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## The drover's wife leah purcell analysis

"The Drover's Wife" is one of Lawson's most famous short stories. Set in the Australian bush, it is the tale of a woman facing off against a snake in order to protect herself and her children. The character's stoicism and quiet heroism, as well as the naturalistic depiction of the wild, hostile bush, have cemented the story's critical and popular approbation. The story was first published in the magazine *The Bulletin* on July 23rd 1892, then included in Lawson's collection *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* (1894). It has been included in many anthologies and short story collections over the years. Lawson's story has been adapted for various media. In 1968, the Australian Broadcasting Commission adapted it for the radio. Leah Purcell turned the story into a play in 2016. In 1945, Australian artist Russell Drysdale painted a work entitled *The Drover's Wife*, featuring a woman standing in the foreground of the picture plane with a man, wagon, and horses in the background. The landscape is barren, painted in ochres and grays. Other Australian fiction writers, including Barbara Jefferts and Damien Broderick, have been inspired by the piece and have written their own variations. The Drover's Wife, the legend of Molly Johnson by Indigenous author Leah Purcell has an unusual genesis in a prize-winning play. The Drover's Wife was first premiered at the Belvoir St Theatre in 2016, and won numerous awards in 2017 including the NSW Premier's Award for Playwriting and Book of the Year; and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Drama and the Victorian Prize for Literature. The feature film based on the play is due for release in 2020. Though I didn't know Purcell's name until she picked up these prestigious literary awards, I did know her work as a scriptwriter. Her credits as a writer, actor and director for the stage, film and TV include film and TV that I've seen: *Jindabyne*, *Redfern Now*, and *Cleverman*. She is prolific. And now there is the novel. Like the play it emerges from Henry Lawson's legendary short story, *The Drover's Wife*, (1893) a tale of deprivation and loneliness and courage in the Australian bush. (You can read the original here). But as you can see from the ABC interview with Purcell below, her version of the story is transformed to deal with a different history of those pioneering days: domestic violence and rape; the Stolen Generations, frontier violence, and the hidden Black ancestry of many White Australians. As you might expect, there is a cinematic quality to the writing, but vivid scenes intersect with internal monologues from the main characters: Molly, the drover's wife who doesn't know the truth about her own parentage; Yakada, an injured Indigenous man on the run back to his family up north; and Danny, the twelve-year-old boy who sees himself as the 'man of the house' during his drunken, violent father's absence. Additional complexity comes from the addition of two more characters: Nate Clintoff, emigrating from England to become the police presence in nearby Everton, and his wife Louisa, who's keen to spread the word about votes for women with a bush newsletter. (And like her real-life counterparts, her reason for wanting the female suffrage, is to improve the rights of women, with legislation to protect them from domestic violence in particular). Storytelling is integral to the novel. Molly is a taciturn woman, who is gradually freed from the prison of silence by the story-telling of Danny, who retells the adventures of their bush life with gusto, and Yakada who gently tells her the story of her identity. Yakada also tells Danny that part of his responsibility as a man, is to keep his family's stories alive. We learn from the prologue that Danny does so: taught to write poetry by Louisa, he has kept an illustrated notebook that tells the story of a great woman, strong, steadfast, reliable and loving, his ma, Molly Johnson, nee Stewart. It's the story of a mother's love, fierce and true. And of a black man who was noble, wise and gentle, a warrior of ancient proportions — but unfortunately not Danny's father. Memories of cautious meetings, bonding and the sharing of stories. Lessons were learnt and a mutual understanding and respect developed from the man to the boy and from the boy to the man — Yakada and Daniel Johnson. (p.2) Also central to the story are questions of crime, justice, and punishment. There is a critical moment in the story when Nate Clintoff is desperate to find Danny as a witness, to counter the drunken testimony of stockmen that Nate knows are lying. If the reader knows anything about Australia's Black History, Yakada's silence is telling. His testimony would not count, because he is Indigenous, but the testimony of a 12-year-old boy could be brought before the court. Justice is shown in these years not long before Federation when Australia became a social laboratory admired around the world for its progressive reforms, to be a flimsy edifice, weighted against Indigenous people and female victims of male violence. For Nate, the unfairness of the system provokes a crisis of conscience which persists in the present-day: how best to preserve law-and-order when law-and-order has failed the vulnerable. The novel, unfortunately, has its flaws, inaccuracies which should have been remedied by its editor. Molly muses on page 18 that perhaps her mood is influenced by her hormones. The scene is set in 1893, and the first hormone was not identified until 1902, and not named as such until 1905. I didn't know this till I looked it up, but the text jarred: it seemed anachronistic, and it was. A reference to a Senator George Turner on page 44 puzzled me too. There were no senators in the Victorian colony because the colonial government consisted of a legislative assembly and a legislative council. The Australian Senate did not exist until Federation in 1901. I think the person mentioned as running for election as the premier of Victoria prior to Federation is Sir George Turner who indeed became premier and subsequently Commonwealth Treasurer when, after Federation, he was a member of the House of Representatives (i.e. not the Senate, and therefore still not a Senator). And though I'm open to correction about this, it also seems to me that Louisa's use of the term 'global economic situation' on page 41 is a 21st century expression. You might think that I'm nit-picking, but I think a debut author of Purcell's status deserves more attentive editing than she had. And I also think that any editor working on Australian historical fiction, to avoid embarrassment, ought to have a rudimentary knowledge of Australian history, at least to the level prescribed by the Australian National Curriculum for primary schools for Years 5 & 6. Leah Purcell is a Goa, Gunggari, Wakka Wakka Murri woman from Queensland. Author: Leah Purcell Title: *The Drover's Wife*, the legend of Molly Johnson Cover: photography by Murray Fredericks, design by Louisa Maggio © Penguin Random House P/L Publisher: Hamish Hamilton, an imprint of Penguin Books, Penguin Random House, 2019, 281 pages ISBN: 9780143791478 Source: Bayside Library These notes were contributed by members of the GradeSaver community. We are thankful for their contributions and encourage you to make your own. Written by Lachlain rolson and other people who wish to remain anonymous This is a modern stage adaptation of an important story originally published in the late 19th century. The story takes place in Australia where a fatherless family lives, a mother with her four children. They live in poverty in a hut in the bush. One day, a child screams about a snake, and the mother tries to find it, but the snake escapes to a pile of felled apple trees. The venomous serpent bites the dog. They lure it out, but to no avail. The threat is severe: if the snake enters their hut at night, it will likely mean the death of one of the family members. The family grows increasingly paranoid as they defend themselves against the entry of the snake. The woman becomes paranoid about noises, and the daughter, Jacky, is paranoid about Tommy's club, which he wields in case of the snake. The dog senses the snake during a windy night, and the woman reflects in monologue about her life, about the death of her brother-in-law to a snake bit. Lately, the farm has dried up and the family doesn't have enough to make ends meet. She wonders if maybe she needs to take her family and escape to a new home. We learn that she has miscarried a child in an illness, because she was too far from medical help. The threats of grassfires and windstorms add to their situation. We learn that once, a ruptured dam took the life of her husband who was working in the basin below. Try as she might to save him, she could not. She wonders if she just doesn't have what it takes as a woman to protect her family. She mourns her situation bitterly. In the morning, she pokes her eye with a blessed handkerchief, and the snake emerges. She works with the dog to kill it, and she saves her family. You can help us out by revising, improving and updating this section. Update this section After you claim a section you'll have 24 hours to send in a draft. An editor will review the submission and either publish your submission or provide feedback.





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