoused by the *Dawn*.

The Dawn's criticisms of masculinity also served to highlight the purity of women. Sara Cousins' study of masculinity in *The Dawn* shows that it constructed masculinity 'to connote the vices of drunkenness, gambling and swearing, and the qualities of moral weakness, self-indulgence, selfishness, idleness and neglect.'¹¹ Women's purity and moral superiority was constantly being constructed, in the journal, in opposition to this depraved masculinity.

The idea that true beauty was rooted in benevolence and purity of character was prevalent in *The Dawn* and central to Lawson's feminine ideal; yet significant attention was paid to the issue of how to display this beauty on an outward level. The art of self-maintenance and adornment was, it seems, a topic of high-interest to writers and readers alike.

9 This idea originated in Britain but due to the close relationship the country had to the Australian colonies, it also manifested in Australian culture. See: Mary L. Spongberg, 'The Body as Infectious Site: Re-Reading the Contagious Diseases Acts' in *The Woman Question: in England and Australia*, Barbara Caine, (ed.) (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1994) pp.27-57.

10 *Dawn*, November 1894, p. 29.

11 Sara Cousins, 'Drunken, Selfish 'Boors?' Images of Masculinity in *The Dawn*', *Hecate*, Vol.25, No. 2, 1999, p. 93. See also: Docker, *The Nervous Nineties*, pp. 10-12.

The Dawn regularly schooled its readers in which styles and commodities were considered fashionable and elegant in its regular style page *Fashions*:

One of Fashion's latest fancies is to imitate the Dahlia in velvet. Fashioned thus, it is used as a trimming, either for the dress that is made of the most dainty material, or for the one which is composed of the richest material.¹²

This page not only informed women of which styles and materials were 'in', but also how and by whom they should be worn. *Fashions* was dedicated to enabling every kind of woman or child to enhance their appearance – not simply those of perfect proportions. A developing young woman could open up the *Dawn* and read: “There is nothing more becoming to a growing girl, who may be somewhat angular and possibly a trifle awkward in her movements, than the soft blouse and jacket.”¹³ Women with more portly figures could find advice such as:

FOR STOUT WOMEN – It is necessary that all lines should be run downwards; perpendicular lines must be preferred to horizontal ones. Hip trimmings must be avoided, but a box pleat at the side, or rather below the side-pleat to the back of the bodice, will take away from the size...¹⁴

Advice about how best to exhibit one's beauty existed for every kind of woman whether young, old, slender, stout, awkward, sickly, petite or gross. The *Dawn* ardently encouraged women to be the most beautiful that they possibly could on the inside and the outside, yet it was also concerned that they not only beautify themselves, but the world around them, by always looking the best they could, and by decorating their environments with finery. To this end it provided regular tips about how to build elegant furniture for the home, interesting ways to arrange flowers, and what type of art to invest in.

¹² *The Dawn*, 'Fashions', March, 1895, p. 13.

¹³ *The Dawn*, 'Fashions', November, 1893, p. 15.

¹⁴ *The Dawn*, 'Fashions', August, 1894, p. 19.

Making elegance affordable and accessible was central to the way the journal engaged with fashion and beauty. Many articles were dedicated to helping women make their appearance more beautiful in economical ways: for example, pieces such as 'The Reconstruction Bonnet', which tells of how to make a new bonnet out of an old or unwanted hat;¹⁵ or 'That old Parasol', which reveals how to make a new, 'charming' parasol using the frame of your old parasol.¹⁶ Articles such as this were most common during the economic depression of the early 1890s and highlight, once again, *The Dawn's* commitment to lightening the load of women under pressure. Lawson had found that the maintenance of a lovely home and pretty appearance were some of the few things that brought her joy during her poorest years on the gold-fields and in the depression of the 1870s; she was determined to see other women comfort themselves in the same way:

There is no woman, I do not care how poor she may be, who cannot do something to improve her personal appearance.¹⁷

Though most fashion pieces were focused on helping the working mother or the impecunious housewife improve their outer beauty, not all fashion advice was directed towards the lower ranks of society. The diversity of readership for which the journal was written is reflected in the diversity of the products and trends it presented. While on one page we find affordable fashion ideas, such as those mentioned above, on the next one might find updates on the latest trends of fine jewellery - "Fine diamond half-loop bracelets display the diamonds set in squares of gold, as many as eleven being shown in a diminishing row."¹⁸ Though rare, such tips highlight the fact that Lawson did, in fact, seek to appeal to and encourage a diversity of woman with her magazine. Though full of tips and encouragements to impecunious mothers and housewives the journal was not exclusive in its audience.

Penny Johnson, who has described the journal as "bourgeois and reformist", asserts that "the

15 *The Dawn*, 'The Reconstruction Bonnet', July, 1894 p. 17.

16 *The Dawn*, 'That Old Parasol', July, 1894 p. 15.

17 *The Dawn*, 'How to be beautiful', November, 1889 p. 12.

18 *The Dawn*, 'Novelties', Feb, 1891, p. 19.

audience [the *Dawn*] was addressing were women of the urban bourgeoisie, many of whom did not have the necessary income to support the income and lifestyle and conventions associated with their new station.”¹⁹ John Docker has suggested that the journal “stood for middle- and lower-class women”- referencing the *Dawn's* complaints about the suffering of most women in these classes as evidence.²⁰ Attempts to classify Lawson's intended audience and ideological bent, such as these, pay little attention to diamond bracelet fashion updates or articles entreating mistresses to be more sympathetic to their servant girls.²¹ Though historians agree that the *Dawn's* readership mostly comprised bourgeoisie and lower-class women in both urban and rural settings,²² it does not follow that Lawson sought only to appeal to this group. There are definitely elements of the magazine which reached out to women of the upper classes. The diversity of intended audience ultimately created a series of contradictions related to beauty which are recurrent in the *Dawn*. These contradictions draw attention to the journal's struggle to describe the outward expression of a beauty which all women could aspire to despite differences in wealth and station.

Some Beautiful Contradictions

While the image of inner beauty cast by the *Dawn's* various articles remains relatively static and simple in its focus on benevolence and purity, fashions and commentaries on outer beautification were constantly fluctuating in a vacuum of subjective and objective critique. Women's fashion and style had been subject to variance from the earliest days of the colony, when it became clear that the weight and warmth of traditional English dresses brought over from Britain could not be endured in the hot Australian climate, and new modes of dressing needed to be explored. Margaret Maynard describes how this early exploration of new dress styles in the colony kindled popular interest in international trends and experimental fashions which often lead visitors

19 Johnson, *1888 Bulletin*, p. 77.

20 Docker, *The Nervous Nineties*, p. 18. Docker refers to an article which asserts that women of the lower- and middle-classes are losing their beauty due to overwork and suffering - *Dawn*, January 1896, p. 13.

21 *Dawn*, September 1890, pp.7-9.

22 Docker, *The Nervous Nineties*, p. 17; Mathews, *Louisa*, p. 202; Olive Lawson, *The First Voice of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Simon and Schuster, 1990) p. 13; Pearce, *Shameless Scribblers*, p. 14.

from Britain to characterise colonial women as materialistic and gaudily dressed.²³ By the 1890s the public's fascination with fashion and purchasable beauty was well-established and the *Dawn*, according to its commitment to explore every interest of womankind, strove to give on-the-pulse updates about new fashions, products and style techniques. This fascination, however, was often at odds with the journal's various exhortations to dress in a functional and healthy manner and even with its picture of inner beauty itself, producing a series of beauty-related contradictions which are central to the *Dawn's* new womanhood.

The most common of these contradictions is found in the dilemma of challenging readers to love simplicity and dress modestly on the one hand, while offering them a plethora of lessons in self-decoration and a series of beautifying tips on the other. A fad for economical, simple dress flourished in Australia during the depression of the early 1890s.²⁴ *The Dawn* was a clear proponent of this fad, regularly advising its readers in how to make clothes cheaply and celebrating the benefits of simple dress.²⁵ An article titled 'Taste in Dress' from July 1889 admonishes women to dress in all simplicity for "as a consequence of it comes freshness, that most desirable quality which to a woman's dress is much the same as a fair, healthy skin to her face."²⁶ The pieces before and after this simplicity-focused article ironically celebrate a series of extravagant, new fashion commodities. One gives details of a woman who has started a new trend by making a wedding dress in white velvet with a lace bodice, and 'a band of snowy fur upon the wide court train'; while the other, titled 'Special Art Fabrics', describes a new collection of embroidered silk fabrics which were designed for the making of fashionable dresses.²⁷

23 Margaret Maynard, *Fashioned From Penury: Dress as cultural practice in colonial Australia* (Melbourne : Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 163.

24 Maynard, *Fashioned From Penury*, p. 88. Maynard discusses the ways that women's fashion became more masculine in the 1890s due to the Austerity of the depression and the growing influence of the rational dress movement.

25 For example: See 'Economical Dressing', *The Dawn*, January 1890, p. 15.

26 *The Dawn*, July, 1889, p. 15.

27 *The Dawn*, July, 1889, p. 15.

The materialism called out by *The Dawn's* numerous presentations of home and beauty products, whether in advertising or editorials, lies at the heart of the journal's second major beauty dilemma: a contest between materialism and benevolence. The nineteenth century was one of rapid industrial development in the colonies in which Sydney came out on top as the most economically developed and commercialised urban centre because of its immediate access to imports, long-established commercial institutions, and large markets.²⁸ Writing from their office on George Street, Sydney, Lawson and her team were in the heart of the nation's commercial happenings. They had stronger lines of communication and information about international events and cultures than anywhere else in the colonies, as well as more access to new products and businesses. The style of much of the journal's advertising gives a sense of the consumerist and fad-driven culture in which it was being created from month to month. Examples include:

Thousands of charming hats and bonnets, correct in fashion, perfect in taste. Fresh arrivals from London and Paris.²⁹,

Ladies! You are not up to date unless you have tried the latest perfect Toilet Preparations. Platypus Eucalyptus Cream is the very best cream for the complexion.³⁰

Almost half of *The Dawn's* page-space is dedicated to products designed for women as they maintained home, family, and appearance. Advertisements were stacked on top of one another, crammed into margins and at the bottom of pages, constantly presenting readers with a barrage of commodities to add to their existences and on which they could spend their money. *The Dawn*, like other newspapers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was a commercially stimulated enterprise, which thrived on the promotion of various products. However, the pressure to spend which the journal placed on its readers was constantly at odds with its encouragements to benevolence and, at times, prudence, as qualities of the truly beautiful woman:

28 C.J.R Linge, *Industrial Awakening: A geography of Australian Manufacturing, 1788-1890* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979) p. 14.

29 *The Dawn*, January, 1895, p. 2.

30 *The Dawn*, November, 1893, p. 23.

A thoughtful girl will begin to consider... whether she is doing right to spend so much money on her dress, when so many good causes are standing still for lack of means.³¹

These contentions surrounding issues of beauty in *The Dawn* reveal that balance was central to the cultivation of the new womanhood it promulgated. Beauty was a quality which, though rooted in the goodness and purity of the soul, required outward expression; most commonly in the bearing of a pretty visage, picturesque home or pleasing outfit. Women's ability to consume or act benevolently were very much governed by their means and stations. A balance between inner and outer beauty needed to be found by each woman. Ultimately, however, no matter how much she invested in aesthetics each woman needed to remember to use her beauty for the sake of others:

We have something more to do than to “look pretty” (though the wise woman will not disregard appearances) and if we wish to find our “sphere” i.e. the place where we can do the most good for ourselves and others, we shall attain it only through the graceful development of our higher faculties.³²

Beauty Challenges the Nation

To have a Kingly race of men, we must have a Queenly race of women.³³

The idea that, through their refinement and beautification, through becoming *Queens*, Australian women could transform the possibilities of the race was fairly prevalent in *The Dawn*. Just as it celebrated the moral transformations brought to the nation by women's maternal qualities, it also announced the capacity of women to 'civilise' the country through their redeeming purity.³⁴ “Woman is beginning... to demand freedom wherein to exercise her love and purity and virtue. This

31 *The Dawn*, March, 1890, p. 14.

32 *The Dawn*, November, 1892, p. 11.

33 *The Dawn*, May 1892, p. 24.

34 Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: Race and nation in Australian women's writing, 1880s-1930s* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995) p. 79.

is her evolution; her highest duty to herself and humanity.”³⁵ By challenging women to continuously cultivate their inner and outer beauty – to be the sunshine of the home and nation - *The Dawn* made beauty a central part of its the developing Australian womanhood. It broadened the sphere of women's beauty, asserting that she could purify more than just home and body, but also society, and even the government. Lawson challenged the popular argument that women had no place in the masculine world of politics³⁶ by proclaiming that the vote would lead “to the development of thought in women, and to the purification of the governing bodies; for women in the mass will never vote for corrupt or dishonourable representatives”.³⁷

The Dawn's focus on beauty, furthermore, threw up an interesting challenge to the widely held social anxiety which stipulated that as women were liberated they would become more masculine. Anne V. Muirhead's article on the public discourse about women in the 1880s looks at the way the *Sydney Morning Herald* portrayed women during the decade. She writes that throughout this period “the woman who dared to tread beyond the home circle [was] depicted as masculine and an unnatural abomination.”³⁸ By encouraging women not to forget to tend to their beauty, both inner and outer, *The Dawn* was directly confronting this anxiety and showing women how they could progress in beauty as they progressed generally. It was promoting an ideal of Australian womanhood which was both liberated and beautiful in the face of public fears that the two could not be had together. Not only did it project hopes of how women could challenge and shape the nation through their beauty, but it also began to challenge existing ideas about whether women would lose their beauty as they became more equal to men.

Beauty as a quality of the soul, expressed outwardly through actions and appearance, is a subject present in every edition of *The Dawn*. The journal's poetry, advertisements, editorials,

35 *The Dawn*, July, 1892, p. 12.

36 The belief that politics was a masculine sphere was espoused regularly by men and women in the media. For example see: 'Women and Politics', *SMH*, 19 January 1888, p. 5. Also See: Anne V. Muirhead, 'Public discourse on the position of women in society: Sydney 1888' in *The Australia 1888 Bulletin*, p. 85.

37 *The Dawn*, July, 1889, p. 12.

38 Muirhead, 'Public discourse on the position of women in society', p. 85.

updates, hints and columns were often concerned with beauty. Yet much of what is said about women's beauty seems contradictory. Ultimately the task of cultivating and expressing true beauty was given to every woman. *The Dawn* was sure that as Australian women grew in beauty and were brought more into the public realm, their beauty would have a transforming effect on the whole nation. Thus beauty was a key quality of the womanhood ideal under construction in *The Dawn*. The ideal Australian woman, however, would not only contribute to the process of national development via her beauty and maternal benevolence; she would also inspire and improve the nation as she entered the classically male domains of work, invention, and academia.

Thrifty, Capable and Intellectually Fecund: Celebrating the contributions of women in male spheres

The immediate need of the world right now is not more of us, but, a better brand of us.¹

Intrinsic to *The Dawn's* new womanhood was the push for a 'better brand' of women, who would improve the world. The magazine was not only committed to portraying how women's moral and physical improvement could benefit society, as was shown in the previous two chapters, but also to revealing how women were already contributing to the typically masculine spheres of work, academia and invention. The call to 'betterment' extended beyond moral lessons and beauty tips; the improvement of mind and skill was also encouraged regularly. Many articles attested to the capacity of women to contribute to the nation in ways beyond motherhood and benevolence by presenting readers with stories of female success in intellectual and entrepreneurial pursuits. Historians believe that the journal's bold announcements of "the achievements of women in any extra-domestic activities," were a key source of inspiration and encouragement to its readers.² This chapter will examine various stories of educated, working, and inventive women which further highlight the relationship between women's rights, new womanhood and nation in *The Dawn*. Ultimately, I intend to show that such stories were inspiring because they provided living examples of the thrift, capacity to work, and intellectual fecundity of the new Australian woman.

1 *The Dawn*, July 1891, p. 11.

2 Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, p. 350. See also: Ollif, *Louisa Lawson*, p. 59; Susanna De Vries, *Strength of Purpose: Australian Women of Achievement from Federation to the Mid-20th Century* (Australia: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998) p. 154.

Cynicisms about women doing men's work were a regular feature in popular Sydney newspapers, like *The Bulletin*, and reveal a spirit of resentment about women working outside of the domestic sphere, which pervaded society in the nineteenth century. Negative reactions to women taking up highly skilled and educated careers as doctors and lawyers were common when Lawson began her work on *The Dawn* as women had only begun studying for such professions in Australia a few years earlier.³ These reactions are epitomised in the *The Bulletin's* frequent and snide remarks about learned women, such as: "We are to have plenty of female doctors shortly... We'll then need some female women."⁴ Stereotypes about men as the 'intellectual' sex and women as the 'emotional' sex pervaded cultural ideals of gender throughout the nation, and stories of women in intellectual spheres 'offended the spirit of the Enlightenment' in which it was assumed that women were 'behind men in evolution.'⁵ Attitudes such as this are further illuminated in a comment made in the *Bulletin* in 1887: "Women are far from that stage of progressive rationalism when they can take their stand on the same platform with men."⁶ The increasing presence of women in universities, schools, and highly skilled careers by the end of the century was presenting a constant challenge to such stereotypes.

The notion that women were educable, that they could reap the same benefits of education as men, had been a topic of world-wide discussion since the dissemination of Mary Wollstonecraft's eighteenth century treatise on women's rights: *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. The work suggested that woman's lack of education and ignorance weakened her humanity and moral

3 Several women, such as Dagmar Berne and Grace Fairley, had challenged the academic status quo by enrolling as medical students at various universities around the nation in the 1880s. Marjorie Theobald has written in depth about such women and the history of women's education in Australia in her book *Knowing Women: Origins of women's education in nineteenth-century Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Chapter 3, pp.55-91, offers particular insights into women in Australian universities.

4 *The Bulletin*, 13 March 1880, p. 3. See also: Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox: A strange Case of Authorship* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1987) pp. 194-204 – for a succinct summary of the *Bulletin's* various positions and stereotypes about women and the 'woman question.'

5 Docker, *The Nervous Nineties*, p. 50.

6 *The Bulletin*, 1 October 1887, p. 4.

sovereignty – “it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason.”⁷ The discussion sparked by Wollstonecraft about women's capacity and responsibility to 'reason' was still in circulation a century later when Lawson began the journal.⁸

Another issue which encouraged this discussion throughout the nineteenth century was the slow democratisation of the colonies. From the 1840s onwards Australian democrats had publicly proclaimed the ennobling and dignifying impact that the education and enfranchisement of men would reap upon the nation. J.B Hirst writes that colonial democrats had looked on a people 'careless of their rights' and decided that education would be the main 'engine of transformation', that “before the people could rule they would be, they must be transformed.”⁹ Thus a link between education, the vote and national development, became an inherent feature of the democratic consciousness which was blossoming from the middle of the century onwards in Australia. Writing upon the acme of this democratic consciousness - the decades before Federation - Lawson sought to prove that women were also ennobled and transformed through education:

Nowhere is real intellectual training found to weaken the feminine type...on the contrary... it brings about a perception of mutual rights that does not come to the ignorant; it prevents encroachment; it renders due honour; and it knows how to produce comfort and joy, and puts the knowledge to use.¹⁰

Thus education became an essential element of the idealised womanhood being espoused by *The Dawn*. It was portrayed as a source of dignity and honour. This is why educated women and women who excelled academically were constantly being celebrated and honoured by the journal. Lawson challenged the notion that women were not able to develop intellectually alongside men and encouraged her readers to take pride in the individual and collective successes of women which highlighted the continuing evolution of the sex. Every copy of *The Dawn* was home to an

7 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (London: Penguin Books, 1975) p. 12.

8 *The Bulletin* provides many examples of the existence of this discussion as a topic of popular interest and humour. See: Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox*, p. 196.

9 J.B Hirst, *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy: New South Wales. 1848-1884* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1989) p. 7.

10 *The Dawn*, September, 1890, p. 11.

assortment of articles and announcements detailing the achievements of women in academics and invention. These stories are exemplars of the new stages of capability and fecundity that women, as a sex, were entering as they moved into typically male spheres.

Two decades after the University of Adelaide first opened its doors to women, in 1869, *The Dawn* came to its readers full of enthusiasm, eager to declare the news of how female students ‘have held their own with the men with whom they have competed.’¹¹ When it came to intellectual matters, a selection of women had reached new heights of achievement. They had defied age old notions of mental inferiority and made their epistemic mark on the world - for this, all women could be proud.

In an attempt to effectively challenge negative stereotypes about women's education and intellectual capacity, *The Dawn* hosted an interview with the registrars of the colony's three main universities in which it ultimately opined:

Review of all the questions shows that Australian experience favours the belief in the mental equality of the sexes, and that a fair start has been made in the higher education of women.¹²

On top of the proofs about the mental capacity of women given in this article, and others like it, *The Dawn* constantly announced individual success stories of women in education such as Miss Ethel Montague; a twenty one year old B.A. Honours graduate who went on to win a chemistry prize in the joint Oxford and Cambridge examinations of 1886, and then the Reid Scholarship to Bedford College in 1887.¹³ Furthermore, it kept readers informed of the journeys such women were making as a result of their education:

Miss Fawcett, the clever daughter of the late professor, who was also Post Master-General, England, is to begin business as a civil engineer. Miss Fawcett is a

11 *The Dawn*, June 1889, p. 13.

12 *The Dawn*, June 1889, p. 13.

13 *The Dawn*, July 1889, p. 10.

mathematician of the highest attainment, and her brilliant success at the University two or three years ago is still fresh in the public mind.¹⁴

Through such updates about the things women were doing with their educations the journal was highlighting the fruitfulness of women's learning - revealing how their educations had made them apt doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists and the like, who were contributing to the world in the same ways as men. Furthermore, the enthusiasm and frequency of such notices instilled a sense of pride into the readers, who partook in the intellectual successes of their sisters world-wide. Each issue of the magazine would deliver a new crop of stories about women who had received degrees or won academic prizes around the world.¹⁵ The success of these women was presented as evidence of women's potential to achieve and succeed in male-dominated arenas if given the chance.

Yet stories of women's intellectual development and opportunity were not limited to the female university student but generally covered any area of learning and education in which women competed with men:

Women Pharmacists – women are this autumn granted the right to compound drugs and practice pharmacy in general in Honduras, U.S.A., provided only they have passed the same examinations as is required of male druggists.¹⁶

Another particular way in which *The Dawn* further promoted the education of women and the ideal of the educated woman, was through providing regular updates on new schools and colleges where women could take up formal studies or learn various crafts. For example, in 1893 the journal published a brief piece in praise of a night school which had been set up by the School of Arts in Sydney: “We would strongly advise any young women who have reason to regret a

14 *The Dawn*, December 1894, p. 30.

15 Every copy of the Dawn contained a monthly page titled 'News and notes' or 'From far and near' which gave details of the accomplishments of women's groups and individuals around the world. However, there were also, on occasion, feature articles which told of the intellectual successes of individual women. For a few examples see: 'A notable Woman', *The Dawn*, January 1893, p. 16; *The Dawn*, April 1899, p. 8; *The Dawn*, May 1899, p. 8; *The Dawn*, January 1901, p.8.

16 *The Dawn*, May 1889, p. 9.

neglected education to enrol in these classes at once.”¹⁷ The journal was passionate that its readers become inspired to seek out the education they were entitled to and step into the new era as new women, ennobled and equipped by their studies and learning to function effectively in every space – especially in the home:

The better the training, the better her balance; the better her understanding of her household needs, and her ability to meet them, the better will she know how to retain and increase the affection once secured, and to make her home all that the ideal home should be.¹⁸

By linking the benefits of education with home, the sphere considered woman's first responsibility, the journal made education an essential experience for every woman.

By the end of the nineteenth century beliefs that intellectual development was unnatural and unnecessary for women still existed despite increases in the amount of women at schools and universities. As well as portraying the ease with which many women took to learning and academic engagement, Lawson sought to establish once and for all why education was as essential for women as it was for men. Furthermore she sought to make women proud of the successes of their sex in education and keep readers informed of various schools and places of education which all women should be aware of, whether for their own sake or simply to be aware of the strides being made by other women. Discussions of women's education in *The Dawn* contribute to the overall picture Lawson was painting of a new womanhood equipped with the necessary rights to bless and shape a nation. The new woman was not only educated, however, but also a highly skilled and capable worker and inventor.

¹⁷ *The Dawn*, April 1893, p. 12.

¹⁸ *The Dawn*, September 1890, p. 11.

Providing through work and invention.

A firm belief that women were as capable as men when it came to work underpinned much of the journal's commentary on women in the workforce. In an article about the possibilities of women in the upholstering industry, which featured in both *Harper's Bazaar* and *The Dawn* in July 1889, we read that "there is nothing surpassing the strength or possible skill and dexterity of woman."¹⁹ The article goes on to place women's innate aptness and skill within a context of necessity – "It is not very choice work... [but] if one must work, and is not beyond the handicrafts, it is one of the most rational and simple to undertake."²⁰ The idea that women were quite capable to work was often shadowed by the belief that women 'must work' in *The Dawn*. Hope for family and nation was often attributed to the presence of women in the workforce.

The economic torpor of the late 1880s saw increased rates of unemployment amongst men which culminated in an unemployment rate of thirty per cent during the Depression of the early 1890s.²¹ As wages decreased and commodity prices soared families could not survive with one breadwinner; women and children had to find jobs in order to provide their families with enough income. Manufacturing companies and labour dependent businesses felt the strain of economic depression and increasingly opted to employ women and children over men as they were much cheaper. The rapid mechanisation of industry in the 1880s and 90s meant that skilled and experienced craftsmen were less in demand because new machinery could be run effectively by cheap, untrained labour. Jenny Lee suggests that most of the public pressure for equal pay amongst women and men in the 1890s came from unions representing the interests of men in the workforce who were unable to hold their jobs and provide for their families when the opportunity to hire much

19 *The Dawn*, July 1889, p. 14. The piece was quoted in the *Dawn* to have been copied from a previous edition of *Harper's Bazaar*.

20 *The Dawn*, July 1889, p. 14.

21 Jenny Lee, 'A Redivision of Labour: Women and wage regulation in Victoria 1896 – 1903' in *Debutante Nation: Feminist Contests the 1890s*, edited by Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley, and Susan Sheridan (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993) p. 28 .

cheaper labour was constantly tempting their employers.²² Lee points to the commentaries made by leading Labour magazines of the period such as *Toscin* which predicted a gloomy future for the nation dependant on cheap labour and machines: “The day comes nearer when the men of the community shall be absolutely idle, and their places taken by low-paid and poorly-fed women.”²³

The Dawn too complained of poorly fed women whose families scraped by on a mother's meagre wage. As was discussed in chapter two, on women at home, economic independence amongst women was portrayed by the journal as the only true way to ensure happy marriages and a well-fed, healthy, Australian progeny. However, its commentary on women's wages also attended to women's skill and worth as workers. *The Dawn* not only recognised women who were achieving in education, but also in the workforce, such as Miss Alice Longfellow, an American who took up amateur photography and soon after had her photos selected to illustrate a popular song book.²⁴ Or Miss Sanger, a type-writer, and “the first woman ever employed at the white house in a clerical capacity.”²⁵ Tales of thrifty women also illuminated the way women were succeeding in the realm of work and income provision:

One thrifty woman who had watched the vegetables and fruit rotting day by day, at her grocer's and which were a dead loss to him, proposed that they enter into an arrangement in the future , whereby she should preserve and pickle his entire surplus, either for regular pay or upon commission.²⁶

In the face of public cynicism about women's place in the workforce *The Dawn* put forward a series of cases in which women had naturally flourished and succeeded as steam boat captains, musicians for hire, poultry farmers, street car conductors, members of the fire brigade... evidence that women could and should be in the workforce.²⁷ On the basis of female success as workers and the fact that the nation's children needed to eat, the journal insisted that every woman should be

22 Lee, 'A Redivision of Labour', p. 27.

23 *Toscin*, November, 1897, cited in Jenny Lee, *Debutante Nation*, p.27.

24 *The Dawn*, April 1891, p. 21.

25 *The Dawn*, June 1889, p. 8.

26 *The Dawn*, March 1901, p. 22.

27 *The Dawn*, February 1900, p. 8; *The Dawn*, June 1896, p. 14; *The Dawn*, November 1897, p. 12.

allowed to work to provide for her family in whatever capacity she could:

There is no sex in occupation...If a woman can work a farm, manage a mine, successfully conduct the affairs of a counting room or plan a house, that is just the proper thing for her to do.²⁸

Stories of female inventors also frequented the pages of *The Dawn*. Stories like that of Miss Alice J. Wilson, of Abilene, Texas, who invented a machine that would dry dishes in 1890.²⁹ Invention stories provided a space in which women's intellectual capacity and hard-work met to show female readers the possibilities of their sex and of their world in new and exciting ways. Lawson had herself invented a productivity-raising postal-bag belt in the late 1890s which revolutionised the speed and efficiency of the postal system in Australia, but had not received the recognition she felt she deserved and was swindled out of her due reward by the Postmaster-General, William Patrick Crick, in such a way as to embitter her for years to come.³⁰ Enthusiasm in *The Dawn* about female inventors in the years before this event, followed by Lawson's own experiments with invention, epitomise the journal's interest in women contributing to the development of society in non-typical or gendered ways. We see how a picture of womanhood that had adapted to work and could meet the needs of society in ways beyond the basic maintenance of families was being slowly built up in such pieces.

As with women's education *The Dawn* did not simply just preach about the capacity and successes of women when it came to the subject of work. It also helped women find training and employment through a series of advertisements and articles about various craft schools and job vacancies for women:

New Work For Women – We are glad to be able to record a new opening for women's work. *The Sydney Morning Herald* has, we understand, already engaged eleven

28 *The Dawn*, April 1893, p. 11.

29 *The Dawn*, March 1890, p. 12.

30 Brian Mathews, *Louisa* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1987) pp. 281-317; Ollif, *Louisa Lawson*, pp. 99-104; De Vries, *Strength of Purpose*, p. 164; see also the conclusion of this thesis.

young women to distribute the type set by the new composing machines...more workers will be required which will probably bring up the whole number to eighteen.

A new business for women is that of superintendent at weddings. A woman of taste and experience can be engaged to supervise costumes, decorations, and everything relating to the festivities...³¹

In some cases, the journal pointed out issues in society which could be dealt with best if women were hired to fix the problem. For example, one article from 1898 complains of the poor quality of restaurant food in Sydney which was generally detested by the citizenry. *The Dawn* suggests that “luncheon rooms be opened in the city by women, who have had a fair training in cookery classes.”³² Women were often encouraged, in pieces such as this, to bring the skills learnt as wives and mothers, such as cookery, into the workforce. Stories of women who had commercialised their household skills and interests in order to provide a secondary income selling embroidered handkerchiefs, playing with sick children, making and selling soup stock from leftover meat scraps at the butcher – also highlighted the way that women were seizing every opportunity to provide new services to the busy public.³³ Women were finding the needs of the public and meeting them with the skills they had learned in private.

Each of these facets of *The Dawn's* discussions of women at work is a key part of the way the journal seeks to encourage women in its vision of independent and ennobled womanhood. The belief that work and education would ennoble and further moralise women was central to women's movements the world-over and part of a colonial heritage of British feminism.³⁴ However *The Dawn* uniquely grounded the issues of women's rights as workers within the context of nation,

31 *The Dawn*, September, 1890, p. 9.

32 *The Dawn*, June 1898, p. 7.

33 *The Dawn*, March 1901, p. 22.

34 See Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780 -1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. 88-123 for more information on the place of work and education in the nineteenth-century British feminist discourse.

portraying how enfranchisement of the female worker was ultimately to the benefit of other Australian workers:

They have no political power to bring to bear upon politicians or newspapers.

Deprived of the power which the ballot gives of making their claims heard and their protests respected, they are forced by competition to accept miserably inadequate pay , and this inevitably reacts upon the condition of the entire body of wage earners.³⁵

With so many stories of woman's success and opportunity as student, worker, and inventor, in each edition of *The Dawn*, the constant stream of pride over female achievement and capacity was made quite apparent. These stories provided readers with examples of the 'better brand of us' that *The Dawn* worked so hard to help every woman become. It encouraged women to take pride in the successes of their sex when a male-dominated media world had labelled them useless and incompetent. Ollif has noted the way in which tales of female accomplishment shifted over the years of the journal's existence, becoming less focused on stories of women in other nations - "No doubt as more victories were achieved on the home-front, less encouragement was needed from elsewhere."³⁶ *The Dawn* celebrated the successes of women on the home-front in order to show Australian women that they were moving forward - their sex could indeed contribute and compete in Australian society. Women who succeeded outside of the home were beacons of 'new womanhood', a womanhood to which the journal sought to help every woman attain to by providing them with updates about opportunities of work and education. Amidst all the pride and celebration of the success of women in outer spheres *The Dawn* remained staunchly loyal to the notion that women's greatest pride and joy were found in the running of good homes and the maintaining of family love and equilibrium. Discourses on women in work and education were designed not to challenge this notion but rather to add value by suggesting that women's capability and success, although manifested best in the home, was not limited to that space alone.

35 *The Dawn*, September 1890, p. 14.

36 Ollif, *Louisa Lawson*, p. 59.

A Vision Concluded

The years 1900 to 1905 were rather unpleasant ones for Louisa Lawson. As a result of an accident which occurred in 1900 she suffered constant headaches, mood swings and became increasingly depressed.¹ There were of course many great victories for women as a whole during these years which *The Dawn* celebrated enthusiastically, such as the winning of suffrage for women in each state and then federally; but the problems in Lawson's family and personal life were ever-growing.² For most of this time she was caught up in an exhausting court case over the piracy of the postal-bag buckle she had invented in 1896, discussed in chapter four of this thesis. The leading article from the last edition of *The Dawn*, July 1905, gives a detailed report of the case and finishes by proclaiming that it had made her existence "almost unendurable."³ At the end of the article, in a completely unexpected public resignation, Lawson declared her intention to end her paper, thanking her supporters and asking that none would write to convince her otherwise. Historians have sensed an attitude of defeatism in the way the journal was closed down:

She could find nobody else to carry on its traditions as she had established them, she quietly closed it down, scorning to sell it to some newspaperman who would not have her ideals.⁴

The struggle of pushing forward with ideals of women and nation when her own existence was becoming rather hopeless and exhausting had seemingly become too much for Lawson.

The mood of Lawson's final piece was indeed pessimistic and bitter; her cynical explanation of the decision to close (delivered coldly in the third person) seemed far from the hopefulness and enthusiasm which had driven the journal for years before:

1 Lawson fell off a moving tram in 1900 and sustained knee, head and spinal injuries which left her bedridden for a year. It has been recorded by many historians that her mental health seemed to go steadily downhill from this point onwards. See: Mathews, *Louisa*, pp. 263-273; De Vries, *Strength of Purpose*, p. 164; Ollif, *Louisa Lawson*, pp. 101.

2 Lawson was constantly confronted by the increasing alcoholism and melancholia of her son Henry Lawson at this time. One of her other sons, Charlie, was also in and out of a mental asylum on several occasions during this time. See: Mathews, *Louisa*, pp. 305-317.

3 *Dawn*, July 1905, p. 6.

4 Ollif, *Louisa Lawson*, p. 139. See also: Mathews, *Louisa*, p. 336.

As she knows none whom she could with confidence trust to continue this journal on the unbiased and independent lines which has characterised it in the past – the independent woman journalist being almost as scarce as the good man politician – she contemplates ending her paper as she started it, quite upon her own responsibility.⁵

For almost two decades the journal had inspired and propelled women forward with its reformist idealism, but in 1905 it seems that Lawson's enthusiasm had dwindled considerably and she could not push on with the magazine. Elements of her vision and hope for women would go on to shape the ideals of other feminists and women's movements for years to come. A prime example of this is Mary Gilmore, a feminist journalist who edited the women's page of the *Worker* for 23 years between 1908 and 1931. Sharyn Pearce has described the way Gilmore followed in Lawson's footsteps, mixing bold feminist treatises with “more ephemeral, domestic material such as the Household Hints and cookery recipes.”⁶ Marilyn Lake has noted that the culture of maternal benevolence encouraged amongst women by suffragists – and regularly celebrated in *The Dawn* – was fundamental to the creation of “a maternalist welfare state” at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷ Equipped with the vote, twentieth-century feminists “engaged in forging a new social and political order.”⁸ The campaigns and programs enfranchised women of the early twentieth century became involved in (campaigns for children's rights, social action on behalf of the poor, family health programs) all reflected the 'mother-element' which Lawson imagined the new Australian women would bring to the nation.

This thesis has shown how by engaging readers in the discourse on 'new womanhood', which was burgeoning among feminist discourses around the world in the second half of the

5 *Dawn*, July 1905, p. 6.

6 Pearce, *Shameless Scribblers*, p. 43.

7 Lake, *Getting Equal*, pp. 49-71.

8 *Ibid.* p. 50.

nineteenth century, and by drawing attention to the role of women in the story of the Australian nation, *The Dawn* constantly pointed out the need for an ideal to which the women of Australia could aspire.

The ideal of Australian womanhood presented by the journal, studied in chapters two to four of this thesis, has been shown to centre around themes of motherhood, beauty, and female contribution in typically male spheres. Australian women were portrayed as great mothers and housewives, worthy of recognition and desperately in need of rest. The journal sought to recognise and support the nation's mothers through celebrating their efforts and providing hundreds of helpful hints to make their 'first calling' easier and more affordable.⁹ *The Dawn* preached that the more liberated women were to enjoy the freedoms of education, health, and political empowerment, the better mothers they would become, the more they would be able to nurture and improve both family and nation. The new woman would bless and raise the moral standards of the nation through her strength and maternal benevolence regardless of whether she had a family or not.

Woman's impact on the nation was not limited, however, to her skills and qualities as mother and housewife. She could also affect change through her beauty. *The Dawn* projected an image of women's purity and virtue as a powerfully transforming force. It told readers that their true beauty was of the heart, a purity and goodness that could civilise a nation. It encouraged them to express this beauty outwardly, to adorn and decorate themselves in a balanced and appropriate way according to their status and means. The contradictory nature of beauty messages in the journal's articles and advertisements highlight the tension created by attempting to inspire and challenge women of varied situations to continue to develop and express their inner beauty.

The final area of woman's interests which *The Dawn* discussed regularly as it cast an ideal of Australian womanhood, is the social fecundity of women, namely the contribution women could make to society through study, work and invention. Studies of the thrift, inventiveness and intellectual successes of Australian women appear multifariously in *The Dawn*. It was committed to celebrating the victories of women in typically male arenas and to encouraging them to continue to

⁹ "No sphere is more important than home." *Dawn*, September 1889, p. 7 – the journal clearly asserted from its earliest days that women's work at home was her highest duty and should be her first priority.

enter such arenas. Lawson used individual stories to show that women were capable of contributing to society in new and unexpected ways, to suggest that their potential had not yet been tapped.

The Dawn sought to equip women with knowledge about how to keep progressing towards the Australian womanhood ideal. Whether through enhancing their beauty, health, intellect or independence, women could move forward; as they did, society would come with them. It is important to realise that *The Dawn* saw self-improvement as the means to national improvement; women's rights were vital to the project of self- and social- development. It integrated the political, the social, and the domestic worlds of women under questions of identity and 'divergence', bringing recipes next to updates on woman's suffrage; fashion tips alongside complaints of male cruelty in marriage; serious issues of national consequence among helpful hints on home improvement. Many of the women's interests which filled its pages still populate women's magazines today: fashion fads, home-improvement tips, women's stories, recipes, advertisements for women's products. However these magazines generally lack a vision of ideal womanhood which integrates discourses of national development and women's progress with such interests, as was exemplified by *The Dawn*.

History has remembered *The Dawn* for the rights it fought for and for the stereotypes it challenged; however, its first and foremost goal was to dignify and inspire women towards something. The journal should be remembered not only for the feminism it espoused, but for the way it integrated its feminism with popular women's interests under an ideal of womanhood. Reactions to gender roles and cultures of femininity in the feminist discourse since the turn of the twentieth century have seen a shift away from this kind of integration.¹⁰ However, based on the re-interpretation of *The Dawn* offered by this thesis it can be clearly stated that idealised womanhood, though steeped in concepts of gender and femininity, can be a powerfully motivating force in the process of women's liberation and development.

¹⁰ For descriptions of the development of Australian feminism throughout the twentieth century and the reactions to gender stereotypes and femininity cultures which characterised it at different points, see: Lake, *Getting Equal*; also, *Australian Feminism: A companion*, (ed.) Barbara Caine et al. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998)

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