

Australia short stories

[Parts of the World](#), [Australia](#)



A Gentleman's Agreement by Elizabeth Jolley, The Drover's Wife by the Henry Lawson and The Kangaroo by Eve Sallis are three short stories that all convey a strong sense of Australian identity which contrasts to stereotypical gender roles. At the heart of each of these short stories is a brave independent woman protecting their families. Landscape is represented differently in each short story but it is used to compliment the strong women in A Gentleman's Agreement, The Drover's Wife and The Kangaroo.

Elizabeth Jolley's A Gentleman's Agreement, tells the story of a working class single mother who fools a rich doctor into letting her and her family live on his land for the rest of their lives. There is almost a complete reversal of stereotypical gender roles; as usually it is men who are the decision makers and manipulators in society but in this story it is the woman. The title of A Gentleman's Agreement, portrays the mother (who is the protagonist) as smooth talking businessperson. Although she is poor she is very intelligent, independent as well as being a very caring person.

She even takes advantage of the rich by letting her poor neighbours into the luxury apartments she cleans. ' While these people were away at their offices or on business trips... We had wedding receptions and parties in the penthouse and the old folk came in to soak their feet. ' There is no dominant male figure in the family, so the only provider and carer for the children is the mother, although she does have a lazy, rude son who can't keep at one job. The mother represents one type of well loved Australian identity, that is battler, the underdog who is at first disadvantaged, who succeeds in the end.

If the text is read for a gendered reading she also represents a clever, determined woman who can successfully look after her family without a man. Australian landscape is represented as a sanctuary for the family in *The Gentleman's Agreement*, it makes them happy and brings them closer together as a family. ' We lost my brother and then suddenly we saw him running and running and shouting, his voice lifting up in the wind as he raced up the slope of the valley. ' I do believe he's laughing! He's happy! Mother just stared at him and she looked so happy too. I don't think I ever saw the country look so lovely before. ' The relationships in the family are strengthened by their surroundings in the countryside. The landscape is represented as a beautiful release with its peaceful nature that helps the family forget their problems of the past and brings out the best in each of them. In contrast to landscape being represented as a sanctuary; is the landscape in Eve Sallis's *The Kangaroo* which is represented as harsh and alien.

The family in this short story are Arabic and unfamiliar with the Australian bush. On their trip to see relatives in Berri, they have a rather strange encounter with an iconic Australian animal, a kangaroo. The kangaroo was incredibly vicious, ' The kangaroo turned to face him, rose high above his head and grabbed him from behind the neck with a huge black fist, sinking black claws into his nape. ' The kangaroo is represented as almost evil and is a threat to the family which is stopping them from getting to where they want to go.

This could be symbolic of the Australian government being a threat to immigrants and not letting them through to our country. The kangaroo represents an obstacle that the family must overcome and Zeen is the character who overcomes it. She is another brave and determined woman who wants to protect her family. Although at the start of the story she seems quite superficial wearing 'patent leather stilettos' and 'Candy Frost' lipstick, she fights hard to save her husband who cannot fight off the kangaroo, which is another reversal of gender roles, the woman being stronger physically than the man.

Although Zeen may not have been born in Australia she still represents the type of Australian identity that is in *A Gentleman's Agreement*, an independent woman who overcomes a struggle to do what is best for their family. Another short story with a strong sense of Australian identity is *The Drover's Wife* by Henry Lawson. Although the drover is the head of the family, he is absent so his son Tommy tries to protect his family when they find a snake outside their house but his mother is the one who stays up all night in case the snake comes up through the cracks in the floor, to protect her children.

The Drover's wife is the real hero of the story, although she is isolated and lonely she puts up with living in the bush for her husband's sake even though she rarely sees him. The drover's wife has to take care of her children and cope with disasters without a man to turn to but she always seems to rise above the struggles and maintains dignity in the midst of chaos. Even when

she is reduced to tears, she laughs when she pulls out her handkerchief and pokes herself in the eye because it is so tattered.

The drover's wife tries to maintain a positive outlook so her children aren't upset, although she may sometimes feel lonely she sacrifices her own happiness to take care of them, in the bush where her husband can support them. Although the landscape can be represented as overwhelming and isolating in *The Drover's Wife*. ' Bush all around - bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted rotten apple trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye... Nineteen miles to the nearest civilisation. The repetition of bush is used to show how similar the bushland looks and how it seems to be everywhere. In this depiction Lawson describes the bush in a way which makes it seem terribly ugly and harsh. But this representation of the bush also adds to the representation of Australian identity, that the woman has overcome the bush, to care for and protect her family no matter what. *The Drover's Wife*, *A Gentleman's Agreement* and *The Kangaroo*, are three short stories which depict a sense of Australian identity in that stereotypical gender roles have been reversed and in the characterisation of the brave women in each story.

They are all incredibly strong and independent as they are doing what is best for their families. Landscape is represented differently in each story (harsh and beautiful) but the landscape in all has in some way helped contribute to the battle each woman has overcome in the short stories. The Australian identity of strong women is very relevant to Australia today and will hopefully continue to be a huge part of Australian identity in the future.