

## Aggressive Masculinity in Australia

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### Literature in Australia and New Zealand

Despite losing its overriding image as a "bushranger" frontier and evolving into a predominately urban society, Australia has maintained a reputation for aggressive masculinity. The nation's sexist ideology, rooted in the very birth of the country over 200 years ago, still runs rampant today, provoking a modern feminist "crusade," led by, among others, author Germaine Greer. In 1970, Greer wrote a book titled **The Female Eunuch**, which not only advocated women's liberation but actually called upon women to "rescue men from the perversities of their own polarization." In other words, the fate of both Australia's men and women, as well as the sexist ideology which has resulted in the "colonization of women in Australia," lies in the hands of the women, often called "God's police."

This sexist ideology--namely, aggressive masculinity--originated when the first settlers of the British "convict colony" -- 586 men and 192 girls and women ("damned whores") -- landed in Botany Bay and embarked on a run of drunken hellraising, with the male convicts chasing the female convicts. As a result of this night, and many others that followed it, colonial reformers later called for the migration of "good and virtuous women" from Britain to Australia to serve as wives, mothers and, as mentioned before, "God's police--a force for moral improvement." Thus, to this day, women in Australia represent, in the eyes of Australian men, both sex objects and "promoters of morality."

In addition to the way in which they perceive their female counterparts, another hinderance in the evolution of sexual roles and masculine behaviour has been the way in which men perceive their male counterparts. The tradition of "mateship"--the reliance of a man on his "pal"--stems from Australia's history of the "lonely, womanless and often dangerous life in the bush or outback." Often, pairs of convicts who settled into the remote bushland to run a farm and raise livestock grew "mutually dependent on one another to the point of homosexuality." As Robert Hughes writes in **The Fatal Shore**, "The feeling of reliance on one's mate would lie forever at the heart of masculine behaviour in Australia."

Other events which contributed to this sense of masculinity, as well as this idea of mateship, include the wars in South Africa, Korea, and Vietnam, in which Australian men gained a reputation as "roughhouse brawlers on and off the battlefields."

Although this reputation of Australian men as bushranger "real men" has diminished dramatically, many, including Germaine Greer, are still attempting to extinguish this sexist ideology once and for all. In her 1984 **Sex and Destiny** she advocates, on the part on women, "chastity, self-control, motherhood, and family," as well as the instruction of men, by females, on how to be less aggressively masculine. (Maclean's, S 12, 1987)

