

## The Union buries its dead.

This story was published in 1893 and is described as Historian Manning Clarke like this:

“He (Lawson) was telling Australians that the bush barbarians had their own way of showing they know just as well as the author of the book of Ecclesiastes what life was all about” Cited in “Studies in Australian Classic Fiction”

This means that the men in the bush had their own rituals and while they might not be very religious they understood life in a really true way.

George Orwell described Australians collectively as : “inveterate gamblers, drink as much beer as their wages will permit, are devoted to bawdy jokes, and use probably the foulest language in the world”. Quoted from ABC Radio National's Perspective program on 7 August 2007.

As you read, have a think about these statements. You may agree with them. You may think that this is not true of your heritage or your experiences as an Australian. Think if your individual identity is different to the identity given to Australians through this story

This story revolves around unionism. The union at the time had the idea of creating an alliance of working people but there was still a division among the classes which Lawson expressed in this story. Henry Lawson was considered by Will H Ogilvie as a “confirmed Socialist...setting high value on the brotherhood of man and seeing nothing but virtue in the attitude of Trade Unionism”

Quoted from [“Henry Lawson’s Socialist Vision” Studies in classic Australian fiction](#)

Lawson believed in Unionism and the values and beliefs around this are in his stories. Some of these values and beliefs became part of our national collective identity. They became part of our culture. Whether they are part of your personal identity is up to you.

### What is a Trade Union?

#### Australian Unions

In Australia, a union is sometimes referred to as a trade union or a labour union.

A union is an organisation of workers or employees who have joined together to achieve common goals. These goals can include seeking higher pay and better working conditions, fighting for job security and protecting the integrity of a trade.

A union, through its officials and delegates, bargains with the employer on behalf of union members and negotiates with employers.

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This bargaining may include the negotiation of wages, work practices, dispute procedures, recruitment, disciplinary and termination protocols, benefits, workplace safety and company policies. Enterprise agreements negotiated by the union are binding on the employer and all employees, including non-members.

There are currently almost one hundred unions in Australia. Everyone who works in Australia is entitled to join a [union](#).

- 1) What are three things modern trade unions fight for?
- 2) Unions 'stand up for' working people. Does this idea affirm/challenge your ideas on what it means to be Australian?
- 3) Even though this story focusses on unionism, there is still an obvious division between the classes. Do you still think there is class division today in Australia (between the working class, the middle class and the upper class)? Can you give an example?
- 4) Read the story all the way through. After you read, get 3 different highlighters
  - a. Colour1- and words or phrases that made you think :”Oh that’s a typically Australian word/idea/attitude
  - b. Colour2- words or phrases you need clarified
  - c. Colour 3- any words or phrases that show you a typically Australian “character”
- 5) Can you see, from looking at these ‘foundational’ Australian stories where some of our cultural ideas came from? Can you explain what you mean/ what you think?

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After you read through the annotated story, fill in this table

Idea about culture/identity	Example (quote)	Language feature/ technique/comment	Effect/Impact (your analysis)	Affirm Ignore Challenge Reveal Disrupt
Ritual and Religion are not meaningful to Australians				
Australia has its own characters (which contribute to the way we see ourselves as a nation)				
Alcohol is a bond between Australian men				
Australia has a class system				
Telling tall tales /spinning a yarn is part of our culture				

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<p>The Union Buries Its Dead</p>	<p>The institution buries someone. It is impersonal</p>
<p>While out boating one Sunday afternoon on a billabong across the river, we saw a young man on horseback driving some horses along the bank. He said it was a fine day, and asked if the water was deep there. The joker of our party said it was deep enough to drown him, and he laughed and rode farther up. We didn't take much notice of him.</p>	<p>Reference to boating on rivers in Europe, meant to be humorous. The audience of late 1800s would know that 'boating;' was not something done in the Australian bush.</p> <p>The adjective 'young' adds poignancy to the scene</p>
<p>Next day a funeral gathered at a corner pub and asked each other in to have a drink while waiting for the hearse. They passed away some of the time dancing jigs to a piano in the bar parlour. They passed away the rest of the time skylarking and fighting.</p>	<p>A funeral- This serves as a collective noun, representing all the people who attended. They passed away- repetition Public house, an abbreviation adding to the casual atmosphere of this funeral</p> <p>They passed away- Double entendre- a euphemism for dying as well as passing the time</p> <p>Look at the verb use to see what the men DID- danced, skylark, fight</p>
<p>The defunct was a young Union labourer, about twenty-five, who had been drowned the previous day while trying to swim some horses across a billabong of the Darling.</p>	<p>Dismissive and negative connotations- this word means it no longer works and is no longer of use.</p> <p>This is the dead end in a river. A reinforcement of the death of the man</p>
<p>He was almost a stranger in town, and the fact of his having been a Union man accounted for the funeral. The police found some Union papers in his swag, and called at the General Labourers' Union Office for information about him. That's how we knew. The secretary had very little information to give. The departed was a "Roman," and the majority of the town were otherwise—but Unionism is stronger than creed. Liquor, however, is stronger than Unionism;</p>	<p>Roman Catholic</p> <p>Other religions</p> <p>Satirical superlative statement</p>

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<p>and, when the hearse presently arrived, more than two-thirds of the funeral were unable to follow. They were too drunk.</p>	<p>The men were drunk Short sentence following a long description emphasises the bond through drinking</p>
<p>The procession numbered fifteen, fourteen souls following the broken shell of a soul. Perhaps not one of the fourteen possessed a soul any more than the corpse did—but that doesn't matter.</p>	<p>Sibilant alliteration in this metaphor coupled with the adjective 'broken' creates a dejected tone  Authorial intrusion. Lawson is making a comment about religion, souls and life after death. He doesn't seem to believe it and his characters generally don't either</p>
<p>Four or five of the funeral, who were boarders at the pub, borrowed a trap which the landlord used to carry passengers to and from the railway station. They were strangers to us who were on foot, and we to them. We were all strangers to the corpse.</p>	<p>Alliteration Collective pronoun, all Union members are bound by the codes of unionism even if they don't know each other Blunt, objective noun</p>
<p>A horseman, who looked like a drover just returned from a big trip, dropped into our dusty wake and followed us a few hundred yards, dragging his packhorse behind him, but a friend made wild and demonstrative signals from a hotel veranda—hooking at the air in front with his right hand and jobbing his left thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the bar—so the drover hauled off and didn't catch up to us any more. He was a stranger to the entire show.</p>	<p>Hyperbole is used to exaggerate the effort  Verb use creates action and excitement around the culture of drinking  Metaphor for the funeral, showing an irreverence and a lack of true feeling over this ritual</p>
<p>We walked in twos. There were three twos. It was very hot and dusty; the heat rushed in fierce dazzling rays across every iron roof and light-coloured wall that was turned to the sun. One or two pubs closed respectfully until we got past. They closed their bar doors and the patrons went in and out through some side or back entrance for a few minutes. Bushmen seldom grumble at</p>	<p>The class separation is between those on foot and those on horseback  The heat is personified. The Australian landscape is a character on its own</p>

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<p>an inconvenience of this sort, when it is caused by a funeral. They have too much respect for the dead.</p>	<p>This qualifier is sarcastic, the respect is superficial</p> <p>Imperative statement which is ironic. They are showing respect but do not really HAVE respect.</p>
<p>On the way to the cemetery we passed three shearers sitting on the shady side of a fence. One was drunk—very drunk. The other two covered their right ears with their hats, out of respect for the departed—whoever he might have been—and one of them kicked the drunk and muttered something to him.</p>	<p>This marks out the class system in this story. The shearers belong to a different union and their strike action at the time this story was written often led to arrest</p> <p>Repetition for emphasis. All classes and creeds of men in Australia drink to incapacitating levels</p>
<p>He straightened himself up, stared, and reached helplessly for his hat, which he shoved half off and then on again. Then he made a great effort to pull himself together—and succeeded. He stood up, braced his back against the fence, knocked off his hat, and remorsefully placed his foot on it—to keep it off his head till the funeral passed.</p>	<p>The verbs, adverbs, hyphens and compound sentences show movement and create an image of forced solemnity- acknowledging a ritual</p>
<p>A tall, sentimental drover, who walked by my side, cynically quoted Byronic verses suitable to the occasion—to death—and asked with pathetic humour whether we thought the dead man’s ticket would be recognized “over yonder.” It was a G.L.U. ticket, and the general opinion was that it would be recognized.</p>	<p>Intertextual reference to Byron a Romantic poet who wrote very sentimental poetry. This is in contrast to the very NON sentimental funeral</p> <p>Occasion and death are juxtaposed here, this is no celebration, it is barely the observation of a ritual</p> <p>A euphemism for heaven</p> <p>A union membership. General Labourers Union. These men considered the union a</p>

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	religion (think about what that says about what Australia valued then and question if we still have the same values)
<p>Presently my friend said:</p> <p>“You remember when we were in the boat yesterday, we saw a man driving some horses along the bank?”</p> <p>“Yes.”</p> <p>He nodded at the hearse and said:</p> <p>“Well, that’s him.”</p> <p>I thought awhile.</p> <p>“I didn’t take any particular notice of him,” I said. “He said something, didn’t he?”</p> <p>“Yes; said it was a fine day. You’d have taken more notice if you’d known that he was doomed to die in the hour, and that those were the last words he would say to any man in this world.”</p> <p>“To be sure,” said a full voice from the rear. “If ye’d known that, ye’d have prolonged the conversation.”</p> <p>We plodded on across the railway line and along the hot, dusty road which ran to the cemetery, some of us talking about the accident, and lying about the narrow escapes we had had ourselves. Presently someone said:</p>	<p>Plosive alliteration highlighting the pity in the situation</p> <p>Telling tall tales and lying to find some connection to others.</p>

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<p>“There’s the Devil.”</p> <p>I looked up and saw a priest standing in the shade of the tree by the cemetery gate.</p>	<p>Irony- the priest is called a devil- think about what this says about the attitude to religion</p>
<p>The hearse was drawn up and the tail-boards were opened. The funeral extinguished its right ear with its hat as four men lifted the coffin out and laid it over the grave. The priest—a pale, quiet young fellow—stood under the shade of a sapling which grew at the head of the grave. He took off his hat, dropped it carelessly on the ground, and proceeded to business. I noticed that one or two heathens winced slightly when the holy water was sprinkled on the coffin. The drops quickly evaporated, and the little round black spots they left were soon dusted over; but the spots showed, by contrast, the cheapness and shabbiness of the cloth with which the coffin was covered. It seemed black before; now it looked a dusky grey.</p> <p>Just here man’s ignorance and vanity made a farce of the funeral. A big, bull-necked publican, with heavy, blotchy features, and a supremely ignorant expression, picked up the priest’s straw hat and held it about two inches over the head of his reverence during the whole of the service. The father, be it remembered, was standing in the shade. A few shoved their hats on and off uneasily, struggling between their disgust for the living and their respect for the dead. The hat had a conical crown and a brim sloping down all round like a sunshade, and the publican held it with his great red claw spread over the crown. To do the priest justice, perhaps he didn’t notice the incident. A stage priest or parson in the same position might have said, “Put the hat down, my friend; is not the memory of our departed brother worth more than my complexion?” A wattle-bark layman might have expressed himself in stronger language, none the less to the point. But my priest seemed unconscious of what was going on. Besides, the publican was a great and important pillar of the church. He couldn’t, as an ignorant and conceited ass, lose such a good opportunity of asserting his faithfulness and importance to his church.</p>	<p>The sapling is a metaphor for the young priest          Proceeded to business- Irony as a funeral is meant to be an emotional occasion</p> <p>Humorous characterisation shown through verb use ‘winced’ and the noun ‘heathens’</p> <p>Irony- it was already a farce. The alliteration of the f adds the impression of scoffing in irritation.</p> <p>Big bull- Plosive alliteration reinforces the image</p>



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<p>The grave looked very narrow under the coffin, and I drew a breath of relief when the box slid easily down. I saw a coffin get stuck once, at Rookwood, and it had to be yanked out with difficulty, and laid on the sods at the feet of the heart-broken relations, who howled dismally while the grave-diggers widened the hole. But they don't cut contracts so fine in the West. Our grave-digger was not altogether boweless, and, out of respect for that human quality described as "feelin's," he scraped up some light and dusty soil and threw it down to deaden the fall of the clay lumps on the coffin. He also tried to steer the first few shovelfuls gently down against the end of the grave with the back of the shovel turned outwards, but the hard dry Darling River clods rebounded and knocked all the same. It didn't matter much—nothing does. The fall of lumps of clay on a stranger's coffin doesn't sound any different from the fall of the same things on an ordinary wooden box—at least I didn't notice anything awesome or unusual in the sound; but, perhaps, one of us—the most sensitive—might have been impressed by being reminded of a burial of long ago, when the thump of every sod jolted his heart.</p>	<p>Lawson's authorial intrusion saying nothing is really important- this is nihilism</p>
<p>I have left out the wattle—because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzled head bowed and great pearly drops streaming down his rugged cheeks. He was absent—he was probably "out back." For similar reasons I have omitted reference to the suspicious moisture in the eyes of a bearded bush ruffian named Bill. Bill failed to turn up, and the only moisture was that which was induced by the heat. I have left out the "sad Australian sunset." because the sun was not going down at the time. The burial took place exactly at midday.</p> <p>The dead bushman's name was Jim, apparently; but they found no portraits, nor locks of hair, nor any love letters, nor anything of that kind in his swag—not even a reference to his mother; only some papers relating to Union matters. Most of us didn't know the name till we saw it on the coffin; we knew him as "that poor chap that got drowned yesterday."</p> <p>.</p> <p>"So his name's James Tyson," said my drover acquaintance, looking at the plate.</p>	<p>Lawson does not want to Romanticise the Australian people or the Australian bush. He is an atheist. He shows us these things through language: the Australian sunset is a pathetic fallacy which has been inverted- sunset equals death but this funeral is at midday</p> <p>Outback-In the toilet</p> <p>This cumulative listing discussed artefacts which would humanise the dead man</p> <p>A sardonic nod to James Tyson one of the largest landowners in Australia who used to travel with a packhorse and pretend to be a drover. This man is not the same man but</p>

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<p>“Why! Didn’t you know that before?” I asked.</p> <p>“No; but I knew he was a Union man.”</p> <p>It turned out, afterwards, that J.T. wasn’t his real name—only “the name he went by.”</p> <p>Anyhow he was buried by it, and most of the “Great Australian Dailies” have mentioned in their brevity columns that a young man named James John Tyson was drowned in a billabong of the Darling last Sunday</p>	<p>Lawson’s audience would have seen the joke- there is a distinct class system in Australia but the poor and the very rich (like the real James Tyson) are all equal in death and as a member of a union</p>
<p>We did hear, later on, what his real name was; but if we ever chance to read it in the “Missing Friends Column,” we shall not be able to give any information to heart-broken mother or sister or wife, nor to anyone who could let him hear something to his advantage—for we have already forgotten the name.</p>	<p>The funeral and religious rites were meaningless</p>

**Creative Task:**

- 1) Imagine you are searching through ancestry.com for your family tree. J.T comes up as your distant relative. Write 200 words about his life before the day at the billabong. Give him a family, a job and even some evidence that someone searched for him. Think about why he might have been going by a fake name.
- 2) Imagine that JT is the Drover’s Wife’s husband. He has now been missing for three years. The last time we met her he had only been gone 6 months. Write a letter to him from her pleading with him to come home and telling him everything that happened since he left.